

**UNIVERSITY OF VAASA
FACULTY OF BUSINESS STUDIES
DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT**

Michael Dorsch

**TRANSFERABILITY OF CAREER CAPITAL ACQUIRED DURING
STUDIES ABROAD TO EXPATRIATION CONTEXTS**

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UNIVERSITY OF VAASA
Faculty of Business Studies
Author:

Michael Dorsch

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Vesa Suutari

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ABSTRACT

Through increasing globalization the skills needed for success in today's world differ from those needed only 15 years ago to pursue a successful career. Many companies are searching for employees with international skills and a cosmopolitan and global world-view. Hence, graduates need an education that enables them to compete in global markets, since many of them might work in an international context or even abroad for some time during their career. Study periods abroad are considered as a possibility to acquire cross-cultural abilities necessary for a successful career in today's globalised world. Over the past two decades an increasing number of students decided to study in a foreign country. It can be assumed that those former internationally mobile students can benefit from their experience gained during studies abroad and transfer these skills to expatriation contexts. Therefore, the aim of this research is to capture the developmental aspects of such study periods abroad on the career and career capital development of graduates, and the transferability of these skills to expatriation contexts.

A qualitative research design has been chosen for this study to capture a richness of information on the career competencies of former internationally mobile students. Data was collected during ten semi-structured interviews, which were recorded and fully transcribed for analysis.

The main findings of this research suggest that studies abroad have a strong effect on the development of career capital. They increased the participants' language skills, lead to the acquisition of intercultural competences, and increased their self-confidence. Generally, it seems that studies abroad were an important factor for students to seek for international jobs. When it comes to the transferability of the acquired career capital, mainly so-called soft skills and language skills could be utilized during expatriation. Previous experience of living abroad also facilitated integration.

KEYWORDS: Expatriation, Boundaryless Career, Career Capital, Studies Abroad,

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

Through increasing globalization the whole world rather than their home country has become the arena of business for many organizations. Regularly operating across geographical borders has become the rule rather than the exception, especially for large companies (Baruch 2004: 211). Having a workforce that is used to operate in foreign cultures is a competitive necessity for organizations (Black & Gregersen 1999). From a career management perspective this means that employees need to manage and to be managed beyond geographical and cultural horizons.

Thus, the skills needed for success in today's world differ from the skills needed only 15 years ago to pursue a successful career. The increasing internationalization of universities, companies and communities is certainly one of the major developments in the recent past. Career perspectives of (business) graduates seem to be more and more dependent on their cross-cultural ability and their capacity to work in various international contexts in this rapidly globalizing world. International mobility programmes, which include student exchanges, study abroad agreements and internships in foreign countries represent an attempt to internationalize university education (Marcotte, Desroches & Poupart 2007).

Study periods abroad are considered as a possibility to acquire such cross-cultural abilities and its proponents frequently praise studies abroad as a gateway to a brighter professional future. For this reason, an increasing number of students decided to study temporary in another country over the past two decades. Such an experience is viewed as beneficial for the learning process of the students and their growth of competences in aspects like gathering and experiencing field knowledge of the economy, society and culture of the host country of study; successful studies in fields which are literally border-crossing (e.g. International Business); broadening students' mind and improving

reflection through contrasting experiences of different countries, different academic cultures etc. and the acquisition of international and intercultural communication techniques, e.g. foreign languages, intercultural communication styles and so on (Bracht, Engel, Janson, Over, Schomburg & Teichler 2006). Additionally, studies abroad are expected to have a positive impact on the personal development and employability of students. Hence, most institutions of higher education in the industrialized world and supranational organisations like the European Union have reacted to increasing globalization by designing policies and programmes aimed at increasing students' understanding and awareness of the ideas, cultures, customs and institutions of other nations. In Europe for example, the ERASMUS programme contributed to the cross-border mobility of students. Currently it enables more than 180,000 students to study and work abroad each year (European Union 2010).

In addition to the increasing globalization today's graduates face a less predictable job market and might have to change jobs and careers up to six times in their lives, and they might retire from jobs that do not even presently exist (Williams 2005). The concept of careers has changed over the past decades. Careers are becoming less predictable and traditional career concepts are no longer dominant. New forms of career have emerged. Individuals decouple their careers and career planning from organizations since often it is no longer possible for organizations to manage careers on behalf of employees as they used to in the past. That is why a managerial career is increasingly becoming a do-it-yourself project. In most organisations, managers and employees are assuming greater responsibility for planning their career moves and identifying the steps required to achieve them (Allred, Snow & Miles 1996). Career management is more and more the responsibility of each individual and, as a consequence, careers are becoming boundaryless and protean.

Those two new perspectives on careers have emerged and become popular in the organizational literature over the last decades. Whereas the protean career focuses on achieving subjective career success through self-directed vocational behaviour, the boundaryless career focuses on crossing both objective and subjective dimensions of career at multiple levels of analysis, such as

organisational position, mobility, flexibility, and work environment. At the same time it de-emphasizes reliance on organizational career paths and promotions.

From an organizational perspective, rather than looking for employees with specific training and experience in a single field, many companies are searching for employees with international (communication) skills and a cosmopolitan and global world-view. As a consequence, graduates need an education that provides them with such skills to enable them to compete in a global market with an increasingly educated population (Williams 2005), since many of them might work in an international context or even abroad for some time during their career. Organizations need employees in key roles to function in ease in diverse locations and to communicate and cooperate across cultural, national, and ethnic boundaries to grow on global markets. A part of the staffing to achieve global expansion is accomplished through international expatriate assignments. It can be assumed that former international students can benefit from their experiences gained during studies abroad if they accept such an expatriate assignment or search for work abroad on their own. Hence, organizations should consider this group of employees as a target group for international assignments.

Existing research has explored the impact of international assignments on careers and career capital development. Interest has shifted from the impact of single expatriate assignments (e.g. Antal 2000; Dickmann & Doherty 2008; Dickmann & Harris 2005; Jokinen, Brewster & Suutari 2008) towards managers pursuing a global career and their career capital (e.g. Suutari & Mäkelä 2007; Cappellen & Janssens 2008). Even the transferability of career capital from an expatriate assignment to a subsequent one has been in the focus of researchers (Jokinen 2010). However, no research that studied the transferability of career capital acquired during studies abroad to expatriation contexts could be found. Nevertheless, it can be expected that some of their skills and competences gained during such an experience can be transferred to an expatriation context. Those are social and interpersonal skills, language skills and cross-cultural abilities. It can also be assumed that a positive experience of living and

studying abroad can lead to an interest in working abroad, or at least to the wish of working in an international environment to apply the acquired competences in business life and to expand them. Possibly young professionals can additionally benefit from networks and contacts born of social interaction during their studies abroad if they decide to work abroad.

The aim of this study is to capture the developmental aspects of studies abroad and the impact of such study periods on the career and career capital development of graduates. The empirical part of this research will try to find answers to the above-mentioned questions, to capture the developmental aspects of studies abroad, and to gain insight to respondents' own experience, perceptions and views by applying DeFillippi and Arthur's (1994) career capital framework consisting of knowing-how, knowing-why, and knowing-whom.

1.2 Research Questions and Objectives

As mentioned above, study periods abroad are considered as a possibility to acquire cross-cultural abilities, international and intercultural abilities and knowledge of the economy, society and culture of a host country. Additionally studies abroad are expected to have a positive impact on the personal development of students and their awareness and understanding of the customs, ideas, cultures and institutions of other nations. Hence, such an experience can be considered invaluable for future professional assignments abroad.

By applying the DeFillippi and Arthur's (1994) career capital framework this study wants to examine the impact of studies abroad on the development of career capital. The research questions are:

1. *What kind of Career Capital could expatriates gain during their studies abroad?*

and

2. *Can Career Capital acquired during studies abroad be transferred to expatriation contexts and how can it be utilized in business life?*

These questions will be answered by a series of interviews with former internationally mobile students, which have been living abroad as exchange students, participated in double-degree programmes based on university cooperation in two countries, or completed a master's degree programme in a country which is not their home country. Additionally, at the time of the interviews, all interviewees were on expatriate assignment (either company assigned or self-initiated) or had returned from such an assignment recently.

1.3 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis consists of seven chapters that represent three main blocks: literature review, research methods, and findings and conclusions. The first chapter introduced the topic and the background of this thesis and presented briefly the research background and research questions.

The second chapter is on expatriation in general. After a short introduction to the topic organizational and individual motives towards international mobility will be explained, followed by an overview on the research tradition on expatriation and the single stages of which an expatriate assignment consist: selection, training, adjustment and integration, failed expatriation, and repatriation.

Chapter three deals with career perspectives. First, traditional career concepts are described, followed by an explanation why and how new career concepts have emerged. Then, two of these new concepts, the protean career and the boundaryless career are presented. Finally, the different aspects of career capital, which are the central point of this thesis, will be introduced.

The fourth chapter provides a review of the existing literature on the development of career capital through international experiences. First, a summary of the benefits of studying abroad will be given, followed by a presentation of the research on career capital acquired during expatriation and the pursuit of a global career and its transferability. Finally, the theoretical framework of the study will be presented at the end of this chapter.

Chapter five explains the chosen research approach and methods, describes the collection and analysis of the data, and evaluates their validity and reliability.

Chapter six presents the findings of this study: It will be shown what kind of career capital formerly internationally mobile students acquired during their studies abroad and to which extent they could transfer this knowledge to expatriation.

The seventh chapter provides a discussion and conclusion of the findings, as well as some suggestions for future research on this topic, and the limitations of this study.

2. EXPATRIATION

Nowadays, having a workforce that is used to operate in foreign cultures is a competitive necessity for organisations (Black and Gregersen 1999). From a career management perspective this means that employees need to manage and to be managed beyond both geographical and cultural horizons. In this chapter an explanation of why companies send people abroad and why individuals decide to relocate internationally will be given, followed by a short overview on the research tradition of international moves and the different stages they go through prior to and during their assignments.

2.1 Organizational and Individual Motives towards International Mobility

2.1.1 Motives for Organizations

Literature and research distinguish between different reasons for sending personnel abroad. In their classical article Edström and Galbraith (1977) propose that expatriates are used for several reasons that sometimes overlap. Those are to fill positions that cannot be staffed locally because of a lack of technical or managerial skills, to support management development by enabling high potential managers to acquire international experience, and organizational development referring to control and coordination of international operations through socialization and informal networks. Developing a common, worldwide organizational culture and to train local managers and technicians (Briscoe 1995: 47) are also motives for the use of expatriates. Especially in an early stage of an organizations' internationalisation expatriates shall boost the skill levels in international subsidiaries (ibid: 51).

Other researchers differentiate between demand-driven and learning-driven international assignments. The traditional expatriate jobs with the purpose of

transferring knowledge and managerial skills fit in the first category. But nowadays the focus has shifted towards learning-driven assignments, i.e. on personal career enhancement and/or organisational competence development because there is less demand for filling local skill gaps (Kohonen 2007: 28). Multi National Enterprises (MNEs) need international experience among their management teams. In order to develop such an experience they move managers to assignments in other countries than their country of origin (Briscoe 1995: 48). Therefore, international assignments are increasingly viewed as an essential part of career progression from a management development perspective (Evans et al. 2002).

But companies do not only send people abroad, quite often they also hire foreigners in their countries of origin. By hiring such so called self-assigned¹ (or self-initiated) expatriates from the outside labour market they have several benefits. Usually self-assigned expatriates are hired as locals in their host country and employed under local compensation principles. Therefore, they have lower levels of compensation than company-assigned expatriates. Additionally, companies do not have to take responsibility for preparation, training, support, repatriation and career management of such employees, since they decide for themselves when to return to their home country (Biemann & Andresen 2010). But at the same time this group of employees offers advantages to their organizations such as special technical skills, language skills, and knowledge of their home culture and markets. Hence, they can be valuable employees for the hiring companies.

After having introduced motives of organizations towards international mobility, the next section will give an overview on the motives of individuals to relocate internationally.

¹ From their New Zealanders' and Australian perspective Inkson et al. use the term Overseas Experience. This research joins Suutari's and Brewster's (2000) arguments using the term of self-initiated foreign experiences, as from a European perspective working in other countries without crossing a sea is rather normal. Therefore the term of self-initiated (or self-assigned) expatriate experience seems more suitable.

2.1.2 Motives for Individuals

The primary motives for individuals for accepting an international assignment are an opportunity to advance vertically in the organisation (Mendenhall, Dunbar & Oddou 1987) and enhanced career prospects (Baruch, Steele and Quantrill 2002). International experience is often seen as important for executive promotion and helps managers to lose the assumption that products or methods that work at home will automatically work in other countries. Briscoe (1995: 51) also mentions that an international assignment helps managers to gain insights into how foreign competitors operate. The skills needed to work in foreign cultures and markets, and to make decisions in the face of the type of ambiguity often faced in an unfamiliar culture, are often seen as precisely those skills needed at the top of multinational corporations. Therefore, many managers decide to accept an expatriate assignment, apply actively for an international relocation within their organization, or search a job abroad on their own initiative outside the boundaries of their current employer.

Such self-initiated (or self-assigned) foreign assignments as a means to develop international working experience got into the focus of researchers in the late 1990s (Inkson, Arthur, Pringle & Barry 1997; Suutari & Brewster 2000; Vance 2005; Jokinen, Brewster & Suutari 2008). With the introduction of free movement of labour within the European Union and the lack of employment opportunities due to increasing unemployment in some European countries in the middle 1990s, searching for career opportunities outside the home country became an alternative for highly skilled and trained individuals (Suutari & Brewster 2000: 418). Inkson et al. (1997) name four characteristics that differentiate self-assigned expatriation and traditional expatriate assignments: the source of initiative, goals for the foreign jobs, source of funding, and career type.

In a traditional expatriate assignment, the initiative for going abroad usually comes from an internationally operating company (Inkson et al. 1997). A suitable individual is chosen and sent abroad for a temporary assignment to another position in the same company. In a self-initiated expatriate experience,

as the name implies, the *initiative for the international experience* comes from the individual itself. In contrast to traditional expatriation, where the *goals* for the foreign job are the fulfilment of organizational projects, self-assigned expatriates seek cultural experience and geographical exploration, aim for diffuse and unspecified individual development, and may even make short-term career sacrifices and “accept employment in unskilled work in order to facilitate valued non-work experience” (Inkson et al. 1997: 358). According to Inkson and Myers (2003) the major motivations of self-assigned expatriation actions appear to be cultural and social in most cases.

But not only people in the early stage of their career as described by Inkson et al. (1997) aim for self-initiated expatriation. Suutari and Brewster (2000) mention also more experienced people who have chosen an international career are included in this group. Those individuals might work for international organisations, e.g. the United Nations and the EU, or in local organizations without expatriate status. Inkson et al. (1997) write in their article that for overseas experience usually a job is not sought before leaving the home country, only in a minority of cases jobs will be arranged in advance. Suutari and Brewster (2000) argue this assumption is more valid among young, less educated people. Older or more successful people and people with higher education would be more career-driven and obtain better opportunities of finding jobs abroad prior to expatriation. Also those in late careers and with family will be unwilling to go abroad without a job arrangement.

And whilst traditional expatriate assignments are funded by company salary and expenses, self-assigned expatriates use personal savings and casual earnings as a *source of funding* for their stay abroad. Employment is a means to paying for itself (Inkson & Myers 2003). As mentioned above, they are usually employed under local compensation principles and have lower levels of compensation than expatriates. Suutari and Brewster (2000) discovered additional individual variables in their comparison of self-assigned expatriates and company-assigned expatriates: Self-assigned expatriates are on average slightly younger and contain a higher percentage of females and there also seem to be more singles among self-assigned expatriates than amongst

company-assigned expatriates. In both groups of their sample a slight majority had no previous international experience.

Inkson et al. (1997) refer to the “boundaryless career” (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996) as *career type* for self-assigned expatriation (this career concept will be explained in depth in chapter 3.2.2). For this alternative type of expatriation traditional ideas of career management are not relevant, since no company supports their career guidance. Also repatriation is less certain, because self-assigned expatriation typically involves inter-company rather than intra-company job transfers. Self-assigned expatriates are creating their own career after coming back, whereas repatriation programmes and career counselling seem to be common among traditional expatriates.

After having discussed and introduced motives for organizations and individuals to relocate internationally, the next subchapter introduces the research tradition on expatriation and the different stages of an (traditional) expatriate assignment.

2.2 Research Tradition on Expatriation

Traditionally, expatriation has been one of the key topics in international human resource management (HRM) research. According to Evans, Pucik and Barsoux (2002) research on expatriation has its roots in the rapid internationalisation of U.S. companies during the period after World War II and in the 1960s. At that time, the main role of corporate human resource (HR) management was to facilitate the selection of personnel for foreign postings, finding employees familiar with the company’s products, technology, culture and organisation and who had the amenability to the constraints of working and living abroad. Generous financial incentives were often used to persuade people to move abroad. Since many assignments turned out to be unsuccessful, attention shifted towards expatriation failure rates. Ensuring successful overseas assignments became an important issue in the late 1970s due to the

growing costs of expatriation. In the early 1980s the problems of coordination and control arising from the international growth of companies, and the challenges of expatriation attracted the interest of researchers and most of the research in international HRM at that time was focused on managing expatriates and international assignments. With increasing global competition, the situation changed in the 1990s. It was increasingly perceived that the competitive advantage of a company lies in its abilities to learn across its geographic and other boundaries in order to be successful on a global level. (Evans et al. 2002: 15 - 25).

This subchapter will follow a similar structure as the research tradition on expatriation. First of all selection criteria for international relocations will be discussed, followed by training contents for successful assignments, and relocation, adjustment and integration issues. Furthermore, reasons for failed expatriation will be introduced, followed by the final step of expatriation: coming home and reintegrating in the country of origin, so called repatriation.

2.2.1 Selection

Expatriate selection criteria have been studied much, whereas other aspects have not been in the focus of researchers. Technical expertise and domestic track record are usually the most important factors that firms pay attention to (Evans et al. 2002). But often selection processes fail to consider factors like the candidate's cross-cultural ability or the family's disposition to live abroad (Black, Gregersen and Mendenhall, 1992). There is academic support providing evidence that stronger efforts should be used by organisations to assess other softer factors (Tung 1981; Scullion 1994). International assignments can be very challenging personally, since the assignees leave their previous life and have to face a variety of challenges such as the inability of speaking the host country's language, coping with culture shock, the inability to interact effectively with host country nationals, and the like (Caligiuri & Tarique 2006). Expatriates must be able to adjust to their new and often alien environment and, at the same time, deliver their technical and managerial expertise (Briscoe 1995: 53). The

main difficulty for most expatriates and their spouses and families is the adaptation to the foreign culture. Hence, firms must choose candidates who will be most able to adapt in their new environment and who also possess the necessary expertise needed to get the job done in their host country.

According to Caligiuri and Tarique (2006) three major areas have emerged in the selection of international assignees. Those are individual-level antecedents of international assignee success, process issues for effectively selecting global assignees, and training and development issues for preparing international assignees to live and work in new cultural environments. Individual level antecedents, which should be taken into account in the selection process are personality characteristics, language skills, and prior international experience. The three key process issues for selecting international assignees in research literature are a realistic preview for the international assignment, self-selection and a proper and systematic candidate assessment, since most international assignee selection usually happens using the most informal methods: recommendations of peers and supervisors (Harris & Brewster, 1999). Training and development issues for expatriation candidates will be introduced in depth in the next section.

2.2.2 Training

In the beginning of a overseas or foreign assignment expatriates and their families must learn to cope with disruptions to their normal routines and ways of living. The bigger the distance between the parent culture and that of the new country, the bigger the changes and the longer and extensive the training should be. Briscoe (1995: 88) suggests that candidates for expatriation and their families should receive a minimum of training and orientation on topics such as intercultural business skills, culture shock management, life-style adjustment, host-country daily living issues, local customs and etiquette, area studies, repatriation planning, and language learning strategies prior to the assignment in order to facilitate the adjustment process.

Caligiuri and Tarique (2006) distinguish between international training activities (ITAs) and international development activities (IDAs) in expatriate preparation. ITAs focus on the competencies needed to perform more effectively in a current job, whereas IDAs refer more to the acquisition of competencies needed to perform in future jobs. Some of those various activities are cross-cultural training, pre-departure cross-cultural orientation, diversity training, language training, traditional education in international management, cross-national coaching or mentoring, immersion cultural experience, cross-border global teams, and international assignments.

In general, training and development for international assignees can facilitate successful expatriation and may enhance the learning process of an expatriate and, hence, facilitate cross-cultural interactions and cross-cultural adjustment (Caligiuri, Phillips, Lazarova, Tarique and Bürgi 2001). Such predeparture training can also reduce expatriate failure rates. Tung (1982) found a correlation between candidate selection and training procedures in her study. The more rigorous the types of selection and training procedures were, the lower the failure rate. This is important since expatriate failure is likely to result in cost implications for the organisations concerned (Collings & Scullion 2008: 88).

2.2.3 Relocation, Adjustment and Integration

Any transition or move in a person's life brings with it a requirement to adjust. Such adjustment is the outcome of a learning process that enables an individual to be more effective and content in new circumstances (Haslberger 2008: 132). Expatriates have to adjust to their new job, to interacting with locals, and to the non-working environment (Stroh, Black, Mendenhall and Gregersen 2005). The more different the new environment from the home country, the bigger the need for adjustment.

Much of the research on expatriate adjustment follows the conceptualizations of Black et al. (1991). This conceptualisation distinguishes three facets of adjustment: interaction, general and work adjustment. Interaction adjustment

refers to speaking, interacting and socializing with host country nationals in- and outside work. General adjustment denotes living conditions in general, such as housing conditions, food, shopping, cost of living, entertainment and healthcare facilities. Work adjustment includes performance standards and expectations, specific job responsibilities and supervisory responsibilities. Thomas and Lazarova (2006) criticise this framework because of conceptual and measurement limitations.

Other conceptualizations of expatriate adjustment distinguish between psychological and socio-cultural adjustment (Searle and Ward 1990; Ward and Kennedy 1999). Psychological adjustment refers to an expatriate's emotional well-being and experiences of stress, whereas socio-cultural adjustment denotes the behavioural dimension, indicating the learning of effective social skills.

According to Haslberger (2008: 132) expatriate adjustment is a lasting change in behaviour or behavioural tendencies that originates in relevant past experiences and enables the expatriate to be more effective in the new environment. For this researcher adjustment has three components: it involves behaviour or behavioural tendencies, information processing and memory, and emotions. Additionally adjustment has an internal and an external component. From an external perspective an expatriate may be regarded as adjusted if the external world perceives him as adjusted. Internally, expatriates can regard themselves as adjusted if he or she reached a level of behavioural effectiveness, knowledge of the host culture, and emotional well-being.

All these conceptualizations have in common that successful adjustment to the host environment is considered as a significant element of expatriate performance (Collings & Scullion 2008: 88). The assumption is that highly adjusted expatriates perform well at work (Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer & Luk, 2005). Yet, some researchers find that the relationship is weak and sometimes non-existent (Thomas & Lazarova 2006). It should be mentioned that the optimal level of adjustment also depends on the expatriate's job. If the purpose of the assignment is corporate control, the company would not want the manager to adjust fully to the life in the host country, whereas if the

purpose is a boundary-spanning activity such as knowledge transfer, enhancing communications, or selling to the local market, dual allegiance is desirable.

On a private level, family problems are one of the most important reasons for adjustment problems. Haslberger (2008: 131) names three possible reasons for this: families have the most difficult time adjusting, families are most likely to press for an early return, and blaming families allows the most important players in the expatriation to save face:

“...If the family takes the blame, the likely damage to the expatriate’s career is minimized. The manager of the expatriate and the human resource department come out fine – the expatriate’s family is not their (prime) responsibility. And finally, the managers who selected the expatriate did not choose an unsuitable candidate.” (Haslberger 2008: 131).

Each family member must adjust to their new life domains abroad such as work or school, shopping and entertainment, making and interacting with friends, general rules of conduct and public order. Haslberger (2008: 142) mentions that children and teenagers often adjust with remarkable speed, gaining fluency in the local language in a matter of months. Children’s successes can also support the parents and make them feel better. It can provide them with useful information, since their offspring may collect important cross-cultural knowledge, which they share with parents. Additionally, children may coach parents in cross- cultural interactions, helping them with ordering at a restaurant or with shopping (Haslberger 2008: 142). If the expatriate and/or his or her family do not manage to adjust to their new environment, expatriation can fail. Reasons for such a scenario will be introduced in the next subchapter.

2.2.4 Failed Expatriation

Failure can be defined as early return, poor performance on assignment and a lack of learning from the international experience (Baruch 2004: 224). Black and Gregersen (1999) argue that a wider definition of failure should include leaving the company after repatriation since many expatriates leave their firms during the first few years after their return. On the other hand, failure from a corporate

perspective may be a successful career move from the individual perspective (Bonache et al. 2010). But whereas some expatriation literature indicates that failure rates are high, Harzing (1995) found out that this assumption is a persistent myth. Nevertheless, failed expatriate assignments occur and have been in the interest of research.

But what are the reasons for failure? Previous research suggests that the answer does not only depend on company practice, but also on the cultural origin of expatriates. Tung (1982) found that for European and American expatriates the inability of their spouses to adjust was the major constraint. Individual expatriates have the advantage of personal contacts at work, while their spouses and families are often left on their own to discover their new environment and to develop relationships with locals and new social networks, often with little understanding of the culture and the inability to speak the language. This is why expatriates often find adjustment easier and less lonely than their spouses and families (Briscoe 1995: 54). Other factors for Americans were the inability to cope with a larger overseas responsibility. But for Japanese expatriates the larger responsibility was the major reason for failure. The spouse's difficulties to adjust were only on fifth position on the list of factors for Japanese expatriates. Additional factors in Tung's study included the level of hospitality of the people in the host country and climatic differences between home and host country, but also religious differences. Expatriation fails as well if the company makes a mistake by assigning a candidate for an international assignment who lacks the necessary technical abilities or motivation to perform under foreign requirements. In such a case the expatriates may be sent home earlier (Briscoe 1995: 56).

To summarize the literature on failed expatriation, one can say that companies do not only have to pay attention to the selection and training of expatriates and their spouses and families, but also to the repatriation process in order to avoid early return, poor performance of the candidate abroad, and repatriate turnover, which can all turn out to be costly failure. But irrespective of a failed or successful international assignment, the next step in the expatriate circle is

repatriation in the home country, which will be introduced in the following section.

2.2.5 Repatriation

Repatriation is the opposite of expatriation. It includes the move of the expatriate back to the parent company and home country from the foreign assignment. Repatriation is often supposed to be easy or to come as a relief because the expatriate is returning home (Kohonen 2007: 31). But for many this move is even more difficult than the original move overseas (Briscoe 1995: 65; Kohonen 2007: 31) and belongs, according to Baruch (2004: 232), to one of the most neglected aspects of expatriation. Re-entry seems to be especially challenging for expatriates who have been on a long-term assignment (Black et al. 1999; Harvey 1989). Much research suggests that the repatriation element of an international expedition can be fraught with difficulties.

Often colleagues, HR managers and line managers think that expatriates happily return home, in the belief that there is no place like home. In many cases this is a wrong assumption. It is a common experience among expatriates that they cannot utilize their new expertise in their original organisation after repatriation (Stroh, Gregersen & Black, 1998). Additionally people struggle with managerial and direct career issues. Hence, many expatriates experience a reverse culture shock (RCS) upon return (Adler 1981; Black 1992; Baruch et al. 2002).

Baruch (2004: 232) defines RCS as the effect when people are surprised and shocked to encounter a new culture when they return home to what is apparently known territory. In literature and research there are two contradicting hypotheses when it comes to the relevance of the cultural gap or distance between home and host country and the level of RCS. The first hypothesis suggests that the 'closer' the cultural differences between the countries, the less RCS impact will be found, since it will be easier to return to a culture after working and living in a relatively similar culture. The other

hypothesis suggests the opposite: the 'closer' the cultural differences between the home country and the host country, the more RCS impact will be found (cp. Baruch 2004: 234).

A reverse culture shock can be a result of several sets of changes. First of all, in many cases expatriates and their families have a high standard of living in the host country, often higher than at home because of the compensation practices of most MNEs: they reward their expatriates quite well (Briscoe 1995: 65). Therefore, coming back to the old standards and readjusting can be difficult. People must relearn their original cultural and life style, but probably view it differently than before the assignment.

Additionally, expatriates change during their assignments. Many find that both, the country and the company remained the same, whereas they had moved forward. Living in another country for a number of years will most probably change their views and ways of thinking in subtle ways (Haslberger 2008: 143). Therefore, some expatriates may experience a gap between themselves and their friends or fellow citizens and find that aspects of their cultural identity have changed. In terms of cultural differences, people learned during their assignments how things can be done differently, or sometimes better. They gain an understanding of people in another culture. The more they have absorbed the perspectives of the host culture, the more difficult it is to readjust back home (Tung 1998: 137).

In business life, an assignment gives people an invaluable experience, since many of them are given greater responsibilities than they had before, possibly as head of an operation, having to make strategic decisions. Returning to the home country often implies a downward shift in repatriates' status. From a senior work role in a foreign subsidiary, where they are a 'big fish in a small pond' they move back to their home country where they are a 'small fish in a big pond'. A lot of expatriates also think they have seen better working practises during their assignment. When they are trying to persuade their colleagues to adopt such practices they will face difficulties and resistance and might make themselves unpopular during this process. Hence, many

expatriates feel that the experience they gained abroad is not appreciated after turning home.

But likewise the company itself may change while the expatriate is away (Baruch 2004: 232). There might be a collapse or disappearance of the company (e.g. bankruptcy, merger or acquisition). In such a case the expatriate returns to an entirely different company. Restructuring, downsizing, change of market niche etc. can also have a strong impact and change the career system to which an expatriate might have been hoping or preparing to return.

According to Stahl and Cerdin (2004) repatriation is the area of highest dissatisfaction of expatriates with respect to organisational policies. There is evidence in research that 10-25% of expatriates leave their company within one year of repatriation (Black 1992). This percentage is notably higher than for equivalent non-expatriates (Black & Gregersen 1999). On a longer term, between one-quarter and one-third of repatriates leave their companies during the first two years after returning (Suutari & Brewster 2003). The expectations of expatriates seem to play an important role in this turnover. They expect the return to enhance their career prospects (Tung 1998; Suutari & Brewster 2003). Thus repatriates form a set of work related expectations, including the position after repatriation and longer-term career prospects (Doherty, Brewster, Suutari & Dickmann 2008: 177). Typically they want to be rewarded with high-level jobs and expect opportunities to utilize their skills acquired abroad.

Therefore, managing the expectations of repatriates should already start during the pre-assignment stage where organisational goals and individual aspirations need to be informed, formed and integrated (ibid: 178). Former international assignees whose expectations are met report the highest level of repatriation adjustment and job performance (Black 1992). If returnees are dissatisfied because their expectations remain unmet, they work inefficiently and are likely to leave the organisation (Forster 1994). Worse, from an organisational viewpoint, is the fact that people often do not change sectors if they leave the company. So the repatriates do not only leave the company that spent a lot of money for their assignment, but they are even likely to join the competition

(Doherty et al. 2008: 181). Because of this job dissatisfaction leading to high turnover rates after repatriation, international careers are often described as prototypes of new perspectives on careers, the protean and the boundaryless career. These concepts will be introduced and presented in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

3. CAREER PERSPECTIVES

Traditionally, careers haven been described as the sequence of employment-related positions, roles, activities and experiences encountered by a person. They contain a wide range of sequences of occupational experiences, do not necessarily involve promotion, and may cross organizational boundaries (Arnold 1997).

According to Hall (2002: 8-10) there are four distinct meanings of the term career in literature. The first meaning considers *career as advancement*. Careers are seen as vertically mobile and employees move upward in an organization's hierarchy. A career consists of the sequence of promotions and upward moves in a work-related hierarchy during the course of an individual's work life. Advancing by changing occupations is possible. The second view considers *careers as a profession*: certain occupations are representing careers, whereas others do not. Career occupations are those in which patterns of systematic advancement is evident. In contrast to that, professions that do not generally lead to advancement are often viewed as not constituting a career. A third meaning sees a *career as a lifelong sequence of jobs*: In this definition a career are an individual's series of positions held during work life, regardless of level or occupation. Hence all working people have careers and no value is made about the type of occupation or the direction of movement. The forth meaning considers a *career a lifelong sequence of role-related experiences*. According to this definition, a career represents the way a person experiences the sequence of jobs and activities that constitute his work history. It is the subjective career as perceived by the individual including changing aspirations, satisfactions, self-conceptions and other attitudes towards work life.

Careers are subjective as well as objective. They comprehend what can be observed objectively as well as people's interpretation of what happens to them (Arnold 1997). But the concept of careers has changed over the past decades. Traditional career concepts are no longer dominant and new forms of career have emerged. In the following subchapters, traditional career concepts will be

explained, followed by reasons for the emergence of new career concepts, and the discussion of two of these new concepts: the protean and the boundaryless career.

3.1 Traditional Careers

In the traditional perspective on careers it has been assumed that people would spend their entire career in the service of one, or very few organizations. Even if this was not the case, it was the desirable development (Baruch 2004 b). During the economic boom after World War II, organizations tried to build stable, expert and long-term workforces by developing career planning systems and incentives for valued personnel to demonstrate career long loyalty and to keep retention rates low.

In this old career concept, managers and employees had to accommodate to organisational objectives and processes to achieve their career goals (Banai & Harry 2004). Building a successful career meant doing what the firm wanted, and getting ahead meant being grateful for opportunities offered by the organisation (Arthur & Rousseau 1996: 3). In return employees were rewarded in pay, promotion and status dependent on loyalty to the organisation. This also inhibited them from changing their employers. Therefore, managers developed organisation-specific skills over the years of their employment. When they needed to acquire new skills and knowledge, they had to negotiate with their employers to be assigned to formal training programmes on or off the job (Banai & Harry 2004). This model has led to managers that develop their careers in one or two organisations. Career success was measured by comparing manager's own progress with the one of others in terms of relative age and seniority (Sullivan 1999).

These traditional careers were based on hierarchical and rigid structures. Baruch (2004 b) writes that the old career model followed a linear structure in which advancement meant promotion and the organisational hierarchy was the

ladder to climb on. Career paths were indicated by a stability of structure and clarity of career ladders. They had only one direction: upwards. As long as employees performed according to the rules they progressed until they reached their level of incompetence and their progress stopped (Baruch 2004 b: 62). The career path is set for the manager and it is determined by clear and set guidelines as well as definition of success for each organisational member.

This traditional view on careers has been the dominant employment form through the mid-1980's (Arthur & Rousseau 1996). It is no longer dominant. Nowadays, firms can no longer promise and offer lifelong careers. New forms of career have emerged and will be presented in the next section.

3.2 New Career Concepts

The context in which careers happen has changed and is changing. In most Western countries the composition of the workforce is changing. Societies are becoming more ethnically and culturally varied, the average age of the workforce is increasing, and the number of men and women in the labour market are almost equal (Arnold 1997: 1). On average, people are less secure in their jobs and certainly feel more insecure than it used to be the case. Many organisations have reduced the number of people who can be considered core employees – workforce with medium- or long-term contracts. It is more and more common to use outside contractors for highly specialised technical or managerial tasks with a limited duration (Arnold 1997: 1).

This is why careers are becoming less predictable. Nowadays, they involve more frequent changes of job, employer and skill requirements. Additionally, there is more need for (re-)education and (re-)training, also known as lifelong learning. Many organisations have responded to change by explaining that it is no longer possible to manage careers on behalf of employees as they used to in the past. Hence, the traditional career contract, with its promises of a long-term employment relationship and security, has been replaced by a shorter-term

transactional understanding: “The contract is renewable daily based on current needs and performance” (Hall 2002: 4).

Hence, a managerial career is increasingly becoming a do-it-yourself project. In most organisations, managers and employees are assuming greater responsibility for planning their career moves and identifying the steps required to achieve them (Allred, Snow & Miles 1996). Career management is more and more the responsibility of the individual.

Along with these changes, two new perspectives on careers have emerged and become popular in the organizational literature over the last decade: the protean career and the boundaryless career. Whereas the protean career focuses on achieving subjective career success through self-directed vocational behaviour, the boundaryless career focuses on crossing both objective and subjective dimensions of career at multiple levels of analysis, such as organisational position, mobility, flexibility, and work environment. At the same time it de-emphasizes reliance on organizational career paths and promotions. (Briscoe, Hall & Frautschy DeMuth 2006: 30). These two perspectives on careers will be introduced in the following sections.

3.2.1 Protean Careers

The concept of the protean career was developed by Hall (1976, 1996, 2002). The term protean is taken from the name of the Greek god Proteus, who could change his shape at will. Hall describes this new type of career as a process, which the person, not the organisation, is managing, and that will be reinvented by the person from time to time, as the person and the environment change.

“It consists of all the person’s varied experience in education, training, work in several organisations, changes in occupational field, etc ... The protean person’s own personal career choices and search for self-fulfilment are the unifying or integrative elements in his or her life.” (Hall 1976: 201)

Hence, individuals adjust to changing circumstances by rapidly changing their shape and the protean career is a contract with oneself, rather than with the organisation. This changes the relationship between employee and organisation. Hall and Mirvis (1996) and Baruch (2004 b) see the protean career as new form, in which the individual, and not the organization, takes responsibility for transforming their career path according to will and inclinations. In contrast to the traditional career models, the individual does not leave the responsibility of planning and managing his or her own career to the organisation (Baruch 2004 a: 71). The individual changes himself or herself according to need. Such a career is characterized by frequent change and self-invention, autonomy and self-direction. It is driven by individual needs rather than by those of an organisation (Hall 2002: 4).

Protean careerists are intent upon using their own values (and not e.g. organizational values) to guide their career and take an independent role in managing their professional behaviour, whereas individuals with traditional career attitudes are more likely to absorb external standards (not internally developed ones) and are more likely to search for external assistance and direction in career management (Briscoe, Hall & Frautschy DeMuth 2006). Protean careers encompass the whole life space, and are driven by psychological success rather than objective success such as rank, power, or pay (Hall 2002).

Additionally, Briscoe and Hall (2006) define the protean career as a career in which the person is driven by internal values that provide the guidance and measure of career success; and self-directed in personal career management, i.e. individuals are able to be adaptive in terms of performance and learning demands. In the protean career concept a career consists of different stages. According to Hall and Mirvis (1996) individuals will have several careers, each of which will comprise the inner stages of exploration, trial, establishment and mastery. However, mastery will follow a new cycle of exploration, ending with the discovery of a new path, a different profession, role or organization.

The aim of a successful protean career is psychological success, i.e. the feeling of pride and personal accomplishment that derives from achieving one's important goals in life. There are unlimited ways to achieve this psychological success, since each human has unique needs. The protean career is not measured by chronological age and life stages, but by continuous learning and identity changes; it consists of a series of learning stages. Work challenges and relationships are its sources of development and growth is seen as a process of continuous learning fuelled by a combination of the person, work challenges, and relationships. This is in contrast to the traditional career model, where the only goal is achieving vertical success. (Hall 1996: 8 – 10).

The concept of the boundaryless career differs from the protean career in some ways and will be discussed in the following section.

3.2.2 Boundaryless Careers

The boundaryless career is another perspective for exploring the consequences of increased employment mobility. It offers a further counterpoint to traditional career theory. DeFillipi and Arthur (1994) were one of the first to use this term. They offer the boundaryless career concept as a career oriented response to the shift from Industrial State to New Economy. If the term "boundaryless career" is taken literally, it means it is a career either with no limits to the territory into which it can extend, or at least no clear line or boundary marking where those limits are (Inkson 2006). Also because of the above-mentioned increased mobility and decreasing predictability, nowadays almost all careers cross multiple employer boundaries (Arthur, Inkson & Pringle 1999).

For these reasons, boundaryless careers are the opposite of traditional organizational careers, i.e. careers that unfold in a single employment setting (Arthur & Rousseau 1996). Arthur and Rousseau (1996: 6) list "several specific meanings" of the boundaryless career: they move across the boundaries of separate employers; draw validation from outside the present employer; are sustained by external networks of information; break traditional organizational

career boundaries; reject traditional career opportunities for personal or family reasons; and perceive a boundaryless future regardless of structural constraints. This new type of career is independent from, rather than dependent on, traditional career arrangements. It involves both objective features such as mobility, and also the subjective attitude of being boundaryless.

In traditional organizational careers given structures, hierarchies, plans, detailed job descriptions, and prescribed relationships provide clear rules and social cues guide behaviour. However, in the pure form of the boundaryless career, such explicit guides do not exist (Littleton, Arthur & Rousseau 2000). Employment situations are often characterized by ambiguity instead of providing clear guidelines. One of the challenges of this new type of career is that people are open to more stimuli and experiences that make up sense of self, and the integration of this complexity is difficult. The new environment of careers suggests a shift from pre-ordained and linear development to perpetually changing career paths and possibilities (Littleton, Arthur & Rousseau 2000).

Since there are many different kinds of boundaries, there are also many different kinds of boundary crossing. A boundaryless career involves both objective features, such as mobility, and the subjective attitude of being boundaryless (Inkson 2006). Within organizations, there are departmental, divisional, hierarchical, and often geographical boundaries. Furthermore, there are boundaries between organizations, occupations, industries, as well as work and family. Hence, Sullivan and Arthur (2006) note that boundaryless careers are characterized as psychological and physical movement between “jobs, firms, occupations, countries...”. Those researchers describe the boundaryless career along the dimensions of physical and/or psychological mobility. They classify boundaryless careers into four broad quadrants. In quadrant one careers are considered to be low in both physical and psychological mobility; in quadrant 2 careers are considered to exhibit high physical but low psychological mobility; in quadrant 3 careers exhibit strong psychological but not physical mobility; and in quadrant 4 careers exhibit both physical and psychological mobility.

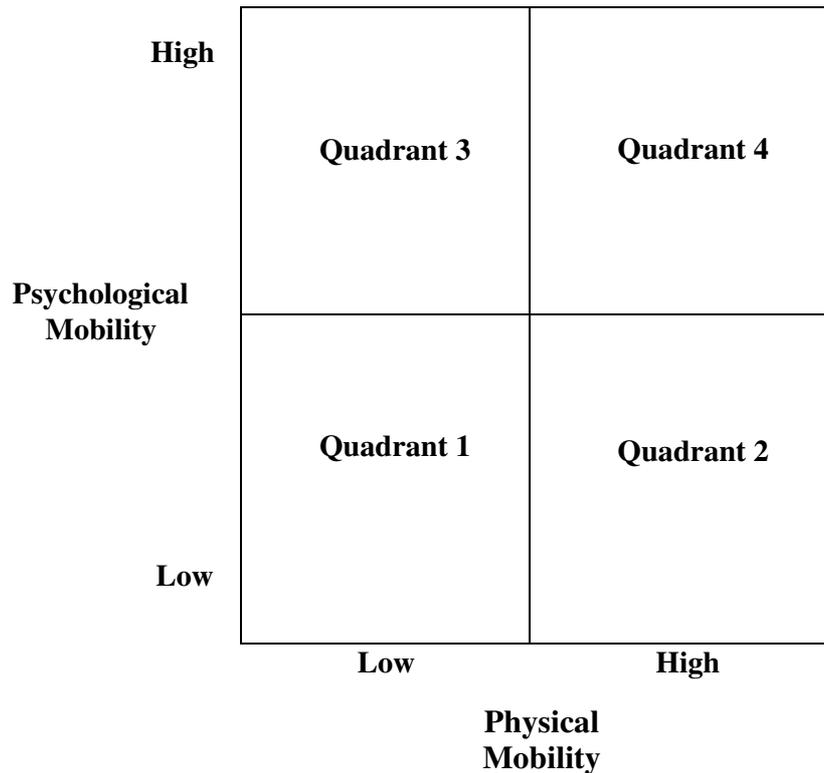


Figure 1: Two dimensions of boundaryless careers (Sullivan & Arthur 2006: 22)

But in practise, most adaptors of the boundaryless career model tend to focus on only one specific type of boundary – the boundary around a particular “employment setting” or company. They see boundaryless careers as inter-organisational careers – the opposite of organizational career, i.e. careers that unfold in a single employment setting.

Various consequences follow these new circumstances. Career actors can draw validation from multiple employment situations, sustain wider inter-company networks, and develop multi-employer arenas of choice for the implementation of their careers (Arthur, Inkson & Pringle 1999).

“The boundaryless career gives us a different yardstick for staying with the same employer, namely because successive accommodations to personal learning and lifestyle agendas rather than because of simple loyalty. This yardstick helps us rethink careers in relation to the dissolution of other traditional boundaries – notably, corporate boundaries of hierarchy and status, occupational, trade, and job boundaries of specialist skill and function, and social boundaries

separating work considerations from those of family and home.”(Arthur, Inkson & Pringle 1999: 11).

Individuals pursuing a boundaryless career will stay in their companies for example not because of the length of service or loyalty, but because of the market value of their skills. Furthermore, Arthur et al. (1999: 11) suggest that in such an employment setting new job aspirants would not be discouraged by layers of privileges negotiated by incumbents; status and rank do not automatically disqualify people from applying their skills; learning becomes a central rather than a peripheral condition behind employment arrangements; past mobility may be seen as a symptom of a drive to learn rather than a propensity toward disloyalty; and career anchors external to the current organization are encouraged. Under this paradigm, employees unilaterally take charge over their careers.

Therefore, rather than checking whether an employee has developed loyalty to the organization and performed according to the organization’s objectives, boundaryless career models consider the motives of the managers in taking the assignment in the first place, and the employee’s performance and loyalty later (Banai & Harry 2004). According to Inkson (2004) organizations should realize that, under the new paradigm, careers are mobile, improvisational, and learning based.

Boundaryless careerists judge success by experiencing psychologically meaningful work (Sullivan 1999). According to Banai and Harry (2004) they seek employment that enables them to achieve excellence and that allows sufficient flexibility for managing their own career’s progress. Additionally, they insist on regular training and development at work to obtain transferable skills, and they do not hesitate to work for a series of organizations that need their up-to-date skills. If they are not satisfied with their current job or seek for new challenges, they are looking for a new job within their current organisation or a new employer.

As a conclusion, it can be said that the new career models are not only more protean and/or less bounded, but they are also increasingly global (Black, Gregersen & Mendenhall 1992). Organisations need employees in key roles to function with ease in diverse locations and to communicate and cooperate across cultural, national and ethnic boundaries to grow on global markets. A part of the staffing to achieve global expansion is accomplished through international expatriate assignments. Many organizations require now that a manager must have significant international experience to be considered for high-level executive positions (Seibert, Hall & Kram 1995). Hence, the accumulation of individual career capital is necessary for managers. The three different aspects of career capital will be introduced and discussed in the following section.

3.3 Aspects of Career Capital

In today's rapidly changing environment with its already mentioned shift from traditional pre-ordained and linear career development to continuously changing career paths, personal career competencies (or career capital) become increasingly important for a successful career, and boundaryless career theorists (DeFillippi & Arthur 1994; Inkson & Arthur 2001) stress the necessity of accumulating such tradable career capital. These career competencies are personal competencies that have the potential to become competencies of the employing institution. They are temporarily put at the employer's disposal, and become part of the reciprocal exchange between employer and employee (Arthur et al. 1999: 124). As current research has pointed out, career capital can be seen as comprising three dimensions of knowing (Cappellen & Janssens 2005; DeFillippi & Arthur 1994; Eby et al. 2003; Inkson & Arthur 2001): knowing how, knowing why, and knowing whom.

Knowing-how career capital consists of an individual's work-related skills, knowledge and understanding needed for good performance and is accumulated over time (DeFillippi & Arthur 1994). These competencies are

portable, flexible, transferable, and transportable across organisational and occupational boundaries (DeFillippi & Arthur 1996). In the case of expatriates they are also internationally applicable (Cappellen & Janssens 2005). Previous research has stressed knowing-how competencies in general terms referring to professional, managerial, and intercultural skills (Stahl, Miller & Tung 2002; Tung 1998). In an international environment they include also more culture-specific skills such as language, negotiation and listening skills (Bossard & Peterson 2005; Culpan & Wright 2002).

Knowing-why career capital answers the question 'Why?' and is related to issues of (career) motivation and personal meaning, which provide with energy, a sense of purpose and identification with work, and is linked to confidence in following a desired career path (Cappellen & Janssen 2005; Inkson & Arthur 2001). According to Cappellen and Janssens (2005) this competency is usually discussed in terms of the individual identifying personally with work rather than with the organisation. In the global management literature the intrinsic motivation of global managers embodied in behaviour such as searching for international challenges and learning experiences (Suutari 2003) is stressed. Knowing-why career competencies are also related to career clarity, insight and confidence (Sturges et al. 1999), motivational energy and self-assurance through which individuals can pursue a desired career path (Inkson & Arthur 2001). Additionally, this aspect of career capital is also closely related to the protean career, since personal career choices and the search for self-fulfilment are integrative elements (Hall 1976). It allows employees to decouple their identity from that of their employers and to remain open to new possibilities and career experiences (Arthur et al. 1999; Eby et al. 2003).

Knowing-whom career capital refers to career-relevant networks and contacts with multiple meanings (DeFillippi & Arthur 1994). These networks reflect no longer solely business networks, but also communities of practice located outside organisational boundaries (DeFillippi & Arthur 1996) and developmental relationships outside an individual's place of work (Thomas & Higgins 1996). They include relationships with others on behalf of the organisation as well as

personal contacts, can provide access to new contacts and possible job opportunities, and venues for career support and personal development.

Knowing-how	Knowing-why	Knowing-whom
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional skills • Managerial skills • Intercultural skills • Culture-specific skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of why things are as they are • Motivation • Personal meaning • Confidence • Career clarity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intra-organizational networks • Inter-organizational networks • Private networks

Table 1: Career Capital

The benefits of such career competencies often outlast the employment relationship, e.g. when an employee transfers skills to others, or a manager establishes a new business relationship for the company from among own personal contacts. Therefore, career competencies offer new possibilities for both, career actors and employing organizations. On the one hand, career actors are likely to decouple their identities and development from company settings and may organise their lives around their own, self-defined learning. On the other hand, employers may opportunistically leverage new learning from their employees, gaining new direction rather than being tied to formal plans (Arthur et al. 1999: 125). Therefore, the next chapter discusses the development of such career capital during studies abroad, expatriation assignments, and its transferability to new contexts.

4. DEVELOPMENT OF CAREER CAPITAL THROUGH INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES

The skills needed for success in today's world differ from the skills needed only 15 years ago to pursue a successful career. The increasing internationalization of universities, companies and communities is certainly one of the major developments in the recent past. In this rapidly globalising world, career perspectives of (business) graduates seem to be more and more dependent on their cross-cultural ability and their capacity to work in various international contexts.

Additionally, today's graduates face a less predictable job market and might have to change jobs and careers up to six times in their lives and might retire from jobs that do not even presently exist (Williams 2005). Careers become boundaryless and protean. In fact, rather than looking for specific training in a single field, many companies are looking for employees with international (communication) skills, and a cosmopolitan and global world-view. As a consequence, graduates need an education that provides such skills to enable them to compete in a global market with an increasingly educated population (Williams 2005), since many of them might work in an international context or even abroad for some time during their career. Therefore, this chapter provides a review on the existing literature on the development of career capital through international experiences. First, a summary of the benefits of studying abroad will be presented, followed by a presentation of the research on career capital acquired during expatriation and the pursuit of a global career.

4.1 Studies abroad

Its proponents frequently praise studies abroad as a gateway to a brighter professional future. Such an experience is viewed as beneficial for the learning process of the students and their growth of competences in aspects such as gathering and experiencing field knowledge of the economy, society and

culture of the host country of study, and successful studies in fields which are literally border-crossing (e.g. International Business). Furthermore, studies abroad are broadening students' minds and improve reflection through contrasting experiences of different countries, different academic cultures etc. They also enable the acquisition of international and intercultural communication techniques, e.g. foreign languages, intercultural communication styles and so on (Bracht, Engel, Janson, Over, Schomburg & Teichler 2006). Additionally, studies in a foreign country are expected to have a positive impact on the personal development of students. Hence, most institutions of higher education in the industrialized world and supranational organisations like the European Union have reacted to increasing globalization by designing policies and programmes aimed at increasing student understanding and awareness of the ideas, cultures, customs and institutions of other nations.

Over the past two decades an increasing number of students decided to study temporarily in another country. International mobility programmes, which include student exchanges, study abroad agreements and internships in foreign countries represent an attempt to internationalise university education (Marcotte, Desroches & Poupart 2007). In Europe, the ERASMUS programme contributed to cross-border mobility of students. Currently it enables more than 180,000 students to study and work in a foreign country each year (European Union 2010). To examine the impact of study periods abroad on the career and career capital development of former students, the career capital framework consisting of knowing-how, knowing-why, and knowing-whom will be applied to existing research.

4.1.1 Knowing-how Career Capital

International competences, foreign language competences, professional knowledge about the host country, and knowledge on the host culture and society (Bracht, Engel, Janson, Over, Schomburg & Teichler 2006; Maiworm & Teichler 1996; Teichler & Maiworm 1997) are typically *knowing-how competences* ERASMUS students acquire during the course of their exchange period.

Furthermore, intercultural understanding and understanding of differences between cultures and the ability to work and communicate with people from a different cultural background can be enhanced significantly (Bracht et al. 2006; Williams 2005). A study period abroad also increases the probability of graduates to work in an international working environment (Bracht et al. 2006). Additionally, employers rate internationally experienced graduates' higher in competences linked to international work tasks, but also with respect to general competences like initiative, assertiveness, decisiveness, persistence, adaptability, communication skills, analytical competences, problem-solving ability, planning, co-ordinating and organising (Bracht et al. 2006).

4.1.2 Knowing-why Career Capital

Since studying abroad is an activity in which students choose to participate themselves, one can anticipate that they have demonstrated an interest in learning about other cultures and will already have a high degree of adaptability, sensitivity, and intercultural awareness in comparison to non-mobile students (Williams, 2005). Teichler and Maiworm (1997) identified some of the personal motives of European students for participating in the ERASMUS programme. The respondents reported that the opportunity to know other cultures was more important than materialistic benefits such as career advancement. Hence, their motives were more experiential than professional or academic. The eye-opening, strengthening experience of comparison and reflection and other new perspectives as a result of studying abroad and living in another country (Bracht et al. 2006) changed students. For exchange students, in a similar way to expatriates, international experience may enhance internal rather than external careers within the context of global movements across borders (Baruch, Budhwar & Khatri, 2007).

It seems that student mobility has a big impact on the future career path of graduates. Maiworm & Teichler (1996) found out that criteria related to the international dimension of work were more important for former ERASMUS students than status and career motives. They were also more important than

issues of job security and spare time for non-professional activities. Additionally, the longer a period abroad lasts, the more likely graduates are to seek employment in a foreign country (Bracht et al. 2006; Jahr, Schomburg & Teichler 2002; Maiworm & Teichler 1996; Teichler & Maiworm 1997). Obviously, many graduates want to utilize the competences they developed and reinforced during their studies abroad on the job. More frequently they take over jobs that require knowledge of other countries, foreign language proficiency, and other areas of knowledge and competences that cross national borders (Bracht et al. 2006).

Students who complete a whole degree programme abroad often seek for employment in their host country (Baruch, Budhwar & Khatri 2007; Jahr, Schomburg & Teichler 2002). In their study on overseas students in the United States and United Kingdom Universities Baruch et al. (2007) found that the perception of the labour market in the host country, the adjustment process of foreign students, and family ties in both host and home country were the most significant factors in the decision to return or to stay in the host country.

4.1.3 Knowing-whom Career Capital

The result of the literature research concerning knowing-whom competences among internationally mobile students is rather small. Jahr, Schomburg and Teichler (2002) found out, that former international students used their networks and international contacts often for job-hunting abroad. Furthermore, this group of graduates uses more often speculative applications to search actively for employment. According to Teichler and Maiworm (1997) a substantial number of former ERASMUS students eventually take up employment in their host country if they continued their studies there. The host country of the exchange period was the most frequent possible target country for employment and one-sixth of their sample travelled professionally to the previous host country. Furthermore, professional contacts of former ERASMUS students are more likely when students spent the study period abroad in a large member state of the European Union (Bracht et al. 2006).

As a conclusion of the literature review on the impact of studies abroad on the development and accumulation of career capital it can be said that former exchange students view the period abroad as leading to international mobility, international competences, and visibly international work tasks (cp. Brach et al. 2006). However, the experience of living and studying in another country does not promise career enhancement compared to their non-mobile fellows. It seems that the more international components of employment and work become common, and the more students acquire international competences, the less pronounced is the professional value of studies abroad and the impact for the individual. Nevertheless, most of the existing research on the development of career capital during studies abroad that has been identified during the literature research is of quantitative nature. A clear description of the acquired competences does not exist, what students actually learned is not clear. A definition and operationalisation of the 'international competences' etc. is needed. More qualitative research is necessary in this area to examine the impact of studies abroad on individuals and their careers.

The next section examines the more extensive existing research on the development of career capital during expatriate assignments.

4.2 Expatriation

Surviving and succeeding in today's global environment requires of a company being able to understand and deal effectively with rapidly changing circumstances not only in one country, but in multiple cultures around the globe. One of the keys to manage this challenge are internationally skilled people (Antal 2000). With increasing international operations the need to develop employees and leaders with global competencies becomes a top priority (Suutari 2003). Globally competent managers must have the ability to communicate effectively with people who are culturally different, to deal with various competitive and political environments, and to see rapid change and uncertainty as an opportunity. International work experience is seen as the

most powerful instrument to develop these competencies (Evans et al. 2002). Therefore, international business skills development and foreign work experience are increasingly considered as a part of career progression by multinational companies and by employees (Evans et al. 2002; Stahl et al. 2002; Suutari & Brewster 2000; Vace 2005).

Career capital considerations are becoming more important in the dynamic global business environment in which organizations aim for agility and flexibility. International assignments are considered as beneficial to organizational success and individual career progression, implying mutual benefit (Dickmann & Harris 2005). The experience of working abroad develops not only important factual knowledge about a country in general, but also insights into how people behave and how organizations work in a different culture (Antal 2000). An expatriate who has really engaged with the host culture builds up an understanding of why things are done in certain ways that may differ from the home country. This subchapter introduces the different aspects of career capital (knowing-how, knowing-why, and knowing-whom) expatriates can develop during their assignment.

4.2.1 Knowing-how Career Capital

Antal (2000) found in her research that during their assignments expatriates acquire knowing-how career capital in the form of general management skills, specialized skills, and learning how to learn. Managers learned how to communicate effectively by learning to listening better, to negotiate differently, and to be more conscious that providing information as such is not necessarily sufficient for ensuring understanding. Furthermore, they developed other skills like project management, teamwork, management by objectives, and the ability to delegate responsibilities more effectively.

According to Dickmann and Harris (2005) the most frequently acquired knowing-how career capital during international assignments was related to people skills, but also a more general business understanding, increased

commercial experience, and increased levels of self-confidence. Additionally, a broader perspective, and intercultural competence were reported as a result of working abroad.

Dickmann and Doherty (2008) differentiated knowing-how career capital into technical and interpersonal competences. Participants in their study developed broader capabilities such as business acumen and higher intercultural sensitivity during their international assignments. The major development took place in soft skills like cultural awareness, intercultural competence, skills in dealing with diversity, managerial capability and a broader perspective.

Jokinen, Brewster and Suutari (2008) compared self-assigned expatriates and company-assigned expatriates in their study. Knowing-how career capital was defined as task related skills, social judgement skills, cognitive skills, social skills, organizational knowledge, knowledge of business, and knowledge of people. Both groups perceived the highest increase in their social skills, whereas the development of knowledge of business was perceived as more moderate.

Jokinen (2010) observed in her research that expatriation had increased managers competences in cultural issues and people related knowledge (including languages), knowledge or awareness of one's self, task related knowledge specific to position and area of responsibility, and knowledge of the organization and its business. Furthermore, respondents in this study had experienced development in interpersonal skills like communication and presentation skills, listening and negotiation skills, and ability to show respect and to follow new behavioural etiquettes.

Suutari and Mäkelä (2007) found that global careers with several international assignments developed managers' knowing-how capital extensively. Participants in their study report the development of general managerial competences as well as international competencies, such as cross-cultural competencies and increased understanding of the global business environment and the needs of foreign customers.

Cappellen and Janssens (2008) divide knowing-how career capital into the two subcategories global business understanding and operational skills, whereas operational skills consist of geographical knowledge, people management skills, and functional knowledge, such as finance or sales.

4.2.2 Knowing-why Career Capital

Cross-cultural understanding is one of the central components of knowing-why career capital expatriates develop during their assignments (Antal 2000). Living and working abroad enables expatriates to develop insights into different logics behind actions, decisions and situations in other cultures and countries and helps them to become more open-minded towards other cultures and other values. They learn to understand why things are perceived, thought about, and handled differently abroad. Understanding the organization and the business as a whole is another outcome of a foreign assignment. (Antal 2000).

Dickmann and Harris (2005) found in their research that some expatriates experienced a fundamental rethink of their individual relationship to the firm and/or questioning of personal norms and values while working abroad. The experience of working abroad resulted in challenging own beliefs, created more self-awareness, encouraged self-reflection and had an impact on values, interests and identity.

Dickmann and Doherty (2008) explored knowing-why career capital for career development related issues and clarity in personal goals. In their study, individuals were predominantly driven by a sense of adventure or a desire to work internationally. Many international assignees experienced changes to their outlook on life and work, which, in some cases, also resulted in a fundamental rethink of individual relationships to the employing organization and/or a questioning of personal norms and values while working abroad. Expatriates found new insights and preferences during their assignments, and the change in their knowing-why career capital was generally seen as positive.

In Jokinen's, Brewster's and Suutari's research (2008), knowing-why career capital consisted of recognizing one's own strengths and weaknesses, needs and motives, acknowledging personal values and beliefs, confidence with one's own capabilities, recognizing the effect of one's own cultural background on one's thinking and behaviour, setting goals for personal development, and a positive approach toward work related challenges. Both, self assigned and company-assigned expatriates, experienced that their international experience had influenced their self-awareness on personal values, work interests and capabilities.

Jokinen (2010) found that expatriates developed knowing-why career capital in areas of self-awareness, knowledge of one's own strengths and weaknesses, and reaction to different situations (adaptability, patience, openness, but also fighting spirit).

Suutari (2003) reports that global manager's knowing-why career capital developed in areas such as flexibility, adjustment capabilities, open-mindedness, extroversion, humbleness and personal interest in learning and development. A successful first international assignment led to a continued work in international positions.

Suutari and Mäkelä (2007) observed that global careers increased manager's knowing-why career capital in terms of increased self-awareness, higher understanding of personal strengths and weaknesses, more crystallized work-related values, clearer career related preferences and motives, and increased self-confidence. Without international work experience, such development would not have been possible. Testing their limits in challenging environments during assignments abroad and succeeding created strong self-confidence, reliance on own capabilities, high levels of self-understanding, and a strong career identity. Through this development, managers were clear about their values and career interests and also had a high trust in their employability.

In Cappellen and Janssens' (2008) study on career capital of global managers knowing-why career capital was related to work-life balance, international

exposure, professional identification, centre of decision-making, career progression and search for challenge.

4.2.3 Knowing-whom Career Capital

According to Antal (2000), expatriates acquired knowing-whom career capital by significantly expanding their network of professionally relevant contacts. For example, after their return those managers could advise others whom to contact in the subsidiary in their former host country, but also other important stakeholders like clients and government officials. Additionally, some international assignees reported having enriched their networks with senior managers and key figures in the corporate environment. Networks proved to be useful for developing careers, providing contacts for future job opportunities, and for facilitating work processes, such as problem solving and getting things done efficiently as well as for innovation.

On the other hand, Dickmann and Harris (2005) report that expatriate's knowing-whom career capital - consisting of intra-firm, inter-firm, professional and social relations - suffered as a result of working abroad, since the international relocation caused strains in their networks at home. Managers felt they had to work harder to keep their social capital by using contacts in the headquarters and reporting senior management about their own personal and business development.

Dickmann and Doherty (2008) found out that expatriates used their higher positions abroad to find new international sponsors and to establish global and local contacts. In this research knowing-whom career capital consisted of professional and social networks. International assignees stressed the importance of networks as well as the strength of informal processes. The development, maintenance and exploitation of social capital was considered as very important. Furthermore, participants in this study considered home network preservation as essential for successful repatriation.

Jokinen, Brewster and Suutari (2008) defined knowing-whom career capital as ability to link resources and activities internationally, ability to build inter-organizational networks and teams across boundaries, ability to build and maintain external networks, and as knowledge of powerful persons within the organization. Those researchers found out that both, self-assigned and company-assigned expatriates extended and developed their knowing whom career capital, but company-assigned managers showed a somewhat bigger development.

Jokinen (2010) divided the development of knowing-whom career capital into three lines of discussion: relationships created in the work context by interacting with colleagues and business contacts, networks outside the work context (e.g. through activities with children), and the type or quality of relationships. She focused more on private networks and reports that expatriates benefited from relationships born from social interaction in the host country. Social networks and benefits were seen as very important for conducting business, but not established with career benefits in mind.

Suutari and Mäkelä (2007) stress the importance of knowing-whom career capital for international careers in comparison to domestic jobs. Global managers considered their networks across various countries and functions to increase work-related effectiveness, since their contacts enabled them to get things done more quickly, to promote important issues in the organization, and to identify influential people. Additionally, those managers showed a higher involvement in more informal networks ranging from friendship ties to informal business contacts, and memberships in certain networks and forums.

Cappellen and Janssens (2008) discuss knowing-whom competencies in terms of using them to obtain the position of a global manager. These consist of personal networks and professional networks (contacts with superiors, colleagues and clients). Global managers in this study consider only professional networks as relevant for career development. They refer to them in terms of making horizontal career moves that sometimes cross organizational boundaries to change the functional or organizational context of their work,

while expatriates consider their business networks useful in making vertical career progression.

Overall, the results on the development of knowing-how career capital seems to be quite consistent. Most of the obtained skills are related to business knowledge and understanding, people and communication skills, and international competencies. For knowing-how career capital the results seem to be more contradictory and diverse. The findings range from cross-cultural understanding, understanding of the organization and the business as a whole to rethinking personal relationships to the employing company. While some researchers report a questioning of personal norms and values as a result of an international assignment, others report clearer career related preferences and motives, more crystallized work-related values, and understanding of personal strengths and weaknesses. Nevertheless, there seems to be consensus that working abroad results in increased self-awareness, open-mindedness and self-confidence. For knowing-whom career capital the results are more consistent again. Whereas some researchers focused only on professionally relevant contacts (intra- and inter-firm networks), others included also personal networks. Most studies report that knowing-whom career capital is considered as useful for career development and increases work-related effectiveness. Only one study (Dickmann & Harris 2005) reports that such capital had suffered as a result of international assignments. The transferability of all three aspects of career capital from one assignment or context to another will be discussed in the next section.

4.3 Transferability of Career Capital

Whilst no research studied the transferability of career capital from study contexts to international assignments, one study (Jokinen, 2010) could be found that specifically addresses the transferability of career capital during international assignments. Technical competencies (knowledge related to task, organization or business) can be considered to be more context related and,

hence, less transferable to new situations. The transferability of other competencies, such as language skills, depends on factors like the official company language and future (geographical) area of responsibility. Furthermore, knowledge of management systems and tools, business and technology can be seen as transferable, as well as expertise related to international legislation and standards.

Additionally, Jokinen (2010) reports that the transferability of competencies also seems to depend on the organizational position and type of expertise of an individual: The higher the organizational position, the more strategic the role and the more general and softer the required competencies. On the other hand, employees with narrow, technical jobs often deal with specific local adaptation issues, which may not be applicable in other contexts.

From a career capital point of view, all types of knowledge are seen as transferable to a certain extent according to Jokinen. Social and interpersonal skills developed during an international assignment are related to international and cross-cultural aspects of foreign expertise. Therefore, they can be considered as highly transferable to subsequent assignments. Learning country or company specific behaviours were perceived as personal achievement, but such culture-specific skills are often seen as non-transferable, or only conditionally transferable.

When it comes to knowing-why career capital, Jokinen found out that a first international experience confirmed and strengthened managers aspiration to work in an international context. Respondents in her study perceived their first assignment as a journey into oneself, with the major development taking place in areas of self-awareness, knowledge of personal strengths and weaknesses, and reactions to different situations. The subsequent assignment was a more conscious and proactive approach to a new environment. People knew what kind of challenges to expect and tried out and used the characteristics they had developed.

Concerning knowing-whom career capital it turned out that managers in Jokinen's sample considered them mainly from a private perspective. Networks had not been created consciously with career motives, but most expatriates had benefitted privately or professionally from relationships created through social interaction in the host country.

Although there are no earlier studies on former internationally mobile students, similar results can be expected. Social and interpersonal skills developed during studies abroad can be transferred to new contexts, as well as language skills and cross-cultural abilities. Similar to expatriates who saw that a foreign experience had changed their competency levels, self-awareness, and future career interests (cp. Jokinen et al. 2008) it can also be assumed that a positive experience of living and studying abroad changes students interests. It can lead to an interest in working internationally, or at least in an international environment and the wish to apply and gain international experience and competences also in business life. Possibly, graduates can additionally benefit from networks and contacts born of social interaction during their studies abroad when they decide to work abroad as expatriates, either self-assigned or company assigned. The empirical part of this research will try to find answers to the questions what kind of career capital expatriates could acquire during their studies abroad, if this career capital was transferable to expatriation contexts, and how it could be utilized in business life.

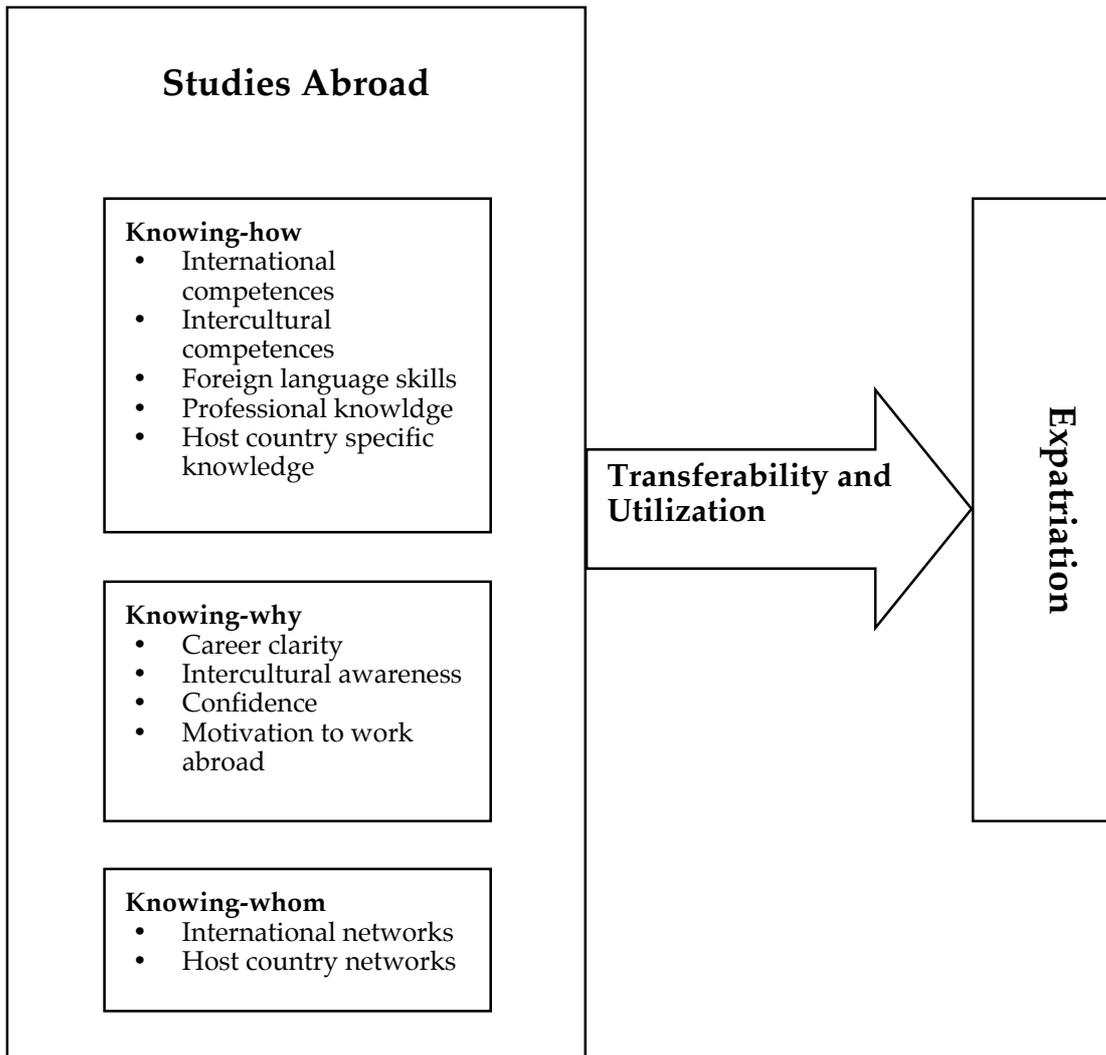


Figure 2: Framework of the study

The theoretical framework of the empirical part of this study (see figure above) is based on the career capital framework, which has its origins in the boundaryless career concept. The changing career perspectives during the past decades lead to the development of this new theoretical framework. Around the same time, the focus in expatriation research shifted from selecting, training, and managing expatriates towards repatriation issues. Former expatriates' dissatisfaction about the utilization of their newly acquired skills led to high turnover rates (see chapter 2.2.5). Researchers considered their careers as prototypes of boundaryless careers and the boundaryless career perspective was applied to expatriation research.

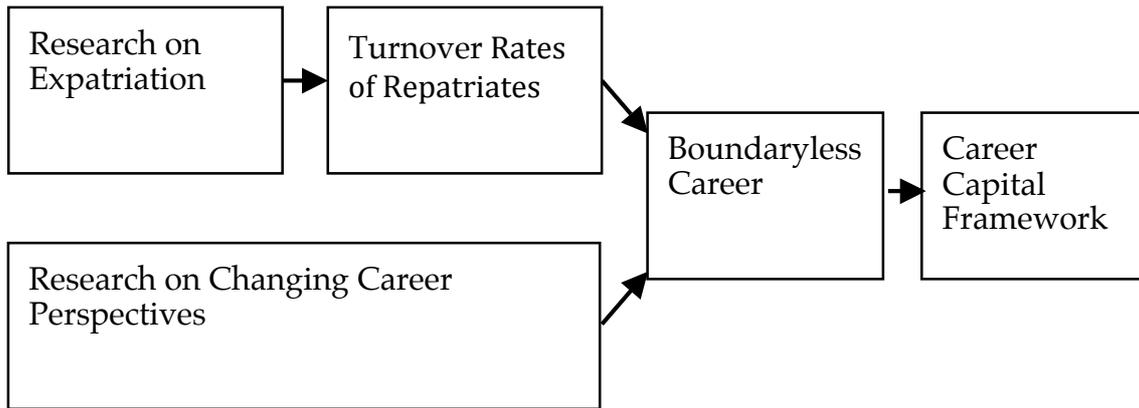


Figure 3: Development of the study's framework

In the next chapter, the chosen research approach will be explained and introduced, followed by a description of the data collection and data analysis process, and finally validity and reliability issues of the study will be discussed.

5. METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodology used in the empirical part of this study. After defining the chosen approach, a detailed description of the data collection method will be provided. This will be followed by a review of the data analysing methods, and finally the validity and the reliability of the empirical data will be discussed, as well as the limitations of this research.

5.1 Research Approach

Traditionally, academic research has been categorized into qualitative and quantitative methods. As already implied by its name, qualitative research highlights the qualities of entities and process meanings which are not experimentally examined or measured in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency (Denzin and Lincoln 2005: 10). Qualitative data provides in-depth, rich and detailed information, giving the researcher a higher degree of freedom since data collection is not constrained by a present sorting (Patton 1988: 9). Moreover, qualitative data values rich descriptions of the every day social world and stresses the relationship between the researcher and what is studied within situational constraints. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005: 12) *“qualitative investigators think they can get closer to the actor’s perspective through detailed interviewing and observation”*.

Quantitative research, on the other hand *“emphasizes the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables, not processes”* (Denzin & Lincoln 2005: 10). It usually involves various mathematical models, statistical tables and graphs, and is unconcerned with rich descriptions as they may disrupt the process of developing generalizations. Qualitative researchers claim that their work is done from within a value-free framework. They abstract from this world and seldom study it directly (Denzin & Lincoln 2005: 12).

To examine the career competencies of former international students, this study relies on a qualitative research design, aiming to capture a richness of information. Qualitative research methods are seen suitable for dealing with phenomena that have not been studied much (Daniels & Cannice 2004) and that rely heavily on individual's personal experience (Gummesson 2006) and in-depth view (Silverman 1993). Semi-structured interviews were chosen since they encourage respondents to describe and reflect their individual experiences (Laverty 2003) and to elicit information on the impact of studies abroad on the career development of former international students and later expatriates.

Daniels and Cannice (2004) offer three situations where interview-based research may be appropriate. First, interview-based studies are well suited for explanatory and theory building studies, where researchers explore an issue with little or no pre-existing theoretical bias, or when *"there is too much to learn for a survey questionnaire to do justice."* In such cases, interviews allow the researcher to discover new relationships or situations not previously conceived, what may lead to theories which might be tested later. The development of career competencies during studies abroad and their transferability to expatriate assignments are such a case and therefore an interview-based research was deemed appropriate. Second, interview-based research may be optimal when there is a small population of possible respondents. Then *"researchers must focus on the depth of collected data when the breadth is simply not available."* Interviews offer an opportunity to acquire a richness of information from each respondent. Expatriates with the experience of studies abroad represent a rather small population. Third, interviews may enable researchers to develop a deeper rapport with informants than it is possible through written questionnaires. This may be necessary to gain honest and accurate responses and to add insights that lay the groundwork for larger follow-up studies (or a dissertation). Additionally, the researcher can avoid *"the possibility that someone other than the target informant supplies the information."* (Daniels & Cannice 2004: 186 -187).

5.2 Data Collection

With the help of personal networks seven interviewees who fit the criteria of this research's population (i.e. having studied abroad and having an expatriation experience) could be identified and contacted. In order to increase the sample size a snowballing method was used and existing respondents were asked to suggest other individuals who fulfilled the criteria until data saturation point was reached. A supplementary snowballing procedure was deemed appropriate because all interviewees fulfilled the pre-assigned criteria and the sampling method resulted in considerable within-frame variation (cp. Suutari & Mäkelä 2007). The point of theoretical saturation is reached when additional data no longer brings extra information to the research (Maylor & Blackmon 2005). After conducting ten interviews, similar patterns of the collected data were identifiable and data collection was terminated.

As can be seen in Table 2, all interviewees had been studying abroad between four months and two years. They participated in exchange programmes such as Erasmus (n=6), obtained a double-degree at two European universities (n=3), or completed a master's level degree in a foreign country (n=1). Furthermore all respondents had been, or currently were on self-assigned or company-assigned expatriation. In six cases, the host country of the exchange period had an impact on the expatriation experience: participants had returned to their former host countries. All of them worked in managerial positions, representing various industries and nationalities. Six of them were male and four female.

Interview	Home country	Position	Studies abroad	Expatriation
1	France	Project Leader	Germany German-French double degree 1995 - 1996	Germany 1998 – ongoing (self-assigned)
2	France	Management accountant	Germany German-French double degree 2000 - 2001	Germany 2001 – ongoing (self-assigned)
3	Netherlands	Sales Manager	Germany German-Dutch double degree 2000 - 2001	Germany 2001 – ongoing (self-assigned)
4	Germany	Sales Manager	England German-English double degree 2000 - 2001	USA 2006 – ongoing
5	Spain	Vice President Corporate Human Resources/ International Assignments	Germany 2 semester Erasmus exchange 1991 - 1992	Germany 1996 - 1997 Portugal 1999 - 2005 Germany 2009 - ongoing
6	Ghana	Management Accountant	Germany MBA 2001 - 2003	Germany 2003 – ongoing (self-assigned)
7	Germany	Sales Manager	Spain 1 semester exchange programme 1999	USA 2003 - 2007
8	Germany	Programme Officer	China 1 year exchange programme 1997 - 1998	China 2003 - 2007
9	Spain	Team Leader	Germany German-Spanish double degree 2001 - 2003	USA 2005 - 2009
10	Germany	Lector (teaching and culture management)	Romania 2 semester Erasmus exchange 1999 - 2000	Russia 2005 - 2007

Table 2: Interviewees' Profiles

The interviews relied heavily on the interviewee's reflection of past personal experience. Considering also studies' abroad impact on expatriation stages emphasizes the role of reflection further. Since such reflection requires time, all interviewees were provided with a shortened outline of the interview after they had agreed on participating in this research. Thereby, the researcher hoped to provide respondents a chance to think over their experiences prior to the interview.

The interview data consisted of personal and telephone interviews conducted in July and August 2009. Strict company and individual anonymity has been given to all respondents. Seven interviews were conducted face-to-face and three on the telephone. The researcher and the interviewees themselves tried to locate them in a neutral location where interruptions were less likely, since interruption can prove fatal to the process (Maylor & Blackmon 2005: 229). However, interviewing in a neutral location was not possible in all cases, but eventually only one interview got interrupted. The interviews lasted between 35 to 75 minutes, were recorded with the consent of interviewees, and fully transcribed before analysis. In addition to this, the researcher took notes during the interviews. All interviews were conducted in German and the verbatim quotations were translated into English by the author.

This research applied the career capital perspective. The interview themes reflected the three different aspects of career capital – knowing-how, knowing-why, and knowing-whom. Each interview started by asking for the respondents' personal information and a short curriculum vitae, including studies abroad and a short summary of their career. The interview then continued using a semi-structured scheme asking questions about studies abroad, acquired skills and experiences, personal development, networks, impact of studies abroad on respondents' career path, utilization of acquired skills, and thoughts on their future career. Respondents were asked to consider the developmental effect of their studies abroad, and to discuss to what extent the career capital they had developed could be used during expatriation and what skills were newly acquired during expatriation.

“Becoming aware of the role played by language, and considering ways of dealing with it, belongs to methodological contextualisation.” (Marschan-Piekkari & Reis 2004: 225). This was important for the research since not all interviewees were native German speakers.

According to Ryen (2002) the researcher’s ability to develop trust and rapport, and to establish relationships with interviewees is of crucial importance for gaining access and for collecting and analysing data in qualitative research. The process is exacerbated in cross-cultural interviews in which the researcher and the interviewee have a different mother tongue, as it was the case in some interviews of this study. In such a setting, it can be a challenge to find a common language that may even be a second language for both, the researcher and the informant (Marschan-Piekkari & Reis 2004). Consequently the exchange between them may suffer from misunderstanding, interviewer and response biases cues such as non-verbal communication (Ryan 2002). The utilization of personal networks to identify suitable individuals and the researcher’s own experience of studying abroad has proven to be very helpful in developing trust with the interviewees, getting insight into the interviewees experiences, and overcoming potential cultural misunderstandings.

For cross-cultural interviews Marschan-Piekkari and Reis (2004) identified three possible settings. ‘Linguistic equality’ refers to a situation in which both, the researcher and the interviewee speak their mother tongue and the parties are thus equal. ‘Linguistic advantage’ means that only one of the parties is able to use their mother tongue and hence may possess an advantage. ‘Mutual linguistic challenge’ describes a situation in which both parties have to use a second or third language. In four interviews of this study researcher and respondents had a situation of linguistic equality and in six interviews the researcher had a linguistic advantage. In such a cross-cultural interview setting where researcher and informant have to find a common language a number of questions emerge according Marschan-Piekkari and Reis (2004). What if the researcher conducts some of the cross-cultural interviews in the same research project in a native language, while conducting the rest in a second language? How open and cooperative is an interviewee who has to talk in a second

language? Are the two sets of interviews comparable and how is the overall quality of the data affected?

All interviews were conducted in German for the following reasons: First of all, the researcher himself and four of the interviewees were of German nationality. Thus, those interviews were conducted in their native language. Second, as Ghauri (2004) states, being interviewed in a 'linguistic advantage' setting is not necessarily a disadvantage, because expressions tend to be simpler and the overall communication tends to be more straightforward and direct if a second language is used. Third, by using the same interview guide for the interviews with non-native speakers a translation into another languages was not necessary. Hence, the collected data was comparable and misunderstandings, translation errors or different interpretation of the same questions could be avoided. All non-native speakers were fluent in German since they had been living in Germany for a considerable time-span. German was their working language and used in everyday life. The interviewees were able to express themselves on a very high level, almost similar to a native speaker. Therefore, the two sets of interviews were comparable and being interviewed in a second language did not affect the quality of the data significantly.

5.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis consists of examining, categorizing, tabulating, testing or otherwise recombining the collected evidence to address the initial propositions of a study (Yin 2003: 109). The ten interviews of this study resulted in 110 pages of interview transcripts in German language. The data was content analysed and coded according to the three types of career capital, sequence of foreign experience (studies and expatriation), and transferability. The semi-structured questions brought out underlying patterns and relationships. The interviewees gave detailed information of their studies abroad and career path. The interview questions focused on the perceived development during studies abroad. The three-dimensional notion of career capital served as the guiding

theory. Knowing-how-related questions focused on the development of job-related knowledge, and career relevant skills and qualities; knowing-why-related questions examined the development of work-related interests, motives, values, strengths and weaknesses; and knowing-whom related questions covered the development and usage of interpersonal networks, relationships and social contacts formed during studies abroad.

5.4 Validity and Reliability

The concepts of validity and reliability are used to define the strength and correctness of collected data. Validity refers to how accurately a research has been conducted, whereas reliability refers to the repeatability of the study, when using the same methods again brings similar results (Maylor and Blackmon 2004). Validity has two distinctive dimensions, internal and external validity. Internal validity refers to the availability of the conducted research to study what it was originally supposed to study, i.e. the credibility of the data. External validity refers to the extent the collected data is applicable in other contexts or settings, i.e. the transferability of the data. On the other hand, reliability refers to the extent the research's findings and results could be replicated in another study, using the same or similar methods. (Ritchie & Lewis 2003: 270 – 273).

In qualitative research, validity and reliability of the collected data are frequently questioned (Seale, Gobo, Gubrium & Silverman 2004). Hence, the validity and reliability of the study were tried to achieve by a number of measures. The transcripts were sent to all interviewees for verification. During the analysis the data was first carefully read and reflected on several times by the author to allow deep familiarization. It was also constantly crosschecked across the multiple interviews and previous research on career capital to increase the internal validity of the study. In terms of external validity, the aim of this study is towards theoretical rather than statistical generalization, based on the in-depth qualitative evidence. To achieve reliability, the interviews

followed a semi-structured guide and were recorded to create a retrievable database that maintains a chain of evidence.

There are several key limitations of the study. Because of the qualitative nature of this research, the sample size is limited. Also the selection of interviewees via personal networks is a key limitation of this research. Additionally the interviewees represent five different nationalities. This may lead to a possible lack of representativeness. Furthermore, qualitative analysis of such a small and limited data has the disadvantage that it cannot necessarily be generalized and one should be careful in interpreting the results. The researchers' own preoccupation with the subject and the interview situations both might have influenced the outcomes.

6. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

In this chapter the findings of the study will be presented. First of all it will be shown what kind of career capital the participants of this study could develop during their studies abroad. Secondly, it will be explained if and how managers could transfer this career capital and benefit of it during their expatriation.

6.1 Career Capital acquired during studies abroad

In this section the kind of career capital expatriates could develop during their studies abroad will be identified. The development of knowledge and skills will be referred to as knowing-how career capital, the development of motivation and drive as knowing-why career capital, and the development of professional and social relationships as knowing-whom career capital.

6.1.1 Knowing-how Career Capital

The participants of this study responded that they were able to acquire work-related skills and knowledge during their studies abroad. Knowledge of the local language was an important part of knowing-how career capital that could be developed during such a sojourn. All interviewees of this sample reported they learned the language of their host country during their sojourn, or improved their already existing knowledge significantly.

“When I arrived I did not speak German at all. (...) In the beginning it was really hard. I had to learn a lot. (...) But if you are living in the country, you learn really fast.”

“In my Business School we also learned German, but most I learned while living in Germany, in every day life.”

“My language studies at home enabled me to master situations in every day life (in China). After a year I spoke simple Chinese quite fluently, i.e. I could take a taxi at the airport, go shopping, order in a restaurant etc. Also

having conversations with friends on simple topics such as interests and hobbies was no problem. After two years I had reached a higher level. At the end of my second year I partly attended lectures on Law and International Relations.”

But not only knowledge of the local language could be gained during these study periods. Half of the interviewees mentioned their English skills improved as well because they had to utilize the language on a daily basis by living in an international environment with fellow students from all over the world. Since English is considered as the world’s most important business language this is a remarkable result.

“If I had studied in my home country only, I would not speak German and English so fluently. My English and German skills definitely improved during my studies abroad.”

“Many people write in their CVs they are fluent in English. But you are never fluent before you have been living abroad for a while. I also thought I’m fluent in English and went to Australia. English was one of my major courses in school and I have always been very good. But before you have not been living abroad and have to practise and utilize the language every day, you are not fluent.”

Another soft skill acquired during studies abroad was openness towards other cultures. The interviewees mentioned that they developed intercultural competence through interactions with other foreigners, or increased already existing skills. For example learning to take the perspective of others led to the ability to see that people with a different cultural background can interpret the same situation in different ways. Former international students also report having developed more tolerance for other cultures and listening and observing skills.

“I gained insight to other cultures and maybe I also became a little bit more tolerant. I also decreased my prejudices. (...) I think I learned a lot about other cultures, not only my host country’s culture.”

“You get in touch with different people. You experience how people from different cultures behave. (...) This was a good opportunity to get together with people from different cultures and to be friends. Thereby you learn a lot. How it changed me? I think I became more understandingly. (...) You have to try to understand others and to get along with them. This is a good opportunity to reflect: Do I explain my point of view correctly? Do I allow the other person to finish speaking? It’s different when you share the same cultural background. Then you can interpret body language. But

body language could have a completely different meaning for a person from a different culture. Then it gets difficult to interpret it. This is a challenge. You have to learn it.”

“I learned to listen and to observe. And maybe I am more easy-going now because everything always works out somehow.”

“Usually you are gathering with other foreigners abroad. (...) This diversity of cultures is something I really learned while living abroad.”

It should be mentioned, however, that for half of the respondents studying abroad was not the first international experience. They already had acquired small amounts of international experience, e.g. through participation in pupil exchange programmes.

“(I participated in pupil exchanges.) Those were always short activities lasting between one and two weeks. I went once to Spain and to France, and twice to Czech Republic.”

“When I was 16 years old I went for one year to Australia with an exchange programme.”

Irrespective of previous international experience, the studies abroad decreased all respondents’ prejudices towards other cultures and increased intercultural abilities like sympathy for and understanding of fellow students with a different cultural background, and other cultural and social competences that are also needed in an international business arena.

“We are different individuals and have different perceptions, which originate partly from our national cultures. You have to try to understand others. (...) A part of it I learned during my studies abroad. I lived in a dormitory and it was like the United Nations. If you’re asking for a term to describe what I’ve learned I would say tolerance. You have to be tolerant, because what’s ok for me can be a catastrophe for another person and vice versa.”

“(When you study abroad you meet people from all over the world.) You don’t meet host country nationals only, but also a lot of other nationalities.”

“On a social level I gained cultural and social competence, intercultural skills.”

“You have to try to understand others and to get along with them. This is a good opportunity to reflect: Do I explain my point correctly? Do I have patience for my counterpart? Do I give him a chance him to finish speaking? It is different when two persons have the same cultural

background. Then you are able to interpret body language and gestures correctly, for instance. But in an international setting it can be difficult to interpret it correctly. This is an exciting and fascinating situation. You have to learn how to cope with such things.”

It was also during their studies abroad when later expatriates got in touch and to know student and family life in their host cultures, but also gained context specific knowledge.

“During my studies abroad I experienced students’ and normal families’ lives in my host culture.”

“I gained a lot of regional knowledge during my studies abroad.”

Additionally, interviewees’ reported integrating in a new surrounding was something they learned during their studies abroad and earlier international experiences.

“The more often you go abroad, the easier it becomes to adjust. You know what to expect and you realize that making friends is possible everywhere.”

Furthermore, a more systematic and structured style of working (as a impact of the host country’s culture) was mentioned in the interviews as acquired knowing-how career capital.

“(During my studies abroad) I learned to work systematically in an environment which now is my working environment.”

But also knowledge on normal business processes increased during the studies.

“When I read the ‘Wall Street Journal’ in the past, I read it as a normal person without having understood certain business processes. My perspective changed because of my studies. When I am reading the ‘Wall Street Journal’ nowadays I am no longer a normal reader, but rather I am having an opinion to it.”

Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that such a development also takes place during normal ‘domestic’ studies and is not necessarily connected with a sojourn abroad.

Moreover, the majority of interviewees gained work-related skills and knowledge through internships abroad (n=6) and through study related

projects with companies operating internationally (n=3). However, these internships and projects were a compulsory part of the studies in most cases.

“During our studies we had a lot of projects with companies. I liked it. It was a nice opportunity to gain professional experience. (...) In Germany we had less lectures (than in my home country), but more projects with companies.”

“After my studies abroad I returned over and over again to China to do internships and to travel.”

Development also occurred on an academic level because of different contents of studies, teaching and learning methods etc.

“In Germany we had less lectures, but more projects with companies. Maybe studies in Germany simply are more practically oriented.”

“In my home country studies are very theoretical. We had a lot of calculating and had to learn things by heart. (...) Grades are not so important, the reputation of the university matters. Students of an elite institution get better positions and salaries. In Germany studies are more practically oriented. Grades are very important (what I don't understand). Lectures last for a whole semester and are not organised in blocks. During the semester you don't have a lot to do, but at the end of the semester you have to study a lot. There also exist no big differences in entry salaries. The reputation of the university is not so important.”

As a conclusion it can be said that the participants of this study acquired knowing-how competencies in different areas. They improved their skills in the local language as well as their English skills; gained intercultural competences such as tolerance, mutual understanding as well as listening and observing skills; learned how to integrate in a new surrounding; gained host country specific knowledge and experienced an impact of the host country's culture for example on their working style. Furthermore the studies abroad increased their knowledge in study related subjects and business processes, partly through internships in the host country and business related study projects. The different contents of studies in the host country and different methods and ways of learning and teaching also developed their skills on an academic level.

6.1.2 Knowing-why Career Capital

In terms of knowing-why career capital it should be mentioned that early experiences of internationalisation, for example acquired through pen friends, travelling, or participation in pupil exchanges, often had an influence on the decision and motivation to study abroad. Five interviewees possess such experience.

“In Gymnasium I had a pen friend abroad. Once I visited her and enjoyed being abroad. We stayed in touch and thus I got an incentive to return for my studies.”

“I’ve always been travelling a lot. It runs in my family. My parents have always been very open-minded. Already in school I spent six weeks in England with an exchange programme and eight weeks in South Africa. I always wanted to study abroad; for myself and because international aspects became more and more important when I started my studies. When we started our studies they told us: do internships abroad, study abroad if you can and complete your studies as fast as possible.”

Family influences also had a big impact on the decision to study in a foreign country and development of an international mindset. Two managers mentioned their parents have always been open-minded to travelling and international experiences and therefore encouraged them to go abroad. One interviewee was exposed to early international and intercultural experiences due to his family situation.

“I am grown up in an international family. Since my mother is American, I also own an American passport. For this reason I had been confronted with intercultural questions and problems in my childhood already. Now you can argue cultural differences between the USA and Europe are not very big, but I think they are big enough to know that there is something like “intercultural skills”, which you can learn and you have to learn. Some attitudes towards life are so different that I already learned as a child seeing things from two different perspectives.”

But irrespective of previous international experience the participants of this study repeatedly reported that exposure to and living in an international environment during their studies abroad increased their understanding of their own. They recognized traits of their national culture in their individual behaviour and started to appreciate some parts of their own culture during their sojourn.

“I started to reflect myself differently and to see the way of living I knew from home from a different angle. (...) I recognised that I’m quite “German”, in a positive and negative way. Suddenly I clearly saw many aspects from my home country and I started to appreciate them.”

Additionally former international students became more relaxed, gained a better understanding of people from a different cultural background, and developed more tolerance and sympathy towards other cultures.

“Living abroad is important for the development of your personality and some characteristics, such as tolerance of ambiguity and frustration, and international exposure.”

“I became a more complete person, more tolerant and patient, I can work in a more structured way and despite all I’m happy to see that all people are somehow equal.”

One manager also mentioned he started to discover the different perception of strengths and weaknesses by people with a different cultural background. This led to personal growth and development.

“My first stay abroad (for one year) in Australia (as an exchange pupil) and holidays in the USA (to see my mother’s family) already have sharpened my view in favour of recognizing differences in value systems and mentalities between different cultures which result in different perceptions. This was very important for myself and my personal development.”

“What is perceived as a strength here can be perceived as a weakness in China. If someone gets upset here, bangs his fist on the table and affronts someone, it will probably be appraised with respect and reverence and as authoritarian behaviour. In China an emotional release implies that a person cannot control itself and tries to impose others by a gruff pronouncement. The same emotional reaction is perceived completely opposite.”

Discussions with students from other countries increased students’ mutual understanding and were perceived as a personal enrichment.

“Dealing with people who think completely different than yourself and developing a mutual understanding through discussions and interactions and trying to understand why they react in certain situations in the way they react was important for me. It was a personal enrichment.”

Living and studying in a foreign country also increased the interviewee’s self-confidence and independence.

“I think I became much more independent (during my studies abroad). You are thrown in at the deep end. Suddenly you have to do everything alone. I think you also become more confident. You learn to do and organize everything alone. It really boosts your self-confidence and independence.”

“Living abroad made me more self-confident and independent. In the beginning I didn’t speak the language very well and had some problems, e.g. with some administrative things like going to the registration office. Or finding a job and understanding lectures and such things.”

Some learned to fight for personal goals and said they grew up and matured faster by studying abroad and being reliant on their own.

“I also learned to fight for the things I want to achieve, to win through and such things. This is what I learned the most.”

“Maybe you develop and mature faster abroad compared to staying in your home country. When you’re going abroad there are different problems. You have to find different solutions and maybe you get to know other facets of your personality you didn’t know before. Sometimes you’re doing things you didn’t know you’re able to do.”

They also learned how to motivate themselves in difficult situations as well as considering problems as challenges and facing them with curiosity instead of perceiving them as threats.

“The most important thing I learned was not to hang down my head, to motivate myself if others don’t do it, and to perceive difficult situations as challenges and not as a crisis.”

“Prior to my studies abroad I probably would have gone crazy in many situations. During my stays abroad I learned to confront problems with curiosity and the faith that everything will be alright in the end.”

One interviewee said that as a result of her studies in an Eastern European country she lost her existing fear of contact with those countries and got an insight into a society in post-socialistic transformation during her sojourn.

Other knowing-why career capital acquired during studies abroad and mentioned in the interviews were recognition of personal technical and professional strengths and weaknesses by comparing the different education systems (differing in emphasis on theoretical and practical knowledge).

Furthermore, former foreign students in Germany reported they perceived a higher pressure to perform during their studies abroad and experienced a lower level of cooperation and mutual support amongst and with host country nationals.

“In Germany existed a high pressure to perform and concurrence amongst German students and I recognized that grades were quite important. (...) Grades are important, but you should also enjoy your life. The competition was fierce. In my home country we had more cooperation between students and mutual help. In the beginning this was very strange for me, but then I learned how it works.”

The development of knowing-why career capital during studies abroad took place in areas such as increased understanding of students' own and their own culture as well as an increased understanding of other cultures. Furthermore studies abroad increased the interviewees' self-confidence and independence by being reliant on their own in a foreign country.

6.1.3 Knowing-whom Career Capital

Many interviewees have been able to develop knowing-whom career capital during their studies abroad. It can be distinguished between professional and more private networks. Concerning professional networks, two interviewees established a contact to their current employer through their final thesis.

“During an information event at my university I sit next to an doctoral student from my current employer. He told me about the opportunity to write my thesis for the company and made contact.”

Another participant used to work as a trainee and working student for the current employer.

“In Germany we had to do an internship. I made it for my current employer. And during the last years of my studies the same company employed me as a working student in a different location.”

Other managers pointed out the good reputation of their university or holding a double degree from two different universities had been helpful for finding a good job and opened doors.

“Our university has a very good reputation in the region. That’s why finding a job was relatively easy.”

“Having a double degree opened doors. In my opinion a German diploma has a higher standing overseas than other degrees.”

Additionally, managers holding a double degree reported they received mutual help and advices from fellow students during job hunting in the host country.

“We supported each other at job hunting and gave advices where to apply and how to behave in interviews etc.”

In one case private, contacts were also beneficial during the adjustment process of studying abroad. One interviewee reported a friend had been to the same place a year earlier and was helpful in adjusting to the new surrounding. The same person also received organisational advices from other foreign students.

“A year before a friend of mine also went to the same place to participate in the same double degree programme. She helped me a lot. There are a lot of foreign students and you get a lot of organisational tips from others.”

Additionally, it turned out that four interviewees met their spouse (which were also foreigners in the host country) during their studies abroad.

“I met my wife during my studies abroad.”

“My wife attended the same MBA programme.”

“I met my husband abroad.”

In three cases this led to the decision to stay together in the host country after graduation and to life and work there.

All in all it can be said that the participants of this study gained also knowing-whom career capital during their studies abroad. But mainly self-initiated expatriates reported having developed and utilized such networks. Most of the acquisition and development of career capital happened in the areas of knowing-how and knowing-why skills. What kind of career capital former international students could transfer to their expatriate assignments will be shown and explained in the next section.

6.2 Transferability of Career Capital acquired during studies abroad

In this section the findings of the study concerning transferability of career capital acquired during studies abroad will be presented. Transferring career capital and knowledge from studies abroad to expatriation differs quite a lot from transferring knowledge from one traditional expatriate assignment to a subsequent one because of the different nature of studies and business life. Despite those differences, such a transfer was possible and will be explained and illustrated. Further, the development of expatriates during their assignments will be discussed to contrast and compare it to study periods abroad.

6.2.1 Knowing-how Career Capital

Adjustment to a new culture during expatriation was facilitated by the previous studies abroad in all cases, either because the managers returned to their previous host country or because they already knew the processes of integrating and building new networks. Hence, moving abroad was not considered as a big step.

“The more often you go abroad the more easier it becomes. My internship abroad was a big challenge, studying abroad was easier and working abroad as an expatriate wasn’t difficult anymore. You know what to expect. And if it worked out once or twice... I’m sure to meet new people when I’m going somewhere. I’m not afraid of finding myself alone because I adjust quite easily.”

The language skills former exchange students could acquire during studies abroad were highly transferable and could be improved and developed further. Now these skills are considered as one of their key competences in their current jobs.

“During my studies abroad I could improve my language skills. Now they are very useful in my job.”

“I started to learn German here. University offered a course twice a week. But in the beginning you are underestimating the whole thing,

respectively you are having other priorities. I gave priority to my university courses. But I was really interested in the language. The turnaround came with my work. There I had to speak German every day and I was confronted with the language.”

Unsurprisingly the participants of this study could not only transfer career competencies from their studies abroad to business life as an expatriate, they could also develop them further and acquire new skills and knowledge. When it comes to newly acquired knowing-how career capital during expatriation, managers reported their already existing awareness of cultural differences and cultural competence had developed and increased further compared to their studies abroad.

“My intercultural competence increased (compared to my studies abroad).”

“I developed a considerably better ability to understand other people. This includes not to make my own decisions too early, but rather to understand first why others take a certain position. I am trying much more to understand other people. (...) You realise that positions or decisions in business life depend on the cultural background, education, general attitude, political attitude, etc. And if there is a better understanding and if you try then to understand people better, it facilitates making more neutral decisions and guiding others. (...) Over time you learn a lot in those areas through living abroad. If you see everything with an open and relaxed attitude, you become more open and can cope well with different cultures. Through this understanding and experiences you can work and lead better in intercultural teams.”

However, it remains somehow unclear if this development happened due to more and stronger international exposure, or if personal growth and ageing also played an important role in this process.

“You also become more mature when you’re getting older.”

Additionally, some interviewees reported teamwork in international teams was newly acquired knowledge during their expatriation.

“(Newly acquired knowing-how career capital during my expatriation are) Teamwork and cultural intelligence. Here, we have lots of intercultural projects and intercultural staff.”

They experienced different ways and styles of working in a professional international environment and adjusted to cultural differences among their international colleagues.

“In my job I’m working with a lot a different nationalities: Japanese, Chinese, Koreans and Australians. And all have different mindsets. There you have to adjust.”

One manager also mentioned she adapted the working style of her host country and became more organised and precise.

“I became quite German in my style of working. I’m quite organised and exact in what I’m doing. (...) I like coming straight to the point.”

Moreover, participants said working abroad helped them in developing a global perspective on business and understanding interrelations and business processes better.

“You get a better overview, because you see issues not any longer from a location’s or continent’s perspective, but rather from a global perspective. You get a better understanding of colleagues from another continent. You are dealing less complicated with small problems and just solve them, instead of agonising or whining. (...) You are confronted more often with little problems or different styles of communication and just ignore them. Some things you just accept or you mention and solve them.”

All in all this research shows that mainly so-called soft skills and language skills could be transferred to expatriation and be utilized in professional life. Previous experiences of living abroad facilitated integration and understanding the host countries’ population. Additionally expatriates developed further already existing competencies and acquired new skills and knowledge compared to their studies abroad.

“Working abroad is easier if one has been studying and living abroad before, but in professional life one has to learn different subjects and matters.”

6.2.2 Knowing-why Career Capital

In terms of international exposure, expatriates report their intercultural competence has increased and developed by working abroad when comparing it to their studies abroad. They got to know life in other, different cultures, or

increased their knowledge and understanding of their (previous) host culture by learning the way of working and thinking in business life. One participant reported that whereas he experienced common families' and students' life during his studies abroad, he got to know the working population's professional life during his expatriation. He concluded:

"You have to be on-site and observe things in order to understand them."

Expatriates also mentioned living in their host countries as a student helped them understanding certain behaviours and ways of living and thinking there. One manager mentioned his studies abroad and private contacts to host country nationals helped him to develop the ability to understand them through a human perspective, and not only from a professional (expatriate's) perspective.

"(During my studies abroad) I learned to understand host country nationals. Most of my current colleagues are host country nationals. And because of my studies abroad I can understand them from a human perspective. If you know people only from work, you know only one side of the coin. But I know also families, and that's a big luck. (...) It helps me to react differently in certain situations than a person with my cultural background usually would."

As mentioned before, many interviewees consider their studies abroad as a driver for their international careers and said probably they would not have worked abroad without their international experience from student life. Studying abroad apparently led to an interest in working abroad.

"If I would have stayed in my home country, I probably would have never worked abroad. I am sure I would have tried to get a position with international exposure within a firm where I have to deal a lot with foreign countries. This has always been exciting for me. Maybe I would have gone abroad for projects for one or two months like some of my friends. But I think I would have stayed in my home country and would not have worked abroad. This step would have been too big for me: applying for a position abroad. It is different if you already have studied abroad and tried living abroad for a while. It is easier during your studies."

"I think if I wouldn't have studied abroad, I wouldn't live abroad. Probably I wouldn't even think it could be better somewhere else."

Other respondents reported that studies abroad did not awake interest in working abroad, but clearly strengthened already existing interests.

“I wouldn’t say that my studies abroad aroused my interest (to work abroad). Maybe it just supported my interest.”

“My studies abroad didn’t awake my interest to work abroad, but it strengthened it.”

Half of this study’s participants also said that the reason why they worked abroad was situational and not planned. Opportunities for working abroad occurred and were taken. For example, two interviewees followed their girlfriend (and current wives) abroad and applied for jobs on-site.

“I didn’t plan to apply for a job abroad. It was situational and not planned. My former girlfriend (and current wife) found a job abroad. That’s why I was also looking for jobs there.”

“After my graduation I went to China because my former girlfriend (and current wife) graduated before me and got a job offer from Shanghai. I had the opportunity to get a training as an editor at a broadcasting company, but eventually I decided to go to Shanghai with my girlfriend and to establish my own business.”

Another expatriate did not plan to move overseas, but got a job offer subsequent to a trainee programme.

“I attended a two-years trainee programme in my company and worked in different departments. One of the positions was in the USA. (...) When the two years were over the department in the USA offered me a job, so I returned for four years as an expatriate.”

Work-life balance also seems to play an important role in the decision-making process to work abroad. Some interviewees simply perceived the quality of life they experienced during studies abroad (and later in business life) higher than in their home country. At least most of the self-assigned expatriates report a better work-life balance and better opportunities to combine family life and career aspirations were important factors to stay in their host country after graduation or to return later.

“Two years ago I wanted to change my employer and I said (to my wife) either we are leaving now (to her home country) or we stay here. We weighted up all factors and decided to stay in Germany because all work-accompanying conditions are better here. Childcare is better and working hours are arranged better, so we decided to stay here.”

“When I’m talking with friends at home it seems to me that it’s easier here (in my host country) to combine family and career.”

Several expatriates also mentioned more flexible working hours and shorter journeys to their working place, as well as the availability of day care for small children as reasons for this perception.

“You definitely have better conditions to combine career and family here. There are two factors: more flexible working hours and shorter journeys to work.”

Better financial conditions for graduates compared to the home country were mentioned as well as one of the reasons why one interviewee with a double degree decided to stay in his host country.

“As a graduate you have better conditions here, mainly better financial conditions. This was a reason for us to stay.”

Some interviewees also consider life more exciting as a foreigner and enjoy being a foreigner and not speaking the host language perfectly.

“In the meanwhile, I like living here. Working life, family life, friends and social networks. And I like being a foreigner. Then life is more exciting than just having studied, lived and worked in my home country.”

“I enjoy being a foreigner and not to speak the language perfectly. It makes me less diplomatic in some situations and I’m coming straight to the point. Additionally I’m cursing more because cursing in a foreign language doesn’t have the same meaning to me as cursing in my mother tongue.”

“The good thing of being a foreigner is you can always play the cultural card. I say in many situations: I am doing this in my home culture’s way and straightforward. (...) They know that you are a foreigner and forgive a lot or perceive it in a different way. Nevertheless it is important to learn and understand the small differences.”

When being asked for their future career thoughts most of the interviewees could generally imagine future expatriation. Whilst some say the professional tasks and challenges are important for them, not the location or host country, others mention the location and basic conditions in the potential host country are important factors for further international relocations.

“What I’m doing is more important for me than the location.”

“(Future expatriation) will depend a lot of the job and the location. We wouldn’t say we’re going definitely. The general conditions have to match.”

Some also stressed the importance of combining professional challenges and private life (e.g. their family’s well-being, or job opportunities for their spouse) in future stays abroad.

“For us the most important is staying together as a family, even if we should move somewhere else some day. I would never go alone for an expatriate assignment like some couples and families do. For me it’s important that we stay together.”

“I can imagine accepting another expatriate assignment. But only if my professional and family life are in accordance. (...) I wouldn’t go to locations of which I know my family would have difficulties and wouldn’t have fun there.”

One person also reported she would like to work in her home country, but in a position in which she can utilize her foreign experience, language skills and networks.

As a result of living and working abroad, one self-assigned expatriate mentioned he does not want to return to his home country.

“I never want to return. My brother, who is also living abroad, had to return to our home country for his job. He completed the project, quit the job and went abroad again because he felt cramped. He was used to work differently. International you work differently. (...) In the meanwhile I’m going home for Christmas only.”

To conclude this section it can be said that studies abroad were an important factor to seek for international jobs. Their sojourns changed the interviewees and broadened their mind.

“I think (my studies abroad) strengthened my personality and my openness towards other people and cultures. And it took away an unknown inhibition threshold: I recognized it’s possible to live abroad and to get along under different circumstances. First there were my studies abroad and later on my internship abroad. Eventually they were both drivers go abroad as an expatriate later on.”

“As a student I went back home for vacations once in a while. There I realized that my friends who studied in my home country developed in a different way. We drifted apart. Even if you study the same subject studies

abroad are such an enriching experience. You start feeling superior to those who stayed at home.”

Quite often expatriation was not planned, though. Opportunities to work in a foreign country occurred and were taken. Additionally, a better work-life balance and better possibilities to combine career and family were main drivers for self assigned expatriates to live abroad. As a result of working abroad, the interviewees’ intercultural competences and abilities had developed further. Most of them can imagine accepting or seeking for more international relocations in the future.

6.2.3 Knowing-whom Career Capital

Transferring networks and social contacts from studies abroad to professional life was possible and occurred more often than originally expected. However, the interviewees clearly distinguished between private and social networks.

“Some contacts are more private in nature, and with others you stay in touch because of business life.”

When being asked for private networks and contacts established during their studies abroad and their usability in business life, one interviewee answered she would use her knowing-whom capital for job-hunting if necessary. Many interviewees also mentioned having private contacts only to former fellow students. They never used their networks for business purposes.

It also happened that people lost contact to former fellow students because, in one case, the studies abroad were ten years ago and lasted three months only. This time was considered too short for establishing deeper contact to fellow students. Additionally this person never returned to the host country for expatriation or a business purpose.

“(I lost contact to my former fellow students abroad.) It is too long time ago. I’ve been there 10 years ago.”

Other interviewees sustained friendships to former fellow students and refreshed these contacts through leisure time activities after returning to their previous host country as expatriates.

“I still have remaining contacts from my studies abroad, but besides establishing first contacts (for my own business) they couldn’t do more for me. But this wasn’t the purpose of keeping in touch with them. Those were more of real friendships: people to have dinner with in a nice restaurant or to show you districts you haven’t seen before.”

One respondent had small benefits from contacts as an exchange student when he started to build his own business there.

“When I came to Shanghai I could refer to old friendships and told them I want to establish my own business and need furniture for my office. I knew the grandpa of a friend owned a joinery or knew someone who knows someone. (...) It started with small things like helping me out logistically or with contacts.”

This manager also reported to benefit a lot from contacts and networks he established during his expatriation and entrepreneurship for his current job.

“I still have a lot of contacts from my expatriation. Many of these contacts I could use for my new job here. (...) Contacts and networks from my studies abroad I can’t use for my job. But I definitely benefit from contacts I established during my entrepreneurship abroad.”

Another expatriate said he once hired a student from his former host university for a trainee position in his home country. Their shared background had been one of the selection criteria.

“Once I hired a person from my former host university. (...) One of the selection criteria for me was that we had a shared background. (...) You see that you establish a better contact to a person if there is a bond.”

Some other interviewee reported to ask former fellow students occasionally for advice if problems occur in business life and he thinks they might be able to help him and provide solutions. The same person already helped out former fellow students with his own professional experience (mining business) when he was asked for help.

“A friend of mine got a job from a mining company in South Africa. (...) My friend wasn’t very familiar with the mining business, so we talked and discussed a bit. (...) When I got my first job, I had to do quite a lot of surveying. I learned surveying for three semesters during my studies, but applying theory into practice was something else. Suddenly I had to do

quite a lot of surveying, so I called my old fellow students quite often and they taught me many things.”

“Such things don’t happen very often. But sometimes you get new ideas you think about who could help you based on his experience.”

Another manager mentioned she regrets having lost contact to her university professors. Now she considers such contacts as a nice source for recruiting trainees.

“I regret a bit having lost contacts to former professors. It’s always interesting to get students from university. If they’re good we can try to hire them. This is something I’d like to do: getting people by contacts to my former professors.”

Other participants stressed the importance of being pro-active. One manager said she had always communicated openly her wish to work abroad towards her superior and HR managers. Eventually, her boss told her about an open position abroad and she got the job when she applied for it.

“I always said I would like to work abroad and the HR department knew it as well. My new boss told me of an open position (abroad) and I applied for it. If you’re having a business background it’s something else than being an engineer. Engineers are specialists and when a specialist is needed abroad the company is searching for them actively. In sales it’s quite difficult. There you have to be pro-active.”

Additionally, new kinds of networks and contacts could be developed during expatriation. In one case an interviewee reported having established contacts and interactions with VIPs and political and economic decision makers in the host country. Due to the different nature of studies and business life this was not possible before.

“What I didn’t learn during my studies was interacting with decision makers in politics and business. Usually you don’t have access to such circles as a student. When you’re working as an entrepreneur you can get access to such levels. And only in this way I could learn how economic and political decisions are made. During my studies I could observe it only indirectly. When I was working I could witness it.”

This research shows that usually expatriates could utilize their contacts only when they returned to their former host country. Nevertheless, these networks and contacts could be used in professional life in some cases and have proven

to be very useful. The conclusions and recommendations based on the results of this study will be discussed in the next chapter.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

In this chapter the findings of the study will be summarized and concluding remarks will be presented. Moreover, the limitations of this research will be discussed.

7.1 Conclusions

The aim of this study was to examine what kind of career capital expatriates could gain during their studies abroad and if and how these competences and skills could be transferred to expatriation contexts and be used in business life. It focused on the development that took place during studies abroad and the impact of such an experience on the career of former exchange students. Such pre-professional experiences of living abroad have not been in the focus of career capital theorists before. Existing research focused on the career capital gained during international assignments and during the pursue of careers with global responsibilities.

The main findings of the study suggest that studies abroad have a strong effect on the development of career capital. Most of the acquisition and development of career capital happened in the areas of knowing-how and knowing-why skills. In terms of knowing-how capital, studies abroad increased the participants' language skills in the host country's language as well as their English language skills. They gained intercultural competences, learned integrating in a new surrounding, host country specific knowledge, and experienced an impact of the host country's culture for example on their working styles. The development of knowing-why career capital during studies abroad took place in areas such as increased understanding of students' own personality and their own culture as well as an increased understanding of other cultures. Furthermore, studies abroad increased the interviewees' self-confidence and independence by being reliant on their own in a foreign country. It can also be said that the participants of this study gained knowing-

whom career capital during their studies abroad. But not surprisingly, mainly self-initiated expatriates and people that returned to their former host countries or started their professional lives there after graduation reported having developed and utilized such networks.

When it comes to the transferability of the acquired career capital to expatriation contexts, this research shows that mainly so-called soft skills and language skills could be transferred to expatriation and be utilized in professional life. Previous experiences of living abroad facilitated integration and understanding the host countries' population if the interviewees returned to their former host countries. Business related contacts could only be transferred to expatriation contexts if former exchange students returned to their host country.

Generally, it seems that studies abroad were an important factor for former internationally mobile students to seek for international jobs. Their sojourns changed the interviewees and broadened their mind. This is in line with the findings of Maiworm and Teichler (1996) and Bracht et al. (2006) who found out that many graduates want to utilize the competences they developed during their studies abroad in their jobs. Additionally, the longer a period abroad lasts, the more likely former exchange students are to seek employment in a foreign country and students who complete a whole degree programme abroad often seek for employment in their host country (Baruch, Budhwar & Khatri 2007; Jahr, Schomburg & Teichler 2002). This study comes to similar results. Quite often expatriation was not planned, though. Opportunities to work in a foreign country occurred and were taken. Additionally, a better work-life balance and better possibilities to combine career and family were main drivers for self assigned expatriates to live abroad. Most of the participants of this study can imagine accepting or seeking for more international relocations in the future.

7.2 Suggestions for Further Research

Existing quantitative research on the impact of studies abroad on career development (e.g. Bracht et al. 2006; Jahr, Schomburg & Teichler 2002; Maiworm & Teichler 1996; Teichler & Maiworm 1997) focuses on former ERASMUS students of all study fields. Future research could investigate the impact of studies abroad on the career development of business students only. Furthermore, it would be interesting to compare the impact of different exchange and study abroad programmes, e.g. ERASMUS exchange semesters, bi-national double degrees from two universities, and full study programmes in a foreign country on the career development of graduates.

7.3 Limitations of the Study

There are several key limitations of the study. Because of the qualitative nature of this research, the sample size is limited. Nevertheless, in the eye of the researcher, a data saturation point had been reached. And, as the choice of research method indicates, statistical generalization is not the aim of the study. Instead, it aimed for analytical generalization. Also the selection of interviewees via personal networks and a snowball system is a limitation of this research.

Additionally, the interviewees represent five different nationalities. A slight majority of them completed their studies abroad in Germany, one of the large member states of the European Union. As Brach et al. (2006) found out, professional contacts of former ERASMUS students are more likely when students had spent the study period abroad in such a large member state of the European Union. Therefore, results of a similar study among former internationally mobile students with smaller host countries may be quite different and reveal additional or different aspects that were not found in this research. This may lead to a possible lack of representativeness.

Furthermore, qualitative analysis of such a small and limited data has the disadvantage that it cannot necessarily be generalized and one should be careful in interpreting the results. The researchers' own preoccupation with the subject and the interview situations both might have influenced the outcomes as well.

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