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**COMPARISON OF EXPATRIATION AND INPATRIATION ASSIGNMENTS
FROM EMPLOYEES' PERSPECTIVE: A CASE OF UNITED STATES STEEL
CORPORATION**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS	Page
LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES	5
ABSTRACT	7
1. INTRODUCTION.....	9
1.1. Research background	9
1.2. The purpose of the study	10
1.3. Research question and objectives	12
1.4. Assumptions and limitations	14
1.5. Structure of the study	15
2. MANAGEMENT OF INTERNATIONAL ASSIGNMENTS.....	17
2.1. Introduction of international assignments	17
2.1.1. The importance of international assignments	17
2.1.2. The difference between expatriation and inpatriation	18
2.2. Description of different phases of international assignments	21
2.2.1. Selection process.....	21
2.2.2. Preparations.....	24
2.2.3. During the assignment	27
2.2.4. Repatriation.....	31
2.3. Problematic issues of international assignments and their effect on the employee's performance.....	33
2.3.1. Spouse- and family-related problems	34
2.3.2. Career-planning issues	35
2.3.3. International assignment failure.....	36
2.4. Theoretical framework for international assignments	38
3. CULTURAL DIMENSIONS.....	40
3.1. General definition of culture	40
3.2. Hofstede's dimensions.....	40
3.3. Country analysis and comparison	43
3.3.1. General culture.....	43
3.3.2. Business culture	46
3.4. Theoretical framework for cultural dimensions.....	48

4. METHODOLOGY	50
4.1. Research approach	50
4.2. Data collection	51
4.3. Data analysis	55
4.4. Reliability and validity of the study	56
5. RESULTS	59
5.1. Issues regarding the international assignment management.....	59
5.1.1. Before assignment.....	59
5.1.2. During and after assignment	65
5.2. Cross-cultural differences	73
5.3. Expatriates' vs. inpatriates' needs and expectations	77
5.3.1. Work adjustment.....	77
5.3.2. General adjustment	78
5.4. Final impressions	83
6. CONCLUSION	86
6.1. Discussion	86
6.2. Implications of the study and contribution for the company	89
6.3. Limitations and suggestions for future research	92
7. REFERENCES	94
8. APPENDIX 1	104
9. APPENDIX 2	107

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES	Page
Figure 1. Structure of the study	16
Figure 2. U-Curve Theory of adjustment	28
Figure 3. Hofstede's dimensions comparison	73

LIST OF TABLES	Page
Table 1. General country overview	43
Table 2. Overview of interviewed expatriates	53
Table 3. Overview of interviewed inpatriates	53
Table 4. Expatriates' evaluation of management practices	72
Table 5. Inpatriates' evaluation of management practices	72

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: In order to succeed in a globalizing marketplace and gain competitive advantage over their competitors, multinational corporations often use expatriate and inpatriate assignments. There are existing theories and guidelines on how to effectively manage these assignments, however, corporations not always adhere to them. Moreover, they often fail to recognize different needs of expatriates and inpatriates. This thesis therefore aims to examine how United States Steel corporation manages its expatriate and inpatriate assignments from the perspective of these employees, and offer improvement of these practices based on empirical evidence.

Design/methodology/approach: The thesis reviews existing research on international assignment management and cultural theories. For the data collection, qualitative approach was used, with semi-structured interviews carried out with five expatriates and five inpatriates. Respondents' answers were then compared and contrasted to the theoretical framework of ideal international assignment management.

Findings: The results show that while prior to assignment, U. S. Steel shows enough support and proper preparation of its employees for their stay abroad, this activity is less prominent during the stay, and almost entirely missing during the repatriation process. The company does not seem to utilize the knowledge its employees gained during their assignment very well. Similarly, quite large differences were observed in company's management of expatriates and inpatriates; the expatriates were receiving far more support and guidance than inpatriates.

Research limitations/implications: Since this thesis is carried out as a case study, its results have limited applicability to other companies' cases. Similarly, generalizations cannot be drawn based on results of this thesis. However, it has direct implications for U. S. Steel, which can improve its international assignment management based on the suggestions of its employees

Originality/value: This thesis offers a look at international assignment management from an employee perspective, and brings directly applicable results for U. S. Steel.

KEYWORDS: International assignment management, Expatriate, Inpatriate, Cultural dimensions, Organizational support, Case study

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Research background

In the globalizing business world, multinational corporations (MNCs) use international assignments more and more often. The reasons are multiple—from personal career development of selected employee, to benefits for the whole company, such as acquiring new networks and improving cooperation between two units in different countries. There are many issues that corporations need to face and organize, when they are dealing with the international assignments management. In this case, the human resources management plays a fundamental role. When managing expatriates and inpatriates, firms need to analyze and coordinate certain matters and problems that arise along the way - from business expectations and assignments, down to the employee's subjective issues, such as family and life comfort, to ensure job satisfaction of the employee and of the company as well.

There is a number of issues that need to be considered before, during, and also after the expatriate assignment. In fact, HR must select those that are perceived as the most suitable to achieve the desired objectives of a international assignment, and this analysis should be conducted quite carefully, as the managing of expatriates and inpatriates represents a high cost for the company (Björkman & Holopainen 2005: 37). Most of the times, expatriates and inpatriates are those who meet certain standard criteria, such as professional, communicational and relational competences, cultural adaptability, previous foreign experience and family situation (Evans et al. 2011:143).

A fairly large number of studies have also attempted to resolve the issue of whether and to what extent intercultural training makes a discernible difference to the work performance of employees abroad. Most have answered the question in the affirmative. Some authors, such as Kealey & Protheroe (1996), dedicated their whole paper just to review the empirically-based literature on the effectiveness of intercultural training for expatriate and inpatriate workers, to discuss its strengths and weaknesses, and to propose some remedies for the deficiencies. Forster (2000) also notes the importance of language and cross-cultural training for both employees and their dependants.

Personal life and family situation of the employee also plays a considerable role in the process. Single males used to be preferred for these assignments, since the employers did not want to spend extra resources, related to the spouse and family relocation and

acclimatization. However, companies do not and cannot be discriminating employees on the basis of family situation, therefore they are coming up with various forms of support that would facilitate the decision-making of the employee, and also his family life in new location.

Repatriation is an important issue, which is often severely overlooked, both by employer and by employee. Not having a suitable place to occupy after return, not being able to utilize the knowledge and networks gained abroad, loss of social status and financial benefits associated with international assignment, or even failure to guarantee a job in the home organization after the end of the assignment are only some of the threats that all persons involved must face. (Evans et al. 2011: 150)

These issues are difficult ones to tackle, as each career and each international assignment is unique, therefore no unified theory that would fit every case can be developed and applied globally. However, there is a certain framework, and if companies and employees adhere to these general instructions (of course, modifying them accordingly, based on each case), the whole process of expatriation and inpatriation might run more smoothly, with less obstacles, and lower rate of failure. However, there is one thing to keep in mind - we are dealing with people, and to predict human behavior is almost as tricky as to predict weather. Everyone is a different individual, and sometimes, despite everyone's best efforts, the international assignment fails.

Since this is such a broad topic, covering many issues that can be widely modified from case to case, this thesis is constructed as a case study of single company - United States Steel Corporation, the largest integrated steel producer headquartered in Pittsburgh, USA, and its subsidiary, United States Steel Košice, Slovakia.

1.2. The purpose of the study

There are literally hundreds of scientific articles debating the international assignments topic. According to Evans et al. (2011: 137), the use of expatriates is as old as international business, and in past twenty years, the research has covered practically every aspect of this issue, as mentioned above. There is research focusing on each problem separately, besides already mentioned authors for example Leskovich, Tung, and others, but despite using empirical data, most of the papers tend to be quite broad

and make many generalizations. Then there are articles with more narrow focus, discussing practical issues of expatriate assignment in a specific country, and how these problems are being dealt with, for example Seak & Enderwick (2008), Wu & Ang (2011), Hsi-An et al. (2010) and many others.

All these works provide a good theoretical background, a sort of skeleton of rules and knowledge that is supposed to make international assignments more easily manageable. However, each case is different, even two companies operating in the same industry and on the same market, therefore this research plans to concentrate on practices of just one company in detail.

Moreover, it can be seen that most of the research focuses on how companies perceive and tackle problems connected with international assignments. Not much attention is paid to the employee himself, and how he sees, understands and values the actions of his employer in this matter. This is where a research gap opens; let us disregard the motives of the company for certain actions, and let us look at the results from the employee's point of view - how was he approached with the offer of a international assignment? Was he given a choice, or was it simply announced to him that he will go? How did he feel about the offer - would he benefit from this assignment, was it open to negotiation, did it have clearly stated contract terms, such as salary, length of assignment, etc.? What (if any) preparation did he get before leaving for the assignment? Did the company take into consideration his family situation, and how did it resolve it? What kind of support and perks did the employee get? Was there a clear contingency plan for after the end of his assignment?

These questions, and many others, can and need to be looked at not only from company, but also from employee perspective, because after all - he is the one primarily responsible for success or failure of the assignment. Post-assignment debriefing of the employee - though being a good practice - is often lacking in large MNCs, where focus on the employee is not as big as in medium- and small-sized enterprises. Lots of valuable feedback and rapport is lost this way, which can lead to major discrepancies; the company continues its seemingly effective management procedures, while employees are struggling with problems that company has no knowledge about. The employer, operating from the management's point of view, can go only so far in helping the employee by facilitating all these issues, and this research aims to take a look at how effective these actions really are. Based on employees' reactions and comments, it will bridge this gap in communication, and propose a way of making the expatriate

management practices even more effective - all this carried out as a case study of a specific company.

Another area, where the research is lacking, and which can be utilized here, is a question of inpatriation. It is rarely mentioned, for example, if we search the International Journal of Human Resource Management, we get only 7 results for 'inpatriate', but 271 for 'expatriate'. Even if inpatriation is mentioned, most authors consider it to be almost the same as expatriation, even though the name itself suggest a difference, and we can intuitively see that relocating from headquarters (HQ) to subsidiary, which is often located in less developed region, entails completely different problems than the opposite process. Geographical and cultural distance is a general way of looking at this problem, however, often it is the small, everyday things - shops, traffic, schools, etc., that can be very frustrating, and unless the employee gets some assistance in the beginning so he can get used to his new home, the transition process can be very difficult, and in the end, costly for everyone, since dealing with these problems will prevent the employee from focusing fully on his working tasks.

The case study of United States Steel Corporation would connect these two gaps in existing research. Since it widely uses both expatriation and inpatriation assignments, it would be possible to compare them, and take a look at them from employee perspective. As a result, we would gain quite a compact picture of how the company's actions are perceived by its employees, and get an answer to a question in which areas expatriation and inpatriation differ, and whether the company treats these assignments equally or not. This study could then serve a practical purpose as well, providing a necessary feedback for the company, and help it to build on experiences of previous expatriates and inpatriates to improve the whole mechanism and management of international assignments for the future undertakers.

1.3. Research question and objectives

The success of any company activity is from a large part depending on employees, and a happy employee is a productive employee. This is probably twice as true, when it comes to international assignments, since the employee is put not only into unfamiliar working environment, but also has to adapt to completely new life routine. The support from the company is crucial, especially prior to and shortly after departure, since the "first impression" and the initial phase of the assignment will often influence the rest of

it. If employee feels that he is thrown into deep waters and expected to learn to swim by himself, his attitude towards his employer will probably change - why should he be trying his best for the company, which left him alone, when he needed it the most? This is a primary and intuitive understanding of human and employer-employee relationships, and this research aims to confirm it.

Second part of the problem is the expatriate vs. inpatriate issue. In this case, two radically different countries will be compared - USA and Slovakia, world superpower and small post-communist country in Central Europe. These two places are different in all kinds of ways - economy, culture, infrastructure, language, customs and traditions, etc. It can be claimed that relocating to USA, a country with quite well-known language and culture all across the globe, is easier than relocating to a small country, never before heard of by most of Americans, with only five million people, speaking a language that is very difficult to learn. Therefore, it would make sense for the company to provide more help (in ways of preparation, guidance and counseling before and during the assignment) for expatriates, coming from Pittsburgh HQ to Košice subsidiary, than the other way around.

Based on the abovementioned assumptions, research question can be formed as follows: *"What are the differences between expatriate and inpatriate assignments, and how does the support and assistance, provided by United States Steel Corporation to its expatriates and inpatriates, differ in eyes of these employees?"*

The hypothesis about the results of this research is following: *"Both groups of employees will note that United States Steel Corporation provides more assistance and support to expatriates, i.e. Americans coming to Slovakia, than to inpatriates, i.e. Slovaks coming to USA."*

Couple of more detailed objectives are defined, to help answer the research question and prove or disprove the hypothesis:

- To identify and compare the needs and expectations of expatriates and inpatriates
- To analyze and compare the working and general life culture in USA and Slovakia

- To study the expatriates' and inpatriates' experiences and impressions from their assignments and their perception of help (or lack thereof) received from the company

1.4. Assumptions and limitations

This study will take a look on employee's perspective of company's management of international assignments. Since this issue is difficult to be quantified, a qualitative approach in form of interviews with former expatriates and inpatriates was chosen. The answers given by interviewed employees are a personal account of their experiences from international assignment at the same place (either Pittsburgh, USA, or Košice, Slovakia), so while conclusions can be drawn regarding these specific assignments for this specific company, by no means should any generalizations be made, looking to apply findings of this research on HR management practices of companies operating in different countries and industries, without making suitable adjustments first.

Secondly, the composition of groups of interviewed employees is going to present a certain liability to the objectivity of the study, as it will be further discussed in the methodology chapter. The assumptions drawn from the interviewees' answers are not going to be suitable for making generalized conclusions. It is sufficient for the purposes of this study, though, since its goal is not to create generally applicable guidelines for expatriate and inpatriate management, but rather to tailor a specific solution for U. S. Steel Corporation.

Thirdly, the cultural and sociological aspect played a major role in devising questions used in the interviews, as well as in evaluating the results and the management approach by the company. By taking into account Hofstede's approach, one of the most well-known and cited cultural theories, this research will try to take the employee's answers and look at them through the prism of this cultural theory, to be able to determine whether any possible complaints are justified, and whether the employer's approach and management style takes these differences into account.

1.5. Structure of the study

This thesis is to be divided into six chapters in a logical order of sequence. The first chapter, concluded by this overview, has introduced the general topic and provided a background of the study. Based on this brief overview, it has identified a research gap and provided a purpose for this study. A research question with more detailed objectives have been drawn to provide answers for the hypothesis and to fulfill the stated purpose. The assumptions that this study is taking, as well as possible limitations, have been listed.

The second chapter is devoted to management of international assignments. It will take a look at the relevant theories and their importance. Firstly, it will discuss expatriation and inpatriation as a whole, moving on to their specific parts and issues connected with each phase of the assignment. Based on this literature review, a theoretical framework suggesting an ideal approach to international assignment management will be drawn.

The third chapter discusses the cultural aspect of this issue. Hofstede's cultural dimensions will be presented, followed by a general and working life analysis of the two countries - Slovakia and USA. Similarly to previous chapter, theoretical framework will be created, predicting the impact of culture on international assignments, and thus enabling the comparison between expatriate and inpatriate assignments.

The fourth chapter will contain the description and justification for methodology used in writing this thesis. It will elaborate on data collection, as well as on their reliability and validity, identifying possible causes for error. The fifth chapter then presents the empirical data and their interpretation, followed by a concluding sixth chapter, which will summarize and discuss the results, show their practical implication for the company, and also note the limitations of the study and suggestions for further research and improvements.

The structure of the whole study and connection between specific chapters can be seen in Figure 1 on the following page.

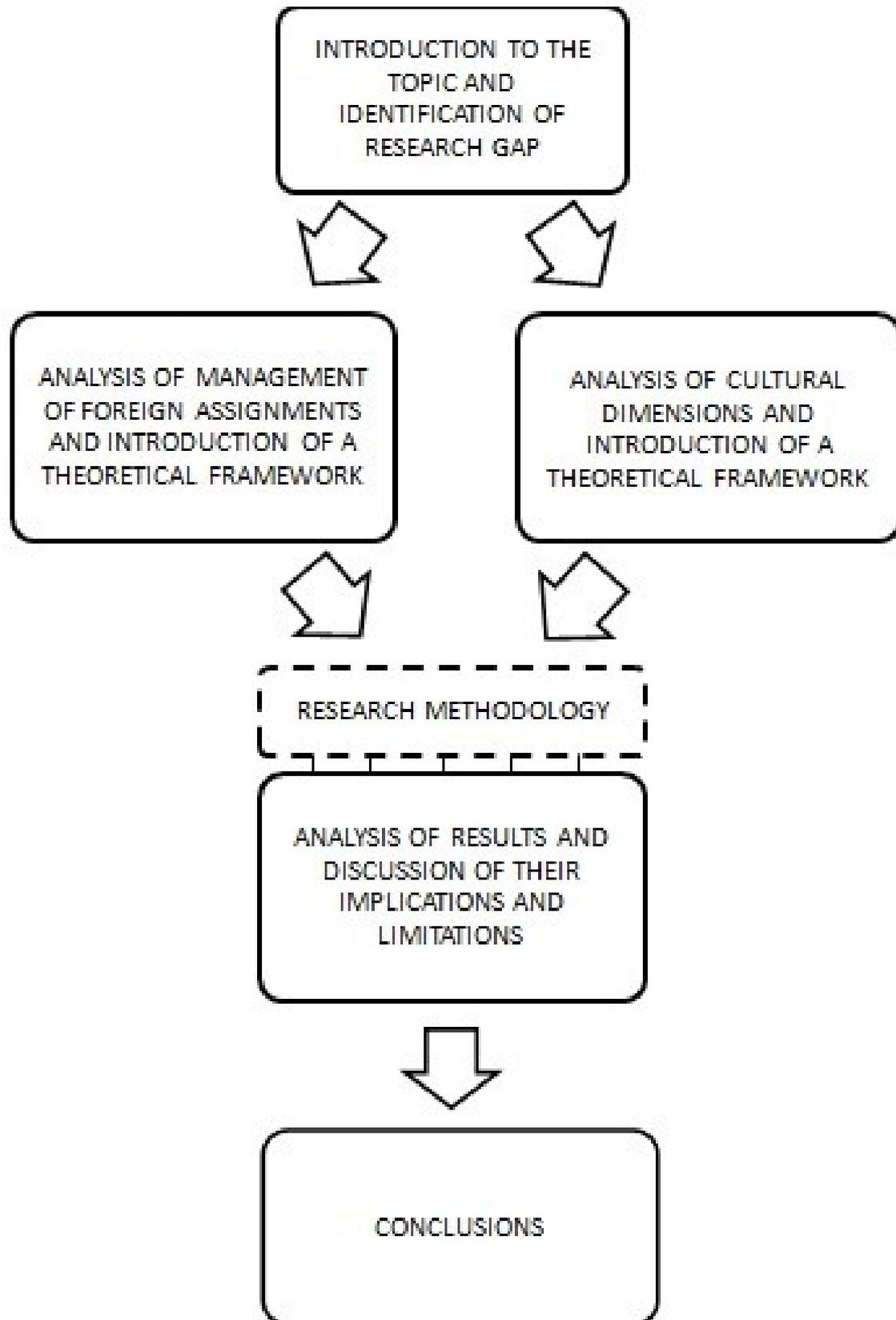


Figure 1. Structure of the study

2. MANAGEMENT OF INTERNATIONAL ASSIGNMENTS

2.1. Introduction of international assignments

2.1.1. The importance of international assignments

In the age of globalization, effective management of an international workforce, spread throughout subsidiaries and divisions around the globe, is becoming increasingly important for the competitive advantage of MNCs. Finding, training and retaining skilled international talents is one of the key issues for HR management. For employees, international assignments also hold a great significance for various reasons, and therefore these assignments, and their effective management, is a topic that concerns both employers and employees alike, since it is in their mutual interest.

MNCs use international assignments mainly for subsidiary control and co-ordination, skills and knowledge transfer, and managers' development (Black, Gregersen, Mendenhall & Stroh 1999; Bonache et al. 2001; Harzing 2001; Stahl & Cerdin 2004). Pinto et al. (2012: 2297) regard international assignments as a key success factor of an international venture, which in the short term strengthens the coordination and control between HQ and subsidiaries, helping the alignment of separate divisions with the overall corporate goals, thus improving the performance, competitiveness and profitability. The long-term benefits of successful international assignments include the transfer of talents and know-how, expansion of the social networks with partners and other individuals in foreign countries, and overall improvement of the company's intellectual capital.

From the viewpoint of individuals, both push and pull factors seem to be influential on the willingness to accept an international assignment. Pull factors refer to the positive motives associated with the benefits of an international experience such as learning and development opportunities. Push factors refer to less positive motives, such as the lack of an adequate position in the home company (Pinto et al. 2012: 2296). From the professional standpoint, these assignments provide an invaluable opportunity for career development, and usually they also follow the organizational goals (e.g. a need for a better subsidiary control, transferring know-how, etc.). However, international assignments hold probably even greater value for employee's personal development, and the long-lasting benefits of being subjected to a different culture also affect his

family, which in this - albeit indirect - way can also gain cross-cultural experience and competence, nowadays so coveted on the job market.

2.1.2. The difference between expatriation and inpatriation

Inpatriation is still less prominent topic, and therefore in international assignment management literature, many authors refer to these assignments purely as to expatriate assignments, and subsequently, to the expatriate assignments management. Most of the theories, e.g. regarding selection, preparation and repatriation process, therefore uses only the term "expatriate", though they are applicable to inpatriates as well. This shows the general neglect of researchers regarding inpatriate assignments, when in fact they are equally important as expatriate assignments.

The existing research on inpatriation is still rather scarce. Michael G. Harvey is the most prominent name in inpatriate research, co-authoring most of the key articles on the topic. These articles focus on the role of inpatriates in building a successful globalization strategy, the challenges that inpatriates have to face, issues associated with staffing these global positions, and strategies aimed at increasing the probability of success of inpatriate assignments (Harvey et al. 1999a; Harvey et al. 1999b; Harvey et al. 2000; Harvey et al. 2011; Reiche 2011; Moeller & Harvey 2011).

Multinational corporations have traditionally utilized the expatriation of home country staff as a means to effectively control and manage their local business units (Bonache & Brewster 2001; Reiche 2006). Recently, inpatriation is gaining interest as global business environments change rapidly, and the companies are starting to recognize the importance of inpatriation, as they seem to be struggling in identifying and hiring qualified globally oriented staff that has the ability to address the expanding competitive needs and to develop global cooperative relationships. Although there has been a tendency to use expatriate assignments to compete in the global marketplace, companies cannot wait for expatriates to acquire the necessary language skills, cultural sensitivity and global vision, and rely on them to also retain the capability to remain observant and receptive of local specifics (Harvey et al. 1999b: 39). Inpatriation therefore represents an innovative means of developing managers and using them as a strategic resource in formulating and implementing a global strategic plan (Harvey et al. 2000: 153). Inpatriates' ability to think globally and act locally can be instrumental in developing a global core competency for an organization, though utilizing their cultural and cognitive diversity (Harvey et al. 1999b: 48).

Inpatriates represent *"host or third-country nationals sent to the home-country organization on a semi-permanent to permanent assignment with the intent to provide knowledge and expertise by serving as a 'linking-pin' to the global marketplace"* (Moeller & Harvey 2011: 2). While most researchers are focusing on the transfer of staff, and thus knowledge, from the corporate HQ to the MNC periphery (expatriate assignments), more recent research has emphasized the role of subsidiary staff in providing knowledge benefits for the wider MNC. Specifically, employees who are transferred from MNC's foreign subsidiaries to the HQ (inpatriate assignments), may serve as a crucial mechanism of importing local knowledge from MNC subsidiaries into the HQ (Reiche 2011: 365). Compared to the expatriates, who usually occupy strategic managerial positions and are dispatched to the subsidiaries with an intent of assuming a leading role, inpatriate staff clearly form a heterogeneous group and differ from expatriate staff in terms of their positions, strengths, and roles (Heejin 2013: 327). This makes the purpose, goals, discourse, and ultimately the management of expatriate and inpatriate assignments somewhat different. It is frequently noted that only few expatriate managers can successfully cross cultural barriers and become fully accepted by the host country managers and employees (Harvey et al. 1999a: 52).

Compared to that, it is easier for inpatriates to enter and adapt to an usually well-known major culture, in which the corporate HQ is located. Besides the possible technological skills and superiority (especially in manufacturing, MNCs often choose to establish their subsidiaries in regions that have prerequisites and affinity for that particular field of operation), the inpatriates also have a thorough knowledge of inner workings and specifics of the local markets. This knowledge is invaluable for the HQ in devising their organizational strategy and at the same time assuring the consistency and coordination of the subsidiary's activities with the global strategic direction (Harvey et al. 1999a: 51). One could say that expatriate and inpatriate assignments are complementing each other, and only proper application of both can help the company to gather the collective skills to compete globally.

Harvey et al. (1999b: 40) predict that the number of expatriate assignments will decrease, and number of inpatriate assignments will increase as a result of companies expanding their operations to emerging markets in developing countries, where a great cultural distance between home and host country renders the assignment more difficult and less attractive for expatriates from developed countries. The cost of assignment, adjustment problems and rate of failure of expatriates are much greater compared to

inpatriates, who have the cultural and social background to adjust and address the problems in emerging markets more effectively.

Despite these advantages, there are still challenges associated with inpatriate management. Due to differences between expatriates and inpatriates (in business education, communication skills, different motivation, cultural differences in social classes and organizational structure, etc.), the process and support infrastructures needed for a successful relocation of inpatriate to the parent organization are different than those required for relocation of expatriate to host country. Expatriate managers will experience a relative comfort of their company's corporate culture even in a foreign country because of their status of coming from the HQ. This status and authority will diminish differences between parent and host operations, and the adjustment will not be as stressful and complex as for inpatriates. The inpatriates will have to acclimate to both external and organizational environment, which in many cases is radically different, leading to initial disorientation. The compounding of stress and likelihood of family culture shock only emphasizes the need to provide proper cross-cultural training that would even out the differences before inpatriates relocate to the HQ (Harvey et al. 1999b: 42).

Harvey et al. (1999a) and Harvey et al. (2001) note that to overcome these challenges, proactive inpatriate program, which would focus on building trust and positive relationship between the employee and his organization is fundamental for a successful inpatriation assignment. *"Providing adequate social support for inpatriate managers and their families is an essential element in implementing a successful inpatriate relocation program"* (Harvey 1999b: 45). There are four types of social support, which should be provided both by inpatriate's social network and by his organization:

- 1) *Emotional support* - providing trust, empathy, attention and affection
- 2) *Instrumental support* - providing time, resources or skills
- 3) *Informational support* - providing facts, opinions and advice
- 4) *Appraisal support* - providing valuation and feedback on performance (Harvey et al. 1999b: 45-46).

The organization will receive returns on its investment in a social support in a form of increased productivity, reduced turnover and greater willingness to accept global relocations. These efforts might seem only auxiliary, but the fact is that the companies will not be able to compete against major global competitors effectively without having

their top-class managers located strategically throughout the global marketplace. These managers, without the company assistance, may not be able to successfully handle all obstacles that come along with inpatriation process, and they might underperform in their duties. As a result, both the employee and the company will be negatively affected by not taking a proactive stance towards inpatriation relocation and adjustment program (Harvey et al. 1999b: 47).

2.2. Description of different phases of international assignments

2.2.1. Selection process

In practice, the responsibility for the success of international assignment starts long before the employee gets dispatched abroad. Human resource managers must select those that are perceived as the most suitable to achieve the target of international assignment, and this analysis should be conducted quite carefully, as the managing of these employees represents a high cost for the company (Björkman & Holopainen 2005: 37).

Most of the times, expatriates and inpatriates are those who meet certain standard criteria, such as professional, communication and relation competences, cultural adaptability, previous foreign experience and family situation (Evans et al. 2011:143). Björkman and Holopainen (2005: 40-42) identify the following personal characteristics of successful expatriates and inpatriates: *stress tolerance*, *relational ability*, *communicational ability*, *previous international experience*, *cross-cultural training* and *cultural distance*. However, not even a careful following of these criteria offers a full assurance that the international assignment will be completed successfully. This is due to the fact that there is no real guarantee on how each individual employee will adapt to the new situation, nor can human resource management forecast how the circumstances of the assignment or the employee himself might change. Nevertheless, these risks can be somewhat mitigated by selecting a candidate that fulfills the abovementioned standards, and the risk of an unsuccessful international assignment should be reduced.

Let us analyze the criteria individually, looking at *stress tolerance* first: Undertaking a international assignment has a substantial effect on a person's social and professional life. Moving into a new cultural environment involves many stress provoking factors, such as uncertainty and ambiguity. It may also produce a feeling of not having control

over the situation, and such " [...] *forced exposure to alien cultural environment can put people under heavy stress. A person's ability to deal with potentially stressful situations has indeed been proposed as an important determinant of adjustment and performance.*" (Björkman & Holopainen 2005: 40)

Relational ability refers to the capability of the employee to interact with the foreign business environment and new colleagues (Tung 1981: 69). A good interaction is vital for the whole international assignment, since usually these assignments are performed with a goal of exchanging a know-how or improving a cooperation between the two business units. The first days at the new workplace are usually crucial; if the employee takes the advantage of - or even actively requests - a helping hand to introduce him to the local business practices and behavior, his adjustment will be quicker and more effective, he will feel more appreciated and approach his tasks with a self-confidence. (Björkman & Holopainen 2005: 40)

Communicational ability is also crucial to a successful completion of international assignment. While commonly understood as a language fluency, communicational ability in this case refers rather to the ability of successfully communicating with the host nationals and the expatriate willingness to blend with the new environment and get involved in the new community. *"The more the expatriate gets involved in communication the better the person can understand the host country culture and nationals. This increased understanding will reduce uncertainty, and increase adjustment and job performance."* (Björkman & Holopainen 2005: 41)

Previous international experience enables the employee to predict what the international assignment will involve. It provides him with more realistic expectations, and as a result, the uncertainty decreases and adjustment is easier (Björkman & Holopainen 2005: 41). It can also serve to the management as a form of forecast on how a person will behave during the assignment. One critique of this point could be that each international assignment is highly specific, therefore the performance of the employee is going to differ; however, it can still help the employee to determine whether an employee is suitable to face another reality different from his own.

Cross-cultural training provides the expatriate with information on the host country and helps the expatriate to form realistic expectations. This increased knowledge on the host country reduces uncertainty and facilitates adjustment (Caligiuri et al. 2001: 358). However, cross-cultural training can have two various outcomes. On one hand, it has

been proven to be positively related to performance on the assignment and negatively related to the premature termination of the assignment (Caligiuri et al. 2001: 358), but on the other hand, it can be negatively related to adjustment to the new environment (Black & Gregersen 1991: 461). This can be attributed to expatriates believing – after a short, relatively superficial pre-departure training session – that they already know the host environment. The shock sustained after arriving to their new location and realizing that their knowledge is inaccurate or insufficient may produce adjustment problems that are greater than those of expatriates who received no pre-departure training whatsoever (Björkman & Holopainen 2005: 42).

Cultural distance indicates the extent to which the expatriate's home country differs culturally from the country of assignment, and it has been found to be inversely proportional both to adjustment and intent to stay on the assignment. The larger the distance, the more different traditions and set of behavior that the expatriate is going to have to process, therefore it is likely that he is going to have a harder time to adjust to these differences. (Björkman & Holopainen 2005: 42)

In addition to these criteria, Tung (1981: 69-70) identifies two more variables that contribute to the success or failure of international assignment - *technical competence on the job* and *family situation*. These factors seem to be quite straightforward and self-explanatory, however, they hold deeper importance than it may seem. When it comes to technical competence and skills required to perform the job, they are crucial to achieve success in home environment, and even more so in foreign one, especially in the case when the employee is relocated to a place with lower technological level and expertise. Without the ability to readily consult with his colleagues or superiors in his native language, the importance of possessing sufficient skills to successfully complete given tasks increases even more.

While the selections should not be made based on the family situation of the employee, it is still a crucial factor to consider, since it is one of the major factors that has an influence on the success or failure of the whole assignment (Tung 1981: 69). The ability and willingness of the whole family to successfully relocate and adjust to the new environment is becoming a routine matter of examination by the employer when selecting the suitable employee to send abroad.

To select a suitable candidate for international assignment, corporations usually conduct an evaluation through a series of different tests that can vary from psychological

profiling to cultural testing. Overall, the interview remains the most efficient system and a common tool for selecting one of the candidates (Evans et al. 2011: 144).

2.2.2. Preparations

In order to help employees to successfully complete their international assignment, companies often organize cross-cultural trainings or briefing sessions on what to expect during the assignment. However, these efforts are not always successful for a number of reasons. Firstly, the trainings provided by the corporations can be inaccurate, inefficient or incomplete, based on a limited knowledge or information, especially when taught by a person without proper qualification. Secondly, even if the training is highly professional, there is a question whether employees should participate in it at all, since its outcome can vary (Black & Gregersen 1991: 461; Caligiuri et al. 2001:358; Panaccio & Waxin 2005: 51). These trainings are quite often optional, and as Björkman & Holopainen (2005: 48) point out, often only a small percentage of employees to whom this opportunity is offered, will participate in the training. The conclusion seems to be that no training is often better than bad training. If the company decides to organize a cross-cultural training at all, it should be carried out in a professional manner and contain clear information beneficial for the employee's international assignment, as a poor training can be misleading and have a negative effect on the whole perception of the international assignment and employee's satisfaction, and as a result, also on his work performance (Evans et al. 2011: 146).

Hays (1974: 29) divided overseas job assignments into four major categories:

- 1) *Chief executive officer* - responsible for overseeing and directing the entire operation
- 2) *Structure reproducer / Functional head* - responsible for establishing functional departments in a foreign affiliate
- 3) *Troubleshooter* - responsible for analyzing and solving specific operational problems
- 4) *Operational element / Rank and file member* - performing as an acting element in an existing operational structure.

Each of these categories requires different knowledge and degree of contact with the foreign culture, as well as different duration of stay in the host country. In general, the international assignments of employees in the first two categories require more

extensive interaction with the local community and usually take longer time, than the assignments of employees belonging to the latter two categories. Therefore, any training and preparation prior to their departure should be organized with these differences in mind. (Tung 1981: 69).

Tung (1981: 70-72) also identified five different training programs or procedures that were designed and are currently used to improve relational skills of the employee, needed for effective performance in foreign job assignments. These programs are not mutually exclusive; they should rather be complementary and viewed as a part of continual effort. Suitability and applicability of these programs depends upon the type of job and the country of assignment.

- 1) *Area studies programs* - environmental briefing and cultural orientation programs, which are designed to provide the employee with factual information about the particular country's sociopolitical history, geography, economic situation and cultural institutions.

However, "*when used alone, area studies programs are inadequate for preparing trainees for assignments which require extensive contact with the local community overseas*" (Tung 1981: 71). This is particularly true in case of first two Hays's employee groups, where area studies programs are insufficient in providing all the necessary knowledge that are required for a successful completion of a international assignment.

- 2) *Culture assimilator* - a technique designed specifically for cases when employees are assigned overseas on a short notice, this consists of a series of short episodes describing an intercultural encounter. These episodes are selected as critical to successful interaction between the members of two different cultures by a panel of experts, including returned expatriates (Tung 1981: 71). "*These programs provide an apparently effective method for assisting members of one culture to interact and adjust successfully with members of another culture*" (Fiedler & Mitchell 1971: 95).

This training places focus on containing as many practical information in as short time as possible, therefore its applicability might be higher in Troubleshooter group of employees, who are usually dispatched abroad on a short notice. For remaining three groups, more rigorous and detailed training programs are recommended.

- 3) *Language training* - mastering a foreign language can take months, sometimes even years, in case of a more difficult language, therefore this option is usually not followed through in its entirety. Moreover, being sent on an international assignment already presupposes a good language level of the candidate, so he can perform his duties effectively. However, it is quite common for the MNCs to offer at least some form of language training to the family of the employee (BGRS 2013: 19).
- 4) *Sensitivity training* - this type of training aims to "*develop an attitudinal flexibility within the individual so that he can become aware of and eventually accept that 'unfamiliar' modes of behavior and value systems can also be valid ways of doing things in a different culture*" (Tung 1981: 71).
- 5) *Field experience* - sending the employee directly to the country of assignment, or, if available, to microcultures nearby (e.g., Finnish employee being sent to assignment to Sweden could spend certain time in Swedish-speaking area of Finland, such as Åland). This field experience does not have to involve months, often just one full week of "live-in" experience can subject the employee to a new reality of living and working in different culture. "*Research indicates that even though differences in cultural content exist between these microcultures and the country to which the trainee is ultimately assigned, trainees seem to benefit from an encounter with people whose way of life is different from their own*" (Tung 1981: 71).

However, there are authors who even question the point of whole pre-departure cross-cultural training, wondering whether it has any impact at all on employee adjustment. Puck, Kittler & Wright (2008) in their paper disproved the positive correlation between cross-cultural training and adjustment, with their data confirming none of the three hypotheses:

- 1) If expatriates participate in pre-departure CCT, they will be better adjusted to the new international environment,
- 2) The longer expatriates participate in pre-departure CCT, the better they will be able to adjust to the new international environment,

- 3) the more comprehensive a pre-departure CCT programme is, i.e. the more methods and content are employed, the stronger is the positive effect on an expatriate's adjustment in the host country.

However, their study has highlighted the importance of language when sending employees abroad and they suggest that not the training, but the language abilities of the employee are the most crucial factor in adjustment, and consequently the success of international assignment. (Puck, Kittler & Wright 2008: 2185-2186, 2193)

Ultimately, a success or failure of any preparatory program depends solely on the employee and his attitude towards the whole endeavor. Of course, there are situations that no training can prepare for, and the employee has to come up with an ad-hoc solution. Despite possible shortcomings, *"companies remain cognizant of the importance of cross-cultural training in international assignments, and continue to see its worth. In this year's report, 85% of respondents indicated that they considered cross-cultural training as a good or great value, the same as last year's survey report and 2% above the historical average of 83%. In addition, 83% of respondent companies indicated that cross-cultural training was available for some or all assignments"* (BGRS 2013: 17).

2.2.3. During the assignment

Probably the most important issue that determines all other aspects of employee performance during his assignment, such as being accepted at the workplace, developing a rapport with new colleagues, being able to perform his duties well, etc., is how well the employee gets adjusted to the new place. As Pattie & Parks (2011: 2267) note, *"those who culturally adapt should be able to perform better because they are more likely to integrate into their new work group and adjust their behavior to meet the demands of their new position."* This section will therefore examine the process of cross-cultural adjustment and its phases, and then look at specific facets of adjustment and their intertwinement.

Cross-cultural adjustment is one of the most widely mentioned and prominently featured themes in expatriation research (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. 2005), and it is referred to as the dominant factor of a success or failure of international assignment (Hedo 2007). Generally, the term *cross-cultural adjustment* is defined as *"the degree of psychological comfort with various aspects of a host country"* (Black & Gregersen

1991), or "a low level of stress and a low level of negative attitudes associated with living in the host culture" (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. 2005). In expatriate literature, we can also come across other terms describing the phenomenon of assimilating to a different culture, such as *cross-cultural adaptation*, *culture shock*, *cultural distance* or *acculturation* (Mendenhall et al. 2002). However, these terms should not be interchanged freely, as they are not describing the same issue, but rather complement each other to create a complex view of cross-cultural adjustment process.

The experience of cross-cultural adjustment is gradual and takes place in phases, length of which depends upon employee's preparation, his understanding of the process, his willingness to take risks and his acceptance of the necessity to modify his behavior (Smith 2014). These phases are illustrated in Figure 2.

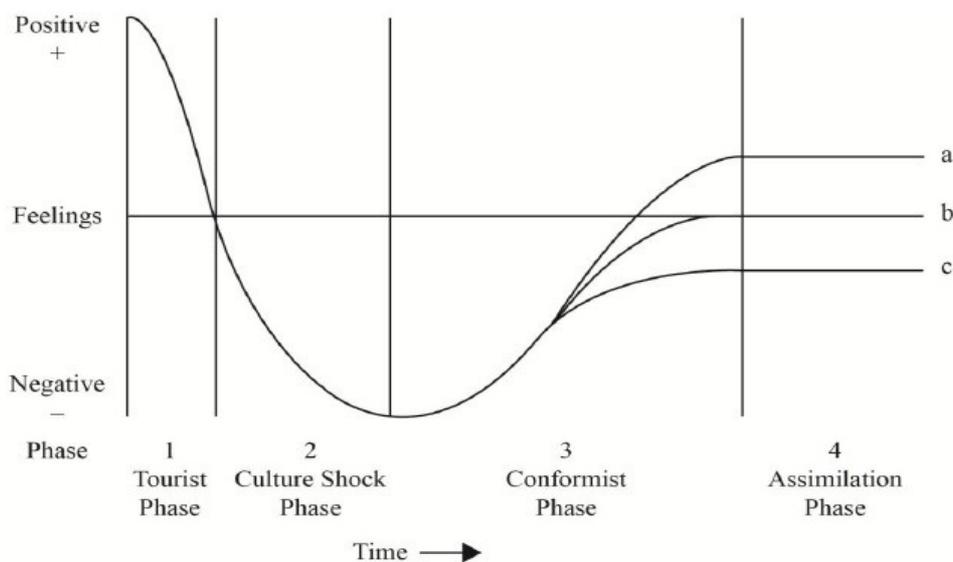


Figure 2. U-Curve Theory of adjustment. (Torbiörn 1982: 93; Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov 2010: 385)

The U-Curve Theory of adjustment has been one of the most consistently used approaches in cross-cultural research (Black & Mendenhall 1991: 226). Often referred to as Lysgaard's model, this curve illustrates the adjustment process of an individual to a new foreign environment. Various authors refer to these phases under different names, e.g. *Honeymoon*, *Culture shock*, *Adjustment*, *Mastery* (Black & Mendenhall 1991), or

Euphoria, Culture shock, Acculturation, Stable state (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov 2010). Ingemar Torbiörn first adapted U-Curve Theory to international assignments in 1982, therefore this thesis adheres to his naming convention.

Tourist phase is a (usually short) period of euphoria: the honeymoon, the excitement of traveling and of seeing new lands (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov 2010: 384), which for a while overcomes the negative effects of relocating to foreign environment. The knowledge of the culture is superficial, and the individual remains wrapped in the secure comfort of his or hers own culture, while perpetually scanning the surroundings.

However, after a month or two, the personal, social and cultural differences start to intrude and one becomes frustrated with the increased difficulty of life (Smith 2014). The foreign way of things, the symbols and rituals they do, present a great obstacle, since the individual cannot see and understand the underlying values. This experience usually leads to feelings of distress, of helplessness, and of hostility toward the new environment (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov 2010: 384). This is *culture shock*, the most critical and difficult phase (Torbiörn 1982: 94), and in severe cases, even medical help is necessary, as the frustration, anxiety and homesickness can affect the physical functioning and even lead to suicide tendencies.

Conformist phase follows after about four months in foreign country, when the individual's understanding and sensitivity take the place of criticism and judgment. By then, the person has slowly learned to function under the new conditions, has adopted some of the local traditions and customs, finds increased self-confidence, which projects into gaining new friendships and greater courage to use local language, as he slowly conforms to the new culture (Smith 2014, Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov 2010: 384).

Finally, in *assimilation phase*, an individual enjoys a stable and full life in the host country. Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov (2010: 385) also observe three different paths that this phase can take. Some people feel even better in the foreign country that they have at home, and after their international assignment ends, they might consider returning to the host country, or even emigrate permanently (4a). Visitors can be considered biculturally adapted, when their level of satisfaction is the same in their home and host country (4b), and some visitors will never fully adapt to the new culture and will continue to feel alienated and discriminated (4c).

The length of the time scale in Figure 2 is variable; it seems to adapt to the length of the international assignment, as people on both short- and long-term assignments have confirmed going through all these stages. For people on short assignments of up to three months, the phases are more condensed and intense, quite possibly influenced by the expectation of returning home soon; people on long assignments of several years have reported culture shock phases of a year or more before acculturation set in (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov 2010: 385).

In his paper, Aycan (1997) proposes that an expatriate adjustment is a multifaceted phenomenon, and "*in the specific context of expatriation, adjustment is conceptualized as the degree of fit between the expatriate manager and the new environment in both work and non-work domains. Such a fit is marked by reduced conflict and stress and increased effectiveness.*" (Aycan 1997: 436). While majority of authors prominently focus on cultural part of the adjustment, Aycan examines both work and non-work aspect of expatriate's adjustment and effectiveness. Black & Stephens (1989) identified three facets of adjustment: *adjustment to work*, *adjustment to interacting with host nationals* and *adjustment to the general environment*, which Aycan further explains as *performance at the expected level of quality and quantity, endurance until the end of the assignment, ability to develop constructive relations with the members of the new society, moderate level of stress to function effectively, and positive attitudes towards work* (Aycan 1997: 436). General acculturation literature utilizes terms *work adjustment*, *socio-cultural adjustment* and *psychological adjustment*, which are essentially the same as Black's & Stephens' facets. The relationship and influence between these facets can be seen in Appendix 2.

Psychological adjustment is evaluated in terms of maintaining good mental health or psychological well-being. It is marked by a feeling of satisfaction with different aspect of life, and a feeling of relative satisfaction with comparison to others in the reference groups in both the country of origin and the host society. *Socio-cultural adjustment* refers to one's progress in becoming fully effective in the society, and the ability to handle problems in non-work situations. Socio-cultural adaptation also includes engaging in positive interpersonal relations with the members of the host society. Finally, *work adjustment* includes demonstration of behaviors that result in effective accomplishment of one's required task, and expression of positive attitudes towards the new work role. (Aycan 1997: 436-437).

Actions of the employer seem to be essential to employee's overall adjustment. Organizational commitment is viewed as a strong belief in organizational goals and values, and a desire to remain a member of the organization. In order for the international assignment to be successful, the employee should express such commitment to the organization. International assignments are usually perceived as a career advancement in which a considerable investment by the firm (such as cross-cultural training, spousal assistance, repatriate compensation plans, etc.) should be involved. If such investment is made, the need for reciprocation is likely to increase the feelings of obligation of the employee to successfully finish his assignment. *"Support provided by both the parent company and the local unit (e.g., organizational socialization, training, social and logistic support) are likely to lead to a perception that the expatriate's well-being is of concern, which, in turn, fosters the affective commitment."* (Aycan 1997: 437)

Aycan's findings show that *"successful adjustment was a function of not only the expatriate manager's personal characteristics, but also of organizational (both parent and local) support and preparation for expatriation. Therefore, an expatriate's failure (premature return or inadequate performance) should not be attributed solely to his/her inability to adjust. The adequacy of the planning and preparation process in parent and local companies requires a close examination, as it is an equally important source of failure."* (Aycan 1997: 451-452). His conclusions only accentuate that a successful international assignment is a joint effort. They support the importance of having a close relationship between employees and employers, who would listen to the feedback and continually adapt their processes to needs of both expatriates and inpatriates.

2.2.4. Repatriation

Returning home after completing the international assignment presents both employee and employer with a number of issues, which are explored below. Studying the role of expectations in the repatriation process is being stressed by a number of authors, since such expectations have been found to be too optimistic. It has been suggested that companies should develop better repatriation support practices, which could help expatriates to develop a more realistic picture of their repatriation (Suutari & Brewster 2003: 1133).

Repatriation is one of the most difficult phases in the process (Sanchez et al. 2008: 1683-1684), and therefore deserves more attention and planning than it is currently

getting. Lack of these is the first and foremost problem of repatriation. International assignments are too often a 'one way street', with the employee abroad being 'out of sight, out of mind', and the company does not worry about the employee until the assignment is over. There are few or none contingency plans for the repatriation of the employee, or for the incorporation of his foreign experience into his overall career plans (Harvey 1982: 53).

Reverse culture shock is often a significant problem, with many employees having even more problems with readjusting to being home than to adjusting to being overseas. When coupled with poor repatriation plans, in some cases, employees are forced to seek a job elsewhere. However, this is a scenario that companies should try to avoid, since the cost of losing repatriates are very significant, both financially and strategically (Stroh, Gregersen & Black 2000: 682). *"In addition to the costs involved in the recruitment and selection of new employees, when the repatriation ends in failure the company loses the investment made on the expatriates and also the international experience and knowledge they have acquired abroad"* (Sanchez et al. 2008: 1684). Retaining repatriates should therefore be crucial to companies, since the knowledge transfer is after all one of the reasons why international assignments are conducted after all. Repatriates understand the operation of both corporate HQ and local subsidiaries, they can transfer important knowledge and technology and provide critical coordination and control functions between the units (Stroh, Gregersen & Black 2000: 682). The turnover of repatriates is usually related to how the company manages the repatriation process and, therefore, to how satisfied the employees are with the process (Sanchez et al. 2008: 1684).

Despite this fact, a large percentage of repatriations end up in failure, and many international workers leave their company one or two years after their return. However, even if the returned employee stays within the same organization, companies often don't recognize or appreciate the additional skills and contacts gained during his assignment, which therefore remain unutilized (Handler & Lane 1997; Suutari & Brewster 2003; Lazarova & Tarique 2005). Therefore, such assignment can effectively be considered a failure, since the primary reason for it - exchange and application of know-how - has not been fulfilled.

Besides abovementioned reasons, the most common factors of repatriation failure are the loss of autonomy that the employee suffers on their return from an international assignment, the lack of a career planning in the company or family readjustment

problems (Sanchez et al. 2008: 1684). Besides these, Harvey (1982: 53-54) also mentions feeling of isolation in the exile, caused by the lack of communication and coordination between the HQ and local unit, and consequent feeling of being left out from the mainstream advancement, since by being away and out of touch, the employee robs himself of chance for promotion. Employee can therefore start to consider moving on to a company where his newly gained foreign experience might be appreciated more than at his old place.

The mitigation of these negative outcomes mostly lies on company's shoulders. The solution for repatriate turnover is a combination of three factors - organization, assistance and commitment. Having the employee constantly updated on the status of his assignment and letting him know well in advance how the company plans to utilize him and his knowledge after his return reestablishes a sense of safety and control by reducing the uncertainty in the new situation. Providing assistance with family reentry and reorientation also decreases the stress of employee and his family. By providing the employee with organizational policy and position definition, financial counseling, professional adjustment and family reorientation programs, the company can bring him back up to speed with his new position, any possible shifts in corporate strategy and other changes that took place during his stay abroad. This debriefing and readjusting period will allow the employee a smooth transition from one place to another, and it will make him gain a sense of value and appreciation. If employer shows commitment to employee and expresses active involvement in his experience, the employee in turn shows commitment to company and is less likely to leave and take his valuable experience with him. (Harvey 1982: 54-58, Stroh, Gregersen & Black 2000: 682)

2.3. Problematic issues of international assignments and their effect on the employee's performance

When dealing with expatriate management, corporations need to face many issues that have to be dealt with in order to ensure the success of the international assignment. In managing expatriates, their assignments and also their overall careers, the human resources management plays a fundamental role. Corporations need to analyze, coordinate and solve a wide array of problems, starting with the immediate assignments, through the general business expectations, down to the employee's subjective issues, to ensure his job satisfaction, and in turn, the satisfaction of his employer as well.

This section will take a look at some of the most common problematic issues connected with international assignment, and how they are being dealt with by corporations. In later chapters, these efforts - or lack thereof - will be scrutinized and commented on by employees themselves, whose opinions will confirm or deny the real effect of company's effort on a success of the international assignment.

2.3.1. Spouse- and family-related problems

The expatriate literature names spouses the number one reason of international assignment failure (Tung 1981; Harvey 1985; Black & Stephens 1989; Lee 2007; BGRS 2013), yet the training programmes for future expatriates are only rarely aimed at family members, even though the relocation often has greater impact on the spouse and the family than on the employee himself (Rosenbusch 2010: 30).

Black, Mendenhall & Oddou (1991) suggested that the employee's adjustment to his international assignment is often directly influenced by the degree to which the spouse has adjusted. The culture shock and subsequent stress that the spouse experiences can be even greater than the one of employee himself, since an assumption exists that the employee already has at least some prior experience with the host culture (from business meetings and negotiations, business trips, etc.). Despite this, it is the spouse, who often has to deal with the new culture in the most immediate, everyday basis, without any prior culture or language preparations (Harvey 1985: 88). Even though the employee can possess the abilities and skills necessary for a successful international assignment, if the spouse does not possess these qualities and fails to adjust to the host country environment as well, the assignment has much higher likelihood of failure.

Research suggest that wife is often the one paying the highest price for her family's move, receiving the most stress and the most blame if the assignment ends prematurely (Harvey 1985: 87). By being forced to put her career development on hold and to abandon her ties in the home country, the spouse can suffer feelings of lesser self-worth and question her own identity. Many spouses express these complaints to their husbands, who are then caught between these significant demands. They cannot work as hard as their work placement demands, and at the same time try to accomodate the wishes of their wives and families (Harvey 1985: 88). As a result, the employee's satisfaction with his assignment decreases, and the lower quality of his performace can also lead to decreased satisfaction of his employer, followed by a premature termination of his assignment.

Despite living in the era of dual income households, it is still primarily the man, who is considered to be the provider of the family. This reason, along with several other factors, such as cultural prejudice towards women in certain countries (Harvey 1985: 85), make it even more difficult for female employees to be selected for a international assignment, and to successfully complete it together with her male spouse.

There is still not enough research conducted on effects of international assignments on employee's children. Children usually do not want to move abroad with their parents, suffering from feelings such as loss of friends, alienations from the community, and the need to adapt and establish their place in the new environment. The strong desire for social continuity, especially in adolescents, can cause them to develop a resentment towards their parents, and studies are indeed suggesting that the most troublesome age for the children to relocate is 14 to 16 years (Harvey 1985: 88-89). The age of children further comes into question when accommodating their educational needs; both the curriculum and social environment at school can be difficult to adapt to. These factors, along with the increased costs that children present for the company (relocation costs, tuition, etc.) are the reasons why some companies may prefer to choose employees without children in school age for their international assignments (Harvey 1985: 89).

However, if the family overcomes these initial difficulties, the international assignment can be a wonderful opportunity for strengthening the family ties. Parents' behavior and happiness is strongly influential on their children's acceptance or rejection of foreign environment. The overall family happiness can make a tremendous difference in their adaptation to living in a foreign country. Similarly, the threat that unhappy children pose on the performance of the employee and ultimate success or failure of the whole international assignment, should not be overlooked. (Harvey 1985: 89)

2.3.2. Career-planning issues

Definition of a successful career has changed quite a lot in past decades. Being successful does not necessarily mean starting as a clerk and gradually climbing up the corporate ladder towards better-paid positions with greater scope of responsibilities, ending up in CEO's chair (Baruch & Rosenstein 1992: 478). However, wanting to advance in one's career is a natural desire. With a progressive move into the knowledge economy, with demographic changes and globalization and with increasing individual mobility (Evans et al. 2011: 257), a foreign experience is becoming a necessary qualification, if one desires to pursue a high-ranking position in MNC. *"Jobs are*

currently being evaluated in terms of their long-term contribution to the pursuit of the chosen career path; in other words, an orientation toward work in which the present job is seen only as a stepping stone to the next one is being reinforced." (Louis 1982: 69). This attitude poses a question - what does accepting a international assignment really mean? Having goals and prospects for the future is an admirable notion, but in their pursuit of a "dream job", many employees forget to enjoy the road, and to take an advantage and pleasure of their current position. The motivation of an employee to accept a international assignment is under question here - does he do it because he is genuinely interested in the opportunity and plans to benefit from the experience as much as possible, or does he regard it only as a tool in his career development, a stepladder leading to a promotion and higher salary and prestige? *"Focus on a career and a career path must be balanced by attention to the job and immediate work experiences. Preoccupation with a "career" can shift attention away from a satisfactory present-day job situation"* (Louis 1982: 69-70).

In spirit of this statement, an open dialogue between employer and employee should be conducted, so there can be an alignment of one's individual goals with company's goals, which then influences the overall success of the company (Evans et al. 2011: 336, 349), and subsequently, also of the employee. Many employees often expect that completing a international assignment will grant them instant promotion and career growth, and when it does not happen, they are disheartened and demotivated. Therefore, a clear contingency plan for after the assignment should be outlined already during the selection interviews, so the employees would know how they can benefit from this experience and how can they incorporate it in their future career path within the company. Setting a clear link between international assignment and long-term career path has been recognized as one of the most important factors in determining the success of such assignment (Griffin & Pustay 2007: 573).

2.3.3. International assignment failure

In the worst case, the whole international assignment can result in a failure. It is generally defined as a premature return from the host country into the home country before the official end of the assignment (Harvey 1985; Tung 1987; Harzing 1995; Forster 1997; Martinko & Douglas 1999; Harzing & Christensen 2004; Harvey & Moeller 2009). The reasons for this return can be various, and not necessarily negative - for instance, the assignment might be completed early - but in most cases, it is either attributed to unfavorable performance of the employee, or change in the business plans

of the employer, which render the international assignment not needed anymore. Career-planning issues and family related problems, which were mentioned in previous sections, are considered the biggest obstacles of a successful international assignment. In addition to already existing repatriation failure, which occurs even with assignments that have been fully completed, these premature returns cause the organizations to lose a substantial amount of capital every year. Because of this, international assignment failure and proper repatriation management techniques are becoming a popular topic among researchers, as well as companies, which start to devote more attention to a time period immediately following the international assignment, not only the assignment itself.

We can look at the cost of international assignment failure from two angles - direct, monetary cost, and indirect, collateral cost. Sending an employee abroad can cost the company up to three times as much as keeping him home (BGRS 2013), since the company has to account for any pre-assignment training, relocation costs, compensation costs (such as housing, transportation, schooling for children, spouse compensation, etc.) and any other expenses related to dispatching an employee abroad (Harvey & Moeller 2009). Premature return of an employee means the company did not get expected returns on its investment, and has to possibly invest even more into a suitable replacement. Such failures can therefore be incredibly costly, ranging from 200,000 up to 1,200,000 million US\$ per employee (Swaak 1995).

Despite a huge monetary cost of international assignment failure, the indirect costs, such as damaged relationships with local employees, partners and customers overseas, as well as home country networks and government officials, lost market opportunities, reduced productivity and damaged reputation of the company can have even greater impact on the company, and while they may not result in any direct losses, this cost will manifest itself over time and affect the long-term profitability of the company (Tung 1984; Mendenhall & Oddou 1985; Harzing 1995; Harvey 1996; Harvey & Moeller 2009). In addition to costs inflicted on the company, the employee himself can also suffer a loss of self-esteem, self-confidence and loss of prestige among others (Mendenhall & Oddou 1985; Harvey 1996), which can negatively affect his future performance.

2.4. Theoretical framework for international assignments

This section is an overview of the international assignment management theories presented in this chapter. Based on these theories, it will create a framework of an ideal assignment, which will be later compared to the real results.

The selection process should start with choosing the most suitable employee, both from professional and personality point of view. The attitude of employee towards the assignment is important, he should show a true enthusiasm and interest in the experience. Therefore, the company should ideally screen potential employee's interest in the assignment before the selection process begins. Proper language competence, besides professional skills, should be probably the most important selection factor, since the ability to communicate is vital to employee's ability to perform well in his new workplace, as well as to his ability to make the cultural transition and adapt to the new environment without much hassle. Prior international experience is a good indicator of employee's behavior during such assignments. Family situation, while not a basis for decision, should be taken into the account by the company, especially the education situation, so the children are guaranteed at least the same progress as in their home institution. Possible need for a spouse compensation, who often have to leave their careers, thus hurting the family income, should also be considered by the company when making the decision.

Preparations for the assignment should reflect the employee's position and the goal of his assignment. Especially for higher managerial positions, training in cultural competence and relational skills is important for employee's ability to understand the mindset of his new subordinates, so he can manage them effectively without any major cultural clashes. The preparatory training should be extended to employee's family as well. It can be assumed that while employee has language and some cultural knowledge of the host country, his family's abilities in this regard are lower, and their struggles to adapt will affect the well-being and performance of the employee. In order to be able to integrate to the new culture with more ease, language and cultural preparations are recommended, with a possible short visit to the new location prior to the assignment, if the situation allows it.

During the assignment, it is important that the employee does not feel alone and alienated in the new country. Especially when relocating to a smaller countries with less common language and culture, it is important that the company extends a helping hand

and assists the employee in the transition, mitigating the impact of the culture shock. Family satisfaction can fluctuate wildly as the curve of cultural adaptation progresses, and especially spouses can feel alienated and useless, compared to their previously active careers. To help them to integrate more into society and form a new circle of friends, company can in the beginning facilitate events and meetings for the spouses of foreign employees, assisting them in finding their place in the new culture.

Repatriation is often overlooked part of the international assignment, since it takes place after the return of the employee. While exact plans and assurances are hard to give in the beginning of the assignment, once the assignment comes near to its end, the company should enter an active dialogue with the employee regarding his return and his placement in the organizational structure of the home division. Since the international assignment presents a considerable investment, both for the company and for the employee, they should strive for a position that would utilize the experience, knowledge and contacts the employee gained during his stay abroad.

3. CULTURAL DIMENSIONS

3.1. General definition of culture

In the Oxford English Dictionary (2014), the culture consists of "*distinctive ideas, customs, social behaviour, products, or way of life of a particular society, people, or period*". Geert Hofstede further described culture as "*the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another*" (Hofstede 2005: 4). Together, these definitions explain how the culture is formed, and what makes it different and distinctive from other cultures. All of these differences make each international assignment unique, depending on the home and host culture. The cultural distance and differences between the two countries affect how well is the employee able to handle his transition, and ultimately also the overall success or failure of the assignment. This section will use Hofstede's cultural dimensions and general cultural facts about Slovakia and USA to draw up a prediction of how cultural differences will affect the discourse of employee exchange between these two countries.

3.2. Hofstede's dimensions

One of the most prominent names in cultural research is Dutch researcher Geert Hofstede. In 1960's and 1970's, he conducted a study on different dimensions of culture, in which he studied the cultural backgrounds of IBM executives. Based on results of this research, Hofstede identified four different cultural dimensions: *power distance*, *individualism versus collectivism*, *masculinity versus femininity* and *uncertainty avoidance*. In 1991, Michael Harris Bond, supported by Hofstede, conducted additional research in Hong Kong, based on Confucian thinking. This resulted in fifth dimension, *long-term orientation* (Hofstede 2010a). Sixth dimension, *indulgence versus self restraint*, was added in 2010, based on Michael Minkov's analysis of data from the World Values Survey. Minkov's results also more or less replicated the fifth dimension, therefore in certain sources, it is referred to as *pragmativism versus normativism* (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov 2010, Hofstede 2010a).

Every dimension is projected onto a 0-100 scale, with each end being one extreme. Every country/culture is rated by a score in every dimension, which creates a complex picture of behavioral patterns in specific culture. Comparing these scores can clarify the differences and help understand the different ways of acting across cultures. Thanks to Hofstede's

dimensions, we can see a quantification of these differences and give actual examples of how cultures differ between each other. (De Mooij 2005: 59-60)

Power distance dimension examines a hierarchy ladder of a culture from the point of view of an inferior member. It expresses the degree to which the less powerful members of a society accept and expect that power is distributed unequally. The issue behind this dimension is the inequality among people and how the society handles it. Societies with a high power distance score accept a hierarchical order in which everybody has a place and which needs no further justification. In societies with low power distance score, people strive to equalise the distribution of power and demand justification for inequalities of power. (Hofstede 2008, Hofstede 2010b)

Power distance dimension does not refer to situation such as dictatorship, but rather to a society where the inequality is accepted and supported by the followers as well. In high power distance cultures, these differences are respected, authority stems from a clear social hierarchy and is given naturally. People's social status is expressed visibly, so the proper respect from the less powerful members can be given. Elders are usually enjoying a high social status, being looked up to for their wisdom and authority. In contrast with these attitudes, in low power distance cultures people place large value on equality and independence, and authority can bear a negative connotation. (De Mooij 2005: 60)

Individualism versus *collectivism* dimension examines the integration levels within a culture. A society's position on this dimension is reflected in whether people's self-image is defined in terms of "I" or "we." Individualistic culture puts emphasis on "I", the goals and needs of an individual. The social framework is loosely-knit, the individuals are expected to take care only of themselves and their immediate family. Any groups that an individual might join, he joins of his own will, and not because of a social expectations to belong. (Hofstede 2008, Hofstede 2010b)

Opposed to this, in collectivistic cultures, tightly-knit framework is preferred. People are strongly integrated within their social group and maintain close ties with their family, also with more distant members, and can expect protection and care in exchange for their loyalty to this group. People are thinking in terms of "we", instead of "I"; needs of the many outweigh needs of the one, and one's identity and goals are often defined by the group. Majority of the world's cultures (70-80%) is considered collectivistic (De Mooij 2005: 62). (De Mooij 2005: 61-63, Hofstede 2008, Hofstede 2010b)

Third dimension, *masculinity* versus *femininity*, examines upon which type of values the society places the importance. Masculine society displays preference for achievement, heroism, assertiveness and material rewards for success, while being generally competitive, and endorsing more stereotypical male/female behavior. To show one's success, these values must be visibly demonstrated, and children are taught to admire the strong winner. (De Mooij 2005: 65, Hofstede 2008, Hofstede 2010b)

The opposite, feminine society, stands for a preference for cooperation, modesty, caring for the weak and quality of life. Society as a whole is more consensus-oriented, believing in "the small is beautiful" philosophy, and teaching values of sympathy for the underdog, the loser. The gender role differentiation is small, with men being able to take typically female job without being ridiculed for his lack of manliness. Humble behavior is appreciated, and people do not generally brag about their successes. (De Mooij 2005: 65-67, Hofstede 2008, Hofstede 2010b)

Uncertainty avoidance dimension expresses the degree to which the members of a society feel uncomfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity. It takes a look at unstructured, surprising or unusual situations and the behavior of a member of certain society in such situation; the way in which it is handled. In cultures of strong uncertainty avoidance, these situations are coped with by posing a rather strict set of rules, laws and safety measures, unorthodox behavior and ideas are not tolerated. Members of these cultures are also prone to be more emotional and innately nervous. (De Mooij 2005: 67-68, Hofstede 2008, Hofstede 2010b)

In low uncertainty avoidance cultures, people tend to be more phlegmatic and reserved, with British 'stiff upper lip' being a prime example. These cultures believe in as few rules and regulations as possible, and rely more on common sense than ritualized behavior. Unlike in high uncertainty avoidance cultures, conflict and competition are not threatening, and practice counts more than principles. Similarly, these cultures are more open and tolerant towards philosophical and religious opinions that differ from their own. (De Mooij 2005: 67-68, Hofstede 2008, Hofstede 2010b)

A fifth dimension, *long-term orientation*, examines the extent to which a society exhibits a pragmatic future-oriented perspective, rather than a conventional historic or short-term point of view, followed by cultures with *short-term orientation*. Long-term oriented societies observe values such as perseverance, orientation towards future rewards, and adaptation to changing circumstances. Relationships are ordered by status, and this order is

generally observed and followed. Short-term oriented societies value stability and steadiness, hold traditions in high regard and follow them, and more highly relate themselves to virtues such as national pride and fulfilling one's social obligations in order to 'maintain a proper face'. (De Mooij 2005: 69-70, Hofstede 2008)

The newest dimension, *indulgence versus self-restraint*, compares societies' attitude towards gratification of basic and natural human drives connected with enjoying one's life and having fun. Indulgent society allows relatively free gratification of these needs, while restraining society imposes strict social norms in order to suppress these needs and their gratification. (Hofstede 2008, Hofstede 2010b)

3.3. Country analysis and comparison

	USA	Slovakia
Population (approximately)	320,000,000	5,400,000
Population Rank	3rd	116th
Land Size	9,629,091 km ²	49,035 km ²
Official language	English	Slovak
Currency	United States dollar USD \$	Euro EUR €
Nominal GDP (2014 estimate)	\$17.528 trillion	\$101.806 billion
Government	Federal presidential constitutional republic	Parliamentary republic

Table 1. General country overview (Index Mundi 2014)

3.3.1. General culture

USA

The United States of America is a federal constitutional republic consisting of fifty states and a federal district. It is one of the world's most ethnically diverse and multicultural nations, the product of large-scale immigration from many countries

(Adams & Strother-Adams 2001). USA is fascinating many people in the world due to its image as the country of limitless possibilities. In 1931, the historian James Truslow Adams coined the term "American Dream", stating that it was the "*dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone*" (Clark et al. 2007), thus providing a term for one important aspect of American culture. It represents a chance for everybody to achieve their dreams and create a rich and successful life out of nothing through own hard work and discipline. It plays the main role in attracting immigrants to USA with a vision of better life and prospects (Clifton 2013).

Americans have traditionally been characterized by a strong work ethic, competitiveness, and individualism, as well as a unifying belief in an "American creed", emphasizing liberty, equality, private property, democracy, rule of law, and a preference for limited government (Huntington 2004). Another related cultural factor is the idea of "American Exceptionalism", suggesting that USA and its culture are superior to other countries (Lipset 1996). It is especially connected to the political pride, since USA emerged out of a revolution as the first democracy in the world. Part of this political pride can be seen in the U.S. its patriotism, which is another major cultural factor, characteristic for USA. This pride of being an American manifests itself in abundant presence of flags and playing national anthems at every possibility, as well as in a large number of national holidays, commemorating important people and events that shaped the country.

USA prides itself in being a sport nation, with sports occupying important part in country's culture and educational system. Superbowl, the annual championship game of NFL, is de facto a national holiday; the Superbowl Sunday holds almost equal significance in minds of Americans as Thanksgiving, and it is one of the most-watched programs, with corporations fighting to have their products advertised in Superbowl commercials. Sports are an integral part of extracurricular activities for students, with the best high school athletes gaining college scholarships based on their athletic abilities. Cheerleaders, marching bands and another group activities related to sports represent the main way in which young Americans socialize and create their interpersonal ties and relationships.

Besides their political and sport achievements, Americans take great pride in their multiculturalism. USA is a melting pot of nationalities, cultures and religions, which have their freedom based in US Constitution. Ironically, American culture is characterized as being quite conservative, especially regarding issues like gun control

laws, homosexuality and same sex marriage, abortions, capital punishment, corruption, etc. Lobbying is widely used, and large MNCs often try to influence the political process in their advantage.

Overall, American culture is best described as a paradox of welcoming cultures from around the world into the melting pot, yet maintaining a strong sense of self-entitlement and national pride.

Slovakia

Slovakia is a landlocked state in Central Europe, with a rich political and socio-cultural history that preceded the formation of independent republic on 1st January 1993. Slovakia's geography and political rules of the past have greatly influenced its current political situation, economy and general life.

The Slavs, ancestors of Slovaks, arrived to the territory of Slovakia in the 5th and 6th century, though there are archeological artifacts dating back to 250,000 BC that confirm the ancient inhabitation of Slovakia (slovakie.eu 2014). Throughout the history, Slovakia rarely enjoyed independence, being a part of one nation either with Hungarians in Kingdom of Hungary and later in Austria-Hungary, or with their brother nation Czechs, with whom they still maintain close ties even after the dissolution of Czechoslovakia.

These factors contribute to both Czechs and Hungarians still living in western and southern region of Slovakia, respectively, and maintaining their language. Historical tendency of Slovakia to be overlooked and repressed is now manifested in a drive for independence and attempts to distinguish themselves from bigger and better-known Czech republic. This is mostly done through sports, where hockey is considered a national sport, and it is a question of pride to place as well as possible in IIHF World Hockey Championship or Olympic Games, ideally better than Czech republic.

Slovakia is mostly Catholic country, with large number of population identifying themselves as religious, despite the long Communist rule that was banning religion in all forms. Soviet occupation on 21st August 1968 had a long-lasting effects on the country's economy, culture and general mindset, and after Velvet Revolution on 11th November 1989, Slovakia has been striving to distance itself from Soviet influence. It has since transformed from centrally planned economy to a market-driven economy, adapting reforms that would help it to become closer to Western Europe standards. The success is dubious, as Slovakia still suffers from large problems with unemployment

and debt and still has a long way to go before becoming a proper knowledge economy (OECD 2012). However, thanks to adopting Euro, low wages, low taxes and well-educated labor force, Slovakia is an attractive location for foreign investors, with the government actively promoting the inflow of FDI. Industry is the main driving force of Slovak economy, having long tradition in steel manufacturing. Recently, electrical engineering and car manufacturing are the biggest industry sectors, with Slovakia being the world's largest producer of cars per capita (Industry Week 2008).

Slovakia is famous for its national beauties and rich cultural history, having the highest number of castles per capita. The mountainous national parks and world-renowned cultural events, such as the International Peace Marathon, attract more and more foreigners to Slovakia each year. However, Slovaks are still not fully used to them, and the low ability of general population to speak English is seriously impeding Slovakia in becoming more open and international.

3.3.2. Business culture

Business background

For more than a century, USA has been the leader in banking and finance, technology, pharmaceuticals, and other industries. The growth and innovation can be explained by very scientific approach to business in USA. Every aspect of commercial life is analyzed and studied, and this study of business methodology results in most of new management theories originating in USA.

In everyday business practices, everything is quantified and assessed. Processes are analyzed in a detailed manner, and these results influence the decision making in the higher posts. This approach of constant search for better, most effective methods, has led to a business environment typical for its constant change and high fluctuation, and the companies have no hesitation to make rapid changes. As a result, the employee fluctuation is quite high, with people being hired or made redundant depending on the current market and company needs. (WorldBusinessCulture 2014a)

Compared to this, Slovakia, as all the former Soviet bloc countries, is a transitional economy in the process of moving from a state-controlled centrally planned economy to a Western capitalist model. However, despite being free from Soviet rule for already a quarter of a century, this transition is still not complete.

One of the most visible legacies of the former Soviet influence is the question of trust in the business environment. Foreigners find it difficult to develop a proper level of trust within business relationships, since Slovaks tend to start from a level of deep distrust when engaging in a new business contact. There are no shortcuts around this fact, and the trust is built slowly over time, by proving to be a reliable business associate. Another remainder of communist times is the different attitudes towards business issues, which depend on the age of the person in question. Older generation (45 - 50+) still prefer more authoritarian style of management and remaining in the same workplace for the most of their career, while the younger employees are already influenced by western business models and thinking and are more open to discussion and change (WorldBusinessCulture 2014b)

Management style

American management style is quite individualistic, and the business structure is more flat when compared to Slovak one, which is characteristic by its high level of bureaucracy and complexity. In USA, the employees are encouraged to be initiative and approach their superiors with any ideas for improvement. Although many business matters are discussed openly, since this is an individualistic culture, the ultimate responsibility for the success or failure of the decision lies with the boss. This is reflected into the "American Dream" ideology - outstanding success of an individual will bring him outstanding rewards. Americans also expect great leadership at the top of the organization, with the leader being strategic and inspirational, motivating his subordinates to exceptional results. (WorldBusinessCulture 2014c)

Management style on Slovakia depends on the type of the organization; subsidiaries of foreign MNCs usually employ management style of their mother organization, but the traditional Slovak management style is rather paternalistic, reflecting the hierarchical, bureaucratic nature of the former state-controlled monopolies. Managers kept the distance from their employees and issued direct commands that they expected people to follow without questions. This approach is responsible for the lack of initiative, which Western expatriates might feel when dealing with local employees. However, this does not mean that locals have no good ideas, but rather that they feel they have no authority to question the instructions given to them, and suggest any changes to them. (WorldBusinessCulture 2014d)

Communication styles

American communicational style and habits during the meeting are tied to their overall business culture. They desire to debate issues directly and openly, which is sometimes viewed as aggressive, or even rude, in other countries. In contrast with this, upon first meeting, Americans seem overly polite, abundantly using phrases such as "How are you?" and "Have a nice day". However, these do not represent any real interest of the speaker, and are regarded rather as a part of the protocol, much like British "How do you do?". Americans are also much more open regarding personal matters, and they would sometimes open business meetings with an informal discussion, but sometimes they tend to ask quite personal questions that are considered inappropriate. (WorldBusinessCulture 2014e)

In Slovakia, the communication with expatriate employees is still affected by the various level of English knowledge among the employees, with the older generation sometimes having issues with a fluent communication. Unlike Americans, they dispense with empty pleasantries, which are viewed as a waste of time, and rather proceed directly to the point. However, in these discussions, they are less direct and open than Americans, trying to find another way to politely communicate the dismissal, rather than just outright saying no. One Slovak specialty is putting a high emphasis on academic titles and education, therefore it is a habit to call the person by their academic title and surname. Omitting this tradition is seen as disrespectful. (WorldBusinessCulture 2014f)

3.4. Theoretical framework for cultural dimensions

This section will use the cultural facts presented about USA and Slovakia and try to determine where the two cultures might clash. These assumptions will be later confirmed or disproved in the results section, using Hofstede's dimensions.

Based on the presented facts, there is an assumption that Slovaks will have easier time assimilating with American culture than the other way around. The reason for this is that American products, movies, music, etc. are present all around the globe nowadays, so Slovaks already have initial familiarity with the culture, unlike Americans, who mostly have no idea what to expect. Regarding personal life and opportunities for free time activities, Americans might become a bit frustrated by the lesser range of options, especially in the area of sports, and extracurricular activities for students. Extensive

socialization with Slovaks, due to language issues, might be a problem, and Americans will thus have limited choice when it comes to creating new interpersonal contacts and relationships.

Being used to foreigners, American will be less hesitant to interact with the locals. However, they might not be used to this, therefore there is a possibility of some initial tension, before the distrust from Slovak side dispels. This will most likely affect the working relationships, at least in their initial phase. Different attitudes towards employee initiative might also lead to a certain frustration, especially in American managers, who might find their workforce to be apparently apathetic and difficult to motivate to an independent work. On the other hand, Slovaks, who are used to a more hierarchic structure, might find the lack of it and subsequent freedom a bit intimidating and disorienting; missing the clear leadership and explicit work orders. American attitude of "living for work" is also different, since Slovaks tend to be more family people, not identifying themselves by their job.

All in all, these two cultures are very different, and it will take lots of effort, both on company and individual level, to make personal and professional relationships smooth and working well.

4. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to present and justify the methodology used in this study. The section starts by defining and reasoning for the choice of method, further describing the research sample, data collection and its analysis, and concludes with discussion of reliability and validity of the data, identifying possible causes for error and shortcomings of the research.

4.1. Research approach

In theoretical literature on research methods, there is often a discussion on which methods are more suitable or 'scientific', claiming that structured and qualitative methods are more 'scientific' and therefore better. However, their quantitative nature does not automatically make them 'better'. The choice and suitability of methods are always dependent on the research problem and its purpose, and the main difference between qualitative and quantitative research is not its 'quality', but the procedure, and a reflection of different perspectives on knowledge and research objectives. (Ghuri et al. 2005: 109)

As Ghauri et al. (2005: 110) further states, "*Qualitative research is a mixture of the rational, explorative and intuitive, where skills and experience of the researcher play an important role in the analysis of data. It is often focused on social process and not on social structures, which is frequently the focus in quantitative research.*" These are some of the reasons why qualitative research was used - it puts emphasis on understanding from respondent's point of view, and focuses on subjective 'insider view' and closeness to data. It attempts to make generalizations by comparison of properties and contexts of individual organisms (Ghuri et al. 2005: 110), which is the objective of this thesis - it aims to understand the point of view of employees, and to refine and synthesize the knowledge provided by them into a concise form, which would serve as a general summary, from which conclusions can be drawn. Due to the highly subjective view of the matter, more in-depth methods, which would allow the participants to freely express their ideas, are needed. Questionnaires, as a form of qualitative research, would therefore be too restrictive and insufficient to explore the hypothesis.

One of the most common method used in qualitative research is interviewing. In general, they consist of a talk organized into a series of questions and answers, where

the interviewer talks first and asks questions, and interviewee talks second and provides answers. However, qualitative interviews may also resemble everyday conversation, where the role of interviewer and interviewee is not distinguished at first sight (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008: 78). Regardless of the degree of structure of the interview, the agenda is always set by the researcher, and there is usually a requirement of minimum for give and take, so the interview can be still classified as a research interview, and so that it fulfills its purpose (Vogt et al. 2012: 32).

Interviews are a very broad topic, in itself open to multitude of researches. Eriksson & Kovalainen (2008: 80) categorize them into three types: structured and standardized, which use the same standardized questions for all participants; guided and semi-structured, which utilize an outline of topics, themes and issues, but there might be a variation in wording and sequence from case to case; and informal, instructed, open and narrative interviews, which use some guiding questions or core concepts to start with, but there is a freedom to move the conversation in any direction that may come up. Silverman (2006: 118-133) provides a typology of interview studies that he calls positivist, emotionalist, and constructionist, each focusing on different type of research questions, which therefore require different type of interview questions. These, in itself, can be an issue, with many researchers confusing their research questions and interview questions (Glesne 1999:69). When preparing for the interview, the researcher should not expect the direct answer to his research question from the participant; the interview questions should rather serve as means of obtaining the material, which upon further analysis can be used to answer the original research question, and thus confirm or refute a hypothesis (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008:79).

4.2. Data collection

As stated in the previous section, data was obtained in a form of interviews. When creating the set of interview questions, Silverman's emotionalist (also called subjectivist) interview research approach was used, considering interviews as a pathway to the participants' authentic experiences and memories. In this case, the researcher is interested in how people experience the process of organizational change, and the interview questions would focus on their perceptions, conceptions, understandings, viewpoints and emotions. This is in contrast with Silverman's positivist approach, which would contain a lot of information questions, and be focused on gaining objective and accurate information (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008: 79). However, as the objective of

this thesis is not to obtain an informative overview of international assignments, but rather focus on employees' subjective point of view, positivistic approach was limited only to the beginning of the interview, to gain general information on interviewees, and the rest of the interview was carried out in emotionalist approach. Critical incident technique was utilized as well, in which participants were asked to describe in detail a critical incident or number of incidents that are key to the research question. It involved any activity or event related to their assignment, where the consequences were so clear that the participant had a definite idea regarding the effects (Saunders et al. 2007: 332).

In addition to constructing the interview questions in abovementioned fashion, the interview as such was carried out in guided and semi-structured way. In addition to 'what' type of questions, 'how' questions were used, since this research is less interested in objective facts, but rather in interviewees' perception of these facts. This data collection method enabled the interviewer to slightly modify her questions during each interview, tailoring them specifically to each interviewee in order to stimulate them to express themselves freely and to provide the sought-after information to their best ability. Nevertheless, even though that interviewees were encouraged to contribute whatever information they deemed relevant to the topic of the research, the sequence of the questions was kept, since they were constructed in logical and chronological order, and couple of questions, answering the key concepts, were asked in each interview without a difference.

This study has two target groups - expatriates and inpatriates. The interviewees from each group had to meet a set of specific criteria. Firstly, in case of expatriates, they had to be American nationals, with their original place of employment being U. S. Steel's HQ in Pittsburgh, USA, who were relocated to Košice, Slovakia, for their assignment. In case of inpatriates, they had to be Slovak nationals, with their original place of employment being Košice subsidiary, who were relocated to Pittsburgh to complete their assignment. Secondly, their assignment's duration had to be for a minimum of six months, since the cross-cultural adjustment usually takes at least four months to progress through all of its stages (Smith 2014). Thirdly, the interviewees had to relocate abroad with their family, or at least with their spouse, so the questions of spouse effect on the international assignment could be examined.

The following two tables present an overview of both expatriates and inpatriates that were interviewed, as well as the data that are going to be further relevant in the analysis of results - their age, working position, length of the assignment and family status.

	Sex	Family situation	Position in the company	Length of the assignment
Expatriate #1	F	Married, 1 adult child (not relocating)	General Manager	Ongoing for 3 years since 8/2012
Expatriate #2	M	Married, 2 children, 9 and 4 y.o.	Vicepresident	Ongoing for 3 years since 04/2011
Expatriate #3	M	Married, 2 adult children (not relocating)	General Manager	Ongoing for 3 years since 08/2011
Expatriate #4	M	Married, 2 adult children (not relocating)	General Manager	Ongoing for 3 years since 03/2012
Expatriate #5	M	Married, 2 children 10 and 13 y.o.	General Manager	Ongoing for 3 years since 02/2011

Table 2. Overview of interviewed expatriates

	Sex	Family situation	Position in the company	Length of the assignment
Inpatriate #1	M	Married, 2 children, 7 and 10 y.o.	Sales Coordinator	05/2011 - 06/2013
Inpatriate #2	M	Married, 1 child, 5 y.o.	Team Manager	09/2010 - 03/2012
Inpatriate #3	M	Married, 1 child, 3 y.o.	Department Head	01/2007 - 02/2009
Inpatriate #4	F	Married, 2 children, 2 and 7 y.o.	General Manager	11/2004 - 12/2006 02/2010 - 06/2012
Inpatriate #5	M	Married, 2 children, 14 and 17 y.o.	Director of Sales	07/2007 - 01/2009

Table 3. Overview of interviewed inpatriates

The preparation for the data collection consisted of refining the interview questions and gaining access to employees who would be suitable for purposes of this study. During this process, the researcher used her father's experience, who himself was an inpatriate, fulfilling all the requirements for other interviewees, in order to review and modify the interview process and to create the final version of the questioning structure. The structure of interview and the order of questions were reflecting the phases of

international assignment, in order to help the interviewee answer the questions with relative ease, not jumping from topic to topic but following his experiences chronologically, which would assure a minimal loss of important information. The interview process, along with the questions, is presented in Appendix.

The nature of this research required a direct, ideally face-to-face access to the interviewees. Saunders et al. (2007: 168-182) notes a list of difficulties in gaining such access, from lack of contacts, time and resources, to organizational concerns about lack of researcher's credibility. He also notes that having an existing contact in the company makes this task much easier, since *"their knowledge of us means that they should be able to trust our stated intentions and the assurances we give about the use that will be made of any data provided."* (Saunders et al. 2007: 176). In addition, such contact may help to farm out the research, bringing other suitable subjects into researcher's attention. Such was the case of this research; the researcher had a number of acquaintances among the inpatriates from the time when her father participated in such international assignment. During her internship in U. S. Steel, these inpatriates introduced the researcher to American expatriates currently completing their assignment in Slovakia.

A pre-survey, exploring the employees' availability and willingness to participate in the interview was conducted via telephone, which led to a collection of sufficient amount of interviewees. During these phone calls, the identity of the researcher, the topic and the purpose of the research were introduced, in order to establish the credibility and develop the initial interviewer-interviewee rapport. As Saunders et al. (2007: 179-181) observes, it is important to establish this initial relationship, since physical access itself does not necessarily guarantee the cooperation and quality of information. This can be ensured by such means as overcoming the concerns for confidentiality and anonymity, and showing the possible benefits of participating in the research. *"Practitioners often wrestle with the same subjects as researchers and may therefore welcome the opportunity to discuss their own analysis and course of action related to such an issue, in a non-threatening, non-judgmental environment."* (Saunders et al. 2007: 180). The time and place of the interview (usually the interviewee's office) was agreed during these calls as well, in order to ensure a sufficient window for conducting the interview. The subjects were all highly accomplished professionals with busy schedules, therefore it was important that interviews were not interfering with their duties, so they could be carried out in relaxed and non-stressful atmosphere, facilitating their cooperation.

The interviews took place in Košice, Slovakia, at the premises of U. S. Steel Corporation, in July and August 2013. The interviews were conducted face-to-face, lasted approximately 30-45 minutes, they were recorded, and the anonymity of respondents, as well as not using their answers for any other purposes than this study was fully guaranteed. All participants were interviewed in their mother language, in order to ensure their maximum comfort and the ability to express themselves fully and without language barrier. Relevant parts and quotations from Slovak interviews were subsequently translated into English by the researcher.

Before proceeding with the interview, the researcher once again shortly introduced herself and her research to the interviewee. A short conversation regarding the interviewee's position, tenure with the company, status and length of their international assignment and their family situation preceded the interview question themselves, to establish the basis for the interview and allowing the researcher to modify some of her questions accordingly, based on individual cases. Since the purpose of this process was to get as much in-depth, personalized opinions and experiences of the international assignment by the employee as possible, the researcher placed a great importance on not letting her personal experiences lead to asking questions that might direct the subject to a certain answer. Active listening skills, as well as ensuring the researcher's correct understanding of complex answers by summarizing them back to the interviewee and requesting confirmation, were crucial to the success of interviews as well.

4.3. Data analysis

Analysis of quantitative data presents a considerable challenge, especially since there is no standardized method that would fit every qualitative research (Babbie 2008: 421; Ghauri & Grønhaug 2005: 206; Saunders et al. 2007: 482). Selecting the right analysis strategy therefore depends on a particular research, and varies from case to case. Nevertheless, there are certain elements that need to be present in each analysis in order to create order out of chaos of the data, such as "*examining, categorizing, tabulating, testing or otherwise recombining evidence*" (Yin 2009:126), so it can be ready for further processing. *Familiarization* with the data and its *categorization* are another two aspects that are regarded as a part of every good and successful qualitative analysis, since they enable the researcher to know the nature of his data in detail, and give him the ability to identify and extract the key information that is relevant to his research from the data (Babbie 2008: 422; Maylor & Blackmon 2005: 349).

In case of using interview as means of gathering the data, Maylor & Blackmon (2005: 345-349) suggest to start the process by immediately transcribing the interviews, and read through the transcripts thoroughly. According to Patton (1987: 149-150), the data should be also organized into meaningful categories and themes, which would allow to explore and analyze the data in systematic manner.

Adhering to these suggestions, the interviews were transcribed, and their contents were classified into several themes, to enable the researcher to compare and contrast individual responses more easily. First prominent theme was the perception of company's management of international assignment. This part conveyed the criticism of practices used by the company, listing the areas in which employees felt the organizational support was lacking or missing entirely, providing their view on how it could be managed more effectively. Second theme identified the cultural differences between the two countries, and struggles of employees and their families during their cross-cultural adjustment. Third major theme entailed comparison of expatriates and inpatriates from each others' perspective, with focus on employees' opinion about the equality of these two groups based on the care and attention they are being given by the company.

4.4. Reliability and validity of the study

A special concern should be placed on reliability and validity of the research, to ensure quality and credibility of the final thesis. This section will discuss each of these issues, presenting possible causes for error, and measures that were taken in order to minimize them.

Reliability refers to "the extent to which your data collection techniques or analysis procedures will yield consistent findings" (Saunders et al. 2007: 156). By this logic, the results obtained via analysis of the gathered material should be highly similar, if not the same, regardless of who is conducting it. To ensure this, there should not be any major variations in the data collection process. In practice, this means that all interviews were conducted in the same way, following the same practices and procedures and skeleton of questions, with the interviewer allowing only minor modifications that would enhance the responsiveness of the interviewee, while not deviating from the general script for the interview. Sufficient number of interviews was also performed, to account for any possible outliers in responses.

There are still multiple threats to reliability, both on the side of participant and on the side of observer. *Participant error*, which may occur when external circumstances, such as stress, sickness, or tiredness influence the participant's response (Saunders et al. 2007: 156). To avoid this issue, the topic and approximate time of the interview were announced to the subjects already during first contact with a plea for cooperation, so they could evaluate their willingness to participate and to prepare accordingly. The time of the interviews was then chosen by the interviewees, to accommodate their busy schedules and to secure enough time to provide thorough answers.

Similarly, *participant bias*, in which the subjects knowingly withhold a key aspect of information, for example out of fear of being reprimanded by their superior (Saunders et al. 2007: 156), was avoided by conducting the interviews in confidential atmosphere of interviewee's offices, with an assurance of full anonymity and voluntary participation. Additionally, the participant bias issue in this study was minimized by establishing a trustworthy relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee. The interviewer used her network of contacts within the company to provide a favorable reference to the interviewees, thus establishing initial contact and trust even before the first personal meeting. A great care was also placed on the interview process itself so it does not resemble an interrogation; more complex and sensitive topics were approached only after initial familiarization of the interviewee with the interviewer and gaining a feeling of comfort over the discussed issue.

Mistakes can also be done on the part of the observer, with *observer error* and *observer bias* being a threat. *Observer error* mostly occurs when more than one researcher is involved, and there is potential for variations and systematic errors in the data collection process (Saunders et al. 2007: 157). To eliminate this risk, a number of precautions (that were and will be mentioned) was taken, such as testing the questionnaire and adhering to the same principles when conducting the interviews.

Observer bias is a risk of the objectivity of results being distorted by the researcher, and may be a result of the closeness of the researcher to the situation being observed (Saunders et al. 2007: 299). Observer bias posed a real risk for this research, since the author has a first-hand personal experience with the researched topic, having lived in Pittsburgh, USA as a daughter of in-patriate, which can be a significant disadvantage. Being very conscious of the assumptions and preconceptions that the researcher carries around is the inevitable consequence of being familiar with the topic and the organization too well. It can prevent the author from exploring issues that would enrich the research, since she can feel that she

already knows them beforehand (Saunders et al. 2007: 151). To avoid inflicting her own opinions on the participants, the interviewer asked mostly open-ended questions, which required further elaboration from the interviewees, and also prompted them to add any information that might not be asked about, but that they feel is strongly relevant to the issue.

Validity of the study is concerned with "*whether the findings are really about what they appear to be about*", and whether there is a causality in the relationship between two variables (Saunders et al. 2007: 157). It can be further categorized into external and internal validity.

External validity, sometimes also referred to as generalisability, presents a question whether the findings of the study may be equally applicable to other research settings, such as other organizations. This is a particular concern if the research is conducted as a case study of one organization (Saunders et al. 2007: 158), which is the case of this thesis. There is a number of issues which prevents making generalizations based on results of this research, as it has already been briefly mentioned in the introduction. Firstly, the research question and objective of this study is very narrow, focusing on a specific setting in terms of culture and nationality, where only employee exchange between two specific establishments in two specific cities was examined. Secondly, the composition of interviewed employees is quite homogenous - both expatriate and in-patriate groups consist of four men and only one woman. This is due to the fact that steel manufacturing is by nature a male-dominated industry, which generally contains only 25% or less of female employees (Catalyst 2013), and as employees themselves confirmed in their interviews, it is not caused by the company considering their sex during the selection process for the assignment. However, since men are still deemed to have the traditional role of provider of the family in Slovakia, the question of the effect of the spouse on the assignment is not going to be very balanced and suitable for making generalized conclusions. It is sufficient for the purposes of this study, though, since, as already mentioned, it does not aim to create such conclusion, but focus on specific solutions for U. S. Steel case.

Internal validity refers to "*the ability of your questionnaire to measure what you intend it to measure. This means you are concerned that what you find with your questionnaire actually represents the reality of what you are measuring*" (Saunders et al. 2007: 372). To ensure this, the interview process was given a "test run", during which it was verified that the questions are formulated in a way that prompts the subject to provide the sought-after information in his answers, and any possible ambiguities regarding the questions were eliminated.

5. RESULTS

This chapter will present the collected data and empirical findings that result from them. It will be divided into three parts, corresponding with the research objectives, and following three prominent themes of the interviews. First section will present employees' views and opinions on company's practices regarding the international assignments management, which will be contrasted with theories presented in the literature review. Second section will focus on the cultural factor, presenting the cross-cultural challenges that employees with their families had to face, and look at them through the prism of Hofstede's dimensions, attributing these difficulties to a different cultural background of the respondents. Third section will explore interviewees' statements about each other, their impressions on different needs of expatriates and inpatriates, and how/if the company recognizes these differences in their provided support. These three parts will be followed by an overall summary and the general impression of the international assignment by employees, along with any additional comments or observations made during the interviews. Throughout the chapter, direct quotations from the interviewees will be used to emphasize the importance of employee point of view of the international assignment management.

5.1. Issues regarding the international assignment management

5.1.1. Before assignment

Selection

As mentioned in Chapter 2.2.1., companies select suitable employees for international assignments usually via form of interview, with a possible pre-selection of suitable candidates through various tests and profiling. This was the case also for U. S. Steel, with employees indicating in their periodic feedback and evaluation sessions whether they would be interested in partaking in a international assignment.

"It was happening over a longer time. It was a process, maybe one and half year before I went, there was a survey about who'd be interested to go to USA." (II)

"Even before the offer came, my superiors were surveying my interest to possibly go on such assignment. I discussed this with my husband, and it

was clear we'd be interested. Before the official offer came, there was this 'fishing' for my interest." (I4)

In addition to routine employee rotation, used by U. S. Steel for high managerial positions in Košice subsidiary, international assignments are used as an exchange of know-how and strengthening of cooperation in various specific projects. Based on their expressed interest, employees were then approached by their superiors when the opportunity has arisen and they considered the employee to be a good fit for the opening in the project. A short tenure with the company did not seem to be an obstacle in getting a chance to take part in a international assignment, as one employee noted. All interviewees recall being offered the position in this way.

"I was a person who already was an expat in Serbia, so I already had some experience. They made a list of interested people, for a while then there was silence, and after a while there was info that it's proceeding, whether I am still interested, that there's something happening, and then at the end of 2010 VP came to see me that Pittsburgh people will call me, and that there is a project for me ready in the states." (I1)

"I was selected based on my experience, especially the projects I was working on, and which were getting implemented in Europe at the time too, and they wanted someone with thorough knowledge of the subject." (E2)

"My situation is a bit different than other employees, I joined USS only recently, and less than 2 years after I've been here, I've been approached with a question whether I'd be interested to come here. I went through the interview process in Pittsburgh along with other candidates, I talked to my wife, and we decided to take it. It caught me completely off-guard, being with the company for so short, and all." (E3)

In addition to his professional expertise, a successful expatriate/inpatriate should possess certain characteristics, which would enable him to adapt to new environment and complete his assignment with more ease. All respondents noted that the main reason for their selection was their professional background and willingness to undergo the relocation process. Moreover, four respondents already had a previous foreign experience, thus proving themselves as willing and capable of expatriation/inpatriation. This ability is usually examined during the interview, along with other crucial factor - family situation. It is discriminatory to make selections based on this factor, however, companies have to factor it into their decision, since it has a major impact on the assignment as a whole. All respondents stated that while they are certain that the

company does not select them on the family situation basis, their superiors still factor the attitude of employee's family members into their final decision.

"I don't know why I was selected. But I personally think that the main reason is whether the person is flexible, whether that person, AND his family is willing to relocate, which, in my opinion, is a characteristics missing in many Slovaks, they are unwilling to do it - which I, however, still understand, because it is difficult process. But since I was an expat already, I knew what I was going into, and we knew what it means to move, for my wife to stop building her career...it really depends whether the family is willing to sacrifice themselves. Second important thing - references about you, about your person - how you are, how you work, whether you are willing and capable to go there and do the job, whether you are capable to adapt. I don't think the company really looks at family situation. What they DO look at is the employee's willingness to relocate." (I1)

"I was picked by people I already worked with, based on their experience with me. Both relocations were offered to me as to a married woman, the second one even during maternity leave." (I4)

"I think it all comes into play, because it is a significant move, but I think they primarily looked at my experience and background. My family situation was also favorable, with my children being already grown up, so for me, it made the decision easier. If my kids were still in high school, I think I would have refused, because it would have been much more difficult. But I really don't think the family situation is taken into regard as much as our professional background, they look for a good fit. Look at other expats, there are people with all sorts of family situations." (E4)

The selection process seems to be quite well managed, with the company being able to select well-fitting people for each position they are trying to occupy. Employees praised the freedom which was given to them in the decision process, they did not feel any pressure or possibility of being reprimanded if they refused.

"The way in which he asked me was very interesting, he said if you don't wanna go, that's fine, you don't need to give me any reasons, just say 'I can't go' and that will be the end of it. But if you tell me you're gonna go and we end up selecting you, you're going. So I talked it over with my family and we decided we'll pursue the opportunity. I definitely did not think I'd be reprimanded or punished, the only negative would be missing on all the opportunities that came along with the offer." (E2)

All employees were quite well informed about what they were getting into. Three American respondents mentioned that the company even gave them a possibility to go

on a look-and-see visit to the new location before making any final decision. However, four other respondents, both Slovak and American, stated that the timeframe given to them to decide was quite short, only about two weeks. Here we can see a not quite unified approach, however, there is a sign of the company actively working on their international assignments management. Inpatriate #4, who was relocated to the same place twice within six years, also noted a big move forwards in how company handles the selection and preparation of employees for their international assignments now.

"There was a huge change between first and second relocation, there was a great improvement, and the second one was much better, you could really see they fine-tuned their system. The first time, I was only third inpat, and they had almost no experience then with how to handle us - looking for accommodation, for kindergarten for my daughter, for the doctors...also the administrative matters, such as salaries, tax, etc...now it's much better, they already have some sort of 'manual' for these things. First time, it was very confusing, the site of the project changed, and nothing was ready. But now the relocation program is much clearer, any grey areas are settled, and you have almost everything on paper." (I4)

In general, employees viewed their time abroad as a way of moving forward in their careers.

"It was a promotion for me, from where I was at that time, I was sure of that." (E1)

"My boss offered me to go, as a further form of my professional growth. I was interested in what I'd do, and what it would give me for the future. They offered me pretty much the same standard as I had here, so I had no reason to refuse" (I2)

"There was a possibility to take part in a project, an offer came from Pittsburgh to employ some Slovaks and exchange people and experience from Kosice subsidiary, and besides work benefits there were also benefits for the family - school system, new lifestyle, American culture - it was an offer I couldn't refuse." (I3)

Overall, both Slovak and American employees noted about the same standard of selection process for their assignments. The only major difference was that Americans were being sent to Slovakia on pretty much set rotational schedule, and Slovaks were dispatched to USA quite ad-hoc, depending on the need of suitable employees for current project. However, this difference cannot be easily mitigated, as it stems from the company's organizational structure, and therefore should not be viewed as unequal

practice towards Slovak employees. HQ in Pittsburgh keeps control of Košice subsidiary via supplying natives into the managing positions, which allows for better coordination and alignment of subsidiary's operation with the overall corporate goals, while local experts from Slovakia are in demand especially in technical positions, since Košice subsidiary, as the most profitable subsidiary, has the know-how to bring back to the HQ, as noted above by Inpatriate #3.

Preparation

Preparations before the departure is the point where expatriates' and inpatriates' experiences start to diverge. If we take Tung's training program differentiation, mentioned in Chapter 2.2.2., as guidelines for effective preparation, all expatriates noted that it was at least partially followed. All five respondents mentioned receiving an informational package before departure, containing important factual information about the new place, as well as more practical guidelines, concerning everyday life. This was largely appreciated, especially by spouses, as noted by Expatriate #4:

"We got a whole big binder full of information on what will expect us here. You read a little bit, and you learn a little bit, and then you learn once you get here. I have been to Slovakia multiple times before on business trips, so I knew how it's looking like over here at least a bit, but for my wife, it was a very helpful tool." (E4)

This type of briefing package corresponds to Tung's Area studies programs, and as the respondent further revealed, Field experience is also utilized by the company. Prior to being selected and dispatched for the assignment, three out of five expatriates have visited their future workplace, either in a form of a business trip or short-term stay.

After their arrival, expatriates were offered another training, which combines Tung's Culture assimilator, Sensitivity training and Language training. These were highly appreciated, as Slovakia is a small, rather unknown and quite different country from USA. These differences are reflected not only in language, but also in other practical matters, such as different traffic signs and rules. To help expatriates overcome these obstacles, the company offered driving and sign-reading lessons to expatriates and their spouses. All five expatriate couples took advantage of this opportunity, and most of them were also taking language lessons, though the employees noted that spouses were more active in this regard, since it was often difficult to fit these lessons into their tight work schedule. Nevertheless, respondents greatly appreciated the company offering them such opportunity. The high level of attention paid by the company to the

smoothness of relocation process is probably best illustrated by Expatriate #2 experience:

"We didn't get any training before coming here, but we had the opportunity to take language lessons once we arrived. We were flown here on what they call a look-see visit, for 4 days, me and my wife. During that time, we were taken to schools, to hospitals, we met with other expats, we had a sort of orientation. That was about a month before we came here. I was also given a traffic and driving instruction manual with all of the road signs and guidance on driving in Slovakia, and I was given a driving instruction by an instructor, with my new car." (E2)

In contrast with expatriates' experience, inpatriates were offered the opportunity to partake in language courses already prior to departure. This possibility was mostly aimed at their spouses and families, since language proficiency was a requirement for being selected for an assignment. Out of five respondents, two requested language courses before departure for their wives and children. In addition, after relocating, the company offered a possibility of private language lessons in inpatriates' homes for their spouses. Three spouses took advantage of this opportunity.

Similarly to expatriates, three out of five inpatriates had a field experience from their business trips to Pittsburgh HQ. Any cultural trainings were not offered, but this can be attributed to the general knowledge of American knowledge by other nationalities, and thus such trainings would be redundant. Two inpatriates also positively valued a chance to visit the new place and pre-settle down. However, in contrast with expatriates, who got a chance to have a look-and-see visit even before accepting or declining the assignment, these inpatriates' visits were conducted only after their decision, approximately one month before their relocation. As Inpatriate #5 recalls,

"Some four-five weeks before going, me and my wife went to Pittsburgh for a week, to pick our house - they offered us three, from which we could choose - and to visit local middle and high school, where our children would be going. We got to talk to principals and see how the education process would go, plus we got to arrange practical matters - furniture for the house, medical care, and such. We took lots of pictures, which we then showed to our children when we returned. Maybe ten days after, I flew back to start my assignment, and my wife with children followed three weeks later. I preferred it to be this way - at least I could immerse myself in the working life calmly. When the rest of the family arrived, I was already settled and could handle the usual chaos they brought (smile)." (I5)

5.1.2. During and after assignment

After arrival, the adjustment of the employee and his family to the new environment is crucial to his overall happiness and work performance. Since the topic of cultural adjustment is very broad, this section will only focus on immediate experiences of employees and their families in their new homes, and how their ability to adapt influenced the decourse of the assignment. The cross-cultural differences and their influence on the work culture and social habits will be discussed in next section. Similarly, expatriates and inpatriates' different needs and expectations, as well as the company's activities during the assignment and evaluation of how well it makes provisions for these differences, will be addressed in greater detail later on. This section will also explore the situation of employees after return, and repatriation measures that the company takes.

Adjustment

All respondents noted that their families and themselves went through a typical U-curve of adjustment. However, there was a difference between expatriates and inpatriates in how they proceeded through the stages of the curve, and how well they managed to assimilate.

For inpatriates, the culture shock was not as deep, since American culture is well-known from media, movies and music all around the world. Inpatriates also reported keeping close ties among each other, with Slovak community in Pittsburgh being quite tightly bound, especially spouses and teenage children of inpatriates spending time almost exclusively in each other's company. All five inpatriates stated that this community made the culture shock phase much shorter and more bearable, with conformist phase taking place sooner than expected. Curiously, despite still being surrounded primarily by their own nationals, inpatriates assimilated to such degree that they regretted when the assignment came to its end. As Inpatriate #3 recalls,

"We were very happy there. When my assignment suddenly ended and it was announced that we have to go home, my wife seriously cried. Wives of all the other guys who were there with me, reacted the same. I am also missing it there, if there's a chance to return, I am immediately in." (I3)

Inpatriates also mentioned rather reserved attitude of locals towards them. Inpatriate #2 stated that

"The company gave me everything they promised, so that was on a very high level, but other than that, it was more like 'every man for himself'." (I2)

which is in contrast with statements of expatriates, who all noticed that Slovaks were very open and helpful with their adaptation. Expatriate #2 recalled exceptionally kind and welcoming attitude of Slovaks:

"I adapted very fast. When I worked in USA, I had two Slovak managers who reported directly to me, so when I came here, they ended up being very helpful and gave me lots of advice and information. I have my personal assistant, who is my social guide, she enrolled my son immediately in the soccer school in her community, and stuff like that, and other Slovaks are also very helpful." (E2)

Comparing expatriates' and inpatriates' adaptation process also showed differences in composition of their social circle. As opposed to inpatriates, who primarily sought each other's company, all expatriates stated that they have managed to make close Slovak friends from outside of the company as well, and that they are striving not to make other expatriates the centre of their social group. Considering this behavior, one would logically expect Americans to assimilate smoothly and better than Slovaks, who seem to be shutting themselves out from the other culture. Interestingly enough, the situation is quite opposite, and even after years spent in Slovakia, all expatriates noted that they still feel somewhat alienated, and they can sense that they are being treated differently. This was an interesting point, so it was brought to inpatriates' attention, who have experience with American employees and could shed some light to this phenomenon. Inpatriate #5 offered quite apt explanation:

"The difference is that we come to USA and we have no problem with joining the culture, and we know we have to communicate in English, so we ended up being treated the same. It's a melting pot, no one even notes you're of a different nationality. Americans come here, and they expect everything to happen in English, schools, work, everything. They don't seem to be all that interested to get into new culture and language, at least I don't know any American that would speak Slovak, and then they wonder they still stand apart. We are much more flexible than them." (I5)

This illustrates the different nature of expatriate and inpatriate experience, as well as why there is a need for different approach to these groups of employees by the

company. Inpatriates are coming to the HQ located in large and well-known superpower from subsidiaries located in smaller and possibly less-developed countries, so in order to be treated equally, they have to join the local culture quickly, while knowing that there is a small chance they will ever be something more than just an ordinary employee. In contrast with that, expatriates are usually coming to the subsidiaries to assume executive positions, therefore they might subconsciously expect the locals to adapt to their ways. Expatriate #2 confirmed this assumption, when asked whether he is treated the same as locals:

"(laughter) No way...are you crazy? I am getting preferential treatment everywhere I go, I'm not gonna lie. EVERYWHERE I go. It's because I am a VP in U. S. Steel. My assistant calls anywhere, says who I am, and I get reservations, and stuff. In USA, we get treated like ordinary people, but here, we are superstars." (E2)

If expatriates are expected to assimilate easily, this definitely should not be the norm, despite expatriates occupying executive positions, and inpatriates being of lower ranks. Even expatriates themselves acknowledge this fact.

"Sure I do get a preferential treatment, and it makes me feel uncomfortable sometimes. We shouldn't get it, we're just people like everyone else, but you can feel it, that you're being treated differently. The nationality and rank both come into it. People put it together, American, and executive...I think it's because you guys are still not used to foreigners here so much." (E4)

Getting a preferential treatment might seem like an advantage at first, since expatriates do not have to concern themselves with troubles of ordinary employees. However, in the long run, it might be harmful for the company, if it strives to become a true multinational organization. If such differences are continued to be made between the HQ and subsidiary employees, it might lead to resentment and discord within the company. International assignments serve exactly the opposite purpose - they are meant to make the differences smaller, and to bring separate units of the company closer together.

Family influence

Both expatriates and inpatriates fully confirmed Harvey's findings (1985) about the influence of family happiness on their ability to perform well with their work tasks. All employees acknowledged the sacrifice their spouses made by relocating, and they

highly appreciated this support. They were also willing to make compromises in case the family was unhappy.

"I really didn't have to worry myself about my family, I could fully focus on my work, since they were happy. If family wasn't happy and I'd be listening every day to 'I wanna go back to Slovakia', I'd quit. I really think it's 80% of the success. Kids have to fit in well, spouse needs to find her social circle, so it can work." (I1)

"That is an absolutely true statement, my job performance is directly tied to my family satisfaction. If my family was unhappy, it would be very, very difficult for me to do my job. The fact that my family has adjusted well is a big advantage." (E2)

In relation to family situation, a general consensus among the employees was that the age of children does matter, when going on an international assignment. All employees, with exception of one inpatriate, had either children in pre-school or elementary school age, or already adult children. Age of the children seems to have significantly influenced both the decision of employees whether to accept the assignment or not, and the adaptation process. As Expatriate #5 stated,

"When kids are younger, and they are in elementary school, it's easier for them to adapt and to find new friends very quickly, and then when your kids are ready to start college/in college, that's good time as well, since they are slowly leaving the nest. Those are the two windows when it's easy to go abroad. If my kids were in middle school/high school age, I would probably decide differently, since it's a tough time for kids, establishing their place among their peers, and being away would impede this process." (E5)

Inpatriate #5, who was the only one with teenage children, confirmed this opinion:

"My son was 14 and my daughter 17, when we went to Pittsburgh. When I announced that I had a chance to go, she flat out refused, and when we went anyway, there wasn't a day that we wouldn't listen to her saying how miserable she is, how she misses her friends, her boyfriend, etc. Other inpats had it much easier, their kids were almost toddlers, they had no resistance from them (smile). In the end, I had even requested to go home half a year sooner, since she didn't want to miss on her high school graduation and the chance to apply to universities in that academic year. I know some people that allowed their teenage kids to stay home, but I insisted we all go. For kids, it's amazing benefit for future life, being subjected to different culture, the language, the experience. Now, seven years later, even my daughter agrees and she's glad I forced her to go." (I5)

Experience of this in-patriate confirms that family situation is the number one reason for premature return, even though in this case it was not the spouse, but children, that prompted his decision. In general, all employees, except for one, relocated with a spouse, who gave up their career and became housewives/househusbands. Employees recognized the importance of their spouse being well prepared for this assignment, and if the company did not do much in this regard, they took it as their personal responsibility:

"I don't think I've had expectations of something different, I am not disappointed by the way that things were handled. In addition, many of us have been here in the past, so you don't have pink glasses, coming here. Some spouses might, but then it's up to us prepare them." (E4)

Both expatriates and in-patriates acknowledged the fact that while they were mostly occupied with work, where they suffered little to no cultural and language complications, their spouses had far more direct contact with the host culture, and therefore much more complicated job. Since many of the in-patriate spouses spoke only little to no English, the situation was pretty equal. Yet, the expatriate spouses seemed to get more support, compared to in-patriate spouses who were left to their own devices:

"I got a driver, who was very, very helpful in the transition. He speaks English and basically spends most of the day with my wife, and takes her where she has to go." (E2)

"My wife speaks no English, absolutely none. Yet, with kids at school and me at work whole day, she was alone for everything. Shopping, any maintenance...I remember how once she had to go alone to take our car to service. I have no idea how she managed, without a word of English! I would die in her place (laughter)." (I5)

Both expatriates and in-patriates reported that this experience made them value their time with their family, and they tried to fill their free time with as many interesting activities as possible, to ensure their happiness and satisfaction.

Repatriation

One area of international assignments management that was largely criticized especially by in-patriates, was the repatriation process. This research confirms findings of other authors presented in section 2.2.4., namely that company tends to have little to no follow-up plans for employees after their assignment is over, and that this area is badly neglected.

None of the expatriates knows what exactly is going to happen once their assignment ends. However, compared to inpatriates, they have one big advantage - the rotation system of expatriation, mentioned in previous section. Since all expatriates are on a two to three year rotational schedule, they have a relatively exact idea of when their assignment will come to an end, and can actively take part in the repatriation plans.

"Unless some position opens all of a sudden, I don't think they'd send person back so rapidly. From what I've heard, the company does quite a good job with the succession planning. When I go home for Christmas now, I will visit the Pittsburgh office and ask about what are the plans for me after this is over." (E3)

All expatriates also stated that an assurance was given to them to come to at least the same level position as they were leaving from. They praised the experience they have gotten in Slovakia, and expect to be in close contact with Slovak employees - whether inpatriates, or communicating distantly with Košice subsidiary staff - also after their return. Nevertheless, expatriates expressed their desire for being informed better.

"I have comments to repatriation process, since for about 8 months, it was not clear what would I do, because the project failed, and they didn't know where and what would I do. And I think I have to say that thanks to my reputation and people who knew my work helped me to get back where I am." (I1)

Since inpatriates were interviewed after their assignment had ended, they could offer more specific comments and criticism regarding the repatriation process and how the company is lacking in its proper management. Firstly, inpatriates had no fixed rotational schedule. Since their deployment was project-based, their tenure abroad depended solely on the duration of the project, and since all inpatriates were abroad during the time that was affected by global economic crisis, their projects either ended prematurely, or did not follow the originally planned path. Inpatriates did not appreciate that these circumstances were not taken into account, and that there was general lack of contingency planning.

"This was actually quite bad. There wasn't any assurance, any discussion about 'we are thinking that we'd send you back then and then', but it was really overnight decision made by the company. For example, you get your work tasks one day, you go home, and next day they tell you 'pack up, we're sending you home'. The company does give good benefits, that's undeniable, but they can take them away just as easy. That wasn't very pleasant." (I3)

Secondly, inpatriates noticed that *"while you're there, it feels like Slovakia is gone, it doesn't exist - and all of a sudden, you have to come back, and it feels weird. It's like they've forgotten all about you."* (I3). It would suggest that the separate divisions of the company are disconnected, and the contact to inpatriates, which should be maintained and cultivated as an important information vein and provide both-way know-how exchange, simply does not exist. Thirdly, all five inpatriates expressed great disappointment on how their time abroad is absolutely disregarded by local management, and their experience and contacts not taken into account at all.

"Slovaks usually envy each other even good weather on a funeral...but in this case, noone cared. This felt really weird, like they are not appreciating all the knowledge and contacts you brought, and they are not even trying to utilize them for their advantage. Your boss treats you as any other person that just came from a different department, not as someone with invaluable experience. Americans can at least appreciate this, and they make an effort to put you to good use." (I2)

"The main problem is that you go abroad, and after you get back, you should have a chance to apply your experience you gained in America, and here management doesn't care. There's no synchronization, there's no conception of progress and using the skills of the candidate. That's the main lacking area. They should create a system, that when person comes back, he knows where he will go and how he will utilize what he learned abroad. I think that in other European countries, in other large companies, they have that working, while here it's absolutely non-existent, and that bothers me a lot. Since the company invested so much into you going abroad, they should be looking for a return on that investment. Here, you have to pretty much work your way back to the top again, by yourself." (I3)

While these assignments can't be considered inpatriation failure in the truest sense of the word, there are signs that are identical with the literature definition - unexpected and premature return, family member's discontent, and lack of contingency planning for when the assignment ends. Granted, these inpatriations did not end in any employee turnover, since all inpatriates still work for U. S. Steel, but according to their words, their repatriation is considered a failure.

Following tables present a summary of expatriates' and inpatriates' evaluation of company's management of each stage of the assignment.

😊 - positive opinion 😐 - neutral opinion ☹️ - negative opinion ? - no opinion

	Selection & Preparation	During assignment	Repatriation	Overall grade of the assignment
Expatriate #1	😊	😊	?	😊
Expatriate #2	😐	😊	😐	😊
Expatriate #3	😐	😐	😐	😐
Expatriate #4	😊	😊	?	😊
Expatriate #5	😐	😊	?	😊

Table 4. Expatriates' evaluation of management practices

	Selection & Preparation	During assignment	Repatriation	Overall grade of the assignment
Inpatriate #1	😊	😊	☹️	😊
Inpatriate #2	😐	😐	☹️	😐
Inpatriate #3	😊	😊	☹️	😊
Inpatriate #4	😐	😊	😐	😊
Inpatriate #5	😊	😊	😐	😊

Table 5. Inpatriates' evaluation of management practices

5.2. Cross-cultural differences

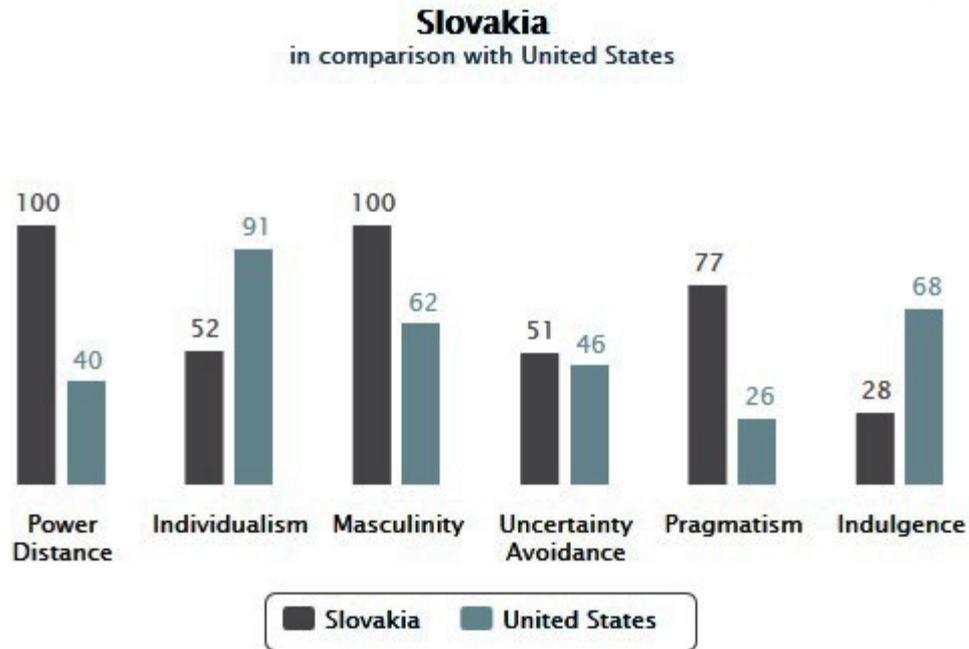


Figure 3. Hofstede's dimensions comparison (Hofstede 2010c)

This section will explore cross-cultural differences between Slovakia and USA with relation to Hofstede's cultural dimensions as presented in the graph above, and how do these differences translate into different behavior, both in workplace and in private lives. Since in all areas, except for Uncertainty Avoidance, the values are very different, clashes between working cultures, attitudes and managerial approaches were to be expected.

With the highest score in Power Distance dimension, Slovakia is a very hierarchical society. It translates into working practices in a form of tall organizational structure that also contains lots of bureaucracy, and a highly visible boss figure, who issues orders. This is something that Americans are not used to, as their Power Distance is very low. Expatriates observed all these phenomena, sometimes also in their negative form as abuse of power by the supervising figures.

It's a cultural issue. Sometimes people think that positions are granted just based on time, not effort or achievement. One of the troubling things is that here you can sometimes see that power is abused, especially with Slovak

ranks - in a way that I am your boss, so my opinion has more value, I am potentially smarter than you, even though you might be an extremely bright individual, you have to listen to me, don't park in my parking space, I get to eat in this lunch room, and so. I think this is a very cast society, you can see it just by walking down the corridor, seeing which doors are open and which are closed. Another difference - very defined work hours, which are less than what you are expected to work in the US. Then there's more employees here doing work here in the States - for the same sized operation, we'd have less employees. Some of it is design inefficiency, it's the way the system works here, like you have to get 10 signatures on a paper before you can proceed, in USA it's much less structure, requirements and regulations around business process. Here it requires more people to complete the same amount of work. " (E5)

Low American Power Distance, in combination with being one of the most individualistic countries in the world, is reflected into their working culture in a way that hierarchy is established for convenience, superiors are accessible and managers rely on individual employees and teams for their expertise. Both managers and employees expect to be consulted and information is shared frequently. At the same time, communication is informal, direct and participative to a degree. Expatriates complained that this was not the case in Slovakia:

"The work culture is very different. People are very distrustful to you from the beginning. Sometimes there's a little bit of exclusion, you're cut out from some things, and you can feel that you are just a guest. I can still feel it in lot of ways, that people are keeping distance from me and not telling me everything. It's like I am not managing to get my employees fully engaged - already in America it's difficult, and here so much more. Also, initiative - here, people seem to lack it. You have to come and tell them what you want them to do. If you say 'I need you to work harder', that message doesn't mean anything. You need to state specifically what you expect. Slovaks are not very self-assessing in their own work - I mean, they compare themselves to the job, so they'd say 'okay, I am meeting requirements of the job', but not necessarily looking out how they compare themselves to everybody else. You have some extremely talented folks here, that give a lot to the company, and then others just look at them and they don't aspire to become like that, they just say 'that guy is an overachiever and that's great, but I am doing my job and that's enough.'" (E2)

Inpatriates appreciated more egalitarian workplace culture, in which paperwork seemed to flow more smoothly and all nationalities were treated the same.

"You have a time to work, and to think about what you're doing, there's a space for discussion - sometimes even a bit too long one - but there isn't

such stressful environment, people are more willing and helpful, and there is more communication, it doesn't feel like your boss is so distant from you, people value each other, there is no ignorance and demeaning behavior, cultures work together and are equal. I didn't feel that as European I was treated as something lower, while here it is different. Here, Slovaks behave like 'uuu, American, he saw everything and knows everything' but it is not so." (I3)

On the other hand, they did not appreciate American "live for work" attitude, and as a pragmatic and not very indulging society, they did not identify very well with typical American attitude of maintaining positive attitude.

"People work more there, and are more dedicated to their jobs, and spend less time with their families. But I guess it has to be so, when you waste 3 hours per day just travelling to and from work. It's a different attitude. But in order to get the same standard, they have to work more than us Slovaks." (I2)

"Everything was 'good job' there, which bothered me, because not everything can be a good job. So they are less open to criticism, and they don't take it very well. However, I had very good relationships with my coworkers, I can't say anything negative regarding interpersonal relationships. I didn't like their 'good job' attitude, but on the plus side, they have much more positive outlook on life." (I1)

This difference in openness and constant positive attitude seemed to be the main point in which the two cultures clash. All five expatriates noted how unfriendly people seemed to be; they voiced their surprise about this almost exactly in the same words.

"It's difficult, but that's just American vs. Slovak culture. We say hello to people on the street, even to people we don't really know. Here you walk through your neighborhood and noone speaks to you, in America that would be considered rude. Here it felt quite unfriendly." (E2)

Similarly, inpatriates, with their high score of Power Distance, were not used to a friendly banter that they were expected to engage in, even with the strangers. Inpatriate #2 noted that it took him a while to get used to this fact:

"There is a constant barrage of 'Hello' and 'How are you' among Americans. It even got to a point where I was genuinely annoyed with it, since we are not used to wasting time with empty phrases. It all seems phony, no one is genuinely interested in how you are doing, you are always supposed to say 'Good' and I see absolutely no point in that." (I2)

These differences are most probably the reason for complaints voiced by expatriates about their employees being distant, and the reason for inpatriates to mostly seek each other's company, instead of socializing more closely with locals. Being highly pragmatic, Slovaks enjoy honest, to-the-point conversations and relationships, unlike Americans, who are more indulgent.

Scoring high on Pragmatism and low on Indulgence dimension also gives Slovaks the ability to adapt their habits and traditions easily to changed conditions. It also gives them thriftiness, viability and perseverance in adapting and achieving good results. This was reflected in their ability to settle down in their new homes rather quickly compared to Americans, who reported to struggle more in this regard. Differences in these two dimensions are translated also to working culture, where Americans still seem to feel like guests even after long time, and it takes them a while to establish themselves within the workplace. On the other hand, the normative dimension of American culture makes them strive for quick results within the workplace, which can be the reason for American managers to complain about Slovak employees' apparent lack of speed and initiative in work processes.

Slovakia is masculine and more collectivistic country than America, so their emphasis inclines more towards the family, while still keeping the traditional male and female roles when it comes to division of labor within the family. When asked about the difference in male to female ratio of employees sent abroad (as also seen on the gender distribution of both expatriate and inpatriate group), all respondents replied that this is purely coincidental and a result of steel manufacturing industry being dominantly male area. However, Slovaks and Americans had quite different opinions about the male and female expatriates. While for female expatriate, it was an automatic fact that her husband will follow her abroad, the female inpatriate had a different opinion:

"Men are providers of the family in Slovakia, and when a woman from USS gets such offer, the man is usually better paid so it's difficult for them to decide. It's not really about company preferring to send men to women, but when scouting for interest, women often indicate they are not willing to go. My husband gave up his job to come with me. There are not many men willing to do this. The society looks at such men differently, and not every man has the confidence to do this." (14)

5.3. Expatriates' vs. inpatriates' needs and expectations

According to Aycan's findings, mentioned in Chapter 2.2.3., actions of the company seem to have a major influence on employee's adjustment and performance, both general and in work. However, the cultural differences between Slovakia and USA, presented in the section above, make it difficult, if not impossible, to apply a standardized approach towards expatriates and inpatriates. This section will therefore explore these differences. It will present different needs and expectations of both groups of employees, and assess how the company assistance helps them with their psychological, socio-cultural and work adjustment.

5.3.1. Work adjustment

Let us start from the core - the work differences - and work our way upwards, through all the differences and facets of adjustment, to form a complex picture of U. S. Steel's expatriates and inpatriates, and their comparison. Despite all the factors influencing it, the international assignment is primarily about work. As already mentioned before, the expatriate and inpatriate assignments are fundamentally different, and employees themselves realize this difference and seem to adjust their needs and expectations to this fact.

*"I went to work in an area that I had no prior experience with before. But I knew this was going to be so, I went there to learn something new. The intention was for me to go there, gain experience, and then bring it back."
(II)*

*"I was well prepared as far as what to expect. This is pretty much the same position as I had at home, and the gentleman I replaced was very helpful with bits of information both about work and outside of work situation."
(E1)*

This difference in employees' work placement seems to have an impact on their subconscious perception of what is going to wait for them in the new place - inpatriates expect a big jump to the unknown, while expatriates want to maintain the status quo and have the same standard as they are used to from home. While work-wise, all of the interviewed employees claimed to be content with the company's approach, in private life, there were considerable differences that lead to differences in employees' general adjustment.

5.3.2. General adjustment

When it came to situation outside of work, both expatriates and inpatriates were primarily concerned with the same three things - settling down, support in case of troubles, and education for children. However, the details of their experience vary greatly, as the company support was considerably different.

Company support services

Even before settling down, inpatriates and their families had to face a need that expatriates did not share - getting the visa. This is the case in many MNCs, especially the American ones, which have subsidiaries in countries, whose nationals need to obtain visa and/or working permit prior to departure. Even though expected, this was still a notable inconvenience for inpatriates, since the US Embassy is located on the other end of the country, in Bratislava, and inpatriates along with their family members had to take a day off from their work and school obligations to address this need, and they reported no assistance from the company in this matter.

All inpatriates received the standard company perks package for employees going on a international assignment - a house, company car, and placement of their children in local school system. However, when it came to day-to-day challenges, such as getting various permits (e.g. driver's licence), navigating around their new environment (e.g. finding grocery stores, places for sport activities, various social outlets), or even a simple thing such as getting to work in the morning, the inpatriates found themselves to be stranded and without much help from the company. This is in direct contrast with suggestions that Harvey et al. (1999b) present in their paper, where they suggest four different types of support that should come both from inpatriates' social circle, as well as their employer. Inpatriates intuitively confirmed these findings:

"What they could improve, is part shortly after arrival. Menial stuff like getting a driver's licence, and so. The company did not prepare us to how these things work, and we had to figure it all out by ourselves, or with help of inpats who were already there. We are not prepared to the way things work there, and we don't have expat support like Americans have to do those things for us. Now it's a bit better, but when we went there, you could feel that insecurity, that you don't know what to do, and you had to call other Slovaks there, and help each other." (I1)

"Inpats are holding together, and there is sort of a word-of-mouth manual passing on from one employee to another, these trivial things, about how the system works. Where the shops are, how doctors work, and so. If this

community wasn't there, it would be very hard to settle down and adapt, but I heard that eventually it got better, since we were the first wave of inpats. I could see that by the time we were leaving, there was already some system, they had some guidelines for people, it was better. It felt like they were testing and polishing the system on us, and we had to figure things out and inform each other." (I3)

In contrast with inpatriates' experience, expatriates all praised the work of the company, especially of the expat support. As explained by one of the expatriates, expat support is a group of Slovak employees with exceptional language skills and thorough knowledge of administrative matters, who are assigned to act as a 24/7 assistance for the expatriates.

"The expat support is a group within HR organization, and they facilitate the housing, any issues with your house, your driver's licence, your paperwork, that sort of stuff. Any questions you have, you can go to them, they act as a buffer between us and Slovak community. Then they are also helping you to integrate into the community, get you out, show you around." (E2)

The comment about buffer was interesting; it reflected the observation voiced by one of the inpatriates about Americans refusing to integrate themselves fully into society. The existence of expat support and lack of any similar organization for inpatriates also prompted a discussion about why is it so, and whether American employees have any information about the situation of inpatriates. All expatriates stated that the main difference between expatriates and inpatriates is the language, and all disparities in treatment by the company stem from that

"There is one major difference - there is an assumption in USA that English is a language you have to speak, and there is an assumption that Americans coming here will never speak Slovak, so they have to accommodate that. That's the largest difference. The areas where they would help me are things like facilitating with getting my driver's licence, getting my paperwork done, they have to help me with that, and we have organizations to do that. In America, Slovaks are expected to take care of that by themselves, since they know the language." (E2)

However, while inpatriates got the company assistance only in the most serious matters, such as getting their Social Security numbers, expatriates noted they could rely on expat support services practically in everything.

"I had no problems whatsoever, I could either call expat support, or my assistant. We have expat support - they would take me to get my driver's license or residency card, my assistant would take me to the bank, they were helping me with all the administrative stuff. My assistant helped me with going grocery shopping, etc. I think people who come to Slovakia get better support than the other way around. For example, our credit card got declined, and we didn't speak the language, so we could call the expat support and have them handle the problem via cell phone." (E1)

Even then, some expatriates thought the assistance is not enough, and complained about not being provided with personal driver, which made their lives very difficult. In this area, inpatriates seemed to have much more realistic and down-to-earth expectations than expatriates. Inpatriate #4 very realistically commented on this difference, with Expatriate #2 expressing similar opinion:

"When an American comes here for VP position, it's logical that he gets bigger perks, but it's not because he's American, or expat, but it stems from the position, and people sometimes forget this, and then expect to get the same benefits." (I4)

"In USA, there is NO manager, including the president, who has a driver. The culture in the organization lends itself to give much more perks to certain employees, and that's what happens. You may hear other expats complaining that they don't have a driver and they don't get invited here and there, but that has nothing to do with them being expats, but with their position and with the organization of the company." (E2)

Both groups of employees also acknowledged that expatriates have different, higher expectations than inpatriates, when it comes to the assistance by the company. Once again, this difference does not seem to be related to nationalities, but it stems from the different nature of expatriate and inpatriate assignments, and different positions that these employees occupy:

"Americans who come to Slovakia usually come to higher managerial functions, and therefore get higher benefits as us, who go to middle management/technical positions. They get bigger benefits, more security, better care. If they have some family problems, or with school, or with doctors, they have people to take care of that for him. There is a group of people specifically for that, they can turn to them 24/7 if there is any problem. Slovaks in USA don't have that." (I3)

However, in general, expatriates had a quite good knowledge of inpatriate situation, and they were mostly sympathetic, admitting that company does a *"lousy job in supporting*

Slovaks who come to America" (E4). Expatriates even expressed the interest to help their Slovak counterparts, if they had the opportunity to do so. Expatriate #5 summarized the situation, as well as a general standpoint of expatriates on this issue, very fittingly:

"I know a bit about that. They get far less support than we do. I think it's really just ignorance by the Americans, we are not doing our part well over there. I think we don't understand how difficult your situation there is. I've heard stories that on first days, people didn't know how to get to work, and nobody explained things to them. Even though you have a good grasp on the language, there's still so much jargon, so many idiosyncrasies that are extremely tough to navigate. Most of them, with their spouses at home, have some English skills, but not all of them. I think it's hard for the spouse, to try to create a similar standard for the family as they had at home. It's additionally difficult that kids have to go to English school, it's not their mother language...but all in all, since Slovaks are in a bit more pain, but their growth is greater than our growth over here. They grow more as a person." (E5)

Another difference between expatriate and inpatriate assignments could be observed in employees' attitudes and expectations of how problems should be handled. Expatriates, coming to small post-communist country to fill in top managerial functions expected higher level of service than inpatriates, who were aware of the fact that they are just one of many subsidiary employees, without entitlement for special considerations.

"The expat services hotline is there, you call them, and generally, if they're not responsible, they point you into the right direction. I personally found this frustrating, though, why delegate me somewhere else, when they could solve it for me? But maybe I just have a different opinion of what such 'service' should be. Your problem should be taken to one central group and they should solve it, instead of passing it on to someone else." (E3)

"It's a culture thing. Here your computer gets broken, your secretary will take care of that. Over there, you pick your own phone, call helpdesk and deal with it." (I4)

Education for children

Another common concern, yet different in its core, was the question of education for children of expatriates and inpatriates. Stemming from the differences between countries where HQ and subsidiaries are located, both groups of employees had their separate concerns about their children taking part in the local educational system.

The inpatriates were mostly worried about how their children would handle instruction in a language different than their own, especially since majority was not proficient in it. Many parents also noticed a considerable difference in American curriculum, which is usually not as extensive as Slovak, especially in high school. Inpatriate #5, whose both children attended local high school, recollected:

"My both kids attended the best high school in Pennsylvania, but despite taking honors classes, they were bored, especially when it came to math and science courses, which were just sub-par. My daughter was about to apply for universities back home, and her math abilities, needed for entrance exams, suffered there. Upon return home, she had to get extra tutoring to catch up with her classmates. On the plus side, English is almost like their second mother tongue now, and the options for sports and clubs for students are amazing over there. There are pros and cons to everything." (I5)

The expatriates, on the other hand, had assurances that the instruction would be in English language, and were concerned about the quality of education being on the same level as in USA. Besides the content of curriculum, they also demanded equally rich extracurricular activities for their children as back home.

"From educational standpoint we were concerned, when you're here for three years, you don't want your children to fall behind, therefore there was a bit of trepidation about whether to take our kids here. They are in English speaking school here, the programme is internationally-based, to keep the kids on par with American education. It is also doing map testing, which is equivalent to proficiency testing in the States, so you get a good baseline of where your children stand, and compares how their educational progress goes compared with American statistics. However, the international school is smaller, so it's not the same base as in America, they don't have all sports that there are in USA, such as cheerleading, baseball, etc. I think that major challenges for expats stem from children, and from the school system. Not necessarily about the quality of education, but about the extracurricular activities." (E5)

Overall, the expatriates seemed to have more issues and concerns when it came to education system of the host country. This can also be related to the general differences between inpatriate and expatriate assignments - HQ are usually located in one of the major countries, which tend to have a high-quality education system, therefore inpatriates regard it as a perk, to have their children be a part of it. On the other hand, the education system of the countries in which the subsidiaries are located, can be a bit more questionable, therefore the trepidation of American parents is understandable. This also manifested itself in their answers, where the expatriates relocating only with

their spouse stated that if their children were still of school age, they would have most probably refused to accept the assignment.

5.4. Final impressions

Both expatriates and inpatriates assessed their assignments positively. They regarded it as a step forward, both in their professional and private lives, and they especially appreciated the positive effects of their assignments on their family life and children:

"As a family, our ties strengthened a lot. For kids, it's amazing benefit for future life, being subjected to different culture, the language, the experience." (I4)

Inpatriates, who already finished their assignments, also confirmed the long-lasting benefits, and that despite some of the assignments being cut short due to the unfavorable situation on the market and still lasting effects of the world economical crisis, the overall assignment was a success and they are still in contact with their former colleagues from HQ, communicating not only on work topics, but also maintaining a certain level of friendship. Expatriates expect similar effect to take place upon their return home; both groups intend to keep the ties and cooperation between the two divisions active and lively.

In their overall assessment of the international assignment and how the company handled it, the general consensus among the employees was that the expectations met the reality. Most of employees maintained realistic view and realized that things are not going to be perfect every day, but in the end, *"you forget the bad things, and you remember the good ones."* (I1). All employees also stated that despite any shortcomings, they would make the same decision again. Both expatriates and inpatriates also offered some valuable insights into the foreign exchange management, regarding both employees and employers.

From the employee point of view, it has been repeatedly emphasized by both groups that besides personal abilities to complete the job, the attitude is most important.

"Such relocation is not for everybody, and there were people picked who thought that they could handle it, but they couldn't. It is not a language exchange, you have to go there already with the knowledge of the language, so you would be able to fully complete your given work tasks. If the inpats

are open, if they are the type of people who like to experience new things, they will be very successful. If they aren't, if they want things to be the same as they were when they left, when they try to keep them the same as when they left, sometimes they struggle. You have to have a positive attitude and open mentality, and you go a long way." (I3)

"It is very important that the person is capable to go through the assignment, from the personality point of view. Not only that he remains positive - because in the end, how you feel about the whole assignment is up to your own attitude - but that he won't get 'lost', that he is self-sustaining and capable person. Sometimes people envy you for going, but it's not easy, to uproot your family and move all across the world, and not everyone can handle this. The selection process should be important, so the selected people represent us, their home division, properly. No one will walk you around by your hand. The initiative has to come from your side." (E5)

In general, any and every lodged complaint and concern regarding the management of the international assignments by the company was related to two areas, which are proved to be challenging for companies by previous research in international assignment management - repatriation process, and company assistance in adjustment process. Surprisingly, most of the criticism came from the expatriates, who previously reported that they were very content with the services and assistance they were getting. However, as people coming from the HQ, they expressed that they felt somewhat responsible for the treatment of inpatriates by their home unit, and as being part of the management, they should be active in the improvement process.

"I don't think I have anything to criticize, because the way in which the expat group is taken care of here is truly outstanding, there's not a lot to criticize on this side. If people go the other way and recreate this kind of structure in USA to provide more help for Slovaks coming there, then it will be perfect...and if I had the opportunity, I'd try to do something more for them myself." (E4)

Inpatriates also agreed with this point of view:

"Considering what sort of experience the company has with relocating people to USA - since it focuses primarily on that - it could have been better. There are still things that are surprisingly not taken care of." (I1)

Both expatriates and inpatriates noticed and appreciated the change in international assignment management over the years, but despite these improvements, they still had a couple of suggestions on their own:

"From the operating side, we need to understand our terms a bit better. Like, exactly how long are you gonna stay here, the job is very fluid, and it would be helpful if those terms were defined a bit more clearly." (I3)

"I think in general company tries to look at this with open mind. One thing I'd suggest is - there is some small expat service group in Pittsburgh too, but none of the folks in that expat group were ever expats themselves, so they have pretty much no practical idea what it's all about. They're trying to help us, but they don't understand the problem . People have to totally uproot their lives. You can't really fully realize what it means until you get here." (E3)

6. CONCLUSION

This chapter will start by discussing the results with regard to the theoretical background presented in the literature review, answering the hypothesis and addressing the research objectives. Implications of the study will be presented next, along with the practical contribution for the company. The chapter will be concluded by stating the limitations of the study, and suggestions for future research of the topic.

6.1. Discussion

The main objective of this thesis was to combine the expatriate and inpatriate management studies and cultural studies, and apply them on a case of a single company. Looking through the prism of existing research, this thesis tried to provide a critical analysis of United States Steel's management of its international assignments, as seen by the employees selected for these assignment, and evaluate the existence and reasons for any difference in treatment of expatriates and inpatriates by the company. The research question was therefore formulated as follows: *"What are the differences between expatriate and inpatriate assignments, and how does the support and assistance, provided by United States Steel Corporation to its expatriates and inpatriates, differ in eyes of these employees?"*

To answer the research question, these objectives were guiding the research process:

- What are the needs and expectations of expatriates and inpatriates, and how do they differ?
- What are the differences between the working and general life culture in USA and Slovakia?
- What are the expatriates' and inpatriates' experiences and impressions from their assignments, and how do they perceive the help (or lack thereof) received from the company?

Let us answer all three questions by comparing expatriates' and inpatriates' experiences. Since expatriate and inpatriate assignments are different in the position, organizational role and the competences of the employee (Heejin 2013:327), needs and expectations of employees undertaking these assignments are also different. When it came to work

expectations and adjustment, inpatriates stated that their main goal and purpose was the knowledge and communication transfer - to bring their local expertise to the HQ, and at the same time see and learn the new ways of operation, which would be implemented back in the subsidiary upon their return. These statements are in agreement with Harvey's findings, who recognizes the importance of inpatriate assignments in enhancing company's global competitiveness by using them as means of know-how transfer and alignment of subsidiaries with overall company strategy (Harvey et al. 1999a: 51).

When it came to cultural differences being reflected to the workplace, inpatriates noted typical American openness, high level of individualism, which requested them to take more initiative than they were used to, and equal approach regardless of their nationality. Flatter organizational structure also resulted in less bureaucracy, which was highly appreciated by all inpatriates. As one of ordinary rank employees, inpatriates had no specific needs that they expected to be fulfilled, embracing the idea of "American dream" in which their own hard work is the way to success. American business culture proved to correspond quite well to cultural theories, as well as inpatriates' expectations.

Expatriate assignments differed from inpatriate assignments in the fact that all expatriates occupied high executive functions, and their needs and expectations stemmed from this fact. In work environment, their role was to assume control and effective management of the subsidiary in accordance with HQ plans (Bonache & Brewster, 2001; Reiche, 2006).

The culture barrier had more prominent role in this case, and as Harvey et al. (1999a: 52) noted, not all managers can successfully cross it and become fully accepted by host country employees. Expatriates acknowledged this difficulty, and frequently complained that they were met with an initial wall of distrust, which never fully subsided. Hofstede's cultural dimensions were also present in the workplace, notably Slovak high Power Distance and lower Individuality, which caused American managers to be frustrated with apparent lack of initiative from their employees. Power Distance was also reflected in more prominent separation between managers and their subordinates and less open and informal communication, a fact that expatriates were not used to, and complained about feeling excluded from Slovak social circle at times.

Cultural differences were projected also into general life, in which Hofstede's dimensions proved to affect the ways in which both cultures communicated and adapted

to new environment. High on Pragmatism and low on Indulgence scale, Slovaks proved to be more capable of easy adaptation to American culture. High Power Distance was also reflected in inpatriates not being used to mostly informal and open style of communication, even with strangers. Inpatriates' needs were mostly centered on fast and easy adaptation of both them and their families into American culture, which was made easier by universal knowledge and general acceptance of American culture around the globe, as well as its multiculturalism and ethnical diversity (Adams & Strother-Adams 2001). According to Black, Mendenhall and Oddou (1991) and Harvey (1985: 88-89), good adaptation of spouse and children to new conditions are crucial to success of the assignment, and inpatriates generally reported that the process was smooth.

However, there were rather strong complaints voiced by inpatriates when it came to company support and assistance; employees stated they felt rather abandoned and alone in the new country. Aycan (1997: 451-452) and Harvey (1999b: 45) stated that good employee adjustment and performance is a result of joint effort of both employer and employee, and the company seems to not have played its part properly, when it provided little to no assistance after the arrival of inpatriates into the new country. Similarly, very little attention was given to the repatriation process, despite its crucial implications (Harvey 1982: 54-58, Stroh, Gregersen & Black 2000: 682). Inpatriates stated that their experience was not taken into account and that they were treated as any other employee, even encountered complications in trying to establish themselves in their original workplace again.

The only part of company performance that was assessed positively were its activities prior to the assignment, and the rest was subjected to criticism. However, all inpatriates gave their assignment overall positive grade.

In private sphere, Americans were on the other ends of spectrum of Hofstede's dimensions in Pragmatism and Indulgence than Slovak, which could be seen in their adaptation process. Coupled with arriving to small, relatively unknown country with a very complicated language, expatriates encountered a wider array of problems, such as dealing with bureaucracy, finding suitable educational institutions for their children, and forming interpersonal relationships. Company support was therefore much more extensive, with expatriates having their own group of local employees devoted to troubleshooting their problems and issues, as well as organizing various events for them and helping them immerse into local culture. While expatriates agreed that higher support in their case is needed due to the language barrier, which inpatriates do not

have, at the same time it was acknowledged both by expatriates and inpatriates that the support and assistance provided by the company differs greatly, thus supporting the original hypothesis: *"Both groups of employees will note that United States Steel Corporation provides more assistance and support to expatriates, i.e. Americans coming to Slovakia, than to inpatriates, i.e. Slovaks coming to USA."*

6.2. Implications of the study and contribution for the company

This thesis was constructed as a case study, and aimed to bring specific findings that would be applicable to management practices of a certain company. However, it has also contributed to research in international assignments management. It explored the differences between expatriate and inpatriate assignments and specific needs and issues that stem from these differences. Furthermore, this study also tried to connect international assignment research and cultural research. It looked at how the adaptation process of employees is influenced by the type of their assignment, as well as by how well-known the host culture is. Most importantly, this study has attempted to shed light onto how much the company actions influence the employees' satisfaction with the assignment. It aims to bring together disconnected ideas of employers and employees about how the international assignment management should be performed, and tries to suggest a solution beneficial for both sides.

Employee interviews provided couple of useful suggestions for improvement of U. S. Steel's current management practices. In selection process, the company should offer the employees more time before making the decision. Accepting an international assignment is a huge undertaking with major implications, both professional and personal, and when employee feels under pressure, he might reach the wrong conclusion. Some employees mentioned having the opportunity to visit the new country before making any final decision. This is a chance that many other employees did not have, and it might have influenced their decision-making process. It would be therefore suggested to create a more unified approach, which would offer employees more equal chance to see the consequences of their decision.

Since happy family equals happy employee, it is suggested that any cultural or language trainings prior to departure are extended also towards employee's spouse and children. This is already partly happening, however, especially expatriates could benefit from more extensive preparation, which would help them to get adapted to their host culture

more easily, and as a result, they would require less assistance from the company, which could use these currently tied resources in more productive way.

The cultural differences between USA and Slovakia call for a different managerial approach, and in this instance, the problem can be solved already before it arises. In order to mitigate American managers' initial frustration with their Slovak subordinates, it is suggested that expatriates selected for higher managerial posts also undergo specialized cultural training aimed at cultural differences and effective management of employees from this new culture. Many expatriates stated that they had some experience with Slovak employees from their business trips; however, these largely consist of business meetings and negotiations, where the members of two countries are dealing with each other as equals. Such a short and radically different interaction is clearly insufficient to prepare them properly for managing a completely different culture, where Slovak employees are mostly their subordinates and are expected to be lead.

Company assistance during the assignment was under the greatest employee scrutiny, with both groups agreeing that the company is doing maybe a bit too much for expatriates, while nearly not enough for inpatriates. Here we can see a disparity in company's attitude which should be corrected in order to receive a more fair and unified approach. According to findings of Harvey et al. (1999b), despite seemingly easier task of relocating from peripheral subsidiary to the HQ in a well-known developed country, as opposed to the other way around, inpatriates have more complicated task, where they have to adjust not only to new environment, but also to new company culture. The article further stated crucial importance of company support on the adjustment process and overall performance of the inpatriate. Employees reported that such support was not provided, therefore it is suggested for the company to revisit this issue.

Another well-aimed observation noted that even if there are people involved in assisting employees on their assignments, these people have never undergone such assignment themselves, therefore are not fully aware of seemingly miniscule details, which, however, can make a big difference. It is therefore suggested to the company to create inpatriate support group, which would assist inpatriates upon their arrival to Pittsburgh, so they would not be forced to deal with all exhausting details by themselves. Involving former expatriates and inpatriates in these support groups, whether directly, or indirectly (debriefing employee after his return home and utilizing his comments in improving this service), could also improve the effectiveness and usefulness of company assistance.

The existence and activities of expatriate support group, while partially justified, seem to have its effect on employees' psychological and socio-cultural adjustment. It is a double-sided weapon - while having someone to rely on makes expatriates' psychological adjustment easier in a way that they are more satisfied and receiving higher standard of living compared to other groups of employees both at home and in host society, their socio-cultural adjustment suffers - they lack the ability to become a fully self-sufficient member of society, and handle the everyday problems and challenges. In comparison to this, Slovaks emerge from their assignment more "weather-beaten" and ready to face various challenges. A suggestion for the company in this case would be to create a more equal support structure for expatriates and inpatriates, in which both groups of employees would be able to use the services of expat/inpat centre shortly after arrival in order to accommodate themselves in the new country. Accounting for the language differences, this support could work in its extended form all throughout the expatriates' stay in Slovakia, but in lesser extent, in order to allow Americans and their families to stop living in their "bubble" and fully experience their host society.

While repatriation was explored only from inpatriates' point of view, it was shown that the company absolutely does not follow the rules for a successful repatriation, and thus gains very little return on its investment into the whole assignment. While it is often hard, or even impossible, to promise the employee a specific position upon his return, when the assignment is coming to a close, a discussion should be started between the company and the employee regarding his future and his placement, so he does not have to fear whether there will be any position available at all. Recognizing the skills and contacts the employee gained on his assignment should be the primary concern for the company when deciding a new position for the employee; one in which he could utilize these new competences would bring the most benefits for both company and the employee. As already mentioned, upon his return, the employee should be also debriefed, so the company can collect his ideas and observation of the assignment and use this information in further improvement of their management practices.

U. S. Steel's practices indeed seem like an ineffective management, and because of this, company gets no return on their considerable investment. It seems like an inconsistency in overall company plans - the subsidiary employees are requested to come working to the HQ to exchange know-how and contacts and the top management remains almost entirely American, yet there seems to be no real effort to utilize the results of this connection. It is therefore advisable that the company devotes more effort to the

repatriation process - not only for these assignments to yield a good ROI, but also to avoid future talent losses - inpatriates realize that their foreign experience makes them quite a desirable asset, and if their home company does not appreciate this, they might choose to apply their skills elsewhere.

6.3. Limitations and suggestions for future research

Firstly, since this research was conducted as a case study, its results are not suitable for making generalizations and applying them to other companies. A small sample size for both interviewed groups, as well as the qualitative research approach, can lead to certain limitations, such as inability to quantify the quality of the company's international assignment management. The composition of the two groups and the location of their assignment was also rather homogenous, which was desirable for this specific study, but once again poses a limitations in applying these findings to different companies, countries, and circumstances.

Secondly, due to limited anonymity, it is questionable whether the employees were always fully honest in their answers. There is a risk of participant bias, which might be true especially in case of inpatriates, since Slovaks, due to their high Power Distance, are not used to express their criticism of authorities very openly. Furthermore, the lack of researcher's experience in conducting interviews may have lead to inefficiency in the data-collecting process and influenced the quality of data. Observer bias was also a high risk for this research, due to the researcher's personal experience with the very same inpatriate process that is studied in this thesis.

Thirdly, precise comparison between expatriates' and inpatriates' experiences was not fully possible, due to expatriate assignments still being in process, while the inpatriate assignments have already ended. This made it impossible to collect expatriates' opinions on repatriation management of the company. Additionally, inpatriates have ended their assignments in different times, at which the company's inpatriate management was at different stages of development, so the inconsistency in their evaluation can be attributed to this difference. Participant error is also a possibility; after a certain time has passed since the assignment ended, the employees tend to forget the bad aspects and remember just the good ones.

For future research, these shortcomings could be reduced by involving larger number of employees, and to interview both groups while they are at the same stage in their assignment, to ensure the most accurate comparability between the two groups. This research, after adaptations, could also be conducted in different companies, which wish to know their employees' stance on the effectiveness of their international assignment management, and how to improve it. Additionally, this study has focused only on the employees' point of view. It did not include the company's side of story, which might have provided justification for certain actions. In the future, it is suggested to include company in the research, and to challenge employees' and employer's answers against each other. Last, but not least, the family's point of view could be utilized to present a more complex view of international assignment, and how they are perceived by those who undertake them. Spouses and children are often subjected to the new culture even more than the employee himself, but are still rather helpless in changing their circumstances and have to accept the situation the way it is. Their opinions on how they are being assisted during the assignment could uncover new possibilities and implications for international assignments management.

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8. APPENDIX 1- Interview Guidelines and Questionnaire

Introduction

- Short introduction of the researcher and her background.
- Explanation of the purpose and process of the interview:
 - *The purpose of this interview is to understand your experience from your international assignment, and to gain your insight on how well these assignments are managed by the company.*
 - *Additionally, this interview also focuses on comparison of expatriates' and inpatriates' situation, and whether you consider their treatment by the company equal or not.*
 - *The interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes.*
 - *The interview is anonymous, and will be voice-recorded.*
 - *You will be asked a series of questions, which are aimed to capture your experience and impressions from your international assignment. However, if you feel that there is any information crucial to the topic that has not been addressed by the questionnaire, you are encouraged to contribute this knowledge.*
- Thanking for cooperation
- Starting the interview

Participant information

- Sex
- Family situation
- Position at the company
- Time frame of the assignment (in progress/finished, when?)

Selection procedure

- In which way were you offered the assignment?
- Was there a choice, or were you ordered to go? Did you feel you would be somehow negatively affected or reprimanded if you refused to go?

- Do you know on what grounds were you selected? What was taken into consideration during selection (family status, work position, language abilities...)?
- Were contract terms clearly stated (length, salary, position...)?
- Did you have the ability/possibility to negotiate terms of your assignment?

Preparation before assignment

- Did you get any language/cultural preparation?
- Was your personal/family life situation taken into account (schools for kids, job for spouse, house, car...)? If yes, how?
- Did you get any perks that you previously did not have in your home country workplace?
- Before your arrival, what were your expectations of new place (both at work and in private)? Were they met?
- Do you think that company has been doing enough to assist you with this transition?

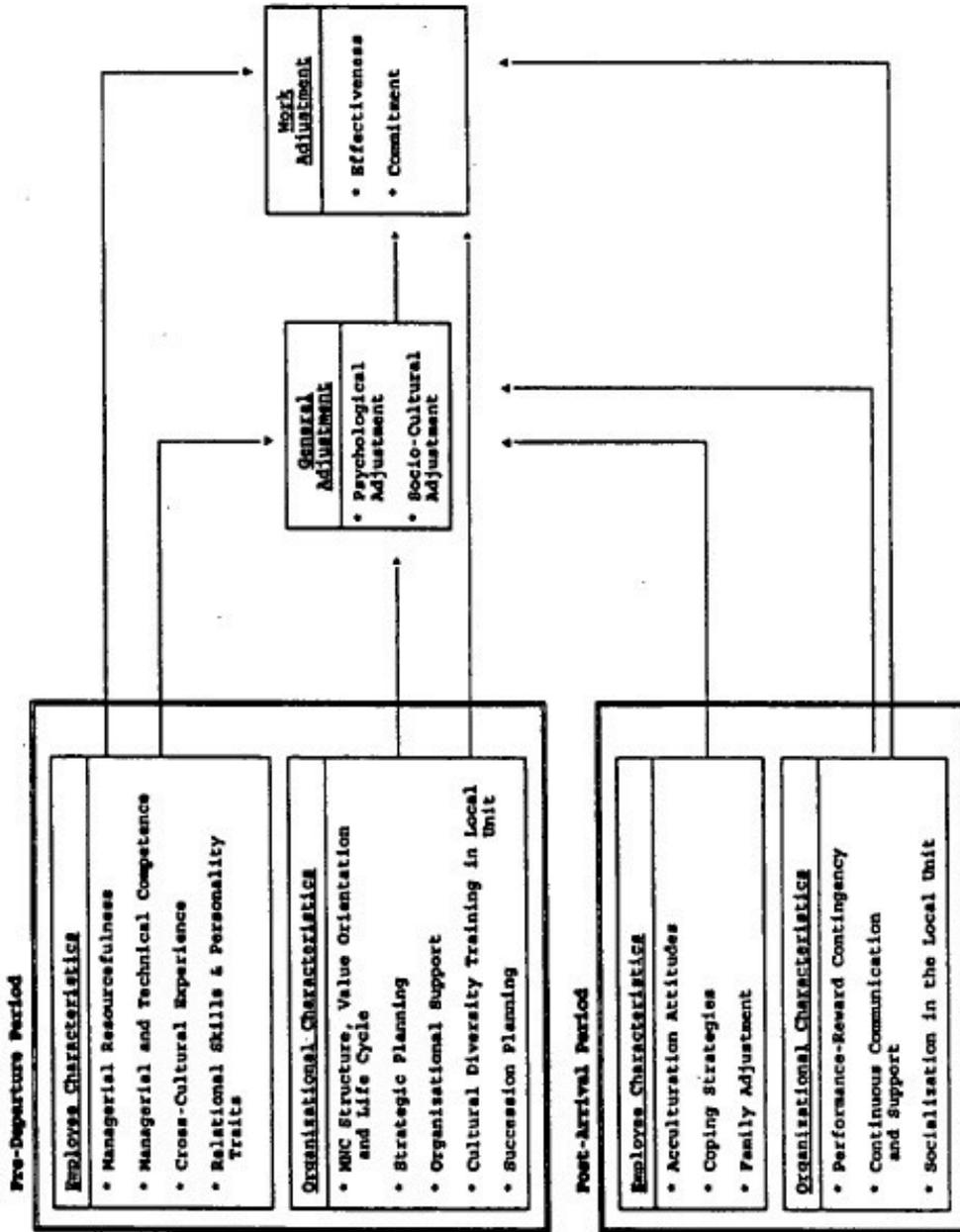
During assignment

- What was your first impression? Did company help to make it good?
- Did you manage to adapt to working/social life well? Did company do anything to help, or were you "thrown into a deep water"?
- Were you getting enough assistance during your stay? Did you feel like you have a person on whom you can rely, or did you have to sort all issues by yourself?
- Did you feel you were getting different treatment from locals?
- (For American employees) Do you know about the situation of Slovaks in USA? Can you compare?
- (For Slovak employees) Do you know about the situation of Americans in Slovakia? Can you compare?
- How was your family (dis)satisfaction influencing your work performance?
- Can you compare Slovakia and USA, and how are the needs of employees and their families different (social life, working behavior...)?

Repatriation

- Was the length of the assignment set, or was it subject to change?
- Was there a clear contingency plan for after your assignment?
- What was your overall impression from the assignment, and the way the company handled it?
- Do you feel you were treated differently after you returned?
- Were you promised something, which was different/not fulfilled? Is there a consistency between promises and what the company actually does?
- Do you have suggestions for how could the expatriate management be improved?

9. APPENDIX 2 - A conceptual model of expatriate adjustment



Aycan (1997: 438)