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**REPATRIATION ADJUSTMENT AND ORGANIZATIONAL REPATRIATION
SUPPORT PRACTICES AMONG LONG-TERM ASSIGNEES**

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TIIVISTELMÄ

Tässä tutkimuksessa keskitytään siihen, miten repatriaatit, eli ulkomaankomennuksella olleet työntekijät, sopeutuvat työympäristöön ja muuhun ympäristöön kotimaassaan pitkäaikaisen ulkomaankomennuksen jälkeen. Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on selvittää, millaisia haasteita sopeutumisessa kohdataan, ja millaisia tukimenetelmiä organisaatiot käyttävät sopeutumisprosessin helpottamiseksi. Pitkäaikaisilla komennuksilla tarkoitetaan vähintään vuoden kestäviä komennuksia, ja ne ovat perinteisin kansainvälisten työkomennusten muoto. Paluumuuttajat ovat yleensä huippusuorittavia työntekijöitä, jotka kehittävät kykyjään edelleen komennuksen aikana. Näin ollen voidaan olettaa, että kotimaahan palaavat ovat usein arvokkaita työntekijöitä organisaatioille. Kotimaahan sopeutuminen aiheuttaa kuitenkin haasteita, jotka voivat pahimmassa tapauksessa johtaa repatriaatin irtisanoutumiseen. Tässä tutkimuksessa keskitytään kahteen tutkimustavoitteeseen. Ensinnä tutkimuksessa analysoidaan haasteita, joita kotimaahan palaavat työntekijät kohtaavat, ja sitä, miten nämä haasteet vaikuttavat heidän sopeutumiseensa työhön, vuorovaikutukseen ja yleiseen ympäristöön. Toiseksi tutkimuksessa käsitellään organisaation tarjoamia tukimekanismeja, jotka kotiutuneet ovat kokeneet hyödyllisiksi, ja tukimekanismeja, joita he olisivat toivoneet.

Tässä tutkimuksessa sovelletaan teoreettisena viitekehyksenä Blackin ja muiden (1992) takaisinpaluusopeutumiseen liittyvää kehystä. Tutkimus toteutettiin laadullisena tapaustutkimuksena, ja sitä varten haastateltiin puolistrukturoituina verkkohaastatteluinä pitkältä työkomennukselta kotimaahan kotiutuneita henkilöitä eri yrityksistä ja toimialoilta. Tulokset analysoitiin sisältöanalyysin avulla abduktiivisesti, eli osittain induktiivisesti aineistosta pääättelemällä, ja osittain aiempien teorioiden avulla deduktiivisesti.

Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat, että pitkäaikaiselta työkomennukselta kotimaahan palanneet henkilöt sopeutuivat yleisesti hyvin takaisin kotimaahan. Tutkimuksessa havaitut haasteet liittyivät lähinnä työhön sopeutumiseen. Kaiken kaikkiaan työhön sopeutuminen sujui osallistujilta melko vaivattomasti, sillä he olivat tyytyväisiä uusiin työtehtäviinsä kotimaassa. Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittivat kuitenkin, että uuteen työtehtävään liittyvän palkkausprosessin pitkittyminen voi aiheuttaa repatriaateille epävarmuutta, mikä vaikuttaa negatiivisesti sopeutumisprosessiin. Organisaatioiden olisi siis suositeltavaa keskittyä järjestämään repatriaattien asema ja työtehtävä hyvissä ajoin ennen kotiinpaluuta.

KEY WORDS: Expatriate, Repatriation, Long-term assignment, international assignments, Repatriation adjustment, Organizational support

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1. INTRODUCTION

The ongoing trend of globalization gives companies enormous possibilities to grow, and many companies are already exploiting these possibilities. However, to retain their competitiveness in the emerging international markets it is obligatory for the companies to grow global knowledge ja perspective. (Paik, Segaud & Malinowski 2002). The global perspective is what matters when operating in the highly competitive global markets (Brookfield 2015). As always, great possibilities also bring challenges with them. Especially challenging is to transfer company's skills and capabilities to a new unit abroad. Conn & Yip (1997) found that the most efficient way to securely transfer these crucial capabilities is by transferring promising employees or managers to the new country. Employees who are sent to abroad for an assignment are called expatriates and they are expected to achieve various strategic activities such as transferring skills and knowledge to the host organization and gain international experience (Reiche 2012). Because of this, they can be highly valuable pieces of securing company's competitive advantage upon their return (Chiang, Esch, Birtch & Shaffer 2017). Repatriates are often expected to become managers with global knowledge and understanding. Even though they would not become managers they are expected to bring additional value with their global mindset to their own job tasks. Another key component of why expatriates are seen so valuable is that they have knowledge of the conflicts between corporate headquarters and subsidiaries. (Stroh, Gregersen & Black 1998.)

Sending managers and possibly their families abroad is not an inexpensive solution. Multinational corporates (MNC) can be investing even three times more capital to the manager sent abroad than to an average equivalent manager who stays in the home country (Lublin 1989). MNCs are investing to expatriates and expatriates trust that they will also be profiting from the international experience after repatriation themselves. MNCs are providing well needed help and guidance for the expatriates and their families to adjust to the new country and work environment and throughout the expatriation time. (Black, Gregersen & Mendenhall 1992). However, the last part of successful expatriation process is often sort of ignored or forgotten. The term repatriate denotes a person who is returning to his or her old home country from an international assignment and is going

through a reintegration (Bailey & Dragoni 2013). Shocking part is that repatriates resign from company's service so often within two years that their turnover rate has been reported to be as high as 51% (Brookfield 2015). As it was mentioned earlier expatriations are investment made by the MNCs to pursue human resources with international know-how. Although, all the invested money, time and human resources will be wasted if repatriates leave their company. Yet, despite of the high rate of resignation companies does not seem to be paying great deal of attention to the repatriation process. Expatriation is a circular process and without proper repatriation the circle will not be whole (Salomon 1995).

Due to high resignation rates demand for studies of recognizing the critical reasons that lead to failure of repatriation has been high. MNCs obviously want to keep their important repatriates in their service which means they need research and knowledge of the key elements of repatriation management that they can reach that goal. First it is important to understand the repatriate's expectations and what problems they are going through (Cox et al. 2013). After understanding the repatriate's thoughts, it is important to know what practicalities companies should arrange and how they should manage the process of moving back home which seems to be much more complicated than it appears at first (Howe-Walsh et al. 2017).

Expatriates have been used for decades but somehow still the repatriation process is overlooked in many companies. So far, several aspects of repatriation have been studied, for example, repatriation adjustment, repatriation expectations, repatriation coping strategies, reverse-culture shock, repatriate's identity, repatriation outcomes, repatriation moderators and mediators, abilities and motivation, and organizational support practices (Chiang et al. 2018). Repatriation adjustment might be the most studied subject within repatriation. The repatriation adjustment studies have shed light to the problematic side of repatriation adjustment and showed companies how to improve their repatriation processes to increase the repatriate's possibility of adjusting back to home country. However, it seems that there is not enough knowledge when it comes to fully understanding the repatriate's adjustment issues.

1.1. Research objectives

This study responds to the need for further research on repatriation adjustment process of assigned long-term repatriates. Assignment length of time can vary from weeks to years. Generally, 3-12 months lasting assignments are called short-term expatriation and over 12 months lasting assignments are called long-term expatriation. (Shaffer, Kraimer, Chen & Bolino 2012.) The aim of this study is to provide further information about which factors have been challenging for the long-term repatriates when returning home. To identify the factors influencing repatriates' adjustment, the Black et al.'s (1991a) theory of repatriation adjustment will be applied. This study also aims to give more information of the organizational supporting practices which the repatriates have experienced to be helpful and what additional practices the repatriates would have wished for. As practical implications, the study aims to provide suggestions for the organizations on how to manage the repatriation process successfully.

These themes have been studied earlier but still the repatriation continues to be a challenging part of the expatriation process. Thus, more research is needed to truly understand the reasons behind unsuccessful repatriation as well as successful repatriation.

The following objectives are given to the study:

1. To identify what kind of repatriation adjustment challenges repatriates have faced.
2. To identify which support practices the repatriates have found useful and what kind of support practices the repatriates would have wished for.

1.2. Definitions of key concepts

Long-term assignment

Long-term assignments are international assignments which have traditionally been used by corporations to relocate their employees and oftentimes their families from country to another (Caligiuri & Bonache 2016). Long-term assignments are also called corporate expatriation (Chiang et al. 2018). Long-term assignments last usually at least 12 months but can be prolonged considerably. Konopaske, Robie & Ivancevich (2009) defined the

length of long-term assignment to 1-4 years. Long-term assignments can also be initiated by the person him- or herself. This is called self-initiated long-term expatriation (Chiang et al., 2018, p. 192). In this study the long-term assignment however refers to company assigned long-term expatriations.

Repatriation

Repatriation is “the final phase of a prolonged international assignment” (Chiang et al., 2018, p. 192). Repatriation is the process where an expatriate and his or her possible accompanying family returns and readjusts to the home country after an international assignment (Linehan & Scullion, 2002a, p. 254, Herman & Tetrick, 2009, p. 69). Thus, repatriate is defined as an employee who has been on an international assignment and is returning or has recently returned to his or her home country (Kraimer, Shaffer, & Bolino, 2009, p. 28).

Repatriation adjustment

Adjustment to new country generally is defined as a process of adaptation to the new environment by overcoming the negative feelings which can be caused by the cultural differences (Huang, Chi & Lawler 2005) In repatriation the environment is not new entirely, but it has changed probably considerably which causes the need for adjustment for the repatriate (Zhou 2015; Chu & Morrison 2011). In addition, the environment is not the only factor changing as the repatriate change during the assignment as well and thus causes more need to adjust to the new environment (Black et al. 1989). Repatriate’s adjustment process can be divided into three facets: work, general and interaction (Black and Stephens, 1992). According to Black et al. (1992) work adjustment includes adaptation the new work environment and organizational culture, general adjustment refers to the culture adaptation outside of the company and interaction adjustment indicates the level of social adjustment within and outside of the company. Different factors influence the adjustment of each of these facets and some of them influence more than one facet.

Organizational repatriation support

According to Sousa, Gonçalves, Santos & Leitão (2017) the organizational repatriation support is defined as the assistance provided by the company for the expatriate before, during and after the international assignment. Even though, the support practices are partly conducted already before the repatriation they have an influence on the repatriation process and thus are an important part of repatriation. These supporting practices are aimed to ease the difficulties the assignee to facilitate the international assignment process (Howe-Walsh et al. 2017). In this study the organizational support is focused on facilitating the repatriation process and by organizational support practices we refer to the practices conducted to support the repatriate during the repatriation process.

1.3. Structure of the study

This thesis' structure follows a linear-analytic structure, which is a standardized way to present a research process (Yin 2014, pp.188). First, the research problem is discussed and validated. After, relevant literature is reviewed comprehensively. The selected methods will be presented and justified, and data will be analyzed. The research is completed with conclusion.

This study is divided into seven main chapters. The first chapter presents the background and justification for the study, as well as main objectives of the study. The literature review of this study is composed from the following three chapters. In the second chapter the repatriation literature will be introduced in general. The third chapter focuses on presenting the repatriation adjustment model and findings about the factors affecting repatriation adjustment. The fourth chapter presents the literature on organizational repatriation support mechanisms. After the literature review, the fifth chapter defines the methodological choices of the research. In the fifth chapter, the analyzed data is presented, and the findings are discussed. Lastly, the final chapter concludes the research with summary of the findings, delimitations of the study and future research suggestions.

2. RESEARCH ON REPATRIATION

In this chapter the most studied entities within repatriation literature will be presented. The aim of this chapter is to provide a brief but comprehensive overview of the repatriation literature.

2.1. Adjustment

Adjustment is commonly defined as a process of adaption into a new environment and managing the negative feelings caused by culture shock. According to Furnham & Bochner (1986) unfamiliar and unexpected situations in a foreign culture can create a psychological reaction called culture shock. Culture shock is seen as a temporary stress reaction as well (Furnham, 2005). Culture shock is often connected to moving to a new country, but repatriates experience a similar shock, also called as re-entry shock, when returning to the home country (Chaban, Williams, Holland, Boyce, & Warner, 2011). Most studies in the repatriation literature which examine the relationships between individual factors and repatriation outcomes focus on re-adjustment. It is believed that re-adjustment issues caused by 'reverse culture shock' are a typical reason for high turnover rate. Repatriation adjustment studies often apply Black et al.'s (1992) theoretical model about repatriation adjustment. The model divides adjustment to three facets which are adjustment to interaction, work and general environment. The model will be more profoundly presented in the chapter 3.2.

2.2. Cultural identity changes

Studies about repatriation have mainly focused on repatriate adjustment and retention. As an exception to the mainstream, Sussman (2002) conducted a research from cultural identity perspective. The research examined cultural identity change and how does it affect the repatriation process. Later, other studies have also been executed which are suggesting that expatriate's identity may change under the influence of foreign culture as they live and work overseas (Hyder et al. 2007; Kraimer, Shaffer, Harrison & Ren 2012). Changes in repatriate's identity may not be visible during the international assignment or he/she does not recognize them while aboard, however, the changes may become visible

to the repatriate upon repatriation. In addition, repatriates may understand changes as external when in fact the changes might have happened within themselves. (MacDonald & Arthur 2005.) Kraimer et al. (2012) stated that repatriates who are remarkably embedded and adjusted to the host country and culture are likely to create an international identity by including their international roles to their self-concepts. Repatriates who stated to be highly merged with their communities before expatriation were more likely to bring an international identity upon return to home. They also state that developing an international identity may result turnover intentions. Repatriates' international identity effects on how they communicate and react with employees back at the home office who do not have international experience.

It appeared from the Sussman's (2002) research that long term, over 10-year assignments, repatriates who were able to retain their home country identity have decreased stress upon repatriation. At the same time, individuals who combine host country culture to their identity are more likely to have issues upon returning home. Hyder et al. (2007) have also studied the connection between identity changes and repatriation. They suggest that developing modified identity overseas does not have straight negative connection with repatriation. According to Hyder et al. (2007) two kinds of identifications have positive influence on the repatriation experience. First is affirmative identification which stands for strong identification with the home country. This is in line with Sussman's (2002) findings. However, the second identification was not mentioned in Sussman's (2002) research. Second positively on repatriation effecting identity according to Hyder et al. (2007) is global identification where repatriate feel strongly identified with 'global society'. According to Hyder et al. (2007) also two identifications have a negative effect on repatriation experience. They are also in line with Sussman's (2002) research, however, Hyder et al. (2007) have specified them slightly. First is subtractive identification which means powerful identification with host country. Second is additive identification which stands for powerful identification with both home and host countries.

Understanding person's identity is the key to understand why a person thinks, behaves, and interacts the way he / she does in different environments. Identity is in the core of how repatriates perform in their job and why they stay or leave from the current employee.

(Ashforth, Harrison & Corley 2008.) Hyder et al. (2007) suggest that in the field of repatriation research the focus should move from repatriate adjustment to individual's experience of the repatriation process. This way researchers and HR managers would be better able to define and control the repatriation process. By knowing how to control the repatriation process HR managers could influence on the repatriate's intention to stay in the current employing organization.

2.3. Coping strategies

Quite a few studies have been conducted concerning which coping strategies repatriates use and how they are connected to their repatriation. Traditionally, more focus has been given on how organizations manage repatriation transition and less on how the individuals themselves manage the transition to home after an international assignment. According to self-management literature, however, employees have proactive roles during changes. By being proactive they can take charge of controlling the external problem. (Feldman et al. 1992; Frayne & Latham 1987.)

Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis & Gruen (1986) have identified coping strategies individuals use upon stressful situations to two main categories. First category is problem focused where individual try to change the environment itself. The second category is symptom focused where the individual tries to control the anxieties that have arisen from the new situation and environment. Folkman et al. (1986) presented four main coping strategies that are especially connected with job changes:

1. Actively trying to change the working environment
2. Actively trying to get additional training and gain information
3. Psychological reappraisal i.e., attempt to see positive sides of the issue and try to profit of the benefits the job has to offer
4. Psychological withdrawal i.e., not acknowledging the problems and feelings but pushing them away from mind.

Feldman et al. (1992) have analyzed five different coping strategies which are based on the Folkman et al. (1986) coping strategies presented above. According to Feldman et al.

(1992) coping strategies are categorized as active coping strategies and passive coping strategies. Active coping strategies include *task help* which was measured by how proactive expatriates were getting additional assistance or information, *social integration* which was measured by how proactive expatriates were to become integrated with the local culture, and *psychological reappraisal* which is the same as the third of coping strategies in the Folkman et al. (1986) research. Passive coping strategies include *psychological withdrawal* which is the same as the fourth coping strategy in Folkman et al (1986) research presented above, and *palliative coping* which was measured by how much the expatriate was trying to control his/her anxieties through eating, sleeping, and drinking too much.

Active coping strategies have benefits of having positive connection with relationship developing, acquiring skills, job satisfaction, and job motivation. Active strategies also have negative connection with psychological and physiological stress symptoms. On the contrary passive coping strategies are negatively connected with relationship development, intention to stay in the service of current employee, job satisfaction. In addition, passive strategies are related positively with stress symptoms. (Feldman et al. 1992.)

Herman & Tetrick (2009) have categorized coping strategies alike with Feldman et al. (1992). However, in Herman et al. (2009) research active coping strategies are called as problem-focused coping and passive coping strategies are called as emotion-focused coping strategies. It appears from the research that problem-focused coping is positively connected with repatriates' interaction and work adjustment. However, it seems that problem-focused coping is not related with repatriates' general adjustment. Whereas emotion-focused coping it appears that it is negatively connected with all three facets of repatriates' adjustment.

However, a question about the relationship between repatriate adjustment and coping strategies has arisen. Is it truly that coping strategies effect on repatriation adjustment or could it be the other way around? It could be that repatriates who have adjusted poorly to the home country are more likely to lean on using emotion-focused coping strategies

whereas repatriates who are well-adjusted use more likely problem-focused coping strategies (Stahl & Caligiuri 2005). Coping strategies used in repatriation adjustment has still space and need for new research as the causal relationships between them stays unclear. New studies should examine the relations between repatriation adjustment and coping strategies to understand and prevent the usage of negatively effecting coping strategies (Chiang et al. 2017).

2.4. Repatriation outcomes

Repatriation outcomes have been studied to understand how the repatriation success can be measured. Various studies have recognized that the repatriation success is defined differently between individuals and organizations (Yan, Zhu, & Hall, 2002; Kraimer & Wayne, 2004; Lazarova & Cerdin, 2007; Suutari & Brewster, 2003).

2.4.1. Individual outcomes

Individual outcomes of repatriation have mainly been studied in terms of job, career, and development success (Cerdin & Le Pargneux, 2009). *Job success* has been assessed in terms of job satisfaction (Cerdin et al., 2009; Stevens et al., 2006; Yan et al., 2002) and job commitment (Chi & Chen, 2007; Stevens et al., 2006; Stroh et al., 2000). *Career success* has been measured through objective factors e.g., pay rise or promotion and subjective factors e.g., career satisfaction (Cerdin et al., 2009). *Development success* has been measured in more several terms as it has been measured through long-term career growth, development opportunities (Yan et al., 2002), experienced learning and attainment of international knowledge, marketability, and network building (Cerdin et al., 2009; Jokinen, Brewster & Suutari, 2017).

Benson & Pattie (2008) have approached the question of whether international experience is beneficial for one's career by comparing the anticipated and actual career outcomes with each other. Their results do indicate that compared to the domestic counterparts in the short run the repatriates are promoted less often and receive fewer recruiting requests. However, in the long run repatriates career prospects are more promising as they perceive greater internal and external career opportunities. Jokinen et al. (2017) have conducted a

study comparing the development of career capital between self-initiated expatriates (SEs) and company assigned expatriates (AEs). This study shows that both groups experience that their *knowing-how* and *knowing-why* has increased markedly through their international experience. In addition, both groups indicate a clear increase of *knowing-whom*. However, in this category AEs scored statistically significantly higher meaning that SEs develop their *knowing-whom* career capital less than AEs. These studies show that even though repatriates might accept some set back in the short term they are more likely to have greater career opportunities in the future (Benson et al., 2008; Jokinen et al., 2017)

2.4.2. Organizational outcomes

Organizational perspective to the success of repatriation is different from the individual perspective. The organizational perspective focuses on how the organizational tasks and objectives attached to the repatriation process have been achieved (e.g., Cerdin et al., 2009; Yan et al., 2002). The studies have been focusing on retention, performance, network and relationship building, and knowledge transfer. Firstly, from the organizational outcomes, *retention* has been studied very extensively (e.g., Chi & Chen, 2007; Doherty & Dickmann, 2012; Haslberger & Brewster, 2009; Hyder & Lövblad, 2007; Kraimer et al., 2009, 2012; Pattie et al., 2010; Stahl et al., 2009; Stroh, 1995). As the repatriate retention or turnover is hard to measure, most studies focus on the turnover intention. However, more studies are needed to determine if turnover intentions lead to actual turnover in the long run (Van Dick et al., 2004). The second organizational outcome, *Performance*, is mostly studied as ‘the accomplishment of organizational tasks’ or as ‘the achievement of key organizational objectives’ (Cerdin et al., 2009; Yan et al., 2002). Thirdly, *network and relationship building* has been proposed to be an organizational outcome of repatriation as they are important part of generating multinational capabilities (Cerdin et al., 2009; Yan et al., 2002). However, there is still a gap in the literature as network building has not been studied as an organizational outcome of repatriation (Chiang et al., 2018). The fourth organizational outcome of repatriation has not been studied yet either but there has been growing interest concerning *knowledge transfer* (Lazarova et al., 2007; Mäkelä & Brewster, 2009; Oddou et al., 2009; Stevens et al., 2006). However, there are still research issues which need to be addressed.

For example, there are differing conceptualizations of ‘knowledge transfer’ between empirical studies. Thus, this needs clarification from the future research. Another example is that there is not enough knowledge about how individual aspects affect the knowledge transfer process (Lazarova et al., 2007; Lazarova & Tarique, 2005; Mäkelä et al., 2009). Overall, there is a need for further studies about individual and organizational outcomes of repatriation (Chiang et al., 2018).

2.5. Mediator and moderator variables of repatriation outcomes

Repatriation studies have extensively studied the direct effects of individual of contextual factors on repatriation outcomes. However, such effects have been recognized to be less straightforward than previously seen. Thus, it has been suggested to concentrate on potential *mediating and moderating* factors of repatriation outcomes (Chiang et al. 2018).

2.5.1. Mediators

To understand the reasons behind repatriation outcomes it is essential to understand the underlying processes. Thus, studies have been conducted to explore the possible mediators and mechanisms connected to repatriation outcomes. Two studies have researched trust as a mediator in relation to knowledge transfer (Oddou et al., 2009; Mäkelä et al., 2009). These studies have found that repatriate socialization, interaction frequency and overall repatriate interaction contexts are positively associated with knowledge transfer through trust (Oddou et al., 2009; Mäkelä et al., 2009). Factors such as value congruence and perceived organizational support as well as job resources such as social support, supervisory coaching and performance feedback (Bakker, Demerouti, & Verbeke, 2004; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004) are all positively associated with employee engagement. Thus, Chiang et al. (2018) suggest that employee engagement should be further researched as an important mechanism as it has been positively associated with task performance and organizational citizenship behavior (Schaufeli et al. 2004).

According to Chiang et al. (2018) repatriation outcomes are shown to be influenced by repatriate’s *abilities and motivation*. Studies about repatriate’s motivation have mainly either focused on how the repatriate’s motivation to accept the international assignment

effects or on how the repatriate's motivation on knowledge transfer effects. According to Hyder et al. (2007) repatriate's motives to accept an international assignment affect's one's expectations. Paik et al. (2002) indicate that the differences between repatriate's and organization's motives can create contradictions which can result in high repatriate attrition rates. Some studies (e.g., Oddou et al., 2009) perceive *abilities and motivation* as a components of knowledge transfer. These researchers state that the repatriates' ability to transfer knowledge is essential but it is not sufficient on its own. Repatriates need to be motivated and their readiness to share knowledge is highlighted (Chiang et al., 2018).

2.5.2. Moderators

Quite recently researchers have begun to explore the possible moderators within repatriation literature. Studies have found multiple important individual and organizational moderators. Vidal et al. (2007) suggest that the effects of cultural differences between host and home countries can be moderated by varying HR management practices such as career management system and mentorship. Zikic et al. (2006) propose that repatriates' organizational career support would moderate the relationship between repatriation career success and post-assignment career exploration. Kraimer et al. (2012) found that perceived job deprivation moderates the repatriate's identity strain and international identity. Shen and Hall (2009) have created a theoretical model which suggests that there are four factors which moderate the effects of job embeddedness and adjustment on repatriates' career exploration. The first factor is related with repatriates' career growth opportunities. Repatriates' low job embeddedness or repatriation adjustment difficulties will result to resigning more likely the more they have external career opportunities. The second factor connected with repatriate's life stage as repatriates have less career opportunities in their later life stages and thus, they are less affected by adjustment difficulties. The third factor is more related with career stage as repatriates' job embeddedness tends to be lower in the beginning of their career stages. The last factor is related with repatriate's career orientation as repatriates with high protean career orientations are more likely to exploit external career opportunities in response to even few adjustment difficulties.

2.6. Training and organizational support

Organizational repatriation support has been researched widely aiming to find the most suitable practices to facilitate the repatriation process. Studies have found that repatriation can be facilitated by supporting the repatriate through different mechanisms (Robinson, 2021). The following supporting practices have been found to be the most common to facilitate especially the adjustment of the repatriate back to the home country and organization. Repatriation support can be initiated already before the employee has left to the assignment (Greer & Stiles, 2016; Howe-Walsh et al. 2017; Wu, Zhuang & Hu). By providing the repatriate training and possibly a mentor has been found to have a positive effect on the repatriation of the employee. The repatriation can be also supported during the assignment e.g., by enabling the employee to visit the home country frequently, providing accurate information about the home country and organization, and securing a re-entry position well ahead before the repatriation (Bailey et al. 2013; Howe-Walsh et al. 2017; Cox et al. (2013). Staying in connection and offering accurate information for the repatriate enables the repatriate to compound more realistic expectations. During and after the repatriation organization can assist e.g., with the relocation of the repatriate's personal belongings, offer possibilities to utilize the acquired skills, give the repatriate training and briefing, allowing the repatriate to have transition time, and ensure the repatriate experiences that his/her international knowledge is valued (Lazarova et al. 2013; Bailey et al. 2013).

To conclude, repatriation is still least researched part of the international assignment. However, interest in repatriation has been and is still growing. Repatriates experienced repatriation is affected by multiple aspects and it is not a straightforward process. Yet, through proper repatriation support practices organizations are able to ease the repatriates return back to home country and organization. This chapter presented the most studied entities within repatriation literature giving a cross-section of the repatriation literature. The next chapter will be focusing on repatriation adjustment and especially on Black et al.'s (1992) theoretical repatriation adjustment model.

3. REPATRIATION ADJUSTMENT

Repatriation adjustment is the most widely researched area of repatriation. Studies have found that expectations play a crucial role in repatriation adjustment. First in this chapter repatriates' most common expectations regarding work and general environment will be introduced. Second, the repatriation adjustment model is presented and after the factors found to be affecting the three repatriation facets will be discussed.

3.1. Expectations

Returning home is often expected to be an easy process with no difficulties. Hurn (1999) requested in their research repatriates to list expectations of returning home and their expectations were very positive. Many repatriates do not have quite realistic expectations about their retuning process to home. They falsely expect everything to remain the same in the home country. A common expectation regarding their home country acquaintances and friends is that everyone would be very interested about their experiences. Yet, repatriates do not always remember that during that time that they have been away, they have changed, their home country have changed, and their job have changed.

Employees usually form a psychological contract with the employer. This contract includes expectations about how the employee assumes the employer and the co-workers treat him or her. The psychological contract is associated with organizational commitment because if the expectations of this contract are met or more it likely results strong commitment with the company (Stroh et al. 1998).

Rousseau (1989) has divided the concept of psychological contracts into two based on their features. The first is transactional contracts, which are mainly contracts concerning economic issues and usually contain a timeframe. The second, relational contracts include socioeconomical exchange together with economical exchange. There are no timeframes in relational contracts along with the fact that they are much more variable and open contracts than transactional contracts. Stroh et al. (1998) state that relational contracts are especially important to research of expatriates' repatriation. At the point of leaving for an international assignment the employee typically has already been in the service of the

company for several years. Therefore, expectations the expatriate has concerning repatriation interlaces together with the wider and broader expectations that have been composed during the expatriate's career in the firm.

3.1.1. Work related expectations

After returning home, expatriates often expect that they will be welcomed with enthusiasm and rewards as an acknowledgement for their sacrifices abroad. Progress within the organization is frequently pursued goal among repatriates. (Stroh et al. 1998) A study highlighted that the repatriates expect organizations have integrated repatriation into career management and into their formal career development path with positive evaluation concerning their international assignment. Career development possibilities are often employee's main reasons to leave to an international assignment (Suutari & Brewster 2003). Repatriates expect that their newly developed competencies would be highly appreciated by the company (Suutari et al. 2003) and executing an international assignment would eventually lead to advancement within the organization (Baruch and Altman 2002). After all, they have been doing much more challenging assignments overseas than they used to do before leaving. Yet, another study suggests that repatriates necessarily do not expect to get a promotion upon return to home after an international assignment. The absence of the possibilities to promotion, in particular, is affecting turnover intentions only if it leads to the repatriate to experience underemployment. (Kraimer, Shaffer & Bolino 2009.)

Financial increase is another change which is expected among repatriates after an international assignment (Stroh et al. 1998) One study emphasized that first time repatriates, individuals who are high in the hierarchical level and individuals who's newly acquired knowledge was not benefitted were found to be more interested on financial concerns as career outcomes (Ramaswami, Carter & Dreher 2016).

Repatriates' earlier experiences or assumptions of other expatriates' returns may influence their expectations and they might wait for the same kind of treatment. A study indicates that repatriates tend to form a reference group of other employees on international assignments instead of domestic employees which can cause them worrying

of being paid less than other expatriates. (Banai & Harry 2004). Another study pointed out that if repatriates have perceptions of lack of attention concerning the repatriate policies and support within organization it can result as declined commitment to the organization and by this effect negatively on repatriation (Lazarova & Caligiuri 2001). Returning expatriates are expecting coworkers at home to be highly keen on hearing what kind of assignment they did overseas and all the other experiences also. (Stroh 1995). After all, it is commonly known that people value more their own experiences which makes us believe that everyone else are as interested of our experiences as we are.

3.1.2. Non-work-related expectations

Expatriates naturally develop expectations of other elements besides with work related aspects in home country during their stay overseas. They have expectations concerning their living circumstances, earlier friendships, and the standards of living. (Stroh, Gregersen & Black 1998.) The amount of being in contact with closest people in the home country might channel the expectations closer to the reality. However, during the years of expatriate's absence the neighborhoods change, friends might get divorces and many other things can happen as life goes on while the expatriate is living in another country.

The role of spouses and family is very important on repatriates' career choices and on the whole international assignment process including repatriation. Stroh et al. (2000) particularly indicated that unmet expectations concerning organizations offering support for the repatriates' family can result as weaken organizational commitment. However, Mäkelä & Suutari (2011) stated that global employees who have been to many international assignments are aware of the possible negative effects of relocation to their families and have taken to account the possible issues.

3.2. Adjustment

In the following chapter, the general adjustment model of repatriation will be introduced. All the parts of adjustment will be presented, and more focus will be put on three facets of adjustment by introducing research findings of factors influencing these facets.

3.2.1. Adjustment model

According to Black et al. (1992) repatriation adjustment does not differ significantly from expatriation adjustment. Thus, Black et al. (1992) have developed a theoretical model to better understand the repatriation adjustment process based on the expatriation adjustment model. This repatriation framework has been the most influential model in the repatriation literature (Vidal et al. 2010) and is often used for repatriation adjustment studies (Van Gorp, Boroş, Bracke, & Stevens 2017). Black et al. (1991a) were the first ones to present expatriation adjustment as a multifaceted process. As expatriation and repatriation both contain relocation experience between countries, the repatriation adjustment process has similarities with expatriation adjustment. Multiple aspects in repatriates' home country have likely changed and repatriates often form inaccurate expectations of the home country, similarly as expatriates often form inaccurate expectations of the host country. Due to the similarities of expatriation and repatriation, Black et al. (1991a) proposed that the three dimensions should fit the repatriation adjustment process as well. According to Black et al. (1991a), expatriation adjustment can be divided into three facets: adjustment to the work, adjustment to the host culture together with the general environment, and adjustment to interaction with host nationals. They found evidence that repatriation adjustment has also three related yet separate facets: general, interaction, and work adjustment. General adjustment contains the adaptation of culture and environment outside the company, which is why it is also called cultural adjustment. Interaction adjustment refers to the degree of adjustment with the home nationals within and outside the organization. Adjusting to the new work environment with a new job and organizational culture stands for work adjustment. They also noticed that some variables affect all three above-mentioned facets, and other variables have an effect on only one or two facets.

According to Black et al. (1991a), people experience a great amount of uncertainty moving to a new environment and country. They have recognized that it is the central driving force in the adjustment process. This view is parallel with Bell and Straw's (1989: 232-51) control theory, which indicates that when entering a new environment, a person needs to preserve a certain level of control. Below is described the process by Black et al. (1992a) of how expatriates and repatriates alike advance adjustment through controlling and reducing uncertainty.

- 1) Individuals develop behavioral routines grounded on their perception of expectations, preferences for specific outcomes together with reward and punishment possibilities.
- 2) When experiencing a new and unfamiliar situation, developed routines fall apart, and the individual sense decreased feeling of control.
- 3) Individuals use predictive and/or behavioral control as they try to recreate the feeling of control and decrease the uncertainty in a new situation.
- 4) Thus, the most essential factors in the adjustment process are expected to be the factors that cause uncertainty and decreased sense of control. Generally, factors that increase uncertainty would prevent adjustment whereas factors that decrease uncertainty would make adjustment easier.

Individuals will make anticipatory adjustments unless the transition to the new environment is totally unexpected without any warning, which is unusual (Black et al. 1991a). Thus, theoretical repatriation adjustment framework consists of two kinds of adjustment: adjustment before returning home (anticipatory) and adjustment made after arriving (in-country) (see Figure 1.).

Black et al. (1992a) presented four general categories of variables in their framework. As the Figure 1. shows, all these four categories occur in both anticipatory adjustment and in-country adjustment but the content of these four categories change between anticipatory and in-country adjustment.

In-country adjustment's first category is individual variables which includes individual values, attitudes, needs or characteristics. The second category is job variables which contains tasks and characteristics of the person's job. Third category is organizational variables where variables of organization and its policies and practices are included. Finally, the fourth category is non-work variables where all variables outside job and organization as general environment and family are grouped.

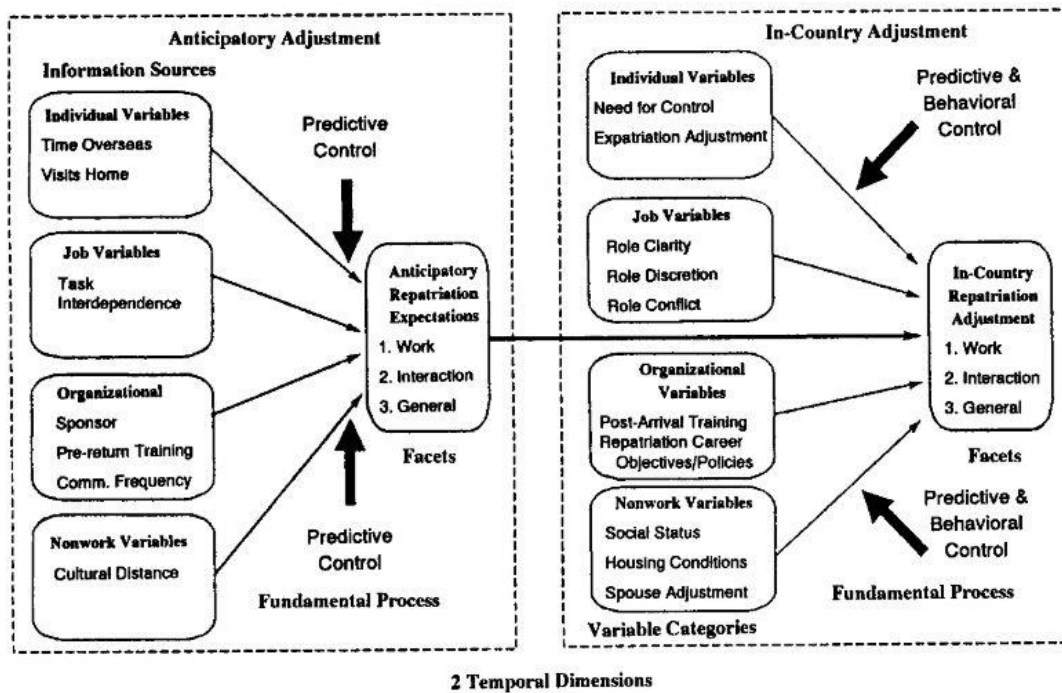


Figure 1. Basic framework of repatriation adjustment (Black et al. 1992a)

Black et al. (1992a) have created an important theoretical base to the repatriation adjustment research. Most of repatriation studies have focused and still focus on these three facets that Black et al. (1992a) represented. However, there is happening some progress in repatriation adjustment literature as Suutari and Välimaa (2002) have proposed that the work adjustment category from Black et al. (1992a) framework can be divided into two distinct categories. Suutari et al. (2002) proposed that work adjustment should be divided to job adjustment and organizational adjustment. Yet, Vidal, Valle & Aragón (2010) presented in their study that only two facets would be applicable: general adjustment and work adjustment. Interaction adjustment was not found alone at all which is why social and general adjustment was presented together with a term general adjustment. Whereas Haslberger, Brewster, and Hippler (2013) did the conceptualization of expatriation adjustment in a completely new way. They presented that only work and non-work adjustment would be applicable. Both categories are also divided into three dimensions and each dimension contains internal and external perspective. These dimensions are cognitive, affective, and behavioral.

Hyder and Lövblad (2007) present an argument of the actual importance of repatriation adjustment in their literature review study. According to Hyder et al. (2007) the repatriates experience is more important than the adjustment. They based their claim on previous literature and especially on Lazarova and Caligiuri's (2001) indirect suggestion that the repatriate experience should be first mainly positive to repatriation adjustment to be relevant and functional.

3.2.2. General adjustment

The longer the assignment is the more likely expatriates' return can be forgotten. At the same time, expatriate expects return to home country go with ease. (Suutari et al. 2002) It appeared from study made by Suutari et al. (2002) that the length of the assignment does correlate negatively with repatriates' *general* adjustment.

Expatriates become separated from the realities of home country over time. Being overseas and separated makes it easier to conduct unrealistic expectations based on the old information the expatriate has personally gathered. Vidal et al. (2010) presented that more accurate expectations of general environment repatriate has the better the repatriate will adjust to *general* environment. Thus, it is proposed that expatriates should maintain their knowledge about events in the home country. (Suutari et al. 2002.) It appeared in the study of Suutari et al. (2002) that maintaining connection with home country and keeping up with events does correlate positively with repatriate's *general* adjustment.

As Suutari et al. (2002) suggest staying in connection influences repatriates' *general* adjustment. However, Van Gorp, Boroş, Bracke and Stevens (2017) have gone deeper studying with whom the repatriate should stay in connection to especially help the general psychological adjustment. Van Gorp et al. (2017) found that it matters with whom the repatriates are in connection and from whom they receive their emotional support from. According to their research, receiving emotional support from home country friends/relatives upon the repatriation positively effects on the repatriates *general* and *interaction* adjustment. Moreover, Van Gorp et al. (2017) research' results even suggest that receiving emotional support from the host country friends/relatives can inhibit repatriate's *general* adjustment back to home country.

When it comes to connection between expatriate adjustment and repatriate adjustment it has been suggested that the better a person adjust to the host country the harder it makes to adjust back to the home country. Findings vary through the years as one research found that employee's poor adjustment overseas improves *general* adjustment upon repatriation (Vidal et al. 2010). On the other hand, Adler (1981) have found in his empirical research that expatriates who had adjusted well to the host country returned home with better attitude than expatriates who had adjusted poorly to the host country. Suutari et al. (2002) found also that troubles in expatriation adjustment correlated negatively with repatriate's *general* adjustment to the home country. In addition, they found a significant negative correlation between expatriate adjustment problems and repatriate *interaction* adjustment.

Different individual variables relation to repatriation adjustment have been studied. Vidal et al. (2010) found that repatriate's social capacity is positively correlated with general adjustment as it helps repatriates to interact with others and understand the situation. Age is another individual variable that has been researched to have an influence on repatriation adjustment. Knowledge is cumulative by nature, meaning it grows by time. Older employees typically have more knowledge of their home country and organization because of their time in the working life. They usually have more experience about changes and new situations which can reduce the uncertainty of the repatriation process. (Black 1994.) A study about Japanese repatriates showed that age does relate positively with *general* and *interaction* adjustment. According to this study the older the repatriate is the easier the repatriation adjustment is. (Black 1994.)

3.2.3. Work adjustment

Organizations often treat expatriates with an "out of sight, out of mind" -attitude. The longer expatriates are away the more likely they are forgotten. The longer employees live abroad the more they adopt foreign customs and culture. Thus, Feldman (1991) suggested that the less time employees spend overseas in total the better they will adjust to their new *work* environment.

The greater the autonomy of the re-entry assignment is the better repatriate's *work* adjustment has found to be. Also increase in repatriate's social status has been proved to improve repatriation *work* adjustment. (Vidal et al. 2010)

Even though, Black et al. (1994) presented that age correlates positively with *work* adjustment some studies have differing results. Feldman (1991) suggested that middle-aged repatriates would have more issues adjusting to new work environment than their younger and older colleagues because they are more like to have family with spouses with careers and teenage children that makes the relocation more difficult. Older repatriates seem to be less willing to relocate as they perceive their future career development and possibilities to promotion less bright compared to the younger employees (Brett, Stroh & Reilly 1993).

3.2.3.1 *Job adjustment*

Breitenmoser and Bader (2019) state that the current findings support the notion that repatriates are less likely to stay with an organization if they see their job level and responsibility declining compared to their last job during the IA. This phenomenon triggers feelings of deprivation and lowers their intentions to stay with the company. However, if the repatriates experience that they are benefitting more than their domestic colleagues in terms of promotion opportunities, autonomy, and compensation they are more likely to stay in the organization. Breitenmoser et al. (2019) presented that a relative compensation advantage provided for the repatriate has a moderate positive effect, whereas not receiving compensation can be significant negative factor for the repatriate.

It has been suggested that the role clarity upon return would also influence repatriate's adjustment. Black et al. (1992b, 235) found that usually repatriates are not aware of their exact new jobs upon return which causes them considerable amount of uncertainty. Therefore, Suutari et al. (2002) suggested that there is connection between repatriates' adjustment and the length of time between when the role negotiations and decisions were made and repatriates actual return. From their study it appeared that the amount of time before repatriates return when the role negotiations and decisions were made had a positive effect on their *job* adjustment.

Not only the clarity of role has an influence on job adjustment but also role discretion has been studied. Role discretion is related to how much an individual has the liberty to adjust the new role to be more familiar, controllable, and predictable in order to make the transition easier (Black et al. 1992a). Role discretion influences repatriate's adjustment because when the level of role discretion is low the level of uncertainty becomes higher which affects negatively on repatriate's adjustment (Feldman 1991). Suutari et al. (2002) proved in their study that role discretion and repatriate *job* adjustment have significant positive correlation between them.

3.2.3.2 *Organization adjustment*

Quite little has been studied how expatriates can themselves guide their career transition. As an exception Feldman and Thomas (1992) have suggested that if an expatriate can choose to leave or not to leave on an international assignment, it will have a positive effect on expatriation to become successful. Suutari et al. (2002) assumed that this kind of willingness could have a positive effect also on repatriation. They found in their study a positive correlation between willingness to relocate internationally and repatriate's *organization* adjustment.

3.2.4. Interaction adjustment

Kierner and Suutari (2017) found through their research that repatriates truly struggled with interaction adjustment after returning to Finland. Losing the connection with home country friends and colleagues created challenges for the repatriates. Repatriates stated that colleagues in home country easily seem to forget the international assignee as there is no connection and they do not see each other. It was identified that the repatriates need time to reconnect and rebuild the relationship with the home country nationals. This action might need some additional effort because of the possible cultural differences.

A role conflict will be developed if a repatriate's own impression of what should be expected of him or her conflicts with the new job and what home organization expects of him or her. It might sound obvious that role conflict would have a negative effect on

repatriate adjustment. (Suutari et al. 2002.) However, the findings are varying as Black (1994) found that there is a significant correlation between role conflict and *interaction* adjustment, but they did not find great correlation between role conflict and *general* or *work* adjustment. On the other hand, Suutari et al. (2002) did find a negative correlation between role conflict and repatriates *general*, *interaction* and *organizational* adjustment. Herman and Tetrick (2009) discovered in their study that how repatriates react and take action on a problem has an impact on repatriates' interaction adjustment. It was found that problem-solving behavior which aims to find a solution to a specific problem positively affects interaction adjustment. Emotion-focused strategies which aim to reduce the emotional outcome of the problem, on the other hand, affect negatively to the *interaction* adjustment.

To conclude, Black et al.'s (1992) theoretical repatriation adjustment model has been widely applied in repatriation studies. Most of the factors have been found to have an effect on work or/and general adjustment. Thus, some studies have presented that repatriation adjustment would be divided only to these two facets. However, studies have found factors such as role conflict which has a direct negative effect on the interaction adjustment. Additionally, losing connection with the home country nationals was found to have an effect on the interaction adjustment (Kierner et al. 2017). In the following chapter the suggested organizational repatriation support practices will be presented.

4. ORGANIZATIONAL REPATRIATION SUPPORT PRACTICES

Prior to sending employees to international assignments, the organization's repatriation process together with repatriation policies should be efficient and clear (Howe-Walsh et al. 2017). In the following chapter first, international human resource management function (IHRM) in developing repatriation management policies and practicalities will be discussed. Secondly, the recommended repatriation supporting practices will be divided into three categories.

4.1. Development of repatriation policies

A common problem within organizations is that repatriation policies are not planned properly in International Human Resource Management unit. HR is considered to have main responsibility of successful repatriation and if IHRM lacks clear code of repatriation procedures and policies, the HR managers are not able to consistently lead the process either. (Howe-Walsh et al. 2017.) Explicit repatriation policies are important for repatriates as way of reducing uncertainty. IHRM, HR managers and line managers have crucial role on repatriation management which is why it is important for them to have knowledge about repatriation (Howe-Walsh et al. 2017). Mendenhall, Jensen, Black and Gregersen (2003) mentioned that in a previous study, only 11% of HR executives in America had international experience of working or living overseas. Repatriates have acknowledged the same problem by themselves. In research conducted by Black et al. (1991b) repatriates from all three countries mentioned the same issue. For example, a Japanese repatriate stated:

“Most people in the personnel department have not had any international experience. Consequently, they cannot understand the process. This is a big mistake.”

Shen and Hall (2009) conducted research which suggests that HR executives who are responsible of the repatriation process should have international experience themselves in order to understand better the possible complications and issues during the process. Based on the research of Shen et al. (2009), Howe-Walsh et al. (2017) also suggest that by ensuring that HR managers have international experience of their own the quality of

repatriation support can be improved. Employees who have been on international assignments have practical knowledge and experience of the repatriation process which is highly valuable in developing repatriation strategies and policies. Who would be better prepared to improve strategies concerning issues concerning repatriation than persons that has undergone them recently? (Stroh 1995)

After developing clear repatriation policies IHRM needs to plan how to follow these policies in practice as policies are only guidelines and do not present the process in steps. According to Howe-Walsh et al. (2017), both HR managers and line managers have stated to be uncertain of their responsibilities during repatriation. The problem stems from lack of information concerning the roles of responsible persons. HR managers are not able to provide line managers correct information of their responsibilities if IHRM have not planned and clearly informed these roles in the first place. (Howe-Walsh et al. 2017.) If line manager is not able to support repatriate efficiently it effects the repatriates overall Perceived Organizational Support (POS) which is connected to repatriate's intentions to stay in the organization. (Howe-Walsh et al. 2017.)

4.2. Repatriation management

In this chapter repatriation management practices for organizations to support the repatriation will be introduced. Supporting practices are divided to three categories based on the stages of the international assignment.

4.2.1. Before expatriation

Planning of the repatriation stage should be included to the planning phase of the international assignment. After all, employee is expected to come back and to stay in the company's service after completing the international assignment. In what depth repatriation should be planned then?

4.2.1.1 Purpose of the assignment

The first step towards an efficient repatriation process for organizations is to analyze the strategic outcomes of repatriation. The purpose of the assignment should be defined well before sending employee to the assignment. Black et al. (1992b) presented three primary international assignment purposes of why particular expatriate should be sent overseas. These purposes are *executive development*, *transfer of technology and information*, and *coordination and control*. One or more should be selected from these three purposes before executing expatriation further. If organization decides that executive development is the main priority outcome of the international assignment, the job upon repatriation should be the next critical step of improving additional executive skills. When transfer of technology and information is the purpose of conducting an international assignment organization should identify the home-country units where the expatriate's information and knowledge would be needed and benefitted the most. If coordination and control is pursued outcome of the assignment, the job after returning to home could include utilizing the contacts acquired overseas. By doing this, organization could ensure the efficient control and coordination between foreign units and headquarters. (Black et al. 1992b.)

Why should organizations plan the purpose of sending an employee to an international assignment? It is unlikely that any organization would accept a zero or negative profit of a long-term investment worth of approximately million dollars. However, without a proper strategic purpose of the assignment organizations can have mentioned unpleasant results from their repatriates for example in form of repatriate's resignation (Black et al. 1992b). In addition, without strategic purpose of the assignment company usually have quite little compelling motives to pay considerable and systematic attention to the diverse group of issues that the repatriate and his/her family face. Why should the company send an employee overseas if there is no clear strategic reason for the international assignment and moreover to help, he/she to adjust back after returning home? (Black et al. 1992b.)

4.2.1.2 Nature of the assignment

Different types of assignments might require different amount of attention upon repatriation. Repatriates should be identified by how much problems they are likely to

have upon repatriation and then focus especially on the high-risk group of repatriates (Black et al. 1992b) Two characteristics of assignments have been recognized to place repatriates to these high-risk groups. First is extended international assignment, including several shorter assignments. Second is repatriates and their families who return from highly distinct country compared to their home country. (Black 1992.) In addition, Stahl, Chua, Caligiuri, Cerdin and Taniguchi (2009) found that expatriates who were on developmental assignments (learning-driven) instead of functional (demand-driven) perceived their career development opportunities to be better and were more willing to leave their company. Due to this, Cox et al. (2013) suggested that specific attention should be paid on repatriates returning from developmental assignments.

Lazarova et al. (2001) propose in their research one slightly different way to ease the repatriation retention. They suggest that depending on the nature of the assignment, the assignments length could be shortened. They base the suggestion on the knowledge that time spent overseas influence negatively on repatriate retention. It is mentioned that shortening international assignments length is possible to only on certain type of assignments but can be helpful in some situations.

4.2.1.3 Career planning

Expatriation and international experience are commonly viewed as highly valuable advantage and requirement for promotion within the organization. However, career outcomes are usually disappointing from repatriates' view and do not correlate with their expectations upon return. (Stahl et al. 2009.) Research show that organizations often fail on integrating international assignments with expatriate's long-term career development plan (Riusala & Suutari 2011; Stahl & Cerdin 2004). Repatriates often feel that conversely to their expectations international assignment had a negative effect on their career. They often see that the reentry position is less challenging and satisfying with less authority compared to the position overseas. (Stroh et al. 1998.)

Several studies have confirmed that career development plan does have positive influence on repatriate's satisfaction of the repatriation process and negatively related with repatriate's turnover intentions (Stroh 1995; Feldman et al. 1992; Vidal et al. 2008). Vidal

et al. (2008) ensure that how organization manages their expatriates' careers is a factor that defines repatriates' satisfaction of the repatriation process. Thus, career development planning is not a duty that should be overlooked. Feldman et al. (1998) suggested that organizations should ensure that international assignment fits into the expatriate's overall career plan. Additionally, international assignment cannot prevent or hamper any repatriates career development possibilities. Career planning should be done together with repatriate to help them see how assignment will influence their career. In this way repatriate is likely to have more realistic work expectations upon return (Handler et al. 1997). Vidal et al. (2008) point out that repatriate's international experience should be seen as a promotion criterion in the organization.

4.2.1.4 Providing training and a mentor

As mentioned earlier, expectations play critical role on repatriation adjustment and satisfaction. Organizations should aim to manage expatriate's expectations already at home country before he/she leaves for the assignment. Organizations should provide training sessions which would cover information of what to expect upon return. Training sessions could be delivered by former expatriates who would have experience of their own to brief the return process realistically. (Lazarova et al. 2001.) Another way to reduce the uncertainty of repatriation is to provide a formal written agreement of repatriation. The agreement could include, in possible measures, the type of assignment which will be provided upon return. (Lazarova et al. 2001.)

On the planning phase of expatriation organization is recommended to provide expatriate a mentor who can actively help expatriate in different stages of the international assignment (Wu, Zhuang & Hung 2014). Several studies show that having a mentor during an international assignment correlate positively with repatriate's adjustment (Wu, Zhuang & Hung 2014; Harvey 1982; Vermond 2001). Mentor helps repatriate by providing functions of career development, psychosocial support, and role modeling (Scandura 1992). Mentor can also be protecting expatriate's interests during the international assignment and inquire potential reentry positions for the repatriate. Not all studies, however, have found mentors to be related with retention of repatriates. For

example, Stroh (1995) did not find that mentoring program would have an independent positive input to the repatriation process.

4.2.2. During/Pre-return

Jassawella et al. (2004) suggest that in order organizations to efficiently control repatriation process, they should plan majority of the practices before sending the employee for the assignment and not to intervene just before the end of the assignment. However, if plan have not been conducted prior to assignments beginning, the planning should be done at least well before repatriate has returned to home (Stroh 1995).

4.2.2.1 *Communication*

Managing repatriation solely upon return does not seem to be enough as the assignment can last many years and during this time expatriate cannot completely lose touch with home office. Having accurate information of home country helps expatriates to form more valid expectations (Stroh et al. 2000). As have been discussed, accurate expectations play a critical role on the repatriation. To avoid of becoming alienated with the expatriate it is highly recommended for the organization to provide a proper communication system to keep in touch with the expatriate. Expatriates should be kept on the home organizations e-mail lists of company news and should be encouraged to actively communicate with mentors and colleagues back home (Lazarova et al. 2001). All changes concerning organization policies, especially repatriation, need to be informed to the expatriate even though he/she is not present at the home office (Howe-Walsh et al.2017). Another way to help keep expatriate up to date is offer home-country newspapers and magazines (Black et al 1992b). Nowadays this is quite easy to fulfill as newspapers are available in the internet and can be read all over the world.

4.2.2.2 *Home-country visits*

Periodic visits to home help the expatriate to stay in contact with close people and colleagues back at home. Couple of research point out that visits home should be scheduled with an event at home office. Lazarova et al. (2001) suggest that visits to home

should be arranged to match with a networking event. Cox et al. (2013) propose expatriates to train and orientate home-country staff concerning foreign market policies during visits to home. This would facilitate knowledge transfer and show expatriate that his or her acquired knowledge is appreciated. Thus, organization should offer trips to home evenly during the assignment so that repatriates would adjust easier back home upon repatriation.

4.2.2.3 Reentry position

To avoid issues upon repatriation, supervisor should explore together with the expatriate the career path opportunities and positions that are available upon return (Black et al. 1992b). Most important factor is that a job has been provided upon return to help repatriates adjustment to work environment (Stroh 1995). This is not always the case as in the research of Bailey et al. (2013) only one company stated to promise a job upon repatriation for the expatriate. Majority of the companies in the study left the task of finding a job upon return for the expatriates themselves. Three companies even stated that they do not guarantee any job for the repatriate. Ideally, the reentry position would enable repatriate to execute one of the three strategic objectives that was recommended to identify before sending employee overseas. Repatriates newly acquired skills and knowledge should be considered and tried to combine with the new assignment at home. (Black et al. 1992b.) Most repatriates have had a job with higher autonomy, challenge and responsibility overseas which is why the reentry position should be proportioned specially with the overseas assignment and not with earlier position at home. Thus, by providing a job with some elements of challenge and reasonable amount of autonomy organization would enhance repatriate's satisfaction with the repatriation process and by this decrease the possibility of turnover. (Bailey et al. 2013.)

In the occasion of downsizing organization may have challenges to offer repatriate ideal position or job of any kind. Stroh (1995), however, found that providing an adequate job despite of downsizing decreases repatriates' turnover intentions. Hence, if possible, downsizing should not influence the placing of repatriate to keep repatriate in company's service. Nevertheless, if providing adequate position is not possible Black et al. (1992b) recommend organizations to communicate the situation clearly and openly the situation

with the expatriate rather than keeping them in the dark. Repatriates should be told if there will not be good positions waiting at home. This way inaccurate expectations will be avoided.

4.2.2.4 Housing

Living circumstances should be paid attention already before repatriate and family is concretely back in home-country. Finding adequate housing is often a major challenge for repatriates and has a great influence on spouse's adjustment to home-country. (Black et al. 1992b.) Locating, purchasing and moving to a new house can be remarkable stressor for the repatriate and family without organizations support. For example, house-hunting trips to home-country can be helpful during the last couple of months. Repatriates who have kept their home during the assignment and have rent it probably needs to renovate and repair the damage caused by the tenants. In this situation, organization should consider how long does the repairs take and provide temporal accommodation and financial support. (Black et al. 1992b.)

4.2.3. After returning

After repatriates have returned to home-country all the rest planned supporting practices are needed to be executed. As long as supporting practices and planning are carried out before and during the assignment, this part of the repatriation management should secure the successful repatriation.

4.2.3.1 Training/ Briefing

As discussed earlier, training has been suggested to be provided prior to assignment. Some research proposes organizations to provide training also upon return. For example, Lazarova et al. (2001) recommended to provide reorientation session of informing possible changes in company strategies, personnel, and policies immediately after returning. Handler et al. (1997) proposed arranging a briefing session where the repatriate had a possibility give feedback concerning the expatriate experience and relay the skills that have been acquired during the international assignment. Vidal et al. (2008) did

examine if training after returning increased the satisfaction of repatriate. On the contrary with other studies training after repatriation was found not to have an impact on repatriates' satisfaction with the process.

4.2.3.2 Allowing transition time

Moving from overseas to new work, new environment and possibly new home requires a lot of time but repatriates often are expected to go to work the very next day arrive back home. The transition can feel really overwhelming with all the changes and things that need to be taken care of. Overseas working hours can be different than at home and moving straight back to longer working weeks can be exhausting. (Black et al. 1992b.) Organizations should allow repatriates some transition time to help their adjustment. Companies can ease the transition by slowing down the working tempo of repatriates for the first couple weeks. It can be done by reducing repatriates working hours, excessive demands and travelling together with being generally flexible allowing repatriate to adjust to the new circumstances. (Black et al. 1992; Lazarova et al. 2013; Harvey 1989.) As discussed, Van Gorp et al. (2017) found that receiving emotional support from home country friends/relatives facilitates the adjustment of repatriate upon returning to home. Thus, they also suggest organizations to ensure that repatriates will have a manageable amount of work so that they are able to invest their time to connect with their home country friends/relatives. Organizations can also encourage repatriates to participate to social activities where they can reinforce and (re)build their social connections in the home country.

4.2.3.3 Utilization of developed competencies

Transferring knowledge is often important and pursued aspect of repatriation for organizations (Bailey et al. 2013). Whereas repatriates expect to be able to make use of their new knowledge after their return (Suutari et al. 2003). Studies have recognized ways to combine facilitating knowledge transfer and supporting repatriates to utilize their skills. Repatriates should be used to train and orientate future expatriates (Lazarova et al. 2001) and organizations should arrange forums where former expatriates could share their international experiences with their colleagues (Bailey et al. 2013). The influence of this

kind of activities is twofold as repatriates can share their acquired knowledge and skills with domestic colleagues. In addition, they can encourage other employees to leave on international assignments (Lazarova et al. 2001). Another way to facilitate knowledge transfer was mentioned by a company in Bailey et al. (2013) study. They told they were using one-on-one sessions where former expatriates educate domestic employees the skills they acquired overseas. Repatriates should also be involved with developing and improving repatriation policies (Stroh 1995).

4.2.3.4 Valuation of international experience

Repatriates and their spouses expect and wish to receive appreciation from their companies related with their assignment overseas. They have usually made great sacrifices when moving overseas, living there several years, and coming back home. Especially spouses have mentioned how much it would mean to them to get some acknowledgement concerning the sacrifices they have done. (Black et al. 1992b.) Organizations should seriously take into consideration the ways they show that international assignments are appreciated as corporate values can have negative effect to the repatriate turnover rates. Stroh (1995) found that repatriates turnover intentions were higher when corporate values concerning international assignments were low compared to an organization where international assignment were highly appreciated. Organizations can prove that they appreciate international assignments, for example, by making good use of repatriates' knowledge.

4.2.3.5 Compensation

Repatriates often experience major losses in compensations after returning home from an international assignment. Using monetary compensations as an incentive usually make organizations and repatriates fail upon repatriation because of losses repatriates suffer when returning home. Companies do not often see coming home as a difficulty worth of perks even though compensation specialists more easily consider repatriation as a situation needed for financial support rather than expatriation. (Black et al. 1992b.) Black et al. (1992b) propose to compare financial inequities between domestic employees and repatriates. A repatriate had stated that his salary back at home was not adjusted during

the two years he was overseas which obviously is not rewarding for the repatriate (Black et al. 1992b). However, the influence of compensations is not as straightforward as Black et al. (1992b) expressed as Sánchez Vidal, Valle, and Aragón (2007) did not find relation between repatriate satisfaction and compensation in repatriation process.

4.3. Framework of the study

This section summarizes the long-term assignees' repatriation adjustment framework which is applied in this study. The framework in this study is based on the Black et al.'s (1992) theoretical repatriation adjustment model. It proposes that repatriation adjustment is divided into three facets, adjustment to work, interaction and general environment. It is assumed that the different areas of repatriation adjustment are identified in this study as well. In line with the model and previous studies, this study assumes that e.g., repatriates' expectations, re-entry position, role clarity and independency, connection and visits to home country will affect the repatriation process (Van Gorp et al. 2017; Vidal et al. 2010; Suutari et al. 2002). The interview guide is built based on the Black et al.'s (1992) theoretical model. As the repatriation process remains difficult to control, the aim of this study is to further understand which factors affect the repatriation adjustment.

In addition, the organizational repatriation support practices which have been experienced helpful are studied in this research. Previous studies have discovered that by planning the repatriation stage organizations are able to facilitate the repatriates' adjustment back to home country and organization ((Howe-Walsh et al. 2017). Prior to sending the employee on the assignment it is advisable for organizations to provide the expatriate training and a mentor within the company (Wu et al. 2014). Career planning is suggested also to be executed before the expatriate leaves to the assignment (Vidal et al. 2008). During the assignment it has been found that the most effective practices to ease the return is to stay in connection with the expatriate and enable regular visits to home country (Cox et al. 2013; Howe-Walsh et al. 2017). It is assumed that some of these support practices are found useful in this research as well. This study aims to find which support practices repatriates have experienced useful and at which stage they have received the useful support. The study aims to discover what kind of support the repatriates wish for.

5. METHODOLOGY

In this chapter the methodological choices of the empirical study are presented. The methodology is carefully selected to gain the most accurate information to answer the research objectives ‘*What kind of challenges the repatriates have faced*’ and ‘*which organizational support practices they have experiences helpful*’. The chapter is structured as follows: First, the research approach and philosophy are presented. Second, the research design is introduced, and the research methods are specified after. The third section covers sampling, data collection technique and data analysis procedure.

5.1. Research approach and philosophy

According to Saunders et al. (2019, pp.101) the term *research philosophy* is used to describe the nature and development of knowledge. Ontology is the core of the study as it describes the nature of reality and existence. In addition to ontology, epistemology is also in the core of the study as it represents the theory of knowledge. The methodology and actual methods used stem from the philosophical concepts of ontology and epistemology. Within ontology and epistemology there are different views and schools of thoughts. This study is based on the interpretivist and constructionist view. Constructionism is described by Saunders et al. (2019, pp.135-137) as a way of perceiving the world to be socially constructed and formed by subjective perception. The social constructionist view asserts that “that social reality is made from the perceptions and consequent actions of social actors (people)” (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 137). In this study the social actors are the interviewee repatriates who perceive the repatriation process subjectively based on their own experiences. Even though the perceptions and repatriation processes are unique, there are still some similarities.

Interpretivism is also applied in the study. Saunders et al. (2019, pp. 148-149) state that interpretivism highlights that human beings and their experiences cannot be studied in the same way as physical actions because people create varying meanings. In interpretivism the aim is not to find universal laws but rather to find deeper understanding by focusing on what is meaningful for the participants of the study. Interpretivist philosophy is a logical choice for this study as individuals’ personal experiences are in

the focus of this study. Saunder et al. (2019, pp.149) state that because the business environment and situations are often highly complex, such as repatriation adjustment, the interpretivist and constructionist views are the most suitable choice.

The research approach of this study is abductive. Abductive approach refers to research where there is continuous movement between theory and data. Abductive research conflates both deduction, which moves from theory to data and induction, which begins from the data and modifies or creates the theory based on it (Dubois & Gadde 2002, p. 554). The aim of the study is not to create a new theory but to complement the existing theory and identify the adjustment challenges and most suitable practices for organizations to support the repatriate. The empirical research and interview structure of this study is based on the previous research about the subject to make sure that all the needed parts are covered.

5.2. Research design

Generally, there are three possibilities for the research methods: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. Quantitative method means collecting and analyzing numerical data to find correlations, describe characteristics, or test hypotheses. The data is normally analyzed through graphs and statistics and the data is often collected through surveys. Qualitative method means using and analyzing non-numerical data aiming to understand, opinions, concepts, or experiences. The data normally is collected through interviews and is analyzed by categorizing the data. Many times, these two research methods are combined in research creating a mixed method research. (Saunders et al. 2019, pp.145, 180)

This study will be conducted as a mono method qualitative study. Mono method means that data will be collected with single qualitative or quantitative data collection technique and the data will be analyzed with corresponding data analysis procedures. Easterby-Smith et al. (2015, pp. 129) define that normally qualitative data is in form of reports conducted from the research participants' statement or actions. These reports can be in different forms including textual, audio, visual or verbal. However, it does not matter in which form the data is a common feature for qualitative data is that it enables

interpretation and description without focusing on measurements (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 82). Thus, qualitative data is not solely defined by its non-numerical nature but also by the interpretive and interactive nature of generating the data. In addition, qualitative data is exploratory in nature and must be generated by the researcher. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, p. 82). Thus, qualitative data enables more in-depth understanding about the subject than quantitative data would. In this study qualitative method is the appropriate choice to study repatriation adjustment as it is a complex issue and thus needs in-depth understanding.

The classification of a purpose of the study is divided into three concepts within the research literature. These concepts are exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory. Saunders et al. (2007, pp. 133) define an exploratory study especially useful when the researcher wishes to clarify an existing understanding of a problem. Exploratory study questions are often open questions started with 'What' or 'How' to gain as much insight of the topic as possible (Saunders et al., 2019, pp. 186-187).

Case study is a common strategy for conducting a qualitative study (Saunders et al., 2019, pp. 180.) According to Yin (2014, pp.16) case study aims to generate in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon through empirical research. There are varying means of collecting data for a case study such as interviews, questionnaires, and observation. In addition, case study can be either single or multiple and simultaneously either descriptive, exploratory, or explanatory. The "case" in a case study can refer to for example a group, an organization, an event, or a person. In this study the case will be the repatriates. A variant of a case study was chosen as the research strategy, as the objective of this study is to study the experiences of a few selected individuals. Thus, an exploratory case study serves the purpose of achieving integrated insight of repatriation adjustment and repatriation support.

This study will be using cross-sectional time horizon. According to Saunders et al. (2019, pp.174) cross-sectional studies often apply surveys. However, qualitative studies are often cross-sectional as many interviews are conducted within a short period of time. Moreover, the most fitting research technique selected for this study is non-standardized,

semi-structured interviews. In semi-structured interviews the outline of topics, themes or issues are pre specified but the wording and order of questions can be changed in each interview (Eriksson et al. 2016, pp. 94). This allows room for discussion and interpretation during the interviews and encourages the interviewees to share their experiences. However, during the interview new questions might arise and it might be beneficial to investigate those deeper. Thus, the interview is not strictly limited to the pre-defined subject areas. (Eriksson et al. 2016, p. 94; Saunders et al. 2019, pp. 437-438.)

5.3. Research methods

In this chapter the applied research methods are presented. First, the sampling method is introduced. Second, the data collection is described in detail and lastly, the data analysis method used in this study is presented.

5.3.1. Population and sampling

The target population of the study is long-term repatriates who have returned from one or more long-term international assignments back to their home country. The sample population is formed from different companies' employees to gain information from different situations. The sampling technique is self-selection because it suits the study the best as the study is exploratory research and reaching the interviewee candidates can be difficult. Volunteer sampling was used meaning that the interviewer contacts the interviewee candidates, and the interviews are conducted to those who agree being interviewed. The sample size for this study is six persons and it consists only of males. As the sample only includes males it does not completely represent the target population. However, expatriates overall primarily are men and only 15% are women according to Berry & Bell (2012). Thus, the sampling can be considered accurate enough. The participants' age varies from 35-years-old to 67-years-old. Two of the participants had retired and others were still in work life. From the whole sample 5 participants had their family of wife with them at least for one assignment. Only one participant has left alone to all assignments but also his partner came to visit him frequently to the host country. The assignments' lengths vary from 3 years to 14 years, and they were located in Asia, Europe and North America.

Table 1 Participants

Participant code	Number of assignments	Length of assignments in total (years)	Number of repatriations	Repatriated to the assigned company	Length of interview	Continent of assignment(s)
A	3	9	3	Yes	01:01:18	Europe
B	1	14	1	Yes	00:30:50	Europe
C	4	8	1	Yes	00:46:47	Asia & Europe
D	1	3	1	Yes	00:40:17	Europe
E	1	3	1	Yes	00:34:18	North America
F	1	3	1	Yes	00:28:49	Asia

5.3.2. Data collection

The data collection technique for this research was selected based on the nature of the research' objectives and the research method. The chosen data collection technique for this research is interviews. Eriksson et al. (2016 p. 138) present that in-depth interview is the most used technique to collect primary data in qualitative studies. As the focus of the study is repatriates perceived experiences, interviews are the most suitable option to gather personal in-depth information from the interviewees. Semi-structured interviews were selected as they leave opportunities for the interviewees to share their experiences more widely. Semi-structured interviews are not limited solely to the questions the interviewer has prepared. The questions are only guidelines for the interview to make sure all needed themes will be covered. In addition, Eriksson et al. (2016 p.94) state that it might be beneficial to investigate further some themes that the interviewee brings up during the interview.

The interview questions were carefully compiled to secure successful interviews. According to Eriksson et al. (2016 p. 96-97) open questions are most likely to offer

detailed answers. Thus, all the presented questions were open questions to encourage the interviewees to share and explain their experiences widely. Complex and long questions should be avoided, and the questions should be kept simple as they are easier to answer. To prevent interviewer's presumptions affecting the interviewee's answers it is important to keep a neutral tone in the questions (Eriksson et al. 2016 p.97). The questions for this research were formed based on the researchers' suggestions and based on existing studies' questions. The interview guide with the main questions is presented in the appendix.

In an ideal situation the interviews would have been conducted face-to-face but because of the pandemic this was not advisable. Thus, all the interviews were conducted online in Teams as a video meeting. All the interviews were conducted in English even though all the interviewees had Finnish as their native language. All the interviewees agreed doing the interview in English without complaints as all of them have been working in English for years. They all agreed that English has become a natural way of communicating through the years and there is no need to do the interview in Finnish. All the interviews were screen and audio recorded and later they were converted to transcriptions for analyzing. As the interviews were conducted in English the transcriptions were ready to use and there was no need to translate any parts. This was the reason to conduct the interviews in English as translating easily changes the tone or meaning of an argument.

5.3.3. Data analysis

The data analysis process aims to reconstruct and describe the data in an integrated way. In the beginning of the process the data is disassembled into parts, units, pieces, or elements in order it to be reassembled and analyzed systematically (Boeijie 2010 p. 76-77). Saunders et al. (2009 p.516) emphasize the importance of the researchers' objectivity in the analyzing process as in the qualitative research only the researcher interprets the data.

The data for this research consisted of six interviews which resulted to 48 pages of interview transcript in English. The data was analyzed by qualitative content analysis presented by Eriksson at al. (2016 p. 199-121). In this method the data is coded by categorizing it to the '1st-order categories' and these were analyzed based on the previous

studies. The analysis provided the ‘2nd-order themes’ which then could be combined into aggregate dimensions. The coding to 1st-order categories was done inductively from the data to prevent the existing literature and findings to influence the possible new findings of this research (Eriksson et al. 2016 p.202). The coding was done manually on the transcriptions. As suggested by Eriksson et al. (2016 p.141) the theoretical concepts from existing research were utilized later when analyzing the main features of empirical data and the meanings inside of them. The findings will be presented in the next main chapter after the discussion of trustworthiness of the study.

5.4. Trustworthiness of the study

The quality and credibility of a study can be evaluated by assessing three elements of the study. These three elements are reliability, validity, and generalizability. Generally, these concepts are considered appropriate when evaluating quantitative research because of the positivist assumptions. However, the criterion in qualitative studies is a subject of discussion among researchers (e.g., Guba and Lincoln 1985; Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002; Bryman, 2012). Even though there are some researchers who suggest that the quality of qualitative studies cannot be secured through the concepts of reliability and validity, there are also researchers who suggest firmly that using these terms is crucial in assessing quality of any study. According to these academics applying the terms reliability and validity are crucial as all studies must be valid and reliable. Thus, using these terms allows studies to be indicated to the comparable status and quality (Saunders et al. 2019, p.216). In addition, regardless of the nature of the study, most academics in Europe have continued applying the terms validity and reliability when assessing the quality of a study (Morse et al. 2002, p.14). Thus, in this study the concepts validity and reliability will be applied to assess the quality of this research.

5.4.1. Reliability

Reliability in qualitative studies refers to the coherency and replication of the research. If another researcher can attain the same findings by replicating the study’s research design, the research can be perceived reliable (Saunders et al. 2016, p.192). When assessing the reliability of a qualitative study transparent reporting of the research methods becomes

crucial. According to Saunders et al. (2019, p.215) each part of the research needs to be reported in detail and completely in a transparent way allowing others to evaluate the study themselves and repeat it if needed. In this research the research design and methods are described fully step by step in the section 5.2. 5.2. Research design and methods. Because of the qualitative nature of the research, all the interviewing situations could not be exactly similar. However, all the interviewees were asked the same questions which enables the comparison of the results. Also, the interview guide is available in the appendix to increase the transparency of the interview process.

Saunders et al. (2019, p. 214-215) have recognized four threats to reliability which are participant bias, participant error, researcher bias and researcher error. Participant bias refers to interviewee providing a false response. To avoid this bias all the participants were informed in the beginning of the interview of the research subject. If the interviewer noticed that the interviewee did not fully understand the question, the interviewer provided more detailed questions making sure the interviewee understood the main question. The second threat is participant error which means factors that affect the respondent's performance unfavorably. To avoid this threat the interviewees were able to decide when they wanted to do the interview, in which language they wanted to conduct the interview and through which program they wanted to do the video meeting. Third threat is researcher bias which refers to situation where researcher's own perceptions affect the analysis of the data. This bias cannot be completely avoided but Saunders et al. (2007, p.291) state that it is important to be acknowledged and tried to be controlled. In this study all the recordings are converted to transcriptions word to word and the analyzing process is reported in the section 5.4.1. in detail. The last threat is researcher error which means factors that affect the researcher's performance unfavorably. To avoid this threat the interviewer was well prepared to each interview and conducted all the interviews in the same place.

5.4.2. Validity

According to Daymon and Halloway (2011, p.79) the concept of validity is more unequivocal and important in qualitative studies than the concept of reliability. The validity of a study refers to the suitable way of making conclusions and interpreting the

collected data. Weathington, Cunningham and Pittenger (2012, p.59) state that a study can be considered valid when the researcher has been able to make accurate conclusions of the data. In other words, validity ensures that the research findings measure what they were intended to measure (Saunders et al. 2016, p.194). Validity can be divided into internal and external validity. Internal validity refers to the accuracy of the research method and questions. Internal validity evaluates whether the questions and research method measure what they intend to measure. Saunders et al. (2016, p.400) remind that generally, because qualitative studies are in-depth in nature the internal validity is not seen as a big problem as the proposed theoretical relationships can be seen comprehensively grounded in a prosperous collection of data. High level of internal validity can be achieved when semi-structured interviews are conducted carefully using clarifying questions, probing and by interpreting the responses from multiple different angles (Saunders et al. 2016: 400). In this research the internal validity has been increased by forming the interview guide based on the Black et al. (1992) repatriation adjustment theory which has been used widely when researching repatriates' adjustment (e.g. Hyder et al., 2007, Suutari et al, 2002, Cow et al., 2013).

External validity refers to the generalizability of the study findings to another relevant context (Saunders et al. 2009, p. 157-158; Saunders et al., 2019, p. 215-216). Saunders et al. (2019, p.216) state that a small sample size affects the external validity of a study. In this study the small sample size can affect the external validity. A sample of six respondents is reasonable to offer enough data for the analysis but bigger sample could have given more reliable data. All the 6 respondents are Finnish which means that the results may not be generalized to other country nationals. However, respondents' profiles vary in terms of age, experience, industry, and destination country. This increases the external validity of the research. In addition, the interviews were conducted in English which significantly decreases the interpretation errors when analyzing the data compared to a situation where the interviews would have been conducted in a different language.

Overall, in a qualitative study the reliability and validity are not measurable in the same way as in a quantitative study as there is no possibility to calculate the validity or reliability of a qualitative study (Weathington et al. 2012, p.58). In addition, as interviews

are human interactions the situations are not repeatable completely. However, as earlier have been stated the study's reliability and validity have been deliberately increased wherever it has been possible.

6. RESULTS & FINDINGS

In this chapter the data collected through the interviews is described and analyzed in detail to answer the two objectives of this study. These objectives are to identify what kind of repatriation adjustment challenges repatriates have faced, and to identify which support practices the repatriates have found useful and what kind of support practices the repatriates would have wished for. The first subchapter is the antecedents of repatriation adjustment which includes general, work, and interaction adjustment. This chapter answers to the first objective of the study. The second subchapter is organizational support practices, and this chapter will answer to the second objective of the study. Before the subchapters the repatriates' backgrounds are briefly presented.

The repatriates of this study have quite different backgrounds and they have repatriated based on different reasons. Thus, their mindsets have varied towards the repatriation process from the beginning. As have been mentioned, all the assignments have been long-term international assignments meaning they have been assignments from two years to 14 years. Some of the participants repatriated from their own initiative, some were asked to return, and some knew already in the beginning of the assignment how long will it be. From all the six participants five found a new position within the assigning company and one changed the company twice during his career.

6.1. Antecedents of repatriation adjustment

This chapter will include the findings focusing on the antecedents of repatriation adjustment. Repatriation adjustment has been divided into three categories based on the literature and the data is analyzed based on these three categories. The antecedents were found by focusing on each adjustment area at a time. The repatriation adjustment areas are general, interaction, and work adjustment. In the repatriation literature work adjustment has been divided into job and organizational adjustment by some researchers (Suutari et al. 2002). In this study there was no such segmentation noticeable and thus, the work adjustment will not be divided into subcategories.

6.1.1. General adjustment

Adjustment to the general environment was overall quite easy process for the participants. There were not many challenges found from this area of adjustment in this study.

In general, the repatriates' expectations were accurate about their home countries general environment. All the repatriates had regularly visited the home country thus despite spending many years abroad the repatriates had been able to maintain the contact to the home country. The following repatriate had spent 14 years abroad without living in Finland in between. However, he visited Finland so regularly that he did not need time to adjust to Finland and he even commented the returning as follows:

So even being in Brussel I traveled a lot in Finland, so I never lost the connection. I always felt like that was my other home and home base. I moved three times in Belgium, so I think moving from Belgium to Finland was no different.

Another antecedent which supports adjustment to the general environment is home culture identity. It was discovered in the study that the more connection the repatriate has with the home country the easier it is to adjust to the general environment. Repatriates do not become alienated with the home culture if they visit and stay actively in touch with their home country friend and family. As the participant above states, he still felt after 14 years that Finland is his home base and this was because he had visited Finland frequently. Another participant felt that working abroad did not make difference at all: "My four-year absence from Finland did not show at all because it was so easy to do keep in touch".

Other studies (Suutari et al. 2002) have found that the time spent abroad has a negative effect on the general adjustment. However, in this study the participants did not show any signs that the time they have spent abroad would have affected negatively on their repatriation. 12 months and longer assignment are considered long-term assignments, yet one participant commented: "Three years is not so long time, I wouldn't say that it is a shock. We travelled to Finland several times, like five times per year". From these comments we can draw the conclusion that time spent abroad does not necessarily affect negatively on the adjustment to the general environment. However, also in these

comments there has always been the aspect of frequently visiting home country. Thus, we can conclude that visiting home country can ease the adjustment to general environment significantly as well as decrease the negative effect of time spent abroad on the general adjustment.

The housing aspect of the repatriates was found to affect the general adjustment in this study. At least the repatriates who had not sold their houses brought up the positive affect of having their own house when coming back. They felt that coming back was easy as they had their own house, and they did not need to rebuild their lives in Finland. The following participant had not sold the house in Finland and assumed that returning would have been harder if he had sold it: "I think if you would sell the house or without having the connection, property or without the weekly connections I guess that it could have been different to come back and start rebuilding." The repatriates who had sold their houses, however, did not describe the process of getting a new home very negatively. However, the following participant is aware of the difference of being on an assignment and working from home organization.

That took a year before we could move into the new house and refurnishing it. So, it was normal life, so I'm not complaining. But that's a very different from going out and being supported by the company. I'm not saying that it's wrong but there is big gap between those two lives.

One aspect which the participants did not appreciate in Finland was the climate. As many of the participants were located closer to the equator than in Finland, the days there were not as dark as in Finland. The participants got used to the sunnier weather and they felt the difference especially severely when they moved back to Finland in the end of summer. The following participant noticed that the climate had a clear effect on him:

The first fall was quite awful, little bit depressing I would say. It had an impact also a little bit to the mental health and I wasn't performing as well as I could. I was thinking that maybe it wasn't that good to move. It was the first time I realized it wow the winters are so dark here.

Despite of the dark and harsh Finnish climate, all the repatriates agreed that life is easier in general in Finland. Moving back to Finland made them realize how well things work in Finland. By things the participants meant errands and tasks which needed to be done outside of work. One participant said: “Everything was much easier in Finland compared to China, you know how to get things working easiest.” He did not say that life in China would have been especially hard but coming back to Finland and noticing the positive difference supported the adjustment. For one participant moving back to Finland enabled him to continue his sailing hobby. This was an important aspect for him as he is very passionate about sailing and he initially selected the international assignment’s location partially based on the best possibility to sail.

To conclude, the participants’ adjustment to general environment had gone quite effortlessly mainly because of their frequent visits to the home country and maintenance of their home country connections. The participants stayed up to date with the knowledge of the home country and thus, there were no unexpected surprises when returning. Finnish climate had stayed the same but the difference after living closer the equator negatively surprised some of the repatriates. All the participants identified strongly with the home country, and this helped their general adjustment.

6.1.2. Work adjustment

Some challenges and supporting antecedents were found in this study regarding work adjustment. Overall, all the participants were quite happy with their repatriation process. They also had one common important factor with each other in the repatriation: they all felt that they received good positions when coming back. All the participants were generally happy about their positions upon return. Getting a suitable position which fulfills the repatriates’ ambitions and interests is a meaningful factor in supporting the work adjustment. The repatriates acknowledged themselves as well that the new position has a great impact on the work adjustment process:

I would say that most important thing is to get proper position. It's always the question when you are returning that are you getting decent position.

Even though, all participants were happy with their positions they criticized the recruitment process for the new position. It was discovered that the process of confirming the new position caused distress and it was experienced as a negative factor regarding the repatriation. The participants highlighted that the repatriate needs to be active him-/herself in finding the new position at home. However, these participants who had been active themselves were unhappy how long the process took. They felt that there was too much unnecessary uncertainty regarding the new position. Two participants who were in general happy with their repatriation commented the length of the home position recruitment process accordingly:

I came back end in the of December and I think we agreed somewhere in November about the new position. It took a pretty long time. It was already in June when I started to talk about it. I think that it took too long time.

It actually happened just bit before my return, maybe weeks maximum two months before I came back. In the end they offered me two positions actually, so at least that was good.

It appeared that lack of transition time can negatively affect the work adjustment. One participant criticized the transition process to the new role. He was expecting a transition time to the new role as it was more challenging than his previous roles. However, instead of transition time there was an overlap of those positions:

It was quite clear the new role I was supposed to start but then in reality I didn't exactly get all the time and all resources. That didn't make it easier as I was just jumping into that role while running the earlier role as well.

As all the participants regularly visited their home countries it was assumed that they would have rather accurate knowledge about their home organizations. This, however, was not the case as it discovered that when the participants visited home, they rarely visited the home office. Some home organizations expected the repatriates to be up to date about the home organization as well as one of the participants commented:

There was training or some kind of introduction booked, and I thought I will get some introduction what has happened, but it actually turned out to be other way around and I was expected to keep introduction of the company. I barely knew anything because the company had changed so much.

Antecedents were found more related to work adjustment then work expectations. These had to do with the differences between host organization and home organization caused by the host country and culture. Even though organizations are international and aim to have global guidelines there still are differences between offices in different countries, as the next quote indicates:

If there are challenges its related to work because working style in China is so different. Different working style so it was more like more hard-working time than in Finland. Let's say you have own secretary who is doing all the paperwork, so you don't need much touch on your computer.

The differences between countries and positions usually result in deducted salary or having a decreased overall packaging as the salary guidelines differ between countries. The salary level also depends on the role upon repatriation obviously and as often times the assignment role is very independent the salary might be slightly lower back in the home organization. This can hamper the work adjustment as the following participant commented:

Package wise I had to downgrade my package when I returned to Finland. It was not seriously drastic but still it was not making it easier. I didn't expect it, but it happened, and I understood the reasoning.

However, as we can see from participant's comment he was provided with sufficient reasoning for the downgrading of his package and in the end, he seemed to be completely ok with the situation. Thus, the deduction might not cause any hardship to the work adjustment if the situation is handled well.

Another antecedent which was discovered in the study is reduced job autonomy. Often on assignments the expatriates have a rather high job autonomy in their positions and when they come back to the home organization the position often includes less autonomy. Job autonomy can refer to ability to take responsibility or authority to make decisions. The following participant said that his expectations about the new position after repatriation were correct and the role was clear to him. However, after one year the position changed due to organizational changes and thus his job autonomy changed as well. His statement describes well how important the job autonomy is for a repatriate who once has had the autonomy abroad already:

It was not filling my ambitions, during these three years in our home organization I felt very much internal politics. In Hong Kong or Istanbul, I had high level of independency and I could decide most of the things but coming back and closer to the head office then I was sort of losing that independency. After having the new role in the heading segment, I regained my independency, and I was even personally surprised that I could sort of recommit to our company.

This participant had already decided to leave the company mainly because of the reasons stated above. However, after receiving a satisfying position he was able to completely recommit to the company. The job autonomy was also discovered to have a positive effect on those repatriate's repatriation process who got a position with more autonomy than before. Three of the participants said that they got a promotion to a managerial position which they had not had earlier. All of these participants stated that their repatriation had gone smoothly without noticeable setbacks.

Knowing the colleagues from the new position helped some of the repatriates. One commented that he only had very positive expectations about the new position as he had been working in the same factory earlier already. Knowing the people increased the repatriate's confidence of returning and starting the new position as the following quote indicates:

I was of course very excited to take this new position and of course my colleagues in this new position in the domestic sales they were really super guys I know all the people there and for me I had only very positive expectations about the position.

To conclude, the work adjustment was found to be mostly affected by the re-entry position and when the re-entry position was confirmed. All the participants were satisfied with their re-entry positions when they came back. If issues appeared around the position, they were related more with organizational changes rather than incorrect re-entry position expectations. The repatriates felt that their international experience was appreciated in the home organization, and it has helped them with their career development. Cultural differences, income changes and transition time were identified as possibly negatively affecting factors. Knowing the re-entry colleagues was found to be supporting the work adjustment.

6.1.3. Interaction adjustment

The repatriates' interaction adjustment with work and personal life had in general been fast and easy. None of the participants brought up personal difficulties concerning interaction adjustment with work colleagues or personal life friends. Some issues were raised about the interaction adjustment of one repatriate's children.

The participants colleagues in the re-entry positions were found to be very similar minded with the repatriates which supported the interaction adjustment heavily. One repatriate described the atmosphere in their company as follows:

I have to say no, I didn't have culture shock with my colleagues. My colleagues they are really international people. No matter where you go around the world you repeat the company's name. It feels almost like you're one family that that people are very international, and our company is genuinely a very international company.

Another repatriate did not describe his colleagues' attitude towards his experiences as positively as the repatriate above. His colleagues were more negligent about his international experiences which surprised the repatriate slightly:

I almost little bit expected we would be somehow notified but colleagues in the house and others in the company acted like mostly like you were never elsewhere. It was like welcome back OK this is where we left and that's it. It almost sounded like people were not either interested or don't want to hear too much about it.

Similarly, as in the adjustment to general environment visiting and staying in connection with the home country friends and family strongly supports the interaction adjustment. Staying in connection enables the repatriates to stay up to date about the current events and news. All the repatriates stated that there was not actually any hardship to adjust back because they had stayed so closely in contact with everyone back in Finland. The following quote well summarizes the repatriates' thoughts and situation regarding interaction adjustment:

We had been in intense contact with Finland. Every summer we came here. I was here for a month and my wife and the kids two months, and they sort of retained the relationships with the friends. I can't recall that that would have been an issue at all.

One repatriate said that he did not have issues regarding adjustment to the home country friends and family, but his two young children had visible issues adjusting back. The children had especially difficulties finding new friends and a group of friends that best suits them. Especially his son had issues as he did not identify himself with most of the boys of his age:

Very hard to accommodate and he didn't know which group to belong to. Even though he had some friends same age boys in the same school, but he still didn't feel belonging to the HPK ice-hockey kind of stuff, and he had to find his own way. So, it took quite some years and emotionally it was quite hard for them.

Most of the repatriates' spouses were able to continue in their previous employers and none of the participants mentioned anything about their spouses' issues regarding interaction or in general. One repatriate commented his spouse's adjustment as follows:

She returned to teaching in our hometown and that in my understanding was very easy sort of jump to pack to the school world. She even returned to the same school and retired from there last year, so it was all fine.

To conclude, the interaction adjustment was quite effortless process for the repatriates themselves. Staying in close connection and visiting home country strongly facilitated the repatriates' interaction adjustment in Finland. Some repatriates had different expectations about their colleagues' reactions about their returning. However, this was more surprising for the repatriate rather than extremely negative issue. It was found that the participants' spouses in all adjusted well back to interacting with the Finnish friends and colleagues.

6.2. Organizational support practices

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the organizational support mechanisms which have been found helpful in the repatriation of the interviewees. In most of the organizations there were no established procedures to support the repatriation of their assignees. Two of the participants were working in the same company and in that company, there were clear process as the participant explains: "In my case when I was in China there were so many people from our company having assignment in China so there was already kind of established process what should be done when new people are coming and then what should be done when new people are leaving back." Some support practices were offered in other companies as well but in general the participants said that they did not expect any special support when returning. Generally, the supporting practices were related with relocation, tax and other payments and re-entry position related support by the HR.

Most of the participants' expectations were not high concerning the organizational repatriation support practices. Some of them stated that as their host country was so close to Finland, they did not feel that they should have received any support from the organization. One participant commented:

Well, it [repatriation] was not organized at all. We're talking about Copenhagen, and it is almost next door. I was actually flying every week between Helsinki and Copenhagen. And Skype was invented so we could be in touch. At that time my four-year absence from Finland did not show at all because it was so easy to do keep in touch.

Similarly, the following participant, stated that he didn't feel that he would have needed help in the repatriation. He decided himself to return to Finland after 14 years in Belgium and he compared moving back to Finland with moving within Belgium. He also did not feel that their HR could have helped him with the repatriation:

No, I didn't really get too much of an open help [from the company]. I didn't ask either because I didn't feel that I needed anything. I think I was more effective myself because our HR would have been in, well our European HR is in Turkey, so I don't think they could have helped me much either.

Helpful organizational support mechanisms were recognized from the data even though overall the participants first stated that they did not receive support and did not expect support upon repatriation either. After continuing the conversation different mechanisms could be identified and it appeared that these mechanisms were experienced helpful for the participants in the end. Usual supporting practices were related to housing and offering help with relocation of the personal belongings. Participants had practical help with importing furniture, possible vehicles, and other personal things. For most of the participants the company was paying for the relocation services. Some participants needed warehousing services in Finland and their company organized and paid for that as well. These supporting services were found to be easing the repatriates process of

moving back to Finland, but these practices were also partly taken for granted by the repatriates:

Obviously, the company took care of the removal matters, so the goods were carried to home country when we returned.

As the quote above indicates repatriates' expectations were partially very high regarding the relocation services. If the relocation services would have not been available, it could have influenced negatively on the adjustment of the repatriate.

For repatriates who had sold their houses in Finland the companies did not offer help with finding a new house. However, the companies helped the process of finding a new house in another means as the following participant explains:

When I left, we were living in Rauma and when we came back my new position was in Helsinki. It took a couple of years when my wife got also position from Helsinki and then we sold the house and bought a new one from Helsinki. Our company was pretty flexible there in the process. They were waiting for us, and I got paid for my travelling to Helsinki during the transition period.

Another commonly offered support practice found was assistance with the tax and social security payments as well as with other paperwork. Assuring that all the compulsory payments are done correctly can be confusing for the repatriate when returning to the home country as there are often bureaucracy involved. Thus, assistance with these issues were found beneficial. Another way of supporting was to adjust the repatriates' benefits and salary upon return as the following participant indicates:

There was a company car in Belgium and a company car in Finland with all the taxations. It is not very practical when I do don't drive here for two months. So those things were settled in a good way. It was like ok I don't need a car anymore so there is some compensation for giving up the company car and all those things.

It was discovered from the data that the support provided by an HR person was appreciated and found helpful. Some participants had one person from the company's HR to whom they could be in contact regarding any questions about the repatriation. This kind of support decreases the repatriate's feeling of uncertainty and thus, helps the repatriate to adjust better. HR was also assisting the repatriates with the practicalities of their re-entry position. How the available support is experienced is personal as can be seen from the following quotes from two repatriates who are working in the same company:

There was this one dedicated person who was looking after me for from the HR head office. HR's support in our company was really great that I had one person that I could ask all the questions.

There was HR person and she helped me getting organized in a new position to get the new working seat somewhere and such things.

When discussing about the repatriation support practices offered by the organization the participants highlighted the importance of the re-entry position. As mentioned, the re-entry position was found to be the most important factor for work adjustment in this study. The participants underlined the importance of receiving a proper re-entry position and stated that other supporting practices come secondary:

I would say that the most important thing is to get proper position. That was the only thing, and all the other things were pretty clear how those are happening'

To conclude, the main support practices offered by organizations found in this study are illustrated in the following figure. The provided repatriation support practices depended greatly about the organization. Relocation services were discovered to be common in all of the organizations in this study. The repatriates in this study were also all provided with proper re-entry position which was considered especially important. Most of the

repatriates received support with administrative practices and the others who did not, they did not consider it necessary. All the participants were able to visit home country regularly and quite frequently. In the next section the suggested support mechanisms which have not been yet provided by the companies are presented.

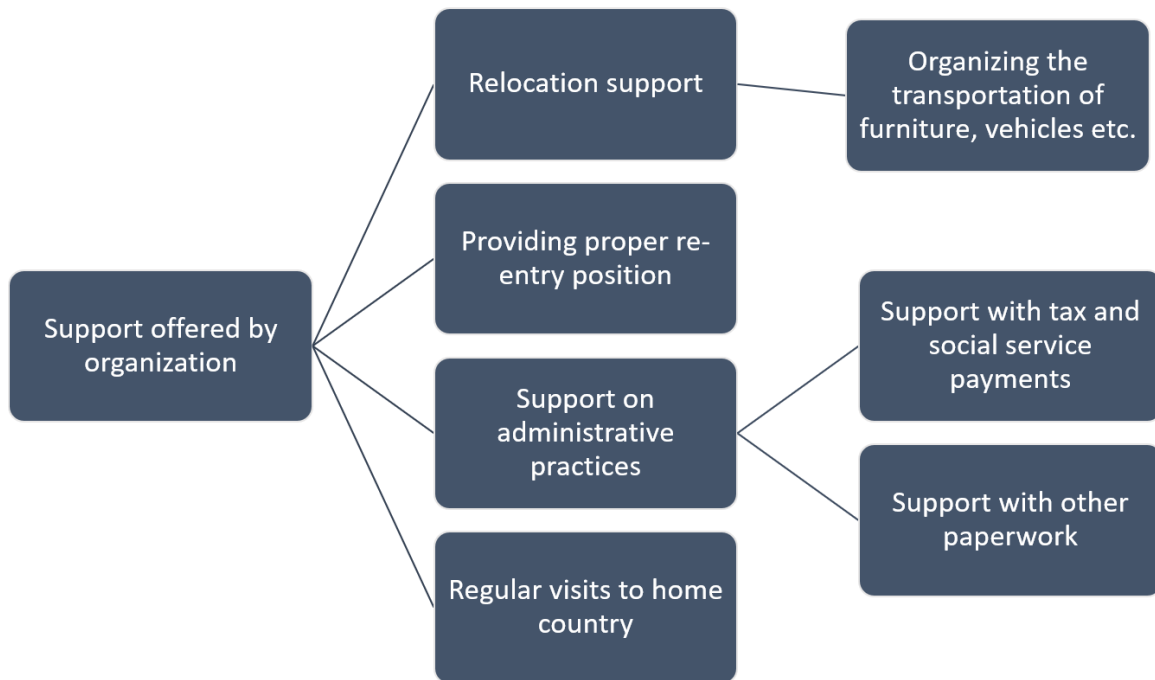


Figure 2 Repatriation support offered by the companies

6.2.1. Suggested organizational repatriation support practices

When it comes to suggested supporting practices most of the participants stated that they would have not needed more support addition to what they had received. However, the repatriates did have some adjustment issues when starting the re-entry position. They also expressed their dissatisfaction towards the prolonged re-entry position recruitment process. Thus, in this section the suggested organizational repatriation supporting practices will be presented.

The transition to the re-entry position was found to have an impact on how well the repatriate adjusts to the work environment in the home country. The transition together with other adjustment challenges can be affecting the repatriates work performance. Starting a new position with many new responsibilities can be straining for the repatriate but having the old positions responsibilities at the same time can become too much for the repatriate quite quickly. Thus, ensuring transition time as a supporting mechanism would have been advisable. Regarding the re-entry position, some transition time would have been desired by the repatriates as the following quote indicates:

There could have been maybe some type of support or transition period instead of this overlap.

As previously in this study has been stated receiving the re-entry position has been found to have the most substantial effect on the repatriates' work adjustment. Repatriates also presented their discontent regarding the prolonged timeframe of the confirmation process of the re-entry position. The repatriates acknowledged that they need to be extremely active and advertise themselves to ensure that they will have a re-entry position. However, some had initiated the process months prior to the return to home country and still got the confirmation of the re-entry position only couple of weeks before returning to the home country. This kind of prolonged uncertainty concerning the most important aspect of the repatriation adjustment can lead to issues in home country. Thus, it was discovered in the study that the repatriates would wish for more efficient re-entry position recruitment process as an organizational repatriation adjustment support practice. One suggestion was to have one HR person with whom the re-entry position process could be handled.

The distinction between expatriation and repatriation processes was given attention by the participants as well. Participants recognized the difference of going abroad fully supported and returning less supported. They quite neutrally commented on the difference and did not explicitly present it as a negative aspect as the following quote addresses:

When you go out there somebody organizes the housing, and you have special package for the housing and school etc. When you return, you are

*expected to find your house by yourself and sort everything out yourself.
I'm not saying that it's wrong but there is big gap between those two lives.*

This gap was suggested to be reduced by active repatriation supporting practices and surveying the repatriate's expectations regarding the repatriation process. The repatriates suggested that more active communication about the available support could increase the feeling of being supported also during the repatriation process similarly as in the expatriation process.

To conclude, it was discovered that the supporting practices were found to be helpful by the participants even though they stated that they did not expect much support when returning to Finland. Most of the supporting practices which were helpful were related to adjustment to work or general environment. Interaction adjustment was not supported by the organizations, but the participants did not need support with this section either. Participants stated that interaction adjustment went without issues. Participant's adjustment to general environment had gone well overall as it was well supported for example by different relocation services and arrangements. Suggested organizational repatriation support improvements were mainly related to support practices which would help the work adjustment.

7. CONCLUSION

This section concludes the research. First, the research is summarized and answers to the research objectives will be given. Second, theoretical and managerial implications will be presented. Lastly, the limitations of the study are identified and suggestions for future research are given.

7.1. Summary of the study

The main objectives of this study were to understand what kinds of challenges repatriates face and identify the means of organizational support deemed necessary by the repatriates. The study aimed to provide practical implications for organizations about the management of long-term repatriates. Despite of the previous research on repatriation adjustment, it remains to be a challenge for organizations. This study focused on investigating assigned long-term repatriates who have stayed overseas one year or more.

The study fulfilled its objectives and answers to the main objectives given to the study were identified. Regarding the first objective of the study, it was discovered in this study that repatriates faced most of their challenges in adjustment to work even though in general repatriates experienced that their repatriation process had gone smoothly. The identified issues in work adjustment were related with the re-entry position. Especially the timeframe of having a confirmation of a re-entry position was found to be important for the repatriates. Prolonged process of agreeing on re-entry process was found to have a negative effect on the work adjustment which supports the Suutari et al.'s (2002) findings. Adjustment to general environment was found to be easy because all participants visited home country frequently which is in line with previous research (Lazarova et al. 2001; Cox et al. 2013). Also staying in connection with home country friends and relatives and identifying Finland as home country was discovered to ease the adjustment to general environment. Interaction adjustment had gone without issues for the repatriates as well. In line with previous findings (Stroh et al. 2000; Lazarova et al. 2001; Howe-Walsh et al. 2017)

Staying in connection with home country colleagues and having like-minded colleagues in the re-entry position was discovered to support the interaction adjustment strongly.

Regarding the second objective of the study, it was discovered, in line with previous research, that by providing a proper re-entry position organization can significantly increase the possibility of a successful repatriation (Stroh 1995; Bailey et al. 2013). It became clear that repatriates value the re-entry position highly and the position needs to be sufficient to satisfy the requirements of the repatriate. In addition, relocation support and support on administrative practices provided by the company was experienced helpful. Organizations were flexible about the domestic location of the repatriates after return for couple of years to give the repatriates time to organize their housing in home country. Organizations provided repatriates possibility to visit home country regularly which repatriates identified helpful. When it comes to suggested repatriation support practices it was found that transition time from old position to the new one would be needed (Black et al. 1992; Lazarova et al. 2013; Van Gorp et al. 2017). The repatriates also acknowledge the difference between leaving to in international assignment and coming back. It was suggested that the gap between these processes should be decreased to ease the adjustment to home country.

7.2. Managerial implications

This section summarizes the organizational support practices which were considered helpful in the long-term assignees' repatriation adjustment. The findings are based on Finnish repatriates meaning the findings cannot be generalized to all repatriates as they are. However, the findings might be useful in organizations from other countries as well.

The study indicates that systematic repatriation management can facilitate the repatriates' adjustment back to home country. Based on the findings it is advisable for the organizations to organize the repatriate a proper re-entry position. This was found to affect strongly on the repatriates' adjustment to work. Repatriates have acquired new skills and knowledge during their assignment thus their requirements for the re-entry position have likely changed. Through e.g., career planning can be secured that the employee and employer are aware about the requirements of the re-entry position.

Frequent visits to home country have been found to positively affect the repatriation. Thus, organizations should provide the assignee a possibility to regularly visit home country and actively stay in connect with them. This will help preventing the repatriate alienating from the home country. Supporting the repatriate practically with the relocation was found to be helpful in this study. Thus, organizations should provide logistical help moving the repatriates' personal belongings to the home country. Repatriation always generates questions and thus having a person from HR department with whom the repatriate can discuss open questions is suggested.

It was discovered in this study that repatriates would have wished for transition time when changing from assignment position to re-entry position in home country. It is advisable for the organization to ensure repatriate has time to settle to the new position and ensure that there will not be an overlap when changing to the new position. Repatriates also noticed the vast difference between expatriate support and repatriate support. This gap should be decreased by providing more open support in the repatriation stage as well.

7.3. Theoretical implications

This research increases the general knowledge of long-term repatriates' adjustment. The first part of the theoretical framework of the study was based on a widely adapted Black et al.'s (1992) theoretical repatriation adjustment model together with prior research of the topic. The second part of the theoretical framework of this study was based on the research of organizational repatriation adjustment support practices. The repatriation adjustment literature needs more knowledge on what challenges repatriates face and how organizations should manage the repatriation process. This study contributes to this gap in the literature by broadening understanding on these entities and thus, enabling more successful management of repatriation.

7.4. Limitations of the study

In this chapter the limitations of the study are presented. As studies typically, this research has limitations. The sample of this study restricts the generalizability of the findings as all participants are Finnish male assignees. Thus, the findings cannot be generalized to

cover all long-term repatriates. Differences are likely to occur between different countries as cultural aspects effect how situations are experienced. In addition, female repatriates might be experiencing divergent challenges in repatriation adjustment. Moreover, due to the time restrictions of this master's thesis the study was completed as cross-sectional research. Thus, the data was collected within a quite short period of time. Through a longitudinal approach more valuable and accurate information about the development and changes of the studied phenomenon could have been found.

7.5. Suggestions for further research

Basing on the limitations the research and previous repatriation research, suggestions for future research are given in the following chapter. Due to the limited number of longitudinal research within the repatriation literature, more studies incorporating the whole development of repatriation process, should be conducted. These studies would provide further insight to the issues and would show how the expectations develop and change over time. For example, longitudinal research measuring expatriate's intent to leave prior to the assignment as well as after the assignment should be conducted.

The number of female expatriates is growing. However, most of the repatriation adjustment studies are conducted with male repatriates. Further insight is needed to female repatriates' adjustment and challenges they face when returning to home country. In addition, research is needed concerning repatriate's family. Especially repatriate's children and the challenges they face should be further studied. Some participants in this study stated that their children struggled after returning to home country. Thus, this should be investigated further as family matters often effect on the repatriate's adjustment as well.

Many organizations have started to send their employees to short-term assignment rather than on long-term assignments. Thus, more knowledge about the short-term assignment repatriation is needed to understand that process. Lastly, more studies are needed regarding the objectives of this study. The most critical organizational support practices need to be identified through a longitudinal study with wider and more diverse sample.

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Appendix. Interview guide

Background questions:

- 1) How old are you?
- 2) What is your educational background?
- 3) For how long have you been employed by the company? How long before the assignment?
- 4) How many assignments have you completed?
- 5) How many years have you been on international assignments over your whole career?
- 6) How long was your most recent assignment?
 - a) What was the position? What kind of work did you do there?
 - b) Where were you located during the assignment?
 - c) Were there any changes in the length of the assignment? If yes, how did it change?
 - d) When did you repatriate?
- 7) Are you still working with the company for which you completed the most recent international assignment?
- 8) What is your current position?
- 9) Do you have a spouse or children?
 - a) Did they accompany you in the assignments?
- 10) How was your international assignment in general?

Repatriation adjustment:

- 11) Could you describe your experiences with repatriation?
- 12) What did you expect from returning to your home country?
 - a) How were those expectations met?
- 13) How do you find life in Finland after spending many years abroad? Has something been especially easy or difficult?
- 14) How did you readjust...
 - a) ... to your job

- b) ... to the organization
 - c) ... to interaction with home-country colleagues and friends
 - d) ... to the general environment and culture of Finland?
- 15) Did you find something especially easy or difficult in the adjustment in general?
- 16) Anything to add about repatriation adjustment?

Organizational support:

- 17) Who was involved in the repatriation process?
- 18) Could you describe your experiences with those involved in the repatriation process?
- 19) Did you receive support before repatriation, if yes, what kind of support?
- 20) Did you receive support after repatriation, if yes, what kind of support?
- 21) How did you expect the repatriation process would be organized by the employer?
- a) How were those expectations met?
- 22) Could you describe the effects of successful and failing organizational support for repatriation?
- a) Was there something you were especially satisfied or unsatisfied?
- 23) How would you improve the repatriation process?