UNIVERSITY OF VAASA

FACULTY OF BUSINESS STUDIES

DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT

Vesa Suonto

THE IMPACT OF EXPATRIATE ASSIGNMENTS ON INTRA-ORGANIZATIONAL CAREERS:

A Case Study

VAASA 2013

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ABSTRACT

International assignments are widely regarded as requirements for top managerial positions in many multinational organizations. Many studies also confirm that individuals with international experience tend to earn more, perform better and are promoted more often. Despite this, many repatriates report that their international assignments have in fact disrupted, rather than advanced their careers. This aim of this study is examining the effects that expatriate assignments have on employees' intra-organizational careers. Furthermore, this study examines organizational support mechanisms and their role in facilitating assignment and career success.

The theoretical section of this thesis discusses mainly existing theories of expatriate career literature. An analytical framework for this study was proposed as a product of the literature review. The qualitative research was conducted by applying a case study research strategy. The empirical part consists of semi-structured interviews of seven former expatriates working in the case company. These were conducted and analyzed using qualitative methods.

The findings of the study mostly support the notion that assignments facilitate career success. Four out of seven interviewees reported that they believed international assignments had advanced their careers and only one felt that career advancement might have been easier without assignments. In addition to external career success, the expatriates felt they had received substantial self-developmental benefits and five out of seven also believed that their value in the job-market had increased due to the assignments. However, in some cases, international assignments were seen to restrict available career options and cause a lack of networks in home country. This was seen as a restriction in moving between different jobs inside the organization.

KEYWORDS: expatriate, assignment, career, success, intra-organizational, case study

1. INTRODUCTION

In this age of globalization, more and more companies seek success from international markets. Whether this internationalization happens by using mergers and acquisitions or by creating foreign subsidiaries, expatriates have a significant role in the process. International assignments are also seen as the single most powerful means for companies to develop future global leaders for themselves (Stroh, Black, Mendenhall & Gregersen 2004). When a company starts its internationalization process, expatriates have a critical effect on both organization's global strategy formulation and its implementation. The number of expatriates is constantly rising, and as world business becomes more and more global, international assignments are seen as an increasingly common part of business careers (Suutari & Tornikoski 2000). Because of the rapid growth of international business especially over the past two decades, the demand for expatriates has increased and it still keeps on increasing. According to the 2008 Global Relocation Trends Survey, 67% of companies reported an increase in their expatriate population compared to the previous year and 68% expected a further increase in 2008 (Hippler 2009). Global assignments are becoming more and more important for both the global success of organizations, and the careers of individuals (Saunders & Aycan 1997: 118).

Many multinational firms regard developing internationally mobile expatriate managers as strategically paramount. The need for internationally competent executives is constantly rising and therefore, corporate career development of expatriate managers is seen as critical. Companies need world-class managers world-wide, in order to effectively compete against major global competitors (Selmer 2000). Expatriate assignments not only enable multinational firms to carry out their current global initiatives, but also serve as an important tool for developing the global managers who will lead these organizations in the future. Globalization has created an increased demand for business leaders with a high level of international skills and global awareness. Expatriate assignments play a crucial role in developing such global

managers (Bolino 2007). It has even been argued that, for many executives, international assignments are the 'single most influential force in their development as managers' (Stroh et al. 2004). Studies of long-term career success of professional employees and managers have also shown that individuals with significant international experience earn more, perform better, are promoted more often, and are more likely to take high-level executive positions (Benson & Pattie 2008).

As a form of international work, deploying expatriates is still constantly growing. This is despite the costs of traditional expatriation and the inherent risks of losing talent during or after the international assignment, as well as the difficulties of organizations to design adequate selection processes. Expatriate assignments are increasingly seen by many multinational organizations, as well as individuals, as keys to successful careers (Jokinen, Brewster & Suutari 2008). It should be noted, that career success of expatriates, or for any employee for that matter, is of concern not only to individuals but also to organizations, as employees' personal success often eventually contributes to organizational success (Ng, Eby, Sorensen & Feldman 2005).

1.1. Purpose of the study & research questions

Expatriates are a topic of great interest for HR managers and researchers due to the importance and increasing use of international work assignments. Extensive research has been done on many different aspects of international assignments e.g. the suitability of employees for expatriate assignments, willingness to accept international assignments, the expatriate adjustment process, and cross-cultural and organizational support practices used in facilitating expatriation and repatriation. One area where important questions still remain, however, is the impact of expatriate assignments on careers (Benson & Pattie 2008).

Employees of international organizations often believe that international experience is necessary if one wishes to be promoted to top levels of management. There are many studies also confirming that individuals with international experience earn more, perform better and are promoted more often. Despite this, many repatriates report that their international assignments have in fact disrupted, not progressed their careers. There are studies showing that returning expatriates receive fewer promotions and less recruiting contacts than their domestic counterparts (Benson & Pattie 2008). This is a paradox in a sense that while international experience is often seen as a requirement for top managerial positions, it seems that organizations often have difficulties in rewarding the human capital developed through expatriation. (Carraher, Sullivan & Crocitto 2008). This contraction in the HRM literature was the key reason for choosing the topic of this Master's thesis. This specific subject was chosen mainly because it is interesting from academic perspective but it can also offer valuable insight and contribution for the management of the case company.

This study will examine the effects of expatriate assignments on employee intra-organizational careers in the case company. The focus of this master's thesis is determining whether or not expatriation is actually good or bad for employee's careers. Furthermore, this study will examine organizational support mechanisms and analyze how organizations could better support expatriates in their assignments and careers.

The main research question this study aims to answer is:

- How do international assignments contribute to the intra-organizational careers of expatriates?

The study will also aim to answer a sub question:

- What is the role of different organizational support mechanisms and tools in facilitating assignment and career success?

1.2. Definitions

Expatriates

Expatriates are employees of business or government organizations who are sent by their organization to a related unit in a country which is different from their own, to accomplish a job or organization-related goal for a pre-designated temporary time period of usually more than six months and less than five years in one term (Saunders & Aycan 1997: 250). Moving from parent company or headquarters to foreign subsidiaries or overseas operations is traditionally viewed as expatriation. Expatriates are most typically used in developing and managing foreign operations, and also in helping to build global relationships, and common corporate identity and business culture among management ranks (Briscoe 2004: 234-235). Expatriates are generally believed to have an easier acceptance of headquarter-determined rules, a better understanding of overall corporate priorities, and a greater commitment to overall corporate goals (Morley & Heraty 2004). Previous research indicates that expatriates are typically sent overseas for managerial development, to serve as a source of control, or to fill in an overseas vacancy until a permanent employee can be found (Bolino 2007). Expatriates who return from an international assignment are referred to as repatriates.

The principal reasons for employing HQ expatriates in MNCs have been identified by Suutari. The first one is the lack of availability of management and technical skills in some countries. The second reason for using expatriates is to be more able to control local operations. Thirdly, companies can use senior expatriates to maintain trust in key foreign businesses after major international acquisitions. Expatriates are also used for important representational purposes and management development purposes. (Suutari et al. 2000)

The constantly globalizing business landscape and advanced technology solutions that facilitates global business have also brought changes to how expatriates are defined.

The term expatriate is no longer as precise in describing the constantly evolving duties, career goals and skills that are required in global business. In recent years several new terms have emerged such as, Halfpats, Glopats, Self-Initiated Expatriates and Flexpatriates to define the different forms of expatriation (Biemann & Andresen 2010). The focus of this paper is, however, on the traditional company assigned expatriates.

Career success

The concept of a career has been defined as a sequence of related work experience and activities, directed at personal and organizational goals, through which a person passes during his/her lifetime. These activities are partly under their control and partly in the control of others (Selmer 2000). Career success, in turn, is defined as accumulated positive work and psychological outcomes resulting from one's work experiences. Career success has been defined by scholars in two ways. The first is to examine career success objectively from en extrinsic point of view. This is the traditional way of examining career success that includes things that can be evaluated by others such as number of promotions, salary attainment etc. However, to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of career success, there has been an increasing emphasis on more subjective evaluations of individuals' careers. This second way examines subjective or intrinsic variables and individual's own subjective judgment towards his/her career such as career and job satisfaction. Based on previous research, the objective and subjective career success are, as can be expected, often positively correlated (Ng et al. 2005).

This thesis will look at both perspectives of career success. It is important to look not only the objective career advancement but also the intrinsic success of expatriates; both the actual promotions and climbing the corporate ladder as well as the way the expatriates feel that their international assignments have contributed to their overall career satisfaction and success.

2. EXPATRIATE ASSIGNMENTS & CAREER IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, the issues concerning career implications of expatriate assignments, and the different reasons that might cause the contradiction between hopes of career advancement and often reported negative impacts, will be discussed.

2.1. General problems with international assignments

There are many reported issues with international assignments. The cost of a failed expatriate assignment can be five to ten times the cost of a local hire. And as, according to Carraher et al. (2008), the failure rates of expatriate managers ranges from a low of 3% to as high as 70%, it is clear to see that having successful expatriate assignments can be a crucial success factor for companies. The most usual reported difficulties faced by the international assignee are culture shock, transitional difficulties, and differences in work-related norms, homesickness, isolation, housing, schooling, health care, cuisine, language, customs, sex roles, and the cost of living. Other major issues identified in the expatriate literature include inadequate selection, poorly designed compensation packages, poor pre-departure training, and the expatriate's and/or his/her family's problems in adjusting to the new culture and environment (Morley & Heraty 2004). In addition to these problems and high organizational costs, many returning expatriates report that their international assignment disrupted their careers. As much as seventy-five percent of expatriates complain about the 'out of sight, out of mind' syndrome and other negative outcomes such as lack of expected promotions and rewards, reverse culture shock, and receiving less satisfying and less challenging positions after returning home (Carraher et al. 2008).

In a study by Antal (2001) on German expatriates, the interviewees expressed several key reasons for dissatisfaction in the ways their expatriate processes were managed. The

preparation phase was not inclusive enough, communication during the assignment was inadequate, and the planning of the repatriation process was negligent. Expatriates felt cut from the home organization during their assignment. This was due to lacking contact to the line manager back home, infrequent or nonexistent return visits to head office, and because the official contact person in headquarters was from HRM and did not have a deep understanding of business issues and international work. During repatriation process, the interviewees found severe problems due to bad or late planning of the return post. Wittig-Berman & Beutell (2009) also point out that expatriates are underutilized because the organization simply does not know how the newly gained international knowledge of the repatriates can be used appropriately. This observation suggests that there is a need on organizations' part for a better understanding of the type of knowledge gained abroad.

The costs to firms for losing returning expatriates are also significant, both strategically and financially; expatriates usually have understanding in both the corporate headquarters environment as well as foreign operations. This is of great importance for the management of these foreign operations (Stroh, Gregersen & Black 2000; van der Heijden, van Engen & Paauwe 2009). Furthermore, expatriates can be seen as sources of competitive advantage. During their assignments, they acquire market-specific knowledge, personal skills, job-related management skills, network skills, and general management skills that are vital for competitive advantage. The loss of expatriate knowledge and skills can be critically detrimental for organizations hoping to develop global competence (van der Heijden et al. 2009).

To further stress the costs and risks of international assignments Webb (1996) has provided the following figures. The direct costs of bringing expatriate managers back home and finding replacements for them range between $50,000 and $200,000. It is estimated that direct costs of failed overseas assignments in US firms amount to annual losses of $2 billion. Another figure by Kotabe & Helsen (1998: 224) gives an estimate of annual costs between $2 billion and $2.5 billion for failed assignments. These figures do not include losses that cannot be measured, such as lost business opportunities,

damage to corporate reputations, reduced productivity etc. (Webb 1996). These indirect costs are also the most damaging and difficult to reverse in a short period of time (Lee 2007). In most instances, however, organizations view the risks and costs involved in sending employees abroad as worth the benefit of developing international management skills, and multinational mentality within the firm.

2.2. Motives for expatriates to accept international assignments

International assignments are accepted for several key reasons. Search for new experiences and challenges, and personal interest in internationalization is an important factor. Economic motives are also very important as companies often pay additional allowances to expatriates. Also differences in taxation and cost-of-living can impact the standard of living among expatriates. Learning, personal development and career progression possibilities are also often seen as crucial factors when accepting assignments. (Suutari 2003) Often, an international assignment is viewed as a career move with the expectation of career advancement upon return to the home office. The career backgrounds of many of today's high ranking executives seem to support this notion (Wittig-Berman et al. 2009).

Hippler (2009) has further defined different motives for expatriates to accept overseas assignments. There are many lists of different motives by several authors but it seems that they all can roughly be divided into the six following categories: career prospects, increase in salary, being urged by the company, broadening one's horizon, interesting task and interest in the country. It is obvious that each individual is motivated by different things; expatriates are a various group of people and there are a lot of differences of motives between them. However, most expatriates see international postings as a way to develop their skills and knowledge. Majority of assignees cite personal development as their main reason for accepting an assignment, rather than achieving company project goals or being good corporate citizens.

As has been stated, there is a shortage of managers who possess global skills and abilities and such managers are in high demand. However, some employees are not willing to accept overseas assignments. One critical reason for their reluctance is that they have seen what has happened to their colleagues when they returned home, and these potential expatriates often come to believe that their colleagues would have been better off if they had just stayed home (Bolino 2007). Many high potential managers may not be willing to accept global assignments for fear of derailing their careers (Konopaske, Roble & Ivanicevic 2009). In this light, it could be argued that organizations should take interest in the fate of their returning expatriates since their placement sends a strong signal to employees considering investing in expatriation themselves (Antal 2001).

2.3. Expatriate selection

One of the reasons often cited by scholars to explain high failure rates of expatriates is bad selection process. Webb (1996) reports that ninety per cent of the time, businesses select employees for overseas assignments solely on the basis of their technical expertise, not on their cross-cultural fluency. Important traits such as interpersonal skills, cultural sensitivity, adaptability and flexibility are often ignored in the selection process. Many managers and professionals believe that technical expertise is the most important criterion in selecting employees for international assignments. Technical competence is obviously an important factor, but relational abilities increase the probability of success by a large degree. In a study by Tung (1987) it was determined that the lack of technical competence as a contributor to expatriate failure was ranked only sixth. It has been argued that companies often take the safest route by placing the focus on technical qualifications, since in most cases sufficient technical competence can help to avoid immediate failure. It seems, however, that more recently companies are starting to pay more attention to other factors as well. Stone (1991) reports that in a study on expatriate selection criteria, managers ranked the ability of the expatriate to adapt to the foreign environment as the first. Furthermore, in a study by Yavas & Bodur

(1999) it was found that relational capabilities are just as essential as technical competence. The ideal personal characteristics for an expatriate were also identified. These include: Being culturally sensitive, having empathy, willingness to accept the challenge of intercultural experience and being culturally prepared for the assignment. Tung (1987) provides us also with a list for the main reasons for expatriate failure: 1. Inability of managers to adjust to the new environment, 2. The managers inability to adapt to the new environment, 3. Other family related issues, 4. The managers personality or emotional immaturity, and 5. the managers inability to cope with responsibilities associated with the overseas work. Also Mol, Born, Willemsen & Van der Molen (2005) found in their research that factors predicting expatriate success are 1) cultural sensitivity, 2) local language ability, 3) extraversion, 4) emotional stability, 5) agreeableness and 6) conscientiousness. These lists quite clearly show that technical expertise is not the only thing companies should be looking at when selecting the most appropriate expatriate to fill an international posting. Lee (2007) argues that expatriate assignments are more likely to succeed when there are both self-fulfillment factors (love of travel, searching new experiences etc.) as well as work-related factors (promotion, financial benefits etc.). Having the right attitude also plays a significant role in their perceived level of success.

Prior international experience can also predict success in the future assignment. In a study by Takeuchi, Tesluk, Yun & Lepak (2005) on 243 expatriates, researchers found support for previous international experience helping both in specific work adjustment as well as in general adjustment. When the prior experience facilitates individual's ability to effectively work and function in a host country, it can be seen as a relevant predictor of expatriates' success. The type of prior experience is also likely to influence the adjustment to a host country. A greater past experience, (a single lengthy episode or numerous shorter episodes) is associated with higher adjustment. Past experience provides expatriates with opportunities to learn certain essential skills. For example intercultural communication, relocation, and cognitive all have a positive influence on the expatriates' cross-cultural adjustment. (Takeuchi et al. 2005)

Sending ill-suited or unprepared managers abroad can mean missed business opportunities in developing overseas markets. For the individual, a failed assignment is likely to hurt career advancement as well as be a big hit for ego and self-esteem. Considering the high costs of expatriates, as well as the expatriate's hopes of career advancement, selecting the employee who is most likely to succeed is, therefore, critical (Webb 1996).

2.4. Assignment success & expatriate performance

Expatriate performance is usually conceptualized in terms of task completion, relationship building and overall performance. Expatriate success is defined as completion of the foreign assignment as defined at the beginning, cross-cultural adjustment while on assignment and good performance of the job while on the foreign assignment (Briscoe 2004: 256). Harrison & Shaffer (2005) further state that successful expatriates are those who (a) do not quit their assignments prematurely, and (b) complete their tasks and perform effectively, and develop and maintain interpersonal ties with host-country employees. Harrison & Shaffer (2005) have also created a model on expatriate performance. Their model of expatriate performance is based on general principles of motivation and is divided into three categories; *Psychological adaptation, effort regulation* and *job performance*. The basic idea of the model is that psychological needs drive job performance. Expatriates' *psychological adaptation* to international assignments has a direct impact on expatriates' *effort regulation*. Effort regulation is defined as allocation of personal resources, time, energy etc. to specific, day-to-day job activities. Effort regulation then determines expatriates' *job performance.*
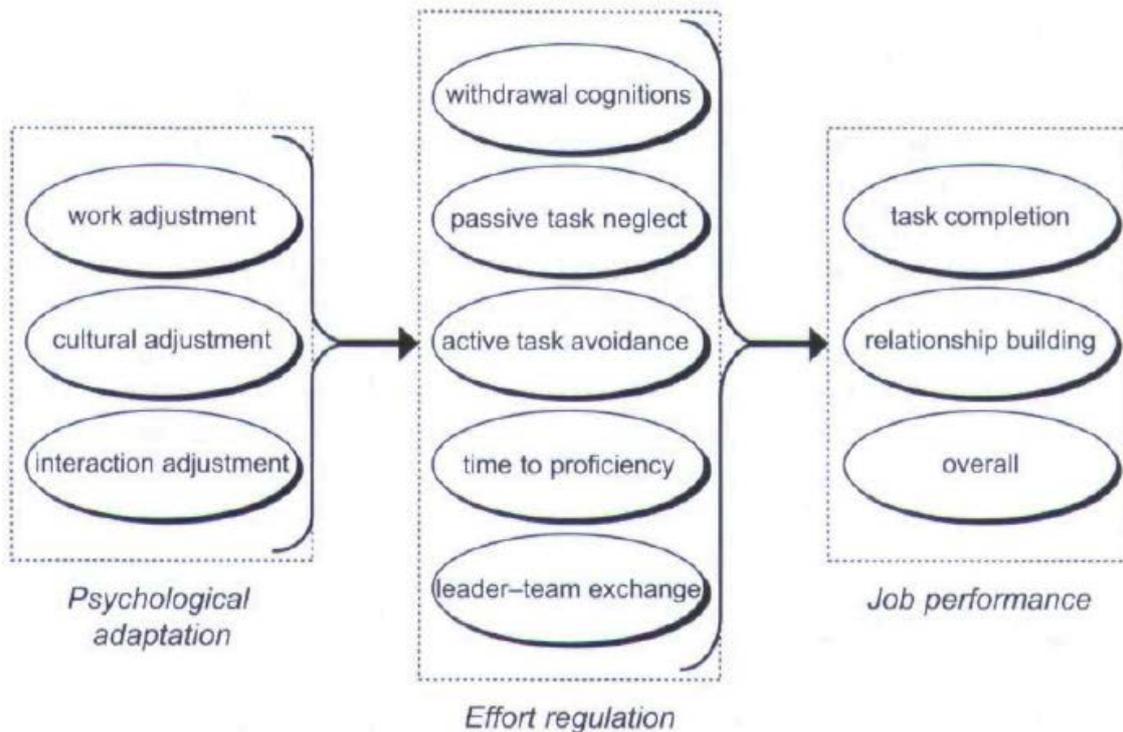
Figure 1: Model of expatriate performance (Harrison et al. 2005)

Organizations play a big role in facilitating expatriate success. According to Webb (1996), the components required to create competent international managers include language training, cross-cultural and business orientation and training, family consultations and cross-cultural training, mentoring programs and a career management approach to expatriation and repatriation. Effective programs will address human resources before, during and after the foreign assignment. For the individual, a failed international assignment is likely to affect his or her career and self-esteem negatively. Uncompleted assignments, poor performance, and high rates of turnover after repatriation are very common and cost MNCs millions of dollars every year (Stroh et al. 2004).

Yan, Zhu & Hall (2002) bring forth a perspective that includes individual's career building as a part of a successful expatriate assignment. In their view, successful expatriation depends not only on effective selection and training but also on the

individual's perceived future prospects beyond the assignment, particularly long-term career building and job opportunities upon repatriation.

The level of assignment success is often assessed from the perspective of either the organization (high financial costs etc.) or the individual assignee (career building opportunity etc.). Yan et al. (2002) suggest an integrated approach to defining assignment success that takes in to consideration both organizational as well as individual factors. Moreover, assignment success is also often defined by focusing on either the expatriation or the repatriation stage but not both. They argue that the outcomes of an international assignment should be assessed from both parties' perspectives and by considering both immediate and longer-term effects because the costs to the individual and the costs to the organization are most likely concurrent, and because the employee's expatriation and repatriation experiences are inherently related.

For the company, an important criterion for a successful assignment is an effective and timely completion of organizational tasks. If the key organizational objectives attached to the assignment are not achieved an assignment is looked upon as a failure. For the individual, however, success can mean different things such as experience of high job satisfaction, strong performance, and learning and personal growth. But because the process of an assignment consists of both the expatriation and repatriation stages, the assignment is seen as unsuccessful if repatriation is a failure. From a career theory point of view, repatriation is particularly critical, because the employee's assessment of success will be based on how the completion of the assignment impacts his or her career development and whether the initial expectations around the assignment are met. This kind of assessment can be done only after the individual has completed the assignment and has returned home. (Yan et al. 2002)

Success in repatriation can be measured, from the expatriate's perspective, in terms of longer-term career growth and development opportunities, such as promotions, challenging job assignments, increaser responsibility etc. From a human capital perspective, because the firm has invested large sums in developing the employee

through the overseas assignment, effective future utilization of the new expertise may be critically important. Longer-term measures of success for the organization could be institutionalizing and utilizing the expatriate's experience through retaining the repatriated manager, applying the individual's learning in future assignments, and transferring that manager's new expertise to other employees. (Yan et al. 2002)

Figure 2 represents an illustration of the integrated success criteria for international assignments by Yan et al. (2002). The figure shows the possible benefits to the individual and the organization, and integrates the assessment of success from the expatriation stage and the repatriation stage. By defining international assignment success this way, any particular assignment can be assessed as a success, failure, or mixed or in terms of a certain level of success. An assessment can be conducted from either the individual or the organizational point of view.

	Individual	*Organizational*
Expatriation *(shorter-term)*	- Task performance - Skill building, learning, and growth - Job satisfaction	- Accomplishment of organizational tasks - Achievement of key organizational objectives
Repatriation *(longer-term)*	- Continued development - Attractive future assignments - Promotion - Enlargement of responsibility	- Retention of repatriated employee - Utilization of new expertise - Transfer of expertise

Figure 2: Integrated Success Criteria for International Assignments (Yan et al. 2002)

2.5. Career impact

Expatriation is often considered as a developmental experience that leads to knowledge, new skills, and an international mindset which are valued in multi-national firms. Employees who accept international assignments believe that the skills and knowledge that are acquired overseas will benefit them in terms of salary growth and external marketability. The results of many studies on career impacts of overseas assignments are, however, mixed. For example, a study on 53 expatriates from Finland found that that they viewed expatriation as positive for their careers. Survey respondents reported that 77% believed that international assignments had enhanced their career progress and 68% had experienced a positive change in organization status (Suutari & Brewster 2003). Many other studies, however, are negative and suggest that working overseas delays or even damages careers. In a study by Oddou & Mendenhall (1991) on US repatriates, only one quarter were promoted while one fifth faced downward career mobility. In a study by Forster (1994) on UK expatriates, 46 % reported positive effects on their careers and 54 % negative. For the individual, satisfaction with the expatriation and repatriation process can be largely explained on the basis on the perceived impact of the assignment on the manager's career (Konopaske et al. 2009). A study by Morgan, Nie & Young (2004) also further indicates that promotion and increase in responsibility significantly contribute to expatriate satisfaction. Both expatriates and repatriates are more satisfied if their assignments involve career advancement, with promotions contributing much more to satisfaction when accompanied by increases in autonomy and responsibility.

All in all, it seems that organizations have a difficult time in rewarding the human capital developed through expatriation. According to Benson & Pattie (2008) repatriates receive promotions less frequently than domestic employees and both expatriates and repatriates receive less recruiting contacts than their domestic counterparts (Benson & Pattie 2008).

2.5.1. Expatriate expectations

Career advancement is one of the key reasons for employees to accept international assignments. Many surveys made on expatriates indicate that they tend to have high expectations that overseas experience will benefit their careers when they return to their home countries (Stroh et al. 2004). Stahl et al. (2002) found that 59% of expatriates believed that an expatriate assignment would help them advance within their companies (Bolino 2007). Furthermore, in a study on Finnish expatriates, 74% believed that their international experience would be valued in their organization and 62% felt that the international assignments would help promote their careers (Riusala & Suutari 2003). However, many studies show that repatriates often complain about being placed in unchallenging jobs with low levels of authority and little utilization of the acquired international skills and knowledge when they return home (Benson et al. 2008). Also, a common complaint among repatriates is that they are put in 'holding patterns' or temporary positions rather than permanent jobs when they return home to their organizations. Expatriates' expectations of instant benefits or promotions is in stark contrast with the fact that less than 10% of expatriates are assured of a promotion when they return home, and many are not even guaranteed a position of any kind within the company (Bolino 2007). Expatriates' expectations of career advancement are often overly optimistic.

It seems that many companies do not specify in advance how the international experience will fit into an employee's career progression. By failing to do so, they inadvertently make room for unfounded high expectations. This is one of the key reasons why repatriates often express much disappointment when discussing their return to the home office (Wittig-Berman et al. 2009). Managing expectations is a critical issue in international management and career development. An employee's subjective assessment of organizational practice and the gap between an expatriate's expectation and reality can have significant effect on the expatriating process (Yan et al. 2002). Hyder & Lövblad (2007) suggest that information is a key issue in managing and understanding the expectations of the expatriate. Receiving information and having

opportunities to communicate effectively with the home organization and environment are essential in keeping the expectations of expatriates as realistic. In addition to the communication behavior of the individual, the support practices of the company are also of great importance.

Expectations have a profound effect on the perceived success of the assignment, especially from the individual's point of view. The assignee's expectancy of the assignment for career building will significantly affect his or her job performance during expatriation, and the meeting of the individual's expectations when the assignment is completed will determine the success of repatriation. (Yan et al. 2002)

Yan et al. (2002) have created a framework that focuses on the psychological and transactional contract between individual and organization and their expectations toward one another. The main argument is that individual - organization match or mismatch in expectations can have a significant effect on the success of an international assignment. Each of the two parties looks a particular overseas assignment as a transactional or a relational contract. The way the assignment is assessed depends on multiple factors. From the organization's point of view, a reason for wanting to have a long-term relationship (relational contract) with the individual could be if the assignment has high strategic stakes, e.g. developing a major emerging market where the expatriate's market expertise can be an important competitive asset. Also, if the individual has been noted to have high potential for advancement, an organization might strive for a continuing relationship. The individual might be motivated to seek a relational contract if he or she feels that the organization will provide good opportunities for long-term career advancement that are in line with his or her own goals and values, and it is a firm to which he or she would like to commit to. Simply put, if either party sees long-term rewards with a relationship with the other party, they might have a motivation to pursue a relational contract with that party.

According to the dimensions of individual versus organizational and the type of contract, relational versus transactional, Yan et al. (2002) created a two by two matrix

(Figure 3). By using the matrix four different scenarios can be seen. These different scenarios are mutual loyalty, agent opportunism, principal opportunism, and a mutual transaction contract. These different relationships and scenarios can help us to understand why some assignments are more successful than others and why some assignments offer better career progression and others don't. This matrix also helps us to analyze the different goals of organizations and individuals toward international assignments. The matrix also looks at expatriation and repatriation phases separately and can help us better to understand the underlying mechanisms in the reported difficulties in repatriation. (Yan et al. 2002)

Figure 3: Organizational-Individual Alignment Matrix

Individual

	Relational	Transactional
Relational	**Cell I: Mutual loyalty** - High organizational success in expatriation and repatriation (P1) - High individual success in expatriation and repatriation (P2)	**Cell II: Agent opportunism** - Moderate organizational success in expatriation but failure in repatriation (P3) - High individual success in expatriation but mixed success in repatriation (P4)
Transactional	**Cell III: Principal opportunism** - Moderate organizational success in expatriation and low success in repatriation (P5) - Moderate individual success in expatriation but failure in repatriation (P6)	**Cell IV: Mutual transaction** - Moderate to high organizational success in expatriation and a better chance of organizational success in repatriation than that in the case of misalignment (P7) - Moderate to high individual success in expatriation and a better chance of individual success in repatriation than that in the case of misalignment (P8)

Organization

In mutual loyalty, both parties are committed to a long-term relational relationship and expect to receive and give loyalty. For organization, it is likely that the international assignment is seen as a part of a strategic plan for the business and for the individual's

development. The learning and experience of the individual is seen as having long-term significance. The expatriate would likely regard the assignment as a valuable and satisfying development opportunity (expatriation success). The base assumption in mutual loyalty is that when both parties view the contract as relational, an international assignment is likely to result in high levels of success in both expatriation and repatriation for both individual and for the organization. (Yan et al. 2002)

Both principal opportunism and agent opportunism happen because of disparities in perceptions. Agent opportunism is a case where the organization considers the international assignment as a relational contract but the employee sees it as shorter term or transactional. The base assumption of agent opportunism is that when the organization views the contract as relational and the individual views it as transactional an international assignment is likely to result in moderate success in expatriation and failure in repatriation, from the organization's perspective but is likely to result in a high level of success in expatriation and mixed success in repatriation, from the individual's perspective. (Yan et al. 2002)

In principal opportunism, the organization views an international assignment as a transactional contract while the individual perceives it as relational. The employer may be simply filling an open slot and consider the assignment as nothing strategic or intentionally misinform the employee, that the assignment has a long-term benefit to the company and will have a positive impact on the individual's future career prospects. The base assumption is that when the organization views the contract as transactional and the individual views it as relational, an international assignment is likely to result in moderate success in expatriation and low success in repatriation, from the organization's perspective, and moderate success in expatriation and failure in repatriation, from the individual's perspective. (Yan et al. 2002)

In mutual transaction contract both parties look at the assignment as transactional, project based, and open ended relationship that does not require long-term commitment. Both sides have less-than-full involvement and commitment in the relationship.

However, both the employee and the organization can focus fully on making the expatriate assignment a success, because the parties are being honest with each other about the future and there is no wasted effort in maintaining the appearance of a longer-term commitment. In this mutual transactional contract both parties do not have expectations beyond the expatriate assignment. However, there might be hopes for a subsequent assignment, and it is quite possible that based on a satisfying expatriate experience the parties might decide to continue the relationship. The base assumption is that when both parties view the contract as transactional, an assignment is likely to result in a moderate to high level of success in expatriation, from both the individual and organization's perspective, and the chances of repatriation success will be greater than either agent opportunism or principal opportunism from both organizational and individual perspective. (Yan et al. 2002)

According to this model, a win-win solution is possible in creating international assignment deals; both individual and organizational interests can be maximized or at least balanced. This, however, might not often be the case. This model could nevertheless be useful in raising the level of both individual and organizational awareness about one another's expectations, as well as help to understand longer-term organizational and individual consequences.

2.5.2. Human capital perspective

Expatriates report that they receive significant personal and self-development benefits from international assignments. Their communication skills are enhanced because of their exposure to different cultures and they gain a broader, global perspective on the firm's operations. The more complex the environment, the more it enhances their motivation and planning techniques, thus, increasing their confidence and skills (Webb 1996). This type of development should therefore lead to positive career and organizational implications because of the increased human capital.

Human capital refers to individuals' educational, professional and personal experiences that can enhance their career attainment and can be examined as a predictor of career success (Ng et al. 2005). It includes the skills and knowledge we gather in formal and informal learning and it can be seen as important explaining also expatriate success. Human capital theory suggests that individuals tend to get ahead more rapidly when they have noteworthy accomplishments and achievements, invest in themselves, and are experienced. Therefore, human-capital variables have been widely recognized as important determinants of career success. Based on the human capital theory, having acquired and developed valuable skills and abilities overseas, expatriates should advance in their organizations more quickly than their domestic counterparts (Bolino 2007). Expatriate assignments are seen as valuable learning experiences that develop new knowledge and skills. Placing employees in difficult or unusual assignments, such as international assignment, often results in substantial learning. Expatriate assignments are thought to develop general knowledge of international business, leadership, and specific international technical skills. This should indicate that expatriates have positive impacts on their careers within their organization as well as increased external opportunities. However, research is showing that organizations often do a poor job in compensating, placing and supporting expatriates. (Benson et al. 2008)

Peltonen (1997) offers an explanation as to why the rational match between international work experience and promotions within international firms often fail. The argument is that international assignment as an investment in human capital paradoxically clashes with available selection criteria and performance measurement in the home office. In other words, international experience is valuable but home organization cannot register it because the environment and skills needed are somewhat different between the home-office and abroad. The expatriate has absorbed a lot of new knowledge and has most likely enhanced his/her cognitive flexibility and managerial skills. However, these new competencies are for most part due to the uncertainty and novelty of the foreign work environment, which, paradoxically, can often be incompatible with the home unit's scales for measuring career potential and performance. The key reason for the irrational treatment of expatriates lies in the distance between foreign value adding experience and domestic criteria used in

selection and promotion decisions. According to human capital perspective, international assignments should promote individual careers but home office's ethnocentric operating logic often rejects international experience as a career merit in the promotion decisions after repatriation. (Peltonen 1997)

On another note, Yan et al. (2002) propose that as the overall level of globalization increases, so does level of international experience of the average employee. This means that the human capital accumulated in an individual foreign assignment is relatively less important. Today's employee may be involved in overseas assignments frequently, and, therefore, the completion of single assignment is less critical in influencing the individual's career building. The expatriate may have to take many consecutive assignments and demonstrate superior performance on each of them in order to separate themselves from the mass and significantly impact their career advancement.

2.6. Connectivity issues

Out of sight, out of mind

When employees are overseas and away, there is a risk of them being forgotten by organizational decision-makers. Often, expatriates lose touch with the home office and find they are no longer automatically included in business communications (Webb 1996). This is one of the most commonly cited problem and is called 'out of sight, out of mind'- problem (Suutari & Välimaa 2002; Benson et al. 2008). Expatriates are forgotten while overseas and organizations don't put enough effort or thought into fitting the international experience into the employees' job and career when they return. Upon returning home, repatriates often report coming back to unchallenging jobs with little utilization of the newly acquired international abilities and low levels of authority (Stroh et al. 2004; Benson et al. 2008). This is particularly problematic, because during their assignment repatriates have not had the opportunity to develop their domestic skills, experience, and networks. For example, a survey of US employees found that

only 39% of repatriates believed they were able to use the international skills acquired during their overseas assignments when they returned home (Stroh et al. 2000).

It is important to keep expatriates informed and in contact with the home office. There should be regular contact to exchange information and to create an avenue for discussion of problems and future planning. Communication channels should be monitored to see that they work. It is also essential to visit the home office periodically on business assignments to keep in touch with corporate thought and direction. (Webb 1996) There should also exist some informal channels for the expatriate to keep in touch with the home office. Many of the career opportunities in organizations are created through informal social networks and an overseas assignment typically impedes the maintenance of these networks (Peltonen 1997).

Career-cone model

Schein's (1971) career-cone model proposes that employees who work near the place where important organizational activities take place (i.e. 'core'), will advance quicker than those who work in areas that are further removed from the central strategy of an organization. Other theories of career success have also confirmed that employees who work in visible or central areas have greater upward mobility in the organization (Bolino 2007). In light of these theories, overseas assignments can hinder one's career development since expatriates are often removed from the critical functional areas of the organization. This is in line with the 'out of sight, out of mind' –problem. In short, expatriates who are assigned to subsidiaries with greater strategic importance are more likely to have greater career success.

LMX-theory

The leader-member exchange theory can also be examined as a way to explain career success of expatriates and from the organizations point of view also the high levels of repatriate turnover. The LMX-theory focuses on the dyadic relationships between

supervisors and subordinates. The theory suggests that by creating positive relations between leader and subordinate, organizational success and also the career success of the individual is increased. Employees, who are close to the leader, are classified as "in-group" members. They tend to work beyond their required job duties and make more contributions towards work success. In exchange, they receive greater attention and more support from their supervisors, and thus have better access to resources, information and enjoy better career advancement and increased levels of responsibility. Conversely, employees belonging to the "out-group", are given low levels of influence and have hindered career prospects. Empirical evidence confirms that high-quality LMX relationships contribute to favorable employee behaviors and attitudes, including job satisfaction, higher performance, organizational commitment and less turnover. (Han 2010)

According to Han (2010), employees who have favorable relationships with the boss, will also enjoy increased career success. It can be argued that when employee belonging to the in-group of home office supervisor leaves for an international assignment, the high-quality LMX-relationship is severed or at least hindered. This weakened relationship could lead to worse career prospects or even turnover upon repatriation. This notion seems to be in line with previously introduced career-cone and out of sight, out of mind models, and can be used to explain the negative career impacts of expatriates.

The contradicting elements of the human capital perspective and being away from headquarters (out of sight, out of mind, career cone-model, LMX-theory) can be seen as important in explaining both the individual's expectations of career advancement based on his/her acquired skills and experience, but also the problem of not advancing. The acquired skills and experience are not easily recognized by organizations simply due to the fact that expatriates are away from the headquarters. There seems to be a contradiction with the fact that employees acquire scarce and valuable skills which are crucial for organizations' success and the notion that their careers can suffer because of it. While human capital theory predicts that expatriate assignments develop new skills

and knowledge which should be recognized and rewarded, in practice the value of these new skills may not be recognized by organizations.

2.5. Employability

Expatriation is believed to have a positive effect on careers because it is a developmental experience that provides personal challenges and unique professional skills that cannot be acquired by other means. Expatriates develop unique knowledge and skills while overseas and are likely to know that these skills are in high demand (Benson et al. 2008). Expatriates also realize that international work experience provides a strong signal to potential employers that they are well qualified and it is easy to recognize on a résumé. Therefore, in line with the human capital theory, expatriates might look at overseas assignments as investments in their human capital for the hopes of these investments' paying off in future. A way to explain the contradiction between negative impacts and expectations of career progression is that expatriates may view international assignments as investments where they limit their short term progression for larger payoffs later. Expatriates may see international assignments as a way to differentiate themselves from other employees the next time they are up for a promotion. This is similar to employees who leave their jobs to acquire additional educational degrees, with the expectation that the short-term loss of income will pay dividends in long run. (Benson et al. 2008) Expatriates may be making a tradeoff where they are willing to accept the negative impact on their promotion opportunities or pay in the short-term for the expectation of opportunities for larger growth of salary when they return home or even later in their careers.

Employees who are selected as expatriates are often high-performing employees with important skills and knowledge (Gregersen, Morrison & Black 1998). Overseas assignment sends a signal that the individual can complete a challenging assignment and has international skills. Based on this, it would be rational to think that former

expatriates have greater employability than people with no international experience. Even though their career could suffer in their own firm they would be more likely to find jobs in other companies due to their international experience. It is likely that expatriates and repatriates realize that they have acquired important human capital that can qualify them for other jobs outside their current employer and regardless of their current position (Riusala and Suutari 2000; Suutari and Brewster 2003).

However, in a study by Benson & Pattie (2008) it was found that expatriation actually reduces the contacts that lead to new jobs. One reason for this could be simply their contact information becoming obsolete; phone numbers and e-mail addresses are more difficult to find for home country recruiters. More importantly, going on international assignment removes expatriates from their existing domestic network of contacts and while they build new networks abroad they often do not translate into recruiting contacts in a domestic setting.

2.6. Organizational context

Organization's strategy

While international experience is increasingly showing up in the profiles of CEO's, global experience is not always seen as an indicator of critical managerial talent, in all organizations. In a study on HR professionals, Roberts, Kossek & Ozeki (1998) found that the valuation of international experience varies significantly between different organizations. At one extreme, companies considered the overseas experience critical for all employees and are willing to upgrade their job descriptions as a result of it. At the other end, international experience is mostly ignored at the lower ranks and acknowledged only for upper level management. In general, the value that organizations put on international experience varies between different organizations and corporate cultures (Wittig-Berman et al. 2009).

The value of which organizations put in international experience is often defined by organization's global strategy. Firms who have a broad global strategic posture will have a relatively greater need for international managers than firms who for example focus on exporting. They need people who understand international business and are familiar with the overseas operations of the organization (Bolino 2007). Therefore expatriates should be more likely to advance in companies that consider international activities critical for their overall strategy. Upward mobility should be enhanced because firms with a global strategic posture are reliant upon the skills of expatriates. Importance of the country that the assignment takes place can also affect the value that companies put on the expatriate assignment. An increase in the company's overall stake in the foreign country where the expatriate performs the assignment raises the strategic importance of the assignment. This is especially true for newly established international operations in emerging economies (Yan et al. 2002).

The nature of assignment

The nature of the assignment is also meaningful as to how much the individual will benefit from it. It has been stated that developmental assignments facilitate career advancement more than control of fill-in assignments. Expatriates who are sent abroad to control subsidiary operations are often less concerned with developing international skills and abilities. However, employee's attitude toward his or her assignment is also crucial. Employees who are sent overseas for managerial development can develop only to the extent that they allow themselves to truly develop. There are likely to be few developmental benefits for expatriates who are sent overseas for managerial development but nevertheless maintain a 'fill-in' mindset (Bolino 2007). The relationship between international experience and career success is likely to be rather complex. All expatriate assignments are not equal in regard to their potential effects on career advancement. When examining the factors influencing the career outcomes, expatriates should not be looked upon as a homogeneous group. Different types of assignments will lead to different levels of competence development (Bonache, Brewster & Suutari 2001). Some assignments are even likely to harm one's career

especially if the individual performs poorly in his or her overseas job and has to be called home. (Bolino 2007)

Generally, career experiences can be greatly affected by contextual factors unique to the organization. These include such issues as human resource policies (e.g., promoting the localization of management talent), corporate culture (e.g., the value placed on employees and employee development), and the company's overall business strategy (e.g., cultivating and deploying the talents and commitment of its employees as key competencies to gain strategic advantage) (Yan et al. 2002). Also attitudes of current top management play a role in the value that is put on international experience. Companies that are led by executives that have significant international experience themselves tend to also value it more (Bolino 2007). Hence the career success should be greater in such firms.

Organizational perspective on expatriation

Global competition has increased the demand for companies with foreign expansion to utilize more rigorous and intricate policies in the area of international assignments. Traditionally, there are three main reasons for international posting: to fill positions, to control local operations, and to develop managers with long-term potential international experience (Huang 2003). From the organizational perspective supporting, developing and retaining expatriates can be a difficult task. On one hand, it is in the interests of multinational corporations (MNCs) to make sure that international assignments go as smooth as possible and to support their international employees the best way they can, but on the other hand they must modify their expatriation policies to keep the costs as low as they can. After all, expatriates are among the most expensive employees of any business organization. Also retaining the expatriates is crucial since international experience can be seen as a competitive advantage for global firms; the corporate governance literature has provided evidence that suggests that international experience of executives is linked to bottom-line results. Furthermore, the importance of expatriates as unique vehicles for organizational learning and knowledge transfer has been stressed.

These are after all the processes that constitute the foundation for building organizational competitiveness in a global knowledge economy (Lazarova & Cerdin 2007).

Reducing the number of expatriates, shortening the assignments, cutting special compensation packages, outsourcing the administration of their benefits, changing their status and conditions at the end of an assignment and expecting the manager to stay on anyway are among the typical ways companies try to keep the costs down. Banai & Harry (2004) further suggest additional alternatives to expatriation. These include virtual-team assignments and telecommuting, short-term assignments, business trips, cross-border commuting, interregional travel, frequent flying, rotational assignments, and host-country nationals. These practices have proven themselves to be less costly to the firm, but also, in many cases, to be less disruptive to the employees' family and work life. Still, the traditional expatriation is considered the most important international staffing strategy when the transfer of a firm's knowledge and its culture are concerned (Wittig-Berman et al. 2009). An emerging trend for top management is also to abolish the special perks and compensation of expatriates by simply stating that an international assignment is necessary for career advancement (Selmer 2000). It is clear that many of these cost-saving mechanisms can contradict with the financial interests of the expatriate.

Despite changing business environment and pressure, there is still a great need for expatriate managers. In a study by Scullion (1994), she reports that two thirds of companies in her study had experienced shortages of international managers, and over 70% indicated that future shortages were anticipated. From the organizational perspective expatriates are often used as a significant means to transfer corporate culture, strategy and philosophy from the parent to the foreign operations. In other words, expatriation can be seen as a way to exercise control and coordination. Organizations try to develop trustworthy internationally mobile cosmopolitan managers that are capable of handling relationships with the head office, host country as well as manage the foreign operations. These managers are often developed through a number

of previous assignments (Selmer 2000). Webb (1996) further underlines, that it is not enough to send managers overseas for brief stints once or twice a year. Managers need to live within the foreign business arena for several years in order to gain the necessary experience. From organizational point of view the overseas experiences and global perspectives of expatriates should lead firms toward effective multinational strategies. Banai et al. (2004) further stresses the organizations need for such cosmopolitan managers. These managers' willingness and ability to work in a wide variety of situations make them highly sought commodities, as these people can better cope with culture shock. Often, they are also keener to go to places where a traditional expatriate would demand very high pay and benefits to persuade them to move. Whereas other expatriates fear losing their connections and contact with the HQ, as well as the promotions and rewards, the cosmopolitans prefer the wandering life. As stated, these kinds of managers are hard to find, and the existence of global managers with frequent international relocations has even been called a myth (Brewster & Suutari 2005). Forster (2000) also reports in his study that as little as 13 per cent of UK expatriates were willing to accept further assignments in the future. There is, however, also evidence for the opposite. For example Suutari (2003) states that as much as 91 percent of Finnish expatriates were ready to consider going for another assignment abroad. Be that as it may, there are a limited number of individuals that are willing to accept back-to-back assignments and the benefits of expatriation have called into question. Many managers regard an international assignment as a compulsory part of long career path and will only accept one assignment and then return home, expecting a stronger position at the home office. Alternatively, some view foreign assignments simply as a chance to live abroad for a while. Another possible factor for reluctance is the deteriorating compensation packages. Furthermore, there are an increasing number of dual career couples which makes the decision to live abroad even more difficult. Many spouses are not willing to break their own careers for a long period of time let alone abandon them altogether (Selmer 2000). The family issues are further discussed in chapter 3.

While many international organizations need expatriate managers and are even having trouble finding employees willing to accept international assignments, using pressure might not be the best option after all. Webb (1996) reports that expatriates, who feel

coerced into taking assignments abroad, often for fear that their careers will suffer, will have negative attitudes towards their new assignment and therefore greater difficulty in adjusting. Having a free choice whether to accept the assignment is important and leads to greater assignment success. Forcing or otherwise pressuring candidates to accept overseas assignments can easily lead to waste of corporate time and money.

3. CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT PRACTICES

Career development in general is an issue that organizations should take seriously. For the organization, successful career development can be seen in improved efficiency, profitability and corporate growth. For the individual, career development and planning can provide direction and insight to handle organizational demands, lessening stress and identifying career opportunities. Today's view is that the responsibility of career development lies both with the organization and with the individual who works for them (Selmer 2000). There are several components that are seen as necessary in in training and developing successful international managers. These include cross-cultural and business orientation training, language training, family consultations, mentoring programs and a career management approach to expatriation and repatriation. Effective programs will address human resources before, during and after the foreign assignment (Webb 1996). These different career development and support practices are discussed in this chapter.

As business is constantly globalizing, and international management plays an ever more critical role in business practice, an increasing number of employees are sent on expatriate assignments. Several studies point out that corporate career support with the aim of the retention of expatriates has become a significant determinant of international business success. The ability to improve employee adjustment and success with expatriate assignments can provide a critical competitive advantage for a firm (Morgan et al. 2004). For example, the way the expatriation process is managed by a company, has a profound impact on the ability of expatriates to contribute to organizational learning (Antal 2001). However, research indicates that companies are not paying enough attention to the career development of their expatriates and that the lack of career support is one of the main reasons why companies fail to retain expatriates (Suutari et al. 2003; van der Heijden et al. 2009). Nearly 27 percent of repatriates leave their employer within one year of repatriation with additional 25 percent leaving between the first and second years. Suutari (2003) further reports the following figures:

As much as 10-25 per cent of expatriates leave their companies within a year from repatriation and within three years the figure in some companies is as high as half of expatriates. Repatriate turnover rate is reported being almost double the rate of domestic turnover (Pattie, Marion & White 2010). While the turnover rates can partly be attributed to increased job market attraction toward experienced international managers, bad repatriation management is also often the cause. It is essential for organizations to create interesting career tracks for individuals and identify suitable tasks for them. After all, it is in the company's interest to hold on to their experienced international managers. Failing to support expatriates can also cause more difficulties in the future. Managers working for companies perceived to be failing in their support, may be hesitant to accept expatriation offers as they see that the experiences and career impacts of their colleagues have been negative (Selmer 2000). Expatriate failure can have considerable costs for managers, including loss of self-confidence, self-esteem, and reputation. Failed expatriates also have reportedly reduced willingness and motivation to support other expatriates e.g. as a mentor (Takeuchi et. al 2005).

A study by Lee (2007) on factors that influence expatriate failure suggests that most expatriates are not happy with the way their assignment was handled by their companies. When a group of 15 individuals were asked how satisfied they were with how their assignment was handled, only one respondent stated being satisfied. The other 14 respondents felt that they were only somewhat satisfied or not satisfied at all. They were further asked how the program should be modified and what should be done differently. The expatriates felt that there should be improved pre-departure training, more respect, attention and time for family issues, and more support in all aspects of the program.

Repatriate managers add value to their companies by amassing knowledge of their host countries and transferring this information to others in the organization. They bring new perspectives and insights when they return home. Organizations have recognized the need for executives that can operate successfully in an international context, and are investing millions of dollars to send their top managers overseas. With this significant

financial investment at stake, one would expect that global firms would develop strategies to retain and support repatriates and their unique talent (Pattie et al 2010). However, most of the research on repatriates suggests the opposite. More than 30 percent of companies do not discuss repatriation with their expatriates at all, and more than 40 percent of those that do address repatriation do so with less than six months left in the assignment. Less than 37 percent of companies do any type of career planning for repatriates (Lazarova & Caligiuri 2001).

The research on career implications of failed overseas assignments is still inconclusive and although it is possible that some failed expatriates can return home without any negative career consequences, it would seem unlikely that expatriates who return early would actually improve their positions or receive promotions. In other words, career success should be greater among those who completed their international assignments than among those who failed to complete their assignments (Bolino 2007). This is why support practices and career development play a big role in determining also the future career advancement of expatriates.

In this chapter several different support practices and career development tools will be presented. At the end of this chapter a framework for the thesis will be presented.

3.1. Career development program

A formal organizational career development program includes career management, for which firms are responsible, and career planning, for which individuals are responsible. Career planning focuses on activities that help the individual make informed decisions about such choices as self-development and job assignments. Previous research indicates that some major impacts of firm-wide career development effort include: enhanced employee skills and morale, enhanced employee retention, employee

empowerment, improved HR planning and selection, and better strategic advantage. A successful career development program will help companies make the best use of repatriates' knowledge and skills when they return home rather than losing these employees to competitors (Pattie et al. 2010). When it comes to career success, career planning helps employees to develop the skills necessary for lateral transfers and promotions. When employees seek development opportunities they increase both their internal and external labor market value.

Career development programs can play an important role in fostering expatriate effectiveness, and in facilitating the adjustment of repatriates as well. Both career development assistance and mentoring can help in facilitating career success. The level of which employees have been supported by their organizations, is likely to affect their chances for career success. There is also clear evidence indicating that repatriates are more likely to quit when their repatriation was mishandled by their organizations (Bolino 2007). This has also negative implications for the organizations since high turnover rates among repatriates can have a negative impact on the willingness of other workers to relocate internationally. Even though in the recruitment and selection of executives international experience is a highly sought after element and can contribute to long-term career success, few companies have clearly articulated practices designed to ease the repatriation process and retain employees with international experience (Pattie et al. 2010).

3.2. Support practices

Though firms are often compelled to send managers overseas, many companies do not have clearly defined human resources programs to support their international employees. Expatriate training and development must go beyond cross-cultural training and orientation, to on-site involvement and support. Supervisors in the home office can play an important role in increasing the success rate of their expatriates by strengthening

company support for international employees (Webb 1996). As the lack of headquarters' support has been found to be one of the main contributors toward expatriate failure, organizations should really focus on monitoring their expatriates and ensure that the employee as well as his/her family is coping with the assignment from both a business and personal point of view (Lee 2007).

In a study on support practices for repatriates Pattie et al. (2010) found that in many cases career support practices were severely underutilized. These support practices include such issues as: career development plans, career planning, repatriate agreements, skill utilization, recognition, connectivity mechanisms and repatriation assistance. These different support practices are further discussed in this chapter. Majority of firms surveyed in a study by Pattie et al. (2010) used two or fewer support practices. 60 percent of firms offered relocation services and other logistical assistance, but less than 70 percent offered career and training support for repatriates. They also found that the lack of job openings in the home organization upon reentry caused the most involuntary turnover. The most common cause of voluntary turnover was the organization's poor utilization of the expatriate's skills acquired on the overseas assignment. The amount of support has a clear correlation to repatriate turnover. Organizations with more support practices reported a lower average repatriate turnover compared to organizations with fewer support practices, which can be seen in the Figure 4 on the next page. (Pattie et al. 2010)
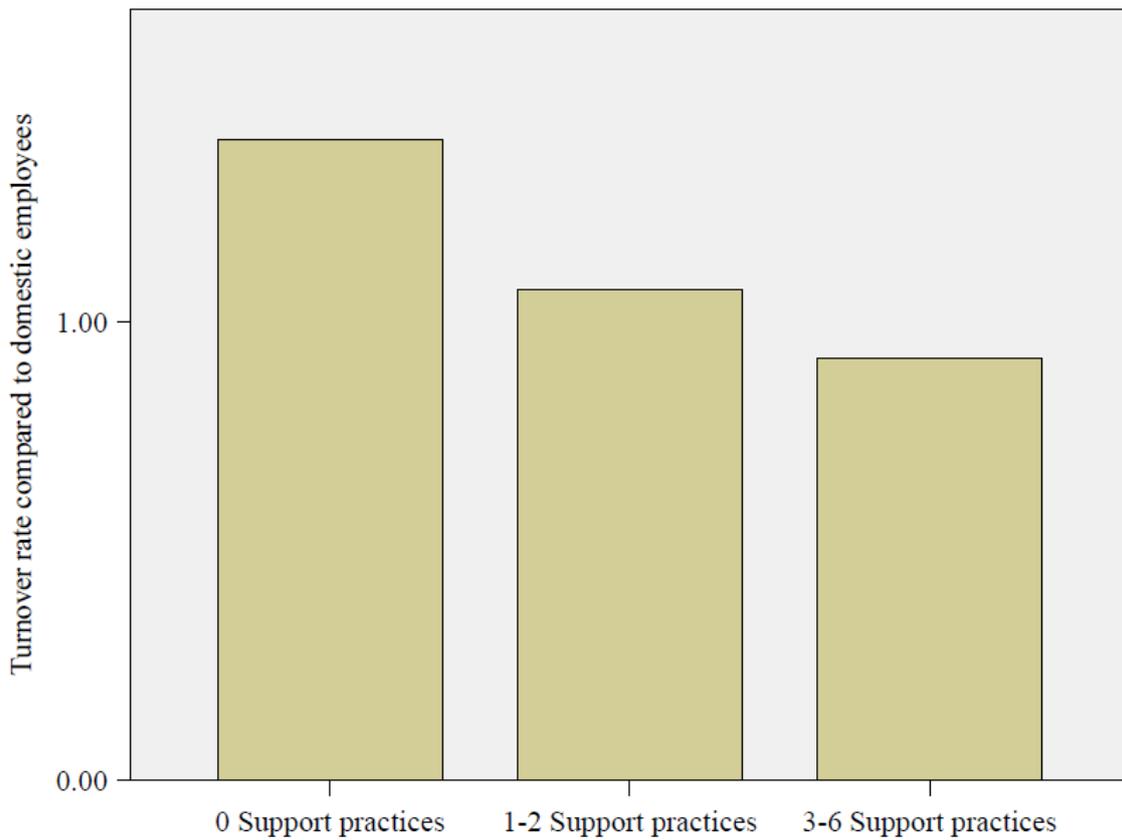
Figure 4: Relative turnover when compared to domestic employees (Pattie et al. 2010)

Repatriate turnover is often divided in voluntary turnover and involuntary turnover. The most important reasons for involuntary turnover as reported by Pattie et al. (2010): 19 per cent reported having no position to return to, 12 per cent reported poor performance as being the reason, 5 per cent cited abuse of company policy, and 2 per cent reported poor readjustment being the reason of leaving. From people who leaved voluntarily the reasons for leaving the company were the following: 43 per cent felt that their skills and experience was not utilized, 31 per cent had less decision-making responsibility, 29 per cent had no permanent job upon return, 29 per cent felt out of touch with corporate culture, 26 per cent had lower status in the new job, 26 per cent were offered a better job in another organization, 24 per cent were retired, 17 per cent reported problems with repatriate adjustment, 12 per cent were unhappy with their financial situation, and 7 per cent reported that their foreign spouse was the reason for leaving. (Pattie et al. 2010)

3.3. Expatriate training

The aim of expatriate training is to develop more cosmopolitan managers who better understand cultural differences and who can apply this knowledge in cross-cultural situations. The ultimate objective is to improve the functional skills of managers on overseas' assignments and thereby increase the likelihood of success of the assignment (Harrison 1994). Pre-departure training often includes a cultural awareness program, preliminary visits to the target country and language training. Three issues for expatriates have been identified by cross-cultural researchers as being paramount for success. These include personal adjustment to the host environment, professional effectiveness in accomplishing business responsibilities, and interpersonal adjustment. Therefore, expatriate training programs should provide expatriates with the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed for cross-cultural adjustment, effective business performance, and cross-cultural interactions (Littrell, Hess, Paley & Riedel 2006).

Cross-cultural training is generally seen by researchers as necessary to increase the probability of success on foreign assignments. Despite this view many MNCs are not following these suggestions. According to Littrell et al. (2006) less than one third of MNCs offer their expatriates' any kind of cross-cultural training, and most of these programs are only one day briefing sessions. Researchers offer the following reasons for the lack of training: The time between selection and expatriate departure; the belief that technical competence is the key factor in determining success; the opinion that good managers operate well in all locations; and the high costs of such training (Littrell et al. 2006). Shen (2005) provides a very similar list of the common reasons why many MNCs neglect preparatory training for international assignments. The main reasons are:

- Training is not thought to be effective;

- Lack of time; the temporary nature of most assignments does not warrant budget expenditures for training;

• Lack of knowledge of how to carry out training and what courses should be offered (lack of training experts and expertise);

• No need for training because there is a belief that technical skills are the only ones needed to carry out assignments abroad; and

• The right people do not need to be trained.

It seems that often expatriate training is thought to be unnecessary as technical skills are regarded as the main success factors for overseas assignments. Intercultural competencies are not seen as important. Moreover, technical skills are considered not able to be learned through short training (Shen 2005). Most companies also feel that pre-departure cross-cultural training is enough to provide the necessary knowledge and skills expatriates need in order succeed overseas. According to Mendenhall & Stahl (2000) such thinking is misguided. They argue that it is extremely important to continue cross-cultural training at least during the early stages of an overseas assignment. Expatriates need further in-country training that responds to their specific needs and concerns to be able to make wise decisions based on accurate cultural analysis (Mendenhall et al. 2000). MNCs should bear in mind, that when expatriate managers are unable to maximize opportunities and fail because of their limited cross-cultural skills, they are also preventing the company from successfully fulfilling its strategic goals (Harrison et al. 1994).

The model of cross-cultural training by Selmer, Torbjörn & de Leon (1998) is based on the perspective that training is not a one-time event, but a process. Their view is that a training program should be able to correspond to the cycle of adjustment that an individual progresses through as he or she adapts to a foreign environment. The training should differ according to different phases of the foreign assignment and depending on the psychological receptivity of the expatriate to the culture. Also an element of pre-departure training should be included. In the pre-departure phase, the training material should include essential information on local living conditions and the details of the cross-cultural adjustment process. This will prepare expatriates for culture shock and changes in their frame of reference as they adapt to the local environment. Post-arrival

training should underline cultural awareness in relation to the cultural differences between home and the host country. After a few weeks in the host country the training should focus on learning how to learn about the new environment. As the expatriate moves into the next, so-called conformist phase, the focus of cross-cultural training should be on learning by doing. Expatriate should also try to mix with the locals as much as possible. (Selmer et al. 1998)

Cross-cultural training programs should also take into consideration the needs of the expatriate, the customization of the content and design, and the program quality. Before the training starts the strengths and weaknesses in of interpersonal, cognitive, and self-maintenance skills should be assessed. Furthermore, spousal and family needs should be identified. The assessment should also include assignment objectives, past international experience, job responsibilities, spousal interests, children's needs, and family dynamics. The training design and techniques should be customized to meet the individual's needs and the content of the training program should be tailored to each individual. The employer organization should also ensure that the program is designed and delivered by on the expatriation process in general but also the experts on the country of destination as well. A component of evaluation should also be included in the program. This element should include a performance assessment of the expatriate and a section in which the individual can assess the training experience and his/her level of preparedness. (Littrell et al. 2006)

Most studies support the belief that cross-cultural training improves expatriate performance on a foreign assignment (Selmer et al. 1998; Caligiuri, Phillips, Lazarova, Tarique & Bürgi 2001). Cross-cultural training is positively related to cross-cultural adjustability and adjustment is, in turn, positively related to expatriate performance and skill development. (Caligiuri et al. 2001) Furthermore, cross-cultural training is positively related to self-development, the creation of interpersonal relationships with members of the host culture, and facilitating the use of cognitive skills to develop appropriate perceptions of the host culture (Littrell et al. 2006). However, it should be noted that the need for this kind of pre-departure training is likely to be determined in

part by the nature of the assignment. At one extreme, assignments can requiring extensive interaction with locals (e.g. a key representational role in isolated parts of a new country), and at the other end, there are assignments that may be almost entirely technology related, with the expatriate living in a close expatriate community in a capital city or even a specific compound reserved for their compatriots (Bonache et al. 2001).

3.4. Repatriation

The repatriation process typically starts months before the end of the expatriate assignment, continues during the repatriation event, and becomes critical during the first months the repatriate's re-socialization to the domestic organization. The process of repatriation is a complex affair and depends on several variables such as: the magnitude of the change from the home to the host culture; the length of time spent in the host country; the frequency and time spent on return trips to the home country; the total time away from the home country; and the quality of the adjustment made by the expatriate and the family members (Zikic, Milorad, Novicevic & Breland 2006). The repatriation process often has a substantial impact on the relations between the organization and the employee. In other words, the way the repatriation is managed has a strong influence on the individual's intention to stay with the organization (Hyder et al. 2007). The following problem areas have been identified with the repatriation process: organizational/career issues, financial pressures, family problems and executive psychological stress (Konopaske et al. 2009).

One of the key reasons for dissatisfaction with their repatriation is the belief that they have made a real sacrifice for their companies, and they expected that their companies would appreciate their efforts by promoting them. Expatriates frequently agree to work overseas because they believe it will help them get ahead in those same companies (Bolino 2007). The reality, however, may be a little different. Many repatriates feel that

their organizations have restricted the number of career possibilities within the organization upon their return (Pattie et al. 2010). Research indicates that career issues are central in successful repatriation: 78 per cent of expatriates' comments about the most important repatriation factors concerned career issues. Furthermore, 86 per cent of the variance in overall satisfaction with repatriation could be accounted for by one item: the impact of expatriate assignment on their careers (Suutari et al. 2003).

In order to understand the situation of the expatriate and the repatriation process, it is essential to also examine why the expatriate accepted overseas assignment in the first place. Accepting assignment is a major decision for an individual, and the expatriate therefore likely possesses clear motives for accepting or refusing the job abroad. Although expatriation often is a management decision, the can also have a profound impact on the employee's plans for the future and career development and. Therefore, it can be predicted that he/she will discuss it with the family and think the matter over several times before relocating in the host country. From this perspective, the motives of expatriates are the basis for their expectations. In other words, expectations will vary depending on the nature and type of repatriates' motives. For instance, a person who has taken an assignment with the primary motive of exploring future career possibilities will have higher expectations regarding the position assumed upon return compared to a person who just wants the experience of living in another culture. These motives are also likely to have a direct effect on one's willingness to remain within the same organization after returning (Hyder et al. 2007). Brewster & Suutari have also (2005) underlined that expatriate managers' internal motivation is a significant factor in global career orientation and commitment.

Planning repatriate careers is essential also from the companies' perspective. In their study on repatriates, Suutari & Brewster (2003) found that generally foreign experience is good for the individuals' careers but without careful management, the value of the expatriate experience may be lost to the organization making the investment. This further stresses the need for greater attention on the part of organizations and earlier planning of the repatriation together with the expatriate. According to researchers, there

is a growing consensus that organizations and employees should plan together, prior to departure, how the overseas assignment will meet both parties' professional needs (Pattie et al. 2010). It has been recommended that organizations should treat the process of expatriation as a whole cycle in order to maximize the positive impact of expatriation on achieving the organization's strategic goals. Organizations should support and monitor their employees throughout the assignment. From the selection of an expatriate for the assignment, to the preparation for that assignment, through the entire period in the foreign post, to the reintegration in a new post (Antal 2001). As has been stated, expatriates also tend to have overly optimistic views concerning their future careers (Suutari 2003). Discussing career impacts and repatriation issues with expatriates well before the assignment is crucial in making the expectations on life after the assignment more realistic.

It is understandable that the objectives of individuals and the objectives of companies are not the same. Hyder et al. (2007) argue that all motives are not feasible or productive and therefore cannot be fulfilled. The point is to try to create a win-win situation, where there exists a mutual understanding on the nature of motives and to what extent they can be achieved. They further state that many of the motives and objectives are of common interest and that it is important to carefully deal with the remaining individual motives in a way that does not make the repatriate feel deprived by the organization. Career management of repatriates needs to be planned, supported by management, and must try to look for a common ground between corporate and individual objectives. A balanced approach for career management can be instrumental in gaining success for individuals, and therefore also for the organizations they work for. (Hyder et al. 2007)

To deal with the problem of limited career opportunities for repatriates, organizations have traditionally used various approaches. These include preparing the expatriate for return, finding a suitable position for them, creating mentorship while abroad, and focusing on their career-management (Zikic et al. 2006). Researchers have recommended that expatriates be given a career development plan ensuring that the

overseas assignment makes sense in individual's overall career within the company. Organizations should also actually follow through with the plans in regard to the employee's expatriation and repatriation. It is crucial to the repatriate's career development that the first job upon reentry builds and expands upon the individual's international knowledge and expertise (Pattie et al. 2010). However, many companies fail to offer suitable positions for their repatriates. On her study on expatriates working in German multinational companies Antal (2001) found that many of them had to initiate the search for an appropriate post themselves. Furthermore a third of the interviewees felt that they lacked the organization support in finding the right next step after the foreign assignment. Many of these also felt that they could not make enough use of their international experience in their new jobs.

3.4.1. Repatriate turnover

A significant problem related to overseas assignments is the repatriation process upon completion of the work overseas. Coming back to the home office is not always the experience expected by managers or professionals. Often, the years of work experience acquired through foreign assignments tends to be ignored by the organization, and ends up being a hindrance rather than a facilitator of career progression. Disappointing experiences have prompted many expatriates to leave the company for a better position elsewhere (Wittig-Berman et al. 2009). There have been several suggestions as to why companies have difficulties in keeping repatriates. There are two main propositions for this dilemma. Traditional repatriation research has suggested that repatriates leave because they feel organizations do not value them or their newly developed expertise. This can cause extreme dissatisfaction with their repatriation experience, and ultimately causes them to leave. Antal (2001) reports that organizations have a tendency to treat the returning expatriate as a placement problem rather than as a resource to be competed for. In addition to making the returning expatriate frustrated, his or her potential to be seen as a valued resource by others in the organization is also significantly reduced.

Adjusting to repatriation can often be even more difficult process than adjusting to life overseas, because of repatriate's greater expectations. Upon returning home, many repatriates feel like foreigners in their own country. They have lost most of the generous financial benefits of the expatriate assignment, and because there are often no plans for repositioning them within their organization, they are made to feel as if their assignment was of little or no value to management. Organizations might not seem to care about what they learned during their foreign assignment and they are often neither debriefed nor consulted about what they learned while overseas (Webb 1996). All these things often result in high repatriate turnover rates.

High turnover among repatriates is expensive for organizations. First, because sending employees overseas for several years is very expensive, repatriate turnover means that organizations lose resources in which they have already invested heavily. Second, when leaving, former expatriates take along with them the skills, abilities, and connections critical to the future success of the company (Stroh et al. 2004). Furthermore, when repatriates leave, the company is losing the newly developed skills and knowledge most probably to their competitors (Lazarova et al. 2007). Repatriates are often ignored and expected to just slip back into the organization, or put in holding patterns when they return, because management does not know how to use their expertise. Many expatriates believe that the overseas assignment will increase their career mobility, when in fact it can actually slow down promotions. When expatriates are not integrated successfully on return, companies also lose out on a valuable resource in which a great deal of time and money has been invested (Webb 1996). In order for MNCs to utilize the benefits of international experience, they should ensure that repatriates stay with them upon return from their postings. Unfortunately, many global organizations complain about low retention rates, and characterize repatriation as one of their greatest human resource challenges (Lazarova et al. 2007).

The most typical reason for expatriates to leave their companies is because they feel unappreciated and their returns have been mismanaged. According to Tung (1998), majority of international assignees were satisfied with expatriation, but most were

dissatisfied with repatriation. In regards to career success, 'inadequate advancement opportunities upon return' is seen as one of the principal reasons for high levels of dissatisfaction among former expatriates (Bolino 2007). In other words, repatriates who have limited career success within their organizations following an overseas assignment are more likely to quit than those who have been able to get ahead following an expatriate assignment. Most companies do not give their expatriates any post-assignment employment guarantees whatsoever and as much as 20–50% of repatriates are not even employed by the same company within 2 years of coming back home (Bolino 2007). This further underlines the importance of career planning and development.

Repatriation assistance

Adjusting back home from an international assignment can take months is often a stressful experience for the expatriate and there may be exist performance and retention issues for managers in the home office. One way for organization to ease the crucial readjustment process is by providing pre-return training for repatriates. This indicates organization's commitment to the employee and an understanding of the challenges related to the reentry process. Increasing individual's awareness of the possible challenges they will face when returning to home office and assuming a new role in the organization can help their adjustment. Discussing the repatriate's job and responsibilities before return at the home office is especially important because many repatriates have had high levels of discretion and autonomy in their international position. This includes structural changes in the organization, legal and ethical developments, technological changes etc. Most expatriates are provided with relocation support by employers when expatriates move overseas. Some organizations, however, choose not to provide this type of support for employees returning home because adjusting back to their home country is seen as relatively easy. (Pattie et al. 2010)

An interesting fact that Suutari & Brewster (2003) found in their study on repatriates was that even though many expatriates had left their earlier employer, they remained satisfied with their international experience. There were no notable differences between

those who had left the organization and those who had stayed when it comes to the level of satisfaction, their willingness to accept a new assignment or their willingness to recommend international assignments to their colleagues. Individuals may feel that the assignment benefited them even though from the organization's point of view it might be seen as a failure.

Individual motives

Another proposition has emerged in recent years, according to which repatriate turnover is not so much a consequence of lack of organizational attention and support, as it is a response to the changing nature of the employment relationship, the availability of better employment opportunities outside current employers, and the need for individuals to manage their own careers (Lazarova et al. 2007). This perspective looks beyond organizational predictors of repatriation and includes variables related to the individual and the environment within which repatriation took place. Today, international experience has high intrinsic value. The individual is rewarded by the experience itself rather than by being offered a big promotion back at headquarters. This perspective suggests that individual initiative and career goals are of more importance than organizational decisions. International experience is seen as a tradable asset that repatriates can use to advance their careers. This advancement can happen either with the company that sent them on the assignment, or elsewhere. Therefore quitting the company may also be about the expatriate pursuing external opportunities that provide the best fit with his/her career objectives than be an outcome of poor organizational efforts. Today expatriates are even urged to view their assignments primarily as an opportunity for personal and professional growth. When looking at this perspective, it is arguable whether organizations lose repatriates because they are not doing enough or because repatriates are pursuing other opportunities that help them achieve their subjectively defined career goals and psychological well-being. (Lazarova et al. 2007)

Recognition

Many repatriates feel that their international experience and acquired skills are not valued by their organizations. By formally recognizing the value of international work experience the home office can send an important signal to employees. This type of explicit recognition (e.g. company newsletter, home-coming reception etc.) is an inexpensive way to reward and acknowledge repatriate employees. This recognition can enhance repatriates' perceived expertise, credibility, competence and status (Pattie et al. 2010). This in turn can be seen as helpful in future career progression.

3.5. Connectivity mechanisms

Managers are concerned with the long-term implications of being removed and disconnected from the home-office for an extended period of time (Konopaske et al. 2009). Researchers have suggested that organizations should implement career development practices that keep expatriates connected with the home office while working overseas (Mendenhall, Kuhlmann, Stahl & Osland 2002). This can help in hindering the 'out of sight, out of mind' syndrome. Such practices are called connectivity mechanisms. Connectivity mechanisms often involve e.g. supporting regular visits to the home office and assigning back-home mentors and sponsors (Bolino 2007). This can be critical as individuals' ability to maintain and improve important connections and networks is significantly related to their career success. Expatriates who are in touch with key decision-makers and have knowledge of new job openings back at the home office are in an advantageous position compared to people with no connections. Therefore, they are more likely experience greater career success upon repatriation. Insufficient communication with the expatriate abroad not only generates a feeling of isolation for the individual, but also means that the home organization is not fully aware what the expatriate is learning and therefore will not be able to take advantage of his/her newly gained international knowledge and skills on return (Antal 2001).

Sponsored-Mobility model

To examine the importance of different organizational and career support mechanisms, it is relevant to look at the Sponsored-Mobility Model of Career Success. This model suggests that the people to whom the established elite (i.e. the leaders of organization) pay attention and who are provided with sponsoring activities will enjoy increased career success compared to those that are not. According to the model, the winners of the "career-race" are those who receive greater sponsorship from the elites of their organization. Employees who receive career sponsorship, supervisor support, have access to training and skill development opportunities and work in organizations with greater development resources should be more likely to enjoy career success (Ng et al. 2005). In the context of expatriates and their career success compared to domestic employees, the question might be which employee enjoys more sponsorship, the expatriate or his/her colleague at the home office. According to literature, it seems that more often it is the domestic employee. The Sponsored-Mobility theory is quite similar to the LMX-theory. Belonging in the in-group of elite members of the organization would seem to offer more career advancement possibilities.

3.5.1. Mentoring & Coaching

Mentoring

It is generally agreed that mentoring is the most intense and powerful developmental relationship since it features both high psychosocial and career support and often contributes to the career success of the protégé. Both theoretical and empirical studies show that mentors often provide junior protégé's with important career support such as coaching, protection, sponsorship, exposure-and-visibility, and challenging assignments, as well as psychosocial support including acceptance, friendship, counseling, and role modeling (Shen & Kram 2011). Traditionally, mentoring has been defined as a hierarchical, one-on-one relationship between an experienced organizational member and a less experienced employee. Research on mentoring in a

domestic setting has reported that protégé's enjoy many benefits, including increased organizational knowledge, increased ability to achieve goals, visibility, and improved career advancement. They also report higher pay rates and job satisfaction and lower work stress, work–nonwork conflict, turnover intentions, as well as increased organizational socialization, work adjustment, and other positive career outcomes (Crocitto et al. 2005; Carraher et al. 2008). Mentors at the home office can be helpful to the expatriate, acting as a liaison, counselor and protector of the expatriate's best interests while he or she is overseas. If individual mentoring is not possible, an alternative solution would be the creation of separate departments or divisions whose sole function is to oversee the career paths of expatriates (Webb 1996).

Scholars are suggesting that expatriate effectiveness may be enhanced by having multiple mentors; having both a home- and a host-country mentor (Crocitto et al. 2005). The host-country mentor's role would be to assist expatriates with cross-cultural adaptation, and the home-country mentors link expatriates to the global organization and help with repatriation issues (Carraher et al. 2008). However, in a research on 27 expatriates by Jassawalla, Asgary & Sashittal (2006), only 63% reported having any kind of mentor: nine were home-country mentors and eight were host-country mentors. Nobody had both. It seems that mentoring is an underutilized tool in international assignments, even though the benefits are proven and well documented in a domestic setting.

There are many issues that make global mentoring difficult. Expatriates often believe that host-country nationals are of little help for them in their international assignments. The mentoring process can also be greatly hindered by the cultural differences between the expatriate and host-country nationals. The more differences there are between the expatriate and host-country nationals, the less likely he or she is to believe that such a relationship would lead to positive things or even engage in a mentoring relationship with them in the first place (Carraher et al. 2008). This is in line with Feldman, Folks & Turnley's (1999) study of international interns and mentors that were of a different

gender and nationality. Their findings showed that interns learned less, received fewer job offers, and did not view the internship as beneficial to their careers.

Also host-country nationals may find little personal benefit in having an expatriate as a protégé. Host-country nationals may have difficulties in evaluating the expatriate's abilities, and may be unwilling to risk his time and effort to mentor an expatriate, especially in a cross-cultural relationship. They may also resent the higher pay and higher standard of living which expatriate managers often have. They may even perceive the expatriate to be an outsider which may lead to them intentionally engaging in counterproductive work behaviors, including insubordination and even sabotage (Carraher et al. 2008). Also home-country personnel may lack motivation to mentor a protégé who is on an international assignment. Mentors may think that the costs of mentoring outweigh the benefits. Also communicate across large distances may be particularly discouraging in initiating and maintaining contact with expatriates. The organization also may not support or reward such mentoring (Crocitto et al. 2005).

Coaching

Coaching is another support mechanism that can be used to help the acculturation process of an expatriate and thus increase the likelihood of successful assignment. Mentors will have expertise in the business of the expatriate manager. Professional coaches usually have different skills and experiences and in most cases do not provide direct advice based on their own work experiences. The professional coach's expertise lies in facilitating the executive's learning and development using a range of validated techniques. The coach's experience can, of course, be relevant, particularly where there is strong overlap with the challenges facing the executive client. Executive coaching encompasses a wide range of services such as coaching for enhanced strategic planning, anger and stress management, presentation skills, team building and leadership development. Executive coaching is defined as a 'helping relationship formed between a client who has managerial authority and responsibility in an organization and a consultant who uses a wide variety of behavioral techniques and methods to assist the

client to achieve a mutually identified set of goals'. In short, the coaching process is a systematic goal-directed process that facilitates sustained change, by fostering personal growth and self-directed learning of the executive (Abbott, Stening, Atkins & Grant 2006).

Executive coaching can be distinguished from training, in that the training process is often a one-off event that follows a predetermined agenda, and is commonly focused on the acquisition of knowledge and skills. Executive coaching is an individualized process, in which the client has a greater influence in the direction and agenda of the process. For example, if the expatriate experiences a personal crisis, he or she can raise the issue in the trusting environment of the coaching relationship. The client and coach explore what is happening within the context of the expatriate assignment, including the impact of the crisis across the expatriate's behavioral and cognitive domains. The coaching conversations can help the client through the crisis, or actions decided as a result of coaching may provide solutions for the crisis. Training programs cannot deal with expatriate acculturation with the same individual attention and immediacy as coaching can. Coaching runs as a simultaneous and connected process with acculturation and can be an invaluable in assisting clients to identify the training they need rather than being passive recipients of training that others think they need. (Abbott et al. 2006)

Executive coaches typically do not belong to the executive's organization. This independence provides the executive with a level of freedom when discussing sensitive issues where the organization may be the subject of criticism. The independence also helps in creating an environment of trust and high confidentiality. Executives can hire coaches directly but more typically, the organization engages a coach to work with executives. Professional coaches who have knowledge and experience in cross-cultural psychology and management should be able to make a strong contribution towards enhancing the performance and personal satisfaction of expatriate managers. In particular, mentoring can help expatriates to navigate the complexity and uncertainty of their new cultural environments. (Abbott et al. 2006)

3.6. Family issues

Expatriate families face more demands than single expatriates. One of the primary reasons highlighted in numerous studies for assignment failure include factors relating to family situations that disrupt the adaptation of the employee and thus can cause difficulties in future career progression (Webb 1996). In a study by Lee (2007) it was also found out that expatriates feel organizations handle the assignments poorly when it comes to the expatriate's family. They felt that organizations do not give enough respect, attention and time for the family issues. It is, all in all, universally recognized that family and spousal adjustment is positively related to international adjustment, and the significance of an expatriate's family and spouse to the ultimate success of the assignment is firmly established (Schoepp & Forstenlechner 2010). Also, the results of a study by Shen et al. (2011) show that expatriates rely heavily on their family, both at home and in the host country, for psychosocial support. These findings should represent significant implications for management. Organizations should really devote increased attention and resources to assist the spouse and family and thus minimize expatriate failure. The consultancies report that about 60 per cent of expatriates are accompanied by a spouse or partner, and about half are accompanied by children. 60 per cent of partners were employed before the assignment, but only 21 per cent worked abroad (Haslberger & Brewster 2008). Expatriate spouses who give up their jobs may eventually experience boredom and not having enough to do in addition to a loss of professional status.

Concern about the cost and quality of children's education is often a reason for reluctance to accept foreign assignments (Selmer 2000). Local school systems are very different in the design of the curriculum, how the learning experience is structured, and the type of behavior that is rewarded. Therefore, the demands children face can be even broader in range than those of the parents (Haslberger et al. 2008). Adjustment of the spouse and family to an assignment abroad reportedly enhances productivity, performance and morale of the expatriate. Many companies fail in including family issues when considering candidates for expatriation, or when providing cross-cultural

training; families are often treated as an afterthought. Webb (1996) reports that only 50 per cent of spouses receive cross-cultural training only 21 per cent are included in the pre-selection interviews. Empirical research also shows that employees with young children at home are less likely to accept expatriate assignments. Konopaske, Roble & Ivanicevic (2009) argue that families having children at home, is negatively related to employee willingness to move for career advancement. Also the importance of living near elderly relatives was negatively related to manager willingness to assume global assignments. Before making the decision to accept, it is important for the expatriate and the family to see what they will be facing. A pre-departure trip should be arranged where housing, potential schools as well as other crucial services can be investigated (Webb 1996).

There have also been discussion on how far should the family support go and what is the balance of responsibilities between the family and the organization. Many companies pay for housing, schooling and home visits for the whole family. Does the company share responsibility for preventable psychological hardships related to the adjustment and adaptation process? Should companies accept responsibility for partners who give up a job and to what extent and are companies responsible for the wellbeing of the children? Despite these questions, there is a need for organizations to change the view on expatriates from the level of the individual to the level of the family unit. Companies could benefit from recognizing the full impact of families on expatriate assignments and involving families more in selection. Organization's awareness of the family issues is a crucial element in expatriate adjustment and support and it can alleviate many problems. From the company's point of view, the degree of involvement of families should vary depending on factors such as the criticality of the mission for the business and the overall difficulty of the posting. (Haslberger et al. 2008)

3.6.1. Dual Career Couples

The recent worldwide increase in the number of dual-career couples is seen as a constraint on the available candidates for foreign assignments as well as their willingness to accept expatriate assignments. Global assignment literature has found that spouses have a strong influence over expatriate's willingness to relocate, his/her intention to stay in the assignment, and over expatriate's general and work adjustment (Konopaske et al. 2009). Problems have further increased due to an increase in the number of male accompanying spouses. According to Punnet (1997), 15% of employees reject an international assignment due to not willing to risk the career progression of their spouses and the number has been estimated to have risen in the past fifteen years. The dual-career trend is making it even more important that organizations improve on the problems that have resulted in failures in many past assignments, most of which, are centered on the spouse and children. Suggested solutions for this dual-career challenge can be divided into two categories. The first is the use of alternative assignment arrangement, replacing assignments with business travel or short term arrangements. The second is developing family-friendly policies. These policies can provide the spouse with job hunting assistance in the host-country, inter-company networking to find suitable work with another multinational, intra-company employment and on-assignment career support to enable the accompanying spouse to maintain or even improve career skills. (Andreason 2008)

Selmer (2000) offers three main principles for companies in assisting dual-career couples: sensitivity to how the international relocation will affect the spouse, the creation of established programs for assisting the spouse to find paid employment or professionally rewarding activity while abroad, and proactive job searching to help them find employment upon repatriation. Despite the increasing significance of problems related to dual career couples, many international firms have difficulties in dealing efficiently with this problem. Andreason (2008) even states that most international firms continue to neglect the spouse in all phases of the international experience from pre-

departure selection and training to in-country support programs and, finally to reintegration programs and repatriation process.

3.7. Self-management

As has been stated, in today's careers more and more focus is put on individual's own input in his/her career progression. This characteristic of contemporary careers refers to self-management, indicating that the individual is in an important role in determining the course of his/her career. Recent career theory suggests that organizations need to be aware that they are no longer the solely in charge of career systems and planning. Individuals take increasingly big role in navigating their own career which incorporates the advantage of having multiple options available to choose from. These new career theories, such as boundaryless career and protean career- theory suggest that workers also have the power to reject existing career opportunities for personal or family reasons. Although these concepts have their own specific emphasis, they all refer to a changing nature of careers that is characterized by an increased level of flexibility and complexity. Recent career theory strongly emphasizes self-management when discussing employability and the extent to which employees are marketable through a high transferability of skills and competencies. Skills are no longer seen as organizationally bound and firm specific, but the skills, knowledge and abilities are seen as portable. They increase workers' range of potential jobs as well as organizations on the labor market (Cappellen & Janssens 2010). These changes in the nature of employer–employee relationships have been particularly prominent in the context of international careers. Evidence of this is provided by research findings indicating that the most important motives for going on an expatriate assignment are internal, such as the search for new experiences, learning and personal development, and a personal interest in the international environment, rather than externally derived (Mäkelä & Suutari 2009).

In an era of corporate downsizing and reorganizing the role of the organization is also changing and career paths have become rather blurry. Layers of the organizational hierarchy are vanishing and the connection between employer and employee has changed. Corporations can no longer guarantee job security, and people are expecting to change employers during their careers. Self-management, self-awareness, and self-reliance are needed if an employee wants his or her career to take a particular direction. In other words, today's organizations can be viewed primarily as offering opportunities for self-development, education and enrichment, rather than providing structured career paths (Lazarova et al. 2007).

Today's managers are making sure that they are being trained and developed so that their skills are transferable. They are more willing to move around and work for different organizations. Career progression is seen more as an inter-company self-development rather than hierarchical advancement within one company (Mäkelä et al. 2009).

3.7.1. Career exploration

There have also been studies which place the responsibility of repatriation on the repatriate. In their model of repatriate career exploration Zikiz et al. (2006) shift the responsibility for post-assignment career development and planning from the organization to the individual. They underline repatriates' role in acting as active career agents pursuing a desired career goal, their motivational processes, self-determination, and goal directedness in achieving positive repatriate career growth. In short, career exploration consists in gathering information about the self and various career options in the changed home country environment, with a goal of fostering career prosperity, development and growth. They propose that repatriates will increasingly engage in career exploration at the end and post their international assignments as a way of coping with the transition and in this way becoming more responsible career actors. Career

exploration involves self- managing and the investigation of various new career options in the pursuit of his/her post-assignment career growth.
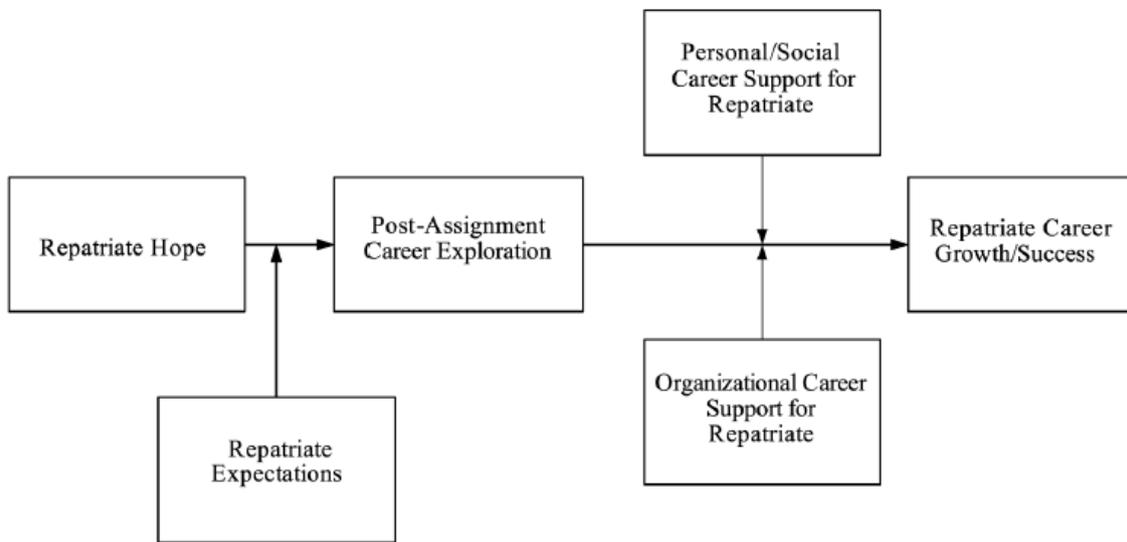
Figure 5: Repatriate career exploration (Zikic et al. 2006)

Repatriate career exploration stresses the individual's proactivity in finding new information on jobs, organizations and occupations that have not been previously considered during the international assignment. This permits the repatriate to make more informed career decision-making, set more specific or redefine existing career goals and assess the degree of fit with various options. It involves reflecting about and rethinking post-assignment to gain a deeper understanding of himself/herself. The idea for the repatriate is to obtain a clearer perspective of his/her desires and abilities relative to what he/she may or may not want to have in the post-assignment work environment. (Zikic et al. 2006)

As a summary for this chapter, it can be said that it is in the best interest for companies as well as expatriate managers to have good career support and development practices. Career development and support practices are essential in facilitating successful expatriate assignments and therefore increasing the possibilities of upwards career progression. In short, intra-organizational career success is more likely to occur when

companies provide cross-cultural training, offer connectivity mechanisms, repatriation assistance, mentoring, coaching and establish and implement career development plans for their international assignees. This is important not only for the individuals, but also for the companies, in whose interests it is to hold on to their internationally experienced workforce. Table 1 presents a summary of the support mechanisms discussed in this chapter.

Table 1: Summary of different support practices and tools

Support practice	Attributes
Cross cultural training	cross-cultural adaptation, language training, facilitates skill use, increased performance
Career Development Program	enhanced employee skills and morale, employee retention, empowerment, improved HR planning and selection
Repatriation assistance	Higher retention of repatriates, increased awareness & readjustment, career success, realistic expectations
Recognition	inexpensive way to reward repatriates increased credibility, competence and status
Connection with home office	awareness of home country developments, increased career success
Mentoring	increased organizational knowledge, increased ability to achieve goals, visibility, and improved career advancement
• Host country mentors	cross cultural adaptation, increased job-performance
• Home country mentors	counseling, protection of the expatriate's interests while overseas, providing connection

| Coaching | increased assignment success, facilitating learning, stress management, fostering personal growth, cross-cultural adaptation |

| Family support | increased adjustment, increased psychosocial support, smaller risk of returning prematurely |

3.8. Theoretical framework

The framework of this thesis is an adaptation of Mark Bolino's (2007) framework of repatriate career success. The framework has been modified to include other factors found in the theory and put more focus on individual expectations and motives, and the fit between them and career outcomes. The framework (Figure 6) serves as a synthesis of the findings of the literature review. This framework also serves as a context for the empirical part of this study.
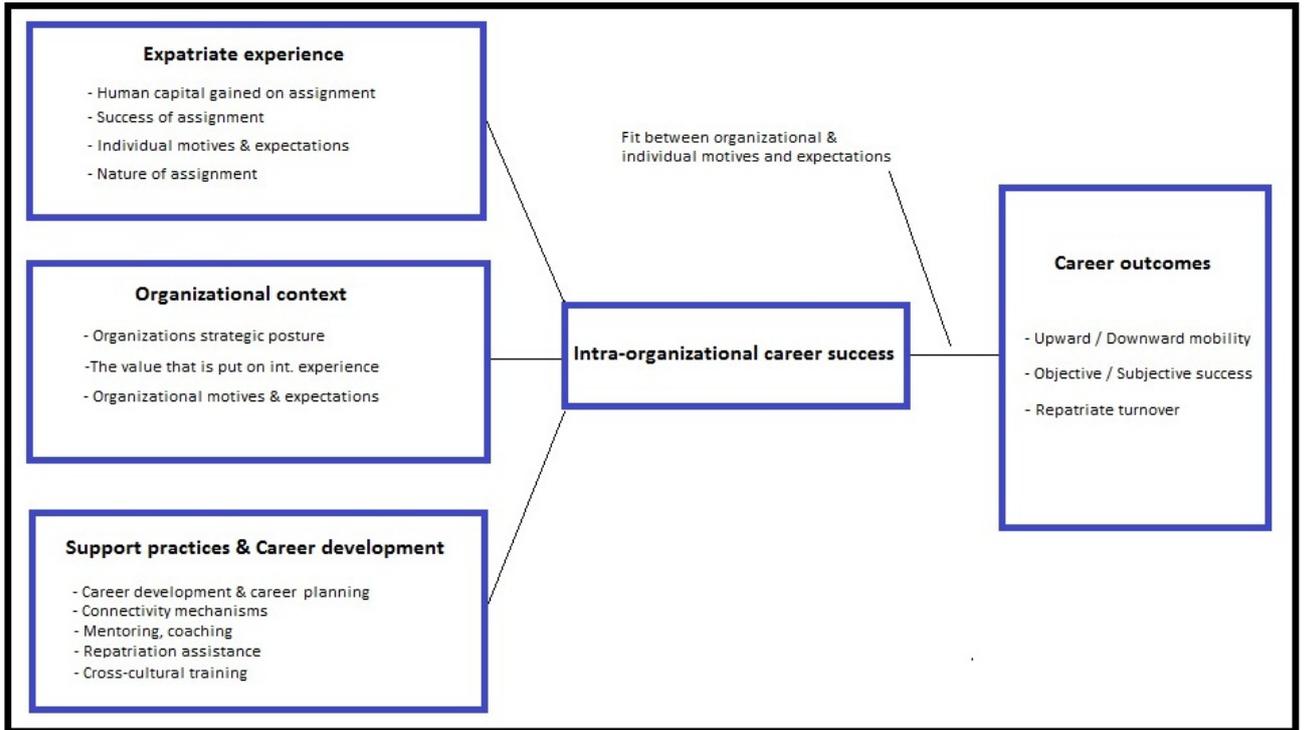
Figure 6: Illustration of the theoretical framework

The items that affect expatriate's intra-organizational career success have been divided into three categories. These are Expatriate experience, Organizational context, and Career Development and Support practices.

Expatriate experience concerns issues that are related to individual perspectives such as human capital gained on assignment, assignment success, nature of assignment and individual motives and expectations. *Human capital.* Expatriates gain valuable human capital during assignments. The basic assumption is that this human capital should manifest itself in increased career success. *Success of assignment*. The basic assumption is that expatriates who perform effectively and complete their tasks are more likely to achieve career progression through expatriation. *Nature of assignment.* The basic assumption is that nature of the assignment is important in determining how much individual will benefit from it. Developmental assignments facilitate career advancement more than control of fill-in assignments.

Organizational context deals with the organizations view on international experience. This contains the value that the company puts on international experience and organization's motives and expectations toward the assignment. If company has a very global mindset and the organization highly values international experience, expatriates are more likely to advance.

The third category focuses on career development and support practices. These can have a profound effect on the success of assignment as well as maintaining connection to home office and decision-makers. Expatriates who enjoy mentoring, coaching, training, repatriation assistance etc. are more likely to achieve career success through expatriation. Some support practices facilitate expatriate performance and assignment success and therefore indirectly enhance the likelihood of career success but some support practices are directly linked to career progression. For example mentoring and having connection to the home office are directly related to career success. Also expatriates who maintain relationships with colleagues and supervisors back home will experience greater intra-organizational career success following their repatriation (Bolino 2007). A successful career development program will help companies make the best use of repatriates' knowledge and skills upon return (Pattie et al. 2010). Career planning on the other hand helps employees to develop the skills necessary for lateral transfers and promotions. When employees seek development opportunities they increase both their internal and external labor-market value.

Fit between individual and organizational motives. Expectations have a profound effect on the perceived success of the assignment, especially from the individual's point of view. The assignee's expectancy of the assignment for career building will significantly affect job performance during expatriation. From expatriate's perspective, meeting the individual's expectations when the assignment is completed will determine the success of repatriation. A great disparity between individual and organizational expectations is likely to cause problems when returning from assignment. If the expectations do not match, there is an increased likelihood of disappointments and these may cause the repatriate to look for employment elsewhere.

4. METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodology applied in the empirical research. The methodological choices are discussed and examined and the units of analysis in the empirical study are presented. Furthermore, the data collection process is described in detail and finally the data analysis process is presented. This chapter also deals with the issues of research validity and reliability. The actual results of the thesis are presented in the next chapter. The aim in the empirical part of this study is to find out how expatriates perceive that the international assignment affected their careers and how they felt about their organizational support and development practices before, during and after their assignment.

4.1. Research approach

The foundation of the research design of the study is exploratory. The study attempts to provide insight and understanding of the impact of expatriate assignments on career success as a whole. Because of the study's exploratory nature the research was conducted using qualitative approach.

According to scholars, qualitative methods are suitable for research that pursues in-depth understanding (Eskola & Suoranta, 2008; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). The main reasoning for choosing qualitative approach lies in the need for deeper understanding of international assignment's impact on careers. Since the goal is to find out how expatriate assignments affect organizational careers, the focus is on the personal experience of expatriates and thus qualitative study is appropriate. This approach enables the researcher to go deeper in the respondents' experiences, behaviour, and the motives behind it. Furthermore, when studying societal phenomena,

the research questions cannot be answered by means of quantitative research. Qualitative research is the best method for answering questions 'how' and 'why' (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005).

This research study is based on a qualitative single case study design. The single-case method helps to understand the underlying dynamics in the company and is suitable for research focusing on deep (but narrow) understanding of the case in question. The single-case study can be used to provide deep understanding of contemporary real life phenomena (Yin 2009: 18). According to a definition by Piekkari, Welch and Paavilainen (2009: 569) a single case study is:

> *"A research strategy that examines, through the use of a variety of data sources, a phenomenon in its naturalistic context, with the purpose of 'confronting' theory with the empirical world."*

According to definition by Stake (1995) a case is: *"…a specific, complex, functioning thing"*. The case company can therefore be examined as a case, because it is a particular system with organizational borders. The research aims to answer the question of "how do international assignments contribute to the intra-organizational careers of expatriates?" This type of the question that focuses on "how", makes case study a suitable method of research (Yin 2009).

Ghauri et al. (2005) argue that a case study is an appropriate approach if the research questions contain "how" questions and when a single organization is studied. This is the case in this Master's thesis. Furthermore, this study employs inductive reasoning, which means conducting research on the topic being studied and then comparing the results to previous theories on the subject. The goal of this thesis is interpreting and understanding information obtained from the standpoint of expatriates, and relating that to previous research and theories. The selected approach is appropriate for this thesis

because the goal is to gain understanding of a phenomenon that takes place in a specific context, and to reveal how and why this situation has emerged. The aim is to offer deep and rich information of the case and a possibility for context dependent generalizability rather than to produce statistically generalizable rules.

4.2. Validity and reliability

Trustworthiness of a study can be estimated using validity and reliability. The data collection and analysis largely determine the reliability and validity of the research. The term reliability represents confirmability and dependability, whereas validity refers to representing the objective reality without bias. Validity and reliability are the measures of trustworthiness of the results. Also consistency and coherency are measures of the research quality (Yin 2009). In essence, reliability means that if a later investigator followed the same procedures as described by an earlier investigator and conducted the same study all over again, the later investigator should arrive at the same findings and conclusions. The goal of reliability is to minimize the biases and errors of the study. (Yin 2003: 37)

Reliability can be divided into internal and external reliability. Internal reliability refers to the issue of whether another researcher can make the same observations on the subject. External reliability refers to the degree of how the research can be replicated. However, in qualitative research it is generally impossible to execute another research in thoroughly same circumstances and social settings in which the data has originally been collected.

Validity can be separated into internal and external validity. Internal validity is to do with how well the researcher's observations on the examined subject correspond to the theoretical ideas and conclusions the researcher ends up with. External validity, in turn,

focuses on to what extent the results can be generalized in changing social settings. Therefore, external validity is often held as a critical element of qualitative research as it tends to rely on relatively small samples and case studies. (Bryman & Bell 2003: 288)

4.3. Limitations

The single case study approach can pose concerns to external validity. This approach has been criticized by arguing that it does not allow generalizations and provides fragmented data (Yin 2003). This view has been challenged by pointing out that the basis of case study research is to gain rich data that leads to finding new theoretical relationships (Dyer & Wilkins 1991). On this note, finding support for old theories or seeking generalizations is not the main focus of this Master's thesis. In this study, the goal is gaining rich information of the impact of international assignments to intra-organizational careers at the case company. This rich information can then be evaluated and improvement suggestions derived based on the data analysis. Trying to draw general conclusions from any case study contains a risk of incorrect results (Stake 1995: 39). The aim of the thesis is therefore not to generalize the findings outside the case company's circumstances.

Because the empirical data is collected from a limited amount of qualitative interviews from a single company it creates a problem of external validity. The results are not necessarily generalizable beyond the immediate case study (Yin 2009). As this research study is a mere Master's thesis, the research focus was narrowed down and the number of interviews was limited to a reasonable size. The lack of experience of the researcher in conducting semi-structured interviews can also be seen as a serious limitation.

In terms of ethical issues, it should be noted that the researcher was familiar with the case company due to prior working relationship. This may have caused some bias to the

work as some prior knowledge may have had an influence on the writing process. However, the researcher had no prior contact to any of the interviewees or to the company representatives that were contacted in making this thesis. This prior connection should not be considered a threat to the validity of the study.

According to Hirsjärvi & Hurme (2003) there are three key issues that cause limitations to the applicability of an interview. First, the interviewer's earlier experience defines how well the interview is conducted and how elaborative questions are asked. In the case of this Master's thesis, the non-existent interviewing experience of the author suggests that during the interview process some degree of potential for acquiring information was not realized. Second, the interview situation holds possibilities for error from both the interviewee's as well as the interviewer's side. There might e.g. be a risk for the interviewees to give socially acceptable answers on the cost of honesty. Third, the interpretation of the interview data is subject to the interviewer's judgment and experience. Again, the author's limited experience may have caused biased or otherwise lacking results.

One limitation has to do with the fact that all interviewees are current employees of the case company. According to scholars repatriates who have limited career success within their organizations following an overseas assignment are far more likely to quit than those who have been able to get ahead following an expatriate assignment. Suutari (2003) reports the following figures: As much as 10-25 per cent of expatriates leave their companies within a year from repatriation and within three years the figure in some companies is up to half of expatriates. Repatriate turnover rate is constantly reported being almost double the rate of domestic turnover and disappointed expatriates often leave the company for a better position elsewhere (Wittig-Berman et al. 2009). As all interviewees are still employed by the case company, the results might be skewed as it could be argued that employees who have been very disappointed by their career progression have already left the company. The fact that they all have worked at least a decade and are still working for the case company, suggests that they are, at the very least, somewhat content with their intra-organizational careers.

The interviewees themselves might have also affected the data. Even though the interviews were given anonymously, it is possible that they have been wary when talking about their current employer, and their ambitions or disappointments about their career progression. In many cases there had also been many years, up to almost 20 in some cases, between the international assignment and the interview. This obviously causes limitations. The way they feel now about their assignment and its effect on their careers might be very different than what they felt e.g. one year from the assignment.

It is also necessary to mention that the analysis of the interviews has been affected by the researcher's subjective interpretations. However, I have been aware of this subjectivity and have tried to be as objective as possible in order to end up with most reliable results. In addition, as the study is based of interviewees' self-reports and retrospective sense-making, it may suffer from hindsight bias and attribution bias.

4.4. The case company

Due to confidentiality reasons, no specific information can be revealed about the case company. Some background information can, however, be given. The case company is a listed company headquartered in Finland and it operates in the construction industry. It is one of the largest players in Finland within its field with a significant part of its net sales (more than one third) coming from international markets. The case company is one of the most significant infrastructure construction companies in the Baltic region. It operates in all Scandinavian and Baltic countries as well as in Russia, Poland and China. In 2012, they employed more than 3000 people in their international business segment. International operations are seen as the most important growth opportunity for the company in the future and one of its goals is to increase their presence in the growing international markets. According to organizational communication, profitable growth will be sought especially through international operations and they will continue to receive more focus from management and in operational development in the future.

4.5. Data-collection method

In this section, the data-collection method is presented and background information is given about the seven interviews conducted during this research. For the sake of protecting individual as well as company anonymity, specific details concerning the interviewees will not be given.

I decided to use semi-structured theme interviews as the main data source in this thesis. Since the thesis focuses on individual's subjective experience on his/her international assignment's impact on intra-organizational career, interviewing can be seen as the most appropriate data collection method. In this study, the expatriates' subjective feelings and experiences about their careers and case company's expatriate processes are the most valuable data source.

The semi-structured interview method is the most suitable method for this study since the purpose is to get in-depth and open-minded information within clearly specified area. The reason for some structure is to ensure that career implications of international assignments will be kept in the centre of the discussions and that the predetermined aspects will be discussed. Interviews are no longer perceived as simple questionnaires or traditional interviews, but rather as discussions between the interviewer and the interviewee. The semi-structured interview method provides a frame for the discussion but does not limit the interviewee with fixed questions (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2008).

The interview design was based on the literature review findings, so that main topics relating to international assignments and their impacts on career were covered. The interviews were based on a set of standardized questions. The interview question frame is included in this thesis in **Appendix 1**. These questions were presented to each interviewee to ensure that the selected topics were covered. In addition, the interviewees were given the chance to discuss aspects that appeared during the interview process and they were encouraged to speak freely. Also additional follow-up questions were asked

in order to get more deep understanding on the subject. The intention was also to try to spot interesting points and ask further questions about them. The interviewees were also given freedom to discuss matters they wanted to open up.

As said, the data was gathered using interviewing method. For this study, seven expatriates were interviewed. The selection of interviewees was made by HR managers of the case company. The interviewees were selected based on their history of working as an expatriate for the case company, as well as their willingness to participate in this study. This gave some power to the managers to influence the results of the study, but as they were the only channel to reach the people and have the required knowledge of their working history, the risk was acceptable. Ten contacts were given to the researcher. A short email was sent to the interviewee candidates describing the study and their role in it. After this, these people were contacted via both e-mail and telephone in order to schedule the interviews. Due to two refusals and one scheduling problem, ultimately seven of these ten people were interviewed for the study. The interviewees were told beforehand the themes that would be discussed, but no specific questions were handed out before the interview. The questions were not necessarily asked in original order if the themes were covered elsewhere in the interview. This allowed the interviews to be free from a strict structure and helped bringing forth the experiences of the interviewees.

4.5.1. The interviewees

The interviewees were all Finnish citizens between ages of 40 and 56. Six of them were male and one female. Their educational background was quite homogenous. Five out of seven were M.Sc., with four majoring in construction and one in architecture, one was a Bachelor of Engineering, and one had Vocational Qualification in Business and Administration. All had long careers inside the case company, ranging from 11 to 25 years. Three of the seven interviewees work for the international branch of the parent

case company, another three of them work for a subsidiary that does almost all its business outside Finland, and only one works in a purely domestic setting. All of them had families and five of them had also had families accompanying them on one or more assignments with the case company. There were major differences in their amount of international work. The number of different expatriate assignments within the case company ranged from one to seven between the interviewees. The definition of an international assignment for this thesis was that they had to work and have a permanent residency in a foreign country for at least six months. In addition to the longer assignments, many had done, and are still doing, international work in the form of business trips, frequent flying etc. although now permanently living in Finland and being stationed at the company headquarters. Three out of seven had also prior international work experience from other companies. This disparity of their level of international experience caused some troubles in answering interview questions. It seemed easier for the people with only one or two assignments to acknowledge and talk about the assignment's impact on their careers, whereas for the people who have made most of their careers abroad, it seemed to be more difficult to see the impact of the assignments on careers.

The fact that the case company does business in the construction industry causes some considerations for the study. The work that the interviewees do is largely project work. This, in limited understanding of the author, means that they set up a construction project abroad, follow it through and then move on to the next project. Six out of seven interviewees work either as project engineers, project developers or project managers, or area project managers. While they are stationed in Finland the work they do in is still largely international; mainly, developing, supervising or otherwise managing the international projects.

4.5.2. Conducting and analyzing the interviews

All interviews were conducted in Helsinki at the headquarters of the case company in March 2013, and were done within a time period of two weeks from the first interview to last. These face-to-face interviews lasted approximately one hour and were conducted in Finnish. The use of native language facilitates the depth and accuracy of follow-up questions made by the interviewer, as well as improves the overall efficiency of making most out of the time available for the interviews (Welch et al. 2006). The interviews were digitally recorded after the interviewees had given the permission to do so. The interviews were scheduled to last an hour each at most and with one exception they were conducted within an hour. The reason was to not take too much of the interviewees' time and also to help in transcription and analysis phases. The relatively short time frame was also thought to help on keeping the discussion within the topic of the thesis. The interviews were then transferred into a computer for playback and transcription. The transcriptions of the interviews were done within a few days from the actual interviews in order to have the interviews fresh in mind. The transcripts were carefully written word-for-word to avoid losing or corrupting the data and to imitate the actual interview situation. For the sake of shortness and readability, filler words and stutters were left out. Also some irrelevant discussions about the researcher himself were not transcribed. Altogether the length of the transcriptions was around 55 sheets and 19,000 words.

As said, the seven interviews were all conducted in Finnish, as it is the first language of all interviewees as well as the interviewer, and it enabled a more detailed and rich use of language. When appropriate, the interviewees are quoted. When quoted, the interviewees are represented as a letter I and a number, for example I1 for interviewee one. This was mainly done to make it easier for the researcher to differentiate the interviewees and keep track on what each interviewee had said. The quotes were translated from Finnish to English by the researcher. This creates a risk for reliability because the quotes used in the thesis had to be translated to English. Because of the different nature of the two languages they don't translate well word to word. In

translation, the aim was to hold on to the meaning of the sentence. This meant that in some cases the structure of the sentence or the vocabulary had to be altered in order to preserve the original meaning of the response. As a native Finnish speaker, I have tried to decode the real meanings of the interviewees and present the findings in a realistic manner.

The transcripted interviews were then organized and combined in to a single file and categorized according to interview questions and different themes. Thematizing can be used to analyze qualitative data by identifying characteristics that are common to the cases under examination (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008). The next chapter presenting the findings of this study is organized based on these themes that appeared during the interviews and literature review.

5. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

This chapter presents the actual findings of this study. This chapter will outline the findings from the semi-structured interviews. The findings are categorized in to different themes that are based on literature grounded interview questions and on themes that came up during the interviews.

5.1. Motives of expatriation

In order to assess career progression and expectations of expatriates, it is valuable to know what their motivation for leaving on expatriate assignments is. Hippler (2009) has defined different motives for expatriates to accept overseas assignments. These are: career prospects, increase in salary, being urged by the company, broadening one's horizon, interesting task and interest in the country. Most expatriates see international postings as a way to develop their skills and knowledge. Majority of assignees cite personal development, rather than achieving company goals, as their main reason for accepting an assignment.

When the interviewees were first asked about their motivation to go abroad, several different motivations could be found. All of the interviewees expressed interest of seeing new places and being abroad. In three cases the economic recession in Finland in the 1990s also had a significant effect. As two interviewees put it:

> I3: *"To be brutally honest, the first assignment to Moscow was because of the deep depression in Finland. There simply were no jobs here. That was the main reason that guided me abroad."*

>I2:*"The biggest reason was of course the fact that I had no work in Finland. When the opportunity opened up to go abroad, I obviously left."*

Three of the respondents also felt that challenging themselves was the most important motivation. The international projects were also seen generally as more interesting than working in domestic setting. Five out of seven also had no families at the time of their first international assignment. This was also seen as a convenient time to go abroad.

>I1:*"When I left for the first assignment, I was still a bachelor. It was easy to go when I really had no ties to Finland."*

>I7:*"…then they said to me that, hey, go to Ukraine to work as a procurement engineer. And as a bachelor with no family, I left. And I had no regrets."*

When comparing the answers to the six categories provided by Hippler (2009), it is noteworthy that nobody expressed the motivation of getting ahead on their careers and only one mentioned that maybe the increased salary also had an effect. Broadening one's horizon, interesting tasks and interest in foreign countries seemed to be the most important motives. All of the motivations that were first mentioned were intrinsic or to do with individual or Finland's economic circumstances.

The interviewees were then specifically asked if they saw career advancement as a motivation to leave for expatriate assignment or if they had had any expectations for career advancement due to the assignment. Only one of the respondents clearly stated that advancing career was a key reason for going abroad. Two of the respondents, who had prior international experience in other companies expressed that the first assignment in another company was seen as a way to advance career, but the motivation for the assignments in the case company were not inspired anymore by career advancement.

I4:*"Career advancement had a bigger effect when I left abroad for the first time. In this company my motivation had more to do with wanting to show what I can do, and to demonstrate that I have the knowhow that I talk about."*

Four of the respondent did not see career advancement as a key issue for their motivation for going on international assignments.

I6: *"I wouldn't say I had any career expectations for the assignment. Well, yes and no. Of course you think that by doing your job well you could grow in to the next position, but this has nothing to do with the international assignment. It doesn't matter where you do it."*

I1: *"I didn't think the assignment as a career move really. I've always had a great interest towards the world and I speak different languages. That has probably been my main interest of going on an assignment."*

I3:*"On an individual level assignments increase your knowhow, business awareness and global mindset, but I've never really thought that they would help in gaining titles. I see them more as good opportunities to learn new things."*

On the whole, when asked about their careers, everybody seemed to be quite satisfied with the position they were in right now. Some acknowledged that had they had any ambitions for more senior positions, it would have probably worked out as well, but due to a lack of personal ambition or family issues they had not strived for such positions.

I2: *"The career goals that I have set for myself have come true. I've never had an ache for leading positions as some people may have. But of course if I had had such ambitions, I think that progressing there would have been possible too, if I just had invested in that and strived there more."*

I6: *"In my case career progression has depended on other issues. My family has had an impact on that. I have always thought that my children need to grow up first, before I take on any bigger challenges."*

5.2. Assignment success

Expatriate success is defined as completion of the foreign assignment as defined at the beginning, cross-cultural adjustment while on assignment and good performance of the job while on the foreign assignment (Briscoe 2004: 256). Bolino (2007) argues very logically that career success is greater among those who complete their international assignments successfully than among those who failed to see their assignments through to completion. Also human capital theory suggests that individuals who have more accomplishments and have done well in previous jobs are more likely to be promoted. Therefore, the theory suggests that expatriates who succeed in their assignments are more likely to get ahead when they repatriate.

When asked if they thought that their assignments in the case company had been successful, from both company and individual aspects with a few exceptions all were seen as successful, even as great successes.

I2:*"Yes. It was professionally what I looked for and I got a new life experience out of it. And the fact that I got to continue working in Finland reflects that the company was also satisfied with my input there."*

I3:*"Generally speaking my assignments have been successful. But the last assignment I didn't feel as particularly rewarding. It was mostly due to the global recession in 2008 and everything stopped because of that. And when everything stops it includes certain difficult issues like shutting down operations and participating in things like that."*

> I4:*"It was a perfect assignment! It started in the spring and ended in the fall. It was the best time of the year in St. Petersburg. It was like in The Cherry Orchard by Anton Chekhov: "All starts in the spring and ends in the fall". And I left there on Yrjö's day, which in Russia used to be day when serfs were allowed to change their masters. By that day I had done my work there. And the governor Valentina Matvyienko was still bragging by our results after two years, by telling how she had set up a factory in a record time. I gladly give all the credit to Matvyienko, but it was our team that did it!"*

For the individual, a failed assignment is likely to hurt career advancement as well as be a big hit for ego and self-esteem (Webb, 1996). There were no reported individual assignment failures among the interviewees. Only in one case the assignee had to return home before what was intended. However, this was due to organizational changes, not individual failure. Therefore, it can be said that assignment failure is not among the reasons for possible negative career effects with the interviewed expatriates.

5.3. International assignments and career advancement

Then the interviewees were then asked if they believed that their international assignments had had a positive effect on their overall career advancement. Four out of seven believed that international assignments had helped them progress their career. They believed that they would not have maybe risen as high in the organization without expatriate assignments.

> I1:*"I really believe that if you look e.g. at my salary with this level of education, I would have never risen to the position where I am now. The assignments have really helped me in that sense. Also I have learned a lot during the assignments, and that's not a negative thing either. Of course the assignments have helped my career advancement!"*

I4:*"Oh yes. You can say that only after the assignment my salary was put at the level that it should be. Before that, I was, to be honest, severely underpaid in this company. I really believe that the assignment played a key role in that."*

I5:*" Yes, I think the assignment had a big part in my promotion. Because on the first assignment there were a lot of older, experienced people there, and I learned a lot. I learned so much on how to manage these large projects."*

I7:*"Yes, I believe that my career advancement has been more rapid due to international assignments. Now I have my own area of specialization. But on the other hand being abroad for so long has also restricted me in some ways. Coming back to Finland was hard because I didn't really have any contacts here. All my contacts were elsewhere."*

There were also neutral beliefs and also thoughts that maybe the assignments had even hindered career progression.

I2:*"I don't know if the assignment really had any effect on career progression. When I came back home, having been away for four, five years, I might have even had small uncertainty if I can even operate in a domestic setting anymore. It is so different out there. And I didn't know any domestic companies at the time."*

I3:*"I don't believe that international experience has in any way accelerated my career. But maybe I'm better at moving with different work. It has made my own skills more versatile."*

I6:*"Very difficult to say, but I don't think that the assignments have necessarily helped. If I had worked for the same company in a single country, it might be that I would have risen higher. If I compare myself to my college friends that have worked in Finland the whole time then maybe it has been easier for them to climb the ladder."*

These findings illustrate well the difficulties found also in the literature. While some expressed that international assignments had progressed their careers, others felt that

they had had no effect or that working solely in home country might advance your career quicker.

5.4. Human capital

According to scholars, expatriates report that they receive significant personal and self-development benefits from international assignments. Their communication skills are enhanced because of their exposure to different cultures and they gain a broader, global perspective on the firm's operations. The more complex the environment, the more it enhances their motivation and planning techniques, thus, increasing their confidence and skills (Webb, 1996). Placing employees in international assignments, often results in substantial learning. Expatriate assignments are thought to develop general knowledge of international business, leadership, and specific international technical skills. Based on the human capital theory, having acquired and developed valuable skills and abilities overseas, expatriates should advance in their organizations more quickly than their domestic counterparts (Bolino 2007).

When the interviewees were asked, how they have benefited professionally from their international experience, some clear themes could be seen. These can be seen as being in line with the theory. Most reported that it had profoundly increased their social skills and openness towards different people and different ways of working. Many felt that assignment help in creating a "global mindset" and that they had more thorough understanding of their company's business. They also felt that they had learned to be more initiative and spontaneous through international experience.

> I4: *"As the Chinese curse says: "May your life be interesting". International experience is truly a mind blowing experience. You can no longer get by with the code that you learned as a child. You think that "Everything is like this, right?" And then you go to another country, and nothing is like that! Then you come back home and you think: "The*

way it was there was good, why do we do things like this in Finland?" The fact that you have to go through both a culture shock as well as reverse culture shock, it revolutionizes your thinking in a way that after all that, you are quite a smooth person in every way."

I4:*"Without a doubt I have a broader view on my company's business. My colleague back home doesn't have a clue! He comes to the wonderland that is Russia, and is utterly lost the first time. He doesn't know how to get to our office and can't even read the street signs. Let alone do business there!"*

I6: *"It has definitely given me international perspective. It is more on the social- and humanitarian level, rather than specific technical skills. And I have also learned to be more independent and work more independently. You are not going to just sit down to a table that has been already set for you. In many places, the first issue is even finding the table. That is something that can't be learned by working only in Finland."*

Self-development

As has been already stated many expatriates report that they receive significant personal and self-development benefits from international assignments. Their communication skills are enhanced because of their exposure to different cultures and they gain a broader, global perspective on the firm's operations. The more complex the environment, the more it enhances their motivation and planning techniques, thus, increasing their confidence and skills (Webb, 1996).

The interviewees were asked if they felt that international experience had changed them as employees. All of the seven interviewees felt that they had achieved a lot of self-development benefits. They felt being more flexible, spontaneous and being more open to different people, and other ways of working and interacting. These were seen as things that can only be learned overseas.

I1: *"It has definitely changed me. You really notice it when you come back to the headquarters in Finland. The Finnish work life in seems so bureaucratic and slow. Overseas you have to be very quick and spontaneous. You have to make decisions immediately and in comparison Finnish work culture seems ancient. You have to have initiative, otherwise you won't make it."*

I3: *"I suppose I have changed. At least I'm more broad-minded and I understand that things can be made in many different ways. You learn that the end result is what ultimately defines the success, not the method of doing."*

I4: *"Yes I have. I'm much more flexible. And my knowledge of human nature has increased when I have got to know so many different people. Nowadays I get so much good feedback because of my language- and culture-skills that my days are just more fun."*

I6: *"Difficult to say, when I can't tell how I would be like if I had not been abroad. But at least I'm more open to dissimilarity. I can take in to account, that not everything always goes by-the-book like in Finland. I can relate to other values and other ways of working. You learn a completely different attitude toward these things."*

Increased value in the job market

Theory suggests that having acquired and developed valuable skills and abilities overseas, expatriates should advance in their organizations more quickly than their domestic counterparts (Bolino 2007). Benson & Pattie (2008) argue that expatriates also often think that international work experience provides a strong signal to potential employers and it is easy to recognize on a resume. Expatriates might look at overseas assignments as investments in their human capital for the hopes of these investments' paying off in future, either within their current company or as increased opportunities and value in the job market. Employees who accept international assignments often believe that the skills and knowledge that are acquired overseas will benefit them in terms of salary growth and external marketability.

The interviewees were asked if they felt that their value in the job-market had increased due to the international assignment. They were asked if they felt that they would be in a better position than a similar level colleague with no international experience when looking for a job outside or an opening in the current company. Five out of seven employees stated that international work had clearly increased their value in the job-market. Many had also been head-hunted.

I1: *"Surely it has increased...I believe I'm in a stronger position than a colleague with only home country experience. Of course it goes like this. The years abroad have given so much, it gives you certain edge."*

I4: *"Yes. And if it doesn't grow in your current company, you can always go elsewhere, because international experience is a thing that is always wanted. It isn't always appreciated in every firm, but we don't have that problem here. But I really believe it was worth it. I'm definitely in a stronger position than my home country colleague, with no overseas experience. And for my current position obviously!"*

I2: *"I would think that it's a positive thing. At least it is a way to separate you from other applicants, if there is competition. I believe it is a good thing. Especially now, that I have experience working in Finland as well as abroad."*

I3: *"Well maybe it is a good thing. I have never really tested my value. But it is clear that you benefit from international experience. And when competitors are searching for a suitable people, they usually call for the neighboring firms and ask if you want to change firms. That is how it goes."*

Two out of seven could not really say. They both felt that while they would be in a good bargaining position when looking for international work, they felt that their value in Finnish job-market might be worse.

I5: *"If I'm looking for a position in a Finnish company, then probably not. Such few Finnish companies are international. In Finnish projects I'm probably in a weaker*

position, because the other applicant would have more experience working in Finland. In that way international assignment might be a bad thing. The ideal is probably that you have both international and home country experience."

I7:*"It is so different, like I said. No one will take me to a home country project. They are two different worlds. Just as they would not send people with no language-skills overseas. It depends on the task. For an international job, such as starting business in Ural they would hire me but for a home country job, like an area manager to Oulu, they wouldn't pick me. But to Moscow, they probably would."*

When asked if the interviewees had looked for opportunities outside the case company, many admitted that they had not. Six out of seven had not actively looked jobs outside. When asked for reasons as to why not, they stated being satisfied in their jobs, their own laziness or a combination of the two. Three however told that they had been head-hunted or received some offers from other companies. Only one stated that he was actively looking for opportunities outside the case company. This was due to uncertainties in the business perspectives and with the direction the company is being developed.

5.5. Repatriation

A significant problem related to overseas assignments is the repatriation process after the work overseas is completed. Many expatriates report being disappointed in their repatriation. The years of work experience acquired through foreign assignments is often ignored by the organization, and ends up being a hindrance rather than a facilitator of career progression.

Finding a suitable position

According to Pattie et al. (2010), it is crucial to the repatriate's career development that the first job upon reentry expands and builds on the individual's international knowledge and expertise. There are, however, often problems with the repatriation process after the completion of the work overseas. The international experience tends to be ignored by the organization, and can end up hindering, rather than facilitating career progression. Many expatriates report feeling disappointed in the positions that they are put in after they're assignments.

The interviewees were asked if they had encountered difficulties in finding suitable positions in home country after their assignments. Five out of seven were satisfied or even very satisfied with the jobs in which they had returned to after their assignments. One reported there having been some difficulties in the past, but overall was quite satisfied. Only one reported severe difficulties in finding a suitable position.

> I3: *"Generally speaking, when you look at all my assignments then yes, I have found suitable positions quite easily. In some cases there has been a bit of searching, but overall, yes. The company has also grown so big over the years that in principle there are always some jobs available."*

> I7:*"It was not easy finding a position in Finland. I also tried looking from other firms. International experience has really restricted me in that sense, in finding a position back home. Even outside this company. There were offers to leave to Siberia in the middle of nowhere, and tons of other expatriate offers. But my specific criterion was to find a position in Finland. When I looked for work in Finland, people thought I can only operate abroad. My international experience wasn't appreciated. It was a disappointment."*

They were also asked if the position they returned was the same level as in the assignment and if they had received any promotions upon returning from an assignment. Two had received a clear promotion after repatriation, four had returned to similar level positions as on their assignment. In one case there was, if not a clear demotion, at least a

reduced responsibility upon repatriation. There were also mentions of decreased level of compensation when returning home, but this was due to certain expatriate benefits and allowances not being issued in home office.

At this point, it has to be noted again, that in the case of these interviewees, many do not correspond directly to the case that is often presented in the expatriate literature. The literature often paints a picture, where an expatriate works in the home office and then leaves for a single assignment of limited duration with the expectation of then coming back to home country permanently. And this might very well often be the case. But in this study three of the seven interviewees had spent most, or at least half of their time with the case company working abroad and also moving between different foreign countries without spending much time in country between. One was even employed from overseas in 1999 and came to Finland only in 2009 having only worked abroad for the case company. Two other had spent only short durations in home office between assignments. All but one of the interviewees is working in international projects from home office. This made it difficult to pinpoint the effect the assignments have had on their careers, since in some cases the whole career had progressed almost solely abroad.

Guarantees of a position

Bolino (2007) reports that many expatriates are not guaranteed a position of any kind within the company before leaving on an assignment. This often causes uncertainty with expatriates and problems with redeployment when they return to the home office. Most companies do not give their expatriates any post-assignment employment guarantees whatsoever and as much as 20–50% of repatriates are not even employed by the same company within 2 years of coming back home (Bolino 2007).

The notion in previous research that very few people are given guarantees of a position seemed to also be true in the case of the interviewees of this study. Only one had received a specific guarantee of coming back to a certain position in the home office. In other cases there were no guarantees of having a job back home.

I1: *"No no. No guarantees. The times that I have come back to Finland, they have just said that come back to headquarters and we'll see what we can find."*

I2: *"There were no guarantees. There was of course a discussion that if everything goes well, it is possible that we'll try to continue from there. But there was no written or even verbal guarantee. It was more like if both are happy and there is work, we will try to continue the employment."*

Having no guarantees seems to be fairly typical in the organizations of this era of corporate downsizing and reorganizing. Career paths are becoming vaguer and the role of the organization is also changing. Companies are no more able to guarantee job security, and also many employees are not expecting to spend their whole careers in a single company but change employers during their careers. Employees have more responsibility in steering their own careers. Self-awareness and self-management are needed in order to take one's career in particular direction.

It seems that the interviewees often have very little certain knowledge on how their career will progress after their current project ends. However, in the construction industry it might be even more difficult to offer guarantees of a position than in some other industries. It seems, to the limited understanding of the researcher, that there is often very little knowledge on what kinds of projects are starting for example in two years. Therefore, it can be extremely challenging to offer any special guarantees for people who are leaving on assignments, simply because the future is very unclear for the organization also.

Repatriation assistance

One way for organization to ease the readjustment process of expatriates is by providing pre-return training for repatriates. This can demonstrate organization's commitment to the employee and an understanding of the reentry challenges. Increasing individual's awareness of the possible issues they will face when returning to home office and assuming a new role in the organization can help their adjustment.

When it came to such repatriation assistance, there was also a feeling that there are no uniform procedures in that. The repatriation assistance was quite insignificant at least among the respondents. In the case of the interviewees, it seemed that many had not even required or expected such assistance. As one interviewee put it:

> I3:*"I don't think there has been any specific repatriation assistance. I am not sure if anyone will ask you how are your family issues or living situations in Finland. You just come back, and hopefully you have a clear position and a job to do. Without a clear role you will become an encumbrance. I understand very well that it can be unpleasant. You are like a fifth wheel."*

The interviewees were also asked if they felt that international assignments had had some negative impacts on their careers of restricted them in some ways in their organization. One had had severe difficulties in finding a home country position and many expressed fear towards future employment or feelings that they might have a hard time finding jobs in domestic setting.

> I7:*"It was not easy finding a position in Finland. I also tried looking from other firms. International experience has really restricted me in that sense, in finding a position back home. Even outside this company."*

> I1:*"You always think that what happens if these international projects end. So far we're still doing ok, despite the recession... but if it hits us, then what will happen? I do have a small fear, if I'll be able to find a home country job if our boom ends."*

> I2: *"Personally I haven't noticed anything negative. But many get kind of stuck with international jobs. It can be very difficult to go back working in the home country."*

> I3:*"I don't know if the assignments have closed any doors from me... But on the other hand, they have made me limited. I don't think that moving to a home country job could happen without friction. The people for example, I don't really know anybody there. Also*

if you think professionally, all our R&D happens in home country and it is implemented a bit later overseas"

Ability to utilize international experience

Many studies show that repatriates often complain about being placed in unchallenging jobs with low levels of authority and little utilization of the acquired international skills and knowledge when they return home (Benson et al. 2008). The interviewees were asked if they have been able to utilize their international experience back in home country. In the case of the interviewees, six out of seven have been strictly involved in international projects from the beginning of their employment or since their first assignment. Therefore it is not surprising that they have been able to utilize their international experience quite well after repatriation. Some had even difficulties in answering to the question, because of the fact that their work in Finland is strictly international.

I1: *"Well this is hard to answer to, because after coming back to home country, I've been doing pretty much the same job to the target country, only now from Finland. This is such a special job in these projects that the location doesn't really matter. I can do the same things from here as in there."*

I3:*"This is hard to answer to. I'm doing international work also at the moment. But during the assignments I've learned to understand the logic behind many things. I think I'm better at my job than if I had not been there. For example, nowadays I can foresee pretty well how certain things will progress. I have been there for so long that I have learned to pinpoint the Achilles' heels and difficult issues of a project in a completely different way, even before the work has even started."*

I5: *"Yes I have (been able to utilize international experience), in the subsequent projects. My professional experience has grown of course. You learn things there in a whole different way. By cooperating with foreign companies, you also gain good models and guidelines on how to do things. Also I've learned a lot on how things are done and what the important things in different countries are, you know, cultural aspects."*

I6: *"Of course I have (been able to utilize international experience). I can relate to what is happening there in the project because I have been in both ends. If you compare this to a situation in which I would have tried to do this work only from Finland. The understanding of how international projects work has obviously increased."*

5.6. Willingness to accept future assignments

According to scholars there are a limited number of individuals that are willing to accept back-to-back assignments. Many managers regard an international assignment as a compulsory part of long career path and will only accept one assignment and then return home while some view foreign assignments simply as a fun, one-time opportunity to live abroad for a while. Companies have reported that they have hard time finding these kinds of managers, and the existence of global managers with frequent international relocations has even been called a myth (Brewster & Suutari 2005). Forster (2000) reports in his study that as little as 13 per cent of UK expatriates were willing to accept further assignments in the future. There is also, however, evidence for the opposite. For example Suutari (2003) states that as much as 91 percent of Finnish expatriates were ready to consider going for another assignment abroad.

It can be said that four of the interviewees could be seen as global managers. They have been on from four to seven international assignments and have spent the majority of their time within the case company abroad. They were, as said, still working in international field, now only managing their projects from Finland. The three others had only been on one assignment inside the company. The interviewees were asked if they would still be willing to leave for an assignment. Their answers were in line with Suutari's (2003) figures as all were willing to consider future assignments. Only one was reluctant in principal, but also implied that it would not be totally impossible, if circumstances were right. Six out of seven stated that they would be willing to accept another assignment. However, out of these six, five had several reservations and conditions as to where they would be willing to go and when. Many of these

reservations had to do with family situations. Also many felt that the target country would have to be relatively close to Finland.

I1: *"Yes. I suppose I would be willing to go, but now we have to wait at least for a while until my girl gets a little older. Then it might be a bit easier to go. But I'm not willing to leave anywhere far, we're talking mainly about Nordic countries. It used to be easier when our girl was just a baby."*

I4: *"I think I could leave. At some point I thought that that's it. But now I'm thinking that maybe one more assignment. But I have to admit, that if my family is not coming with me, it has to be somewhere close. And even with family, I wouldn't go to China for example. I wouldn't leave anywhere far."*

I6: *"Yes. I'm spending almost two days in a week in Norway as it is. But now that I have a family I wouldn't go anywhere far without them, or for a long time. And if the family comes with me it sets restrictions to the place. But yes, I see another assignment as a possibility."*

I7: *"It depends on how and where. It depends on where, for how long, and with what salary. But on certain conditions, yes. But I wouldn't leave as I did in the 1990s, like anything goes."*

5.7. Organization's appreciation

Scholars have pointed out that one of the key reasons for dissatisfaction with their repatriation is the belief that they have made a real sacrifice for their companies, and they expected that their companies would show appreciation towards their efforts (Bolino 2007). Expatriates often feel international experience and acquired skills are not valued by their organizations. By formally recognizing the value of international work experience the home office can send an important signal to employees. This recognition

can enhance repatriates' perceived expertise, credibility, competence and status (Pattie et al. 2010).

The interviewees were asked if they felt that the case company values and appreciates international experience, and how this appreciation has been demonstrated by the organization. All seven respondents felt that the company values their international experience. Most felt the appreciation due to the fact that they are employed and in increased responsibilities. Two also mentioned that because many of the top management have international experience, it shows that international experience is valued by the organization. There were, however, some reservations also.

> I1: *"I suppose the fact that I have always found more work inside the company can be seen as appreciation. I have been offered more work. On the other hand my salary has not always been at the level that it should have been, when people are sent overseas."*

> I3: *"I think they have to value international experience. It doesn't work otherwise. Such a big part of our operations are overseas. The appreciation can be seen in the company's efforts in holding on to people with international experience."*

> I4: *"I feel that it appreciates. It could be seen especially in the fact that after my assignment I was a wanted intra-organizational expert. And it also could be seen in my salary progression. The appreciation also showed when I was also made an offer from another company, which I almost accepted, but my firm didn't want to let me go. They really showed that they wanted to hold on to me as an employee. Also as soon as I came back, my supervisor, who had sent me abroad, invited me to lunch and wanted to personally thank me."*

> I2: *"I think it (the appreciation) can be seen in organizational communication. When recruiting people, the case company advertises the opportunity to go abroad. And it also shows in the fact that we have a lot of top management who have worked overseas themselves. The people who have been on assignments tend to appreciate others who have also been there."*

I5:*"Yes it does. We have many directors that have been on international assignments. People who have been on assignments have been given positions of responsibility."*

I6:*"I think they do. It can be seen in the fact that I am given more and more responsibility and I am given a chance to work more independently. They appreciate that I have been in challenging jobs out there so my responsibilities have increased because of that."*

5.8. Support practices

Several studies suggest that often expatriates are not happy with the way their assignment was handled by their companies. For example in a study by Lee (2007) expatriates felt that there should be improved pre-departure training, more respect, attention and time for family issues, and more support in all aspects of the program. In another study by Antal (2001) on German expatriates, the interviewees expressed several key reasons for dissatisfaction in the ways their expatriate processes were managed. The preparation phase was not inclusive enough, communication during the assignment was inadequate, and the planning of the repatriation process was negligent. Expatriates also often felt cut from the home organization during their assignment.

The interviewees were asked many questions on how they thought their organization had managed their assignments. While many were quite satisfied in their company's way of handling things and there had been no severe problems, it seemed that many organizational support mechanisms were underutilized. However, many respondents also felt that there was no need for formal support processes.

At first the interviewees were asked if they were overall satisfied on how their assignments were handled. Five out of seven were satisfied or very satisfied with the way their assignments were managed by the company.

> I6: *"I think that everything that is needed is arranged for us on the assignments. There is usually a person there who takes care of arrangements. And if you need something from Finland, there is someone also. The biggest projects have included hundreds of people and there are clear things for expatriates. There is an assigned person who you can ask about things and who then finds out where to get more information,"*

One interviewee was happy with the way his assignment was handled but he nevertheless acknowledged that there are many problems in the management of expatriate assignments.

> I4: *"Overall, supporting assignments should be developed further. We have many unsuccessful assignments and recruitments. And when the people fail, there have also been losses of millions in these projects. Maybe these failures could have been avoided, if it had been remembered that the work is done by people, not excel charts!"*

One interviewee mentioned small difficulties in living arrangement and only one reported any serious dissatisfaction. However, it has to be acknowledged that some of these assignments happened in mid 1990s and the practices and support have probably developed over the years.

> I2: *"Well there were some issues. At times you felt kind of forgotten. You were there working in the project and couldn't get any support from Finland. You had to take care of things that should have been handled by the organization. Getting licenses and looking for apartment, taking care of practical issues. They were left for the person himself."*

Cross-cultural training

Cross-cultural training is generally seen by researchers as necessary to increase the probability of success on foreign assignments. Despite this view many MNCs are not following these suggestions. According to Littrell et al. (2006) less than one third of MNCs offer their expatriates' any kind of cross-cultural training, and most of these programs are only one day briefing sessions.

The interviewees were then asked what kind of preparation and training they have received before their assignments. Four out of seven reported that they had not received any kind of cultural of language training before their assignment. In three cases they had received some language and cultural training. In general, the interviewees did not see this kind of training as being particularly important and it was also seen as being the individual's responsibility to prepare him/herself.

> I3: *"The training has been minimal. The departures are so quick. The level of support probably changes between cases, some receive more than others, but often you just pack your bags and go. There might have been some training available, but I haven't received any cultural training personally. I don't think training makes anything easier. In my opinion it is up to the person leaving to find out about things. Training doesn't hurt, but I believe it is something that you need to work on personally."*

> I1: *"We have had some pre-departure training, but in general not that much. The training that is needed has been often arranged in the target country and also by our customer. But in my assignments I have not really longed for any training. I don't believe that would have made a difference on anything."*

There were also special circumstances in which the training would be hard to organize and also there was a case where the expatriate was already an expert language and culture-wise.

> I7: *"I have moved from foreign country to other foreign country and I have had to train myself. Two times I have also been the first person in our organization to go to a new country. They just said to go there and take care of business. I had to arrange things for myself and then for others as well. But of course some training would have been good."*

> I4: *"When we made the assignment contract I was already a cultural expert before that. So I knew where I was going. I knew the language as well as the culture.*

It seems that this sort of pre-departure training is not very much utilized. In some assignments the target countries had also been other Nordic countries, and the respondents felt that thorough cultural training is not necessary, because the culture is so similar to Finland. One interviewee even stated that he does not think Sweden or Norway as foreign countries, because they are so close culturally and geographically. Even though it seems that there is not extensive pre-training, it was not seen as a problem by the interviewees.

Connectivity mechanisms

When employees are overseas and away, there is a risk of them being forgotten by organizational decision-makers. According to Konopaske et al. (2009) expatriate managers are concerned with the long-term implications of being removed and disconnected from the home-office for an extended period of time. This is one of the most commonly cited problem and is called 'out of sight, out of mind'- problem (Suutari et al. 2002). Researchers have suggested that organizations should implement career development practices that keep expatriates connected with the home office while working overseas (Mendenhall et al. 2002). These connectivity mechanisms can greatly help in hindering the 'out of sight, out of mind' syndrome. These practices often involve supporting contacts to the home office and assigning back-home mentors and sponsors (Bolino 2007). This can be critical as individuals' ability to maintain and improve important connections and networks is significantly related to their career success. Expatriates who are in touch with key decision-makers and have knowledge of new job openings back at the home office are in an advantageous position compared to people with no connections. Weakened relationship with home office and supervisors can lead to worse career prospects or even turnover upon repatriation.

The interviewees were asked about their connection to the home office during their assignment. Five of the interviewees reported as feeling isolated in their assignments and felt that they lost contacts and connections to the home office. Keeping in touch with home office was largely left for the expatriates themselves.

I1: *"The farther away from Finland you go, the more you are forgotten there. You don't have much contact to Finland. Some e-mail might come through secretaries, but that's it. I suppose that goes with the program. There hasn't been any official contact. Only when some specific issues arise. Usually it's just:" Come to Finland, here are your tickets, do you accept?".*

I4:*"I sort of fell out of what was happening in the home country. In some ways my own area supervisor was also acting as a buffer between me and the headquarters. I once only accidently heard from him that people can't sleep because they are so anxious about this project. Then I too started to fear that I will fall in to a canal or a construction pit, because I realized that if something happens to me, the project will end."*

I3:*"Briefing and communication is very random. It is left largely on your responsibility and activity. You yourself have to ask how people in the home office are doing. Nobody will come and tell you how things are. On a yearly level you might see some figures from your branch and what is happening. But I think it is a part of it. You have to ask yourself and of course some information comes through your bosses."*

Two of the interviewees had felt no lack of communication or feelings of isolation.

I5: *"I didn't feel lonely or that I dropped out of what was happening in home country. I had a great project manager and he sort of took us under his wing as a team. You could always ask for guidance or help. In that way I didn't feel lonely. The connection to home office was sufficient, and we didn't know any better at the time. I was so long ago. Nowadays you have developed systems, Skype, Lync and everything. There were no official connection to home office; you just had a supervisor who sometimes called. Back then it was different."*

When talking about connections to home office during their assignments, some interviewees expressed that their intra-organizational networks are still quite small and lacking. Many said that they do not really know people in other parts of the organization. This was seen as a problem because this hindered their ability to move from international work to home country projects. While many seemed quite satisfied in

their work doing, they also acknowledged that moving to home country projects would be difficult because they did not know anyone in home country branches. It is noteworthy, that these expressions were coming from people who have worked for the organization for ten to twenty years.

> I3: *"I don't think that moving to home country work could happen without difficulties. The people for instance. I don't really know anybody there."*

> I1: *"We are a small circle. Of course inside our own branch we know each other well, but we have very little to do with the company's home country people."*

> I7: *"The major problem in moving to home country job is the lack of contact network. When I came back to Finland I knew no one. I had a Finnish passport and my supervisor was here and I worked for a listed company that is mostly owned by Finnish people. Those were my contacts to Finland. I had no professional contacts to Finland whatsoever."*

One of the interviewees suggested an explanation for the lack of cross-branch contacts and little movement between international and home country projects.

> I3: *"Often, if you are recognized as a valuable asset in the home country, people don't want to let go of you and send you to international projects and vice versa. Everyone is trying to hold on to their best resources."*

Due to a lack of deep knowledge on the organization I can't but speculate on this matter. However, according to the interviews, it would seem that there might be room for job rotation and diversifying the skills of the employees so that more people had experience in working both in international projects as well as in home country. This could also be very valuable for their individual careers as the lack of home country knowhow and networks were seen as a career hindrance from the interviewees'

perspective. Also from organizational perspective, having a diverse workforce both in home country and overseas might be a positive thing.

Mentoring

Scholars are suggesting that expatriate effectiveness and success may be enhanced by having mentors (Crocitto et al 2005). Mentors at the home office can be helpful to the expatriate, acting as a liaison, counselor and protector of the expatriate's best interests while he or she is overseas (Webb 1996). None of the seven interviewees had received any mentoring during their assignments. Five of them did not find formal mentoring as being particularly important. They felt that unofficial support and advice through more experienced colleagues and managers was enough. Two however did find mentoring to be something that needs to be further developed in the future. One of them had received some mentoring in the early part of career in Finland and thought that it should be implemented again.

> I4:*"I did not have a mentor on my assignment. But in general, I really feel that we should develop mentoring in our firm. I have myself acted as a mentor in Aalto University and I think it's very valuable. I think our company should really utilize the benefits of mentoring, because it's a great way to increase people's sense of belonging and caring for one another."*

> I5: *"I didn't have a mentor on my assignment. But back in the 1990s when I came to this company, we had mentoring. We had a few older people assigned to us. They guided, gave advice and looked after us. I thought it was a very good thing, and I think we should have more of that. A lot of people with amazing knowhow have already left the firm, and soon more are leaving. We should somehow harness that knowledge. We just had a discussion with my superior officer that we should start mentoring activity again!"*

As said, others did feel that formal mentoring was not necessary. All the support and information could be gained through informal channels from colleagues, superiors. They felt that official mentoring was not needed.

I6: *"I haven't longed for any official mentors. I have always had a superior that has been on assignments himself. The needed support comes more from there. Through so called unofficial channels. You get to know how things have been done in the past. From superiors and colleagues, there it comes from."*

I7: *"At first, when a project is started abroad, everything is totally unclear. The first assignment I was on in Ukraine, there were other Finns that had been there a few months already. They gave me a lot of great advice. I gained the necessary knowledge through working there every day. I didn't feel any need for official mentors or procedures."*

Career development and planning

Career planning focuses on activities that help the individual make informed decisions about such choices as self-development and job assignments. Previous research indicates that some major impacts of firm-wide career development effort include: enhanced employee skills and morale, enhanced employee retention, employee empowerment, improved HR planning and selection, and better strategic advantage. (Pattie et al. 2010). Career planning can also help employees to develop the skills necessary for lateral transfers and promotions. When employees seek development opportunities they increase both their internal and external labor market value. According to scholars organizations don't put enough thought or effort into fitting the international experience into the employees' job and career when they return. Many companies do not specify in advance how the assignment will fit into an employee's career progression.

The interviewees were asked if they had received any career planning in regards to their assignment. Five of the interviewees had not received any career planning in regards to their assignments. There had been no discussions with their superiors on how their assignments will fit into their careers and how their careers were seen to progress after the assignments. This was seen as a serious drawback in international assignments. All felt quite strongly on this subject and they felt that the implications of the assignment should have been discussed more thoroughly.

I1: *"This is probably one problem we have in our firm. There have been very few discussions with our line managers. That is a deficiency we have. You are pretty much left to your own devices. You go to a project, do your job, come back, work here for a while and then they give you the next thing. There haven't been many discussions with the supervisor. Things just progress by their own weight."*

I3: *"I don't think that I have ever had a discussion like that with my supervisors. It is mostly just "go there and do that and we'll see what happens after that". There haven't been any systematic discussions. But I think it would have been good if there had been discussions, at least in the beginning of your career. It would give you a feeling that you would know what to invest in and what to focus on. I think these discussions could be valuable. There should be open discussions on what kind of milestone the assignment is, and how we move forward from there."*

I2: *"There were no discussions on how my career would progress after that. I would have needed more of that and my supervisors could have brought it up sooner, even if they had no facts and certainty. We could have at least discussed it. It felt like many of us on the assignment had a vulnerable feeling. We didn't know what will happen when the project ends. In the end I was just asked to come to headquarters to see what I will do. There were no details and it was a bit of an unpleasant situation to be in."*

I4:*"There weren't really any discussions on career planning. I think that career planning would be very valuable and it should be done with long scope that you would be able see some development paths. On this subject, there is a lot to be hoped for in our company."*

In the case of two interviewees there had been some career discussions, but they were seen as being quite insignificant.

I6: *"We have had some general career discussions, but we have never discussed how the assignments affect my career. There have been some career discussions but it is not significant by any means."*

> I7: *"Very seldom. Actually only on my last assignment we had this kind of a discussion. And yes, these discussions are valuable. It is always good if your supervisors are interested in your career."*

However, it should be noted again that some of these assignments had been in the 1990s and there have been development in this field. Nowadays, the interviewees have a yearly discussion with their superiors where these things can be discussed. However, according to the more recent assignees, it seems that career planning is still not very systemic and the career implications of international postings are not discussed.

All in all, the interviewees were quite satisfied with the support they had received. There was, however, a feeling that many of the support practices found in the expatriate literature were severely underutilized or at least not very systematic. Some interviewees felt that very much is depending on a single expatriate and there should be more investment on supporting the expatriates.

> I4: *"So much is depending on one person that is sent there, that if he fails, the company fails. In that sense we should mentor and support our expatriates more. In a way, the fact that I'm here now, increases the company's support on our overseas people. I'm not some headquarters' director that commands people from here and demands figures. I am the support that they can send there to help in order to make our people succeed!"*

Family issues

Family situations that disrupt the adaptation of the employee cause difficulties in future career progression are one of the primary reasons highlighted in numerous studies for assignment failure (Webb 1996). Expatriates often feel organizations handle the assignments poorly when it comes to the expatriate's family (Lee 2007). It is universally recognized that family and spousal adjustment is positively related to international adjustment, and the significance of an expatriate's family and spouse to the ultimate success of the assignment is firmly established (Schoepp & Forstenlechner 2010).

All seven of the interviewees have families and in five cases families had accompanied them on at least some of their assignments. When it came to family issues, the interviewees were quite satisfied. Living arrangements, trips, day-care, insurances etc. have been taken care of by the case company. There were no negative feelings toward the case company with family arrangements. It seemed that, all in all, the interviewees were happy with how the case company had handled their family issues. There were no dual-career situations during the assignments. The spouses that had accompanied the expatriates were taking care of the children. In one case the spouse was unable to accompany the expatriate because of her challenging job in home country and inability to find a job in the target country.

> I1: *"They have organized trips to Finland and many times my family has been allowed to come with me. Also all insurances have been paid for my family. There has been no need for day-care, because my wife has taken care of our child."*

> I2: *"Our living situation was organized; we could live together as a family. And all trips were organized so that my family could travel with me. We didn't need any schools and such, because the children were so small."*

> I5: *"I didn't personally need any family arrangements. But those people that had children, everything was organized very well."*

> I6: *"We have had a person there, who has been in contact with us and helped in practical issues if we have required babysitting, transportation etc. The discussions haven't always even gone through me, but my wife has been able to handle these things directly. We haven't required any school things because the children have been so little."*

> I6: *"We also found contacts to other expatriate communities through the company. So we have been very content. And if there have been health care and other issues, the firm has helped."*

I7: *"My employer has always paid for an accommodation that my family has been satisfied with, and the school fees for my children have been paid as well."*

There were, however, negative feelings related to family life and other personal contacts. These are mostly issues that are inherent to assignments, and there isn't necessarily much that a company can do about these situations.

I4: *"I can't find any negatives related to professional life in my assignment. But a negative thing is the sacrifice that you make in your personal life. My wife had a challenging job and she couldn't leave it, so she could not come with me. So the family's life continued in Finland without me and I became an outside member of the family. And also friends. Not many friendships survive these long assignments."*

I4: *"One problem during my assignment in St. Petersburg was how independent and emancipated my wife grew. That is always a risk, because long-distance relationship doesn't necessarily work. I had to contemplate if I want to lead a life where I only exist for my family during the weekends."*

I3: *"On a personal level you get severed from your life. I'm not saying that people are left alone in there, but on the other hand you lose your old pals very quickly if you are abroad for a long time."*

I5: *"I personally didn't yet have a family during my assignment, but many people have problems because of that. The family back in Finland learns to live without you and they create their own pattern of life. And when you come back to Finland it is hard to jump in to that pattern or you feel like an outsider."*

As was noted also in chapter 5.6., family situations have a big impact on the willingness to leave on an assignment. Many of the respondents said that being single made it easier to accept international work in the first place. They also had many restrictions for future international work because of their current family situation. According to the interviewees, when single, or having small children, it is easier to accept the assignments, but when they become near school age, it is no more that easy. There was

also a notion that international assignments should be offered to young people in particular.

> I4: *"I think family agreements are extremely important in assignments and that is why assignments should be offered especially to young people, who can leave more easily. It is also important that your spouse could find employment there too."*

6. CONCLUSIONS

In this final chapter the conclusions of the thesis research are being presented. The main results of the empirical study are being discussed in relation to the theory of previous chapters. Some managerial recommendations for the case company are also presented in the end part of this chapter.

The starting point of this study was to determine how international assignments impact intra-organizational careers. Also a sub-question was presented in order to determine the role of organizational support mechanisms in facilitating career success. As no one knows how the interviewees' careers had progressed without international assignments, there can be no clear facts on this subject, but the results are based more on the beliefs and feelings of the interviewees. The theoretical literature on the subject is quite inconclusive e.g. in a study by Forster (1994), 46 % of expatriates reported positive effects on their careers and 54 % negative. It is therefore not a big surprise that the results of this study are also quite inconclusive when it comes to perceived career impact of assignments. These results are, however, mostly positive. Four out of seven interviewees reported that they believed international assignments had advanced their careers. Only one reported that advancing in home country might have been easier and two felt that the assignments had had no significant impact. In addition to external career success, all of the interviewed expatriates felt that they had received substantial self-developmental benefits. They saw themselves as being stronger, more self-reliant, aware, and flexible as well as more open to different people and different ways of working. They reported also feelings of having a more thorough, global perspective on the case company's business. Five out of seven also believed that they are more sought after in the job-market and that they are in a stronger position than their colleagues that have no experience in working and living in a foreign country. These findings seem to imply that international assignments enhance careers. The interviewees felt that there is important human capital gained in international assignments that is only attainable through international experience. However, there were also differing views that many subsequent international assignments have restricted available career options. Some of

the interviewees felt that while the specialization on international work had brought benefits and had made them possibly progress faster, it had also closed some career paths from them. There were some fears that were expressed in regards to finding work in the home country projects if international markets slow down. There were also feelings of doubt about their own professional skills in working in Finland and many also expressed a lack of networks in home country. Many had still very little connections to their colleagues working in Finnish projects. This can be seen as a problem as the interviewees felt it restricted them from moving between different jobs inside the organization.

When it comes to organizational support toward assignments, the interviewees seemed quite satisfied. Pre-training, while often quite minimal was seen as sufficient. People with accompanying families were also happy with the arrangements that organizations had made. Overall, the interviewees also felt that their international experience and knowhow was valued and appreciated by the organization. The problem areas were much to do with the lack of connections and networks. Also the lack of career development plans was seen as a negative thing. In many cases, there had been no discussions with their superiors on how their assignments will fit into their careers and how their careers were seen to progress after the assignments. This was seen as a serious drawback in international assignments. Also the lack of knowledge of future employment was seen as a problem.

6.1. Recommendations for the case company and future research

Final words of this thesis are dedicated to providing recommendations for the management of the case company. It must be admitted that there were no deep discussions with the HR management of the company and therefore the researcher's knowledge on the case company's HR policies is quite limited. It would also be presumptuous to assume that interviews of only an hour could reveal every career

impact that an international assignment might have had on the interviewees. Despite this, some development potential was recognized during this study. These recommendations are based on the data from the interviews as well as previous research on expatriates.

As has been noted, many of the interviewees felt lack of connections to other branches of the company and felt that it hindered them from moving between positions within the company. Therefore, it might be advisable for the company to organize instances where people in different branches could meet each other and improve their intra-organizational networks. This could make it easier for people have an option of moving to different jobs inside the company.

Also the connections to home office during the assignments might be more carefully thought of. Many felt being isolated from the home office when abroad. Defining official connections for the expatriates and keeping them connected might be advisable. Assigning home-country mentors, for example, might be a good way to keep expatriates connected and having someone to keep an eye on your interests while you are overseas. If possible assigning also official target-country mentors during the assignment might make the adjustment process easier for the expatriates.

Many of the respondents also felt that there was a lack of knowledge on their future career progression. While it may be very difficult to offer any guarantees for employees in today's business environment, some long term career paths might be discussed. It might be advisable to have discussions with their superiors on how their assignments will fit into their careers and how their careers are seen to progress after the assignments. As one interviewee said, even if there is no certain knowledge, it would be helpful to discuss these matters. It seems that there are yearly general development discussions where these issues can be discussed, but the impacts of an international assignment, and career outlooks after the posting could be more specifically conversed on.

As for future research, as Stahl et al. (2002: 216) argue: 'relatively little is known about the long-term impact of international assignments on managers' careers.' More research is still needed on this subject. Therefore, a longitudinal study that follows expatriate managers over time might be very valuable in further examining the impacts that international assignments have on careers.

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Appendix 1. Interview questions

Background information

1. Age
2. Education
3. Current job
4. When employed by the case company
5. Assignment history
6. Family

Career issues

1. What were your motives to go on an international assignment?
2. Did you feel your assignment was successful?
3. Did you stay for the intended duration?
4. How have you benefitted from international experience?
5. Do you feel your career advancement has been more rapid than it had been without the assignment?
6. Have you noticed any negative career impacts due to the assignment?
7. Were you able to get a position in the home country easily after your assignment and were you happy with it?
8. Was the position you returned to higher/the same level/lower than where you were before your assignment?
9. Did you receive guarantees of a home country position before the assignment?
10. Was repatriation discussed before the assignment? Were any details of returning discussed?
11. Did you look for other jobs after your assignment, if you did, why?
12. What were your expectations of career advancement for the international assignment? Did they come true?

13. Have you been able to utilize your international experience and skills after your assignment? How?

14. Do you feel your organization values international experience and skills? How does this appreciation or lack of it manifest itself?

15. In what ways has your organization acknowledged your international experience and skills?

16. Do you believe your value in the job-market has increased due to your international assignment?

17. Do you feel you are in a stronger position in the job-market than your colleague who has not been on an assignment?

18. How has international experience changed you as an employee?

Support practices

19. What kind of pre-departure training did you receive? Was it sufficient?

20. What kind of support did you receive during your assignment? Was it sufficient?

21. What kind of different support mechanisms your company employed? Training, mentoring, coaching, career development etc.?

22. What was your connection to the home office like during your assignment? Did you feel out of touch with the home office?

23. How was your family taken in account on your assignment?

24. What was organizations role in accommodating your spouse and family?

25. What kind of support you would have needed more in order to make your assignment easier?