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Organizational support in repatriation adjustment of rotational short-term assignees

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ABSTRACT:

Tutkimus käsittelee toistuvilla lyhyillä kansainvälisillä komennuksilla olleiden työntekijöiden paluusopeutumista ja organisaation tukea paluuprosessissa. Tutkimuksen tavoite on selvittää, minkälaisia haasteita paluusopeutumisessa on ja minkälaisilla tukimenetelmillä organisaatiot voisivat helpottaa paluusopeutumista. Lyhyillä komennuksilla tarkoitetaan vähintään kuukauden mutta enintään vuoden kestäviä komennuksia. Lyhyet komennukset ovat yleistyneet globaalissa yritysmaailmassa ja osittain korvanneet perinteisiä yli vuoden kestäviä komennuksia. Huolimatta lyhyiden komennusten yleisyydestä se on yhä melko vähän tutkittu komennustyyppi, ja lyhyillä komennuksilla olleiden paluusopeutumisesta ei juurikaan tiedetä. Paluusopeutumisen on aikaisemmin ajateltu olevan helppoa, sillä useat lyhyillä komennuksilla olevista työntekijöistä palaavat aikaisempaan tehtäväänsä tai jatkavat seuraavalle komennukselle. Useita peräkkäisiä komennuksia tekevät työntekijät kuitenkin usein lopettavat komennukset jossain vaiheessa ja jäävät pysyvästi kotiorganisaatioon. Yrityksissä on havaittu, että heidän paluusopeutumisessaan on haasteita. Tämä tutkimus pyrkii selvittämään kyseisiä haasteita ja tarjoamaan yrityksille niihin ratkaisuja.

Tutkimuksen tukena käytetty kirjallisuus pohjautuu vahvasti pitkien komennusten paluusopeutusteorioihin, sillä vastaavia tutkimuksia lyhyistä peräkkäisistä komennuksista ei ole tehty. Tutkimus on toteutettu laadullisena tapaustutkimuksena. Tutkimusta varten haastateltiin eräässä globaalisti toimivassa teollisuusyrityksessä komennusuransa tehneitä työntekijöitä, jotka olivat hiljattain palanneet kotimaahansa Suomeen. Tulokset on analysoitu sisällönanalyysillä abduktiivisesti, eli osittain induktiivisesti aineistosta pääättelemällä ja osittain aikaisempia teorioita deduktiivisesti hyödyntäen.

Tutkimuksen löydökset osoittavat, että peräkkäisillä lyhyillä komennuksilla olleiden työntekijöiden paluusopeutumishaasteet olivat osittain samoja kuin perinteisillä pitkillä komennuksilla olleiden. Peräkkäisillä lyhyillä komennuksilla olleiden työntekijöiden oli kuitenkin tyypillisesti helppo sopeutua uudelleen kotimaahansa. Eniten ongelmia taas aiheutti työhön sopeutuminen, mikä johtui siitä, että työn luonne kotimaan toimistolla oli hyvin erilainen kuin fyysinen työ vaihtelevissa komennuskohteissa. Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat, että organisaatioiden kannattaisi tukea komennuksilta palaavia työntekijöitä erityisesti uuden, mahdollisimman sopivan työn löytämisessä. Tutkimuksessa korostui myös komennustyötä tekevien paluuaikojen aikainen tunnistaminen ja niihin reagointi.

KEYWORDS: short-term assignments, rotational assignments, international assignments, repatriation, repatriation adjustment, organizational support

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Abbreviations

COLA	Cost of Living Allowance
HR	Human Resources
HRM	Human Resource Management
IBT	International Business Traveler
LTA	Long-Term Assignment
MNC	Multinational Corporation
STA	Short-Term Assignment

1 Introduction

The nature of business has changed. Nowadays, business is more geographically spread, because corporations' management is structured globally, and much work is based on international projects (Beaverstock, Derudder, Faulconbridge, & Witlox, 2009; Dicken, 2015; Welch & Worm, 2006). To answer this change in business, the forms of international mobility have also transformed. Traditionally, expatriates "acted as corporate agents" and were assigned for "establishing control mechanisms in newly established subsidiaries or by transferring knowledge", but recently, the motive for global mobility is more often for solving a singular problem, and the need for international assignments is for shorter periods of time (Collings, McDonnell, & McCarter, 2015, p. 263). Thus, alternative forms of international mobility have partly replaced and partly become to supplement traditional long-term expatriation (Tahvanainen, Welch, & Worm, 2005). Such new forms include short-term assignments (STAs), international business travelers (IBTs), and international commuters (McNulty & Brewster, 2019). Even though the digitalization has enabled a lot of work to be done online, some work has still to be done physically at the location. Also, despite the cost and time spent on traveling, in some cases it is more beneficial to have face-to-face meetings than online meetings. (Aguilera, 2008; Davidson & Cope, 2003, pp. 21-22, 137-139; Faulconbridge, Beaverstock, Derudder, & Wiltox, 2009.) Compared to traditional expatriation, the alternative forms are more flexible and less expensive ways to ensure international presence (Harvey, Mayerhofer, Hartmann, & Moeller, 2010).

The most popular type of alternative global mobility is short-term assignment (Collings et al., 2015). Using STAs is a cost-efficient way to answer the global mobility needs in the current international business environment (Tahvanainen et al., 2005). The number of STAs is expected to continue its growth. For example, 82% of the Finnish mobility survey 2017 respondents expected the number of STAs in their organization to increase during the following years, while in the 2015's survey, the result was 66% (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2017, p. 37). In a global survey, 84% of respondent companies reported to use

short-term assignments, and 63% expected the number of them to increase (KPMG International, 2018, p. 16).

1.1 Justification of the study

Despite the increasing popularity of STAs, research about them is very limited (McNulty & Brewster, 2019, p. 240). Short-term assignments have long been used, but the research about them has raised interest only from the beginning of the 21st century (Starr & Currie, 2009). So far, several aspects of STAs have been studied, for example, implications of STAs (Tahvanainen et al., 2005), the impact of an assignee's family (Starr & Currie, 2009), repatriation (Starr, 2009), for what purposes STAs are used (Salleh & Koh, 2013), management of STAs (Suutari, Brewster, Riusala, & Syrjäkari, 2013), STAs in a military context (Crowley-Henry & Heaslip, 2014), stress of cross-cultural adaptation (Crowne & Engle, 2016), and training and support offered for short-term assignees (Conroy, McDonnell, & Holzleitner, 2018).

Even though STAs are increasingly popular, they are still relatively little researched type of international assignments (Collings & Isichei, 2018; McNulty & Brewster, 2019, p. 113). Thus, researchers have recognized a need for more research on STAs (McNulty & Brewster, 2019, pp. 118, 240; Mäkelä, Saarenpää, & McNulty, 2017). One topic that requires more research is repatriation of short-term assignees (Lazarova, 2015). Repatriation of long-term expatriates is rather widely studied (see Chiang, van Esch, Birtch, & Shaffer, 2018; Knocke & Schuster, 2017; Lazarova, 2015), but research of short-term assignees' repatriation is scarce. The lack of research can be explained by the fact that many short-term assignees who are working on projects often leave for another assignment right after returning from one and thus do not repatriate, while others typically return to their old position in the home location because often a replacement has not been hired (Starr, 2009; Tahvanainen et al., 2005). That is why the repatriation of short-term assignees is seen mostly unproblematic. However, Starr's (2009) study demonstrated that re-integrating to one's home location after a short-term assignment is not always easy and

unproblematic. That is why more research about repatriation of short-term assignees is needed.

This master's thesis investigates short-term assignees, because there is very little research about them, even though they are widely used in companies and the number of them is expected to keep increasing. More specifically, the study focuses on their repatriation adjustment and how it could be better supported, because it is recognized that there are challenges in short-term assignees' repatriation. This research is needed because the theories and findings from studies about long-term expatriation cannot be fully applied to short-term assignees' situation. For example, expatriates' families often relocate with them, while short-term assignees' families stay in the home country during the assignment. Because of their different situation, short-term assignees require their own research and practices, and this study contributes to this still limited field of research.

1.2 Research problem

Researchers have pointed out the need for more research about short-term assignments and repatriation from them. The detailed research problem, however, is determined based on a specific problem experienced by a multinational corporation (MNC) that is selected as a case company of this research. The study focuses on rotational short-term assignees, who are used on projects; they complete several consecutive STAs and might spend years abroad in different countries. In this context, repatriation means the act of quitting the assignment job and transferring to another position in the home country. In the following subsections, the study's aim and purpose, research questions, and delimitation are presented. The case company is further discussed in chapter 4.2 as part of the methodologies.

Purpose of the study

This study answers the need for research on short-term assignees and their repatriation. The study's purpose is to fill the research gap and advance the scarce research on STAs. Thus, the aim of the study is to increase the general knowledge of short-term assignments. At the same time, the study's purpose is to help the case company to better manage the repatriation process of its rotational short-term assignees. The study tries to discover what kind of challenges repatriating rotational short-term assignees experience, and what the organization could do to prevent and ease the obstacles. Thus, the study aims to provide practical suggestions to the organization.

Research questions

Based on the aim and the purpose of the study the main research question is defined as follows:

'How organizations can support rotational international short-term assignees' repatriation adjustment?'

The following two sub questions help to answer the main question:

'What challenges there are in repatriation adjustment of rotational short-term assignees?'

'Which support mechanisms have been experienced as useful and what kind of additional support rotational short-term assignees would have wished for?'

As the research on short-term assignees' repatriation is scarce, the literature about long-term expatriates' repatriation is utilized and applied to rotational short-term assignees when it is applicable. In the focus of the study are assignees who have done many consecutive short-term assignments before permanently returning to their home location.

Thus, similarly to long-term expatriates, they had spent several years abroad, even though they visited the home country in between assignments. Short-term assignees are in a different situation than long-term expatriates, but they are likely to experience at least partly similar challenges in repatriation. Thus, it is justified that the literature review utilizes literature of long-term expatriates' repatriation and support whenever it was considered useful. However, empirically the study focuses solely on rotational short-term assignees who have repatriated after several consecutive assignments. The empirical research is conducted to be able to answer the research questions.

Delimitations

The phenomenon of short-term assignees' repatriation adjustment is studied from the employee perspective. It is a logical choice because in the center of the study are the assignees' experiences. Starr (2009) was one of the firsts to study short-term assignees' expectations about repatriation from that perspective. This study maintains the employee perspective to further investigate and better understand the phenomenon.

The study focuses on a single industrial MNC that is based in Finland and operates globally. The focus group of the study is located in Finland, and they are all Finns, but they traveled globally to customers' sites as short-term assignees. The company is selected because it employs numerous short-term assignments yearly. It provides a great opportunity reach a large number of participants and collect various data about repatriation experiences. The focus group is selected because Finland is the base for the company's rotational short-term assignees. The Finnish assignees form the main group of short-term assignees in the company. Thus, it is reasonable to focus on them.

1.3 Definitions of key concepts

The key concepts of the study are short-term assignments, rotational assignments, repatriation, repatriation adjustment, and organizational support. These concepts are defined in the following sections.

Short-term assignments

The definition of short-term assignments is not unambiguous, because the length is determined slightly differently by researchers and different companies (Tahvanainen et al., 2005). In general, STAs are defined as assignments that are longer than business trips but shorter than traditional expatriate assignments (Collings, Scullion, & Morley, 2007; Tahvanainen et al., 2005). The specific definitions vary from one to twelve months (Collings et al., 2015; Herod, 2012; Tahvanainen et al., 2005). In this study, the length of a short-term assignment is defined as from one to twelve months, because that range represents the typical lengths of the target groups' assignments. During a short-term assignment, the assignee's family most often stays at home instead of relocating with the assignee (Herod, 2012, p. 3; Starr & Currie, 2009; Tahvanainen et al., 2005). Short-term assignments are used mostly for projects, solving problems, managerial control or for transferring skills and knowledge, but sometimes also for training and development purposes (Herod, 2012, p. 3; Pucik, Evans, Björkman, & Morris, 2017, p. 84; Salleh & Koh, 2013; Tahvanainen et al., 2005).

Rotational assignments

Rotational assignees work for a specific number of days on assignment sites and return home for a specific amount of time for time off (Petroleum Labour Market Information (PetroLMI) Division of Enform, 2015, p. 3). These on and off work periods are rotated, so the assignees return to the site after the time off at home. Rotational assignments are used especially in remote or harsh locations, such as oilrigs (Collings et al., 2007; Millar & Salt, 2009; Welch & Worm, 2006). Rotational assignees' families do not typically relocate with them (Collings et al., 2007; Millar & Salt, 2009). The rotational short-term

assignees, which are the focus of this study, do not work at the same site all the time, but travel to different locations because they work on different projects. The projects last from a couple of months to more than a year. The rotation cycle of the target group consists of three months of work at site and around a week at home.

Repatriation

Repatriation is “the final phase of a prolonged international assignment” (Chiang et al., 2018, p. 192). Repatriation is defined as the process of an expatriate and possibly his or her family returning and readjusting to the home country after an international assignment (Hurn, 1999, p. 244; Kraimer, Shaffer, & Bolino 2009, pp. 28-29). Consequently, a repatriate is defined as an employee who returns to his or her home country after an international assignment (Herman & Tetrick, 2009, p. 69) or as a recently returned employee (Benson & Pattie, 2008, p. 1636). Reiche (2012) defines repatriation more specifically; “as the completion of the international assignment and the assignee’s move to a subsequent position, either at the individual’s home unit or another MNC unit” (p. 1052). However, this study regards repatriation only to the home country.

Repatriation adjustment

Adjustment is defined as a process of adaptation to a new environment and overcoming the negative feelings that are caused by a culture shock (Black, Gregersen, & Mendenhall, 1992; Church, 1982). In repatriation adjustment, the environment is not new, but it has likely changed during the assignment and thus, repatriates need to adjust to it (Adler & Gundersen, 2008, p. 286). In addition, expatriates change during the assignments, and returning home as a changed person requires adjustment (Black, 1992). According to Black, Gregersen, Mendenhall, and Stroh (1999, pp. 209-210), repatriation adjustment includes three facets: adjustment to new job and work environment, adjustment to communicating with home-country nationals, and adjustment to the general environment and culture. Wu, Zhuang, and Hung’s (2014) definition highlights repatriates’ subjective

experiences of life satisfaction and “feeling qualified to do their jobs and interact with parent country nationals (PCNs) while they repatriate to a home country” (p. 181).

Organizational support

Erbacher, Netto, and Espana define organizational support as assistance that organizations provide to assignees (as cited in Sousa, Gonçalves, & Santos, 2017). In this study’s focus is the support that relates to repatriation. The assistance may take different forms, such as career planning, training, and keeping in touch with the expatriate during his or her assignment (Cox, Khan, & Armani, 2013). Even though some forms of support covered in this study take place during the assignment and before return, their aim is to ease the repatriation process. Organization’s support may help a repatriate to better re-adjust to the home location (Cox et al., 2013).

1.4 Structure of the study

The structure of this thesis follows the linear-analytic structure, which according to Yin (2014, p. 188) is a typical way of presenting case studies. It is a standardized way to present a research process. First, a research problem is discussed, and relevant literature is reviewed. Then, the selected methods are covered, and the collected data is analyzed. The reports end with a conclusion.

This report is divided in seven main chapters. This first chapter presented the background of the study and described the research problem. The following two chapters review the relevant literature. The first part reviews the STA literature and discovers what has previously been studied about short-term assignees. The next section focuses on repatriation adjustment and organizational support. As literature about short-term assignees’ repatriation is scarce, this section will be based mostly on research on long-term expatriates. The second part covers also the scarce literature on short-term assignees’ repatriation and describes the theoretical framework of the study.

After the literature review, the fourth chapter outlines the methodological choices of the study. The fifth chapter presents the findings of the empirical study, and the sixth chapter discusses them together with previous research. Finally, the seventh chapter concludes the study by discussing the study's managerial and theoretical implications, addressing its limitations and providing future research suggestions.

2 Short-term assignments

As mentioned in the introduction, researchers and companies determine the length of STAs differently, varying from one to twelve months (Collings et al., 2015; Herod, 2012; Tahvanainen et al., 2005). By all definitions, short-term assignments do not last more than a year (Collings et al., 2015; Tahvanainen et al., 2005). Rather common, however, is that they are defined to last up to six months due to the possible changes in taxation and social security status when an assignment exceeds six months (Collings et al., 2015; Suutari & Brewster, 2009; Suutari et al., 2013). This contradicts with the RES Forum survey results according to which, in 50% of respondent organizations, the typical duration of an STA was reported to be seven to twelve months, while in 29% and 6% of the organizations it was reported to be four to six months and one to three months respectively (Dickmann, 2018c, p. 81). PricewaterhouseCoopers regards assignments as short-term assignments usually when they last from one to twelve months (as cited in Tahvanainen et al., 2005). However, Herod (2012) defines short-term assignments as assignments that last from three to twelve months, as he regards assignments that last less than three months to be extended business trips. In this study, an assignment is considered an STA when it lasts for one to twelve months.

STAs are considerably shorter than long-term assignments (LTAs), which typically last for longer than a year (Tahvanainen et al., 2005). In addition to the length of the assignment, a distinguishing feature of STAs is that during a short-term assignment, the assignee's family most often stays at home instead of relocating with the assignee (Herod, 2012, p. 3; Starr & Currie, 2009; Tahvanainen et al., 2005). Also, the purposes of using short-term assignments are slightly different from long-term expatriation. Short-term assignments are used mostly for projects, solving problems, managerial control or for transferring skills and knowledge, but sometimes also for training and development purposes (Herod, 2012, p. 3; Pucik et al., 2017, p. 84; Salleh & Koh, 2013; Tahvanainen et al., 2005). Thus, the objective of an assignment is often for a singular purpose that can be achieved in a short period of time (Collings et al., 2015).

This chapter reviews the literature about short-term assignments. First, STAs' increasing popularity is discussed and then the main purposes on which STAs are used are covered. The following subchapters present the advantages and disadvantages of using STAs from organizational and individual points of view. The final subchapter focuses on the management practices of STAs, including selection, training, performance management, and compensation of short-term assignees.

2.1 Popularity of short-term assignments

Recent reports have confirmed that companies both in Finland and globally are using increasing numbers of international assignments (Dickmann, 2018b, p. 59; ECA International, 2017, p. 4; PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2017, p. 5). The globalization has caused economic, competitive, and demographic changes, which have led corporations to be more globally present and as a result, the demand for global employees is increasing (Caligiuri & Bonache, 2016). International assignments are a central part of conducting international business operations (Tahvanainen et al., 2005) and strategically important because they help obtaining companies' competitive advantages (Chiang et al., 2018). For example, traditional expatriation is used mainly for filling a position or skills gap, and for developing managers by placing them in demanding international positions and organizations through control and co-ordination of operations (Bonache & Fernández, 1999; Edström & Galbraith, 1977; Harzing, 2001; Tahvanainen et al., 2005).

International assignments can be categorized into different types, such as long-term assignments, short-term assignments, or international business travelers (Tahvanainen et al., 2005). Tahvanainen et al. (2005) defined three determinants that affect the selection of a type. These are the assignment's purpose, duration and location. Traditionally, expatriates "acted as corporate agents" and were assigned for "establishing control mechanisms in newly established subsidiaries or by transferring knowledge", but recently, the motive for global mobility is often for solving a singular problem and the need for international assignments is for shorter periods of time (Collings et al., 2015, p. 263).

Companies are using new forms of international assignment instead of and in addition to traditional long-term assignments. The alternative types include international commuters, rotational, virtual and short-term assignees (STAs), and international business travelers (IBTs) (Mayrhofer, Reichel, & Sparrow, 2012; McNulty & Brewster, 2019, p. 111; Brewster, Dickmann, & Suutari, in press; Tahvanainen et al., 2005). These terms can overlap. For example, an expatriate can be an IBT when he or she travels in his or her expatriate position (Brewster et al., in press). What differentiates these other types from traditional expatriates, is that employees often travel for shorter periods of time and their families do not travel with them but stay in the home country (Brewster et al., in press). These more flexible new forms of international assignments enable companies to answer the global mobility demands faster and in a more agile way than using long-term expatriates (Brewster et al., in press). The alternative forms of international mobility are increasingly popular, and the most commonly used type is short-term assignment (Collings et al., 2015, p. 264; Tahvanainen et al., 2005).

According to KPMG International (2019, p. 21), 75% of the respondent companies use STAs. The number of STAs has grown rapidly (Herod, 2012, p. 4), and according to consultancy reports, the number of STAs is expected to continue increasing (Collings et al., 2015; Dickmann, 2018d, p. 104; McNulty & Brewster, 2019, p. 113; Tahvanainen et al., 2005). For example, Global Assignment Policies and Practices Survey (KPMG International, 2019, p. 22) revealed that 19% of the respondent companies anticipate the number of STAs to increase, and 51% of the companies expect the number of long-term assignments to decrease in the following five years. Similarly, based on the results of surveys completed by Global Mobility professionals (Dickmann, 2018d, p. 106), 49% of the respondent companies reported growth in using STAs during the last five years, while the number of LTAs has decreased. 30% of the companies expect the number of STAs to increase moderately and 40% expect it to increase substantially (Dickmann, 2018d, p. 107). Only 8% expect their STA numbers to decrease (Dickmann, 2018d, pp. 106-107).

Dickmann (2018d, p. 106) suspects the reasons for the increase of STAs are thought to be the objectives and the nature of them and the fact that most of the families do not relocate with short-term assignees. Also, based on Air Inc., Johnson, and ECA International, McNulty and Brewster (2019, p. 113) conclude that cost-savings are an important reason for relying more on STAs than LTAs. According to the Global assignment policies and practices survey (KPMG International, 2019), controlling costs is the second common goal of international assignment programs. Because STAs generally have lower costs than LTAs (Tahvanainen et al., 2005), cost control goals might explain the increase of STAs.

2.2 Purposes of short-term assignments

In their study about STAs functions, Salleh and Koh (2013) discovered four main reasons for why short-term assignees are used: “1) to implement a specific assignment (training and meeting); 2) to gain international experience; 3) to identify and solve problems; and 4) to maintain relationships” (p. 37). Based on the study, STAs are used mostly for completing a specific assignment or transferring skills and knowledge from one location to another where it is needed. Some STAs were found to be used for management development and enabling an assignee to experience a foreign environment and gain international experience. Many short-term assignees were selected based on their skills and knowledge, which they already had and which that was needed in another location, for example, to troubleshoot and solve problems. Short-term assignees were discovered to be used also for building and maintaining relationships, for example, with customers or local employees. In some countries, it was reported crucial to build relationships and trust, and it is easier to do face-to-face than over digital communication tools. The study indicated that cost-efficiency is not necessarily the main reason for using STAs even though sometimes they are used for cutting costs.

The results of Salleh and Koh’s (2013) study are in line with other findings about STAs. The RES Forum survey discovered that short-term assignments are most often used for project-based work (Dickmann, 2018d, p. 107). That has been explained by STAs

suitability for that (Mäkelä et al., 2017; Suutari et al., 2013). Because of their flexibility, STAs are used also in urgent needs, for example, to transfer knowledge or build networks (Mäkelä et al., 2017, p 248). Other common reasons for using STAs include filling a skills gap, knowledge transfer, and solving a problem in a host location (Dickmann, 2018d, p. 108). Professional and personal development was seen less important in the RES Forum's global mobility survey (Dickmann, 2018d, p. 107). STAs can be used also for filling a gap of temporarily needed talent (Minbaeva & Michailova, 2004). According to Tahvanainen et al. (2005), the major reasons for using STAs are skills transfer and problem solving, managerial control, and management development.

2.3 Advantages of using short-term assignments

As previously mentioned, STAs offer a flexible and relatively affordable way for organizations to ensure their international presence. Short international assignments do not provide advantages only for organizations but also for individuals who undertake these assignments. Such benefits are listed in the following subsections first from an organization's perspective and later from an individual's perspective.

2.3.1 Advantages for organizations

According to Tahvanainen et al. (2005), the greatest advantages of STAs for organizations are the flexibility, simplicity, and affordability of using them compared to LTAs. STAs are easier, cheaper and faster to arrange than long-term assignments because often less bureaucracy is needed in arranging STAs than LTAs. Tahvanainen et al. (2005) justify this opinion by stating that "complicated salary calculations, three-party-contract preparations, household removals, etc. are not needed" and that the administration of the assignments is handled in the home country (p. 668). Thus, STAs provide a flexible way to practice companies' global mobility while achieving many of the benefits that LTAs would bring (McNulty & Brewster, 2019, p. 115; Suutari et al., 2013). Such benefits include

knowledge transfer (Mäkelä et al., 2017; Reiche, Harzing, & Kraimer, 2009) and communication and coordination between units, which enhance corporations' global integration goals (Suutari et al., 2013). Especially managers who have undertaken several STAs have built broad international networks, which is valuable in knowledge sharing (Harvey et al., 2010). STAs help companies to be in close contact not only between internal units but also with customers (Suutari et al., 2013).

Also, STAs enable access to talent that is not available in host locations (Minbaeva & Michailova, 2004). STAs are often used in projects when there is a need for a specific work for a relatively short period of time (Brewster et al., in press). STAs serve well in situations where a particular talent is needed for a short period of time in another location (Brewster et al., in press). STAs can easily respond to even urgent staffing needs (Suutari et al., 2013). It is often the most effective to send a short-term assignee with the needed talent to troubleshoot or solve a problem (Meyskens, Von Glinow, Werther, & Clarke, 2009), because it is faster and easier than trying to do it remotely or training local employees to do it (Tahvanainen et al., 2005).

If the duration of an STA is less than six months, salary, pension and social security benefits are handled in the home country location (Tahvanainen et al., 2005). It is simpler and cheaper for an organization than handling the practicalities of a long-term expatriate. When an assignment lasts for longer than that, the taxation and social security might have to be transferred to the host country (Collings et al., 2015).

In addition to lower administration costs, STAs are cost effective because an assignee's family does not typically relocate with the assignee and thus, there will not be additional costs of large family apartments or children's school payments (Tahvanainen et al., 2005). Cost effectiveness is achieved also because like Tahvanainen et al. (2005) discovered, "short assignments can be planned in an exact manner: more specific goals can be set for the assignment, and achievement of goals can be evaluated more accurately" (p. 668).

2.3.2 Advantages for individuals

Based on Suutari et al.'s (2013) study, the main benefits of STAs for assignees are development possibilities. According to the study, the development opportunities include discovering how things are done in other locations, creating personal relationships with people in other locations, and learning to truly know customers' environments. In addition, they include witnessing technical solutions in action in the field, creating contacts to customers in other countries, and gaining an understanding of their specific needs.

For assignees STAs offer a relatively simple way to gain international experience because there is no need to make special arrangements to their families' situation (Tahvanainen et al., 2005). Because the family of a short-term assignee often stays in the home country, there is no need for them to adjust to a new culture, new schooling does not have to be arranged to the children, and the assignment does not affect the spouse's career (Dickmann, Suutari, & Wurtz, 2018; Tahvanainen et al., 2005). This benefits both the assignees and organizations, which might otherwise have to help the assignee to arrange such things.

The family staying in the home country has also other benefits for the assignee; he or she does not have the unwanted pressure from the family, which gives space for the assignee to do self-reflection and re-assess his or her identity (Kohonen, 2005; Starr & Currie, 2009). In addition, the lack of the family's pressure enables the assignee to fully concentrate on to the job and make long days because there is no one waiting for him or her after the workday (McNulty & Brewster, 2019, pp. 117-18; Mäkelä et al., 2017). The assignee has more freedom because of not having the pressure to go home, and also the organization benefits from this because the work will be done maybe better and more swiftly. However, a stressful working environment and many extra hours can also have negative effects (see Suutari et al., 2013; Tahvanainen et al., 2005).

Compared to LTAs, objectives of STA are often more clearly defined, which provides clarity about the job and purpose for a short-term assignee (Tahvanainen et al., 2005).

Similarly to LTAs, STAs provide opportunities to develop assignees' knowledge but without having to leave the home country for an extended period of time (Suutari et al., 2013). STAs can also improve assignees' career and social capitals (Suutari et al., 2013), which might reinforce their employability (McNulty & Brewster, 2019, p. 118). Also, if a short-term assignee works in a project group, he or she may develop "in-depth working relationships that enhanced co-operation, knowledge sharing and communication between employees even after the project has been completed" (Suutari et al., 2013, p. 124). In addition, international assignments have been discovered to provide a welcomed change to assignees' normal routines (Crowley-Henry & Heaslip, 2014), and they may serve as a restoring experience (Westman, Etzion, & Chen, 2009). Finally, short-term assignments typically improve an assignee's income because of additional compensations (Tahvanainen et al., 2005). Some assignees consider the financial benefits as important motivators for taking the assignment (Suutari et al., 2013).

2.4 Disadvantages of using short-term assignments

Despite the advantages, there are also challenges related to STAs. Such challenges and disadvantages are discussed in the following subsections. First, challenges for organizations are considered, and then, challenges for individual short-term assignees are discussed.

2.4.1 Disadvantages for organizations

The major challenge regarding STAs is related to their management. STAs are often managed by a responsible line manager as they bear the costs, and the human resources (HR) department is seldom involved in it (Brewster, Harris, & Petrovic, 2001). Thus, the line managers and often assignees themselves together with their families are responsible of dealing with the issues (McNulty & Brewster, 2019, p. 119). Handling family-related issues is often complex, and it requires sensitivity from a manager (Suutari et al., 2013).

As managers are often not trained for it, they might experience such issues as administrative burdens, which increase the costs and reduce the flexibility of using STAs (McNulty & Brewster, 2019, p. 119). Also, the lack of human resource management's (HRM's) involvement might result in inadequate coordination and incoherence in appropriate compensation practices (Brewster et al., in press). If a company does not have common policies for short-term assignments, negotiations about contract and compensation might be time-consuming, because they are done on a case-by-case basis (Suutari et al., 2013).

Due to the disadvantages of the current STA management practices, Tahvanainen et al. (2005) suggest that managerial support could help to tackle the challenges of short-term expatriation. Moreover, McNulty and Brewster (2019, p. 119) state that developing policies to support STAs is critical (see also Collings et al., 2007; Starr & Currie, 2009). Collings et al. (2007) stress the importance of flexible policies which take into account individual differences and specific needs. The current challenge of MNCs is to balance the management of STAs between line managers and HRM in a way that the best outcomes for both organizations and assignees can be achieved (McNulty & Brewster, 2019, p. 119).

2.4.2 Disadvantages for individuals

Problems related to international business travel and thus also to international STAs may cause travel stress and burnout to an assignee before, during, and after a trip (DeFrank, Konopaske, & Ivancevich, 2000; Westman, Etzion, & Gortler, 2004). Travel stress may be caused by several work or nonwork-related stressors, such as trip arrangements, host country issues, work overload, or a work-family conflict (De Frank et al., 2000; Striker, Dimberg, & Liese, 2000). Especially separation from one's family is a strong stressor and may cause stress to both assignees and their families (DeFrank et al., 2000). Travel stress is a threat for individuals' personal health and well-being (Striker et al., 2000).

International project assignments are often located in harsh and sometimes insecure locations, which also causes stress (Tahvanainen et al., 2005). Tahvanainen et al. (2005) give an example of a such a challenging location: “a construction of a power plant in the middle of a jungle, with no telephone connections or electricity, with armed men protecting the workers at a site” (p. 668). In addition to harsh working environments, short-term assignees are often exposed to tight schedules with challenging goals and demanding working times (Conory et al., 2018; Suutari et al., 2013). These stressful experiences might lead to severe problems, such as alcoholism (Tahvanainen et al., 2005). Additionally, trying to adjust to a foreign culture may cause unwanted stress, especially during an STA when there is the pressure to do it quickly to complete the assignment in time (Crowne & Engle, 2016). However, only 12% of the respondent companies in PricewaterhouseCoopers 2000/2001 survey reported stress and fatigue as disadvantages of short-term assignments (as cited in Tahvanainen et al., 2005, p. 668).

Family issues

According to Starr and Currie (2009), majority of short-term assignees’ challenges are related to family issues. Because the family does not accompany an assignee, it does not eliminate all the problems related to family, but it creates new forms of challenges (Brewster et al., 2001; Starr & Currie, 2009). Starr and Currie (2009) argue the statement by applying studies about other alternative forms of international mobility; for example, Welch and Worm (2006) discovered that IBTs experienced isolation and loneliness, their spouses were displeased about them spending time away from home, and their family relationships were disrupted during the travels and even after they had returned home.

Short-term assignees are away from their families for relatively long times, and a major reason for rejecting a short-term assignment offer is that an employee does not want to be away from his or her family (Starr & Currie, 2009). Separation might cause anxiety, depression, and stress (Morrice, Taylor, Clark, & McCann, 1985) that might lead to burn-out (Meyskens et al., 2009). Separation is a stressful experience for both assignees and

their family members (DeFrank et al., 2000; Espino, Sundstrom, Frick, Jacobs, & Peters, 2002; Mayerhofer, Hartmann, Michelitsch-Riedl, & Kollinger, 2004).

Family affects the travel stress in all stages of a trip: before the trip, during it, and after it (DeFrank et al., 2000; Westman et al., 2004). New technologies make communication between an assignee and the family at home easier (Panozzo, 2015), but some locations limit the communication possibilities because of harsh environments, different time zones or intensive work schedule (Suutari et al., 2013).

In addition to family issues, STAs cause also other work-life balance issues (Suutari et al., 2013). In addition to separation from immediate family, assignees are separated from their extended family and friends in the home country (Shaffer, Kraimer, Chen, & Bolino, 2012). Also, long working hours create conflicts in assignees' work-life balance (Mäkelä & Suutari, 2011). In addition, due to different time zones, some assignees might have to interrupt their regular sleeping patterns to be able to make international phone calls (Shaffer et al., 2012). According to global mobility professionals, some of the main challenges of STAs include the situation when the family is not relocated with the assignee and work-life balance issues combined with work overload (Dickmann, 2018d, p. 115).

Difficulties in integration and adjustment

The most common disadvantages found by the PricewaterhouseCoopers 2000/2001 survey included assignees not integrating into the local workplace or community, host company employees resenting international assignees, and other problems in working relationships (as cited in Tahvanainen et al., 2005, p. 668). Tahvanainen et al.'s study (2005) is in line with it; "the dual role in home and host country was regarded as the most common disadvantage" (p. 668). Based on the study, for short-term assignees it may be a challenge to integrate to the host country workplace and community, and thus, it is difficult for them to form strong relationships with local colleagues and customers. This is a challenge for an individual, but it also affects the organization.

Furthermore, tensions might arise between assignees and local workers due to challenges of a multicultural team, jealousy about the assignee who gets to travel much, assignee not integrating as well as longer-term expatriates and if the assignee does not get to know with the local workers well (Tahvanainen et al., 2005). Despite the findings, Tahvanainen et al. (2005) state that "in our study, only four HR managers mentioned the relationship between the assignees and local colleagues or customers as a problem area" (p. 668).

Like long-term expatriates, short-term assignees experience cultural challenges during their assignment (Collings et al., 2007; Crowne & Engle, 2016). However, often they have not had any intercultural training because the assignment happened in such a short notice that there was not time for any trainings (Conory et al., 2018). Nevertheless, assignees have been discovered to need culture specific training (Conory et al., 2018). Cultural adjustment may be insufficient also because of the short period of time spent in the host location (Suutari et al., 2013). In addition to the local culture, short-term assignees should adjust to the local working environment, which might dramatically differ from the home working environment (Suutari et al., 2013). Global mobility professionals have acknowledged also cultural adjustment, social isolation of the assignee, and the assignee's high stress level as some of the main challenges of STAs (Dickmann, 2018d, p. 115).

In addition to the family and adjustment issues, taxation might become a problem related to STAs. Especially when an assignment exceeds six months, an assignee's taxation and social security may cause challenges (Collings et al., 2015; Tahvanainen et al., 2005). For example, Tahvanainen et al. (2005) studied short-term assignees from Finland and in that context, taxation did not change or cause additional issues when an assignment lasted less than six months. However, problems occurred when assignments lasted longer than expected and exceeded six months. In that case tax terms changed and help from tax authorities was not competent enough. Thus, individuals had challenges with the changed tax terms. The taxation affects also organizations. In the same study it was

discovered that many organizations faced challenges when their assignees did not want to bear the tax liabilities. According to global mobility professionals, tax compliance was reported to be the most severe challenge of STAs, followed by legal compliance (Dickmann, 2018d, p. 115).

2.5 Management of short-term assignments

The responsibility of STAs' management is typically in the hands of line managers, and HRM has a relatively small part in the process (Suutari et al., 2013). It is more common for companies to have clear corporate policies for LTAs than STAs (KPMG International, 2019, p. 21; Suutari et al., 2013). Due to the lack of clear policies, assignees might be left on their own to make preparations and arrangements related to the assignments and rely to their own contacts (Conory et al., 2018; Mayerhofer et al., 2004). Suutari et al. (2013) suggest that formalized policies are needed because the number of STAs is increasing and clear policies could better support the assignees and help treating them equally. They expect that unified treatment would increase short-term assignees' satisfaction, which in turn would help attracting new international assignees. Unified processes and policies would also improve the cost-effectiveness and save time in managing individual STAs. However, they speculate whether strict policies would add value to companies or decrease the valuable flexibility that STAs enable. The following subsections describe more in detail how STAs are managed in companies, for example, how short-term assignees are selected, trained, and compensated.

Selection

For short-term assignees there is often no formal selection process because the need is for specific skills or experience and the pool having those is limited and thus well known by those who make the selection decisions (Tahvanainen et al., 2005). Selection is often made based on personal relationships rather than an official selection process (Suutari et al., 2013). However, a need for a more systematic selection process is recognized,

because it would ensure that the best people are objectively selected possibly from a wider pool (Suutari et al., 2013; Tahvanainen et al., 2005). In the case of long-term expatriation, selection methods are better developed and, for example, the expatriate's spouse and family are suggested to be included in the selection process (Dowling, Festing, & Engle, 2008). However, in Tahvanainen et al.'s (2005) study about STAs, the interviewees did not mention family when talking about considering an assignee's suitability - probably because the families were not to relocate. Meyskens et al. (2009) suggest involving candidates' work-life balance objectives, which include the family considerations, into the selection process. They further propose that short-term assignments are better suited for those who do not give strong importance on high levels of work-life balance, because it is difficult to maintain during assignments.

Training

According to Tahvanainen et al. (2005), in comparison to traditional expatriation, also the training and support of short-term assignees is less organized. Sometimes there is no time to organize any training because the need for a short-term assignment comes on a very short notice (Tahvanainen et al., 2005; Conory et al., 2018). Tahvanainen et al.'s (2005) study revealed that cross-cultural or country-specific training is often not provided for short-term assignees, especially when the cultural distance is low. However, an increasing number of short-term assignees are sent to developing countries or other untypical locations, which increases the need for culture specific training that would cover also nonwork-related issues (Conory et al., 2018). That is why the type and amount of training depends on the assignment type and the cultural distance of the country (Suutari et al., 2013). Conory et al. (2018) found that in cases, when formal cross-cultural training was offered, it was too superficial and not tailored enough to cover the issues about the host country. Thus, training of short-term assignees could be improved. Conory et al. (2018) suggest that also information packages should be offered to short-term assignees before departure.

To gain country-specific information, many short-term assignees rely on personal contacts who live in or have previous experience about the host country (Conory et al., 2018; Mayerhofer et al., 2004). The formal training that is offered for short-term assignees is offered only prior to departure; generally, no training is offered after arriving to the host location (Conory et al., 2018). However, assignees do not even expect post-arrival training because usually the assignments are so short and the assignees' working days so long that there would not be time for additional training (Conory et al., 2018). Post-arrival support is mostly done by guiding assignees to local employees who support assignees in cultural adaptation (Conory et al., 2018).

Performance management

In Suutari et al.'s (2013) study's case company, performance management of short-term assignees was done by their home-country supervisors according to the regular annual performance management policy. However, the assignees of the study hoped to have an assignment-specific performance management practices and receive feedback about the assignment from the manager who actually knew about their performance during the assignment (Suutari et al., 2013). Similarly, based on the results of Mayerhofer et al.'s (2004) study, the performance management of 'flexpatriates', who also "travel for brief assignments", was conducted by their immediate superiors in the parent country (pp. 1371, 1381).

Compensation

Most commonly, short-term assignees' remuneration is based on the home country salary, and it is not linked to performance (Dickmann, 2018c, pp. 86, 93). Salary payments typically stay in the home company when an assignment lasts less than six months, and the assignment compensation is based on the basic salary with possible additional elements and the organization's travel policy (Tahvanainen et al., 2005). For example, short-term assignees are often granted daily allowances (Suutari et al., 2013; Tahvanainen et al., 2005). Sometimes the host location pays the compensation when an assignee works

in a subsidiary (Suutari et al., 2013). In fact, in the RES Forum's global mobility survey, this was the most common way to cover the expenses, and the second common way was to use the project's budget (Dickmann, 2018d, p. 109). However, the practices varied a lot.

Other additional compensation elements may be, for example, a cost of living allowance (COLA) or a hardship allowance, which depends on "a host country's degree of toughness . . . [and] . . . the stressful nature of project work and the stress caused by frequent travelling" (Tahvanainen et al., 2005, p. 667). However, more common is that the COLA is not paid for short-term assignees (Dickmann, 2018c, p. 87). Typically, the organization arranges and pays for the accommodation of the assignee during the assignment (Dickmann, 2018c, p. 87; Tahvanainen et al., 2005). In addition, rather often a home leave allowance is paid (Dickmann, 2018c, p. 81). Based on Tahvanainen et al.'s (2005) study, those STAs that last from six to twelve months are compensated like long-term expatriate assignments.

To conclude, STAs are becoming an increasingly important form of international assignments due to the flexibility which they offer for both organizations and individuals. However, it remains a relatively little studied field of global mobility. Especially the repatriation of short-term assignees is a rather unstudied phenomenon. The next chapter reviews literature about repatriation. It starts by discussing the literature about long-term expatriates' repatriation, and then it covers the scarce literature about short-term assignees' repatriation. In the end of the chapter, a theoretical framework for this study is presented.

3 Repatriation

An international assignment starts when an employee is assigned abroad to work as an expatriate in a foreign location of the company (Suutari & Brewster, 2003; Vidal, Valle, & Aragón, 2007). McNulty and Brewster (2019, pp. 52-53) present the expatriate process as a cycle that includes planning, selection, defining and agreeing on terms, preparation, adjustment, performance, and repatriation. Thus, after an assignment is completed, the process ends when the expatriate returns and re-adjusts to the home organization (Sussman, 2001; Suutari & Brewster, 2003; Vidal, Valle, & Aragón, 2007). The final phase of expatriation is called repatriation (Sussman, 2001; Suutari & Brewster, 2003).

This section focuses on reviewing literature about repatriation focusing on repatriation adjustment and support and training offered for repatriates. Because repatriation and organizational support of short-term assignees has not been much studied, this section utilizes the literature of long-term assignments. It is assumed to be partly applicable, because rotational short-term assignees do several consecutive short-term assignments and thus might spent many years abroad. That is why they are assumed to experience partly similar challenges in repatriation adjustment to long-term expatriates. The main difference between a rotational short-term assignee and a long-term assignee is that the former travels often without the family and visits the home country regularly. Also, the target group of this study typically travels to different countries, while long-term expatriates often stay in one location during the whole assignment. This chapter begins by presenting few repatriation adjustment frameworks and organizational support practices, which are gathered from the LTA literature. In the end of this chapter, the differences between LTAs and STAs are taken into account and a framework for this study is presented.

Repatriation is less studied than expatriation (Chiang et al., 2018). That is probably because returning home was considered easier than going abroad (Black, 1992; Black et al., 1992; Stroh, Gregersen, & Black, 2000), as it was assumed to be simply “going back to normal” (Lazarova, 2015, p. 379). However, that is often not the case because an

expatriate experiences various changes at repatriation (Lazarova, 2015). In fact, previous research suggests that repatriation is more difficult (Adler, 1981; Linehan & Scullion, 2002) and less systematically managed than expatriation (Furuya, Stevens, Oddou, Bird, & Mendenhall, 2007; Jassawalla & Sashittal, 2009). Due to the challenges reported by returnees and organizations' concerns about high repatriate turnover, repatriation is, nevertheless, much studied (see Chiang et al., 2018; Knocke & Schuster, 2017; Lazarova, 2015). What is most commonly studied is retention linked with repatriation adjustment and satisfaction (Lazarova, 2015). It has been discovered that repatriates experience challenges in re-adjustment, which causes high turnover rates, and companies' poor management has been blamed for that (Lazarova, 2015).

A successful repatriation outcome can be defined as "one in which, upon return, the repatriate gains access to a job which recognizes any newly acquired international competencies; experiences minimal cross-cultural readjustment difficulties; and reports low turnover intentions" (O'Sullivan, 2002, p. 597). However, often repatriation is not that successful. Unsuccessful repatriation may cause repatriates to resign (Cox et al., 2013) or stay in the company unmotivated and performing poorly (Vidal, Valle & Aragón, 2010). 45% of companies find the retention of key talent after international assignment being a challenge (Cartus, 2018, p. 14). If a repatriate decides to leave the company, it loses the valuable knowledge and skills gained during the international assignment (Bossard & Peterson, 2005). In addition, a resigning repatriate causes financial losses to the company because the significant amounts spent on training and paying compensations to the expatriate (Cox et al., 2013). Unsuccessful repatriation causes also another problem for organizations: unsatisfied repatriates diminish the organization's ability to assign new expatriates, because others might be less willing to accept international assignments when they see the negative career impacts of others (Downes & Thomas, 1999). Because of the negative effects of failed repatriation, it is a critical phase of the international assignment process (Cox et al., 2013; Reiche, 2012). One important aspect of successful repatriation is repatriation adjustment, which is discussed in the following chapter.

3.1 Repatriation adjustment

Early adjustment studies focus on cultural adjustment. Thus, adjustment is traditionally defined as a process of adaptation to a new environment and overcoming the negative feelings that are caused by a culture shock (Black et al., 1992; Church, 1982). Culture shock is a psychological reaction to unfamiliar and unexpected events in a foreign culture (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). It is also considered as a temporary stress reaction (Furnham, 2005). Culture shock is often connected to moving to a new country, but repatriates experience a similar shock, also called as re-entry shock, when returning to the home country (Chaban, Williams, Holland, Boyce, & Warner, 2011). As discussed before, repatriation adjustment process is not always easy and simple. It is not uncommon for a readjustment process to last more than six months, and some repatriates never readjust to their home country (Harris & Moran, 1996, pp. 142-143). Expatriates are typically less prepared for the re-entry shock of returning home than the culture shock that they experience on their assignments, because they do not expect to have cultural challenges when going back home (Adler & Gundersen, 2008, p. 286). However, during their absence, the country, the organization and the expatriate himself or herself have changed, so they do not return as the same persons to the same place as it used to be (Adler & Gundersen, 2008, p. 286). That is why re-entry shock is a useful concept.

Chaban et al.'s (2011) study relies on the idea that adaptation to the stress moves in waves and has ups and downs. Figure 1 illustrates this adaptation from a cross-cultural aspect. Expatriation adjustment stages are omitted from the figure as it focuses only on the repatriation adjustment phase. An expatriate's mood is high when he or she has integrated into and accepted the host culture after living there a considerable amount of time, for example, more than one year. After a decision to return to the home country, the expatriate's mood drops and he or she feels return anxiety because of realizing that the new friends and acquaintances will be left behind in the host country, and that people in the home country might not understand the changes that the expatriate has undertaken. However, return elation cheers the expatriate's mood upon returning to a once familiar environment. This stage is followed by the re-entry shock that is caused by the

changed environment and the expatriate's changed identity. Readjustment challenges, which are discussed more in detail later, might cause significant difficulties in this stage. After overcoming the re-entry shock, the expatriate reintegrates to the home culture.

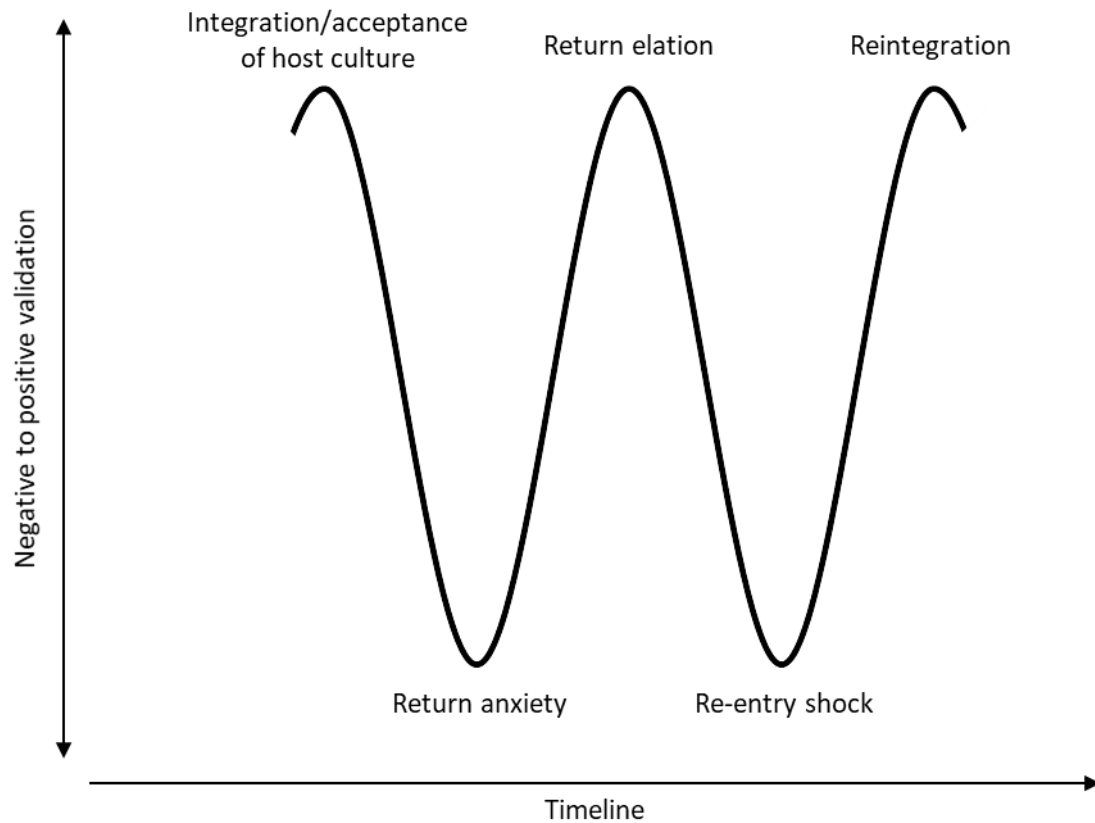


Figure 1 Ten stages of cross-cultural adjustment (adapted from Chaban et al., 2011, p. 779).

In addition to the cultural perspective, it is important to examine repatriation adjustment also from other aspects. Upon return, expatriates overcome numerous changes, which are not related to only a culture. For example, the work's nature or the expatriate's responsibilities or status might change dramatically. To provide a better overview of repatriation adjustment, this study presents several models and frameworks that explain the phenomenon. Besides adjustment to the culture, the other models include additional aspects of adjustment. The following subsections present Black et al.'s traditional repatriation adjustment framework, the psychological and sociocultural adjustment framework, and Arman's newer and less used model for repatriation adjustment.

3.1.1 Black et al.'s repatriation adjustment framework

Black et al. (1992) argue that repatriation adjustment is significantly different from other work adjustment situations, such as relocating to other domestic location or adjusting to an international assignment. Thus, they created a framework for repatriation adjustment. It was first introduced in 1992 and later modified in 1999 (Black et al., 1992, 1999). Their framework is the most influential theoretical model in the repatriation literature (Vidal et al., 2010), and traditionally used in repatriation adjustment research (Van Gorp, Boroş, Bracke, & Stevens, 2017). Black et al.'s (1999) repatriation adjustment model has been tested in other contexts and the model has been partly supported (e.g. Suutari & Välimaa, 2002; Tahir & Azhar, 2013; Vidal et al., 2010).

Black et al.'s (1992) framework relies on adjustment theorists' (e.g. Ashford & Taylor, 1990; Brett, 1980; Louis, 1980) idea about accurate expectations making adjustment easier. Transferring to a new location always creates uncertainty (Black, 1992), and difficulties in repatriation adjustment are often caused by the anxiety and uncertainty that are experienced when returning (Gregersen & Stroh, 1997). People have a need to reduce that uncertainty (Black, 1992).

Repatriation adjustment problems are often caused because of false expectations (Stroh, Gregersen, & Black, 1998). When expatriates are experiencing a culture shock in a foreign culture during their assignment, they tend to idealize their home country in contrast to the difficulties in the foreign culture (Adler & Gundersen, 2008, p. 286). They often cling to "fond memories and myths" about the home country (Andreason & Kinneer, 2005, p. 114). In reality, the home country and the home organization are likely to experience changes during the expatriate's absence (Black, 1992; Linehan & Scullion, 2002). Thus, when expatriates return to the home country there are two gaps: a gap between how everything was before their departure and how everything is now, and a gap between their idealized memories and the reality (Andreason & Kinneer, 2005).

Also, expatriates themselves change during their assignments (Black, 1992). For example, a change in personal values affected by the host culture (Black & Gregersen, 1992) might make it more difficult to readjust to the home culture (Andreason & Kinneer, 2005). Thus, expatriates do not come back to what they left as they were, but as changed persons to a new environment. Due to these changes, repatriates often experience a reverse culture shock (Hurn, 1999). Thus, the framework emphasizes that the more accurate repatriation expectations are, the less surprises and less uncertainty there will be and consequently the easier the repatriation adjustment will be (Black et al., 1992; Stroh et al., 1998).

That is why Black et al.'s (1999) repatriation adjustment model consists of two phases: prereturn and post return adjustment. In the prereturn adjustment phase, factors that affect repatriation adjustment include "important sources of information about changes in the home country and the parent company" (p. 210). Such sources include regular communication between an assignee and the home organization, an assigned sponsor or mentor for the assignee, visits to the home country during the assignment, and training prior to the return (Black et al., 1999, pp. 212-214).

The post return adjustment, according to the model (Black et al., 1999, pp. 117-118, 210-223), is affected by individual, job, organization, and nonwork variables. Individual factors include self-oriented, relational and perceptual-oriented factors. Self-oriented factors relate to an individual's confidence about managing new situations. Relational factors include the ability to meet, interact with and empathize with new people, and perceptual-oriented factors are an individual's abilities to understand cultures' invisible rules. These factors enhance repatriation adjustment. Other individual factors include successful expatriation adjustment and extended international experience, but these factors make readjustment more difficult.

Job variables concern the possible challenges related to a repatriate's new role (Black et al., 1999). Dowling et al. (2008) discovered that an international assignment is often

regarded as a promotion because of the greater autonomy, wider responsibilities, and a high level of financial compensation. Because of these advantages, an expatriate's status is often higher than it was before the assignment. However, the new status is typically lost upon return along with the benefits, especially if the expatriate returns to the same position he or she left before the assignment. Thus, poor career management causes difficulties in repatriation adjustment. For example, expatriates' career development might suffer from international assignments. While an expatriate is absent from the home organization, his or her colleagues might be promoted to better positions while the expatriate's career development seems to be 'on hold' while being abroad (Andreason & Kinneer, 2005).

Also, sometimes suitable positions are not available, and repatriates are assigned to jobs, which do not match the knowledge and skills gained during the international assignment (Harvey & Novicevic, 2006; Stroh et al., 1998). It may seem that the home organization does not appreciate or try to exploit that knowledge (Andreason & Kinneer, 2005; Stroh et al., 1998). This results in career disappointment (Andreason & Kinneer, 2005). Often a re-entry position is less satisfying than the repatriate's international position and less than what they had expected (Adler & Gundersen, 2008, pp. 288-289). According to Andreason and Kinneer (2005), the new job upon repatriation may include less authority, responsibility and autonomy than the position abroad. Thus, repatriates might feel over-qualified for their re-entry position. This makes them feel underutilized and it might be demoralizing. The major reason for a repatriate's resignation is that there is no appropriate job available in the home organization or that he or she is offered a better job in another company (KPMG International, 2017, p. 79). To ease these challenges, in the framework (Black et al., 1999) it is suggested that role discretion, role clarity, promotion and a possibility to utilize the recently gained international knowledge facilitate repatriation adjustment.

Organization variables in Black et al.'s (1999) model relate to questions of how clear the repatriation process is, how well the financial compensation of the assignment is

balanced with the salary after return, and whether support is offered to an assignee by offering training about the repatriation phase. Organizational support is discussed more in detail in chapter 3.2.

Black et al.'s (1999) framework's nonwork variables include the changes in social status and housing condition; if either of them decreases upon repatriation, it affects repatriation adjustment negatively. Also, spouse adjustment is one of the nonwork variables; if an assignee's family relocated with him or her, the spouse's successful readjustment affects the assignee's repatriation adjustment. According to Andreason and Kinner (2005), repatriation may result not only in loss of status but also loss of self-esteem. The whole family might experience a negative change in status, because of the basic salary after higher compensations and the change in their general way of living. Also, life back in the home country may seem "dull and unexciting" for repatriates (Dowling et al., 2008, p. 197), and some may want to return to the host country instead of settling back to the home country (Andreason & Kinneer, 2005) because they start glamorizing the life they left behind (Dowling, et al., 2008).

The variables that are very likely to affect repatriates' maladjustment found by Forster (1994) are very similar to previously mentioned issues. The variables include: "length of time abroad", "unrealistic expectations of job opportunities in the home company", "downward job mobility", "reduced work status", and "negative perceptions of the help and support provided by employers during and after repatriation" (p. 416).

Repatriation adjustment is a multifaceted process that is greatly affected by "job, organizational, and environmental novelty" (Black et al., 1992, p. 739). That is why Black et al.'s (1999, pp. 209-210) framework includes three facets of adjustment: adjustment to work, adjustment to interaction with home-country nationals, and adjustment to the general environment and culture in the home country. These three facets are present also in the prereturn phase as expectations about the three areas of adjustment: expectations about new job and work environment, expectations about communicating with

colleagues and other people in the home country, and expectations about the general environment and culture. The expectations affect the three facets of adaptation in the post return phase. The framework is summarized in figure 2.

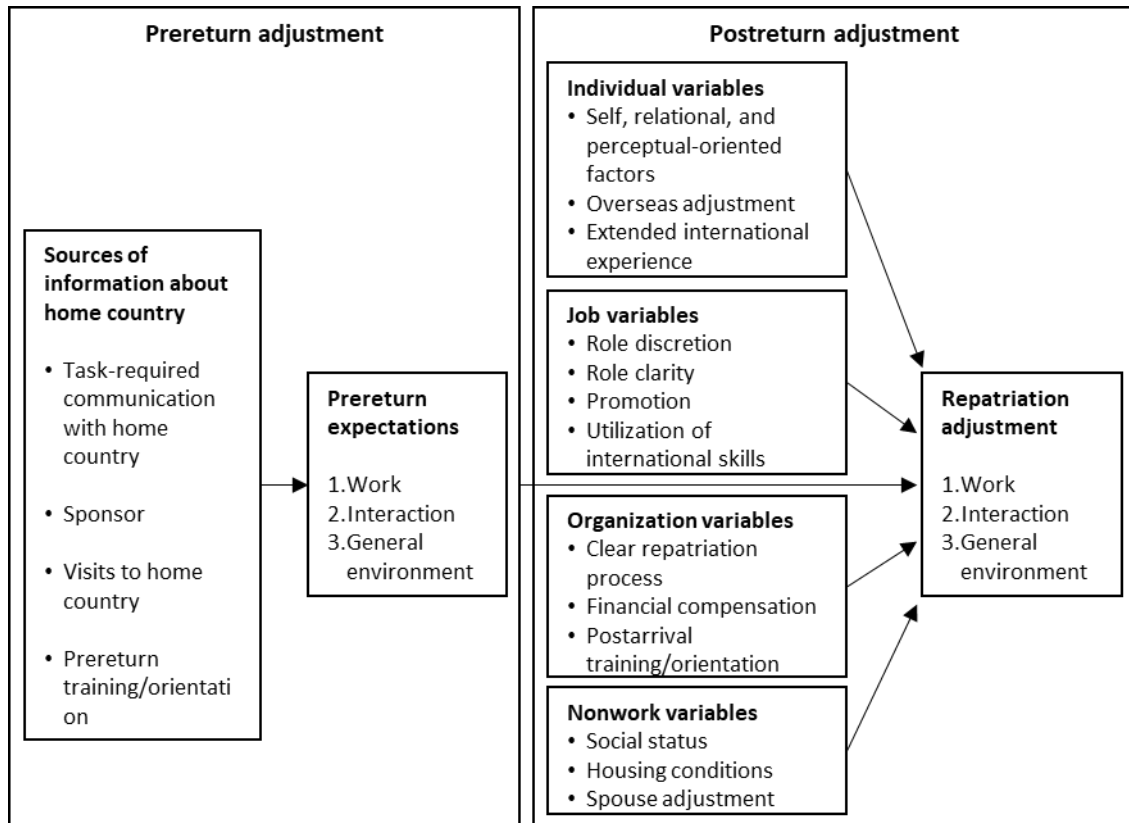


Figure 2 Balance sheet (source Black et al., 1999, p. 211).

The framework has received partial support from further empirical studies (e.g. Vidal et al., 2010; Stevens, Oddou, Furuya, Bird, & Mendenhall, 2006; Suutari & Välimaa, 2002). However, Vidal et al.'s (2010) found support in their study only to two facets in both expectations and adjustment. The two facets of the prereturn phase are work expectations, which included expectations about interaction with colleagues, and general expectations. The post return phase, on the other hand, consisted of "the social adjustment outside the organization and the adjustment to the general environment" (p. 30). Thus, in their study, they used only two adjustment dimensions: work adjustment and adjustment to general environment. However, Suutari and Välimaa's (2002) study suggests that job and organization adjustments are two separate facets of repatriation adjustment.

Thus, they argue there being in total four facets in repatriation adjustment: adjustment to job, adjustment to organization, adjustment to interacting with home-country nationals, and general adjustment to the country. Andreason and Kinneer (2005) further categorize the four facets into two groups: personal readjustment, which includes general and interactions adjustments, and professional readjustment, which includes job and organizational adjustment. The last-mentioned studies presented also interaction as a separate dimension of adjustment. That is why it is included in the present study. The multiple facets, which form a base for this study, can be seen in figure 3.

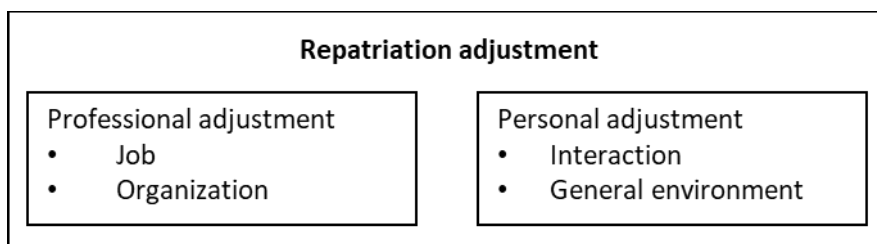


Figure 3 The facets of repatriation adjustment.

3.1.2 Psychological and sociocultural adjustment framework

Ward (1996) and others' (Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward & Kennedy, 1996; Ward & Kennedy, 1999; Ward & Searle, 1991) framework includes psychological and sociocultural adjustments. The model is created for adjustment "during the process of cross-cultural transitions" (Searle & Ward, 1990, p. 449), which often means a transition to a foreign country. However, the model has been used also in repatriation research (e.g. Van Gorp et al., 2017) because it is considered a broader model than Black et al.'s (1992, 1999) repatriation adjustment framework.

At the center of Ward's (1996) model are stress and coping strategies, which are affected by individual and situational variables, such as personality, training and experience, and cultural distance. Psychological and sociocultural adjustments are the outcomes of the repatriation process. Even though they interrelate, psychological and sociocultural

adjustments are two separate concepts, which are affected by partly different predictive variables (Ward & Searle, 1991). According to Ward and Kennedy (1996), psychological adjustment is about feeling well and satisfied. Sociocultural adjustment, on the other hand, refers to “the ability to ‘fit in’” (p. 290) and behave in a socially acceptable way in the host culture. In the case of repatriation, it is about refitting in the home culture. The framework is presented in figure 4.

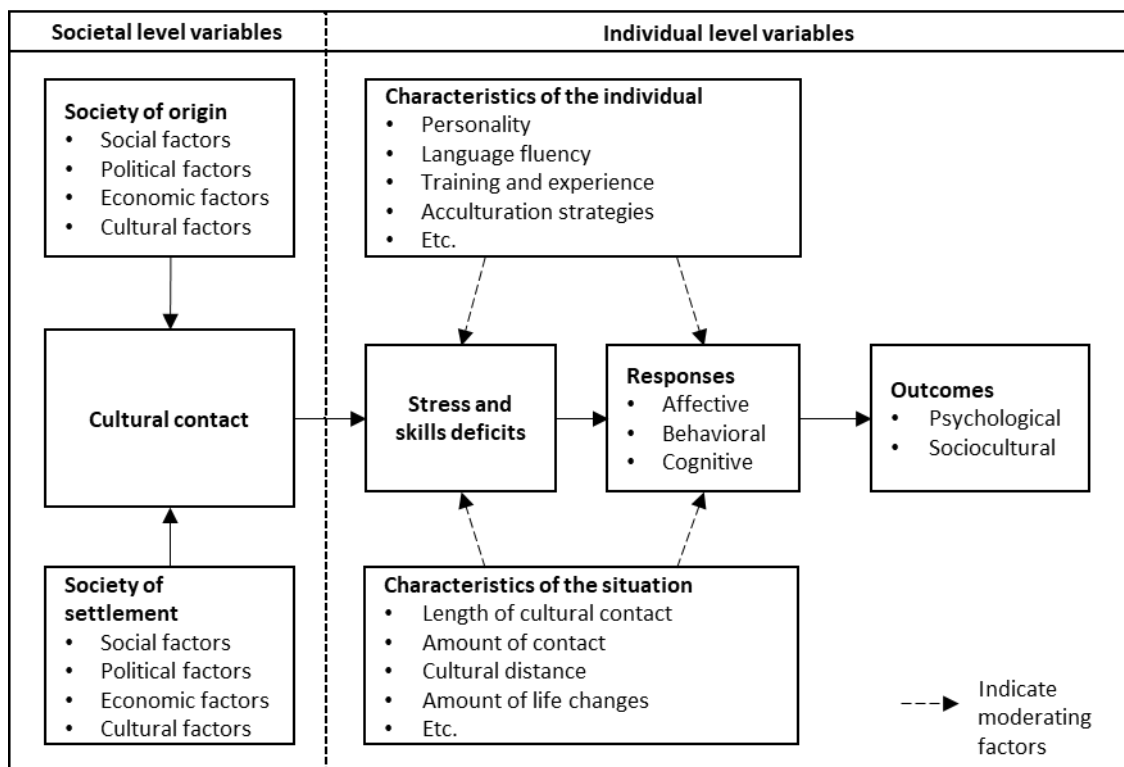


Figure 4 The acculturation process (adapted from Ward, 1996).

In chapter 3.1.1 some challenges related to psychological adjustment were mentioned. There are challenges related to sociocultural adjustment as well. False expectations appear also when an expatriate anticipates that the colleagues in the home organization would be interested in hearing about his or her experience abroad, but often in reality they lack the interest even though expatriates have a need to talk about it (Copeland & Griggs, 1985, pp. 204-205). Repatriates might have a feeling that because of their international experiences they do not belong to the home location anymore, and they feel like foreigners (Andreason & Kinneer, 2005).

3.1.3 Arman's repatriation adjustment framework

Arman's (2009) framework of repatriation adjustment is much less utilized in repatriation research, but it works as a useful summary of a repatriation process and sort of a combination of the previously presented frameworks. It should be noted that Arman's (2009) framework is based on theory only, and it has not been empirically tested. The main difference compared to Black et al.'s (1992, 1999) and Ward's (1996) frameworks is that Arman's (2009) model includes not only antecedents and repatriation adjustment but also outcomes of repatriation, which are distinct from adaptation. In addition to the main variables, it includes moderating variables that affect adjustment and outcomes. The framework is illustrated in figure 5.

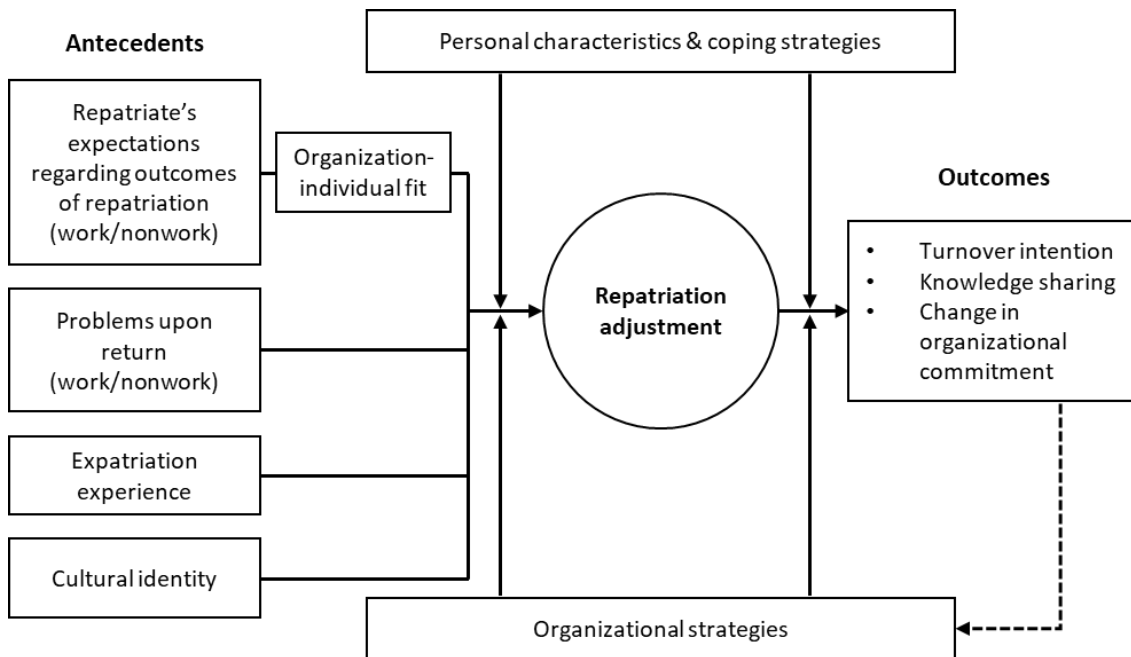


Figure 5 Comprehensive framework of repatriation adjustment (source Arman, 2009, p. 5).

Arman (2009) groups repatriation adjustment in three dimensions: work adjustment, sociocultural adjustment, and psychological adjustment. Similar to Black et al.'s (1992, 1999) model, work adjustment in this framework relates to the changes that happen in job responsibilities and elsewhere in organization, for example, relationships with colleagues. Sociocultural adjustment, on the other hand, relates to the "adjustment to life

style, social activities, relationships, financial conditions and to the culture of the home country” (p. 1), similarly to Ward’s (1996) model. Finally, psychological adjustment includes expectations, stress, and perceptions of the happened changes (Arman, 2009).

Antecedents in Arman’s (2009) framework include an expatriate’s expectations about the repatriation outcomes, problems upon return, expatriation experience, and cultural identity. Repatriation expectations include both work and non-work issues. The work-related expectations are connected to the organization-individual fit, which relates to repatriates’ motivation to share the knowledge, skills, and abilities that they have gained through the assignment. Organization-individual fit is about the “expectations of organizations from expatriates and expectations of expatriates from organizations” (p. 4) about the use of the recently gained international knowledge.

Return problems might include the previously discussed expectations that are not met or underutilization of the repatriate’s newly gained skills and knowledge. Expatriation experience relates to many variables that affect repatriation adjustment, such as expatriation adjustment. One part of expatriation experience is the personal communication with others from work and outside of work. Also, the number of assignments, time spent abroad, and the number of visits to the home country during the assignment affect repatriation adjustment. In addition, frequent communication with the home country helps expatriates to form accurate expectations, so it is also included in the expatriation experience in the model.

The final antecedent of the model is cultural identity. Expatriates may form different cultural identities while abroad: some identify strongly with the home country, some start identifying strongly with the host country, some identify with both countries, and some with none of them (Cox, 2004; Sussman, 2000). Cox (2004) discovered that, for example, the length of an assignment affects the intercultural identity: those whose assignments lasted longer were more identified with the host culture and less with the home culture. Similarly, assignees on shorter assignments identified more with the home country.

Sussman's (2002) study revealed that the less repatriates identified with the home country, the more difficult their repatriation was, and that the repatriation process was the easiest for those who identified strongly with the home country. Cox's (2004) study, however, suggests that repatriation is the easiest for those who "acquire proficiency in the host culture while maintaining connection with home culture" (p. 216). Also, Altweck and Marshall (2015) have studied cultural identity's effects on repatriation adjustment.

In addition to the antecedents, Arman's (2009) model includes factors that moderate the repatriation adjustment and its outcomes. They include individual factors and organizational strategies. Individual factors mean individuals' coping strategies and personal characters, such as age, gender, marital status, education level, and self-efficacy. Organizational strategies relate to the support practices offered to repatriates. Support and training are discussed in chapter 3.2.

The main outcomes in Arman's (2009) framework are "turnover intention, knowledge sharing and change in commitment" to the organization (p. 3). As discussed earlier, high turnover rates among repatriates are a concern for companies. For example, difficulties in repatriation adjustment or unmet expectations may result in a repatriate leaving for another employer because of a better job offer or career prospects. Another outcome of repatriation is knowledge sharing, which means transferring the recently gained international knowledge to the parent organization. Such knowledge may include knowledge "about global operations, characteristics of national markets, business climate and cultural patterns" (p. 3). Finally, repatriation adjustment affects repatriates' organizational commitment levels. Successful repatriation adjustment increases repatriates' commitment to the organization (Jassawalla, Connolly, & Slojkowski, 2004).

The final aspect of Arman's (2009) model is feedback to the organization about the repatriation process. The feedback consists of turnover rates and the general impression of international assignments and repatriation within the company. High turnover rates among repatriates give a clear signal about there being room for improvement in the

organization's repatriation process. Successful repatriation observed by colleagues, in turn, serves as an encouragement for others to accept international assignments.

3.2 The role of support and training

Erbacher, Netto, and Espana define organizational support as assistance that organizations provide to assignees (as cited in Sousa et al., 2017). The assistance may take different forms, such as career planning, training, or simply effective communication (Cox et al., 2013). Organization's support may help a repatriate to better readjust to the home location (Cox et al., 2013; Pattie, White, & Tansky, 2010). Due to the previously discussed negative outcomes of failed repatriation, it should be in organizations' best interests to support repatriation adjustment process. This chapter reviews the literature about organizational support in repatriation. First, different types of organizational support are presented. Then, the second subchapter covers the support practices that are found to be used in companies. Finally, the last subchapter discusses different stakeholders involved in repatriation support.

3.2.1 Types of organizational support

A key to a successful repatriation process is to plan it early, even before the assignment. Planning the repatriation process in advance and setting clear repatriation policies help gaining successful results (Jassawalla et al., 2004). Andreason and Kinneer (2005) suggest that proper selection methods and expatriate training prior to the assignment could prepare the expatriate to the challenges that he or she might expect not only during the assignment but also upon return and thus prevent problems in repatriation adjustment. Black et al. (1999, pp. 223-224) suggest forming a repatriation team that consists of a human resource specialist and the expatriate's supervisor at the home location to handle the repatriation process at least six months prior to the return. Also, Black et al. (1999, p. 225) advice companies to target the repatriates who have the highest risk to

experience problems in repatriations, i.e. those returning from extended assignment or assignments and those returning from highly different countries.

Bolino (2007) stresses the importance of especially these three support mechanisms: “the use of connectivity mechanisms”, “repatriation assistance”, and “career development plans” (p. 827). He discusses them from a career development aspect, but they are relevant also when talking about repatriation adjustment in general. These aspects of organizational support are further discussed in the following sections. Also, the role of self-adjustment capabilities is considered.

Connectivity mechanisms

One of the most often mentioned support practices is an efficient communication system between an assignee and his or her home organization during the assignment. It relates to the prereturn adjustment (Andreason & Kinneer, 2005). Being in frequent touch with home location helps expatriates to create more accurate expectations (Andreason & Kinneer, 2005; Pattie et al., 2010; Vidal et al., 2010). Thus, such communication has been discovered to have a positive effect on repatriation adjustment (Cox et al., 2013) and reduce turnover intentions (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001). The communication system helps an assignee to maintain professional contact to the home country and might include, for example, visits to the home organization and those family members who stay in the home country (Andreason & Kinneer, 2005; Bolino, 2007; Pattie et al., 2010). Another successful way to ensure that an assignee stays in touch with the host organization is to assign him or her a mentor from the home unit (Andreason & Kinneer, 2005; Bolino, 2007; Cox et al., 2013). Also, company newsletters could help to keep expatriates updated about the changes that happen in the home organization (Pattie et al., 2010). Pattie et al. (2010) point out that supporting communication is relatively inexpensive to include in international assignment programs.

While effective communication between the assignee and the home organization helps matching the assignee’s expectations with the reality, it could also support the assignee

in accepting and valuing the changes. Majority of the respondents of Kulkarni, Lengnick-Hall, and Valk's (2010) study thought that repatriation adjustment would be easier not only if repatriates were made aware of non-work and cultural differences, but also if they were helped to appreciate the changes that have happened during their absence.

Repatriation assistance

Repatriation assistance is also important in ensuring a smooth repatriation experience. It can consist of, for example, prereturn training, logistical support, or financial assistance (Andreason & Kinneer, 2005; Bolino, 2007; Cox et al., 2013). Training prior to repatriation helps reducing uncertainty about the repatriation and helps clarifying what kind of a role an expatriate may expect when returning to home location (Black et al., 1999). Thus, it eases the repatriation adjustment process (Cox et al., 2013). For most repatriates in Kulkarni et al.'s (2010) study re-entry culture-related training was not offered, but some would have welcomed it. That is because on assignments they were used to the different ways of working and living in the host country and maybe forgotten how things are done in the home country. Contrary to prereturn training, training after return is found not to affect repatriates' satisfaction with the repatriation process (Vidal, Valle, & Aragón, 2008).

Other post return actions, such as re-entry debriefings, relocation assistance, and support provided for the family, can help meeting expatriates' expectations (Andreason & Kinneer, 2005; Black et al., 1999, pp. 228-232). Re-entry debriefings could focus on, for example, assessing an expatriate's newly gained skills (Andreason & Kinneer, 2005). Relocation assistance could mean help with finding a new house and moving into it (Black et al., 1999, p. 231). One of the most used ways of support repatriates is to offer logistical assistance (Pattie et al., 2010). Family support, on the other hand, might involve finding schooling for the repatriate's children and providing career counseling for his or her spouse (Andreason & Kinneer, 2005). Black et al. (1999, p. 232) mention also another cheap way to offer support for repatriates: forming support groups, which consist of other repatriates with whom the international experiences could be shared. In addition,

they suggest allowing repatriates to have vacation upon return so that they can settle down without having to hurry back to work immediately.

Another post-return support mechanism suggested by researchers (Andreason & Kinneer, 2005; Black et al., 1999, pp. 230-231) is financial assistance. As an expatriate's financial situation is likely to change significantly upon return, Cox et al. (2013) argue that an additional compensation package might affect repatriation adjustment. However, there is disagreement about it in the literature. For example, in Vidal et al.'s (2008) study, changes in such a compensation package were not found to influence repatriation satisfaction.

Career development plans

Another important aspect of repatriation support is career management. How repatriates' careers are managed has an impact on repatriation adjustment (Cox et al., 2013). As previously discussed, many repatriates are unsatisfied with the position they are assigned upon return and feel that their skills and knowledge are not valued and utilized in the home organization. Thus, it is important to make career development plans for them (Bolino, 2007). Pattie et al. (2010) state that repatriates should be assigned to positions where they can utilize their knowledge and skills that was gained during the assignments, and the international work experience should be valued by the home organizations and formally recognized. The formal recognition could involve, for example, organizing a home-coming reception or writing about the repatriate in a company newsletter. Researchers recommend companies also to create repatriation agreements to ensure that a mutually acceptable position will be found (Andreason & Kinneer, 2005; Pattie et al., 2010). This would ensure that repatriates' job expectations are met (Andreason & Kinneer, 2005). These practices are important because both effective career management and accurate work expectations correlate positively with repatriation satisfaction (Vidal et al., 2008).

According to Andreason and Kinneer (2005), career counseling and other procedures that assess the skills gained abroad could help finding a suitable position for a repatriate; when a repatriate's current skills and knowledge are known, it is easier to utilize them in the home organization. According to Arman (2009), knowledge transfer is an important outcome of successful repatriation. Expatriates gain valuable knowledge from other locations, which should be utilized after returning to the home organization. According to Furuya et al. (2007), HR policies and practices have a significant effect on reintegrating repatriates' newly gained learning, and organizations should have both strategic and general HR repatriation policies to facilitate the knowledge transfer. By strategic HR policies they mean the policies that specifically match the company's business strategy, while general HR policies relate to the common processes, such as recruiting policies or training and development programs.

Encouragement of taking a proactive role in self-adjustment

The role of HR practices is significant in a successful repatriation process, but it is discovered that an individual's self-adjustment capabilities have an even more important role in determining repatriate's job attachment (Stevens et al., 2006). That is why organizations should not only provide formal repatriation policies but also encourage expatriates and repatriates to take a proactive role in their repatriation adjustment. Andreason and Kinneer (2005) divide organizational support into two categories: "direct support in the form of organization-sponsored programs that assist in the readjustment and indirect support in the form of organization encouraged individual proactive strategies" (p. 121).

Expatriates should be encouraged to take an active role in repatriation and use their coping strategies, for example, seeking information and networking socially (Andreason & Kinneer, 2005). Herman and Tetrick (2009) studied coping with stress as a central part of repatriation adjustment. The study revealed that problem-focused coping strategies facilitated but emotion-focused coping strategies diminished repatriation adjustment. Problem-focused behavior includes "conflict resolution, exploration, focusation [focusing], giving task help, micropolitics, organization change, planful problem solving,

reinforcement substitution, relationship building, and situation control” (Herman & Tetrick, 2009, p. 83). Emotion-focused behavior include “cognitive avoidance, ethnocentrism, future orientation, negative comparisons, refusing responsibility, resignation, and withdrawal” (Herman & Tetrick, 2009, p. 83). As coping strategies are individual variables, they suggest companies to organize training that would increase repatriates’ problem-focused coping behavior and reduce their emotion-focused coping behavior.

O’Sullivan (2002) suggests organizations to create a ‘protean-receptive organizational climate’. According to her, “the protean approach reflects the presumption that career trajectories can, and often must, be actively influenced by the individual if the career is to advance to both the individual's and the organization's satisfaction” (O’Sullivan, 2002, p. 601). Such a climate can be created by letting repatriates search for suitable post-return positions, providing proactive training, creating a useful organizational appraisal system, and providing sufficient job discretion. Also, encouraging top management to support the protean approaches helps the aim.

3.2.2 Support practices used in companies

Despite the risk of losing talented repatriates and the practical recommendations provided by researchers, not all companies pay much attention to repatriation. For example, Pattie et al.’s (2010) empirical study revealed that many companies do not provide sufficient support to repatriates; 26% of the responding companies did not have any repatriate support practices, and on average, companies used only less than two out of three practice types identified in the study. The most common support that companies offered to repatriates, is relocation help, with 60% of the respondent companies offering it. Other types were much rarer. Less than 20% of the studied companies offered repatriate recognition, visits to the home location, newsletters, or had an expatriate HR department. Other support mechanisms, such as career planning, repatriation agreements, job assignments, re-entry sponsors, mentor program, and training, were offered in less than ten percent of the companies.

A more recent study conducted by Bailey and Dragioni (2013) provided slightly better findings. 80% of the companies provided some sort of support for repatriation adjustment, most commonly keeping in touch with the expatriate during his or her assignment. Less often utilized supporting practices include cultural support, training and utilization of former expatriates. Half of the studied companies actively facilitated knowledge transfer after expatriation. In 30% of the companies, assistance was offered to expatriates to find a new position or to adjust the length of the assignment to match a time when a suitable position would be available. However, in most of the studied companies, expatriates returned to their old positions or to similar ones, while in only 20% of the interviewed companies repatriates received a promotion or other special arrangements. Only one out of ten companies promised a guaranteed job after repatriation. In the study, the repatriation support that was used in companies was divided into the following three categories: “job placement upon return”, “facilitation of knowledge transfer”, and “support to expatriates” (Bailey & Dragoni, 2013, p. 51).

3.2.3 Stakeholders in repatriation support

HRM plays a key role in repatriation success (Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2001; Howe-Walsh & Torka, 2017; Vidal, Valle, Aragón, & Brewster, 2007; Vidal et al., 2008). HR professionals and line managers are thought to be the major part in securing organizational support for repatriates (Howe-Walsh & Torka, 2017). However, they are not the only providers of repatriation support. In addition to HR professionals and line managers, there are several stakeholders that affect repatriation’s effectiveness, for example, mentors and colleagues from both host and home locations (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001; Howe-Walsh & Torka, 2017; Linehan & Scullion, 2002). Especially a mentor from a home country acting as a role model for an expatriate and supporting his or her career development is discovered to facilitate repatriation adjustment (Wu et al., 2014). Also, other third-party providers may provide valuable support, for example, other managers who have international experience, specialists, outsourced services, and people not related to work, such as relatives (Howe-Walsh & Torka, 2017). Family is an important support provider

in repatriation (Howe-Walsh & Torka, 2017; Starr & Currie, 2009). Also, friends and relatives from the home country are discovered to help repatriation adjustment by providing emotional support (Van Gorp et al., 2017). It contradicts with Mezas and Scandura's (2005) study, which demonstrated that because relatives and friends might not have personal experience of living abroad, they might not be able to give advices on repatriation adjustment. That is why to ensure support from persons with international experience, they suggest involving the organization in the repatriation adjustment support process from early on, for example in a form of a mentor.

Because of several stakeholders are involved in repatriation support, Howe-Walsh and Torka (2017) argue that successful repatriation requires good coordination between HR professionals and line managers, HR support to line managers, and line managers' international experience. Also, line managers at host and home locations should coordinate the repatriation. Because many repatriates feel that there is a lack of clear and formal procedures and responsibilities, the researchers stress the importance of clear repatriation policies.

3.3 Repatriation of short-term assignees

This section covers the scarce literature of short-term assignees' repatriation. First, it considers what is known about short-term assignees' repatriation in general. Then, organizational support in short-term assignees' repatriation is discussed. Finally, a framework for this study is presented.

Majority of repatriation studies focuses on traditional long-term expatriation (Shaffer et al., 2012). Much less is known about short-term assignees' repatriation because that field of research is very limited. That is because STAs in general are less studied than long-term expatriation, but also because repatriation of short-term assignees is considered easier. STAs enable companies to avoid some issues with repatriation and career, which may occur with long-term expatriation (Brewster et al., 2001; Starr, 2009).

Repatriation of a short-term assignee is typically not seen as an issue (Starr, 2009; Tahvanainen et al., 2005). Short-term assignees' repatriation is often unproblematic, because an assignee simply returns to his or her old position, to which a replacement is rarely hired, or leaves for a following project related assignment (Starr, 2009; Tahvanainen et al., 2005). Also, retention of short-term assignees is estimated by global mobility professionals to be better than long-term assignees (Dickmann, 2018d, 114).

However, Starr's (2009) study demonstrated that re-integrating back to one's home location after a short-term assignment is not always easy and unproblematic. The interviewed short-term assignees thought that repatriation was the most "important or unsettling aspect of their entire short-term assignment experience" (p. 296). For example, their job expectations did not always match the reality, and thus repatriation provided unpleasant surprises for them. Like long-term expatriates, some short-term assignees assumed that an assignment would have an enhancing effect on their career. That is because they considered themselves changed and grown from the international experience. As a new job was not always offered to repatriates, the situation was problematic. Unanticipated surprises happened also to those who did not expect or even want a change in their career; yet, they were assigned to new positions upon return.

Starr (2000) discovered that even if assignees do not expect to be promoted or assigned to different jobs after an assignment, they still might find it difficult to settle back to the same job, because they have changed during the assignment, no matter how short the assignment might seem. This individual change or personal growth becomes a problem when returning to the same job, unless the goal of the assignment is to learn how certain things are done in another location and transfer the knowledge back to one's original job and so improve the work. Starr's (2009) findings contradict with Mayerhofer et al.'s (2004) study, which indicates that returning and reintegrating to a same or similar position is rarely a problem for short-term assignees.

Identity change does not cause challenges only in job adaptation but also in adaptation outside work. After becoming independent on an assignment and doing every decision alone, returning home to one's spouse it can be challenging to readjust to that life when one has to consider both parties in the relationship and do decisions together (Starr & Currie, 2009). Starr and Currie (2009) also discovered that spouse's support is important in the repatriation process.

In general, short-term assignees' repatriation is presumably easier than it is for long-term assignees. That is because they spend abroad a shorter period time and thus, the home country and the home organization are likely to undergo less changes than during a longer-term expatriation. Also, because short-term assignees' families often do not relocate with them, they do not have to readjust to the home country.

However, the same cannot be assumed about rotational short-term assignees who leave for another assignment immediately after returning from one. Such rotational expatriation will evidently come to an end, and often the reason for repatriation is the demanding nature of the work. Rotational short-term expatriation is typical in project-related work, where the working hours are long, schedules tight and the location might be hazardous. Also, their separation from the family is greater compared to employees who are on a single short-term assignment. Rotational short-term assignees do visit the home country between assignments, but they might be away from the family and the home country for long periods of time during many years. Thus, their situation differs from those who undertake only one short-term assignment and immediately return to the home organization.

It is likely that rotational short-term assignees' identities change even more than assignees on single short-term assignment, because they spend more time abroad and in different cultures doing different tasks. Also, their information about the home country may be less accurate because they might spend altogether several years abroad, even though they regularly visit the home country and home organization. Extended

separation from family and the challenges that it causes to the relationships might be the reason for high divorce-rates reported by researchers (Tahvanainen et al., 2005). Because of extended absence from one's family and home country, it can be assumed that rotational short-term assignees' repatriation process is harder than for a one-time short-term assignee.

Mayerhofer et al.'s (2004) study supports the idea. They assume that 'flexpatriates', who also often travel for short assignments, might have challenges in keeping in touch with the changes in the home location, because also many of their colleagues travel frequently. Also, home and other personal relationships are harder to maintain when being absent a lot. Thus, it is possible that 'flexpatriates' do not have accurate expectations about the home country and organization. Similarly, rotational short-term assignees spend considerable amount of time abroad and it can be assumed that also for them maintaining relationships is difficult. Also, if they work on projects, their closest colleagues consist of fellow assignees who also travel on different assignments. That is why keeping in touch with one's colleagues is likely to be difficult for them too.

In a sense repatriation of rotational short-term assignees may be more similar to long-term expatriates than short-term assignees who repatriate after one short assignment. Rotational short-term assignees might have spent years abroad before repatriating, just like long-term expatriates. Thus, from that aspect they are in the same situation. The greatest difference in repatriation between the two is that long-term expatriates often relocate with their family, while rotational assignees return to their family in the home country. Rotational assignees do not have to worry about the family's repatriation adjustment, but they have to readjust to the family life.

3.3.1 Organizational support in short-term assignees' repatriation

Because of the different nature of long-term and short-term assignments and the different challenges they face upon repatriation, the same framework and policies cannot be

applied to both assignment types as such (Starr, 2009). Starr (2009) suggests that short-term assignees' repatriation should be planned early to avoid the currently used 'ad hoc' procedures in managing STAs and the organizational repatriation support should start before the actual repatriation process.

Starr's (2009) study demonstrates that an early consideration and an assignee's proactive approach facilitate repatriation. Because individuals' expectations about repatriation, for example, an assignment's effect on their career, differ (Starr, 2009), the expectations should be considered when planning repatriation. It would be beneficial to have that discussion already when planning the assignment. Whatever the assignment's career outcome will be, organizations should communicate it to the assignee to ensure that the assignee's job expectations will be accurate. A repatriation agreement could ensure that a mutually acceptable position will be found for a repatriate (Andreason & Kinneer, 2005; Pattie et al., 2010).

Mayerhofer et al.'s (2004) study about 'flexpatriates', who constantly travel for short assignments, discovered that due to the lack of comprehensive HR policies, the assignees had to be proactive in coping with the challenges that they faced. Similarly, it can be assumed that because organizations do not offer extensive repatriation support, short-term assignees must take a proactive role in their repatriation adjustment. Thus, organizations should encourage short-term assignees to be proactive in their repatriation. Proactive approach is important especially in repatriation challenges that organizations cannot as such affect, such as difficulties in readjusting to the family life and shared responsibilities.

However, as previously argued that rotational short-term assignees' repatriation is in many ways similar to long-term expatriates' repatriation, it can be assumed that many support mechanisms that are found to facilitate long-term expatriates' repatriation adjustment could help also rotational assignees' repatriation adjustment. These methods, which were discussed in chapter 3.2, are used as a base for this research, excluding

support offered for the expatriate's family, because families typically do not relocate with rotational short-term assignees.

3.3.2 Framework of the study

This section presents the rotational short-term assignees' repatriation adjustment framework that is the base for this study. Since the literature about STA repatriation is scarce, the theoretical framework is based on the LTA repatriation adjustment models. As argued earlier, LTA literature can be applied in this study because it focuses on rotational assignees who complete several consecutive short-term assignments before repatriation. Even though they visit the home country regularly, they spend time abroad sometimes for as long as long-term expatriates. That is why many elements of the previously presented models can be assumed to apply also in the case of rotational short-term assignees.

The framework is based on the uncertainty reduction model that is recommended to be used as a framework in further research (Andreason & Kinneer, 2005). According to the framework, accurate expectations prepare assignees for the repatriation, while false expectations result in disappointments and difficulties in repatriation adjustment. Thus, the assignees' prereturn expectations are studied and compared to the reality after return.

The different areas of adjustment are likely present also in rotational short-term assignees' repatriation. These areas are adjustment to job, adjustment to organization, adjustment to interaction with home-country nationals, and adjustment to general environment in the home country. Repatriation adjustment of rotational short-term assignees is examined through these dimensions, and special attention is paid to their challenges in each area.

The antecedents of repatriation adjustment are not specified in this framework, because even though it is likely that there are similarities with the previous models, it cannot be assumed that all of them apply to rotational short-term assignees. As their repatriation is not previously studied, this study aims to find the specific antecedents of rotational short-term assignees without relying too much on the previous studies of LTA repatriation.

As previously discussed, relevant organizational support practices ease the repatriation process and facilitate adjustment. It is assumed that this is the case also with rotational short-term assignees. Thus, organizational support is included in the framework of this study. However, as rotational short-term assignees' situation differs from both long-term expatriates and single short-term assignees, the types of useful support are not known and thus are not specified in this framework.

To conclude, due to the lack of research, this framework is based on repatriation adjustment models, which are created for traditional long-term expatriates. Rotational short-term assignees' repatriation is considered in many ways similar to long-term expatriates' repatriation. Thus, it is assumed that rotational short-term assignees' repatriation adjustment includes four facets: job, organization, interaction, and general environment. Also, it is assumed that their expectations and organizational support affect the adjustment.

4 Methodology

This chapter introduces the methodology choices of the empirical research. The methodology is selected in a way that enables gaining the most accurate answer to the main research question ‘*How organizations can support rotational international short-term assignees’ repatriation adjustment?*’ through the sub questions ‘*What challenges there are in repatriation adjustment of rotational short-term assignees?*’ and ‘*Which support mechanisms have been experienced as useful and what kind of additional support rotational short-term assignees would have wished for?*’ First, the research philosophy and approach are explained and then, the research design is presented. The section after that covers the study’s research methods, including the sampling method, the data collection technique, and the data analysis procedure. Finally, the study’s quality is discussed.

4.1 Research philosophy and approach

Research philosophy relates to “beliefs and assumptions about development of knowledge” (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019, p. 130). More specifically, it refers to “assumptions about the nature of the reality” and knowledge, and “the role of values and ethics” (Saunders et al., 2019, pp. 133-134). This study is based on a subjectivist research philosophy, which according to Saunders et al. (2019, pp. 135-137) means considering the world being socially constructed and formed by subjective perceptions. Subjectivism asserts “that social reality is made from the perceptions and consequent actions of social actors (people)” (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 137). The social actors of this study are repatriates, who perceive repatriation subjectively based on their own unique experiences. Even though it is unlikely that there are two exactly same kind of repatriation processes and perceptions about them, some similarities still exist in repatriates’ perceptions. That is why a social constructionist framework is applied in this research. Social constructionism “puts forward that reality is constructed through social interaction in which social actors create partially shared meanings and realities, in other words

reality is constructed intersubjectively” (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 137). The social constructionist framework has been also previously used in STA research (e.g. Starr & Currie, 2009). This empirical study focuses on the shared meanings and realities in rotational short-term assignees’ repatriation adjustment.

Also, interpretivist philosophy is applied in the research. According to Saunders et al. (2019, pp. 148-149) interpretivism underlines that human beings and their experiences cannot be studied in the same way as physical phenomena because humans create different meanings. Interpretivists do not find it meaningful to try to find universal laws, but rather aim at gaining “new, richer understandings and interpretations of social worlds and contexts” (p. 149) by focusing on what is meaningful to the participants of their study. As this study is highly subjective and individuals’ personal experiences are in the focus of the research, interpretivism is a logical choice. According to Saunders et al. (2019, p. 149), it is argued that interpretivism is very suitable in business and management studies, because business situations are often complex and unique. Such is also the phenomenon of repatriation adjustment.

The research approach of this study is abductive. An abductive research moves in between theory and data, combining both deduction, which proceeds from theory to data, and induction, which starts from data and creates or modifies theory from it (Suddaby, 2006). The thesis’ aim is not to form a completely new theory but to try to modify repatriation adjustment theories into the new context of STAs. The empirical research was designed based on previous research. Especially the interview questions were selected based on earlier studies to ensure that the most important themes are covered. The analysis was done in the beginning based on only the collected data to ensure that theoretical presumptions did not overrule the new ideas and concepts that arouse from the data. However, in the later parts of the analysis, the previous theory was utilized, and the data was connected to it. Eriksson and Kovalainen (2016) describe this kind of a research process “as a continuous interplay or dialogue of theory and empirical data” (pp. 135-136). Often interpretivists’ studies are inductive, but as some argue that pure

induction is very difficult or even impossible (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 156) and the researcher of this study is not yet very experienced, abduction is considered the best choice to gain valuable results. An abductive approach is commonly employed by many business researchers (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 155), which also supports the selection of the research approach in this study.

4.2 Research design

The methodological choice for the research is mono method qualitative study, which according to Saunders et al. (2019, p. 179), includes only one data collection technique followed by one analysis technique for the collected qualitative data. Saunders et al. (2019, p. 813) define qualitative data as non-numerical or “data that have not been quantified”. Qualitative data is often “derived from spoken, written, typed or printed words and still or moving visual images” (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 813), and qualitative research investigates the meaning behind these words and images (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 179). Thus, qualitative data offers more in-depth information about the subject than numerical quantitative data would. It is an appropriate choice for studying repatriation adjustment, which is a complex issue (Conory et al., 2018). Because the nature of the studied phenomenon, rotational short-term assignees’ repatriation adjustment process, is socially constructed, the aim is to gain an in-depth understanding of it. Saunders et al. (2019) describe that kind of a phenomenon as follows:

As social interactions between actors are a continual process, social phenomena are in a constant state of flux and revision. This means it is necessary as a researcher to study a situation in detail . . . in order to understand what is happening or how realities are being experienced. (p. 137)

Also, it is important to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon because very little is known about it due to the lack of previous research. That is why an exploratory strategy is adopted. According to Saunders et al. (2019), exploratory study is the most suitable option for gaining comprehensive knowledge about the studied phenomenon because it offers “valuable means to ask open questions to discover what is happening

and gain insights about a topic of interest” (p. 186). Exploratory research questions often start with ‘What’ or ‘How’ (Saunders et al., 2019, pp. 186-187), just like the research questions of this study.

Case study is a common strategy for qualitative studies (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 180), especially in business research (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 132), and also this research is conducted as a case study. A case study is defined as a research that aims to gain an in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon in its real-life context with the help of empirical research (Yin, 2014, p. 16). Thus, a case study strategy serves the aim to gain comprehensive knowledge about rotational short-term assignees repatriation adjustment.

The case company of this research is an MNC in an industrial field. The corporation’s headquarters are located in Finland, but it operates globally. The company transfers knowledge and skills between its locations through both long-term and short-term assignments. However, in the focus of this study are the rotational short-term assignees, who are used on customer projects. The company has yearly 70-100 such projects. The rotational short-term assignees form a unique group of international assignees, because they do not repatriate after one assignment, but their job involves consecutive assignments. The length of the rotational assignments varies from a couple of months to a little over a year. The assignees visit the home country in between the assignments and every three months when an assignment lasts longer than that. The assignees relocate without a family. That is why the group consist of mostly men who are young singles or older fathers whose children have grown up. When they wish to quit the assignment work, they often independently look for another position within or outside of the company. The organization has recognized that there are challenges in this particular group’s repatriation adjustment. That is why they are focused on in this study.

Similarly to some previous studies (e.g. Suutari et al., 2013), a single case is considered appropriate because very little is known about the studied phenomenon, and thus the

existing theory is insufficient (Ghauri, 2004). The single case company is selected because of the great number of international projects and short-term assignments that are used on the projects. Also, the organization has recognized that their site assignees face significant challenges in repatriation adjustment. Thus, it offers a fruitful research context. Even though other MNCs might encounter similar challenges, the aim of the research is not to generalize the findings, but to understand repatriation adjustment of rotational short-term assignees in the specific organization. That is why the single case study strategy is considered suitable for this research. Multiple cases would probably provide more evidence (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 199), but due to the time restriction, only a single case is studied.

The single case is analyzed holistically. It means that the organization is treated as a whole, and for example, different departments are not compared (Yin, 2014, pp. 53-55). The holistic approach is selected, because the aim is to discover the rotational STA repatriation adjustment challenges that are most commonly experienced in the organization and investigate what kind of support offered by the organization would ease the repatriation adjustment.

The time horizon of the research is cross-sectional simply due to the restricted resources. Cross-sectional study investigates a certain phenomenon at a certain point of time (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 212). While a longitudinal study would provide more valuable information about the change and development of the phenomenon (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 212), such a study is not possible to conduct with the limited amount of time available for completing the master's thesis.

4.3 Research methods

Research methods include the choices of how the empirical data is collected and analyzed. This section starts by describing the sampling method used in the research. Next, the data collection technique is presented and finally, the data analysis procedure is

explained in detail. This section focuses not only on presenting the selected choices but also justifying why they are the most appropriate options for this study.

4.3.1 Sampling

The target population of the research is the case company's short-term assignees who have done more than one consecutive STAs and have recently repatriated to the home location after the final assignment. Since it is not possible to study the whole target population due to the earlier mentioned time restrictions, a sample from that group is studied. The sample is selected by using non-probability sampling because of the limited availability of the target population members. A non-probability sample means that it is not selected in a way that the probability of each member being selected from the target group is known and equal (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 196). The sampling technique of this study is self-selection, which suits this research because the access to the targets might be difficult and because this is an exploratory research (see Saunders et al., 2019, p. 318). It is a volunteer sampling technique in which a researcher announces the need for cases and collects the data from those who respond (Saunders et al., 2019). The sample size is eight, because at the eighth interview, the saturation point was reached. No new knowledge was gained from the latest interviews, because the participants talked mainly about similar issues, which were already discussed in previous interviews. That is why it was decided to stop conducting more interviews.

The sample consists of only males, which does not fully represent the target population. However, as females cover only less than 1% of the target population, the gender distribution of the sample is considered accurate enough. The participants' ages vary from 25 to 43 years, most of the interviewees being around 30-35 years old. The age of the target population varies from 20 to 60, but most of them are 25-30 years old. Thus, the sample represents the target group's age distribution rather well. Four of the participants have a spouse, while three are divorced. Five participants have children. Some of them were born before and during the assignments, and some after return. Only one participant's

family traveled with him for some time. Others' families stayed in the home country except for spending some summer vacations with the assignee in a host country. All the participants are engineers.

Majority of the participants had worked as Commissioning Engineers or Installation Administrators at project sites. Those who had been on assignments for many years typically had had several positions. Some had been in managerial positions, such as Commissioning Manager, Mechanical Section Manager, and Site Manager. The length of the assignments varied typically from one to twelve months. One participant had been also on longer assignments, which lasted up to 18 months, but he was still included in the sample, as he was a rotational assignee and had been also on shorter assignments. When an assignment lasted for longer than three months, the assignees were entitled to visit home every three months for about a week. In total, most of the participants spent from five to ten years abroad, but one had spent only few months and one over 15 years abroad. In the target population, the typical length for the assignment work is five years. The assignments were located globally, and almost every participant had worked on nearly every continent. Some locations were very remote, and some locations were in large cities. Six of the sample had repatriated to the case company, while two participants had changed to another employer upon return.

It is considered appropriate to leave some time for a repatriate to finish the repatriation adjustment process before collecting data about their repatriation experiences (Stevens et al., 2006). This aspect was tried to take into account when selecting the sample, but due to the time restrictions, it could not be fully followed. Most participants were interviewed 7-18 months after return, but one interview was conducted only 1,5 months after return and one 3,5 years after return. Background information of the participants' assignments is presented in table 1. More detailed information is not included in the report to maintain the anonymity of the participants.

Table 1 Participants.

Participant code	Number of assignments	Length of assignments (months)	Total time spent abroad (years)	Repatriated to the case company	Interviewed – after return	Length of interview
A	11-15	1-4	2-5	Yes	1,5 years	0:34:17
B	16-20	6-18	16-20	Yes	2 years	0:59:23
C	6-10	2-12	6-10	Yes	3,5 years	0:56:36
D	2-5	1-4	0-1	Yes	3 months	0:22:48
E	11-15	3-8	2-5	No	7 months	0:45:15
F	6-10	1-4	2-5	No	1,5 months	0:55:01
G	21-25	1-11	6-10	Yes	7 months	1:25:00
H	21-25	3-9	6-10	Yes	1 year	0:44:46

4.3.2 Data collection

The data collection technique that best fits this research design and the research questions is interviews. According to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2016, p. 138), personal and in-depth interviews are the most common source of primary data in case studies. As the focus of this research is repatriates' perceived experiences, they can be collected by interviewing the repatriates. The nature of the interviews is mainly emotionalist, because the participants' experiences are being studied. Because of the exploratory nature of the research, the interviews are semi-structured (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 187), which means that a predefined list of themes and key questions covering the topic guide the interview and encourage interviewees to share their experiences. However, the interview is not strictly limited to those questions, but new themes might arouse from interviews, and it might be beneficial to investigate them deeper (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 94; Saunders et al., 2019, pp. 437-438). This enables gaining in-depth information about the topic. Similarly, other exploratory STA studies have reasoned the choice of semi-structured interviews by their ability to provide in-depth information about a little-known phenomenon (e.g. Baker & Ciuk, 2015; Conory et al., 2018).

The interview questions are mainly open questions, because according to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2016, p. 96), they are most likely to offer detailed responses. Also, as they regard it easier to answer simple questions than complex, simplicity is maintained in the

questions. Following the researchers' suggestions further, the interview questions are neutral so that the interviewer's presumptions would not impact the respondents' answers. The interviews were designed with the help of previous research utilizing previously used questions. The appendix displays the interview guide with the main questions. The questions were provided to the participants before the interviews so that they had time to get familiar with the interview themes.

The interviews were conducted one-to-one face-to-face whenever possible. One of the eight interviews was done over a video call. Majority of the interviews were conducted in Finnish, the native language of the interviewees, to ensure that they were comfortable with the language and that they could better express themselves. One interview was done in English, as it was a more comfortable language for the interviewee. The length of the interviews was typically an hour, but it varied from twenty minutes to an hour and a half. Seven interviews were audio recorded, and afterwards, the recordings were transcribed for analysis. One interviewee did not give permission for recording, so comprehensive notes were taken during the interview. As almost every transcription was in Finnish, the most relevant comments were translated into English by the author to provide evidence for the analysis. Analyzing the data was started already after the first interviews and done in parallel with data collection, as recommended by Huberman and Miles (1994). This way, the interview guide could be modified to include the interesting and important topics that arose from early interviews.

4.3.3 Data analysis

According to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2016, p. 199-121), the goal of the data analysis is to describe and interpret the collected data in a coherent manner. The data in this research was analyzed by using methods presented by them: it was done through a qualitative content analysis, where the data was coded. More specifically, the data was categorized, i.e. systematically coded to provide "holistic and factual description of the data" (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 121). The coding was done with the help of key words,

phrases, sentences, and themes that occur in the data. This study's analysis technique fits also to the term thematic analysis, as its focus is on discovering the themes and patterns that occur in the data, and systematically coding them (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 651).

Because of the study's explorative nature, the coding scheme that determined the coding was inductively driven from the data to ensure that "new theoretical and conceptual ideas" could be generated, when predetermined categories and assumptions from theory did not inhibit them (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, pp. 199-123). However, in later parts of the analysis, theory was utilized. That is called sensitizing concepts (Blumer 1969, 148). It is part of abduction and means utilizing theoretical concepts from earlier studies in describing and analyzing "the central organizing features of empirical data and the meanings invested in them" (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 141).

The coding was done manually from printed transcriptions. The coding scheme was created and the process tracked on Excel. Similar to Conory et al. (2018), the analysis progressed through the phases explained by Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton (2013). First, the transcriptions were read through and the researcher familiarized herself with the content. The coding was started from one interview, drawing the '1st-order categories' from the data. After the initial codes were created, they were reorganized and grouped under occurring themes, by discovering similarities and differences from the large number of the first-order codes. Those were analyzed with the support of previous research and the result provided '2nd-order themes'. Finally, the second-order themes are combined to "aggregate dimensions". When the first transcription was coded, the following ones were analyzed by using the same codes. When needed, the coding was modified until all the interviews were analyzed, and the final codes fit the whole data set. The findings are presented in the next main chapter after discussing the quality of the research.

4.4 Trustworthiness of the study

The quality of scientific research is often argued by reliability and validity, which are considered throughout the research process to provide as accurate answers to the research questions as possible (Saunders et al., 2019, pp. 213-216). However, due to the qualitative nature of the research and the belief that the studied phenomenon is socially constructed, the concepts of reliability and validity cannot be fully applied (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 216). That is why the quality of this study is assessed by trustworthiness, the concept that was formed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to better meet the qualitative nature of research. It consists of credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility relates to ensuring that what is represented in the research is truly what the participants meant (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 301-316). That is why the participant validation technique was used, i.e. interviewees were asked to read the transcriptions and translations to confirm that the researcher has not misunderstood anything. Also, during the interviews, if a meaning of something was not fully clear, the researcher rephrased it to ensure that she has understood the meaning correctly.

Dependability can be ensured by recording the research process and the changes in it and to provide reliable and dependable account of the final research focus that others can understand and evaluate (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 308; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 316-318). Thus, this chapter has described the research process in detail to demonstrate that it is logical and traceable.

To ensure transferability to other research settings, the research process is fully described, including the research questions, the detailed research design, the context of the research, the findings and the analysis process. Because the sufficient information is provided in this chapter, the reader can judge the transferability of the study (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316).

Confirmability relates to ensuring that there is a logical link between the data and the analyzed interpretations, and that others could interpret the findings in a similar way (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 308). That is why the representation of the findings are supported with quotes from the interviewees so that the reader can judge the logic behind the interpretation. Also, linking the analysis to the existing theory supports confirmability (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 308). As previously mentioned, it is done in this research.

5 Findings

This chapter presents the findings of the interviews. The study's focus was on finding the challenges that rotational short-term assignees face in their repatriation adjustment and the support mechanisms that were considered useful in the process. Following the research questions, the findings are divided into two sections: antecedents of repatriation adjustment and organizational support mechanisms. Organizational support mechanisms are part of the antecedents, but they are presented separately to highlight the focus of this study. First, the background of the participants' repatriation process is briefly presented. Then, the first subchapter presents the discovered antecedents and challenges and the second subchapter covers the organizational support findings more in detail.

The participants worked in positions in which they traveled from one project to another and visited the home country typically every three months for one week. They repatriated from their own initiative when they wanted to stop traveling to project sites and instead, spend more time in their home country, Finland. Before repatriation, they typically searched for a new job by themselves. Six participants found a new job within the company, while two participants found a better option from other employers.

The most common reason to repatriate was family. Rather often the idea of repatriation came from a spouse who stayed in the home country. One participant's assignment schedule was continuously changed, and his visits home were postponed several times. The uncertainty of not knowing when he would come home frustrated his girlfriend, as the following quote indicates: "The girlfriend was like 'yeah, if you cannot make up your mind (laughs) then, you know, things happen...'", It was also many participants' own wish to spend more time with their family. The following participant wanted to be present in his family's daily life and see how his children grow:

We had to make a decision about what to do now: whether daddy is the one that is seen around fifty days a year or if daddy is more at home. So, it was because of that. . . . And it has been quite nice to be there. The kids go to school and you see them growing. It would have been a pity to miss that.

Even the only single participant wanted to repatriate because of family. More specifically, he wanted to find a partner. The long periods of time when he was absent from the home country hindered his chances to find one:

It has also been one reason for repatriation, because it is always a bit like an icebreaker when I tell that 'well, now I'm going to somewhere for three months.' (laughs) 'So, let's see after that again'. It keeps you single quite well, so to say.

5.1 Antecedents of repatriation adjustment

This section presents the findings focusing on antecedents of repatriation adjustment. The antecedents are divided into the different areas of repatriation adjustment. Three dimensions were distinguished from the data: adjustment to work, adjustment to interaction with home-country nationals and adjustment to the general environment in the home country. Differing from the framework of the study, adjustment to job and adjustment to organization did not appear as separate areas of adjustment. Many findings about adjustment to the organization relate to adjustment to interaction. Thus, they are presented under the topic of adjustment to interaction, and adjustments to both job and organization are grouped under adjustment to work. The following sections present the antecedents that were found by focusing on each adjustment area at a time. Also, the challenges faced in repatriation adjustment are covered in the following sections. In the beginning of each chapter, an overview of each adjustment dimension is given before a presentation of the antecedents that were found to affect the adjustment dimension in question.

5.1.1 Adjustment to work

Work adjustment was the most difficult area of repatriation adjustment for the study's participants. Those participants who said that their repatriation adjustment had been an easy process were generally happy about their new position. However, the majority of the participants faced challenges in repatriation adjustment, and the challenges were

mostly related to work. A common problem was that repatriates had decided to return to the home country because of family reasons. However, most of them highlighted how much they liked the work abroad and that they would have liked to continue it if it had been easier to combine the work and family-life. Thus, adjusting to a new work after doing a really motivating work was challenging for many of the participants. The following quote represents the compromise that many participants had to make between the job they liked very much and the family and free time:

It [the problem] has been more in the work side, adjusting to the work... (laughs) Oh well, (pause) it's a bit like (long pause) I wouldn't say going through the motions, but it's a little bit like that to be in this position. I can still be in Finland, be at home and have hobbies, family, and everything here close by. But I doubt I'll stay in this position until I retire... Yet I get to live the regular daily life now. (pause) So, the adjustment has been more [difficult] to the work side, I'm still a bit searching for my place, what to do when I grow up. (laughs) So, at the moment I'm here, but let's see where I'm in a year.

It was discovered that accurate expectations about the new job helped repatriates to adjust. Especially previous work experience from a similar position enabled participants to form accurate expectations, while the lack of it caused unwanted surprises upon return. For example, the following participant explained that his adjustment to the re-entry position was easy, because he knew what to expect: "I also knew pretty much what the job was about. And I had been doing this office job earlier, as I said, as a trainee, so, it was pretty easy to adapt, I would say". On the other hand, one participant who had never worked in an office before repatriation was surprised about the way people worked in an office, and he had great difficulties in adapting to it. He commented: "Maybe I don't have such experience in a real office work. So that's probably also something that caused the panic (laughs)".

Also, having previously worked with and knowing the colleagues in the repatriate position had eased the work adjustment of some participants. One participant described his happy feelings about returning to a familiar department after spending several months in a re-entry position in which he did not know the colleagues well as follows: "Well, I knew everyone who work here at the department, so I did say when I started in this

position that it is like I've come home. We do have had a good, good atmosphere". The reason why he knew them so well was that he returned to the same department on which he had worked as an assignee.

It was assumed that the repatriates would have rather accurate knowledge about the home organization because they visited it regularly. However, it was discovered that even though they visited the home country every three months, those visits were their time off, and they did not spend much time at the home office. One participant said: "We may have come to the office to bring receipts and so on. Reporting. But nothing else". The following quote describes how focused the participants were on their own assignments and did not know what was happening in the home organization:

I am rather unfamiliar with the home organization. I'm blinkered, doing my own project somewhere and about the organization I'm really... (long pause) So, for me the whole organization of [the case company] was rather unfamiliar, here at the office. Even though I have been at the company already for over a decade.

More antecedents were found related to work adjustment than work expectations. Most of them are related to job, but one individual factor was identified: the time spent abroad. It was discovered that those who had spent the shortest amount of time abroad had less difficulties in adjusting to work. On the contrary, it was assumed that those who did the assignment work for an extremely long time would find it challenging to adjust to a new type of work, as the following quote indicates:

Maybe many of those who are there [on assignments], don't dare to quit the travel job because they don't really know how they would adjust. Then especially those, who have been traveling for more than a decade, they maybe don't know any more how it is to be, like, just in an everyday job, so to speak.

Other antecedents of job adjustment that were identified from the data relate to job. The most significant factor that caused challenges in repatriation adjustment is ill-planned re-entry job, which can be divided into two interrelated sub codes: different nature of the work and less rewarding tasks. Most participants had repatriated to an office position after spending years in a position, which offered them a great deal of variety in terms of countries, locations, and people. The work, which they did on the

assignments, was very physical, and the office work back in the home country created a great contrast to it, as the following participant describes:

When you are at site, the work is very active, the hearth rate is high, and you do [something physical] all the time. Then when I came to office work to do documentation, you sit still all the time. So, it was a bit like crashing into a wall, at least for me. I had really much challenges in getting the time pass.

Most of the participants had repatriated because of family reasons, and not because they wanted to stop traveling. Thus, many would have liked to still travel in their job, and staying at the office was experienced boring, as the next quote indicates:

Every now and then I did travel somewhere for a week, but then when you have been at the office for something like three weeks, I notice that I – it becomes some kind of a suffering for me, that I'm still here. That I've had enough, I wouldn't want to be here anymore. I get a bit like bored. Even though there is work to do, it's still like 'damn, I would like to go somewhere or do something'.

The following participant had adjusted easily to his latest job, because he had a chance to travel in it. He enjoyed the possibility to stay at the office but still be able to travel every now and then:

And then I found the good [position] in which I get to travel a bit and then stay at the office. In my opinion, it has been the best, at least for me, that it is a gentle slope. Not like going into a wall and stopping there, but sort of piece by piece. It has been the best at least for me when I have the possibility to [travel]. In this I get to– well, last week we visited, well, one site in Finland, but still in the field, and at Christmas we were in the States and last year in June we visited the States again. My colleague does the same kind of work, so, [we travel] every now and then. And I think it is really good! And I have said to my supervisor that I need to get some fresh air from the field from time to time.

Those participants who had a chance to travel every now and then were generally more satisfied with their re-entry position. Also, having a job that was active and provided variety in tasks had helped repatriates to adjust to the work, compared to the ones who only sat in front of a computer writing documents, for example. The following repatriate adjusted to the work easily because of that:

This is so operative and fast-paced department, because there are these developmental tasks and then there are managerial duties, then comes those HR

duties and then there is technical support, and then we do also these kind of, like, site visits, so we do a little of these, that we visit the field. But not that much anymore. So, it is such a broad scale that I don't have time to stop to think about it. This is, like, very active this work, which I like.

In addition to a completely different nature of the work, many participants experienced the new tasks less rewarding. An extreme is the following participant who repatriated to a position in which there was not enough work for him to do:

They said, when I changed to that side [from assignment work], that the direction is steeply upwards, that there will be as much work as I want to do. And well, when I then went there, I literally twiddled my thumbs for five months, so... (pause) On top of the fact that I had just returned to the office and then, like, to do nothing... It was really...

More common, however, was that the new position offered less challenges and thus made it less rewarding. The following participant, who enjoys challenges, did not stay in his first re-entry position for long, but moved on to a new job after some time. This is how he described his re-entry position: "In practice, it is not challenging at all, it is such (pause) performance or (pause) well, this kind of (very long pause) routines, let's say that, more in that position".

Another common reason for why the participants did not find their re-entry position rewarding was that the results of their work in it were rather invisible. On assignments, where they did concrete work, they could see physically what they had done, but when working at the office, it was not that evident, as the following repatriate told:

You see the results of your work [at site]. In this what I do now (pause), it's a bit like (pause) writing emails and... I can't really say after a workday that 'whew, what a day!' (swipes imaginary sweat from his forehead) that 'again I did all kinds of stuff'. It's a bit like... It's so invisible, what we do. Getting feelings of success, it's (laughs) no, it's, it's not really... Well, you got those more in the assignment work.

On the other hand, those who repatriated to a position that they found interesting and motivating, had less challenges in adjusting to work. In general, those who were satisfied with their new position, adjusted easily to it. For example, the following participant had

had much challenges in his first re-entry position, but he adjusted easily to the new job that he got:

Well, there appeared an interesting vacancy, which I have been thinking of a long time, that to that position I want, and it opened and I was in the interview and I got the place then . . . this is so fast-paced and operative department that this is, like, very interesting. And time really flies, so that I don't think that there is always time to do everything. I believe that at this point I'm in a good position, that there is interest and motivation, challenges every day.

Staying motivated and interested in a job is essential. A possibility to learn continuously helps maintaining the interest. Thus, if a position does not involve only routines but also offers a possibility to learn, it may help repatriates to better adjust to work. This was the case with the following participant, for whom adjustment to work was very easy and smooth:

You do get a lot also from this [position] and also in this you learn a lot of things (pause) all the time even though these projects are familiar, and you know what you do in these and so on, what these include, but still there are all– on the background there are all the subcontractors and all the engineering and everything like that. There is all the time something that you learn. And it is, like– it maintains the interest.

Another antecedent that was discovered in the study is reduced job autonomy. It means that on the assignments some assignees have a rather high status and then they repatriate to a position which offers less autonomy to the repatriate. The following participant did not experience it himself but he assumed that it might happen, especially for those having worked, for example in Africa: “If you have been in that kind of a third country, and everybody thinks you are above everything, you decide everything yourself, it is probably quite a shock to come to Finland of course, when your status is different”. Job autonomy could mean also having a possibility to take more responsibility. At the time of the interview, the following repatriate had just recently started in a new position, so he was still going through the orientation phase, and that is why he felt that he did not have enough responsibility in the position. However, he hoped that it would change when he learned the job. The following quote describes how easy it was on assignments to have more responsibility:

There the responsibility, well, in some cases it will be given and then if you want it, you can take more of it, so it's maybe something I would wish in also in the new [position].

Also, the lack of role clarity was discovered to create challenges in adjustment to work. The topic was brought up by one interviewee, who was a little frustrated because the responsibilities in his new position were still somewhat unclear and the orientation to the job had been inadequate. He told that he would have wanted to work harder, but in the unclear situation he did not always know what to do. As he said that “the work has always been the most important thing for me, after that comes everything else”, it is understandable that he had difficulties in adjusting to a job, in which the responsibilities were unclear. The reason for the unclarity was that the department was undergoing an organizational change. Generally, the participants’ roles were clear, and they received sufficient orientation to the new job, so this participant’s experience was an exception.

Finally, skill utilization was found to affect work adjustment. For example, the following repatriate, who had challenges in adjustment, could not utilize his main skills in the new position:

And the fact that the technical know-how, I can't really utilize it in here in any way, in this position. In here I am like part of HR, part of tax office and payroll administration, and (laughs) like this. So, the technical side, which I have studied and about which I have experience from the field, it stays quite minor, so it's a bit... Like... When I can't utilize it, it's a bit like... Well, it is not that rewarding.

On the other hand, some other repatriates could utilize their skills and especially the ones gained from assignments in the new position. For example, the following participant thought that the practical assignment experience had helped him in the new job:

There is the advantage of being familiar with the devices and systems. You know how they work, what components there are and what everything requires in order to work well. And then when there will be some changes, it is quite easy to absorb them. When you have the base and the experience and you know how things have been, you understand what will be changed, so... Yeah, it has helped a lot in that.

To conclude, adjustment to work was found to be affected mostly by factors related to a re-entry position. They include ill-planned job, which means that adjustment challenges were caused by positions, in which the nature of work was too different from the previous assignment work, and which were not as rewarding as the assignment work. Also reduced job autonomy, lack of role clarity and a poor possibility for repatriates to utilize their skills in the re-entry position made adjustment to work difficult. On the other hand, adjustment to work had been easier for those repatriates, who found their new jobs motivating and not so different from assignment work, and they were able to utilize their newly gained skills after repatriation. Also, shorter time spent abroad made adjustment to work easier than longer time spent abroad. Finally, what also supported adjustment to work was previous experience from a similar position and being familiar with the new colleagues.

5.1.2 Adjustment to interaction

The participants' adjustment process to interaction with home-country nationals had generally been fast and easy. Some had to adjust to the different way of working, but especially outside of work adjustment to interaction was not considered difficult. The following quote describes how easy it was for one participant to continue interaction with his family and friends after return: "It kind of continues from where we once left it. (long pause) There hasn't really been any problems with that".

What supported the adjustment to interaction was that the participants had maintained regular communication with their family members and friends during the assignments via the Internet. The following participant had had weekly calls with his girlfriend and closest friends:

And also like the girlfriend, you have to— or some people maybe don't, but I—we had a call two-three times a week just in general, just to talk about stuff. And that was the case with friends as well [inaudible] at least once a week with those, like two-three close friends that you— you notice that they really want to stay in contact with you. You stay in contact with them.

Staying in touch with the family and friends during assignments was a key source of information about the home country, because communication with the home organization was less active.

Interaction with home-country nationals was not totally unproblematic, however. For example, identity change caused surprises to one participant. He told that he had been rather shy when he was younger, but the time he spent on assignments in a very social work changed him: he became more extrovert. After his return, he acted in a way that was not typical for most home country nationals, and others found it strange:

One time on a jogging trail I said hi to someone (laughs) and he looked at me like 'why the fuck are you talking to me?' (pause) So, it was a bit like whoops, that's right, not in here– (laughs) you aren't supposed to say anything to anyone. This kind of funny things happen every now and then. Or happened when I returned to Finland.

However, it was not a great issue for him and soon he readapted to the Finnish way on communication. As he said, later similar incidents had not happened.

Greater challenges were faced in interaction with new colleagues. The same participant had difficulties in adjusting to a quiet office life after working on assignments, which was very social. He told that he was often in contact with others on the assignments:

It is so social the work which you do on the assignments. You are with the customer there, really in the interface. You discuss with them all the time. And then of course there are all the colleagues. In the morning it's like 'okay, what shall we do today?' and 'who will do what?' and 'how will we do it?' and 'when?' and so on...

The new department in Finland surprised him because it was so much less social:

Maybe also the department was a bit withdrawn. There was not social action, really. But the most I was – like when I sat at my workstation, and then I started to listen, I could hear no sounds other than typing on keyboards and clicking of mice. I thought that 'where I have come to? Is it going to be like this from now on?' Everybody has their own cubicles, surrounded by room dividers and nobody talked to anyone in there. They maybe said 'morning' in the morning and then when leaving from work 'until tomorrow'. So, it was really – it was like a shock to me that goddammit, (pause) is this what it's going to be like. This is not what I expected.

Even though he worked with the same projects, he compared the two jobs and said that working at a site is “really a different world” than working at the office. He highlighted

that the lack of social interaction was the major challenge for him in the whole repatriation process: “It took some time before I got like used to this (laughs) silence, so to say. It has really been the greatest shock what I had”. He said that he felt he was alone in the position.

Another participant had similar experiences. He told that he had had to become accustomed to the new type of relationship with his new colleagues. He told about the close relationships, which were formed at assignments due to the vast amount of time spent together both working and during free time in the evenings. They for example “went to have a beer, went for swimming and hobbies and visited museums and zoos” together. Many interviewees spoke about the closeness of the assignment team, calling it a family, but only one participant brought up the topic of the change upon return. He said that in his re-entry position, the relationships with his new colleagues are more professional and distant than they were on assignments and that he does not meet them in free time. However, he would like to know them better both professionally and personally.

On the other hand, some found their new department very nice and supporting, and their adjustment had been easier. Thus, getting along with one’s colleagues helps adjustment. For example, the following participant did not have challenges in it:

I have had really nice colleagues. If you think about the work, the teams and colleagues have been very, very great, so it is nice to come to work, and I don't have stress, like ‘oh no, again I have to go’. No, absolutely not. It's been very, very nice always.

Different way of interacting also relates to decision-making at work. One participant had challenges in adjusting to the lack of open discussion before making decisions. He told that on assignments, when he had been in a managerial position, he had discussed the decisions with everyone: “No matter from which position the idea comes from, it doesn't matter to me at all. Because if the idea is good or bad – well, good ones will be solved”. However, after return he discovered that open discussion was not practiced at the office, and as it was against his values, it was not easy for him to adjust to it:

There isn't that kind of open discussion. And one has to even a bit secretly talk about things. . . . It's probably my personality, so I rather talk things through and then of course a decision comes from a certain position, whether it is like this or that, but still all the options have been heard.

Another factor affecting adjustment to interaction is that others do not share the repatriates' experiences, and thus, do not understand them. Some might think very differently from repatriates, as the following quote indicates:

Maybe not everyone in Finland really understand everything what there– (laughs) and what kind of a life it is. Like, about some experiences, like if you live three months at a hotel, some might think it is like really great, but in my opinion it terrible (laughs).

Even though the communication culture in the home country differs from the communication culture in a host country, it did not bother all the participants. Those who acknowledged the Finnish way of communicating, adjusted easily: "people are (laughs) more silent. You know what I mean? That's just the Finnish way, so (both laugh) cannot complain about that". In fact, one participant said that it is easier to operate with Finns than with people from other countries, because he is familiar the communication style:

We agree that you come half past seven, so you come half past seven. Or if you can't make it you let me know beforehand: 'hey, I will be late for fifteen minutes–' or 'I can't make it at all.' But there, it might be that (pause) two hours pass and you call: (imitates a phone conversation) 'wait a minute, where are you?' 'Oh, he went to a supermarket.' 'Well, what about our meeting?' 'Well, yeah, let's look at it tomorrow, shall we?'

Some participants brought up their need to adjust to the family life. One repatriate talked about the need for the whole family to adjust to the new situation when the father is at home all the time and does not only visit every now and then as he used to. Because his wife had been alone with the children for years, they had formed their own way of operating. When the father repatriated, it affected the whole family:

Well, of course there are some, if you have been in the field for something like ten years and your wife has run the household with the kids, they have their own routines and methods that have become refined. Then when you come home there are small conflicts, like 'why do you do this?' and 'how come this is like this?' and 'why this hasn't been done like that?' and so on. So, there were certain challenges.

It took some time to fuse into it, that daddy is now at home all the time and doesn't leave again after a couple of weeks. So, maybe there were some like challenges in the beginning.

To conclude, accurate expectations and knowledge of the communication style in the home country helped repatriates to adjust. Active communication with family and friends supported the creation of accurate expectations. A repatriate's own change in communication style during absence created challenges upon return. Repatriates were used to active social interaction at work and being a part of a close assignment team whose members they knew personally. Upon return, the lack of social interaction and open discussion made some participants' adjustment more difficult. Also, other people's inability to fully understand repatriates' experiences, caused minor challenges. In addition, repatriates, who had spent in total years in separation from their family, had to readjust to being an active family member.

5.1.3 Adjustment to general environment

Adjustment to the general environment in the home country was the easiest area of repatriation adjustment for the participants. Not many challenges related to general adjustment were found in this study.

Generally, the repatriates' expectations about the general environment were accurate. Despite spending years abroad, the regular visits to the home country helped repatriates to maintain contact with the home country. The following repatriate had spent over 15 years on assignments, but thanks to the regular visits, he did not have problems in readjusting to the home country: "I had visited Finland so often that I didn't have any (pause) surprises, like 'what, do they accept a bank card here' type of things. No, no, I wasn't that alienated". Interestingly, another participant had contrary experiences. He told that Finland had changed much during the decade which he had spent abroad. He said that even though he had visited the country regularly, he had not been able to keep up with all the advancement. For example, he told that he always has to stop to think whether

to select debit or credit when paying with a credit card, and others looked at him like he was an “imbecile” because he was not used to it. Also, he was not yet accustomed to use contactless payment, which had become popular in Finland during his absence. These are a few examples of the many things that had changed during his absence and to which he has had to adapt.

Another factor that had supported adjustment to the general environment was a home culture identity. For the following participant, the adjustment was easy, and he did not even see a need to readjust to his own culture. He strongly pointed out that even though he was abroad, he remained Finnish: “If you go to work abroad, you don't forget your own culture and [inaudible] all the routines here. They do stay there, and they do not disappear”.

A change in the level of income was discovered to affect general adjustment. The lower level of income did not bother the following repatriate much, but he still had to adapt to it:

Also, of course the income level decreases, because when you are in the field, your income is higher. So, when you come to the office, it drops. So, that's also something – well, personally it hasn't been a challenge for me, but you had to check that this is the level of income here and you must live according to that, so maybe nowadays you don't do so much extempore purchases and investments. So, you have to think about also that side.

However, another repatriate commented the lower income level by stating that “due to the long experience and blameless conduct in this company it would be more than fair if they looked for a suitable position after site assignment with a competitive salary”. He had expected better support from the organization and suggested that perhaps a monetary compensation could facilitate the repatriation adjustment.

A matter that almost every participant talked about was that how easy life was in the home country. Living abroad had shown them how life could be in other countries and returning to Finland was a positive experience for them. One participant said: “It is very eye-opening to visit outside Finland. And when living there for a longer period, you of

course learn to appreciate what you have at home. Because everything is well in here". The interviewees learned to appreciate, for example, the light traffic, the safety, and the easiness of operations in Finland. The following repatriate compared his experiences in the home country and in a host country as follows:

I go to somewhere and buy something and get it paid and – or paying a bill: I simply go to a mobile bank and pay it. So, I don't have to go to any offices to get a stamp from here and give the money there and get the receipt from there and... It takes a whole day!

The only thing that the participants did not appreciate about Finland was the climate. Many of the repatriates' assignments were located in sunnier and warmer countries, and after return, spending the whole winter season in darker and colder Finland was not as pleasant, as the following participant told:

Of course, now when it's dark and wet and cold out there, you think that you could be somewhere else. Because before you could always spend the worst times abroad and usually it was warm, and the sun was shining and... You could always skip the winters and autumns.

Another antecedent of adjustment to the general environment is the way of life during assignments. It was discovered that some participants lived a regular life abroad, except for often having to work more than after repatriation. The following participant told that he lived a regular life and had a regular home on his assignments. He compared his situation to those, who stay in a hotel and travel more frequently, and thought that his adjustment was easier, because the change of lifestyle was not that great:

We don't live in any hotels; we don't live out of a suitcase. We have homes there. (pause) And it [the life] is similar there, immovable. You've got your toothbrushes there and your kitchen here. Just like at home. But those, who do the short [trips], stay for two weeks in a hotel and then they fly home for a short while. For them it might be much more difficult to adjust to a 'seven to four' life. We actually traveled very little. . . . So, it's probably easier, because the toothbrush and the spoons just happen to be at home in Finland. Before they were somewhere else. So, it's similar, the life, routines and such.

For some participants, the life changed more. For example, some participants had their first children after repatriation. Even though it did not cause major challenges for the

following participant, he still had to adjust to the new situation to which he was not fully prepared: “You didn't know how to prepare. I didn't really know anything about taking care of a child, I was a bit like, well, everything was new to me. Maybe also a bit like a shock”. In addition to the baby, he had many great changes happening in his life at the same time: new job, new employer, and a new home. He told that combining all the changes at the same time had been challenging:

I had to work quite hard, because I was new. Of course, some tasks were a bit similar, but still new for me, so I had to work quite hard to get everything going and so on. It has been quite hard. The child and the change of a job and then I'm building a cottage and everything in the same year, so it has been quite a shocking year.

Keeping oneself busy has also supported the general adjustment. Surprisingly many repatriates started building or renovating a house after return or otherwise organized activities for their free time. The following participant told that it had kept his thoughts away from repatriation adjustment:

I haven't had any challenges in the adjustment, it has gone pretty smoothly. . . . And it has probably helped that I have had so many activities that (pause) I hadn't even had time to think of what to do now.

The participants appreciated the increased free time and the possibility to spend more time with their family, because it was important to them. As mentioned earlier, the main reason for the participants to repatriate was the family. That is why they had been satisfied with the life outside of work. One repatriate stated: “In this, you get home every day and when I have the house project and a small child and... So, it is a good thing that you get [home every day]”.

To conclude, adjustment to the general environment and culture in the home country had been easy for most participants. Especially visits to the home country helped participants to maintain up-to-date knowledge about the country. However, for one participant the short visits were not enough, and he was not aware of all the changes that had happened during his absence. Adjustment to the home country was easy for those who had a strong home country identity. Change in the income level, on the other hand,

affected general adjustment negatively. However, life in the home country was found easier compared to many host countries. Yet, many participants complained about the dark and cold winters in the home country. Adjustment was discovered to be easy when the lifestyle did not change much, but if there were many great changes in one's life, adjustment was more difficult. Having more free time and a possibility to spend more time with one's family supported the adjustment. Also, being active during the free time was found to support general adjustment. The next section presents the organizational support mechanisms that were discovered to facilitate repatriation adjustment.

5.2 Organizational support mechanisms

This section focuses on the support mechanisms provided by the organization and the kind of support that the participants found helpful in repatriation adjustment. It was discovered that the case company did not have a defined process for the management of the target group's repatriation, but when support was requested, it was offered in an ad hoc manner. That is because the target repatriates were not assigned on single assignments, but their position required them to stay continuously on project assignments. The repatriation was initiated by the assignees themselves when they wanted to quit in the position and move on to another job. Because the decision to quit was made by an assignee, it was typically his responsibility to find a new job. That is why the organization did not provide support with it, and many participants did not even expect it to, as was the case with the following participant:

I didn't really expect anything [support]. . . . [Because?] it was my decision, my own decision to start looking for something else than assignment work.

Similarly, the following participant, who had worked also as a supervisor for the assignees, thought that finding a job for a repatriate is not the supervisor's responsibility but they should do it themselves:

My understanding is that [the company] recruits an employee to the assignment work. You apply for the job, you get selected, you work in it, but when you have enough, you probably start looking for another job. I think it's not the responsibility

of the supervisor. . . . [As a supervisor] I've received an email [from a subordinate], which implies that I should look for a job for him even though he is in a position to which I have assigned him.

Because finding a new job was not typically considered the responsibility of the organization, support in it was often not given. However, some forms of support were offered to the repatriates and a need for some additional support mechanisms was recognized. These support practices are presented in the following subchapters.

5.2.1 Support offered by the organization

As stated before, the case company did not have a defined repatriation process for the rotational short-term assignees as they simply moved on to a new position. Thus, the support offered for them was not systematic and identical for everyone. Rather, it depended on a repatriate's supervisor. That is why many common forms of repatriation support were not identified in this study. The only support mechanism that was written in the assignment contract was regular visits to the home country.

As previously mentioned, the visits home had helped some participants to maintain up-to-date knowledge about the home country. According to the assignees' contracts, they were entitled to visit the home country every three months for about a week. Even though every assignee had the right to travel to Finland, it did not always happen. Sometimes, because of a tight project schedule, assignees wanted to be flexible and stayed at site for longer periods without visiting home in between. They could utilize the missed days off, for example, when the project was finished so that they could spend time in Finland for longer than a week. The following participant was ready to postpone even his summer vacations:

I didn't have my summer vacation every year. I had a bit longer vacations then. (long pause) Perhaps it was also for my benefit. It was flexible from both sides. 'Now this project is finishing and then it would be time for your vacation, but this kind of a project would start right away. Would you like to—?' 'Yes, I would.' 'Well, let's move it then'. And then I moved to another project almost right after... It depended on a project. Flexibly.

Thus, this participant spent long periods of time abroad without visiting the home country in between. Yet his adjustment to the general environment was easy because he was not too alienated from it, as discussed in chapter 5.1.3.

Another commonly offered form of support was vacation upon return. Often repatriation happened during summer, so repatriates could have their summer vacation before starting in the new position. In one case a repatriate had not had time to visit the home country during the assignment, so when he returned, he then had the time off, which he was supposed to have on his cancelled visit to home. It seems that special arrangements were not made for any of the interviewees, but all were able to have their summer vacations or other days off they were entitled to anyway. Repatriates did not typically consider giving the possibility to have time off upon return as repatriation support. However, it was considered useful. The following participant reasoned that repatriates need time to readapt to the life in the home country and possibly rent or buy a house if they do not have one:

I had about one week off where I did some just general packing up and (laughs) adapting to be home. . . . If it [the total time spent abroad] would have been longer, maybe a bit more time off just to adapt to the environmental changes and so forth, but (pause) in this case maybe not. It was good at this one as it was. . . . I know that some people don't even have a place [to live] in Finland anymore. They sell them or just have one to rent when they're here in Finland. So, (laughs) then maybe some time to just adapt and get some place to live at least.

Also, it was discovered that a flexible transfer schedule and a mutual understanding about it between the old and the new supervisor supported the repatriation process. The following two extracts indicate that the participants were willing to complete their last assignment before moving to a new position, and that they appreciated the flexibility especially from the new supervisor:

The vacancy was opened already in the early summer. And there are the recruitment permission things, that you have to—the permission expires, so we had to make a new contract (long pause) in June. So, then we marked in it that the project will be finished in (pause) September. Because that was the best estimation at the time. The transfer happened already in early October, but I was still at the site until November, if I remember correctly. So, it was flexible.

Then when the interviews were held and the selection done, I informed my supervisor of that time that this is the situation. But still we agreed that I'll finish the task, the current job, so the transfer was agreed smoothly, so it didn't cause any problems to anyone, and the transfer schedule suited also the new department, so it went pretty well. (pause) So, in that way, I guess, I got (pause) support from my supervisor– or from both sides. They understood the situation.

Because repatriates started in a new position upon return, they typically received orientation to the job after return. For example, the following participant was assigned a mentor to support him in adjusting to the job: “I got here a mentor for the first week or two help me getting to the job and so forth”. As the participants did not typically mention any challenges in learning how to do the new job, it can be assumed that the provided orientation had been sufficient. However, one participant formed an exception: his orientation was not as comprehensive as he would have expected. As discussed in chapter 5.1.1, it was because of the still unclear responsibilities in the position due to the organizational change.

The same participant forms another exception in regard of how his new position was found. As stated, mostly the participants looked for a job independently, but he received additional support from the organization. Unlike the others, he relied on the managers to assign him to another position and he was ready to resign if a suitable position was not found: “I thought that I quit if they don’t find anything. I don’t have to stay in [this company]”. Finally, a few job options were offered for him and he selected the one he liked the most and stayed in the company. This was exceptional because he was the only one from the interviewed sample who received this kind of support. For some others, their supervisors had said that they could try to help finding another position, but the participants felt like it was only talk and not practical help that could be relied on. The following participant found independently an interesting job at another company and he decided to take it because he did not trust that his supervisor could find an interesting position for him:

My supervisor said . . . that he can check if there is anything [a job] in the company. But of course, I couldn't leave all the eggs in that basket. . . . It wasn't guaranteed that there would have been an interesting job. It could have been basically

anything. They would have probably said that ‘apply for this job’ or maybe they could have helped somehow. But because of the uncertainty I couldn’t rely on that. . . . Most likely I would have found myself sitting in a plane going to another site.

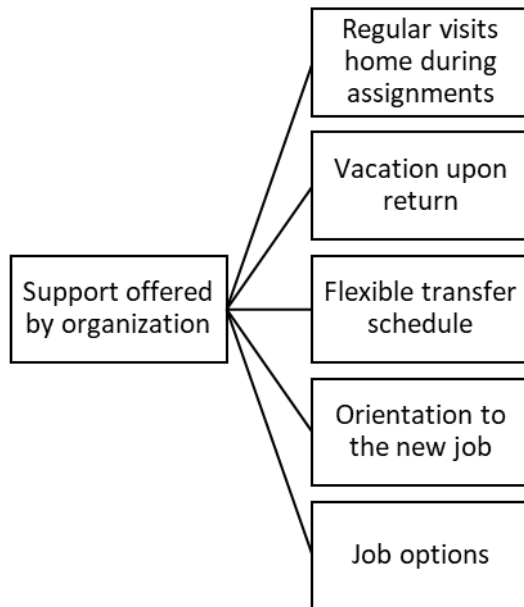


Figure 6 Repatriation support offered by the organization.

Figure 6 summarizes the support mechanisms that were offered by the case company to the repatriating rotational short-term assignees. The support that the participants received from the organization depended greatly on their supervisor. The only support the participants were entitled to was regular visits to the home country. However, also having vacation upon return and being able to flexibly agree the transfer schedule was discovered typical. Also, often orientation to the new position was given after return. Only one participant considered the orientation, which he received, insufficient. Also, he was the only one who received practical support in finding a new position. The next section focuses on the support that was found useful but was not yet utilized in the company.

5.2.2 Additional suggested organizational support mechanisms

Many participants stated that they would not have needed more support than what they were offered. For example, the following participant started at a new employer after return, and he did not think he would have needed additional support from either of the companies: “I think I wouldn't have needed more [support], because I had quite clear plans about the future”. However, as some participants faced great challenges in repatriation adjustment, it is very likely that some additional support would have been useful. This section presents those support mechanisms, which were considered to facilitate repatriation adjustment.

Most of the support mechanisms that were proposed by the participants relate to adjustment to work and especially to the ways of finding a suitable re-entry position. As discussed in the previous sections, the most difficult area of repatriation adjustment was adjustment to work. It was mainly because the new positions were too different from the assignment work and not as rewarding, i.e. not suitable for the repatriates. That is why it would be beneficial to find suitable positions through discovering the personal preferences and the individual competences of assignees who wish to repatriate.

Some participants highlighted the importance of an early discovery of these wishes to quit the assignment work and reacting to them as early as possible. It would provide the organization time to try to find the best possible solution. The following participant, who had worked also as a supervisor for the assignees, told that often assignees resigned very suddenly and there was hardly any time for the organization to react:

Maybe it could be anticipated a little. Because many quit so that they simply announce that 'that's it'. So, maybe one could try to survey it a bit already early—ask people already—like, every now and then that what their future plans are and if they feel like they are getting enough of this. Because often for many people it happens so that 'now I've gotten enough'. It's very sudden, but maybe it [what people want] could be surveyed a bit. To keep them somehow. Asking 'are you interested in working at the office or do you plan to quit this job or...'

Also, it was discovered that a repatriation team or a specific party, who would be responsible of matching the potential repatriates and the need for work elsewhere in the company, could be helpful. One participant proposed that the party could be somebody from the HR because “they should have the best knowledge of the open vacancies”. The following participant had a similar idea, but he also highlighted the importance of the supervisor’s role in the process:

I think that the supervisor is in an important role in it. So, you can discuss and say that 'now I am looking for this [new job]' and he could help in it. I think it would be a very, very good channel.

At the time of the interview, the previous participant worked as a supervisor for the assignees, and he believed that it is important to create trust between a supervisor and his or her subordinates and maintain open communication about the future plans: “In my opinion, it should begin from getting the good communication, creating trust between the supervisor and the team member. And through that the subordinate’s motivation can be discovered”. Open communication would support the idea about anticipating the repatriation and having time to react to the repatriation wishes.

Another issue raised by participants was the location of most of the available jobs. While most of the open jobs were in the largest unit of the case company, some repatriates’ families and lives were in another cities. One participant suggested that if remote work could be arranged, more repatriates would stay in the company. It would give more options for repatriates to find a suitable position if they did not have to worry about the location. He talked from his own experience:

I did look for another positions. And they are mainly here in [city A]. Like I said, in [city B] there is only a small [unit], there is training and spare part sales. So, the scale is very small. In here the hiring managers were interested. But it was not possible from [city B]. . . . So, in practice I should have moved to [city A]. (long pause) So, in my opinion it's against the interest of [the case company]. A lot of knowledge and competence disappear because of that. I think it would be organizable. Doing remote work and visiting only (pause) when you must. So that you would get a hotel for that night. . . . If that [remote work] was more OK, we would keep more people in the house, for sure.

He suggested that open positions could be charted also at the other locations of the company, not only in the home country, because some assignees would be willing to stay abroad permanently:

So, if they considered also, not only the home country Finland, but we have a hundred sixty offices out there, where they do these long assignments. (pause) So, one could be in contact with also those. (pause) If he could stay for example in (pause) our office in Argentina. So, not only like here in Finland. Many do live [abroad] . . . And this is what happens, when you are long enough— . . . They haven't had anything in here for a long time and there they are accustomed to being in that culture and so on.

It could help some assignees to adjust if they could move to a country that feels more like home than their original home country. However, the participants of this study were happy to return to Finland.

Some of the participants talked about uncertainty related to repatriation: they had a wish to repatriate but the options after assignments were somewhat unclear. A career plan might reduce the uncertainty and give time for the organization to find the best possible option. One participant thought that a career plan might help repatriates to stay in the office for some years and after, for example, raising their children, they could return to the assignment work. He could have considered it himself, but not without a plan or a certainty of receiving an interesting job in the future. He earlier said that he was not suited for pure office work, but he could have considered it if he knew that after he is not needed so urgently at home, he could return to the assignment work he enjoys:

And if people could be at the office for a while, do something else, maybe they would be ready to return [to the assignment job] one day. [After getting] past the certain stage of their life or— [when they have] gotten things in order again, they could imagine doing it. For example, when a child is a bit older or something. But now people just disappear. If it was just a matter of organization, if you could get it organized, probably it could work then. Of course, there's again the uncertainty. (pause) I could have probably imagined that if I stayed a couple of years at the office or something, that I would have had an interesting job, or I would have known that I'm going to get a nice job, maybe I could have imagined returning back [to the assignments]. But you can't rely on that. No.

Finally, it was discovered that peer support was helpful in repatriation adjustment. A few of the interviewees told that they had received peer support from colleagues who had

been in a similar situation. The story below demonstrates that it was reassuring to hear from somebody who had gone through a similar experience that at first repatriation can feel difficult, but the situation will improve in time:

It was when I repatriated to the office, I called to one [who had repatriated earlier] that (both laugh) 'how did your repatriation go?' He then said that 'well, I guess it takes around a half a year, and then it will start to calm down.' So yeah. That was for how long it took. (laughs) In that way I got support, 'well, okay... Let's wait for a half a year at least and see how things start to work out.' . . . (laughs) Maybe it was mostly through them how I (pause) started to calm myself a bit. They told how it had been with them and for how long it had taken for them to calm down and so on.

Peer support was not coordinated by the organization, but repatriates used their personal contacts to receive it. One participant told that he did not know anybody who had repatriated, so he did not have a chance for peer support. If the peer support was organized by the company, everybody who needed it, would have had access to it.

To conclude, almost every repatriation support mechanism that was considered useful by the participants relates to work adjustment and specially to finding a suitable position. This reflects the finding that the interviewed repatriates faced challenges mostly in adjustment to work. Adjustment to the interaction and the general environment was considered generally easier, and that is why support practices related to it, such as cultural training, was not needed. The additional organizational support mechanisms that were discovered useful in rotational short-term assignees' repatriation adjustment are illustrated in figure 7 on the following page.

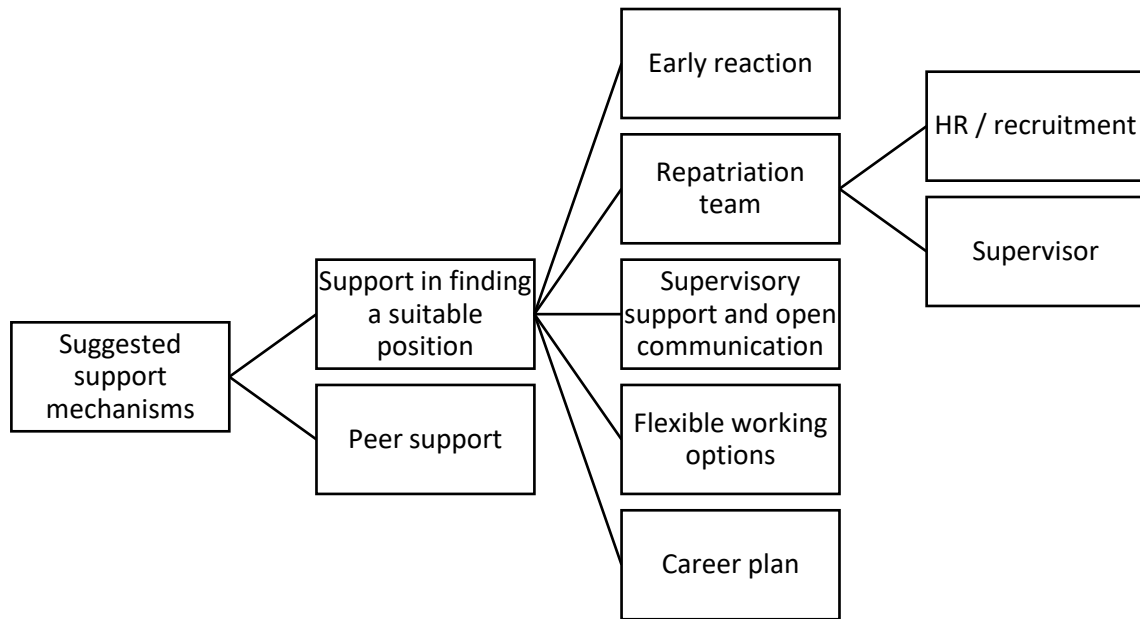


Figure 7 Other suggested repatriation support mechanisms.

6 Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings presented in the previous chapter in relation to the framework of the study and previous research. The structure of the chapter follows the research questions. The first subchapter provides an answer to the first sub question: *‘What challenges there are in repatriation adjustment of rotational short-term assignees?’* Consecutively, the second subchapter answers the second sub question: *‘Which support mechanisms have been experienced as useful and what kind of additional support rotational short-term assignees would have wished for?’*

6.1 Repatriation adjustment of rotational short-term assignees

The process of the target groups’ repatriation is different from a typical repatriation process. For long-term expatriates, the end date of the assignment is typically set when creating the expatriation contract. However, for rotational short-term assignees no official plans of repatriation were created because they had permanent employment contracts. Thus, the participants of this study repatriated from their own initiative when they no longer wanted to work on assignments. While traditional expatriates may have official assignment contracts and repatriation plans, rotational short-term assignees typically had to plan their repatriation themselves, including finding a new job.

Despite the differences of the repatriation process, the findings about rotational short-term assignees’ repatriation adjustment are rather similar to Black et al.’s (1992) long-term assignees’ repatriation adjustment model. For example, the areas of repatriation adjustment that were distinguished from the data were the same. Suutari and Välimaa (2002) distinguished adjustment to job and adjustment to organization as two separate areas of repatriation adjustment. However, the separation was not evident in this study, but the findings follow Black et al.’s (1999) original three facets: adjustment to work, interaction, and general environment.

The findings of the study are more similar to Black et al.'s (1992, 1999) findings about traditional long-term assignees than Starr's (2009) findings about short-term assignees. That is because the participants of this study spent typically several years abroad, just like long-term assignees. That is why there were no old positions in the home organization to which they could have returned, which is the case with many short-term assignees on only one assignment (Starr, 2009). Because of strong similarities between the findings of this study and Black et al.'s (1992) repatriation adjustment model, the findings are discussed in a structure that follows the model. First, prereturn expectations are discussed and then each variable group presented by Black et al. (1992) are covered: individual, job, organization, and nonwork variables.

6.1.1 Sources of information about the home country

This study's findings support the uncertainty reduction model, according to which accurate expectations facilitate repatriation adjustment, while false expectations make it more difficult (see Andreason & Kinneer, 2005; Black et al., 1999, p. 212; Hung & Ho, 2020). It was discovered that those who had accurate expectations adjusted more easily than those who were unprepared for the repatriation. For example, those participants who had previous experience of the work to which they repatriated or who knew the members of the new team adjusted easily. Thus, it is important that rotational short-term assignees mentally prepare for the repatriation before return, and that they have access to accurate information about working and living in the home country.

The participants were typically well informed about the general environment in the home country, because of regular visits to home and active communication with the family members and friends in the home country. Home leave is suggested by Black et al. (1999, p. 213), and it was found useful for most of the participants as it helped them to maintain up-to-date knowledge about the changes in the home country. According to Adler and Gundersen (2008, p. 286), expatriates often idealize their home country when facing challenges in the host culture. After return, the home country's daily routines

might cause a great contrast to the “fond memories and myths” about the country (Andreasson & Kinneer, 2005, p. 114). However, in this study the repatriates were notably happy about their home country and praised it for how smoothly everything worked in contrast to their experiences in some other countries. Thus, it seems that they did not have unrealistic expectations or if they had fond memories about the home country, they matched the reality. It might be that the regular visits to the home country helped not only to have up-to-date knowledge about the country but also to maintain the memories about it realistic. It must be noted that this finding may be country-specific, because all the participants were from Finland. The situation might be different in a case of repatriates from other countries.

While the participants were typically well aware of the changes in the home country, their knowledge about the work was less accurate. The reason for that might be that the work-related sources of information, which are recommended by earlier research (see e.g. Black et al., 1999, pp. 212-214), were not found in this study. For some participants, the lack of accurate expectations caused challenges in adjustment to work. Thus, it would be beneficial to add relevant sources of information, which would enable assignees to form more accurate expectations about work. Practical suggestions are further discussed in chapter 7.1.

6.1.2 Individual variables

All three individual variables found in this study are recognized in previous research: time spent abroad, home culture identity, and identity change. Time spent abroad is a part of Black et al.'s (1992) repatriation adjustment model, while identity is studied by other researchers (e.g. Cox, 2004; Starr & Currie, 2009; Sussman, 2002). According to Black et al. (1999), spending extensive amount of time abroad exposes assignees to the host culture, and if the habits and values of the host culture are adopted, it might be difficult to readjust to the home culture. They state that “the challenges of multiple global assignments or long global assignments result in feelings of being an ‘alien’ in one’s native

country” (Black et al., 1999, p. 215). Other LTA studies support the finding that the length of an assignment is negatively related to work adjustment (e.g. Hoang & Ho, 2020; Suutari & Välimaa, 2002). Similarly, based on the findings of this study, it is evident that those who spent the least amount of time abroad had the least challenges in repatriation adjustment.

Interestingly, this study’s participant who had spent abroad the longest period, over fifteen years, said that he did not feel alienated when he returned. It might be explained by his home country identity because repatriation adjustment is easier for those who identify strongly with the home country (Sussman, 2002). However, Cox (2004) discovered that expatriates on long assignments typically start to identify with the host country. This was not the case with the previously mentioned participant nor with another participant who had spent around five years abroad and who was strongly identified with the home culture. Perhaps regular visits to the home country maintained their home culture identity. Alternatively, a strong host country identity may not have been formed because the assignees did not stay the whole time in one country but changed the location every time a project was finished. On the other hand, the identity of another participant, who had spent more than five years abroad, was changed. He had adopted some communication habits from the host cultures and transformed from a shy person to a sociable person. Like the previous examples, he had visited the home country regularly and changed the host country always after a few months, so these factors cannot fully explain why some identify stronger with the home country than others.

Identity change does not mean only cultural identity, but it can also refer to becoming more independent. In Starr and Currie’s (2009) study, one participant had to readjust to living with a spouse and making decisions together. Similar experiences were discovered also in this study: repatriates had to adjust to the new kind of family life, where both parents stay at home instead of only one parent running the household alone.

Previous LTA research (e.g. Kierner & Suutari, 2017; O’Sullivan, 2002) highlights the importance of assignees’ active role in repatriation and career management. While some of this study’s participants were satisfied with their re-entry position, which they had independently found, it was not the case with everyone. The findings indicate that active self-management of the re-entry career does not guarantee a successful work adjustment for all rotational short-term assignees. Because of that organizational support in career management upon repatriation would be helpful for some rotational short-term assignees.

6.1.3 Job variables

The repatriation adjustment challenges related to job were highly similar to the challenges of long-term expatriates. Black et al. (1999) describe many long-term expatriate’s return jobs as “holding pattern” assignments when they are “ill-defined, low-impact ‘make work’ positions intended to keep the expatriates occupied and out of the way” (pp. 215-216). The situation was not that bad with this study’s participants, because they applied for real positions that were opened because of a need for work. Despite that, one participant told that during his first months after return he did not have much to do. Also, even though the work was often needed, many participants felt that they were in a low-impact job, because the work results were much less visible than on assignments at construction sites. Thus, the findings are in line with some previous studies (e.g. Tahir & Azhar, 2013) about long-term expatriates’ repatriation, which indicate that disappointment in a re-entry position is one of the main challenges in adjustment to work. Also, those participants who left the case company upon return did it because they found a more suitable job outside of the company. This reflects the survey result of KPMG International (2017, p. 79), which indicates that repatriates resign typically because there is no appropriate job available in the home organization or that they are offered a better job in another company.

Because the participants typically applied for open vacancies, the role and responsibilities in their re-entry positions were often clear. One participant, however, had an unclear role in a department that was undergoing an organizational change. It did not become clear in the interview if the position was created just for him or if there was a real need for the position. If it was somehow created for him, it could explain the unclarity of the role, which is a rather common problem among LTA repatriates (see Tahir & Azhar, 2013). According to Black et al. (1999, p. 216) unclear roles are often a result of poor planning and 'make work' assignments.

Reduced job autonomy, which according to Black et al. (1999, p. 216), is a typical problem for long-term expatriates, was not that evident in this study. It was not experienced much among the participants, but one assumed that those who had been in a high status on assignments might find it difficult to adjust to a lower level position in the home country. However, no one directly talked about it, which might mean that it is not as relevant for rotational short-term assignees as for traditional expatriates. None of them had either demotion surprises or promotion disappointments, which according to Black et al. (1999, pp. 216-217) appear among long-term expatriates. Nonetheless, one participant talked about his wish to have more responsibility and be able to take more responsibility if he wanted to. It was possible on assignments, but not at his re-entry position. It must be noted that he had only recently started in the position and the lack of responsibility might be because of the orientation period. He assumed that he would be given more responsibility as he learned more.

Poor skill utilization, another common problem in repatriation adjustment of traditional expatriates (Black et al., 1999, p. 217; Tahir & Azhar, 2013), appeared also among the participants of this study. Traditional expatriates often gain "unique country knowledge, language proficiency, and international management skills during global assignments" (Black et al., 1999, p. 217), and are sometimes not able to utilize them after return. However, the knowledge that a participant of this study was not able to utilize in his latest position was related to his technical know-how, not to his international experience. Also,

he was not placed to the position by the organization, but he voluntarily applied for the job, which does not involve technical work. Thus, he must have made the decision by himself to apply for a job because of other advantages than utilizing his technical know-how. Whether this study's participants were able to utilize their skills in the re-entry positions was not the matter of the organization's repatriation management processes, but it depended on what kind of jobs the participants applied for. That is because some other participants were able to utilize the knowledge, which they had gained from the assignments, in their re-entry positions.

The greatest difference between long-term expatriates and participants of this study is that the participants' work at site was physically demanding, while many traditional expatriates often work at an office. Thus, when repatriating, the participants had to adjust to work that had a totally different nature: they often repatriated to office jobs, because similar physical positions were not available in the home country. This matter makes the repatriation adjustment of rotational short-term assignees who work on projects unique. This research indicates that their main challenge is not to readjust to the home culture but to adjust to non-physical work, which they considered less demanding and less rewarding.

6.1.4 Organization variables

The organization variables that were found in this study differ greatly from Black et al.'s (1992) model. The organization variables discovered by them relate to the unclarity of the repatriation process and the lack of repatriation training. These factors are present in this study, but they were not seen as an issue by most of the participants: it was clear to them that they had to independently find a new job, and they did not expect any repatriation training. Only one participant thought that it was the organizations' responsibility to place him in a new position in the home country. In the end, he was offered a few job options, from which he selected one. However, as it was an unusual action, there

was not a clear process which would have determined how it is done nor a named person who would have been responsible of it.

One variable that is common for both traditional expatriates and the participants of this study is a change in the income level after return. According to Black et al. (1999, pp. 218-219), the financial shock relates to expatriates enjoying great non-monetary benefits on assignments, such as a fine house and a free car, but upon return these benefits are lost. For the rotational short-term assignees, the benefits on the assignments were in a monetary form, and after return, the income decreased significantly. The participants had to adapt their spending habits to the new income level, but it was not seen as a great issue.

Other organization variables that were discovered in this study relate to adjustment to interaction with colleagues in the home country, i.e. sociocultural adjustment at workplace. Sociocultural adjustment is about “the ability to fit in” (Ward & Kennedy, 1996, p. 290). Even though most of the participants of the study fitted in the general environment in Finland, some of them did not feel like fitting in the home organization. For example, one participant did not adjust to the department, in which the colleagues did not talk much, and another participant discovered it very strange that the colleagues in the new department did not know each other personally.

6.1.5 Nonwork variables

Like organization variables, nonwork variables are rather different for traditional expatriates and rotational short-term assignees. Nonwork variables affecting traditional expatriates’ repatriation adjustment include a drop in social status, housing conditions, and spouse’s repatriation adjustment (Black et al. 1999, pp. 219-223). None of these appeared in this study. One participant stated that his life on assignments was very similar to his life back in the home country, the only difference being the physical location. Another participant told that he lived in a hotel during assignments, and he was simply

happy to return to living at home. Also, as most of the participants' families stayed in the home country, there was no need for them to readjust to it. What is notable about rotational short-term assignees repatriation is that they and their family members must adjust to the new situation when the repatriate is at home full-time. The finding is in line with Starr and Currie's (2009) study about short-term assignees.

As stated before, for this study's participants it was easy to return to Finland because most of them had up-to-date information about it and they strongly identified with the home culture. Another reason for the easy general adjustment was that life was seen easy in Finland. Many repatriates had been on assignments in less developed countries and in distant locations. Contrary to traditional expatriates, this study's participants' general living conditions were often better in the home country than in those distant locations.

Another distinct feature about rotational short-term assignees is that their repatriation took place typically when there were other great changes in their life: often starting a family and having children. The changes in life situation bring additional challenges, but also joys. Despite disappointments in repatriation positions, most of the participants were still satisfied in their decision to repatriate. Seeing their children grow and finally having time to build a house or have hobbies had been worth the struggle of adjusting to the new type of work. Similarly to Kierner and Suutari's (2017) findings about long-term expatriates, it was discovered that having active free time and starting own projects, such as building a house, soon after return eased the repatriation adjustment process, because there was not time to dwell on potential challenges.

To conclude, there are many similarities in rotational short-term assignees' and traditional expatriates' repatriation adjustment challenges. The distinct feature of the rotational short-term assignees' repatriation adjustment process is that they had to adjust to work that had a completely different nature. A typical repatriation position, which was voluntarily selected by the repatriates themselves, typically included less active, less

physical, less sociable, and less rewarding tasks than what they were used to on the assignments. On the other hand, their readjustment to interaction with home-country nationals and to the general environment and culture in the home country was generally easy. That is because they were actively in touch with the home country and its nationals during assignments via the regular visits home and the continuous communication with family members and friends in the home country.

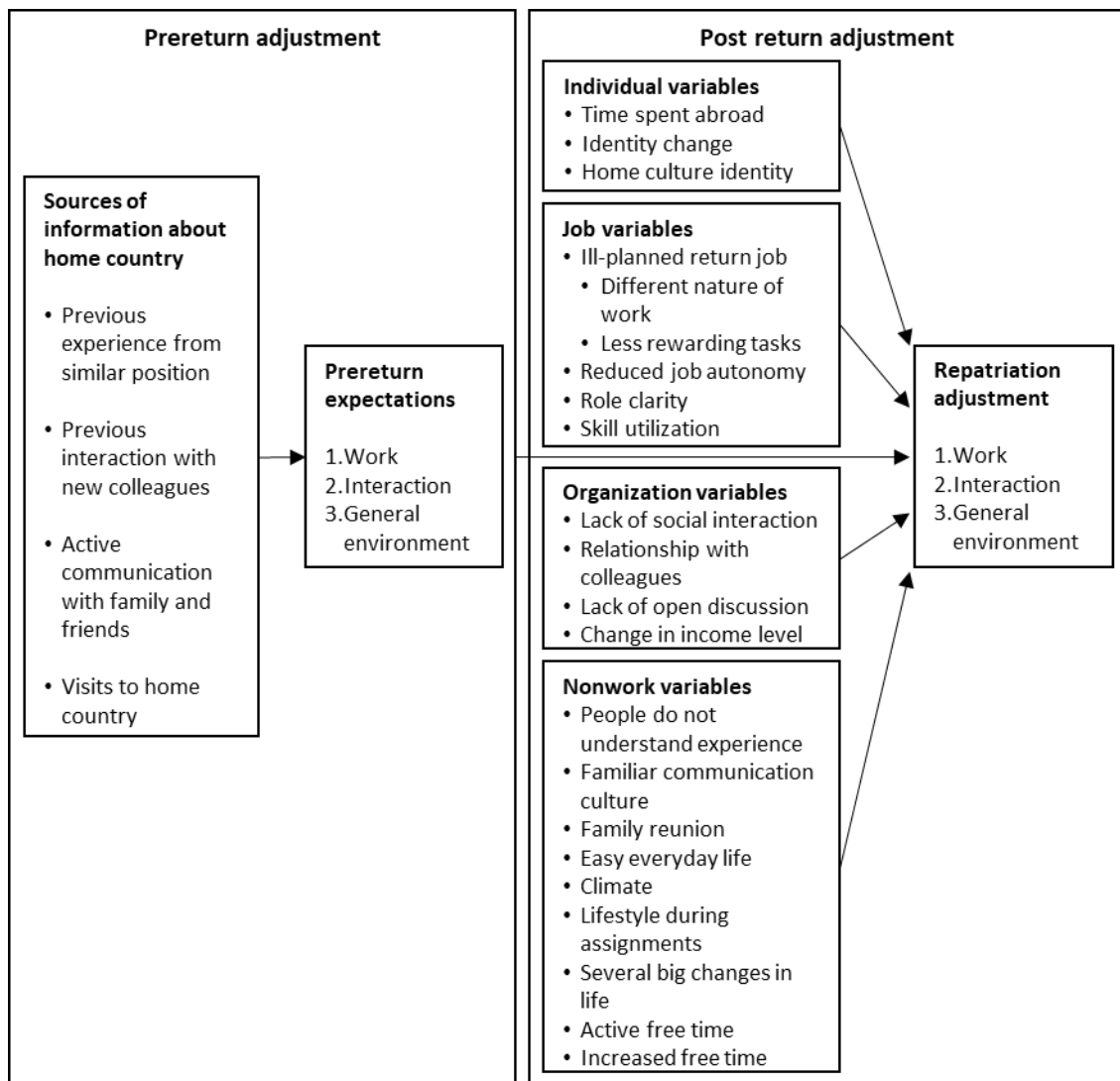


Figure 8 Repatriation adjustment of rotational short-term assignees.

As a result of this study, a rotational short-term assignees' repatriation adjustment model was created. It is presented in figure 8. Black et al.'s (1992) repatriation adjustment framework was used as a general structure of the model because of the similarities

of the adjustment process of the two repatriate groups. It is modified according to the findings of this study, and it includes the variables typical for repatriation adjustment of rotational short-term assignees. Of course, because the model is based on a single case study, it cannot be generalized. However, it provides a starting point for future research about rotational short-term assignees' repatriation.

6.2 Organizational support

Because most of the repatriation adjustment challenges discovered in this study relate to work adjustment, the organizational support mechanisms that were found useful focus on career matters. The only two mechanisms that relate to general adjustment are regular visits to the home country during assignments and vacation upon return. Both forms of support are discussed also in the literature about long-term expatriates.

According to Black et al. (1999, pp. 212-214), visits home are an important source of information about the home country. This study found that it is true also in the case of rotational short-term assignees. Researchers (Andreason & Kinneer, 2005; Bolino, 2007; Pattie et al., 2010) also suggest that visits to the home organization help expatriates to maintain professional contact to the colleagues in there. However, in this study it was discovered that even though the assignees visited the home organization every now and then, it was only for brief visits and it did not have a great effect on repatriation adjustment.

Vacation upon return was thought important in this study. The participants who had spent years abroad were happy about having time to settle their affairs and settle back at home. The case is very similar to long-term expatriates (see Black et al., 1999, p. 232), even though supposedly more rotational assignees than traditional expatriates have a permanent home in the home country, because their families live there. It was discovered that still some time off is needed to settle down before returning to work.

The rest of the support mechanisms discovered in this study relate to work. The most important factor that facilitates adjustment to work is the suitability of the position for the repatriating rotational short-term assignee. A suitable position is important also for long-term expatriates, but the problems are slightly different. Traditional expatriates might be unsatisfied because they are placed to lower positions or temporary holding positions to wait for better jobs (see e.g. Black et al., 1999, pp. 215-217). The rotational short-term assignees, on the other hand, repatriated typically to permanent positions through a regular recruitment process. However, the nature of the work in the new positions was very different from what they were used to. Adjustment to non-physical work with little variety in tasks, environments, and people was found to be challenging for the repatriates. That should be taken into account when planning the repatriation process.

While traditional expatriation literature highlights the importance of assignees' proactive role in repatriation (Andreason & Kinneer, 2005; O'Sullivan, 2002; Stevens et al., 2006), this study demonstrates that it alone is not enough to guarantee a successful repatriation adjustment. As illustrated in the findings, this study's participants were mostly very active in searching for a job individually. However, they did not always find the position to which they were selected suitable for them. That is why career counseling or some other way to assess assignees' skills and career goals, which are recommended for traditional expatriates (Andreason & Kinneer, 2005), could help finding a truly suitable position.

An important remark is that no attention was paid to knowledge transfer, which is a vast research field in traditional expatriates' repatriation (see e.g. Furuya et al., 2007). It must be noted that this study did not focus on knowledge transfer and that might be why the topic did not occur in the interviews. However, knowledge utilization was discussed with the participants, and no sign was found about the company trying to utilize the repatriates' international knowledge. If that is the case, the company could start utilizing the knowledge, because the rotational short-term assignees have a vast international experience after living in numerous countries in different continents.

Because many of this study's participants' expectations about the work after return were inaccurate, it is suggested to increase their knowledge about it. Several earlier studies (e.g. Andreason & Kinneer, 2005; Pattie et al., 2010; Vidal et al., 2010) illustrate that active information exchange between an assignee and the home organization helps repatriates to create more accurate work expectations and thus, it facilitates their adjustment to work (Black et al., 1992; Cox et al., 2013). Especially a mentor from the home organization may help assignees to prepare for repatriation (Andreason & Kinneer, 2005; Black et al., 1999, pp. 212-213; Bolino, 2007; Cox et al., 2013; Wu et al., 2014). Thus, the company could assign mentors for the assignees who plan to repatriate. It would be extremely helpful if a mentor had had similar experiences in their past, because peer support was discovered to be helpful in repatriation adjustment.

Similar to the previous study about short-term assignees' repatriation (Starr, 2009), this study's participants' repatriation was managed in an ad hoc manner because an organized process for managing it did not exist. Earlier studies illustrate that carefully and early planned repatriation process enhance successful repatriation results (Jassawalla et al., 2004; Starr, 2009). Also, the importance of early planning was recognized by the participants of this study. That is because often the decision to repatriate happens very suddenly, at least from the organization's point of view, and thus, it does not have time to react to it. Black et al. (1999, pp. 223-224) suggest companies to start planning the repatriation six months before return. This could be a useful timeline also for rotational short-term assignees' management.

In this study, it was discovered that a repatriation team, which would consist of a repatriating assignee's supervisor and an HR representative, would be useful for rotational short-term assignees. Open communication between an assignee and the supervisor could enable early repatriation planning. It would be beneficial to involve the HR in the process, because it could assess the knowledge and career goals of the repatriate and try to match those with available jobs. Repatriation team is recommended also for traditional expatriates by Black et al. (1999, pp. 223-224). Also, it is recognized in previous

expatriate studies (e.g. Howe-Walsh & Torka, 2017) that HR professionals and line managers are the key persons to provide successful repatriation support. Black et al. (1999, p. 225) recommend a repatriation team to focus on the risk group, i.e. those who have been abroad for the longest and those who return from countries with the greatest cultural distance. Based on this study, repatriation adjustment is the most difficult for those who have spent the most time abroad, not so much for those who repatriate from highly different cultures. Thus, it would be relevant to focus on those who have been abroad for extended periods regardless of the countries in which they have been.

To summarize, rotational short-term assignees' repatriation support is somewhat similar to the repatriation support that is suggested for traditional expatriates. The main difference is that rotational assignees' repatriation support should focus on ways to ensure a suitable re-entry position, while it is recommended that also cultural training is offered for traditional expatriates. In addition, it might be more difficult to plan rotational assignees' than traditional expatriates' repatriation, because their repatriation date is not set in advance. That is why open communication and trust between a rotational short-term assignee and his or her supervisor is important. It makes it easier to early recognize the assignees' wishes to repatriate and thus gives time for the repatriate and the organization to consider the next possible positions.

7 Conclusion

This chapter concludes the study. First, a summary of the research is given and answers to the research questions are provided. Then, managerial and theoretical implications of the study are discussed. After that, limitations of the study are identified. Finally, ideas for future research are suggested.

The aim of this study was to increase the knowledge of short-term assignments, because despite the significant increase of their popularity, STAs remain relatively little studied. This study focused on investigating the repatriation adjustment of rotational short-term assignees. More specifically, it aimed to provide practical suggestions to organizations about the management of rotational short-term assignees' repatriation. This study filled a research gap, because rotational short-term assignees' repatriation adjustment had not been studied before.

The research met its objectives and provided answers to the research questions. Chapter 7.1 provides practical answers to the main research question: *'How organizations can support rotational international short-term assignees' repatriation adjustment?'* The first sub question was: *'What challenges there are in repatriation adjustment of rotational short-term assignees?'* The findings indicate that the challenges of rotational short-term assignees are partly similar to long-term assignees, mostly because both spend several years abroad before repatriation. However, rotational short-term assignees' repatriation challenges were discovered to focus more on adjustment to work and less on adjustment to the general environment. In particular, adjustment to a different natured work was discovered difficult.

The second sub question was: *'Which support mechanisms have been experienced as useful and what kind of additional support rotational short-term assignees would have wished for?'* The empirical study revealed that the case company did not have a defined process for managing the rotational assignees' repatriation. Nevertheless, it provided some support mechanisms, which were found to facilitate repatriation adjustment:

regular visits to the home country during assignments and vacation upon return. Also, the repatriation schedule was flexibly agreed with the old and the new managers, and orientation to the new position was provided. One participant had received support also in finding a new position. In addition, it was thought that career counseling and career management support would ease adjustment to work. Moreover, peer support was found useful in repatriation adjustment. The following section provides more practical advice on supporting rotational short-term assignees' repatriation.

7.1 Managerial implications

This section summarizes the organizational support mechanisms that were found useful in rotational short-term assignees' repatriation adjustment. As the research is commissioned by the case company, and the findings are based on the case company only, also the suggestions are directed to the company. However, the suggestions might be useful also in other organizations, which employ rotational short-term assignees.

The study indicates that systematical management of rotational short-term assignees' repatriation could facilitate their repatriation adjustment. More specifically, career management support was found useful. Based on the findings, the case company is suggested to form a repatriation team, which includes an assignee's manager and an HR professional. Managers have an important role in early discovery of assignees' wishes to repatriate. They should try to create trust and an atmosphere that encourages assignees to open communication. Early discovery of repatriation plans is important because repatriation should be planned, not managed ad hoc. It is suggested that the HR department should be involved in the process. They should assess repatriates' skills and career wishes. Career counseling would clarify repatriates' career goals and thus, make it easier for them to find more suitable roles for them.

Also, the case company should consider whether it is possible to arrange more flexible working options, for example, a possibility for remote work. It would enable repatriates

to apply for positions more widely if they were not restricted to a specific location where repatriates would not want to move into. Also, as one of the biggest challenges discovered in the study was the different nature of the job, managers are suggested to consider whether it is possible to reshape re-entry positions in a way that they would involve more physical work, traveling or a higher variety of tasks to which repatriates are used to.

In addition, it is suggested to maintain a possibility to regularly visit the home country, because visits home were discovered to facilitate repatriation adjustment. Moreover, managers are suggested to provide vacation for repatriates so that they may settle down before returning to work.

Finally, the case company is advised to form peer support groups or provide repatriates a mentor from the home organization. The mentoring or peer support sessions should start already before return so that repatriates would be aware of the possible repatriation challenges and could mentally prepare for them.

7.2 Theoretical implications

This research increases the general knowledge of short-term assignments. It broadens Starr's (2009) findings about short-term assignees' repatriation by addressing the repatriation adjustment of rotational short-term assignees. This study confirms Starr's (2009) discovery about short-term assignees' repatriation not being always easy and unproblematic. This is true especially in the case of rotational short-term assignees. Short-term assignees' repatriation was earlier considered easy, because often an assignee simply returns to his or her old position, or leaves for a following short-term assignment (Starr, 2009; Tahvanainen et al., 2005). However, as discovered in this study, a rotational short-term assignees' assignment career comes to an end at some point, and then he or she will repatriate. At that point, he or she might have been abroad even longer than a typical long-term expatriate, and he or she does not have a position in the home organization

to which return. That is why challenges in repatriation adjustment occur, and that is why further attention to short-term assignees' repatriation should be paid.

The main theoretical contribution of this study is a model of rotational short-term assignees' repatriation adjustment. Earlier repatriation adjustment models were created mainly based on traditional long-term expatriates' experiences. Thus, this model provides novel information about rotational short-term assignees' repatriation. As the model is created based on a single case study and a relatively small sample, it cannot be generalized. However, it provides a base for further research about the subject. The following sections provide more detailed information about the limitations of this study and future research ideas related to the topic.

7.3 Limitations of the study

Like studies typically, this research has some limitations. The most significant limitation is that the research was conducted as a single case study. Thus, the findings are based on a specific group and cannot be generalized to cover all rotational short-term assignees. Challenges in repatriation adjustment and solutions to them might differ between fields, companies, and professions. Also, as all the participants were Finns, it is not known whether rotational short-term assignees' repatriation adjustment experiences are different in other countries. In addition, due to the time restrictions of the master's thesis, this study was cross-sectional, even though a longitudinal approach could have provided more valuable information about the change and development of the studied phenomenon. In order to verify the created rotational short-term assignees' repatriation adjustment model, more research is needed. The next section discusses it more in detail and gives further research suggestions.

7.4 Suggestions for future research

Because of the previously mentioned limitations, the rotational short-term assignees' repatriation adjustment model should be tested in other contexts, for example, in different countries and companies, to see whether the findings of this study are specific for this target group or if they are universal. Also, quantitative research would help to discover to what extent the support mechanisms found in this study affect rotational short-term assignees' repatriation adjustment. In addition, a longitudinal study could further investigate the effectiveness of the support mechanisms.

Also, because this study focused only on repatriation adjustment, future research could investigate also other outcomes of repatriation. In addition to repatriation adjustment, successful repatriation outcomes include high retention rates and the abilities to utilize the newly gained international knowledge through successful knowledge-transfer. Thus, rotational short-term assignee's repatriation retention could be studied to discover whether high turnover rates are a problem among them. In addition, as rotational short-term assignees gain vast international knowledge, it could be studied further to investigate whether the knowledge could be utilized in organizations.

Another interesting research topic would be the well-being of rotational short-term assignees and their families. The interviews with the repatriates illustrated that many had been worried about the separation from their family and the physically demanding work on assignments. Many participants repatriated because of these reasons even though they would have wanted to continue the assignment work. Thus, it would be interesting to study how rotational assignees' well-being could be improved and how their assignment careers could be lengthened so that they could continue the work they enjoy doing.

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Appendix. Interview guide

Background questions:

1. For how long have you been employed by the company?
2. For how long did you do the assignment work?
 - a. What was the position? What type of work did you do there?
 - b. To where did you travel?
 - c. How many assignments did you complete?
 - d. How long were they?
 - e. How often did you visit home? For how long?
 - f. When did you repatriate?
3. Did you work in the home organization before you started the assignment work?
4. What is your current position?
5. Do you have a spouse or children?
 - a. Did they accompany you in the assignments?
 - i. At your own cost or paid by the company?
6. How old are you?
7. What is your education?
8. Could you tell about your experiences about the assignment work (advantages, disadvantages, how it is special)?

Repatriation adjustment:

9. Could you describe your experiences with repatriation?
10. What did you expect from repatriation and how did the reality meet those expectations?
11. How do you find life in Finland after spending many years abroad? Has something been especially easy or difficult? How did you readjust...
 - a. ... to your job
 - b. ... to the organization
 - c. ... to interaction with home-country colleagues and friends

d. ... to the general environment and culture of Finland?

12. Anything to add about repatriation adjustment?

Organizational support:

13. Who was involved in the repatriation process?

14. Could you describe your experiences with those involved in the repatriation process?

15. Did you receive support before repatriation, if yes, what kind of support?

16. Did you receive support after repatriation, if yes, what kind of support?

17. Could you describe the effects of successful and failing organizational support for repatriation?

18. What, if any, improvements would you recommend to improve the repatriation process?