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# **Careers of Highly Educated Self-initiated Expatriates: Observations from Studies among Finnish Business Professionals**

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## **Abstract**

This chapter will review existing literature about the careers of self-initiated expatriates and analyze the different studies carried out among university level educated Finnish business professionals. A series of studies carried out among members of the Finnish Association of Business School Graduates during the last 15 years was cross-analyzed. The studies are based on three surveys and further interviews among their expatriate members (1999, 2004 and a follow-up study in 2012) also involving SIEs. Therefore, this chapter provide an overview what we know about the careers of Finnish SIEs and show evidence of 1) their career motives, 2) the role of family considerations in the career decision making of SIEs, 3) the development of career capital and social capital during SIE-experiences, and also 4) longer-term career impacts of SIE-experiences. Based on the literature review and analysis of above mentioned studies we highlight the gaps in in the knowledge about SIEs and suggest areas where further research is needed.

Keywords: Self-initiated expatriates, Career motives, Work-family, Career capital, Social capital, Career impacts, Finland

## **1. Introduction**

In 2000, we (Suutari and Brewster 2000) introduced the term self-initiated international work experience on the basis of an analysis of the careers of highly educated Finnish business professionals. The original study was aimed at assigned expatriates but because we obtained our data from a highly representative data base (from the Finnish Union for Business Graduates), rather than going through businesses, we found that in our sample around 40% of respondents were not sent abroad by their companies, but had left Finland on their own initiative. Prior to that study, and another study focusing just on ‘young people heading abroad due to travel, work and tourism’ (Inkson et al. 1997), the whole expatriation literature in the field of international business and international human resource management had focused on studying assigned expatriation. During the subsequent 15 years, the situation changed dramatically with increasing numbers of studies of SIEs.

Self-initiated expatriates have, of course, been an element of the international labour force ever since there was such a thing. Indeed, with the exception of religious orders, it seems undeniable that most early expatriates were self-initiated. The fact that studies of expatriation in the management literature mostly used company databases to identify the expatriates meant that for many years the management literature at least assumed that only those categorized as expatriates by their employers (assigned expatriates) needed to be researched.

In the management literature, expatriates are foreigners working in the receiving country for what is intended to be a finite term. SIEs are distinguished from traditional assigned expatriates (AEs) by the fact that they had made their own way to the employment rather than being sent by the organization (see also the Introduction to this book). It may well be that SIEs are even more common than AEs in some contexts (Cerdin and Le Pargneux 2010; Peltokorpi and Froese 2009). Indeed, in some fields such as the InterGovernmental Organizations (IGOs), like the United Nations or the European Commission, and amongst academics, for example, it is so extensive as to be the norm. Although SIEs may, like the assigned expatriates, work in a multinational enterprise (MNE) they are, with few exceptions, employed on local terms and conditions or, as in the case of employment in IGOs, on the same terms and conditions as everyone else. They rarely share the same generous benefits as their much more privileged counterpart AEs. They will know less about the Headquarter operations but otherwise, from the point of the MNE, they bring many of the advantages of AEs at considerably lower cost (Fitzsimmons, Miska and Stahl 2011).

Job markets have become increasingly international and technological changes such as on-line recruitment systems have made international labour markets more fluid and made the filling of jobs internationally (internally or externally to the organization) much simpler. The general internationalization of our economies means that increasing numbers of people have international experiences through their travel or studies, or through previous work abroad. As a result, increasing numbers of people see this as a realistic career option and there are growing opportunities to identify and find a job abroad. It seems clear that SIEs are an important factor in today's global workforce (Tharenou and Caulfield 2010) and possibly are becoming more widespread (Peiperl and Jonsen 2007).

Following the identification of SIEs as a distinct category (Suutari and Brewster 2000), there was a rapid expansion of research on SIEs (see Dorsch et al. 2012; Andresen, Al Ariss and Walther 2013; Vaiman and Haslberger 2013). Several factors have been noted as distinguishing or being likely to distinguish SIEs from AEs. For example, SIEs may be more likely to change organization than AEs (Biemann and Andresen 2010); and they may be more likely to experience stress when they return home (Begley et al. 2008). On the other hand, their international experience may increase their chances of promotion with their current employer and may improve their marketability beyond that employer (Richardson and Mallon 2005). One of the difficulties in assessing these propositions is that typically they are drawn from studies that often fail to meet the criteria of serious research and are based on convenience sampling, small samples and samples that, partly because many of them are drawn from uncontrolled internet studies, are unable to

establish response rates or representativeness. Despite these failings, the research does give us some indications of the assignment experiences of SIEs in comparison with AEs.

In the present chapter, we will first review what is known about the careers of self-initiated expatriates. After that, we will analyze what different studies carried out among university level educated Finnish business professionals tell us about the careers of Finnish SIEs.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1 Career motives of SIEs**

The career motives of both traditional expatriates and, more recently, SIEs have been analyzed in many studies. Among AEs, the importance of new challenges and development opportunities and personal interest in international experience have been reported (e.g. Stahl et al. 2002; Bossard and Peterson 2002; Stahl and Cerdin 2004).

Careers have also been examined from a whole-life perspective (Suutari, Brewster and Tornikoski 2013) since family-related concerns are in an important role in career related decision making among SIEs (Richardson 2006). Doherty et al. (2011) report that location and receiving country reputation are more important motives for SIEs than they are for assigned expatriates. Stressing further the importance of overall life and family concerns among main motives of SIEs, the life style career anchor is dominant among them (Cerdin and Le Pargneux 2010; Doherty et al. 2011).

There is of course considerable diversity within the SIE population and thus findings among one subpopulation may not be valid for others. Some research efforts have been made, for example, to analyze motives of certain specific groups such as academics (Richardson and Mallon 2005; Selmer and Luring 2011), whose main motives were adventure/ travel, life change and family. Their SIE-periods were typically not well-planned career moves involving extensive job seeking, but came rather accidentally from contacts at events such as conferences. In turn, among young graduates, the major reasons for taking international jobs were cross-cultural experiences, growth, career prospects, excitement, and meeting new and different people (Tharenou 2003). International experience as an exchange student increases the probability of seeking international work later on (Baruch, Budhwar & Khatri 2007). Clearly, these observations may not be valid among different kinds of SIEs.

### **2.2 Development of SIEs during their assignments**

During their careers – both domestic and international - individuals develop and utilize their career capital (DeFillippi and Arthur 1994). From the resource-based perspective career capital is normally seen to consist of three ways of knowing. *Knowing-how* career capabilities include skills, expertise, and tacit and explicit work-related knowledge (Inkson and Arthur 2001). *Knowing-why* career capabilities provide an individual with energy, sense of purpose, motivation and

identification with the world of work. It covers motivation, confidence and self-assurance to pursue a certain career path (Inkson and Arthur 2001), and reflects the values, meanings and interests that influence the way in which individuals attempt to develop their careers (Jones and Lichtenstein 2000). Knowing-why capabilities are seen as fundamental for commitment and related learning which in turn improve performance. *Knowing-whom* career capabilities consist of a range of intra-firm, inter-firm, professional and social relations combined in a network. This social capital is created by individuals meeting and/ or getting to know people who may be helpful to one's own career development.

There has been increasing interest in how international assignments affect the career capital of assignees. First, AEs (Kraimer et al. 2009), SIEs (Doherty 2013) and also very experienced global careerists (Suutari and Mäkelä 2007) believe that their knowing how capital has benefited from their international work. Given the stronger career and work-related motivation of AEs and their generally higher status and position, it is likely that AEs gain more organizational and business knowledge through their foreign work (Shaffer *et al.* 2012) but there is little evidence on this. All international work experience offers extensive learning and development opportunities for individuals (Inkson and Myers 2003) who, thus, develop new knowing-how competences. Both AEs and SIEs often operate on more challenging and broader tasks abroad than in their home country and, in addition, they need to adjust to living and working in a new cultural context and often in international teams. Thus, international work leads to higher demands on the capabilities of individuals (Harris et al. 2003) and assignments are often seen by individuals and organizations as a key instrument to further management careers - though it often leads to them pursuing a career in another organization (Suutari and Brewster 2003).

Second, social capital, referring to assets embedded in relationships, has recently become an increasingly popular framework in a number of research fields within the social sciences (Adler and Kwon 2002). Social capital enables managers to do their work more effectively, as it facilitates access to knowledge and opportunities (Lin 2001). Findings from the international career context indicate that expatriates expand their network of professionally relevant contacts during their assignment, both in the assignment country as well as with headquarters senior management (Berthoin-Antal 2000). Furthermore, Mäkelä (2007) suggests that managers with expatriate experience possess considerably more social capital than managers in similar positions but with only domestic experience. Further research is needed to analyze the extent to which the experiences of AEs and SIEs are similar from this perspective.

Finally, international experiences typically modify expatriates' sense of their potential, motivation and identification with the world of work ('knowing-why' capital) so they are interested in different kinds of careers than before the assignment. They also expect their companies to value their development and expect positive career implications. Through their developmental experiences, they often feel prepared for further career challenges and tasks at higher organizational levels (Suutari 2003). Since most studies have focused on assigned expatriates, our understanding of the development of SIEs is still limited in these areas. Overall, existing research on development

which takes place during international assignments supports the view that international work offers extensive development possibilities to individuals, and thus their level of career capital increases. This in turn could be expected to have an impact on their future careers; an issue we discuss next.

### **2.3 Career impacts of SIE-assignments**

Not many studies have analyzed the longer-term career impact of either AE or SIE assignments (Doherty 2012). According to Shaffer and colleagues (2012: 1288) “[a]lmost all of the research ...has used cross-sectional designs”. For all expatriates, and SIEs in particular, there is still very little research into repatriation and subsequent career development so that our understanding of the impact of self-initiated expatriation on careers is limited (Doherty 2012; Suutari, Brewster, and Tornikoski 2013). The development of concepts such as the ‘boundaryless’ (Arthur and Rousseau 1996; Arthur, Khapova and Wilderom 2005) or ‘protean’ (Hall 1996) career may be particularly relevant for SIEs. The interplay between the two may also be important (Briscoe and Hall 2006). SIEs have archetypal boundaryless careers (Stahl et al. 2002; Bossard and Peterson 2005), where employees need to take the initiative (Yan et al. 2002), seek for development opportunities and make sense of their career environment without external guidance or support (Littleton and Arthur 2000). Managers who are active in networking obtain jobs more easily (Lin 2001) and the importance of such networking activities increases with the extent of boundaryless careers (Sturges, Guest, and Mackenzie 2000) and the informality of global career systems in organizations (Dickmann and Doherty 2010). Career sponsorship, support from important people in the organization, has been found to be correlated with career success (Ng et al. 2005; Benson and Pattie 2008). Thus, the situation of AEs and SIEs is different, possibly influencing their job market situation after international assignment (Reiche 2012).

The limited evidence we have so far on the career impacts of SIE assignments suggests that those who have had self-initiated international experience find that it is good for their career developmental (Richardson and McKenna 2003). SIEs are different from AEs: they generally having no repatriation agreements, or home country unit to repatriate to and, therefore, no career sponsorship from key individuals in the home country. In addition, their foreign assignments typically last longer than those of AEs and they have a greater interest in more permanent global careers (Suutari and Brewster 2000; Doherty, Dickmann, and Mills 2011). Hence, we might expect the long-term career outcomes to differ.

Not all expatriates repatriate: many decide to take another assignment in another foreign country and continue working abroad (Stahl and Cerdin 2004; Jokinen, Suutari and Brewster 2008; Kramer et al. 2009). The figure may be even higher among those not categorized as expatriates by the company – the SIEs (Cerdin and Le Pargneux 2010; Andresen, Al Ariss, and Walther 2013). Whilst it may be easier for former expatriates to get further jobs abroad, prolonged absence from the home country can make repatriation more difficult (Kraimer et al. 2009; Hamori and Koyuncu 2011).

Whilst AEs may have at least some kinds of repatriation agreement, and other kinds of career support, such as counselling and training, SIEs typically do not benefit from such organizational practices. Having joined the organization in another country, there can be no assumption of employment back home, nor will they have repatriation agreements and are indeed likely not to have specific plans about a future job (Suutari and Brewster 2000). For them, the career realities when they decide to end their sojourn abroad may be considerably less certain than they are for AEs.

Many expatriates find themselves looking for new jobs at the end of, or even before the end of, their assignment (Suutari and Brewster 2003; Vaiman and Haslberger 2013). SIEs, not logged as expatriates in the organizational systems will, in many cases, have to look for a new employer if they want to return home. This may be a positive development for them, if the external job markets offer better possibilities (Suutari and Brewster 2003). Unlike AEs, they will not suffer from what may be seen as ‘broken’ promises, even if they were in reality assumptions rather than promises, and they will not feel ‘betrayed’ if they are not offered a post back in the home country [See Tornikoski (2011) for further development on the psychological contract of expatriates]. They will start their job search earlier and spread their net wider. However, both groups of expatriates (or now repatriates) will still offer the external job market international experience, having had largely similar international experiences.

Both SIEs and AEs may seek jobs in either the home country’s job market or the international job market. These different career options have been largely ignored in research into international careers. As we have noted, this has tended to be dominated by research into repatriates, that is, among those have decided to repatriate back to their home country (with the same employer). Individual marketability in the home market and the foreign labour market may provide different opportunities, with each increasing or tightening up at different times. Hence, the extent to which these markets value international experience becomes significant; it seems likely that SIEs may have a harder time getting future jobs in the home country than AEs. However, further research on the impact of self-initiated expatriation on careers is clearly needed to confirm such expectations (Bonache, Brewster and Suutari 2007; Hamori and Koyuncu 2011).

### **3. The careers of SIE Finnish business professionals**

To explore these gaps in the research, we cross-analyzed career-related observations from a series of studies carried out among members of the Finnish Association of Business School Graduates during the last 15 years. We conducted three surveys and further interviews among their expatriate members (1999, 2004 and a follow-up study in 2012) also including SIEs. In the rest of the chapter, we analyze the career experiences of Finnish SIEs from the different career angles already discussed:

- their career motives,

- the role of family considerations in the career decision making of SIEs,
- development of career capital and social capital during SIE-experiences, and finally
- longer-term career impacts of SIE-experiences.

Combining these perspectives will provide a broad overview of the careers of highly-educated Finnish SIEs. Our database allows us to be confident that our sample is representative of Finnish expatriates generally and of Finnish self-initiated expatriates in particular. We note, in passing that these categories can be subject to change over time: people can change their nationality (though none of this sample had) and can change their status from expatriate to non-expatriate and from self-initiated expatriate to assigned expatriate (there were a few examples of both in this sample). Overall, though, our data enables us to extrapolate the data confidently to Finnish SIEs and we will, therefore, refer, from now on, to that group rather than to our sample.

### 3.1 Career motives of SIEs

In our first exploratory study of Finnish SIEs, we identified different subgroups of SIEs in the light of different individual, task and employer factors (see Suutari and Brewster 2000, for a broader view of the findings). From a career perspective, the focus of this chapter, analysis of the motives of SIEs indicated that the Finnish SIE group is not homogenous but, instead, consists of six different subgroups with different career motives:

- 1) *Young opportunists*. These are young people in the early career stage heading abroad for a period of travel, work and tourism, very much like the Overseas Experience group examined by Inkson et al. (1997). They are young internationally oriented people, often with good language skills and previous travel or international study experience. They operate in lower organizational levels and often in project-type tasks. Professional development and career progress are ranked as more important motives among these SIEs than among SIEs in general, whilst economic benefits are not regarded as so important.
- 2) *Partners of dual career couples (DCCs)*. It is increasingly common that both partners in the family have careers and research on international DCC has been increasing (Känsälä, Mäkelä and Suutari 2015). Certainly, among highly educated Finns working abroad, especially in the European Union where work permits are not required, such situations emerged. A third of partners were working while they lived abroad. For some SIEs, the main motive was the assignment of the partner.
- 3) *Localized professionals*. This group of SIEs had long-term plans to stay abroad or even not to repatriate at all. Some had an earlier expatriate assignment but, due to their long-term stay, That has been transferred to a local contract, so they are not anymore treated as expatriates. Some had changed employers and, thus, moved to local contracts. As might be expected,



employer initiatives or the job market in Finland are seldom relevant: personal interest in internationalization is a very important motive.

- 4) *Global professionals*. One clearly distinctive subgroup of SIEs is those with long-term experience from various international jobs and countries. Some of them have frequently changed their jobs, employers and locations, although there are also internationally mobile professionals who are still committed to one employer. They experience numerous changes between international jobs while some had changed their location between home country and receiving country/ countries. Due to their value in the international jobs markets, they were sometimes able to negotiate expatriate benefits though they may work as SIEs. 25 percent of Finnish SIEs had experienced three or more international assignments. Global careerists operated typically in managerial and technical functions and had higher salary levels than other SIEs. They are typically motivated by the challenging nature of tasks in an international business environment.
- 5) *Officials*. While most business professionals worked in the private sector, there was also a group of SIEs (12%) who worked in international organizations such as the European Union and the United Nations. They had typically researched and applied for the jobs whilst in Finland. Due to the nature of these jobs, officials were less optimistic about their home country job market possibilities than professionals in the private sector. Such officials regarded economic benefits, personal interest toward internationalization and new experiences as slightly more important motives than average SIEs.
- 6) *Job seekers*. These SIEs found the Finnish job market problematic and saw better options abroad (Finland was in a difficult economic situation with higher unemployment rates then). The majority of them worked as experts or administrators in foreign owned companies.

Thus, whilst career motives such as international interest are shared amongst the SIE group, a more detailed examination shows significant differences between the sub-groups.

### **3.2 Work-family perspective on career decision making of SIEs**

In a study by Mäkelä and Suutari (2013), work-family conflict (WFC) and enrichment experiences, i.e. positive spillovers between work and family spheres, are analyzed among highly educated business professionals working abroad. Interviews were carried out with 21 highly-educated Finnish SIEs. These findings are used here to discuss how the whole family is impacted by SIE-experiences and how the overall family perspective is closely integrated into the career decision making of SIEs. In addition, we utilize some career-related observations from a study by Suutari, Tornikoski and Mäkelä (2012) in which career decision-making of the most experienced global careerists with experiences from various international assignments were interviewed.

As a starting point, many SIEs interviewed in the expatriate project had gone abroad in order to find new interesting and challenging jobs that were not always available at home. In some cases, this reflected the poor economic situation and increasing unemployment at home while, in other cases, the SIEs were just looking for new and different career and life experiences in an international context due to their personal interests.

The interviewees saw that on the positive side of having a SIE-career is that family concerns can be better integrated to career-related decision-making when one did not have to follow a corporate logic, as AEs have to do. This created flexibility for decisions such as when to leave abroad or where to move. When typically both parents were working in Finland, this also helped in taking into account the situation of the spouse as well. However, it was still not always possible to find ideal solutions for both partners and so the partner often had to interrupt her/ his career. SIEs also stressed the importance of the positive sides of their international experience on both them and their families. We discussed earlier about the personal development experiences and overall general interest toward working in international career context of SIEs. From the family perspective, it was stressed that international experiences enrich the lives of spouses and children and offers the possibility of new rich life experiences.

Salary levels were also often found to be higher outside the Nordic context among highly-educated professionals and in addition taxation was lower. This sometimes offered better living standards than those available before the assignment. In turn, the costs related to education, healthcare and daycare were often much higher than in Finland which has social benefits such as free education and a public healthcare system. Sometimes, experienced SIEs had also negotiated certain typical expatriate benefits despite their present SIE status due to their high job market value as international experienced business professionals. Compared to AEs with fixed-term contracts, many SIEs had also made permanent contracts that, in turn, created stability for their overall career and family situation. The SIEs emphasized also the positive impacts of partner support to their careers and overall well-being abroad.

As an outcome of their international career choices, all family members faced stress when they moved abroad (Haslberger and Brewster 2008; Halsberger, Hippler and Brewster 2015). If we contrast the situation of SIEs to AEs, AEs and their families receive much more support with practical arrangements (e.g. travel, accommodations, schooling, daycare) and often also other kinds of training and support (e.g. language training, career guidance, initiation programmes). This puts SIEs into a challenging situation when trying to cope with a new job in a new organization and a new cultural context and, at the same time, trying to deal with practical support and help the family in their adjustment.

SIEs also reported that they worked more hours than at home due to challenges involved in their new jobs and different cultural expectations toward working times. Highly educated business professionals had challenging jobs which often involved travelling both domestically and internationally. In addition, these limited the time together with the family in a situation when they

would have valued more support. They felt they were too much on their own in a new unfamiliar institutional context. As is typical for nearly all expatriates, it is not always easy to get integrated to local community and build relationships with locals. Some SIEs also complained that, due to the lack of position as an assigned expatriate, they lacked the support and compensation benefits offered to AEs (see also Tornikoski, Suutari & Festing 2013). Due to lack of professional support, SIEs sometimes faced unexpected issues with regard to local legislation (e.g. in the healthcare system or on parental leave) or cost levels which impacted negatively on the family situation in comparison to what was expected.

Sometimes work family conflict was created by elderly parents who needed more support in their home country. There were also several SIEs who now have foreign partners or who originally moved abroad due a relationship with a foreign partner. In such cases, family situation and career choices were even more tightly integrated. Overall, these experiences among Finnish business professionals indicate that work and family issues are tightly connected in the international career context and decision making among SIEs.

These observations are further supported when the career decision-making of internationally experienced business professionals were analyzed (for a broader view of the experiences of such global careerists see Suutari, Tornikoski and Mäkelä 2012). Here, we focus in particular on career decisions made in the past which complements the view of career motives in general described above. For example, the main reasons for refusing certain external job offers concerned the location of the work which did not match their family's interests, and overall family reasons. Only once those interests were met did other reasons come into play: such as unwillingness to leave an existing employer, more interesting nature in the existing job and the nature of the organization (e.g. size or level of internationalization). So the family's weight in SIEs' decision making is high.

When comes to earlier employer and job changes, both push and pull factors were identified. Among push factors to initiate a job search, organizational changes (e.g. mergers, acquisitions) were often mentioned to have forced the respondents to leave a job or looked to leave the employer. Another push factor was when SIEs had received attracting external job offers through their networks/ social capital. The respondents also stressed the periodical nature of their contracts in the international career context as a reason to look for new career options. Among pull factors, which positively attracted the respondents abroad, were job-related characteristics, location related concerns (which involved family-related considerations beside personal interests), the nature of organizations and finally the financial benefits/ living standards available.

After analyzing the initial career motives for leaving abroad, which emphasize the weight of the work-family-perspective on the career decision making of SIEs, we will next move forward to discuss what kinds of development opportunities SIE-experiences provided from a career perspective.

### 3.3 Career and social capital perspectives on careers of SIEs

The development of career capital takes place in all three areas of career capital for Finnish SIEs (for a full description of related findings see Jokinen, Brewster and Suutari 2008). In fact, the development experiences of SIEs and AEs are quite similar. The most extensive development took place on knowing-why career capital. Thus, SIEs felt that their assignment had extensively developed their self-understanding and self-confidence. By succeeding in new jobs in new organizational and cultural environments, the SIEs felt that they are capable of succeeding also in other difficult jobs in future. The experiences had also increased their development orientation and interest in having more challenging jobs. The increased competencies and reliance on personal capabilities thus gave SIEs increased knowing-why career capital.

The development of work-related skills and competences (knowing-how career capital) was almost as high as development of knowing-why career capital. The SIEs felt that working in different cultures and in new jobs, in new organizations, had considerably developed their skills, such as task-related skills, cognitive skills and social skills. Seeing how things operate in a new culture and organization offers a possibility to learn new ways of doing things and to critically reflect how things are done at home. International assignments are an excellent tool for developing future leaders (Cerdin and Brewster 2014).

With regard to knowing-whom career capital, clear development took place, though the development was slightly lower in this area than in the other aspects of career capital. In particular, development of internal networks was reported to be lower among SIEs than among AEs. The only area in which no difference appeared related to external networks supporting the view that SIEs are not in such a disadvantaged position there as they are with internal networks.

Besides the career capital perspective, the social capital perspective is also used when analyzing how individuals build social networks which they can utilize in their work and careers overall. We will thus complement our discussion with the analysis of career experiences of Finnish SIE from this perspective. From the social capital perspective, the main career related interest among highly-educated Finnish SIEs is what kinds of social capital SIEs develop during their assignment (for a full report, see Mäkelä and Suutari 2013). The findings discussed in this section are based on the interviews of 18 assignees of which half were SIEs and half were AEs. Hence, it is possible to qualitatively analyze how the development of social capital differs between these assignee groups, and discuss how these differences may impact, in the longer term, careers of assignees after the assignment.

The development of social capital can be analyzed separately in four categories of social capital. Existing research on social capital has typically focused either on within-group *bonding* ties or *bridging* ties across group boundaries (Adler and Kwon 2002). Historically, the research has been more interested on bonding ties which facilitate team-work and co-operation within a group through good relationships and mutual help, support and trust between the team members. Team cohesion and support can also facilitate job performance and career success of individuals.

Bridging ties, in turn, relate to external connections which help in seeking necessary information. From the career perspective, it also involves referrals, i.e. positive remarks to third parties leading to a better reputation (Burt 2000) which, in turn, opens ‘new doors’ by helping in building new connections. Again, such connections and referrals can also have positive career impacts in external job markets.

In the light of this background, four possible types of social capital are identified which expatriates can possess in the international career context: (i) Internal-Bonding capital (i.e. firm-internal social capital in the host country unit), (ii) Internal-Bridging capital (i.e. firm-internal social capital with the home country unit), (iii) External-Bonding capital (i.e. social capital within the broader firm-external host country community); and (iv) External-Bridging capital (i.e. capital within broader firm-external home country community).

Starting from *Internal-Bonding capital*, the observations among Finnish SIEs and AEs indicate that both SIEs and AEs develop connections within the company in the host country. However, it appeared that SIEs were motivated in building new local connections due to their situation as newcomers to the organization. This was also connected with their longer-term job contract situation, i.e. often they did not have specific plans for repatriation, and overall they planned to stay abroad for a longer term than AEs. AEs typically had a fixed-term contract and started with a more temporary view of their assignment, with a clear intention of going back to their ‘ordinary life’ in the home country. As an outcome, SIEs built a much wider range of networks and their connections involved both professional and social dimensions, while AEs had less connections and a larger proportion of those were professionally oriented. They were also more often building relationships with other expatriates who were in a similar temporary situation as they were. There were also some views that locals may have a different attitude toward SIEs and AE due to their different situations and, thus, may be more willing to build more in-depth relationships with SIEs than with AEs.

As could be expected, SIEs’ *internal-bridging social capital* (firm-internal ties with the home country) were significantly weaker than that of AEs. This is natural when SIEs were recruited to foreign affiliations, while AEs typically had longer-term careers within the company at home before the assignment. AEs could, thus, more easily utilize home country connections when they needed job-related information or other kinds of help as they were already well-connected to home country colleagues. SIEs, sometimes, developed such capital over the longer-term, in particular if their job involved bridge-building activities between the host unit and the home unit / the HQ. However, due to their different backgrounds, AEs typically had traditional coordination and control tasks requiring more communication back to home country than SIEs. In that way, they, more often, visited other corporate units and maintained their connections and also developed new ones due to their new job role. As an outcome, AEs had better access to information, advice and support within the MNC than SIEs.

With regard to *External-bonding ties* (relationships in the wider host-country community, including both professional and social ties), it appeared that SIEs developed a wider set of local networks. The ties were also stronger and involved both professional and social dimensions. Similarly, as was discussed in relationship with internal-bonding ties, SIEs' different attitudes toward their assignment motivated them to aim toward broader and more in-depth integration with the local community. AEs, in turn, developed fewer connections with locals and connected rather more with other expatriates. This was further driven by the fact that SIEs got less support from the company with local arrangements such as housing, schooling, and day care arrangements. SIEs were less likely to live in secluded expatriate areas and their children did not go to private international schools, so the families interacted with local professionals of similar status in their day-to-day environment. As an outcome of these different starting points and efforts to integrate with locals, SIEs were better connected with the local community which helped in their adjustment and identification with local culture. This integration, in turn, helped in their jobs when understanding of local culture and networks were important.

In the area of *External-bridging ties* (i.e. ties to the broader home country community), it appeared that the extent of such social capital did not relate so much with the type of the assignment but it was rather driven by the personal interests of the expatriate and his/ her family. In addition, the location was important since, in more distant locations, trips back to the home country were less frequent. There were indications that due to their better integration with the local community, SIEs were in danger of weakening home country ties, because their assignments were longer than the assignments of AEs and there was more uncertainty about possible repatriation. The compensation package of AEs typically also involved some paid vacation trips to the home country beside possible work-related trips and, thus, it was easier for them to stay in touch with friends and relatives at home country.

Generally, the analysis of the social capital of SIEs and AEs indicates that due to their different starting point and interests, their social capital develops differently. The identified differences can be expected to have longer-term implications for job performance and careers. SIEs are better connected locally while AEs remain better connected to the home country. This in turn might affect their job-possibilities after the assignment – both in the home country as well as abroad. Moreover, the analysis indicates that international experiences are highly developmental. Through such experiences, individuals develop their competences, self-awareness and self-confidence, as well as, to some extent, their networks. Consequently, they are increasingly interested in new more challenging jobs in future and believe that they have the necessary personal and professional competencies to deal with them. Their developmental experiences typically made them even more interested in having international element in their work in future.

### **3.4 Career success perspective on careers of Finnish SIEs**

The latest follow-up study of these Finnish SIEs examined the positions eight years later (see Suutari, Brewster, Dickmann, Mäkelä and Tornikoski 2017). The observations from this database

indicate that the longer-term career experiences of highly educated Finnish SIEs are positive and that the career success of SIEs is very similar to that of AEs in the long run.

Almost half of the SIEs from 2004 (45%) had repatriated back to Finland by 2012. The remainder had either continued working in the same receiving country (43%) or were still abroad but working in other country (11%). Almost three quarters (74%) of those who were still (or again) working abroad typically worked for foreign companies. More than three quarters (77%) had found another job since 2004 and, as might be expected from this group of self-initiators, more than half of them (52%) had found their next position by themselves. This left, however, an almost equal number whose new position was taken as the result of an offer by an employer. Indicating the importance of the social capital of SIEs, many of these (43%) had become sufficiently embedded in their organisation that they were offered a new job by their current employer. The rest had received an offer from another employer. Looking more generally at the employment situation of the respondents in 2012, about a third (36%) of these Finnish SIEs still worked with the same employer as in 2014 and, amongst this group, exactly half worked in the same job as before.

Finnish SIEs are very satisfied with the development of their skills and competences during their foreign experience: 90 percent of the respondents reported being satisfied or very satisfied (4 and 5 in the Likert scale of 1-5). Comparing their views on their skill and competence development in 2004 and 2012, it is clear that, with the experience of their later careers, they now value their development more than they did in the earlier phase. In the open-ended questions, the respondents verbally described their experiences like this:

*“It was a great experience which helped me to develop myself in many areas. I learned to succeed in different kinds of situations and to find solutions”.*

*“Through working abroad I have expanded my experiences both professionally and personally. I believe that I have got more professional experience abroad than what I could have achieved in Finland.”*

Interestingly, they also, uniformly, reported that they can utilize overall the career capital they had acquired abroad in their present jobs. For example, only 3 percent (1 and 2 in the Likert scale 1-5) saw that they could not utilize their knowing-how and 6 percent their knowing-why career capital while 26 percent saw that they were not able to utilize their knowing-whom career capital in their present jobs.

*“Challenging tasks in an international environment have opened doors to further challenging international tasks and have increased my level of income”*

The present job of most SIEs in 2004 (89%) involved international responsibilities and a lot of them (43%) also had a lot of international travelling in their work. They were thus quite commonly able to utilize also their international expertise in their present job beside the more general job-related competences they had acquired while working abroad.

The group also perceived that their 2004 assignment had a positive impact on their future career. For example, 70 percent agreed (4 and 5 scale 1-5) with the statement that work experience abroad had helped them to get another good job and 83 percent agreed (4 and 5 scale 1-5) such experience had overall impacted positively on their career success and career progress. Even larger proportion (91%) saw that international work had developed important skills which have been useful in their later career.

*"The international experience made a big impact. I would not be here (in my present job) without international experience."*

*"Development of networks and related contact taking to me has increased my possibilities. This has strengthened my position in my field."*

*"International experience has helped me and has made it possible to get more challenging jobs. I have never needed to search for a job, but I have been contacted with new job proposals".*

However, it is necessary to balance this majority positive main view with some more negative experiences. Among those ones who were not so positive about their future career, the situation was described like this:

*"I was expecting a bigger career impact. Now I feel that it is 'valued' but it had not directly impacted on my career"*

*"It had made it pretty impossible to get back to Finland though I would like to repatriate due to personal relationships."*

*"I have great experience like almost no other, also the results in my work. However, I has not made a career impact maybe even the other way round. HRM-decisions are made in the corridors of the HQ and up in the elevator are going those who are close by those doors along the corridor and close to management groups"*

The mainly positive view was reflected in their promotions during the follow-up period: 50 percent of SIE-population was promoted once or twice during the eight year follow-up, 23 percent had been promoted three or more times while only 27 percent had not been promoted.

*"Without my international experience I would probably not have received the level of salary I now get and I would not be in this position but would work in lower positions"*

*"I progressed in my career in big steps in the early stages and later on quicker than others in average"*

The situation among those who were not promoted was described like this:

*"My career progress in Finland stopped when I was away for many years"*

These mainly positive observations were also reflected in overall career satisfaction which was high in 2012: 31 percent of respondents were satisfied and 52 percent very satisfied with their



career success. Only 17 percent were neutral, dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their careers (sum scale mean  $\leq 3$ ).

They were also keen on having such an international element in their work in future. 55 percent of them agreed that they got satisfaction (4 and 5 scale 1-5) when they are able daily to work with new cultures and countries, and 64 percent agreed (4 and 5 scale 1-5) that are only interested in jobs that include an international dimension. In open-ended questions, one of the respondents described his situation like this:

*“International experience which started already from study times in my case made it clear for me that I want to work in an international environment. My international experience is almost my main capital.”*

Generally, these observations indicate that, in the longer-term, the career outcomes among Finnish highly educated SIEs were more positive than could be expected in the light of the discussion in the literature. SIEs clearly valued their international experiences and saw that those were very developmental. From a future career perspective, the observations that these business professionals saw that their SIE experience had positively impacted on their future career, and that they are able to utilize their learning abroad in their present jobs, are important.

When comparing the career experiences of SIEs to the careers of AEs, the results showed that AEs (75%) changed their job due to job offers more often than SIEs (50%). Furthermore, further analysis indicates that from these offers, 72% of AE job offers were internal compared to 47% for SIEs. This reflects the earlier findings on social capital of both types of expatriates: AEs can get advantage of their better internal networks within the company while SIEs benefit more commonly on their external networks. The results indicated also that as an outcome of such differences, SIEs had more commonly stayed abroad than AEs.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The research on self-initiated expatriation has expanded considerably since the identification of the topic in 2000. We already know that SIEs are increasingly used by international organizations as a staffing option since expatriate assignments are very costly for companies and expatriation involves problems such as high turnover among repatriates.

There remain many areas where our understanding is very limited and, thus, further research is needed. For example, we do not have any larger scale evidence on the repatriation of SIEs or their overall longer-term career impacts. There has been a widespread lack of recognition of how diverse a group the SIE population is, considering how valuable their capital is to local organizations. If the field does not take into consideration the specifics of different SIE samples, we will end up with very conflicting findings and the field will not progress as much as it should. The international career research has focused mainly on single assignments with the expectation of repatriation back to the home country after that. In reality, many expatriates have longer-term global careers with

various international jobs. Research on such global careers has started to expand (see e.g. Suutari, Tornikoski & Mäkelä 2011), but more focus should be devoted to SIEs having such long-term global careers. We also know little about how organizations use SIEs: are they recruited deliberately as part of a strategy or is it just by chance? Moreover, what are the effects for organizations of the strategic recruitment of SIEs? Clearly, there is scope for far more research in the area.

### **Further reading on the experiences of business-educated Finnish SIEs**

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