Int. J. of Human Resource Management 14:7 November 2003 1102–1116

An application of self-assessment realistic job previews to expatriate assignments

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Abstract Using a true experimental design in a field setting, the influence of a self-assessment realistic job preview (RJP) was examined in the context of expatriate candidates' decision-making process in a multinational company. Compared to the control group, participants receiving the RJP reported greater self-efficacy for success on a global assignment and also reported a higher perceived ability to make an informed decision as to whether to accept a global assignment. Interest in a future global assignment was not affected by the self-assessment.

Keywords Expatriate management; realistic job previews; self-assessment; self-efficacy; global assignments; Decision making.

Introduction

In order to remain competitive in today's global marketplace, multinational companies (MNCs) have recognized that global human resource management is critical for their success. Global HR is essential for MNCs' global competitiveness for many reasons, including its integral role in facilitating the success of expatriate assignments (Stroh and Caligiuri, 1998). Successful expatriate assignments are indispensable to MNCs for both developmental and functional reasons (Adler, 1997; Brewster, 1991; Dowling *et al.*, 1998; Mendenhall and Oddou, 1985; Stroh and Caligiuri, 1998; Torbiörn, 1997; Tung and Miller, 1990). Accordingly, researchers and practitioners alike are interested in determining how to facilitate the success of expatriates' global assignments (e.g. Aryee and Stone, 1996; Black and Gregersen, 1991; Black *et al.*, 1991; Brewster and Scullion, 1997; Brewster and Pickard, 1994; Kealey, 1989; McEvoy and Parker, 1995; Robie and Ryan, 1996; Schneider and Asakawa, 1995).

One antecedent of expatriate success is the creation of realistic expectations prior to the global assignment. For many years, researchers have discussed the possibility that realistic recruitment and orientation messages could be especially useful for employees who are entering new or ambiguous work settings such as expatriate assignments, given the ambiguity of both living in a host country and working in a foreign location (Caligiuri, 2000a; 2000b; Phillips, 1998; Wanous, 1992). A realistic job preview (RJP) is the provision of both favourable and unfavourable job-related information to job candidates (Rynes, 1991). RJPs are used to provide candidates with more realistic perceptions of a job and are thought to be most beneficial when focused on intrinsic

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The International Journal of Human Resource Management
ISSN 0958-5192 print/ISSN 1466-4399 online © 2003 Taylor & Francis Ltd
http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals
DOI: 10.1080/0958519032000114228

rather than factual aspects of work (Cascio, 1998). It is thought that RJPs have the potential to help a person create a realistic level of initial expectations when entering any new or unknown setting, including expatriate assignments, which increases the probability of success.

RJPs are typically one-way communications from the organization to the candidate describing the realities of a job. For example, cross-cultural training has been used to create realistic expectations for expatriates with respect to living and working in the host country (Black and Mendenhall, 1990; Black *et al.*, 1991; Caligiuri *et al.*, 2001). These realistic expectations, in turn, have been found to relate to cross-cultural adjustment (Caligiuri *et al.*, 2001). In addition to cross-cultural training, additional methods to help create realistic expectations for expatriate candidates have been suggested. One method is to have former expatriates, or repatriates, share their experiences about their former expatriate assignment. This information sharing by repatriates serves as a means to create realistic expectations for future expatriates (Black, 1992; Stroh *et al.*, 1998). Both of these methods (i.e. cross-cultural training, conversations with repatriates) serve as a type of realistic job preview (RJP) for expatriate candidates.

In an effort to offer expatriate RJPs more widely and with greater person-specific relevance, many organizations have considered providing written self-assessment RJPs that are more interactive and assist expatriate candidates in the decision-making process (Caligiuri, 1999). In addition to describing the realities of being an expatriate, allowing candidates to self-assess the match between their characteristics and the demands of an international assignment can enable them to develop an even more realistic idea of their fit with an expatriate assignment. Although the potential importance of RJPs for expatriate candidates has been suggested, to date no studies have directly examined the causal influence of any type of RJP on the decision-making process of expatriates. This study will use a true experimental design in a field setting to explore the influence of a written self-assessment RJP on the decision-making process of real expatriate candidates. This study is the first to investigate whether a self-assessment RJP that provides information about the realistic demands of international assignments and provides feedback on individual candidates' fit with these demands will enable expatriate candidates to feel that they are making a more informed decision and experience greater self-efficacy for succeeding on a global assignment.

The purpose of this field experiment is twofold. First, we apply the theoretical underpinnings of RJPs to the decision-making context of expatriate assignments. In particular, we examine the expatriate candidates' decision-making context in terms of the ability of the RJP to influence candidates' interest in an international assignment, their efficacy for an international assignment and their perceptions of their ability to make an informed decision about accepting an expatriate assignment. Second, we assess the utility of a written self-assessment RJP, which focuses on personality and family issues, in predicting changes in employees' interest in an expatriate assignment, efficacy for such an assignment and self-perceived ability to make an informed decision about accepting an expatriate assignment. This study is the first of which we are aware that investigates RJPs in an expatriate context and the first that investigates the efficacy of a written self-assessment RJP.

Self-assessment RJPs

Current thinking supports the notion that both person–job fit, or the match between an applicant's knowledge, skills and abilities and job demands (Caldwell and O'Reilly, 1990; O'Reilly *et al.*, 1991), and person–organization fit,

or the match between an applicant and broader organizational and contextual attributes (Judge and Ferris, 1992; Rynes and Gerhart, 1990), are important to successful recruiting efforts (Bowen *et al.*, 1991; Judge and Ferris, 1992; Kristof-Brown, 2000; Rynes and Gerhart, 1990). Whether the process of matching people to jobs and organizations for which they are likely to be a good fit is led by the applicant or by the recruiter, better fit has been shown to enhance employee attitudes as well as job performance (Judge and Ferris, 1992; Kristof, 1996; O'Reilly *et al.*, 1991). Communicating a complete picture of the requirements of the job, as with an RJP, better allows a candidate to self-assess their likely fit with the position, enabling candidates to make a better informed decision about accepting the position and to develop confidence in their ability to perform well in that job. This RJP process would encourage a more thorough decision-making process, compared to the current practice of informal expatriate selection (Harris and Brewster, 1999).

Realistic job previews in the expatriate context should be very similar to realistic job previews in the domestic context. In both cases, the RJPs should contain information about *both* the positive and the potentially negative attributes of the position being considered, rather than communicating only positive information (Rynes, 1991). The way in which this positive and potentially negative information is communicated during RJPs can vary greatly. For instance, realistic job previews in the domestic context consist primarily of verbal (e.g. discussions with current employees or recruiters), audiovisual (e.g. video clips of what the job will entail) and written materials (e.g. pamphlets, orientation books (Phillips, 1998)). While domestic RJPs have employed a variety of methods, expatriate RJPs have been almost exclusively verbal — namely, a verbal exchange from repatriates to expatriate candidates (e.g. Black, 1992).

This verbal exchange between repatriates and expatriate candidates has been difficult for organizations to manage and control. In particular, it is a challenge for organizations to find willing and available repatriates who can *consistently* share both positive and potentially negative information regarding the assignment with prospective expatriate candidates. Because the experiences of each repatriate are likely to differ, as well as the requirements for succeeding in a global assignment in different countries, the message communicated to expatriate candidates is often inconsistent. Another challenge with verbal RJPs is matching the demographics and personal situations of the expatriate candidates and the repatriates so that a relevant realistic experience will be shared. For example, the experience of a single female repatriate may be very different from the experience of a married male expatriate with two children. Also, given the many personality characteristics needed for success on global assignments, people who possess different personality characteristics may have very different experiences (Caligiuri, 2000a; 2000b). Self-assessment can best enable candidates to assess their personal situation (e.g. family situation, personality characteristics, etc.) relative to the demands of a global assignment.

RJPs have often been discussed in terms of a matching model in which realistic information on the job and company was presented to applicants to assist them in self-selecting themselves into positions for which they were good fits (Wanous, 1978; 1980). Realistic previews applied to global assignments could be especially important given the context-specific, subjective nuances of working in another country. For example, family issues become substantially more relevant in the context of a global assignment, compared to an individual accepting the same job domestically. Although it has yet to be studied, an additional way that RJPs might be effective is through the stimulation of a self-assessment by the individual in terms of personality fit and readiness for the demands of the new assignment. Rather than simply communicating information

about the positive and potentially negative aspects of the assignment to the candidate, the candidate could be asked to *actively assess his/her fit* with the personality and lifestyle requirements of the assignment. The effectiveness of this type of RJP could be particularly strong given the richness of and depth of information processing that results from this type of self-assessment compared with the more limited communication of the traditional RJP.

RJPs and candidates' interest in expatriate assignments

Realistic job previews are thought to influence organizational outcomes as a result of a vaccination or personal commitment effect rather than through self-selection out of the recruitment process by applicants perceiving a poor fit between a job and their needs. The most recent meta-analysis of the effects of RJPs found that RJPs tend to be slightly negatively related or unrelated to attrition from the recruitment process (Phillips, 1998), indicating that candidates are generally not self-selecting themselves out of consideration for the position after hearing the RJP message. The personal commitment effect occurs when individuals believe that they made their choice without coercion or external inducements (e.g. after receiving realistic job information), leading to greater commitment to the ultimate decision (Bem, 1970; Wanous, 1992). The vaccination effect is thought to work by giving candidates a small dose of organizational reality before beginning work, which can lower expectations, promote coping mechanisms and prevent dissatisfaction or entry shock (McGuire, 1964).

One reason organizations give for not implementing realistic previews is that they are afraid people's interest in the job or assignment will decline after hearing potentially negative aspects of the position. This fear is especially acute for organizations sending people on expatriate assignments given that there are often more positions available than there are qualified people willing to fill them. While this concern may seem warranted, it is actually unfounded. A meta-analysis by Phillips (1998) found that RJPs did not result in attrition from the recruitment process. This study will investigate whether these meta-analytic findings generalize to an expatriate context. This suggests our first hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Interest in an expatriate assignment will not differ between individuals completing and not completing the self-assessment realistic job preview for expatriate assignments.

RJPs and candidates' ability to make an informed decision about accepting an expatriate assignment

One benefit of RJPs is that individuals are likely to have a greater commitment to the decision to accept the assignment or job (Bem, 1970; Wanous, 1992). An important aspect of the decision-making process is that the employees do not feel coerced or induced to make the given job decision. This statement runs contrary to expatriate management practices of the past. In the past, expatriate candidates were frequently coerced by their organizations to accept a global assignment – by suggestions that, if the candidate did not accept the global assignment, then he or she would not be eligible for promotion to higher levels of management. Also, financial inducements were extensively used. Expatriate candidates were often offered lucrative incentives to accept a global assignment. In both cases, coercion and financial inducements, organizations may have been producing the unfortunate outcome of lower expatriate commitment.

Applying the findings from past RJP research to the expatriate context, the expatriate candidates should feel as though they have a choice, and that the organization is providing them with enough information to allow them to make a good and informed choice. Thus, it is important for expatriates to feel as though they have been given enough information to make an informed decision. A self-assessment RJP allows the candidate to understand the requirements of being an expatriate better, as well as to evaluate his/her potential fit with those requirements. Both of these factors should improve the candidate's ability to make an informed decision about accepting a global assignment. This suggests hypothesis 2:

Hypothesis 2: Individuals completing the self-assessment realistic job preview for expatriate assignments will report a greater ability to make an informed decision about going on an expatriate assignment than individuals not completing the RJP.

RJPs and candidates' self-efficacy for succeeding on an expatriate assignment

An individual's self-efficacy has been found to affect his/her choice of goal level, with greater self-efficacy being associated with the setting of higher goals and ultimately with higher performance (Locke *et al.*, 1984; Phillips and Gully, 1997; Thomas and Mathieu, 1994; Wood and Bandura, 1989a; 1989b; Wood *et al.*, 1990). Self-efficacy has even been found to affect individuals' performance within teams. Individuals with higher self-efficacy are more likely to contribute to their team's effectiveness through their increased motivation, higher goals and greater persistence (Kozlowski *et al.*, 1996; 1999).

Suszko and Breaugh (1986) found that participants receiving an RJP had higher perceptions of their ability to cope with job demands than did members of the control group. Self-assessment realistic previews for global assignments could therefore be an effective way to build self-efficacy. As Brown and Lent suggest, career choices result from 'self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations, which may or may not match more objective indicators of abilities' (1996: 354). These self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations can be shaped by objective assessment tools (Brown and Lent, 1996). Given that most people have little if any experience of living and working in another country they may view the experience as 'too exotic' or 'too difficult'. This lack of experience is likely to limit individuals' perceptions of self-efficacy for a global assignment. It has been also shown that limited knowledge about a career or occupation will tend to lower an individual's efficacy for that given career or occupation (Brown and Lent, 1996). Thus, an objective self-assessment tool for global assignments should enhance an individual's self-efficacy for a global assignment. This suggests hypothesis 3:

Hypothesis 3: Individuals completing the self-assessment realistic job preview for expatriate assignments will report greater self-efficacy for succeeding on an expatriate assignment, compared to individuals not completing the self-assessment RJP.

Method

Participants

A multinational oil and energy company based in the USA was the participating organization for this study. The organization sent a very brief 'Global Assignment

Interest Survey' to *every* employee who was in a job category that might be eligible for an expatriate assignment within the next few years. One question on the survey asked employees to rate whether they had *any* interest in a future expatriate assignment. Approximately 50 per cent of the target employees (total possible n = 92) responded with some level of interest in a future expatriate assignment. These self-nominated employees were the possible participants in this study. The Global HR Director gave us the names and contact information for each of the ninety-two possible participants.

The ninety-two participants were randomly assigned to one of two groups. Group 1 was the experimental group and was given the self-assessment RJP for expatriate assignments (total possible n = 46). Group 2 was the control group and was not given the self-assessment RJP for expatriate assignments (total possible n = 46). Given that complete data were needed, participants were omitted from the analyses if they failed to complete both the pre-test and the post-test. Also, given that the hypotheses predicted a change in perceptions from the pre-test to the post-test, ceiling effects were controlled. Thus, any participant who received an extremely high score on the pre-test was omitted from the study because it would be impossible to detect any increases in perceptions on the post-test. To control for this ceiling effect, participants scoring more than one standard deviation above the mean on each of the three dependent variables were removed from the analysis. This resulted in the removal of seven participants from the efficacy analyses (possible n = 39), six participants from the ability to make an informed decision analyses (possible n = 40) and ten participants from the interest in a global assignment analysis (possible n = 36). Ultimately, the usable response rate for Group 1, the experimental group, was about 25 per cent (n = 12) and about 45 per cent (n = 22) for Group 2, the control group.

Procedure

Participants in Group 1 and Group 2 were sent the same initial letter, along with a pre-test and a postage-paid return envelope. The pre-test assessed self-efficacy for success on a global assignment, perceived ability to make an informed decision about whether to accept a global assignment and interest in a future global assignment. One month was allotted for the pre-test surveys to be returned. Reminder cards were sent to all possible participants two weeks after the initial mailing. After the pre-tests were returned, Group 1 (the experimental group) was sent the self-assessment RJP for expatriate assignments. This experimental group was asked to complete their self-assessment RJP within the next month. Group 2, during this same time period, was sent nothing. At the end of that month, both groups were sent the post-test, assessing self-efficacy for success on a global assignment, perceived ability to make an informed decision about whether to accept a global assignment and interest in a future global assignment. A manipulation check was included in the post-test to ensure that those who were sent the self-assessment RJP actually completed it. After the post-test was returned in the postage-paid envelope, the study was completed and the control group, Group 2, was sent the self-assessment RJP.

The self-assessment RJP for expatriate assignments

The self-assessment realistic preview for expatriate assignments used in this study was a 55-page workbook developed by the first author to enable potential expatriates to make a better-informed decision regarding whether to accept a global assignment (Caligiuri, 1998). In addition to describing the common challenges and difficulties encountered on expatriate assignments, the workbook requires that candidates self-assess themselves in

a variety of areas related to expatriate success and gives the candidates feedback regarding their fit with the demands and challenges an expatriate assignment is likely to present. This proprietary workbook is called *The Self-Assessment for Global Endeavors (The SAGE)*. The content of *The SAGE* was based on previous validity research, conducted by the first author, on the predictors of expatriate success. *The SAGE* contains three sections that correspond to the three categories of predictors of expatriate success (self, family and career). The three sections include (1) an assessment of personality characteristics needed to be successful on an expatriate assignment, (2) family considerations for expatriates and (3) career considerations. The instrument is currently being used by many multinational organizations to encourage more thoughtful decision making by their expatriate candidates regarding whether to accept an international assignment.

To manage expectations as a part of this RJP, the goal of *The SAGE* is to allow the expatriate candidate the opportunity to learn more about himself or herself, his or her family and his or her career relative to the demands of an expatriate assignment. Each section provides exercises and explanations for why various characteristics or issues are important for the expatriate assignment. *The SAGE* provides realistic expectations for what an expatriate may experience while on the assignment relative to their personality characteristics, family situation and career issues. This self-selection workbook went through several iterations and has been pilot-tested with other multinational organizations.

Measures

Self-efficacy In both the pre- and post-tests, participants rated their self-efficacy for an expatriate assignment on an eight-item scale, adapted from Locke *et al.* (1984). Each item was rated on a seven-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 4 = neutral, 7 = strongly agree). Sample items include: 'I can deal with the situations I am likely to experience on a global assignment' and 'I am certain that I can manage the requirements of a global assignment'. The alpha coefficient of the self-efficacy measure was .89 for the pre-test and .94 for the post-test.

Ability to make an informed decision In both the pre- and post-tests, participants rated their ability to make an informed decision on whether to accept an expatriate assignment on a four-item scale. Each item was rated on a seven-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 4 = neutral, 7 = strongly agree). Sample items include: 'If I had to decide today whether or not to accept a global assignment, I believe I could make an informed decision (either to accept or refuse)' and 'I am aware of what will be needed in order for me to be successful on a global assignment'. The alpha coefficient of this measure was .88 for the pre-test and .86 for the post-test.

Interest in an expatriate assignment In both the pre- and post-tests, participants rated their interest in an expatriate assignment with two items. Each item was rated on a seven-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 4 = neutral, 7 = strongly agree). The two items are: 'It is likely that at some point in my career at [company name], I will accept a global assignment' and 'I am excited about the possibility of going on a global assignment'. The alpha coefficient of this measure was .71 for the pre-test and .91 for the post-test.

Analysis and results

Table 1 reports the means, standard deviations and intercorrelations of all variables used in the experiment. The RJP could have an effect on the change scores as a result of

Table 1 *Correlations and descriptive statistics*

Variable	*Mean*	*SD*	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*
1 Received RJP	1.44	.50						
2 Pre-test efficacy	5.82	.69	.16					
3 Post-test efficacy	5.63	1.10	.23	.71**				
4 Pre-test ability to make an informed decision	4.97	1.13	.14	.58**	.67**			
5 Post-test ability to make an informed decision	5.54	.87	.38*	.05	.12	.06		
6 Pre-test interest in assignment	5.43	.98	.17	.56**	.79**	.68**	−.10	
7 Post-test interest in assignment	5.26	1.58	.13	.62**	.93**	.63**	−.04	.85**

Notes
Numbers range from 29 to 43 due to pairwise deletion of missing cases.
$^{*}p < .05$; $^{**}p < .01$.

three things: pre-test effects but not post-test effects, post-test effects but not pre-test effects or an effect of the difference between pre-test and post-test scores. Consistent with the arguments raised by Edwards (1995), decomposing the change score between the pre- and post-test into its component parts (pre-test and post-test effects) allows us to understand what is driving any observed effects. The complementary nature of the components of the difference score is evidenced in the fact that subtracting the unstandardized B weight for the effect of the RJP on the pre-test from the unstandardized B weight for the effect of RJP on the post-test equals the unstandardized B weight for the change score. For example, as shown in Table 2, for the effect of the RJP on the change in interest in a global assignment: $B_{\text{change in interest}} = B_{\text{post-test}} - B_{\text{pre-test}}$ or [.10 = .58 − .48]. This procedure allows a more comprehensive understanding of what is driving the effects of the RJP on the change score.

Change in interest in a global assignment To test hypothesis 1, change in interest in a global assignment was regressed on the RJP condition. The results of this regression analysis are reported on the left side of Table 2 and indicate that no relationship was detected between receiving the RJP and participants' change in interest in a global assignment. Using the technique described by Edwards (1995), we then examined the independent effects of the two components of the change in interest in a global assignment: pre-test interest and post-test interest in a global assignment.

Table 2 *The effects of the RJP on interest in a global assignment*

Step	*DV = Change in interest in global assignment (N = 32) Change in R^2 (b)*	*DV = Post-test interest in global assignment (N = 32) Change in R^2 (b)*	*DV = Pre-test interest in global assignment (N = 32) Change in R^2 (b)*
1 Realistic preview	.00 (.10)	.03 (.58)	.04 (.48)

Note
n = 32.

Table 3 *The effects of the RJP on perceptions of one's ability to make an informed decision*

Step	*DV = Change in ability to make informed decision (N = 34) Change in R^2 (b)*	*DV = Post-test ability to make informed decision (N = 34) Change in R^2 (b)*	*DV = Pre-test ability to make informed decision (N = 34) Change in R^2 (b)*
1 Realistic preview	.33** (1.02)	.22** (.82)	.01 (−.20)

Notes
n = 34.
** = significant at $p \leq .01$.

The decomposition of the change in interest dependent variable was performed by running two additional regression analyses. The first analysis regressed post-test interest in a global assignment scores on the RJP condition. The second analysis regressed pre-test interest in a global assignment scores on the RJP condition. The results of these two regressions are reported on the right side of Table 2. When the change in interest in the global assignment score was decomposed, the RJP was found to be unrelated to pre- or post-test scores. Consistent with hypothesis 1, receiving an RJP was unrelated to interest in a global assignment.

Change in ability to make an informed decision Table 3 reports the analyses for hypothesis 2. The changes in participants' perceptions of their ability to make an informed decision about a global assignment were regressed on the RJP condition. The results indicate that, after removing three outliers (whose residuals were greater than 3), the RJP predicted 33 per cent ($p < .01$) of the variance in the change in participants' perceptions of their ability to make an informed decision. When the change in participants' perceptions of their ability to make an informed decision was decomposed, a very salient finding emerged. Of the two independent variables (participants' pre-test and post-test perceptions of their ability to make an informed decision), only the post-test scores were significantly predicted by the RJP ($R^2 = .22$, $p < .01$). There was no difference between the RJP and no-RJP conditions in participants' perceptions of their ability to make an informed decision on the pre-test, suggesting that receiving the RJP was the likely cause of the change in perceptions.

Change in self-efficacy for a global assignment Table 4 reports the analyses for hypothesis 3. The change in participants' efficacy for a global assignment was regressed on the RJP condition. The results indicate that the RJP predicted 18 per cent ($p < .01$) of the variance in the change in participants' efficacy for a global assignment.

Table 4 *The effects of the RJP on self-efficacy*

Step	*DV = Change in efficacy* (N = 35) *Change in R^2 (b)*	*DV = Post-test efficacy* (N = 35) *Change in R^2 (b)*	*DV = Pre-test efficacy* (N = 35) *Change in R^2 (b)*
1 Realistic preview	.18** (.56)	.14* (.79)	.02 (.23)

Notes
n = 35.
* = significant at $p \leq .05$, ** = significant at $p \leq .01$.

When the change in participants' efficacy perceptions was decomposed, again a very salient finding emerged. Of the two independent variables (participants' pre-test and post-test perceptions of their ability to make an informed decision), only the post-test scores were significantly predicted by the RJP ($R^2 = .14$, $p < .05$). There was no difference between the RJP and control group participants' perceptions of their ability to make an informed decision on the pre-test, suggesting that receiving the RJP was the likely cause of the change in efficacy perceptions.

To provide an alternative test for the effects of the self-assessment RJP on the three outcomes, three separate regression analyses were performed. The post-test scores for each outcome were regressed on the RJP condition after controlling for the effects of the pre-test. For the outcome of interest in a global assignment, the effects of the pre-test were statistically significant ($B = 1.18$; $p < .01$). After partialling the pre-test effects, the RJP condition was not a statistically significant predictor of post-test interest in the assignment ($B = .01$; *ns*). These results are consistent with the results of the decomposed regression analysis that found that the RJP condition was unrelated to a change in interest in a global assignment.

For the outcome of how well informed the decision was, the effects of the pre-test were statistically significant ($B = .48$; $p < .01$). After partialling the pre-test effects, the RJP condition was a statistically significant predictor of post-test interest in the assignment ($B = .92$; $p < .01$). These results are consistent with the results of the decomposed regression analysis that found that the RJP condition was related to an increase in participants' perception of their ability to make an informed decision about going on a global assignment.

Pre-test scores were also statistically significant predictors of post-test efficacy for a global assignment ($B = 1.05$; $p < .01$). After partialling the pre-test effects, the RJP condition was a statistically significant predictor of post-test interest in the assignment ($B = .56$; $p < .01$). These results are consistent with the results of the decomposed regression analysis that found that the RJP condition was related to an increase in participants' efficacy for a global assignment.

Discussion

The results from this study present an interesting picture for RJPs, self-efficacy and decision making, in general, and for global assignment decision making, in particular. With respect to the participants' interest in global assignments, this RJP did not change the participants' initial interest. This finding is consistent with the most recent meta-analysis of RJPs that found that RJPs tend to be slightly negatively or unrelated to attrition from the recruitment process (Phillips, 1998).

In addition to not decreasing interest, the results from this study suggest that the self-assessment RJP actually increased self-efficacy for a global assignment. Self-efficacy research suggests that, when individuals' self-efficacy increases, their interest level will also increase (Lenox and Subich, 1994). Greater self-efficacy has also been associated with the setting of higher goals and ultimately with higher performance (Locke *et al.*, 1984; Phillips and Gully, 1997; Thomas and Mathieu, 1994; Wood and Bandura, 1989a; 1989b; Wood *et al.*, 1990). Thus, RJP self-assessments may actually build interest in global assignments as well as improving the individual's chances of succeeding on such an assignment (outcomes that many multinational organizations would welcome).

This study also found that the self-assessment RJP had a positive effect on participants' perceptions of their ability to make an informed decision about becoming an expatriate. This is the first study we are aware of that investigates the effectiveness of

self-assessment RJPs. Given the ambiguity of global assignments, providing as much relevant and useful information as possible will positively affect the comfort level of the candidate making this important decision. Allowing candidates to self-assess their fit with the challenges and demands of a global assignment appears to enhance their perceived ability to make a good decision.

Implications for theory

Although it is the first study in this area, these results suggest that previous findings regarding the effectiveness of RJPs generalize to expatriates. The RJP did not influence participants' interest in participating in a global assignment and improved participants' perceptions of their ability to make an informed decision about becoming an expatriate. Although past RJP research has typically not investigated the effects of an RJP on self-efficacy, this study suggests that RJPs can positively influence self-efficacy as well.

The fact that the RJP did not change participants' initial interest in a global assignment indicates that RJPs' influence on the other outcomes is likely to be the result of a personal commitment rather than a self-selection effect. The personal commitment effect occurs when individuals feel that they are able to make a choice without coercion or external inducements, which leads to greater commitment to the ultimate decision (Bem, 1970; Wanous, 1980). This finding is consistent with Phillips' (1998) meta-analysis.

Limitations and future research

Although this study makes important contributions to the expatriate and RJP literatures, it is not without limitations. The sample of expatriates is predominantly from the US. Future studies should test these hypotheses with samples of expatriates from around the world. Theoretically, one would not expect substantial differences regarding the influence of RJPs on the decision-making process. Future studies should examine whether people from different cultures create expectations differently. In addition, the sample was from an oil and energy multinational organization. Thus, it was not possible to conduct an analysis by industry. Future studies should examine the combined effect of industry and nationality to expand the generalizability of the findings.

Another potential limitation of the current study is the modest sample size. Although this can be a cause of Type II error, the fact that the effect sizes were statistically significant indicates that this is not likely to have been of concern in the current study. Despite tapping the entire organization, the sample size was not sufficient to allow for continued data collection on expatriate performance, given that the sample size would be likely to decrease further over time. Future research with larger samples will help to better understand the processes underlying these effects, and to estimate the magnitude of the effects of self-assessment RJPs on additional outcomes.

This study examined RJPs in the context of the decision-making process for expatriate candidates. Future research should take these results one step further. In the domestic context, Wanous and his colleagues (Wanous *et al.*, 1992) found that met expectations were positively related to higher job satisfaction, organizational commitment, intent to remain, job performance and job survival. In the case of expatriates, accurate expectations were related to higher levels of repatriation success (Black, 1992) and cross-cultural adjustment (Caligiuri *et al.*, 2001). Using an even longer longitudinal design, future studies should examine the extent to which RJPs affect additional outcomes.

Although previous research has investigated the efficacy of verbal, written and audio-visual RJPs, to our knowledge this study is the first to investigate a self-assessment

instrument as an RJP. RJPs can be considered a type of persuasive communication (Popovich and Wanous, 1982), and the medium of a communication has been shown to influence its ability to persuade. Active information processing results in more enduring attitude change than passive information processing (Osborn and Watts, 1973). Attention and comprehension are likely to be enhanced to the degree that the individual is actively engaged in the RJP, as is the case with a self-assessment instrument such as the one used in the current study. As the effects sizes for the self-assessment RJP in the current study are of larger magnitude than those typically found for RJPs (e.g. Phillips, 1998), future research on the utility of this RJP medium seems warranted.

Practical implications

This study suggests that RJPs can be effective at helping to shape pre-departure expectations positively and to build expatriates' self-efficacy. Our findings have clear implications for the management of global assignees in multinational organizations. We recommend two 'best practices' that we believe have resulted from this study. Our first practical recommendation is to offer a decision-making tool for expatriate candidates. Given the nature of expatriate assignments, the decision-making tool should be comprehensive enough to cover all of the relevant aspects of the expatriate assignment – including family and personality issues. In the past, many organizations were hesitant to provide RJPs. Their concern was that candidates would drop out of the selection process. This concern was expressed numerous times by organizations having a difficult time filling global assignments. The results of this study suggest that this concern is unwarranted, and that RJPs may in fact build interest. This should be considered a best practice for organizations looking for candidates for their global assignments.

Our final recommendation is for multinational organizations to offer more than just RJPs to improve the accuracy of expatriates' pre-departure expectations. In addition to RJPs, multinational companies can offer a visit to the host country prior to accepting the assignment, formal and informal opportunities to discuss the move with former expatriates (i.e. repatriates), tailored cross-cultural training and the like. Organizations should consider the fact that all the information they offer an expatriate prior to the assignment will influence his or her expectations – and that the goal for managing those expectations should be *accuracy*.

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