



Vaasan yliopisto
UNIVERSITY OF VAASA

Viktor Pichard

Comparison of Expatriation management in the West and the East: HR consultancy perspective

School of Management
Master's thesis in International Business
MIB Program

Vaasa 2021

UNIVERSITY OF VAASA**School of Management**

Author: Viktor Pichard
Title of the Thesis: Comparison of Expatriation management in the West and the East: HR consultancy perspective
Degree: Master of Science in Economics and Business Administration
Programme: Master's Degree in International Business
Supervisor: Ausrine Silenskyte
Year: 2021 **Pages:** 86

ABSTRACT:

Expatriation management is an important branch of international human resources in which companies need help from consultants. With the emergence of important new countries in the globalization process such as China or Korea, expatriation is no longer reserved for Westerners. Among the new actors, Confucian countries which foster familial values, modesty, and hard work are particularly active in their integration into the global economy. These new actors may not have the same attitude or vision of business as their Western counterparts. The goal of the thesis is to understand how expatriation consultants can serve best their Western and Eastern customers. In particular, what differences expatriation consultants should consider and address when seeking successful support for the customers from these two diverse cultural clusters. There are studies on the differences between the expatriation processes in the East and the West, but consultancy perspective has been significantly overlooked.

The literature review elaborates on the Western and Eastern expatriation process and provides a short overview of the consultancy industry. Expatriate management can be divided into three main phases: pre-departure, during the assignment, and repatriation. In each of them, similarities and differences in two cultural clusters were observed. Then, empirical research explores to what extent and in what ways consultants should follow available suggestions when serving their Eastern and Western customers. A case study was conducted in 4 consultancies in expatriate management from Europe. Consultancy managers were interviewed and secondary data was collected.

Based on the analysis, consultants believe that the nationality and cultural background of the expatriate or company do not have a significant influence on expatriate management. Culture may have some influence on the behavior or vision during expatriation, but the flow of work and issues involved do not change. The main explanation for such phenomenon relies on the globalization that standardized business practices. Due to high turnover in HR staff of clients, the most challenging part for consultants is working with changing HR staffs that may not share the same vision of policies as their previous peers. It involves a high level of adaptability from consultants.

The industry of expatriate management is divided into three main parts: strategic consulting, immigration, and relocation. Each consultancy has a very different field of expertise but is all linked to one important topic which is compensation. The industry is characterized by coopetition rather than competition, consultancies know each other and may recommend peers for specific enquiries out of their scope. Great consultants are people who have strong compliance knowledge and good communication skills. Among all the findings some were astonishing: In the moribund context of COVID-19, consultants are optimistic about the future of their industry.

KEYWORDS: Expatriate management, Assigned Expatriate, Consultancy, West, East

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Abbreviations

IHRM: International Human Resources Management

HR: Human resources

AE: Assigned expatriate

SIE: Self-initiated expatriate

1 Introduction

The current pandemic situation has somehow disrupted the way people are doing business. Borders have been closed, business visas have not been issued and meetings are now held on videoconferencing. COVID-19 has not only raised people's awareness about humanity's way of consumption and damage to the environment but also shown the differences in management and values between Western countries and Eastern countries. Each country deals with the virus differently and has unlike results. It could be easily argued that expatriation belongs to the past and that consulting in expatriate management is at a dead end. However, the latest developments show that we are nearing a turning point against the COVID-19 since promising vaccines are showing up (World Health Organization, 2020). Moreover, many countries may have closed their borders but other countries such as France are still allowing foreigners who carry an important professional task to come to France (French Minister of Home Affairs, 2021). Thus, expatriation is still possible, but its complexity has even increased because every move from one country to another should be properly justified. Managing expatriation in this complexity requires professionals in the field.

Countries understood that businesses must go on despite the epidemic situation. In this reboot of the global economy, International Human Resources Management (IHRM) will play an important role and firms will have to fight for having the best talents (Deresky, 2017). IHRM is at the core of global strategies for firms (Deresky, 2017). Expatriation management is one of the components of IHRM. Managing expatriate management involves handling uneasy situations and need specific skills or knowledge that might not be required in the day-to-day life of an HR department. Small, Big, generalists or specialist consultancies are therefore needed to bring their expertise to firms (Kubr, 2002). The critical importance of consultancy has been characterized by rapid growth in the need for consultancy in IHRM (Kubr, 2002). In the East as in the West, there are plenty of misconceptions and clichés about expatriates. Among them, there is the idea that expatriation is a "financial windfall" (McEvoy & Buller, 2013, p. 217). Consequently, there is a real need for informed advice in the field of expatriate management: this is the mission of

consultants in expatriate management. Firms cannot send people abroad without taking into consideration their strategic expertise.

The topic of expatriate management offers a broad picture of managerial skills and traits from firms within the same culture. The recent events have shown that Westerners do not have any more overwhelming control over the global economy. Based on Buchholz (2020), among the five highest-valued startups in the world in 2020, two were Chinese (1st and 4th). At last but not least, in 2019, the number of French people officially settled into Mainland China was estimated at 28,934 persons (French ministry of Europe and Foreign affairs, 2020) while the number of Chinese citizens settled in France was estimated at 100,441 persons (INSEE, 2021). This statistic shows a turning trend in the economic figures.

1.1 Theoretical framework and research gap

Most of the textbooks used to teach international human resource management have an important section on international assignments. Several important topics can be found: MNC staffing policies, motivation, and process for posting an employee overseas, and assessment of the success of an assignment (Reiche & Harzing, 2019). All these strategic elements may heavily influence an assignment and its modality. An assignment is usually divided into 3 parts: selection and preparation, during the assignment, and repatriation (Bonache et al., 2001). Each section has different issues and the theoretical comprehension of some parts of expatriation such as the decision to accept or the compensation of the expatriate are less researched (McEvoy & Buller, 2013).

With the emergence of globalization and the development of Asian countries, Eastern firms began to send expatriates abroad. Scholars in IHRM were wondering if the practices in Eastern companies would differ much from their Western counterparts. Thus, some studies such as Tung (1982), Shen & Edwards (2004), or Shen & Darby (2006) were providing food for thought to researchers. However, there is still an important gap between what is known for Westerners and Easterners. Based on Zhong et al., (2015) paper,

it has been shown that the Sino-Western literature focuses more on Western expatriates working in China rather than Chinese expatriates working in Western countries. On 84 English academic papers, 72 were about Foreigners working in China and 12 about Chinese working abroad. This example illustrates the intensity of the gap.

As showed by textbooks and different studies, expatriation management can be complex and difficult to handle, and theoretical knowledge might be lacking. When facing complex business issues, companies might seek help from consultants because they aim to help businesses (Kubr, 2002). Thanks to their knowledge and experience, consultants in expatriation management can solve clients' issues. They are probably among the best interlocutors to speak with about expatriation management because they have an external and fresh point of view on problems related to expatriate management. Unfortunately, they are forgotten by scholars on expatriate management. Putting aside BIG 4 companies (DELOITTE, KPMG, EY, PWC) reports and global textbooks on consulting such as Kubr (2002), it is difficult to find any study on them. Not only their experience in consulting is interesting but also their cultural experiences with different customers and expatriates. It is thus appealing to see if they need there is any difference in the way they work with their Eastern and Western clients.

1.2 Justification for the study

Expatriate management is a complex topic in IHRM. There is an increasing amount of specialists in the consultancy area, and clients expect them to provide accurate answers to their issues (Kubr, 2002). Managing expatriates should not be overlooked because any failure or early return can be very costly for firms (Deresky, 2017). Expatriates usually go abroad to carry on a very important mission. Parent national country (PCN) expatriates are sent abroad to display their skills, fill in some skills gaps in the local country, and help in setting up new operations (Lakshman & Jiang, 2016; Tungli & Peiperl, 2009). They are also required in a position where a high level of trust is needed (Lin et al., 2012). IHR managers are responsible to find the best persons to develop "future leaders" (Mendenhall et al., 2003) so that the global strategy of the company may succeed. For all the

reasons mentioned above, managers and consultants have a limited margin of errors when implementing global IHRM strategies.

To provide correct advice, consultants should understand the environment in which their clients evolve and their mindset. Regarding their mindsets, whether it is in the workplace or personal life, Western and Eastern countries are very different. When dealing with Western clients, it is required to consider key cultural elements such as individualism, pragmatism, bureaucracy, and the significant role of the boss (Browaeys & Price, 2019). Concerning Eastern clients, it is required to consider key Confucian concepts that preach harmony among the group and people's dignity (Browaeys & Price, 2019). These gaps between cultures have for sure consequences on the workplace operations and management (see table below). They should be understood by consultants so that they can deliver appropriate services. However, it is unknown if these differences have any impact on consultancy work.

Table 1: Key practical differences in management between Westerners and Easterners (Based on Rattray, 1998).

Management practices	
West	East
Equality, excellence, and individual skills are the basis of a relationship.	Mutual benefits, sense of duty, and the community are the basis of a relationship.
There is a clear distinction between personal and professional relationships.	Inside a group, everyone is regarded as a friend.
Problems should be resolved as soon as possible according to the firm's principle.	Conflict should be avoided, and face saved.
The creation of opinion is based on debates and individual thinking.	The leaders represent the opinion of the group.
Individual performances are rewarded through individual rewards.	Benefits need to be somehow shared with the group.

These differences shown in the table above may have several implications in many parts of the expatriation process. For instance, conflicts should be avoided, and face saved in

for Easterners. How do Western consultants deal with any issue if confrontation should be avoided? Are Easterners able to negotiate their expatriation package? How Westerners may have a successful expatriation whilst changing their thinking paradigm? All these questions are partially answered without the opinion of consultants who are experts in the field. Thus, there is a real need to look closer at their job.

1.3 Research question and objectives

The degree of awareness on the necessity to implement good practices in expatriate management may greatly vary from one country to another. In the US, there is a real awareness that expatriate management involves many issues and IHRM managers are seeking ways to fix them or at least to know more about them (McEvoy & Buller, 2013). However, in a country like China, this awareness is much more limited since firms may have no formal framework for expatriate management (Shen & Darby, 2006). These difference in awareness certainly implies a different approach from the consultants to help companies to implement the right expatriation process.

As discussed in the introduction, HR consultants need to work with a broad range of firms and different expatriates. It is the perfect topic to investigate the way they should work with them and how do they adapt themselves to this diversity of clients. The differences among Westerners and Easterners may have direct consequences on the management of expatriates from the consultant's perspective which has not been well covered by current studies. The chosen research topic for this paper is:

“How HR consultancies should support their Eastern and Western customers in order to help them succeed in managing the expatriation process?”

To effectively answer this research question, three objectives have been set. The main philosophy is to try to see the main differences between the West and the East in the expatriation management process. After having the big picture of these difference, this paper will try to see how and to what extent HR consultant can help with these issues:

1. *To understand the role of global HR consultancies in supporting companies in expatriate management.*
2. *To understand the differences in expatriate management between the East and the West.*
3. *To understand the practical implications of the differences observed in point 2 for IHRM consultants.*

1.4 Key concepts and delimitation

This subsection aims to give some important definitions to enhance the readability of the thesis. Two important notions will be discussed: East vs West and expatriation nomenclature.

1.4.1 Expatriation

According to the dictionary, an expatriate is “someone who does not live in their own country” (Cambridge Dictionnary, 2021). For scholars, this definition might be too broad. There are several types of expatriation that might exist in the literature: self-initiated expatriate (SIEs) and assigned expatriates (AEs) (Andresen et al., 2015). The difference in definition between migrants and SIEs might also be unclear (Guo & Ariss, 2015). However, some key elements may help to differentiate them such as the origin/destination of the mobility, status of the person, length of stay, and the reason (voluntary or involuntary) to go abroad (Al Ariss, 2010). Some studies in the field indicate that the profile between an AE and an SIE is different. For instance, a SIEs sample can be described as younger, with more women and more working spouses (Suutari & Brewster, 2000). This subsection does not aim to bring an exhaustive list of all the differences between SIEs, AEs, and migrants but rather gives some key elements for clear comprehension.

Table 2: Factual differences between AE and SIE (Adapted from Crowley-Henry, 2007; Suutari & Brewster, 2000).

	AE	SIE
Employer	Go abroad through his current employer	May have another employer
Type of contract	Employee of the parent country	Local contract only and more temporary
Support	Financial (Allowance, Flight tickets)	Fewer bonuses or even no support
Repatriation	For sure in the home organization and country	Unpredictable, might be permanently abroad

Consistent with the research question and objective of this paper (HR consultancies and their clients), the scope of the study is mainly restricted to AEs because consultants mostly work for firms.

1.4.2 East and West

It is important to clarify West and East notions that are involved in the title and research question. According to Kase et al., 2011 (as cited in Browaeys & Price, 2019), managers can be split into two categories according to their way of thinking: “Western” refers to European and Northern American managers who use “deductive thinking” when facing issues (p.95). The term “East” refers to eastern Asians are more likely to use “inductive thinking” when managing (p.95).

Furthermore, the Asian continent can be divided into two important clusters: Confucian Asia¹ and Southern Asia² cluster (Chhokar et al., 2007). The first cluster includes countries or regions that have a strong exposition worldwide and are well-known abroad (K-Pop, Manga, Belt and Road Initiative...). In this paper, for feasibility study

¹ China, Japan, Hong Kong, Korea, Taiwan and Singapore

² India, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand

reasons, we will only consider the Confucian Asia cluster. Another relevant argument is that Confucian countries have a relatively more developed economy and are better integrated into the global economy than their counterparts of Southern Asia.

1.5 Structure of the study

This thesis comprises 7 parts and follows the structure recommended by Tidström (2016). The first part is composed of an introduction where the relevance of the topic is presented as well as the purpose of the study and the research question.

The second and third part is the theoretical part that is separated into 3 main parts: Expatriation management in the West, expatriation management in the East. An overview of consulting in international human resources is provided as a fourth section.

The fifth part is the methodological part where the chosen approach to carry this study is justified. Cases are presented in this section. The validity and reliability of the data generated is also assessed.

The sixth part presents the main findings of the case study. The findings are presented in a way that the more general ones will appear first and the more complex ones at the end. A discussion with the existing literature review on the topic will be held.

The seventh and final part is the conclusion. It aims to answer the research question, measure the theoretical and managerial contribution of the paper, indicate its limitation, and suggest the way forward for other studies on the topic.

2 Expatriate Management in the West

This chapter will focus on expatriate management in the West. By West, it refers to European and Northern American managers who use “deductive thinking” when facing issues (Kase et al., 2011 as cited in Browaeys & Price, 2019). Expatriate management is the management of employees who are parent or third-country nationals that are sent abroad by the company to carry some tasks (Deresky, 2017).

2.1 Pre-departure

The pre-departure section encompasses 3 main steps: Recruitment and selection, the acceptance of the assignment, and the training (McEvoy & Buller, 2013).

It is widespread in the West that men have more ease to move up the professional ladder than women. For Australian and US MNCs, it is also most likely that the expatriate would be a man (Adler, 1984b; Anderson, 2005). The US expatriate is usually a young and educated man (Adler, 1984b). Women are not selected because of stereotypes among the managers; they believe that women may not succeed abroad, that foreigners may lack respect toward them or that women are not interested in assignments abroad (Adler, 1984b). These stereotypes can also be considered as an excuse for not selecting them (Kollinger, 2005). Most companies in their practice could not make a difference in the acceptance rate of expatriation between genders (Kollinger, 2005). Based on the literature, the Western expatriate could be defined as a young and educated man. Nevertheless, it seems that companies are more open to diversity than before: In 1984, women expatriates accounted for 3% of expatriate managers in North American MNCs (Adler, 1984a). More recent studies suggest a better percentage such as 12% in Austrian companies (Kollinger, 2005) or 15% in big MNCs (Feldman & Bolino, 1999).

Selecting the right profile for expatriation is important for companies. IHRM (International Human Resource Management) is at the core of the implementation of global strategies (Deresky, 2017). In many countries such as China and Singapore, the current

legislation has reduced the number of expatriates that Western firms can roll out locally (Lakshman & Jiang, 2016). Therefore, there is increasing pressure on selecting the right person since slots are limited (Lakshman & Jiang, 2016). It is expected from the expatriate that they display their skills and experience abroad (Tungli & Peiperl, 2009). It is difficult to draw patterns in terms of recruitment processes because each company may have a different process. According to Tung (1982), in the case of US and west European companies, there is the awareness that the spouse should be interviewed and usually, there is no test performed to evaluate the competence of the candidate (Tung, 1982; Tungli & Peiperl, 2009). Despite that, the technical skills of the expatriate are usually the most important criteria for selecting the expatriate (Anderson, 2005). Interpersonal skills are taken into consideration but not as much as technical skills (Anderson, 2005). Based on the two previous paragraphs, the western expatriate is young, educated, and technically skilled.

The nature of recruitment and selection might be highly informal. Harris & Brewster, (1999) research on expatriate selection gives a list of characteristics of a good candidate. It implies that IHRM will follow these characteristics when evaluating candidates. However, the reality of expatriate selection within 9 British MNCs showed that expatriate selection is usually not a “formal/open” process but rather a “closed/informal” process. Most of the expatriates are selected through “the coffee-machine” system: 1 male HRM and 1 male colleague at the coffee machine will decide who may be a good fit for an assignment. From this coffee meeting, the HRM manager will see the person recommended by his colleague and have an informal meeting on the conditions of the assignment. Finally, the HR manager in charge of the selection has little margin if the manager of the assignment has already an idea of who is going to go abroad (Anderson, 2005; McEvoy & Buller, 2013).

Selecting the right candidate is not enough, he or she should accept to go abroad. All individuals are influenced by factors when deciding. According to Borstorff et al., (1997)

many factors may influence the consent or rejection of an international assignment. Being single or in a relationship without children raise the probability to accept the assignment. Having a previous positive international experience or at least a positive attitude toward international increases also the possibility of a departure. The level of support (financial, training, career, mentoring...) provided by the company is also highly assessed by the employee and his/her spouse. Among the crucial factors, the spouse is one of the most important factors that the Western expatriate needs to weigh with the possible loss of a second income (Borstorff et al., 1997; McEvoy & Buller, 2013). Spouses highly involved in its career may be reluctant to move (Borstorff et al., 1997). Since men are most frequently selected for foreign assignments, they need to find a compromise mostly with their female partners. Children's education is also key to the decision (McEvoy & Buller, 2013). There is in the West a raising awareness on the equality between men and women, therefore, women should not have to give up on their careers for their husbands.

Assessing whether a new assignment or new role in a new country is good for yourself is a very normal process. Another important question that may cross the expatriate minds is: Can I freely refuse or not this new assignment? In the sample of US MNCs made by McEvoy & Buller (2013), they found that in 75% there was no pressure to accept the assignment abroad. For the other 25% companies might have pressured the expatriate to accept the assignment and to go abroad. Consequently, it can be said that in most of the case there is no issue with saying no to an assignment abroad. An important explication can be found in the individuality of Western societies. Based on Hofstede's framework, several countries such as the US, UK, Canada, and even France scored (out of 100) respectively in "individualism": 91, 89, 80, and 71 (Hofstede Insight, 2020).

After having rightfully selected the expatriate and that the latest one gave his approval, the HR manager or mobility department needs to decide if the expatriate should follow any training and its modality (topic, time and budget allocated...) (Deresky, 2017; Reiche

& Harzing, 2019). It has been proven that there are positive effects of training on expatriates' performance (McEvoy & Buller, 2013; Tung, 1982). Aside from language training, training should help expatriates to feel more comfortable in their new host country (Deresky, 2017). Training can be provided before departure or on arrival. In a study on French MNCs, 43% of 206 participants have received Pre-departure CCT and 40% In-country CCT (Wurtz, 2014).

It seems that the perception of utility and training has been evolving in the West. For instance, Tung (1982) showed that a majority of US firms did not provide training for expatriates. This fact is confirmed by several studies on the topic: language preparation did not seem important to top managers of US firms (Baliga & Baker, 1985). Cross-cultural training was usually short and performed in-house (Baliga & Baker, 1985). However, it led to the fact that US expatriates were not sufficiently prepared for the Chinese environment (Weiss & Bloom, 1990). Nevertheless, US firms nowadays provide more complete training with language and cross-cultural training than before (Tungli & Peiperl, 2009). This move from US firms can be seen as a way to give to expatriates the opportunity to hold all the cards to succeed in their tasks abroad. On the contrary, Europeans have reduced the quantity of training that they were providing over time (Tungli & Peiperl, 2009).

Table 3: Synthesis of the pre-departure process in the West.

	Selection of the Western profile	Acceptance of the Assignment	Training
Summary of the literature review	Young, educated, and skilled man. On-going progress for gender equality.	Several factors such as the spouse, children, and education. Can refuse freely an assignment.	Can be done before or after arrival. US firms improved their standards while Europeans stagnated.
Limitation	A gap between the rational theorized processes of expatriation management, and the reality of the companies.	Research is limited on this aspect of expatriation and it is a very subjective topic since everyone has their own opinion on going abroad.	There are stills ongoing debates on whether training is useful or not (Selmer et al., 1998)

2.2 During the assignment

There are several important topics in this section such as the adjustment, performance, compensation, and early return (i.e., failure) of the expatriate. This section aims to give a brief overview of these topics.

“Although I am not certain, I think culture shocks affects wives more than husbands.” (Oberg, 1960, p. 179). At a time when the studies on expatriate management were at a very preliminary stage, there was already the intuition that spouses (i.e., wives) were more likely to be more affected by adjustment issues rather than the expatriate himself (i.e., the husband). Nowadays, studies have somewhat clarified the topic and it seems that he had sound judgments, at least for the West (Oberg, 1960). For US firms, adjustment issues are more related to the spouse rather than the expatriate himself because sometimes the spouse is unable to get a working visa, and being inactive is difficult to bear (McEvoy & Buller, 2013). He or she cannot fit into the new environment and these issues also exist in the case of West European companies (Tung, 1982). The spousal issue

is important in the Western context and IHRM managers are working on fixing this issue. However, this issue is not the only one. For US firms it may be argued that the lack of preparation might be one of the reasons for early returns. A positive link between increasing standards of expatriate management and the reduction of the early return rate can be observed for US firms (Tungli & Peiperl, 2009).

Expatriate needs to have adequate compensation for the best adjustment and performance. For US firms, compensation varies a lot from one company to another (McEvoy & Buller, 2013). Being fair in the compensation to avoid hostile behavior from host countries national and third countries national who do similar work is a complex issue because they can sometimes feel that expatriates are overpaid (McEvoy & Buller, 2013). US IHRM managers are worried about the individual performances of people because of these differences in pay (McEvoy & Buller, 2013). However, there is a tendency among firms to reduce and rationalize costs of expatriation (Deresky, 2017; McNulty & Inkson, 2013). They adopted significant changes in their policies toward expatriates: from a generous *balance sheet* approach (full package home-based), they adjusted their package to a *Local plus* approach (host-based) that is much more economical in terms of cost (McNulty & Inkson, 2013).

Firms need to invest an important amount of money in their expatriates, they are therefore very interested in evaluating their productivity. Based on Gregersen et al., (1996) empirical study, US firms tend to use mostly use two criteria to assess expatriate performance. They usually utilize a combination of “hard criteria” (i.e., market shares) and “soft criteria” (i.e., interpersonal interaction, cross-cultural skills...). Most US firms have at least 2 persons to rate the expatriate. Expatriates are mostly rated on an annual basis by their immediate superiors who are mainly based in the home country, but it cannot be excluded that the expatriate may be rated by a host-country colleague (1/3 of cases). In the US context, customized appraisal formal is considered less accurate and more subjective than a standardized appraisal. This is a major issue for firms because the main

consequence of avoiding customized appraisal forms is that they cannot gather complete exact information on what is going on abroad.

Table 4: Synthesis of the during expatriation process.

	Adjustment	Compensation	Evaluation
Summary of the literature review	The spouse is the main reason for the lack of adjustment.	Rationalization of the costs associated with expatriation.	Personalized feedback, with at least two superiors to expatriate involved in the process.
Limitation	The reality is more complex than the individual or the external environment matter. Local employees can play an important role in the adjustment of the expatriate. (Slama, 2014)	Each company may have a different policy in compensation. Thus, generalizing is somewhat difficult.	Each company may have different criteria and ways to evaluate expatriates.

2.3 After the assignment

Expatriate management continues after the assignment abroad. There is an ultimate phase after the assignment abroad which is repatriation. Repatriation is a key moment in the expatriation process and US firms are well-aware of it (McEvoy & Buller, 2013). US human resources managers are aware that their repatriation process should be improved (McEvoy & Buller, 2013). A qualitative study by Kimber (2019) on US Christian expatriates might provide some answers. Companies conventionally help the expatriates with the house move and in finding a new job because they believe that this is the most crucial item in repatriation. Unfortunately, for most expatriates, the greatest difficulty lies in the readaptation to their native culture after being a long time exposed and even

internalized a foreign one. The loss of social connection and the need to build new ones in their home country is an important challenge. There is the impression among expatriates that companies put the heaviest effort in the pre-departure, and somehow neglect the repatriation part. This qualitative work is consistent with prior studies on the topic (Bailey & Dragoni, 2013). In conclusion, issues in repatriation in the West might be linked to a lack of comprehension of the expatriates' needs. Companies believe that providing a job and physical help for moving to a new house is enough. However, this is not the case.

The repatriation section is also concerned with limitations. Most of the qualitative studies mentioned above have very restricted samples. Therefore, it is difficult to predict if the results above are generalizable (Bailey & Dragoni, 2013; Kimber, 2019). Finally, reasons for not implementing adequate repatriation programs may differ among industries (Harvey, 1989). This is another limitation for developing a clear vision on the issues for repatriation.

3 Expatriate Management in the East

This chapter will focus on expatriate management in the East. The term East refers to eastern Asians who are more likely to use “inductive thinking” when managing issues (Kase et al., 2011 as cited in Browaeys & Price, 2019). Among the Asian, the Confucian Asia cluster which includes countries such as China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore (Chhokar et al., 2007) will be analyzed in this section.

3.1 Pre-departure

The profile of the Eastern expatriate is diverse, but some features remain in common. Japanese expatriates are usually men who are the best fit for the job and that have experience because seniority is very important in Japanese society (Tung, 1982). In the Chinese context, expatriates usually have degrees and are men, they are all selected among the current workforce in the company (Shen & Edwards, 2004). Korean companies tend to select people who are already familiar with the culture or language of the assigned destination (Kang et al., 2015). It is very unlikely that woman will go for expatriation. Taiwanese female expatriation rate has been estimated at 5% (Lee, 2000 as cited in Lin et al., 2012). In the traditional Chinese context and Confucian context, women are less likely to be selected for international assignments (Lin et al., 2012; Shen & Edwards, 2004). Some papers address expatriate gender questions more in-depth, however, they are published in the Chinese language. There is a need for more studies in English on this topic. In conclusion, the profile of the Eastern expatriate is a man, highly educated and skilled with several years of experience in the working field.

In the East, there is a strong emphasis given on technical skills as a criterion for selecting the right person. For Japanese MNCs technical skills are the most important factor when choosing an expatriate and the least is familiarity with the destination (Fuduka & Chu, 1994). The family factor is not much taken into account (Fuduka & Chu, 1994; Tungli & Peiperl, 2009). The spouse does not take part in the interviews and therefore is not screened (Tung, 1982). This behavior might be linked with Japanese society (Tung, 1982).

There is a wide assumption among Japanese managers that what does matter is employee expertise (Kubota, 2013). As a consequence of this vision, language mastery, for example, is perceived only as a tool to serve a more important task: get the work done (Kubota, 2013). However, this meritocratic selection may not be the case everywhere because seniority in the company is also a key factor (Tungli & Peiperl, 2009). Being a senior does not necessarily mean better productivity. Moreover, some informal processes can interfere with good practices, for instance, the “*guanxi*” (i.e., network, relationships) can lead to not choosing the best candidate (Shen & Edwards, 2004). Confucian culture and especially the *ruling by man* (i.e., decisions are taken out of usual procedures by top management and cannot be questioned) have an important influence on employee selection because everything tends to be evaluated in a subjective way (Wang et al., 2005). Therefore, the process of the expatriate’s selection in the East is rather inconsistent.

As highlighted in the previous chapter, selecting the right profile and person is not enough. He or she should accept this assignment. For Chinese employees, it is nearly impossible for the employee to refuse an overseas assignment (Shen & Edwards, 2004). It is the same situation for Korean employees (Cho et al., 2013). Loyalty and obedience to superiors are expected in the Confucian culture (Wang et al., 2005). Harmony and Hierarchy should be respected (Wang et al., 2005; Yongsun & Sohn, 1998). These cultural aspects can also be found in Korean management which is characterized by a top-down approach (Yongsun & Sohn, 1998). Another possible explanation is that in the Chinese context, a foreign assignment is perceived as an important privilege because it is seen as an opportunity to gain experience, experience a new lifestyle, and have a better wage (Shen & Edwards, 2004). The quantity of candidates available for expatriation is high (Shen & Edwards, 2004). Korean employees overall see the international assignment as a good way to get experience (Cho et al., 2013). Nevertheless, most of the studies we have mentioned above might appear old dated (15-16 years), it might be interesting to investigate this issue in the present time.

Among the 3 major countries in Confucian Asia (China, Japan, and Korea), it is said that Japanese firms provide the best training. It can be even argued that Japanese firms provide better training than US firms (Deresky, 2017). For Japanese expatriates, the most common training is to send expatriates to study abroad in graduates school (Fuduka & Chu, 1994). Japanese firms provide decent training for expatriates to perform in their duties but not to social interactions after work (Fuduka & Chu, 1994). However not all Asian firms provide good training, Chinese MNEs for instance often provide very limited training (Shen & Darby, 2006). Chinese managers believe that technical skill is the most important thing to carry out successfully the assignment and that if the employee performs well in the home country, he will also perform well in the host country (Shen & Darby, 2006). Korea is an intermediary between China and Japan. Korean companies usually provide training for their expatriate (Cho et al., 2013; Kang et al., 2015) but it is very often focused on language learning and disregarding other aspects (Kang et al., 2015). Based on the elements above, the training in the East is very irregular, it can be in some firms outstanding and other firms very mediocre.

Table 5: Synthesis of the pre-departure process in the East.

	Selection of the East-ern profile	Acceptance of the As-signment	Training
Summary of the liter-ature review	Educated men with technical skills. Someone who has several years of ex-perience. However, informal processes may be applied.	Assignments abroad are considered a priv-ilege for the expatri-ate. Expatriate has lit-tle margin to refuse.	Except for the Japa-nese firms, the train-ing is mostly erratic and non-systemic.
Limitation	Informal processes might be heavily un-derreported.	Studies on the topic are scares.	Some studies might appear outdated. In 2021, Chinese firms are now major actors of the global econ-omy.

3.2 During the assignment

Eastern expatriates have their adjustment problems. In Confucian cultures, female spouses should take good care of children and parents so it is more likely that the expatriate will go alone to his destination (Lin et al., 2012). Going to expatriation alone is a phenomenon so popular that there is even a word in Japanese for that which is “*Tanshin-funin*” (Furusawa & Brewster, 2016). Chinese MNEs usually do not provide any support for spouses or children that would go with the employee (Shen & Edwards, 2004). Korean spouses may go but they will have to give up their job and take care of the children (Cho et al., 2013). Therefore no wonder that in the Japanese and Chinese context spouse adjustment is the least mentioned problem, the main problem is more related to the family (Fuduka & Chu, 1994; Shen & Edwards, 2004). Chinese Companies for instance are not trying to solve these issues, because family issues are regarded as a private matter (Shen & Edwards, 2004). Tungli and Peiperl (2009) pointed out “operational reasons” as the main issue for Japanese expatriates. In conclusion, it seems that there are two scenarios when Easterners go for expatriation: either the expatriate goes alone abroad or goes with his family but with minimal assistance from the company.

In the East, expatriation is usually associated with better wages. In Chinese firms, expatriation is associated with good wages (Shen & Edwards, 2004). Nonetheless, it is somewhat difficult to find accurate information about Easterners' compensation, as the Chinese proverb says: “Talk about money hurt feelings”³. Finally, it seems that Korean expatriates enjoy some bonuses and benefits during their expatriation and that their wage is way better than local workers (Lansbury et al., 2006; Zou & Lansbury, 2009).

³ 谈钱伤感情



Figure 1: Expatriate performance appraisal in Korea.

The way of evaluating expatriates' performance is somewhat similar to what has been discussed in the second chapter. It could have been expected in the Confucian context that expatriate rating would have been made somehow in an opaque way to preserve the harmony inside the group. According to Kang & Shen (2016), expatriate appraisal for Korean MNCs in China is declined into 4 main steps. The first step for the expatriate is to make a self-evaluation online. After that, the immediate supervisor in the subsidiary of the expatriate will provide some comments on the evaluation. The third step consists of an interview with the supervisors in the Headquarters (HQ) of the firm where everyone agrees on the final rating. Finally, the results are transferred to the departmental manager in HQ. Korean firms use a mix of hard and soft criteria to assess their expatriate.

Table 6: Synthesis of the "during the assignment" process in East.

	Adjustment	Compensation	Performance
Summary of the literature review	Several issues can be pointed out, (e.g. family or operational reasons) but little is known about expatriate's spousal adjustment.	Expatriates are rewarded with better wages.	A process with several steps and persons.
Limitation	Talking about failure is difficult in the Confucian Context. Studies are not unanimous on the reasons for failure	Very difficult to gather data on this matter because talking about money might be taboo.	Studies and data are small on the topic (Kang & Shen, 2016).

3.3 After the assignment

Repatriation is very often disregarded by Confucian Asian firms. As a good example, it has been proved that for Chinese firms repatriation is a serious issue and is very often disregarded (Shen & Edwards, 2004). No career plan, promotions were given by the HR departments and it can even lead to temporary unemployment in some cases (Shen & Edwards, 2004). Managers believe that international experience is not useful for domestic operations (Shen & Edwards, 2004). Therefore, the staff turnover for repatriates is important which leads to losses for companies (Shen & Edwards, 2004). Korean expatriates do not think that a repatriation program is needed (Cho et al., 2013). However, they are afraid that their children will not cope with Korean Society (Cho et al., 2013). Going abroad does not always mean getting promoted (Cho et al., 2013). Koreans are much likely to repatriate to their company (Cho et al., 2013). However, the study lead by Kang et al., (2015) seems to indicate the contrary. Based on the quoted studies, it seems that repatriation is very challenging for Eastern expatriates.

4 The HR consultancy perspective

Expatriate management is usually seen through the lens of company HR managers. Therefore, studies on expatriate management from the point of view of consultants are very scarce. This entire section will be based on Kubr (2002) which is an important and serious reference for anyone interested in the consulting industry and several consultancy reports.

4.1 A brief overview of consultancy

Kubr (2002) provides a clear and intelligible definition of consulting:

“Management consulting is an independent professional advisory service assisting managers and organizations to achieve organizational purposes and objectives by solving management and business problems, identifying and seizing new opportunities, enhancing learning and implementing changes.”(Kubr, 2002, p. 10)

As it can be understood from this definition, consultants are independent experts in certain types of fields. They can work for big firms, medium-sized firms, or even as an independent. They should provide their expertise while considering the client's needs and background. This expertise is not necessarily technical, it can also be human if needed. A basic consulting process is made of 5 steps which are resumed in the table below. However, it is important to specify that many contracts stop at the third step.

Table 7: Brief overview of the consultancy process (Based on Kubr, 2002).

Order and Name	Definition
1- Entry	Starting point between the client and the consultant(s). The client expresses his needs and what he expects from the consultant. At the end of the process, a consulting contract is made.
2- Diagnosis	The consultant(s) try to understand the client's issue.
3- Action planning	It is about providing a feasible solution to the client's issue.
4- Implementation	Consultants may observe their plan into action and may provide some correction to the plan according to reality.
5- Termination	Consultant and client both evaluate the final result. The consultants finished their work if the client does not have extra needs.

4.2 IHRM consultancy and expatriate management

Expatriate management is part of international human resources consultancy. IHRM consultancy can be involved in numerous steps such as: "recruitment, training, briefing, transfer, adaptation, pay and benefits, evaluation and return" (Kubr, 2002, p. 409). It is important to mention that expatriation does not only concern senior managers but also household servants or hotel workers. IHRM management consultancy is no longer reserved for big accounting firms, smaller specialized players have emerged. International trade blocks have accelerated the need for international human resources services. Consultants play a crucial role in raising the key questions to their clients such as the necessity to send expatriates and their value. They also play an important role in evaluating the cost of the expatriate and the repatriation part. After addressing strategic issues, consultants can address technical issues (taxes, pay...).

The knowledge about the consultancy perspective of expatriate management is very limited. There are some interesting textbooks on the consulting industry on a general scope such as Kubr (2002) or Stryker (2011) about the history, the utility, the finality of consulting, etc. However, papers, books, or textbooks on consulting for expatriate management were not found despite using many combinations of keywords in the literature search.

Qualitative or Quantitative studies global mobility generally collect their data among expatriates, companies' mobility coordinators, or HR, but never among mobility consultants. Hopefully, some global insights can be found in BIG 4 reports (KPMG, EY, DELOITTE, PWC). Table 8 below summarizes the major reasons why companies are outsourcing some of their Global Mobility for consultancies.

Table 8: Reasons for outsourcing global mobility activities (Based on KPMG International, 2020).

Percentage	Reason for outsourcing
64%	Upgrade service and quality
58%	Reduce the load on HR managers so that they can focus on important matters
58%	Get access to knowledge
57%	Obtain a better compliance
30%	Reducing costs

4.3 Conclusions of the theoretical framework

Expatriation is a long journey that should be well prepared for both company and the employee. Each step of expatriation has important stakes. Not selecting the right profile will not lead to a good expatriation because the person will not be able to carry the task. However, selecting the right person, but not providing him appropriate compensation or training can lead to failure. Westerner or Easterner companies might have many cultural differences but they both need to work toward the success of their expatriates because it is essential to them. A KPMG International (2020) survey showed that for 90% of the respondents, the goal of the international assignment was "supporting the organization's business objectives". This goal number 1 overtook by far the others which are worth mentioning: "Controlling program costs" (57%) and "Being adaptable to changing business requirements" (55%).

In short, the knowledge developed in this literature review could be resumed through the following sentences: Expatriation is a crucial key for the business activity of compa-

nies. Expatriation is also a wonderful tool for the development of the employee. Nonetheless, this delightful path is strewn with internal and external pitfalls. The company should guarantee the compliance of their employee abroad and a good environment for them to achieve their tasks. Ensuring this compliance is arduous, time-consuming for HR departments, and requires people who have solid knowledge in the mobility field. Therefore, companies require consulting services in international mobility. The consultants help the company in resolving the issues that the company may have. However, there is no information on how concretely this help is provided. The figure below is a brief summary of the literature review.

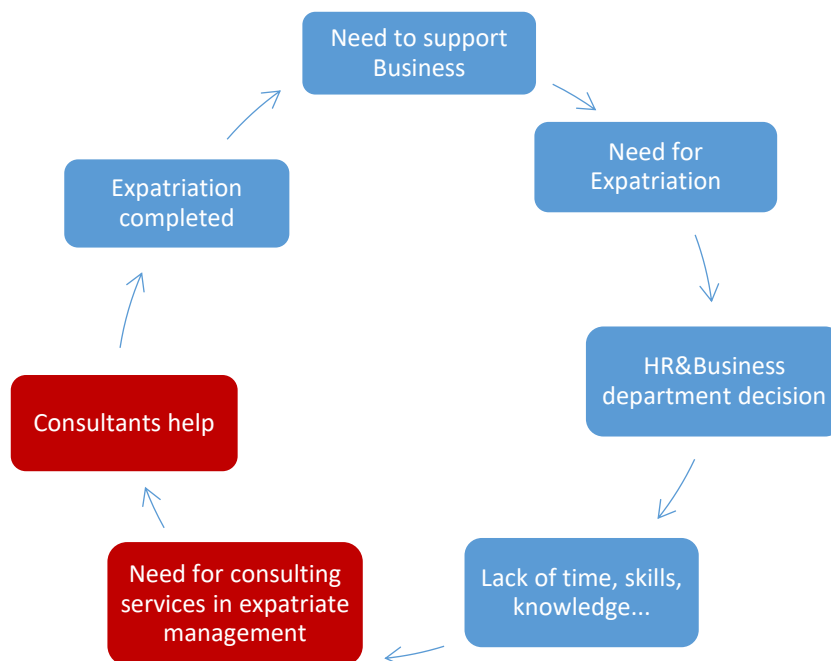


Figure 2: The simplified journey of expatriation and consulting.

As it can be observed through the literature review in this paper, the blue squares are relatively covered by the current studies on expatriate management. However, the red squares for both Easterner and Western companies are barely or not covered by the current literature. There is a real need and willingness to cover these issues within this paper. Hence, a research question from the consultant's perspective have been formulated to cover as much as possible these red squares:

“How HR consultancies should support their Eastern and Western customers in order to help them succeed in managing the expatriation process?”

The following section will explain how this research question will be investigated from a methodological perspective.

5 Methodology

This chapter will explain the several choices made in terms of methodology (philosophy, approach, strategy, etc.) to effectively answer the research question. Data collection (sample, cases, etc.) and data analysis will be also presented.

5.1 Research philosophy and approach

Defining a research philosophy is fundamental in research because it is the foundation for answering the research question and building knowledge (Saunders et al., 2007). Regarding the ontological aspects, this research will adopt a subjectivism perspective. In the eyes of the subjectivist researcher, a phenomenon is created by social actors through their interactions (Saunders et al., 2007). There is the belief in this paper that expatriate management solutions provided by the consultants are the results of social interactions between the consultant(s), the firm, and the expatriate. Success, failure, East and West are constructed concepts that can be totally different from one person to another. Thus, embracing subjectivism is coherent with the topic.

Concerning the epistemology of the research, the research will espouse an interpretivist stance. Interpretivism can be characterized by its emphasis on the comprehension of phenomenon (Farquhar, 2012). The justification for this choice is that culture (East and West) implies an important part of subjectivity. The researcher cannot be “value-free” (Saunders et al., 2007) since he is himself a Westerner. Moreover, the research question is a how question which shows that the researcher is trying to gain an understanding of the consulting industry rather than measuring it. Consultants on each day are facing new clients and issues, therefore, it is a phenomenon too complex to be generalizable on a large scale.

The research approach of this paper will be abductive. Abduction can be presented as a way to use both induction and induction (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016). The current stud-

ies on expatriation through the lens of HR or mobility service brought a pre-understanding of the current situation, which will help later for contributing to the theory after the data collection and the analysis. The research question that has been set involves an exploratory nature for the research. An exploratory study aims to understand an issue without being sure of the problem himself (Saunders et al., 2007).

5.2 Research methods, strategy, and choices

In research, a pertinent research method should be selected in order to answer effectively the research question (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016). Qualitative research aims to understand and explain (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016), therefore it is a relevant choice for the study that aims to explore how consultancies support their Eastern and Western customers – the under-researched topic. The research strategy chosen is a case study. Case studies in the business field are particularly appropriate and popular since they help with complex and demanding business issues (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016). A case study is advantageous and relevant for exploratory approaches because many types of questions can be raised (Saunders et al., 2007). Investigating the literature and interrogating experts are relevant ways to carry exploratory research (Saunders et al., 2007).

Based on Yin (2018), the definition of a case study is “an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the “case”) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident.”(p. 15). Case study provides adequate results with “how” research questions, when the researcher has no command over behavioral events and that the topic is a present-time phenomenon (Yin, 2018). In our case, consultancy in expatriate management is a current phenomenon, and the current research question is based on a ‘how’. Furthermore, the researcher does not influence any possible behavioral events.

Regarding the design of the research study, the study will be a multiple-case design where the consulting firms in expatriate management are the cases. Through the interviews with managers practices serving Eastern and Western customers will be defined

answering the set question. The way of investigating case-study should be clarified between either Intensive or Extensive case study (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016). In this case, the way of the investigation will be extensive, because the aim of the study is not to explore a single phenomenon intensively, or generate laws, or to test the theory, but rather to understand how several companies selected works with their Eastern and Western clients.

5.3 Data collection and cases

The primary data of this study was mainly collected through semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are relevant for exploratory research (Saunders et al., 2007). In a semi-structured interview, the researcher prepares several questions and themes for the interviewee (Saunders et al., 2007). However, based on the discussion, questions might vary from one interview to another (Saunders et al., 2007). Because of the current situation (an ongoing pandemics), interviews were collected only through videoconferencing (ZOOM and MS Teams). Four Interviews were conducted in French according to the preference of the four interviewees. They were all conducted in French because French was the mother tongue of the interviewer and for two of the four interviewees. The two other persons studied in France and are living (or lived), working (or worked, i.e., spent a consequent amount of their life in France). Thus, the non-native speakers were able to completely understand and respond in French and preferred to communicate in this language. Interviews were first fully transcribed in French and for a second time translated into English. The translation was achieved through a meaning-based approach that uses interpretation to preserve the native input from the interviewee (Welch & Marschan-Piekkari, 2004).

The process for an interview was the following one: A first call (unrecorded) with the manager of the firm has proceeded so that the researcher could have a clear comprehension of the firm and make sure that the company qualifies for the study. By the end of the first call, another interview (approximately 1h) interview was scheduled with the interviewee. This second 1-hour interview with the firms' representative was recorded

with the consent of the interviewee. Some other documents such as brochures or leaflets addressed to firms' Eastern and Western customers were also collected and used for triangulation of data. The data was collected during the months of February and March 2021.

In the opinion of Stake (1995), case study does not follow a sampling logic. The key is to optimize the learning outcomes. Attention should be paid to the cases that are selected making sure that they are replicated literally (that cases are likely to be similar and would produce comparable observations) and theoretically (are likely to be useful to test theory from diverse angles) (Yin, 2009). In this study, the cases were replicated literally based on the following criteria: (1) The company is a consulting company. (2) The company helps with matters related to expatriate management. Expatriate management is defined as the management of an employee who is going abroad to carry some tasks or duties for a company. This large definition ensures that the study would not miss any aspect of expatriate management through. (3) The company has Western and Eastern clients. However, the selected companies were also different in several ways. The following table provides information about the companies studied. Some information might be anonymized based on the companies' request for confidentiality.

Table 9: Presentation of the cases selected.

Company name	Interviewee	Firm's nationality	Size	Manager interviewed	Manager position	Interview duration	Primary & secondary data triangulation?
RH EXPAT	C1	French	10	Jorge Prieto Martin	Founder	53:40'	Yes
L'Élan – Consultants à l'expatriation	C2	French	4	Sylvie Piveteau	Immigration consultant	58:44'	Yes
GMC Finland	C3	Finnish	1+	Jenny Rajahalme	Founder	1h15	Yes
Company X	C4	X	13	X	Local Manager	1h01	Yes

5.4 Data analysis

Based on Stake's (1995) vision of case study, it is vital to realize that there is no perfect timing for analyzing. Direct Interpretation and categorical aggregation should both be used. This liberty of analysis offered by case study is also supported by Yin (2018). Both authors support the idea that there is no “magic recipe” for analyzing case studies (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). It is up to the researcher to adopt the appropriate strategy. Hopefully, methodological books offer some support for researchers.

The first method used for analysis is **Pattern Matching**. The Pattern matching method is highly suitable for case studies and descriptive studies (Yin, 2018). This method is about confronting empirical (i.e., extracted from the data) concepts and those that were known before the data collection (in this paper, the literature review) (Trochim 1989, as cited in Yin, 2018, p. 175). Elements such as pre-departure, during the assignment, after the as-

signment, East and West have been used for building the questionnaire order and analysis. By doing so, it also gave the impression of a clear and well-organized questionnaire for interviewees. This method helped in putting their speeches into perspective with the literature review and coordinating the discussion between theory and practice.

The second method used for analysis is ***Cross-case synthesis***. It is a method that can be used only in multiple case study (Yin, 2009). The objective of this method is to fully understand and analyze the meaning of each case and compare it among the cases (Yin, 2018). The topic of expatriate management through consultant perspective is perfect since practices (i.e, patterns) can be compared among consultants for both East and West customers. Transcripts of each interview were read several times so that the meaning of each case could be fully understood. After that, the scope of consulting of each case was clear and put in perspective the salient differences and similarities among consulting firms.

The third strategy was to collect **secondary data**. In a case study for business research, collecting secondary data is a very common practice (Saunders et al., 2007). Secondary data can be defined as “Empirical data that already exists somewhere” (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 81). In this research, secondary data was mainly documentary data which was written (brochure of firm presentation, website...). Documentary secondary data is good data for triangulation of data (Saunders et al., 2007). Triangulation can be defined as “the process of using multiple perspectives to refine and clarify the findings of your research” (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 305). Thus, triangulation of data is about using several sources in order to ensure the veracity of facts (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016). As a conclusion, secondary data was used to either strengthen or confront any element, point of view that was raised during the interview. It also helped the researcher in exploring any issue or details that the interviewee may have forgotten during the interview.

The fourth and final analytical tool used is ***Explanation building***. Explanation building is a complex kind of pattern matching that is suitable not only for explanatory studies but also for exploratory case study (Yin, 2018). Practically, explanation building is an iterative process where a theoretical statement is confronted and modified according to the reality of the data collected (Yin, 2018). Explanation building is a great tool to construct a general clarification for cases that may have some minor differences (Yin, 2018). Based on the literature review, some assumptions were made in the way expatriates should work with their clients from the East and the West. Those assumptions totally or partially changed based on the data gathered. Explanation building was a tool that helped in building a bridge between the theory and the reality of consulting.

5.5 Validity and reliability

This subsection will introduce the key concepts that need to be taken into account when doing research and present the measures that have been taken to enhance the research credibility. Validity and reliability are both important concepts for research.

5.5.1 Validity

Validity is about the trustworthiness and coherence of the findings (Saunders et al., 2007). Based on Yin (2018) exploratory case study may be confronted to two important issues in validity. The first one is **construct validity** and the second one is **external validity**. Exploratory studies are less concerned with internal validity issues because they are less focused on causal logic (a phenomenon explains another phenomenon) (Yin, 2018) than explanatory studies.

Construct validity is “identifying correct operational measures for the concepts being studied”(Yin, 2018, p. 42). Some actions were taken to improve the construct validity. Diversifying the origin of evidence is one of the major actions that can be taken to improve construct validity (Yin, 2018). For the literature review, several research articles were quoted when possible to strengthen the legitimacy of the concepts studied. In this

case study two types of evidence were mainly collected: Interviews and documentation (brochure, leaflet, websites). Both sources were used to carry the analysis.

External validity is “showing whether and how a case study’s finding can be generalized”(Yin, 2018, p. 42). The aim of case study is not to generalize results to populations (i.e, **statistical generalizations**) but to contribute to the theoretical knowledge (i.e, to make **analytic generalization**) (Yin, 2018). To improve the external validity of multiple case study, replication logic should be used. In this case study, 4 companies were selected for replication, therefore the external validity of the study has increased.

5.5.2 Reliability

Reliability is about using the right measurement instruments to ensure the consistency of the findings (Saunders et al., 2007). In the opinion of Yin (2018), paying attention to reliability is to ensure that any researcher that would follow the same research protocol will find consistent results with the current study. Good reliability reduces the number of misconceptions and biases. Transparency of research procedures is the key to enhance reliability in a case study.

Since the main source of data in this case study is semi-structured interviews, some important issues in reliability need to be addressed. The first important issue **is interviewer bias**. It is when the interviewer, by the way of raising question, posture, or tone during the interview may influence the interviewee's answer (Saunders et al., 2007). Some steps were processed to lower the risk of interviewer bias. An important amount of preparation was done prior to interviews such as creating interview guidelines, proofreading the questionnaire by more experienced peers, tests of the intelligibility of the translation by another French native speaker. Appropriate dressing, and good prior knowledge of the topic before communicating with the consultants lowered considerably the risks.

Another important issue addressed is **observer bias**. Observer bias could be defined as a degradation of the researcher's analytical reasoning because of its own beliefs (Saunders et al., 2007). Observer bias cannot be fully suppressed, however, it can be limited thanks to good awareness on the issue (Saunders et al., 2007). It is worth mentioning that the researcher did not have any previous working experience in the field of expatriate management, therefore his bias was somehow limited to that. Moreover, the supervision of the master thesis by a more experienced scholar, helped a lot in getting more familiar with good research practice.

The third important issue to face is **response bias**. It can be described as partial answers from the interviewee for several reasons such as social desirability or not sufficient trust with the interviewer to disclose private information (Saunders et al., 2007). The research question and objectives that were set do not require a consequent amount of private information from the companies interviewed. Moreover, anonymity was offered to respondents that would have felt more comfortable with that. As indicated in the data collection section, the process of collecting data was done in two parts (pre-call and interview). Finally, the time of interview was set according to the consultants' timetable. They all took part in the morning or during lunch break. This ensured a good freshness and energy from participants to answer the interviewer's questions. This way of collecting data increased the trust between the researcher and the participants.

Finally, in order to increase even more the reliability of the study a major action is to develop a case study protocol with four segments (“overview of the case study” “data collection procedure”, “protocol questions” (Yin, 2018, p. 94). This is why the following research protocol has been established (see below).

Table 10: A simplified case study protocol (Adapted from Yin's (2018) framework).

Section A: Overview of the case study	
Goal of re- search and sponsor	The objective of this study is to understand consultancy work with their East- ern and Western clients. The master thesis is sponsored by the University of Vassa which aims to “educate experts that address the needs of society today and in the future”(University of Vaasa, 2012).
Case study question	<i>“How HR consultancies should support their Eastern and Western customers in order to help them succeed in managing the expatriation process?”</i>
Key readings	Textbooks such as Browaeys & Price (2019) and Deresky, (2017) are a crucial help to respectively understand key concepts and information in Cross-cul- tural management and expatriate management which can be very wide top- ics. McNulty & Inkson, (2013) is also an important textbook to understand the firm’s compensation which is not always easy. Finally, Kubr (2002) is an im- pressive textbook that explains consultancy from A to Z. In terms of academic papers, McEvoy & Buller (2013) helped in having a more in-depth comprehension of expatriate management and the typical journey of an expatriate. Even though they are not mentioned very often, papers from scholars such as Tung (1982) and Tungli & Peiperl (2009) are precious to ob- serve and measure the differences between Japanese, European and Ameri- can firms. A very important author to understand expatriate management in Asia is Jie Shen. His contributions are numerous and not only reserved for Chi- nese firms but also Korean firms (Kang & Shen, 2016; Shen & Darby, 2006; Shen & Edwards, 2004). An important author that has not been quoted fre- quently but still important is Jan Selmer, his papers helped in understanding expatriates living in China (Selmer, 1999, 2002). Finally, to get more in-depth knowledge about Japanese firms practices and expatriates Dang & Rammal, (2020) literature review helped a lot in getting redirected to relevant papers like Fuduka & Chu (1994).
Protocol function	The protocol helps the researcher in getting more organized with case study analysis and increases the reliability of the study (Yin, 2018).
Section B: Data collection procedures	

Data collection	The researcher is responsible for collecting the data. The researcher should interview companies that are doing consultancy in expatriation management. People interviewed in the case should somehow be senior/have enough mastery on the topic of expatriate management. Any type of document provided by the company is useful for the research (brochure, leaflet...).
Expected preparation	It is expected to have a clear comprehension of global mobility stakes, to find consultants who are into the study scope, and agree to participate in the study. A research proposal should be sent to the participants so that they can understand the study.
Section C: Protocol question	
Data collection in practice.	Semi-structured interviews were scheduled through Zoom and MS TEAMS calls. They were recorded with the consent of the interviewee. An excel file with all the company e-mailed was created. There were no costs involved in the data collection.
Section D: Guidelines for the report	
Writing instructions	Readers of this master thesis will be students in Business administration, HR, and anyone interested in the field of expatriate management. The language used is formal and the thesis should be consistent with the University of Vaasa guidelines. This type of project is very common for a master's student.

6 Findings

Based on the data collection and the analysis on it, this section will provide all the interesting findings and insight on expatriate management for Western and Eastern customers from a consultancy perspective. It will also enlighten the daily life of consultants with firms and their expatriates.

6.1 Consultancy on expatriation industry

Prior to data collection, the knowledge in the consultant industry was rather weak. It was expected that every firm would provide a similar service with some difference such as price, time to deliver, localization. However, this occurred to be a wrong assumption. An important finding during the data collection (Interview and documents) is that consulting in expatriation management is somehow a divided industry where different companies answer different typologies of needs in the process of expatriate management. The following quote is an illustration of the industry divisions:

"You should know that each consultant has his own field... So what is also good is to have this division...not all the eggs in the same basket, so we are rather specialized in everything that is going to be immigration, and I feel I am specialized in immigration, in accompaniment on this." (C2)

Four major services were distinguished among the different companies:

1. **Strategic consultancy.** It could be defined as comprehensive advice on the strategic issue of expatriation management: Policy, compensation, contracts... It should help a company in having a better understanding of the stakes involved with expatriate management topic. The following quote from the Case 1 brochure provides a perfect illustration:

“RHexpat is the division dedicated to the management of international mobility. From the design of an international mobility policy, to the day-to-day management of mobile employees (packages, remuneration, cost estimates, expatriate pay, etc.) we support our clients in the International Human Resources.”
(RH Expat, 2021)

2. Immigration services. Based on the data collected, this service could be defined as making sure that the expatriate will get his visa, cross the border of and settle legally in a foreign country. Thus, immigration services not only concern the pre-departure phase of expatriation but also the during expatriation phase:

"So immediately upon arrival, it's the visit to the Tax Office, it's the identifications at Immigration, population register so it is administrative things." (C3)

3. Relocation services. Relocation is mainly about providing a home to the expatriate, but it is not limited to. It also includes service that makes the expatriate life easier (opening of water or electricity contract, insurances...). In one of the cases, their best seller was services related to relocation:

"The bestseller is the home package...Search for a home, including home insurance, including electricity contract, including internet contract." (C3)

4. Moving. It is about moving expatriate goods safely from point A to point B. Moving not only concern goods but also animal for or vehicles instance (Company X Website, 2021). Services such as storage units can also be provided (Company X Website, 2021).

Table 11. Summary of the different services provided by companies.

	RH Expat	L'Elan	GMC Finland	Company X
Strategic consultancy	X			X
Immigration		X	X	X
Relocation			X	X
Moving				X

Based on that table, the help provided for firms will vary from their range of expertise. Firms will usually have several interlocutors to get their issues with expatriate management solved. An important implication is that rivalry among cases is not as important as it could have been expected. Actually, the reality could be reversed: A consultant in Immigration may help his client in finding the right relocation company, this last one may help with finding a removal company. The industry is characterized by a mix of both cooperation and competition.

The situation in the consulting industry could be defined as co-opetitive. Based on the advice of one of the cases, the researcher has also done an investigation on associations around the industry. A good example of that healthy cooperation in the IHRM consulting industry is the Cercle Magellan (Magellan's circle) in Paris where companies which are having some needs in expatriate management share their best practices and may access a network of certified consultants. It is defined on the website as:

“The Magellan Circle is a place to meet, exchange information and share experiences in order to increase knowledge, improve processes and find new ideas.”(Magellan Network: Presentation, 2021)

6.2 The need for and role of consultancy in the expatriation process

There is the unanimous opinion that Eastern and Western clients need to be helped with managing the expatriation process, this is why consultants in expatriation are there for their clients during many years. However, it is important to understand why they need that service and why the HR department is not able to do it by themselves. Whatever, the size of the company, the lack of staff, time, or skills is one of the most frequent issues:

"There is a problem in companies, large or small, even more in large companies, where there is a decrease in staff. HR departments find themselves with volumes of things...they have not the skills to respond to each type of issue. International mobility is one of them." (C2)

"Companies that do not have, for example, Human Resources, they do not have a permanent establishment in Finland...so they do not know the culture, they do not have a contact to rent the house; and then they want to give support, support for their employees, already before they come, to have everything ready for them."(C3)

"The reality is that each case is particular and different, so in fact, HR or HR assistants, whatever, they do not have the time or probably the competence to deal with these issues, especially in relation to immigration, for example. So, the housing search, sometimes they try but in the end they realize that it is very time consuming."(C4)

This lack of skills, time, and skills lead to a certain degree of ignorance of the legal framework. Thus, as reminded by one of the cases, companies seek consultants to be compliant because the stakes are too high to be an outlaw:

"There are compliance errors...There are errors because it is very difficult...HR does not study international mobility...without help, there is about a 10% chance that he will make the application [of an expatriate] correctly...And it's often errors in tax and social security declarations."(C1)

"A lack of knowledge to be within the law...Labor law, labor inspection, if it is not well respected, it is both fine and criminal... That's why companies very often prefer [our services]."(C2)

Not only skills and compliance are important factors when considering buying consultancy services but also money. Companies use consultancy services because they are, in fact, saving time and money:

"Our clients are saving money because we help them to do better and faster [tasks related to expatriation], and when we do something faster, we save them money because they can do something else."(C1)

"So indeed, we [from the clients' point of view] prefer to subcontract, it is cheaper to subcontract an application, and we are sure to have an expert who knows and who will manage the thing well."(C2)

Moreover, companies may not be interested in building real in-house mobility services as highlighted by one of the consultants. Bills are less burdensome.

It costs less to sub-contract... the consultant's invoice goes into an accountant's line, as opposed to the fixed costs of an employee with all that it entails..."(C2)

On a more global basis, consultants have the role of informers. With the emergence of the Internet, looking for any information on expatriation is easy. Yet, these important sources of information may be easily misleading for expatriates and companies. Thus, consultants help in knowing if what they read on the Internet is real or just an illusion:

"When searching in Google for "expatriation" you have a thousand articles that will explain who, what, how, opinions, so there are 90%, pardon the word, of nonsense, and 10% of people who say things that make sense."(C1)

"We have clients who do a lot of research themselves, online, "we've heard that, etc.", so there are this type of client and there are clients who let themselves be done completely, so it depends... In fact, it's quite negative in the sense that we have to bring them down to earth." (C4)

6.3 The consultancy process

It seems that the consultancy process is very similar among consultancies. The process can be divided into several steps:

1. The first step is the initial contact between client and consultant. It can be done through email or phone call where the client explains his issues in expatriate management:

“There is a first call in which he [the client] explains his problem, so he tells us 'Here, I would like to send Viktor to the United States it can be as simple as this.'” (C1)

“Very often, it's the company that tells us, 'we recruited or we are going to recruit such a person, we would like to have your support on this, that and that.’” (C2)

“In general, it's the client, i.e., HR, who contacts me most of the time. They tell me what their needs are, we talk, often it's an email at the beginning” (C4)

2. The second step is about analyzing the complexity, feasibility, pricing, and time limit of the client's needs. When the quote is ready and approved, consultants either get in touch with the HR service or directly the employee:

“When we checked that it is feasible [to provide services] ... After that, [HR Services] they send us a little note saying: ‘you can contact Mr. or Ms. X.’” (C2)

“Then I make a proposal for a quote... Then I inform my colleagues about who is to be involved, and the first person on the list, so often Immigration, makes the first contact with the employee, also keeping HR informed.” (C4)

3. Depending on the complexity of the need, the consultants may have to directly deal with the expatriate. In many countries, employers do not have the right to ask personal questions to their employees. However, for administrative reasons or practical matters (health, disability) consultants may need to access these sensitive pieces of information without disclosing them to HR services:

“And at some point, it is the expatriate, who takes HR out of the circle when he wants to ask for more personal matters.” (C2)

“In France, companies are also not allowed to ask all personal questions to their employees... if the employee does not want to say that their child is disabled and needs wheelchair access, HR does not need to know... We will have access to very intimate and personal information about these employees, which we will not disclose to HR.” (C4)

4. Finally, when the service is completed, the company informs the HR department that their job is done, and they can send the invoice to the client:

“And then, once the mission is completely finished, we tell HR that everything is finished, here is the invoice, the report, etc.”(C4)

To sum up the findings a figure can be made. It is made as circular on purpose because consultants explained that satisfied clients tend to come back regularly since expatriation is a complex and moving topic:

“In general yes [clients come back], because this is the particularity of international mobility, it is that it is very technical and very complicated to send someone to work abroad, whether it is a Chinese in France, an American in France or a Frenchman in the United States.”(C1)

“Maybe there is someone who came [in Finland] three years ago, from the same company, and they think the process is still the same. But as the processes change, the papers change, the forms change, so they say 'yes, we know how to do it' but in the end, no.” (C3)

“They [the clients] usually come back anyway, because they see the benefits. Of course, at the beginning, I think they have already tried to do it themselves and they see that it doesn't work as well.” (C4)

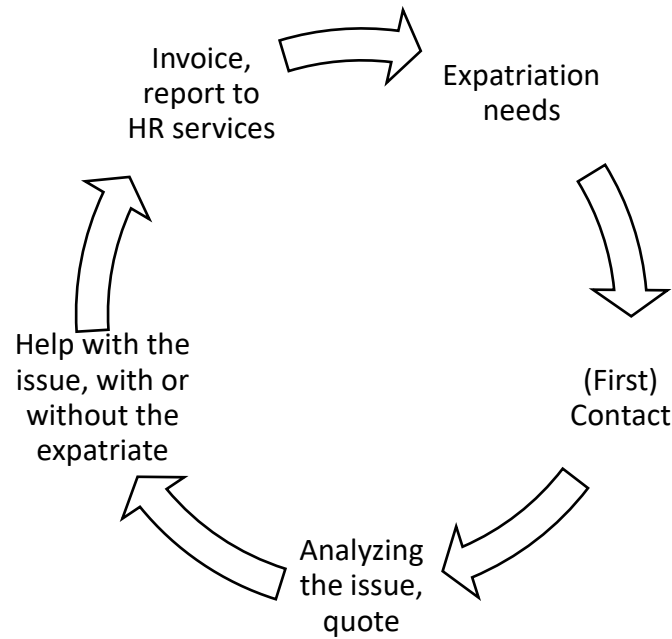


Figure 3: A simplified consultancy process.

Based on Figure 3, it can be said that consultancy work does not differ much from any other service provider. The client asks for a service, consultants analyze the request and provide a quote. If the client agrees with the quote, consultancy provides the service, sends any required invoice or report. A satisfied customer will probably come back when facing similar issues. Consultancies are undoubtedly part of the tertiary sector.

6.4 The influence of East and West cultural clusters on expatriation consultancy

After clarifying consultants' scope of intervention and industry, it was important during the interviews to cover the core of the thesis, i.e., how IHRM consultants should serve their Eastern and Western customers. Surprisingly and despite the cultural differences discussed, it seems that for most of the consultants their work with both groups of customers is the same.

"Nationality does not play much of a role [on consultant work] ..."(C2)

One of the consultants explained that policies for expatriates in nowadays firms were no longer limited to a restricted scope of expatriates but are now aiming to be global and adapted for everyone:

"Today when we make policies for French groups, for example, we don't even make French policies for French people anymore, we make policies for the entire world."(C1)

A possible explanation of that phenomenon is that globalization had considerably reduced cultural gaps between people.

"The cultural differences at the business level are becoming blurred because of the excessive internationalization."(C1)

Based on their experiences, the main differences are due to the client and expatriate personality itself:

"In fact, I would say, the central core that is changing to what we're going to have face... the expatriate, and the company"(C2)

"No, it's the same thing, I would say that when a client is complicated, it's not necessarily linked to his nationality, it's linked to his personality."(C4)

6.4.1 The expatriate profile

Putting aside special immigration agreements such as Schengen for European Union, all expatriates that go to work abroad need to fill in some conditions to enter their new home country. In the case of a special visa for France, minimum wage and education are required by the immigration desk:

"The person must have an indefinite-term contract with a minimum gross annual salary of €54,000 and 5 years experience or a Bac+3 diploma [Bachelor Degree]." (C2)

Conditions to go abroad apply to everyone, however, the likeliness to go abroad or with family is not the same. Asians tend to go alone more often than their Western counterparts:

"It's about the same...Asians may be more inclined to expatriate on their own, because they see it as a period of one year, two years, it's not very serious, they come, the family stays in China and it's no big deal." (C1)

"[Concerning family] In the West, we take everyone with us, we'll manage on the spot; in the East, it's "the family is important, we're going there [first] to clear up." (C2)

An important point mentioned by the experts is that Asians are more likely to have already a previous experience (study for instance) in their future home destination. Such tendency has not been observed among Westerners:

"A lot of employees who are Chinese, did part of their studies in France, are going to come back in the future."(C2)

"They are young [Chinese] women engineers who have studied in France or in Europe for part or all of their university education." (C3)

Another consultant pointed out her company frequently help Asian student to turn their student visa to working visa. Based on the literature review, she frequently had to deal with self-expatriation cases:

"We have had these nationalities, but who were already in France, who were studying and who changed their status from student to employee, we accompanied them, so it was rather young people." (C4)

In terms of age, observation among cases slightly differed. For a Western expatriate, the following quotes illustrate the current trend:

"The typical portrait...it's going to be 30-45 years old... Mostly men... Very often married with children." (C1)

"When it's more in important firms, it's more likely to be people between 35-45 years old because they bring real expertise, they've been spotted in their company."(C2)

"I would say 30-40 years old, maybe 30-35, even, it depends on the field, but these trends, it's rather young, single or maybe in a couple but not necessarily married." (C4)

Things are slightly moving, start-ups that are involved in operations abroad have younger people:

"We are seeing more and more startups...there are a lot of young people who do not have child, and in that case, we have a slightly better gender mix"(C1)

Among the slight differences among cases, one consultancy observed that she was having more females in the Chinese group. Another consultancy pointed out that South Koreans and Japanese were sensibly elder:

"I have more women... They speak several languages and are usually under 30 years old, between 25 and 30." (C3)

"Afterwards, for the Japanese and South Korean clients... Concerning them, they are often more senior, including people between the ages of 58-62. So they are real experts, but they only come on missions."(C2)

Based on the following observation, synthesis can be drawn on the profile expatriate.

Table 12: Synthesis of the expatriate profile.

Key points	Western	Eastern
Requirements to enter the country	Education and Wages requirements for both	
Previous experience in the host country	Not necessary	Frequent but not always. Keener to self-expatriation
Age	30-45 man	Similar to Western but younger people or very senior can be observed, too.
Gender mix	Mostly men in big firms, but the ratio male-female is improving in start-ups.	Mostly men but a majority of women can be observed coming to the countries such as Finland.

6.4.2 Pre-departure services

The implications of the previous subsections are clear: consultancies do not offer the same service to their client. This subsection aims to explore the different pre-departure services offered to both Eastern and Western clients.

First of all, it is important to highlight that for most of the consultancies, pre-departure services represent their heaviest workload:

"90% of the workload is before [departure], 10% is during the assignment and after the assignment, we have very little workload." (C1)

"So the heaviest workload is before [the expatriation]." (C2)

That being said, the nature of the activity is different based on the consultancy nature (see table below).

Table 13: Definition of the different pre-departure services.

Service provided	Definition
Strategic Consultancy (Case 1)	<i>"It's going to be a lot of mobility feasibility studies: I have to send someone, how do I do it and how much does it cost me?"(C1)</i>
Immigration services (Case 2,3,4)	<i>"Delivering the right documents to HR, based on what they have given us, when sending a complete file to the person and their family to apply for their visa, and not getting a rejection."(C2)</i> <i>"Sending all the papers: the marriage certificate...the passports...so that the application can be ready." (C3)</i> <i>"It is the immigration procedure"</i>
Relocation (C3,4)	<i>"The housing research" (C4)</i>

Therefore, the service provided may differ a lot among consultants. The main idea they shared is that the nationality or cultural background in pre-departure service has very little influence on the way they serve customers:

"There are fundamental concerns that are the same, it is indeed 'how I do it, how much it is going to cost me in terms of service?'" (C1)

"The first worry is 'are you sure I'm going to get a visa?'" (C2)

However, some slight differences alluded during interviews are worth to be mentioned:

"The Chinese and the American, they will have a much more "business" vision of the thing [expatriation], the employee comes second...concerns about employees are much more important in Europe, and in France, particularly because of labor laws." (C1)

Not only the vision of expatriation may change but also the preparation, one consultant noted that preparation of Asians might be more conscious:

"They are a little more worried in the sense that they are more cautious, perhaps, in nature. So perhaps expatriation is prepared a little longer in advance, they really ask a lot of questions." (C4)

6.4.3 During the assignment services

For the services during assignment services, Immigration and relocation services are mostly concerned with this phase of expatriation.

Table 14: Definition of the different services provided during the assignment.

Service provided	Explanation
Immigration services (Case 2,3,4)	<p><i>"Then, there is the arrival in France, and there is also the time to ask for their residence permit and to make sure that everything goes smoothly." (C2)</i></p> <p><i>"We have a lot of clients who are already in France and we will have a lot of renewals of their residence permits or what we would call changes of status."(C2)</i></p> <p><i>"Social security affiliation or opening a bank account."</i></p>
Relocation (C3,4)	<p><i>"Search for a home, including home insurance, including electricity contract, including internet contract."(C3)</i></p> <p><i>"We register the spouse to the unemployment office or language courses. We go to the supermarket and explain the recycling process. "</i></p>

It seems that the during the assignment part is where the difference between Easterners and Westerners are most likely to be seen. Asians are considered very autonomous by the consultants because they have access to an important local network and get along easily with the others:

"They need less [during expatriation services] ... because they are much more... to join the Asian community in France, depending on the cities where they are." (C2)

"The Chinese, they are super autonomous. When they arrive, they sign, we've done all the paperwork, they take things in hand... In addition, there are big networks of Asians in Finland, so they get into all the Facebook groups, Instagram, they follow all the networks. So they get together very quickly, easily, with other Asians." (C3)

However, homesickness is more salient for Eastern people and consultants need to help them to cope with that:

"So, with the Chinese I have, it's the homesickness that is much more pronounced than with the Europeans or Americans. And their desire to return home is strong, much stronger...The distance, because it's far away so it's not as easy to get back to see the family as it is for Europeans." (C3)

This homesickness might be explained by the differences between Western and Asian societies:

"They are used to being very grouped, they are used to having noise, they are used to having lights, they are used to having a lot of people everywhere." (C3)

Moreover, consultants need to adapt to some specific issues related to the expatriate nationality or cultural aspect:

"The thing with the Chinese is the driving license...Because Europeans can drive with their license, but the Chinese, their license is not valid in Finland...They always ask me where there is a driving school?"(C3)

Finally, consultants observed that Chinese people have a thriftier way of life than their Western counterparts:

"Their [Chinese] tendency is to put a little less money on their accommodation." (C4)

"They [Chinese] always try to find the cheapest way [to do something]." (C3)

6.4.3.1 The compensation in East and West

An interesting finding is that even though consultants are not concerned with the same issue depending on their expertise, they were all concerned with the compensation of expatriates.

Under the perspective of **strategic consultancy**, in some societies, the topic of money may be taboo, but employers should not forget that money is a concern for people.

"We must not forget that people also work for money..." (C1)

Based on the C1 case, companies would like to understand the cost involved with expatriation. Employers want to make sure that expatriation, at least, does not imply costs for their employees. They want to make the compensation, the same in terms of purchasing power as if the employee was in their home country:

"The standard package [for expatriation] will be a guarantee of purchasing power...So we're basically comparing two things, it's the cost differential between American charges and taxes versus French charges and taxes..." (C1)

If the company is a bit more generous or more willing to reward the expatriate, a more classic package can be given:

"Then there's the classic expat package. This is a package where we're [the company] going to take care of a lot of things: we're going to pay bonuses, expat allowance, mobility allowance, we're going to pay for accommodation, children's schooling, travel, etc." (C1)

In some countries, the spouse may not be able to work, therefore companies must be able to address at least partially this loss of income:

"So if I send someone as an expat to Jeddah, his wife/spouse will not be able to work in Jeddah...So we are losing an income, as a couple... many expats even, who have classic packages with bonuses, no longer earn money...We often merely make up for a loss elsewhere." (C1)

Therefore, as understood from the consultant's perspective, expatriation is no longer a financial windfall and expatriates may lose a limited or certain amount of money because employers may not cover all the loss with one person working instead of two.

Consultants working on **immigration** are concerned with immigration because countries have minimum requirements in terms of income to deliver visas. For instance, the minimal compensation for an expert visa in Finland is 3000€/Month:

"So if it's the special expert [visa], it's 3000 euros/month...And for example, for entrepreneurs, as they come, they have not yet established their business, if they apply for a residence permit for one year, they have to have the money for one year in the account."(C3)

" They [the expatriate] have to [follow the compensation according to the visa guidelines], we are looking at it."(C2)

Without proper compensation, visas cannot be issued and therefore expatriation cannot start. Therefore, there is a particular emphasis on this stake.

Finally, compensation is an important topic for **relocation** experts. Based on the budget that expatriates may have (i.e., compensation) they will not provide the same service. If the compensation tends to be generous, they are more likely to ask for more services from consultants and have other needs such as a car, quarantine services...

"Often, the company pays for their employee's housing, car, our relocation services. They also offer the quarantine service, often. And then they have their daily allowance from France, for every day they are here in Finland, plus their salary. Sometimes, there are also, but it depends on the company, round trips to come and go."(C3)

However, a gradual disengagement on the behalf of companies is observed by other consultants:

"I've seen it shrink [international mobility policies] over the years, it's easy to cut back on that kind of policy...even when they are on local contracts (because that's the big trend, we locate people, it's cheaper), they are entitled to 1 to 2 months, very exceptionally 3 months, of what is called temporary accommodation." (C2)

"Before, it was systematically the company that signed the lease, paid the rent, etc. Today this is no longer the case... It's a general trend [to have reduced package for expatriation], for me, as far as our clients are concerned... regardless of the expatriate's origin." (C4)

Some cultural aspects, such as the way of spending money or the necessity to help the family in the home country needs to be taken into consideration by experts in relocation:

"I discover that the Chinese clients have a very thrifty lifestyle...I see their salary level which is quite correct for the work they come to do...The women who come, they send the money back to China."(C3)

Nevertheless, based on consultancy opinion it seems that compensation is rather a matter of position than nationality:

"I think that the difference today of package and all that, it doesn't come from the nationality of the person, really, it's the policy of the company and also the positions that these people occupy, so the nationality plays a little bit a minor role." (C4)

6.4.4 After the assignment services

Consultants – in general – have less workload on the repatriation part of expatriation because it is less probable that companies will contact them. As illustrated by one of the cases:

"We do not really help much because often the companies have their local partners in these countries, or like in France, they say 'ah, well, going back to your country doesn't require any support.'"(C4)

Still, experts in relocation or immigration may provide some support to their customers.

Table 15: Definition of the different services provided after the assignment.

Service provided	Explanation
Immigration	<p><i>"We take care of them by making sure that their departure goes well by telling them [things such as] ...the residence permit even if it is still valid, it will no longer be valid 8 days after you have left your flat [in France] because you no longer have an address." (C2)</i></p> <p><i>"We sometimes continue the follow-up for the taxes because the declaration is only done the following." (C3)</i></p>
Relocation	<p><i>"We also have exit Finland package, we prepare all the contract closures that need to be done, we also do the transfer to the airport, so we do the pick-up and drop off." (C3)</i></p>

Based on the data gathered there is very little that indicates a difference between the help provided for Eastern or Western clients on the repatriation part.

6.4.5 Conclusion

Based on the previous elements, a conclusion of the current section can be drawn. Even though consultants acknowledged that cultural difference does not play a big role in their daily, some differences were noticed in consultants' speeches. These differences do not imply major adjustments from consultants; however, they are enough important since consultants mentioned them during the interview. Consultants presumed that

globalization is the reason for this convergence between East and West. The most surprising finding is the central role of money (i.e., compensation) for every phase of expatriation and consultancy. The table below summarizes the key findings:

Table 16: Conclusion of the differences between East and West in expatriation.

Important topic in expatriation	West	East
Pre-departure	Less worried, will anyway find a solution. May not have prior experience in the home country.	More conscientious departure, with usually a prior experience in the future host country.
During	Has fewer networks than its Eastern counterpart. May need a longer adaptation time.	Following up with Easterners is easier because they are more independent than their western counterparts. However, being too much autonomous at the beginning may have some drawbacks.
Compensation	Depicted as less thrifty, however as its Eastern counterpart, he/she needs to deal with the rarity of a complete expatriate package. Compensations vary according to the company and position of the expatriate.	Easterners are depicted as thrifty people who do not waste their money. Every penny saved is a penny earned. Compensations vary according to the company and position of the expatriate.
After the expatriation	Consultants are less busy with the after expatriation part because companies are not asking for their services. Some little services, such as following up taxes or closing contracts can be done, but not much is done for both Easterners and Westerners.	

6.5 A good consultant

Added together, consultant opinions on what is a good consultant give a quite complete point of view on this matter. First of all, in terms of hard skills, consultants should have a deep understanding of the law and good command of English:

"We have consultants that are jurist who has generally studied law because in expatriate management, there is a very technical aspect, we need to deal with a lot of content: labor law, social security, taxation, immigration."(C1)

"You need to have a solid training in both HR and immigration law; you should be at least bilingual in English, afterwards if you have other languages, it's always a little advantage."(C2)

"To be able to speak, communicate and write in a language other than Finnish."(C3)

"A person who speaks several languages, so obviously the language of the country and English, that's for sure, and if there are other languages, that's an advantage too, even if it's not 100 per cent mastered."(C4)

In terms of soft skills, consultants should have both listening skills and empathy:

"A person who can better accompany people, especially from other countries, and who should therefore have this intercultural sensitivity..." (C4)

"You need to have a good sense of understanding. Then you have to be multicultural." (C3)

"I would like to say that you have to be anti-conflict, even if the person in front of you annoys you."(C2)

Finally in terms of attitude toward customers dynamism is praised by one of the firms:

"Be very reactive, like American consulting."(C1)

Designed from the consultants' point of view, the perfect consultant is someone who ideally holds a degree from a law university or at least has a strong comprehension of

international mobility from a legal perspective. The consultant should also be able to speak the local language, English, and as a facultative bonus the native language of the expatriate. His or her soft skills are very important in his relationship with the expatriate, the sense of service, empathy is key for being successful in the job.

6.6 Successful expatriation

In the eye of consultants, the definition of successful expatriation is heavily influenced by their field of expertise. Their vision is mostly oriented toward the satisfaction of their clients:

"Success means being able to keep people here, that they enjoy being here, and that they don't leave immediately... So that is also essential for the employer, because it costs a lot of money." (C3)

"For me, a successful expatriation is when the employee - and/or his family, it depends - manages to settle in, as we say in English, the fortnight, in about ten days, without worrying about the problems of finding accommodation, administrative problems, etc., so that the person can, from the very first day, start working for his employer...It is also about the family feeling at home, welcomed, comfortable, and that once this part is done, that they want to stay for the initial duration of the mission and not leave six months later." (C4)

"He should be like a fish in the water after 6-8 months." (C2)

However, one of the cases had a more employee and long-term definition of successful expatriation which is worth mentioning:

"Expatriation today, in many cases, is a career springboard. There are a lot of companies that make the expat pass through expatriation to one day become an executive, to climb the ladder in France."(C1)

Based on the consultant's perspective, a successful expatriation is:

1. A person/family who stays in their new home country for the planned and entire length as agreed with their employers. He/She should feel comfortable in the country and not disturbed by administrative procedure.
2. A person who can rapidly be productive for the firm. The costs and stakes associated with expatriation are high. The sooner the person delivers his potential, the better it is from both consultants and companies' perspectives.
3. Will gain in experience and professional skills during the experience so that at the return, he or she will have a more managerial position.

6.7 COVID-19 from consultants' perspective

The four companies were more or less sharing the same perception of the current health crisis. At the beginning of the current crisis, they were worried about the COVID because it opened a new period of uncertainty on mobility and their business:

"Yes, a little bit [worried about COVID-19] ...We said to ourselves 'oh dear, we hope that it doesn't last too long.'" (C1)

"So let's say that if I look at last year, in terms of spring, it was very, very hard but for all the other companies because the restrictions of the State were very strict, which means that our activity was almost impossible." (C4)

Nevertheless, it is important to recall that consultants are working with expatriates highly qualified that are vital to some projects, therefore countries organized permits to let these experts enter into their territories despite the current restrictions. It can be even argued that the current crisis increased the need for consultancy since extra paperwork is required to enter the country:

"So we have mobility. We have clients who are recruiting and doing intra-group mobility... we have a lot of paperwork to draw up and send to the people who come [to France]. Only people with a long-stay visa and a talent passport [special visa type] can go back to France." (C2)

"So for the moment, this year has been complicated, but the Finnish government is doing everything necessary to keep the borders open anyway, for people who come to work in Finland...So I trust our government to do everything necessary to keep the logistics for the specialists to come and work in Finland."(C3)

"In the summer, it was unblocked [company's business], in the autumn, it was unblocked even more." (C4)

"But that doesn't worry us too much, because the future of mobility is still there and expats will always be needed."(C1)

Therefore, despite COVID-19, companies are not too much worried about their business and mobility because procedures for experts have been implemented in many countries.

7 Conclusion

Consultancies work with Western and Eastern expatriates is complex and multidimensional. The objective of this paper is to observe the role of consultancies in the expatriation process and to see the way consultancies work with Western or Eastern companies. To investigate the research question, case study research has been made in designed and conducted in line with Yin (2018) suggestions. This section will first bring an important discussion on the different findings that have been made in the previous section. These findings will be confronted with the literature review that was presented. It will also present the theoretical and managerial contributions. Finally, the different limitations and suggestions for future research will be pointed out.

7.1 Discussion of the key findings

During the construction of the literature review, many managerial and behavior differences were observed in the two cultural clusters in question. A key assumption was the idea that if Westerners and Easterners behave and work differently and therefore, they must have differences in the way they expatriate themselves. Many studies and scholars have pointed out differences between Westerners and Easterners in their vision of expatriation, among them Tung, (1982) as a pioneer on the topic, comparing the practices between American, European, and Japanese firms. This study has been refreshed by Tungli & Peiperl, (2009), sign that the topic is still ongoing. On the other side, consultancies, who are working with both clients must have a clear vision on the topic. However, papers considering their vision are too rare. Therefore, it is legitimate to see, how they address customers' concerns, whether the way they work is changing based on the cultural cluster of the client, and what challenges they may have because of the culture.

As previously mentioned in the methodological section, “an exploratory study aim to understand an issue without being sure of the problem himself (Saunders et al., 2007)”. Thus, the research question has been formulated without being sure of the problem itself and was mostly based on the assumptions that were made. It aimed to look at the

differences and similarities between the expertise provided by consultants to firms so that they can succeed in the expatriation management process. Although consultants have acknowledged that some differences can be observed among cultures (communication, language...), it seems that cultural differences are not an issue at the core of their work. The current globalization standardized business practices around the world. Among these differences, the most salient was related to the communication, behavior, and relationship with money. Chinese people are described by consultants are much more thrifty people than their Western counterparts. This finding for instance is coherent with Confucian values which preaches modesty, strong familial values, self-sacrifice, and hard work (Chhokar et al., 2007).

A major discovery is about the industry of consultancy itself. Based on Kubr, (2002), it is known that professionals in IHRM and expatriation are divided between big and small firms. However, it did not describe how concretely, they were separated and how the difference among consultants could be made. Three main categories of consultants emerged that could be called: **Strategic consultancy, immigration, and relocation**. Some firms may be specialized in one field or cover everything. As mentioned by one of the interviewees, the various consultants form a network of expertise. This finding demystifies consultancy in expatriation management and shows that even things that everything is important in expatriation. Scholars when talking about adaptation may heavily discuss topics such as cross-cultural training before departure or intrinsic characteristics (gender, marital status) of the expatriate that may influence his adaptation. However, vital services such as **relocation** and **immigration** are key to the good adaptation of expatriates. Despite their differences, it is key to mention that consultants are all linked to the important topic of compensation:

Current cases confirmed the trends observed by BIG 4 on consultancy needs. Consultants are needed because they reduce the amount of pressure on HR departments and have the global and local expertise that the company may not have. Compliance – as highlighted in the BIG 4 survey - was mentioned very often by consultancies. This is a

very important topic because it can have important legal and public image consequences for a company. Unlike the KPMG International (2020) survey, consultants are convinced that they help their clients saving an important amount of money which is less the case than in the survey (30% of respondents). Whether it is tax, strategic, immigration or relocation services, consultancies usually argue that they make the expatriate more informed, fully compliant, and well-informed on its own situation. From the consultancy perspective, the expatriate is ready to work sooner as the employer would have expected without their help and is more willing to stay for the length agreed with the employer. This rift in perception between consultants and clients may be partly explained by the fact that wellness, willingness, and productivity of the expatriate to work cannot be easily measured while a bill can be. Nevertheless, it is a fact that satisfied clients usually come back to ask for the same services to consultants. It somehow means that the billed price is fair. However, to get clients to come back, consultancies should have consultants who have strong knowledge of the law, fluency at least in English, strong soft skills, and intercultural awareness.

The way consultancies work with their client is true to the 5 steps described by Kubr (2002): entry, diagnosis, action planning, implementation, and termination. However, Kubr (2002) highlighted the fact that many consultants may have a scope of intervention limited to the 3rd step which is action planning. Nevertheless, this is not the case for our case study. Consultants usually implement the action decided with their clients and check if everything is going well based on the schedule agreed with the client (visa, accommodation...). Consultants in expatriate management are truly in the field to serve their clients. One interesting fact is that consultancy work is mainly limited to its best efforts. They cannot replace the client for important topics such as paying enough for the expatriate to pass the visa requirement at the border. Another important point is that the consultancy process is mainly seen through a linear process in which the client asks for a service that is delivered and paid. This is not the case for consultancy in expatriation management. It is a circular process because the client very often comes back.

Both East and West companies overlook the repatriation of their expatriates. Therefore, consultancy work is very limited on this phase of expatriation and limited to tasks such as taxes or contract closure. Among the consultants interviewed, very little coaching is done for expatriates to help families go back to their home country. It is an important finding that is correlated with the literature review for both Eastern (Shen & Edwards, 2004) and Western (Kimber, 2019) companies. This feeling of carelessness is perfectly expressed by one of the respondents in Kimber (2019):

“When you first take an assignment overseas, there is enormous support and planning given to placing you. The repatriation is another story. It was like ‘Oh yeah, we better find you a job,’ and there wasn’t the same level of rigor and commitment and concern about coming back” (Kimber, 2019, p. 388)

As highlighted by the workload of consultants, there is an important amount of work on the two first phases of the assignment (pre-departure and during) to get expatriates ready to operate. There is the belief that returning to the home country is an easy process while, it is not.

Finally, consultants are confident in the future. As highlighted in the introduction and despite the current anxiety-producing atmosphere in the news, mobility is still going on. Starting from Summer 2020, consultants are busy working, advising their clients on the topic of global mobility. More than ever, consultants are proactive in finding solutions for their Eastern and Western clients: relocation experts are providing quarantine solutions, immigration consultants are doing extra procedures to get a laissez-passer for the expatriates to come.

7.2 Theoretical contribution

This paper, on a general basis, contributes to the current studies on expatriate management. The originality and heaviest theoretical contribution arise in the perspective offered by the paper which is the consultancy one. Scholars for unknown reasons have neglected the possibility to see expatriation management through their perspective. By not giving voice to consultants, scholars were giving the impression that actors in expatriation management were limited to the following ones: The business department (give the order), the HR department (support the business department), and the expatriate (go abroad and carry the tasks given). Thus, the data gathered provide a new model of 4 actors, with as a new actor, the consultants. Therefore, this paper provides a more concrete vision on the weaknesses that firms may have when using expatriation as a tool for their business activities and prove that consultants are very essential to their business activities.

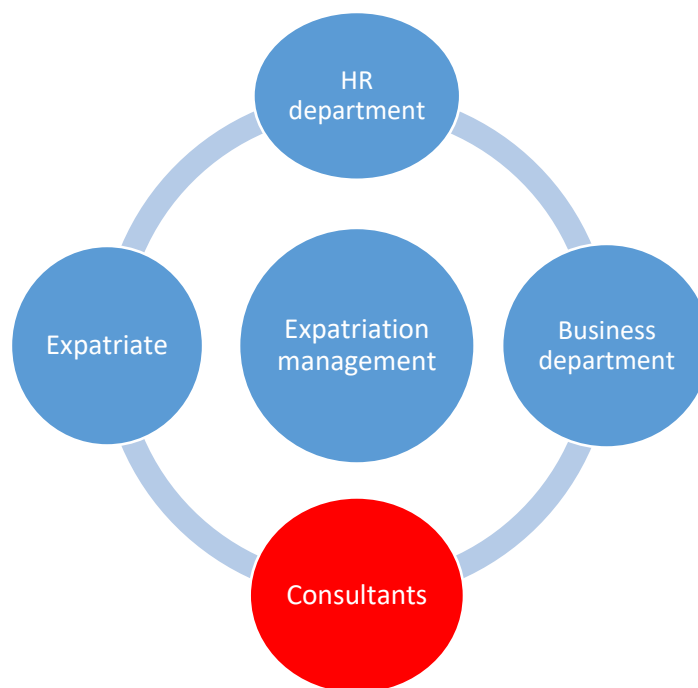


Figure 4: The actors of expatriation management.

Moreover, this paper confirmed the preview of the industry offered by (Kubr, 2002) but provides more details about the actors, their scope of activities. It has also confirmed the different studies which suggested some slight differences in the management of expatriate management between Western and Eastern companies (Tung, 1982; Tungli & Peiperl, 2009). However, these differences do not have any deep impact on consultancy job.

7.3 Managerial contribution

This paper has several layers of managerial contributions. The first layer is for the expatriate. For them, the paper will highlight the role of consultants and the importance they may have on their expatriation. The current paper has a strong emphasis on the importance of consultants between the HR department and themselves. Expatriates that will read this paper will be able to compare the services that their companies are providing for them and the entirety of services that may be provided for them. They will discover that their counterparts in Asia, Europe, and America are going through the same issues as them especially when it comes to the sensitive topic of compensation. The opinion of consultants on the topic may confirm the global impression among expatriates that there is currently an important budget cut in companies for their expatriates. Expatriates are now more likely to be aware that companies hire consultants because they may sometimes lack the time or skills to deal with their issues.

The second layer is toward HR departments that need for business purpose to deal with expatriate management. The current paper suggests best practices for them in the way they need to face issues with expatriation. The best advice from consultants is to ask expert services whenever the department does not have enough resources, skills, or time to deal with the issues. It is way cheaper for companies to subcontract part of their load on expatriation management than doing it hazardously. Lack of skills may lead firms to be outlaw and exposed potentially to important fines and penalties. Based on the local regulation, expatriates might not say everything to them so that they can preserve

their privacy. HR departments must take more conscientiously the return part of expatriation if they want to avoid a high turnover rate.

Finally, the thesis has managerial implications for consultancies themselves. Good practices among firms have been exposed through the whole analysis. Both soft (communication) and hard (legal) skills are needed for the job. Some specificities or difficulties while operating with Eastern and Western customers were exposed through the findings. Any consultant may compare his feelings or thoughts with the ones exposed in the following paper. They may also learn new facts about their peers such as their scope of activities, the different services provided in immigration or relocation, and their vision for the future.

7.4 Limitations

The first limitation that was discussed in the previous section is that this study was exploratory and entered the research field without strong assumptions. During the data collection, the researcher gradually found out that culture or nationality does not play an important role in the eyes of the consultants. It might be argued that this paper has more explored the help provided by the consultants on a general basis rather than exploring the differences in the help provided based on the cultural background of the expatriate. Therefore, it can be argued that the following paper answered partially the research question. Nevertheless, the findings made in the current paper are worth mentioning for the research on expatriate management.

The second important limitation is about the selected cases. Due to a lack of both time and network, the researcher has not been able to have any Eastern consultants in its sample. This is an important limitation because it may have brought significant knowledge and a fresh eye on the practices from the Western side. Since all the consultants are considered as Westerns (French, Finnish and Estonian), it is impossible to provide a complete vision from the consultancy's perspective on the Easterners and Westerners.

Finally, it seems that consultants are not involved in the entire chain of expatriation. Among the firms selected, there are no firms involved in recruitment and selection of the expatriate, do not have any role in the acceptance of the offer or pre-departure training. They are not involved in the evaluation of the expatriate and are superficially involved in the return process. Wrong decisions in key parts of expatriation management such as recruitment and selection process may have tremendous impacts on the whole expatriation and cannot be fixed by consultants. Thus, it is difficult for both consultants and researchers to have a full comprehension of every issue that may occur during expatriation. Some internal issues in firms such as reorganization, budget cuts, or mergers may have a big impact on firms' policies for expatriation management.

7.5 Suggestion for future research

More studies in expatriate management should take consultancies' perspectives. HR departments, managers, and expatriate themselves are subject to several biases because they are themselves deeply involved in the expatriation process. On the other hand, consultants have the necessary distance to analyze the current situation with better objectivity and less resentment than either expatriate or HR department. They have a close relationship with both company and expatriate which might not be the case in all the company. They also deal with the private matters of expatriates and are their first or second interlocutors in case of any hardship during their journey. Other papers could explore the differences among consultancy in the way they work. After COVID-19, some scholars could totally immerse themselves into daily life of a consultancy and write research on them.

Since the current study may not have a complete picture of consultancies practices, further studies may explore the other possible types of consultancies that have not been identified or to analyze in deep practices in a type of consulting (strategic consultancy, immigration, or relocation). Indeed, it could be good to explore consultancy in recruitment for expatriates for instance. It might be also interesting to have a study on the help provided by Eastern consultants (Chinese, Japanese...) to foreign firms in their soil and

to see whether the help required may or not differ. Finally, putting aside the obvious reason of globalization, a sociological and psychological an on why business practices are converging might be valuable.

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