

International Management

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An evaluation of the repatriation process at Company X

Johanna Elenius, Lars Garvik & Fredrik Nilsson

Graduate Business School
School of Economics and Commercial Law
Göteborg University
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Abstract

Many companies today have parts of their organizational activity abroad. By having subsidiaries in a foreign country, employees prepared to transfer abroad are required. Transferring employees abroad is not a new phenomenon; however, it is done more extensively today. Even though expatriation has been around quite some time, companies are still struggling with parts of the process, especially the last part of it, repatriation.

In this study, an evaluation of Company X's repatriation process is conducted, and from our findings, recommendations are made. The study is based on relevant theories that we feel support the empirical data collection. The data collection is made through interviews and is further analyzed and discussed in order to support our findings.

The main areas discussed related to repatriation in this thesis are: reverse culture shock, mentors, career development, proactive behavior, communication, and finally evaluation. A more general conclusion is provided as well as recommendations for Company X on how to deal with the process of repatriation.

Key words: repatriation, reverse-culture shock, international assignments, work role transitions, communication, proactive behavior.

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1. Introduction

Due to increased internationalization, many executives believe that if they lack employees with global skills, their organizations will lose their competitive edge. Therefore, they realize that employees who understand their global businesses are needed. The most effective way to achieve international experience is by having employees live and work within the foreign business arena for several years (Webb, 1996).

The fact that organizations seem to focus much more on the expatriation than on the repatriation process (Harvey, 1982), could be one of the major reason why the repatriation process continues to be a significant problem for companies and the expatriates themselves (Paik et al, 2002). Why is the focus on repatriation not as extensive? The primary reason for this might be that the common perception is that – after all the expatriate is coming home, which should not cause any problems; but in fact repatriating is often more challenging than expatriating (Black et al, 1999, Paik et al, 2002).

A successful repatriation transition outcome can be defined as, “one in which, upon return, the repatriate: gains access to a job which recognizes any newly acquired international competences, experiences minimal cross-culture re-adjustment difficulties; and reports low turnover intentions” (O’Sullivan, 2002 p. 597).

Many different problems can occur within the repatriation process. General guidelines on how to manage repatriation could be used to improve the process. However, some modifications should be made to fit the specific case.

In this thesis, we will evaluate the repatriation process of a well-known multinational corporation. This thesis will be based upon relevant theories and empirical findings, from which conclusions will be drawn. Furthermore, our reflections and recommendations will be given.

1.2 Introducing the Problem

The increased internationalization of business has made the understanding of international human resource management problems important for executives in multinational corporations (MNC). The problem with selecting and training expatriates has been examined by various scholars (Tung, 1981; Webb, 1996). However, few have thoroughly examined the other side of international assignments – repatriation (Black et al, 1992).

Unfortunately, international assignments are sometimes poorly planned and disorganized, leading to poor job performance and/or job displacement. The costs of failed international assignments is high, both financially for the organization and from an individual career perspective. Failures can also be devastating for the expatriate's self-esteem and ego, if the assignment is not considered successful (Webb, 1996). The cost of repatriation failure can be divided into three major areas.

The first area is *underutilization of key personnel*. For a repatriate a promotion might seem obvious but this is of course not possible in all cases. However, a large problem arises when repatriates come home and discover that they have lost ground in their careers, and that other managers who did not make an international move have been promoted (Allen et al, 1998). A problem also arises when the home organization fails to recognize the newly gained knowledge of the repatriate. In many cases these individuals are placed in a lower position in the organization than they are actually suitable for. Therefore, organizations must carefully investigate the international expertise and knowledge repatriates possess in order to recognize their actual value (Allen et al, 1998).

Allen et al (1998) have identified a second area. It is the *inability to recruit key personnel into overseas positions*. It is suggested that poor repatriation in an organization will discourage new personnel from going on overseas assignments. If most repatriates are unsatisfied with the repatriation process it will in one way or another be communicated to the rest of the employees.

In general, expatriates believe that the development of their skills during the assignment will be valued by the company. However, the reality that the expatriates encounter when they return may be quite different (Suutari et al, 2001).

As companies are globalizing more of their operations, the need for internationally experienced workers increases. Furthermore, cross-culture knowledge and understanding will be lost if an organization's employees hesitate to go on an overseas assignment. Successful recruitment of high potential employees can only happen when the repatriates are taken care of properly and overseas assignment are perceived by the employees as an opportunity to career advancement (Black, 1991).

The last area is *loss of key personnel*. Once a repatriate returns from his/her overseas assignment he/she has gained a lot of experience and knowledge. If the repatriation process is not conducted properly, the result might be that the employee quits and moves to another firm. Initial evidence shows that 25 % of the employees that return from an overseas assignment will leave their organization within 2 years (Black, 1991). The cost of an overseas assignment typically ranges from two to five times the usual annual salary of an employee. If an organization loses this person, it will lose not only a large investment but also a high potential employee. However, Scandinavian employees tend to be more loyal to their home organization than American employees. Therefore, this does not seem to affect Scandinavian organizations to the same extent (Paik et al, 2002). The first two problem areas are applicable to our study, and we indeed believe that the company studied suffers from the first two problems.

Organizations recognize that they often need to have qualified managers with international experience in order to stay competitive – what is it then that makes organizations focus less on or completely ignore the repatriation process? The reason for this may be that the common understanding is that repatriating should not be hard; after all, the expatriate is returning to his/her home country/organization. However, researchers (Allen et al, 1998; Black, 1991; Stroh et al, 2000; Tung, 1988; Webb, 1996) argue that repatriation is as difficult as or more difficult than the original expatriate adjustment. It is also evident that many expatriates are dissatisfied with the repatriation process. This

is supported by a number of authors (Black et al, 1999; Hurn, 1999; Feldman, 1991) as well as from the interviews. This problematic area leads us to the main goal of this thesis:

An evaluation of the repatriation process at Company X

Our main goal is to evaluate the repatriation process from a human resource perspective. Furthermore, we will assess whether there are areas in need of improvements. In order to examine our main area of study, two sub questions have been created:

- 1. How is the repatriation process conducted today?*
- 2. How is the repatriation process perceived today among the employees?*

The main purpose is dependent on the outcome of the two sub questions.

1.3 Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to research how to improve and facilitate the repatriation processes. The study is based on relevant theories and empirical information. Our aim is to try to analyze the repatriation situation at a specific large Swedish corporation. From the analysis, we intend to come up with conclusions on how to improve the repatriation process. Furthermore, we will propose specific recommendations for Company X.

2. Methodology

2.1 Type of Study

We have chosen to follow Yin's approach towards research work. Yin (1994) proposes five different research strategies: experiment, survey, archival analysis, history, and case study. Every form of study has its advantages as well as limitations, depending on what the researcher wants to investigate. We have chosen to use the case study method because it gives us greater insight and understanding of the repatriation problem. The problem is very complex; therefore, case study research seems both informative and appropriate for our case. In addition, it also gives us more than just theoretical information. It gives us a good opportunity to understand the process of repatriation at a specific company.

Despite these advantages, Yin (1994) describes three potential barriers when using the case study approach. The most common problem with a case study is that it lacks thorough research, meaning that the researcher has preconceived notions about the case and its problems, which may influence its results and outcomes. The second most common problem that occurs in case studies is that they are not broad enough and, therefore, they do not offer enough material in order to make scientific generalizations. The third and last problem concerning case studies is that they are very often too time-consuming to conduct (Yin, 1994).

Even if these setbacks exist, we strongly believe that using a case study method will be the most appropriate way for us to gain insight into the repatriation process. This approach allows the researcher to maintain a holistic view while investigating real life events. After investigating current theories about repatriation and its importance, we have discovered that the process seems different for every company and needs to be adjusted for each organization. Despite this, we believe that through our theoretical and empirical findings, we can create recommendations for Company X, and that other companies could use our suggestions as a basis for improving their processes. We think the

problems Company X is struggling with regarding repatriation are problems that often occur within large companies today.

2.2 Collection of Data

The preliminary stage of our research started with the collection of secondary data. It involved an investigation of the literature available within the area of repatriation. Examples of secondary data are books, articles and academic journals. Moreover, we have also been given the opportunity to investigate and analyze secondary data at Company X. This type of secondary data involves existing guidelines and contracts regarding repatriation. In order to collect primary data we conducted several interviews. In addition, our theoretical framework and discussions are based upon our findings in the secondary data.

Most of the former research and studies are U.S. based. This is a limitation because the focus on expatriate assignments seems to be different depending on each country. Research suggests that the Europeans focus more on the selection process of the expatriates than the U.S., perhaps reflecting that the international revenues are more important for them compared to the U.S. companies, who have a large domestic market. It has also been suggested that international experience is highly valued in Europe and taken more into consideration in the management development process (Brewster et al, 2001). Even though the company we are conducting our research on is owned by an international MNC, we still consider it European, which is something we have taken into consideration when analyzing the different American sources.

In order to collect primary (qualitative) data, we have conducted 28 interviews at Company X. Interviews have also been our primary source for receiving information about the repatriation process at Company X. Our interviews have been conducted face-to-face because we believe this approach provides more insight and creates more trust between us and the person being interviewed. Yin (1994) describes the advantages of an interview as targeted and insightful. It is targeted due to the fact that it focuses directly on the case study topic. Moreover, it is insightful because it provides perceived casual inferences.

In order to structure our interview, we created questions from our secondary data. Since we wanted to involve repatriates, expatriates, HR departments, line-managers and mentors, different questions were prepared for each category. Even if we had a structured interview guide, additional questions were also made depending of the response of the interviewees. This is an advantage of having open-ended questions because it allows the researcher to talk freely about the issues with the interviewee. Moreover, it allows the researchers to ask spontaneous questions if a new interesting issue is uncovered during the interview. Therefore, we can conclude that we used semi-structured interviews.

Our interviews are based on one single multi national company (MNC) and therefore might not be applicable to all companies. Despite this, we strongly believe that the problems occurring in Company X are common among many organizations. Moreover, almost all of our interviews have been conducted with persons that are still employed by Company X; therefore, some answer may be biased. However, since we guaranteed anonymity to the interviewees, we do not think this represents such a significant limitation.

2.3 Choosing to Investigate Repatriation at Company X

Even before our selection of thesis topic, we had an understanding that there existed an interest at Company X in how to improve the repatriation process. We conducted a minor study concerning expatriation/repatriation during the fall 2002. While we were working on our research, Company X contacted one of our professors, in order to get some information about our findings. Since there was an interest from Company X as well as from us, we decided to contact Company X. Along with the International Human Resource Department at Company X, we concluded that repatriation was an issue that needed to be further examined and improved.

Investigating the repatriation process seemed both beneficial for Company X as well as for our personal development. The underlying reason for this study is that there exists a lack of guidelines on how to manage the repatriation process correctly at Company X. At the same time it has an academic interest for our professors and us.

Moreover, selecting Company X seemed both challenging and pleasurable at the same time. It is a large well-known company that operates all over the globe. The topic is indeed Human Resource related and this is an area that all three of us see as fascinating and interesting. Creating steps towards a better repatriation process at Company X, will not only benefit them, it will increase our own understanding and enhance our future knowledge concerning human resource management.

2.4 Choice of Interviews

Our choice of interviews has been largely dependent upon the availability of persons within the organization. The international human resource department at the company helped us to get in contact with about 35 persons within the organization. These persons are in one way or another related to the repatriation process. Unfortunately, we were not able to interview all persons, but in total 28 were interviewed. In order to gain the best possible insight we tried to interview as many people as possible. It is important to specify that some individuals can fall into two categories. For example, some of our interviewees had experiences of both being a repatriate as well as being a manager and/or mentor.

First, we decided to interview personnel who have experienced repatriation within a two-year period. We wanted to gain insight towards their experiences during the repatriation. Since the repatriate experiences varied, we interviewed ten repatriates. Secondly, we decided to interview six people within different HR departments in order to gain insight into their opinions and tasks related to the issues. We wanted to establish whether HR saw the repatriation process and its problems in the same way as the repatriates experienced the procedure. The third interview group was the line managers/mentors within the home organization. We wanted their insights and opinions on the repatriation process as well. Nine people that fell into this category were interviewed. As a fourth category, we also decided to interview three employees that were preparing for a future expatriate assignment. This was conducted in order to learn about their expectations regarding the expatriate assignment as well as how they believed the repatriation process would turn out upon their return. In addition to these interviews, we have also interviewed one staff member at the international

human resource department. One additional interview was also conducted with a former employee at Company X. This person had been on an overseas assignment for five years prior to their return.

3. Theoretical Framework

This chapter provides the reader with a theoretical framework of the repatriation process in general as well as the problems associated with it. The chapter starts with discussing why companies send out expatriates and why employees accept international assignments. Furthermore, variables that will influence how successful and how rapidly repatriates will adjust to coming home, are presented. Some of the variables of the figure will be analyzed later in the empirical findings and analysis section. Work role transitions will follow the figure and finally proactive behavior will be touched upon.

3.1 Earlier Studies

The studies on repatriate adjustment have been changing significantly during the last few years. While many of the earlier studies were descriptive and narrow in nature, more attention is now being paid to theoretical models that describe how, and why, repatriates have difficulties adjusting to new job assignments (Feldman, 1991).

The earlier studies on repatriation (Tung, 1981; Harvey, 1984; Tung, 1988) have focused mainly upon what the companies should do in order to achieve an effective repatriation as well as why companies need to view repatriation as an important area. In brief, we can conclude that these studies are almost only focusing on how the company should adapt towards individual goals in order to prevent underutilization of knowledge, loss of invested money, not being able to recruit the right people, etc. In addition, the earlier studies do not seem to recognize problems such as restructuring and fast changing business environments.

More recent studies (Allen et al, 1998; Paik, 2002) have investigated the earlier trends within repatriation involving updated numbers such as number of employees that leave the organization and the cost associated with foreign assignments, etc. However, the recent studies have also developed a new focus. It not only reflects what the company should do in order to create an effective repatriation; it also focuses on what the actual expatriate can do in order to repatriate in a more smooth and effective way.

Despite the earlier studies conducted and the theory developed within the area of repatriation, we have not been able to find a single theory that can be used in order to create solid and sufficient guidelines on how to handle repatriation in an effective and satisfactory manner. Therefore, we will introduce different theories and combine these in order to create a guiding principle within repatriation.

Even though there are a number of previous studies and several theories on how to improve repatriation, we feel that the earlier findings and the theories used in this chapter are the most applicable to this thesis.

3.2 Why Organizations Send Out Expatriates

Today organizations must pursue global knowledge and maintain a global perspective in order to remain competitive in the business environment. Due to increased globalization, the business opportunities are tremendous. One of the critical success factors to managing business abroad is to effectively transfer a company's critical capabilities on an international basis. The international perspective and experience an expatriate develops during the international assignment is considered a key component to an organization striving for global knowledge. Contradictory to this is that many companies do not make use of the acquired knowledge (Paik et al, 2002; Suutari et al, 2001).

According to Baruch et al, 2002 there are three basic guidelines for using expatriates. The first one is, specific *business needs, (knowledge transfer)*, sending people with specific skills or experience, which done in cases where the destination operation lack these specific skills. The second reason is, *career development*, which means giving promising managers the opportunity to go abroad in order to gain experience in management autonomy and self-sufficiency. The third reason is, *control over operations abroad*, which means keeping the subsidiary in line with the home organizational direction. Normally this would be done by senior managers (Baruch et al, 2002).

Tung (1981), states that foreign assignments are classified into four major categories; 1. chief executive officer, whose responsibility is to oversee and

direct the entire operation, 2. structure reproducer or functional head, whose job is to establish functional departments in a foreign affiliate, 3. trouble shooter, whose function is to analyze and solve specific operational problem, 4. element or rank the file members.

The objectives for an international assignment differ between organizations and expatriates.

3.3 Why Expatriates Accept International Assignments

According to Paik (2002), the primary motive for expatriates accepting an international assignment has to do with their own personal growth and international experiences. It is a common belief that an international assignment will enhance ones future career. Another motive is higher compensation and cross-culture adventure. Usually higher compensation is given to the employee while on the international assignment. These motives usually are the main reasons for going abroad (Paik et al, 2002).

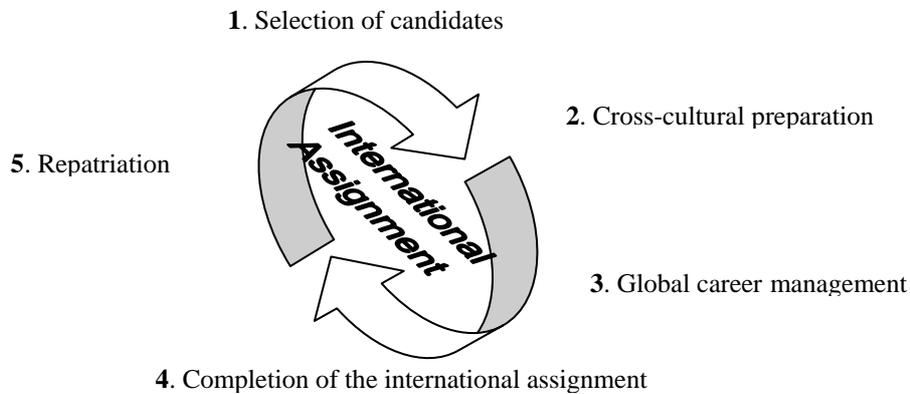
When companies send out employees on international assignments there are several issues to consider. The following section will discuss some important variables.

3.4 Variables of Repatriation

“Ending an expatriate assignment with a deliberate repatriation process is critical to successful completion of international human resource management” (Paik et al, 2002, p. 637). Organizations must recognize that repatriation is a period of major change both professionally and personally. The return includes challenges, which require an equivalent amount of attention as the assignment. All the issues connected to re-entry have a direct impact on the expatriates, their family members, and the company itself (Paik et al, 2002).

Solomon (1995), suggests that a well-designed expatriate program should follow a circular process, starting with the initial assessment selection of candidates, followed by cross-culture preparation, global career management, and completion of the international business objective and finishing with

repatriation. This circular process recognizes the importance of repatriation in completing the process. Despite this, the repatriation stage is often overlooked (Paik et al, 2002).



According to Paik et al (2002), a company must view all these five areas when giving an employee to an international assignment.

“Throughout the international assignments, expatriates must adjust to new cultures and work environments, which tends to alter mental maps and behavioral routines about what to think, say, and do both on and off the job” (Stroh et al, 2000, p. 681). At the same time, changes may be occurring within the home organization, such as corporate changes, shifts in strategies and policies. In addition, one can say that, when expatriates are returning home, they have changed, the company they work for has changed, the people at home have changed and their community has changed (Stroh et al, 2000).

“The occurrence of culture shock is recognized as a natural reaction in the transition from familiar to unknown surroundings” (Harzing et al, 1995, p. 223). When expatriates return to their home country many believe that transferring into a known environment should not be such a big problem, in fact many believe that there should be no problem at all; after all, it is the expatriates’ home country. The returning expatriates are expected to pick up the threads of their old life and settle in quickly without major difficulties. It is not only the organizations that frequently fail to recognize the potential shock of re-entry; the expatriates themselves expect an easy return. They do not consider the possibility that they themselves have changed as a result of a foreign

experience, and that there might have been changes within the home organization and the home country (Harzing et al, 1995).

Many expatriates believe that integration and adjustment to the foreign subsidiary facilitate the most effective performance abroad and they are most likely to adopt these orientations. This might result in a direct conflict with one of the objectives of the companies, which is to bring and maintain the corporate culture to the international subsidiary (Paik et al, 2002).

Many expatriates have been away from their home organization and home country for 3-5 years with only infrequent trips back. “During this absence, most expatriates are “out-of-sight”, “out-of-mind” and are not kept up-to-date with what is going on “back home” (Black, 1991). Research shows that adjusting back to the home country culture and home organization culture is often more difficult than adjusting to living abroad (Black, 1991; Black et al. 1992; Hurn 1999; Solomon, 1995). One of the most accepted explanations for this is that most people being sent abroad have never lived before in their destination country, therefore their expectations are based on stereotypes rather than personal experience, making their expectations more flexible and open to change. On the other hand, all of the repatriates have previously lived in the country to which they are returning. This may lead the individuals to have expectations that are more rigid because they have personal experiences to base their expectations upon return (Black et al. 1992). This indicates that more attention should be paid to the repatriation stage. During the repatriation process, many former expatriates feel insecure and left behind. This often results in a high repatriate turnover (Feldman, 1991).

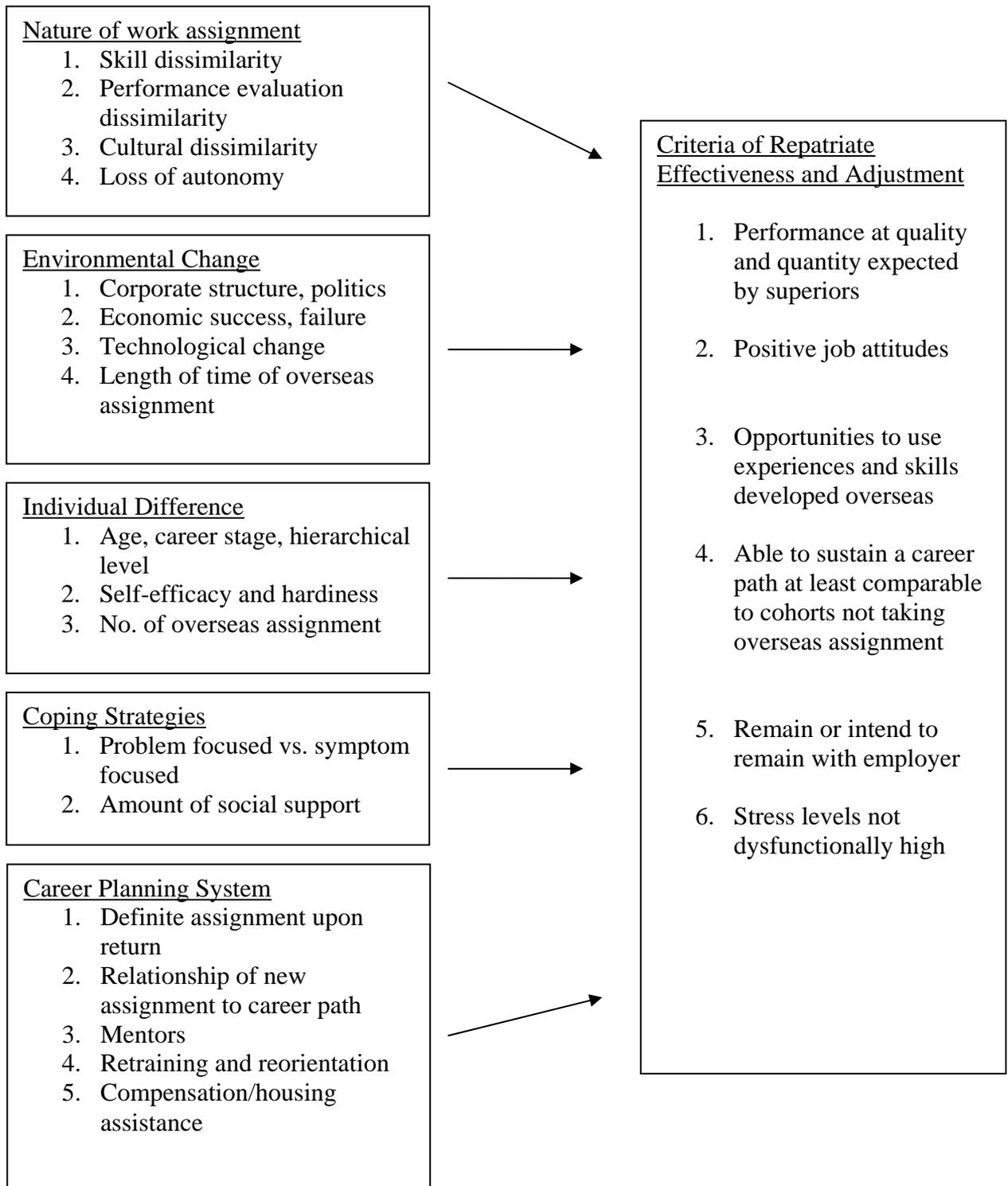
The problem is often that HR view communication as an important component to the success of an international assignment; however, their perception is that they are not supposed to take full responsibility. Instead, the communication responsibility is on the functional department, home office, or the mentor. However, the expatriate often views communication as less important; they feel that it is an extra burden added on to their already challenging responsibilities. The expatriates’ view is that someone from the home office should make the effort to reach them. Very often, it is obvious that HR and the expatriates do

not share the same values and views concerning the primary factors that contribute to repatriation difficulties (Paik et al, 2002).

3.5 Factors Influencing Repatriation

There are various models presented on how to achieve an effective repatriate adjustment (Tung, 1988). Despite this, the criteria for successful repatriation are not formally stated within these propositions. We find it essential to have a structured list of criteria for repatriation within our theory in order to analyze the process correctly. Not many empirical studies that present a theoretical framework focusing on the criteria to achieve a successful repatriation have been done, but we still think it is important to have a theory that describes the areas to focus upon regarding repatriation. In order to establish a model on how to repatriate people, we have decided to use Feldman's (1991, p. 167) theoretical repatriation process model. Feldman does not base his theory on empirical data, but on personal observations and analysis conducted on previous studies about repatriation. This is a framework for understanding the repatriation process. It outlines the criteria for effective repatriate adjustments, as well as the variables, which influence whether the repatriation process will be successful (Feldman, 1991). The study by Feldman (1991) on repatriate moves as career transitions was conducted in order to investigate what could be accomplished in order to lower the cost for companies concerning various repatriation problems. Furthermore, the study investigated whether repatriates are using their new knowledge and skills within their new job position upon return. Since Feldman's theory is based on the author's personal analysis and observation, we will also analyze if there are issues that are missing or issues within the theory that are not as relevant anymore.

The figure below is divided into five areas that have to be considered in order to achieve a so-called successful repatriation. Important to say is that we will have an additional success factor after the theory, which we believe will help the repatriation process to be even smoother and more successful.



All these variables will influence how successfully and how rapidly repatriates adjust to their new work assignments and perform on them (Feldman, 1991, p. 167).

3.5.1 The Nature of A Work Assignment

The nature of work assignments involves the fact that the greater dissimilarity between the new domestic job and the expatriate assignment, the lesser the repatriates initial work effectiveness (Feldman, 1991). The theory suggests that the new job must in one way or another be similar to the foreign assignment in order to achieve efficiency. This might seem obvious but many corporations today do not use the knowledge and skills learned by the repatriate (Paik et al, 2002). O’Sullivan also states this as one of the key elements to achieving a “successful” repatriation. She states that: “the employee must gain access to a suitable job, i.e., one which recognizes the newly acquired international competencies and which enables the repatriate to sustain a career path that is at least comparable to cohorts not taking an overseas assignment” (O’Sullivan, 2002, p. 598).

Moreover, the theory also states that the greater loss of autonomy in the repatriate assignment, the greater the repatriate’s problems in adjusting to the new work assignment upon homecoming (Feldman, 1991). In many cases repatriates find upon return that they have less discretion than they had overseas and it is often a disturbing and upsetting experience. Therefore, the greater loss of autonomy, the more complicated the repatriation process will be. In addition to the nature of work assignments, a more detailed and focused discussion about the work role transition that repatriation represents will be discussed in the section 3.6.

3.5.2 Environmental Changes

This area refers to both changes within as well as outside the company. When an expatriate returns from a long overseas assignment, the company has often gone through organizational changes. Perhaps, for example, the corporate strategies, staff and goals have changed. This creates a new environment for the repatriate. Things are now not the same as they used to be. In addition, the technology could have advanced dramatically in the repatriates’ absence and therefore, their skills may seem obsolete (Feldman, 1999). Many times the expatriate returns home to an organization that appears to have forgotten who they are, and does not know what they have accomplished during the years

abroad and finally does not know how to use their new knowledge appropriately. Often repatriates have to look for an appropriate position within the organization as they are placed in temporary positions or/and positions lower than the one prior to expatriation. Another area that might be problematic is the reintegration of the family (spouse and children). Family problems can affect the repatriation negatively if the family fails to adjust back to the new “situation” (Paik et al, 2002; Stroh, 2000; Tung, 1988). All of these changes can make the repatriate feel uncomfortable and insecure, which could make the repatriation process function less smoothly.

The external environmental changes in society will also affect the repatriation process. If a repatriate has been overseas for a long time and has not visited the home country much, it could result in reversed culture shock. Therefore, we can draw the conclusion that the longer the overseas assignment lasts and the less visits to the home country the expatriate makes; the greater chance of reversed culture shock there exists (Feldman, 1991). The problem with this can be handled by having effective cross-culture preparation both prior to and after the international assignment. Reintegration into the corporate culture is usually valued more by human resource managers than the expatriates. On the other hand, reintegration into the home country culture is valued more by expatriates than by the human resource managers. Since reintegration into corporate culture is valued more, more effort is often made to bring the expatriate back into the corporate culture, when in fact the expatriate is struggling with issues outside the corporate environment. Many expatriates consider reintegrating into the corporate culture similar to starting a new job, though they still tend to prioritize their ability to reintegrate into the home country culture. If HR managers are not recognizing these contradictions, there may continue to be a major problem, and in the worst case scenario the repatriate will leave the company (Paik et al, 2002).

3.5.3 Individual Differences

Many researchers state that a repatriate who has high self-efficacy and hardiness may go through the repatriation process better than those employees who rate low on these attributes (Feldman, 1991). Another positive feature is past experiences in overseas assignment. A repatriate who has experienced

international differences and culture shocks in the past, is more likely to handle the repatriation process successfully.

Even though there are no academic theories regarding gender, family status, or age, it is argued by Feldman (1991) that these attributes have an effect on repatriate adjustments. There is some subjective evidence that suggests the following: repatriates in the middle (in terms of career stage and age) seem to have most repatriation problems. Feldman (1991) explain that this is due to three major reasons. First, these types of managers generally have teenage children in school and a spouse with an established job and own career directives. The second explanation is that the so-called “middle-manager” needs to be visible at the headquarters in order to advance in their career. If they are overseas, they may be forgotten for promotions. Lastly, Feldman states that middle managers in general more often stumble with work problems because they are often in charge of projects that they do not have enough control over (Feldman, 1991).

3.5.4 Individual Coping Strategies

Problem-focused coping involves behaviors that one can use to take advantage of opportunities in a new area (Feldman, 1991). This would help the repatriate to handle stress and other sources of threats. On the other hand, symptom-focused coping behaviors, which refer to blocking out threatening situations, will not help in the long run. Instead of blocking or ignoring the obstacles and the stress, repatriates need to deal with these issues. If the repatriates are symptom-focused in their copying behavior, it will likely decrease their energy and ability to deal with stress (Feldman, 1991).

Another important area in making the repatriation process as smooth as possible involves the social support from the company. It is important for organizations today to help both the repatriate and his/her family with unforeseen problems that can occur during the repatriation process. When it comes to corporate assistance the expatriate should receive a large amount of help. For example, corporate assistance can be provided regarding housing and moving, not only when they go abroad but also when they return. In most cases

a repatriate will receive a lower salary and fewer benefits when he/she returns to the home organization.

3.5.5 Career Planning Systems

The Career planning system of an organization will affect the repatriates' feelings and satisfaction. In some cases, the repatriates return to the home organization without a permanent job position and instead the repatriates are placed into a temporary job position, that does not reflect the repatriates' capabilities. In order to prevent this situation from occurring, there should be a plan in place before the repatriate returns to the home organization. According to Feldman: "to the extent that the dates for return to headquarters can be known and specific job assignments can be waiting returning expatriates, the smoother the re-entry process will be" (Feldman, 1991, p. 173).

If the planning of the repatriation is not done properly, it could result in limited job opportunities for the repatriate. Even if the company highly values their repatriates and would like to assign them a "better" job upon the return, many times there are no jobs available at the time of their return (Allen et al, 1998). It is often the case that companies have a too short planning horizon. This is due to the reality that expatriates are "out of sight, out of mind"; their return is often not planned until very close to their actual arrival (Allen et al, 1998).

Furthermore, it is also suggested that the repatriates should know how their overseas assignment will affect their career plan. If this awareness exists, the more open and approving the expatriate will be towards the new assignment as well as towards developing new skills and competencies.

Tung (1988) stumbled upon instances when organizations put an employee in an expatriate position because they simply did not know what to do with him/her. The problem is that the expatriate might not see the overseas assignment fitting into his/her career plan which could result in a disaster. Once again, it shows the importance of there being a good fit between their overseas assignment and the expatriates career plans.

A good step towards ensuring a good repatriate transition is to have a mentor within the company back home. A mentor should stay in contact with the expatriate during his/her assignment and notify them about changes in the home organization. Furthermore, the mentor should promote the repatriate's goals and opinions in his/her absence. This will result in the repatriate having a greater chance of sustaining career advancement. Without a mentor or another good contact in the home organization, it is most likely that the expatriates will lose communication and their job network. Allen et al, (1998) state that overseas assignments without good communication and commitment from the home organization will often cause an "out of sight, out of mind situation".

Another important area, which helps to ensure a successful repatriation, is having structured retraining and reorientation upon return. These programs should deal with issues such as relocation assistance, short-term financial assistance, career counseling, orientation, etc (Feldman, 1991). It is most likely that repatriates that receive a planned retraining program will have a more positive repatriation experience than repatriates that do not receive this kind of program. Hurn (1999) recommends companies have these meetings off site and that they should include the following areas:

1. Reverse culture shock - the psychological, emotional and physical symptoms of feeling like foreigners upon return and developing coping strategies
2. Update on home country - political, social and economic changes.
3. Business environment - changes in legalization, new company policies, trends and development.
4. Review of financial planning – taxation, investment and pensions.
5. Schoolchildren's education – standards, procedures and school entrance.
6. Spouse issues – job search, CVs and professional updating.

(Hurn, 1999, p. 227)

According to Feldman's theory, if these procedures are done correctly, the expatriate should experience a successful and satisfying repatriation process. However, we believe that more has to be done in order to achieve an effective repatriation process. We would, therefore, like to present some additions to

Feldman's theory. A more detailed theory on the work role transitions is needed to develop deeper insight into Feldman's model (1991).

Since Feldman's model (1991) seems to only focus on what the company should do in order to improve the repatriation and not what the expatriate/repatriate could try to accomplish in order to smooth the repatriation process, we see that there is a need to use a theory on how proactive the expatriate is during the foreign assignment. We strongly believe that being proactive will ease the repatriation process and therefore, proactive behavior will be discussed in section 3.7.

3.6 Work Role Transitions

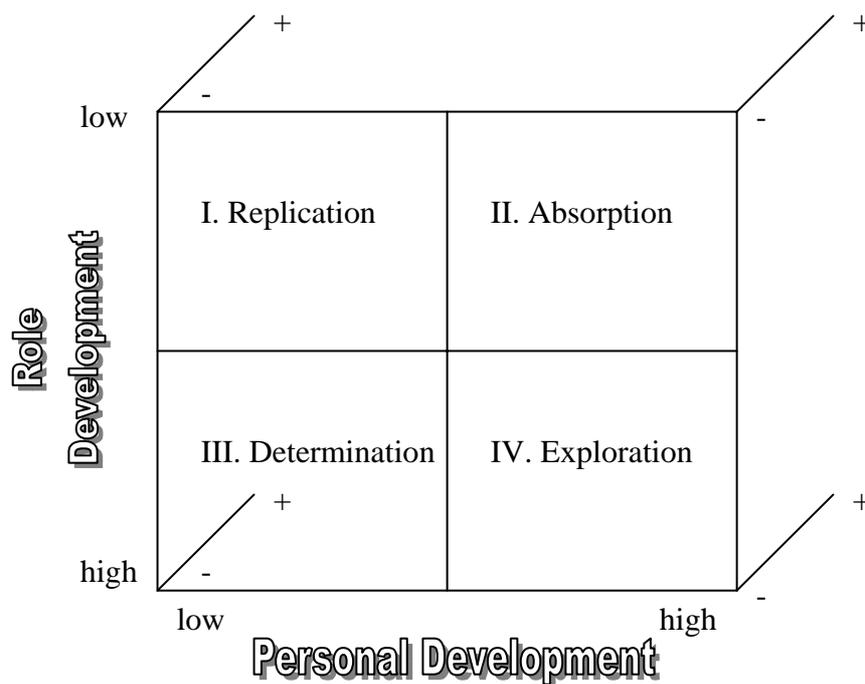
To move back from a foreign country and start to work again within the home company is a significant work role transition (O'Sullivan, 2002). There are many different adjustment categories the individual falls into when going through the transition. At the same time his/her approach when dealing with the situation can significantly alter the results positively or negatively.

Work role transition is referred to as any change in employment status and any major change in job content (Nicholson, 1984). These changes can be triggered for instance by a modification in the technical, organizational or demographical status. Expatriation and repatriation represent a major alteration in the employment status and the job content, and therefore should be considered as a significant work role transition.

A work role transition can have an incredible impact on both the individual and the organization (Nicholson, 1984). The individual can react differently to the new situation. The repatriate could have considerable difficulties while adapting to the new working circumstances since there are many different boundaries to cross in the repatriation process. Examples of these boundaries include moving from one function area to another, changing hierarchical level, or changing ones position in the organization's information and influence network (O'Sullivan, 2002). The work role transition that repatriation represents is of great importance for the company because of the vast amount of financial resources invested in the person during the foreign assignment. It is

a huge investment, and due to this, a “return on investment” in which the employee puts into practice his or her newly acquired knowledge or experience is expected. A negative work role transition could, therefore, have a negative result for both the company and the individual.

According to Nicholson (1984), there are two possible ways to adjust to a role transition. The first way to adapt to the change is by personal development, which means that the individual deals with change by altering his or her frame of reference, values, or other identity-related attributes. Another way to manage a new job role is to adopt a role-developing stance, which means that the individual proactively tries to change the work requirements in order to better match his/her desires, skills, and identity. The outcome of the adaptation will depend on how much the individuals base their job adjustment on role development or personal development.



Modes of adjusting to transitions resulting from personal and role development (Nicholson, 1984, p. 175).

The figure shows the different modes of adjusting to transition depending on how much personal or role development the person exercises.

Replication is when the individual performs very little role development and personal development. The employees perform relatively the same tasks they did in their previous job position, and therefore their performance is very similar to the previous occupants. The existing personal, organizational, and socio-cultural forms will be replicated and maintained. Replication usually occurs when the previous and the new job are very similar to each other.

Absorption takes place when the person exclusively goes through all the change needed to fit the job. The individual tries to adapt to the new work position, but does nothing to change the parameters of the new role. It could be said that role learning is an essential part of absorption. An example could be workers that are reassigned to workshops that are functionally unrelated.

If the new role is changed, but the individual stays pretty much unaffected, then the person is adjusting by means of determination. The person is an active participant in the establishment of the content or structure of the new job. One characteristic of determination is that the occupants make use of their unique skills and have a strong influence on the job and its surrounding environment. One example could be the succession of political leaders in important positions.

Exploration represents cases when both the person and the job are affected. There is a simultaneous change in both the virtues of the person and in the parameters of the task. This is a common case in inter-organization change of middle managers since the company wants to hire them to put into practice the knowledge that they possess. The individual takes the job because it represents a growth in his/her career, but at the same time adapts to the circumstances of the new employment position.

There is a third independent dimension that could be added to role and personal development, and it is the person's affective reactions. Each of the different adjustment categories can have both positive and negative connotations, and these greatly depends on the individual's affective reactions. The axis of this measurement is created by two extreme poles, and a midpoint, which stands for

affective neutrality. Just to name some examples of each category, replication is positive when the conservation of stability is a good perception, but it is negative if the individual feels restricted, helpless, and obsolete. Absorption is seen as positive when there is a satisfaction from learning and from developing as a person, but it could be negative if the individual feels he or she is going through skill degeneration. Determination is positive when the individual is proud about his capacity to introduce new ideas and reform the status quo, but it is negative if other individuals perceive that the change has been destructive or if the person has signaled with a failed role development that he is inadequate for the position. Exploration is positive when the people are satisfied with growing after experimenting individually and with the job role, but could be negative if all the experimentation just ends up in confusion (Nicholson, 1984).

Nicholson (1984) states that there are four different predictors that may help to forecast which category the individual ends up in during the transition. Those predictors are divided into 1) Role requirements 2) Induction-socialization processes 3) Influence of prior occupational socialization and 4) Motivational orientations. These predictors will not be analyzed in depth since they are not relevant for this paper. The central point of this theory is that there are different adjustment categories. The individual could fall into any of these and how the individual deals with this adjustment depends a lot on his personal approach or his affective reactions.

There could be mismatches in the theory where one predictor points towards one adjustment category and another towards a different one. In such cases, the individual could “catalyze lasting changes” (Nicholson, 1984). The person could then either adjust himself to the work situation or try to change the role of the position if possible, and if that is not possible, then seek a job elsewhere. That person could also put into practice a third option, which is to do nothing and stay in a person-role mismatch and suffer the negative psychological consequences.

The affective part of the theory should not be overlooked. It is very individual, but it is this part which gives either a positive or a negative connotation to the adjustment category. This is where proactive behavior enters the picture.

Should the company have a job ready for the expatriates when they come home, risking forcing the expatriates into an adjustment category they will not fit? Alternatively, should the expatriates instead actively search for a job using their personal network and other aids in order to find a job in before which they know they will fit into, increasing the positive affective connotation, even before starting their new job position?

3.7 The Proactive Behavior

O'Sullivan (2002) states: "At present, it remains unclear whether the repatriation problem is indeed due entirely to organizations' difficulties in managing the repatriation process, or whether it is also due in part to the repatriates' lack of initiative in attempting to secure such support". Based on this statement, it would be wise to consider both sides of the coin; what the company can do and what the individual can do to achieve a good repatriation.

It would be excellent if the companies could create a complete career plan prior to the expatriation which would cover what the employee should do when he/she returns from his/her international assignment, but this is unrealistic since the international business environment is unstable, unpredictable, and constantly changing (O'Sullivan, 2002). This makes it very difficult for organizations to know if they can stick to the individual promises they have made two or three years prior to the repatriation of their international employee. The communication and joint career planning with the expatriate may sometimes be overlooked since the company is much more concerned with immediate issues rather than long-term planning. Therefore, an individual approach for reaching a successful repatriation transition should be considered (O'Sullivan, 2002). The expatriates should not put all their faith in the hands of the corporation, but also try to ensure a successful repatriation on their own.

The word "protean" comes from the Greek god Proteus, who was able to change shape at will (Hall, 1996). According to the protean approach, in order for the career to advance both into the individual and the organizations satisfaction, the individual has to actively influence his/her own trajectory (O'Sullivan, 2002). The protean approach is about gaining more control over one owns work and not depending so much on the company (Hall, 1996).

Basing a career on protean behavior is seen as terrifying by many people since they see it as a lack of external support from the company (Hall, 1996), but when there is a lack of support from the company, there is usually nothing else to do than to adopt a protean approach.

The goal of a career is to achieve psychological success. This can be reached in many different ways, not only by following the path of traditional and conservative vertical success for which climbing the organizational pyramid and making a significant amount of money is the ultimate goal (Hall, 1996). Psychological success in a career is the feeling of pride and achievement when reaching personal goals. This can be reached by fulfilling personal goals such as inner peace, accomplishment, family happiness, personal success, etc. (Hall, 1996). It is the individuals themselves who decide what their goals are and how to achieve them. These individual goals could even be considered as personal affective variables in Nicholson's work role transition theory. If the person is able to fulfill these personal desires, then the adjustment phase to the new work role will have a much more positive connotation.

There are different proactive behaviors that may make the repatriation process easier. Some of them include to striving for constant contact with the sponsor and HR managers, developing close relations with many other sponsors that could provide information, developing a connection with managers who supervise positions that could be interesting future job opportunities, maintain visibility, visit the headquarters frequently, and be aware of the dangers of trusting HR too much (Allen et al, 1998). These measures will not only make the repatriation process easier, it will also help the expatriate to find a suitable job even before repatriation. The advantages of these behaviors, and some examples based on the interviews, will be illustrated in the analysis part of this thesis.

Future repatriates usually know ahead of time if they want a similar job to the one they already have in the foreign country. They also know the desired amount of discretion they wish the future job to offer, the influence on the role of the job they would like and how much they are prepared to change in order to fit into the new working environment (Nicholson, 1984). The company might not be able to offer a working position with these characteristics since

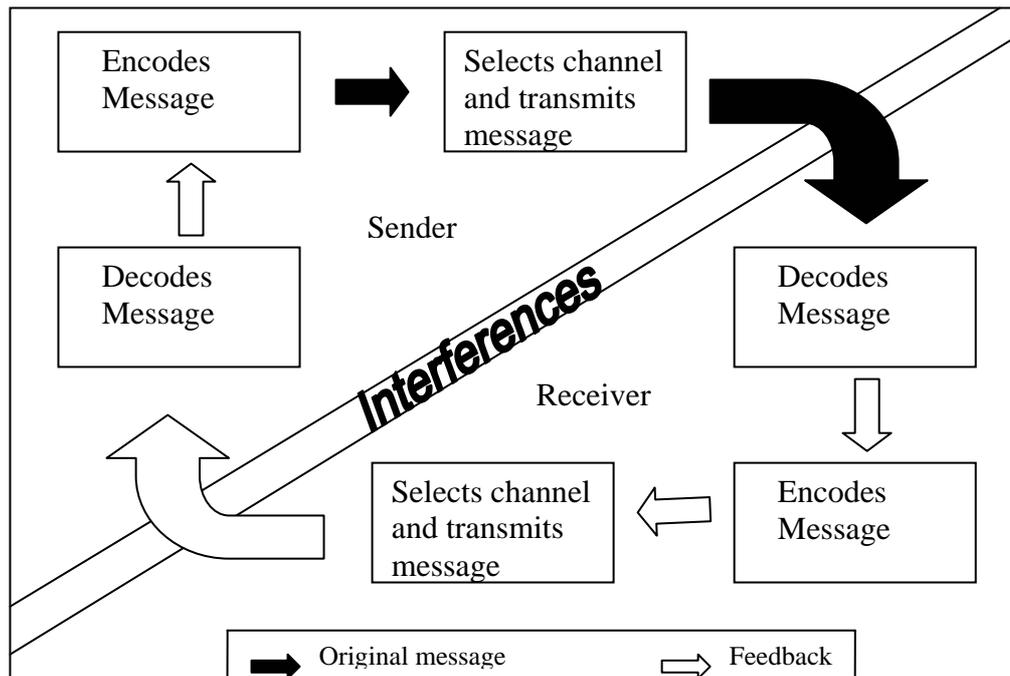
organizations often offer jobs that differ from the expectations of the repatriate (Paik et al, 2002). If the repatriate is assigned to a job in which some of these traits oppose his/her wishes, then the mismatch could lead to frustration (Nicholson, 1984). If an expatriate puts into practice proactive behavior, then he/she can perhaps carve out a job position with the desired characteristics or take advantage of a good relationship with a supervisor in order to change some of the content or the context of the new work role.

3.8 Communication

Later on in the thesis it will be illustrated that communication plays a vital role in the expatriation/repatriation process. Therefore, we have chosen to include a basic theory on this topic.

Communication can be defined as: “the process of exchanging information and meaning between or among individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, and behavior” (Lehman et al, 1999, p. 4). Other words used to describe the communication process are expressing feelings, conversing, speaking, corresponding, writing, listening, and exchanging. People communicate in order to satisfy needs in their work life as well as in their private life. Generally, there are three basic reasons for people to communicate: to inform, to persuade, and finally, to entertain.

Efficient communicators recognize that communication is not an automatic process. This means that he/she realizes that the message might not be interpreted accurately simply because a person transmitted it. An effective communicator anticipates possible breakdowns in the communication process. A communicator with this mind-set understands the importance of designing the initial message effectively and is prepared to intervene at the appropriate time in order to ensure the message received is as close as possible to the message sent (Lehman et al, 1999). The communication process is illustrated below:



The communication process (Lehman et al, 1999, p. 5).

The message starts with the sender who transmits it to the receiver. The sender carefully designs the message by choosing words that clearly transmit the message and gestures that underpin the verbal message. *The procedure when one selects and organizes the message is referred to as encoding.* The primary objective for the sender is to encode the message in such a way that the message received is as close as possible to the message sent.

At next step in the communication process the sender *selects an appropriate channel and transmits the message.* Selecting an inappropriate channel can cause a message to be misunderstood and can adversely affect human relations with the receiver.

The receiver must subsequently decode the message. The receiver is the destination of the message and his/her task is to interpret the sender's message, both verbal and nonverbal, with as little distortion as possible. Since words and nonverbal signals have different meanings to different people, numerous problems can occur at this stage of the process. Examples of breakdowns in communication that can occur at this stage are: *The sender incorrectly encodes*

the original message, due to the fact that words used by the sender might not be understood by the receiver. The *receiver is intimidated by the position* or authority of the sender. This might prevent the receiver from concentrating on the message effectively enough to understand it clearly. Furthermore, the receiver might be *afraid to ask for clarifications* because of the perceived fear that questions might be associated with incompetence. The receiver might be *reluctant to try to understand the message* because topic is perceived to be too difficult to understand. Finally, the receiver is unwilling to listen to new and different ideas, due to having a stereotypical mind set.

Finally, the receiver encodes the message to clarify any misunderstandings. This is called feedback. The feedback indicates if the sender needs to modify or adjust the original message in order to make it clearer to the receiver.

There are numerous factors that interfere with the communication process (interferences barriers). First, differences in educational level, experience, and culture might increase the complexity of communicating. Secondly, physical interferences such as loud talking near an area where communication takes place, and finally, the person (sender) is too rushed or too insecure to allow people to ask questions or offer feedback (uncomfortable setting) (Lehman et al, 1999).

4. Empirical Findings and Analysis

In this chapter, the empirical findings from the repatriation process at Company X are discussed and analyzed. First, an explanation of the interviews will be presented – how they have been classified and the percentages that stated what. Thereafter, the empirical findings will be presented in the different problem areas followed by an analysis of each. The analysis will be presented in connection with each problem in order to avoid confusion. The aim of this section is to answer the supporting research questions – (How is the repatriation process conducted today at Company X and how is the repatriation process perceived today among the employees). This is done in order for us to fully evaluate the repatriation process at Company X.

4.1 Why does Company X send out Expatriates

The company sends out expatriates in different job categories and for different tasks. These consist of:

- *Top management* – key executives working with strategic issues.
- *Career development* – high potential employees learning new skills, competencies, and gaining international experience.
- *Knowledge transfer* – expert competence or/and distinctive experience that is not available at the location.
- *Project implementation* – operations that can only be conducted by home location employees.
- *Integration* – need to integrate different company processes and policies.

Source: Internal documents provided by Company X, 2003

After identifying the reasons why Company X sends out expatriates, an identification of why the employees at the organization accept an international assignment will be presented next.

4.2 Why Employees at Company X accept International Assignments

Based on the interviews, the reasons for expatriation varies a lot depending on the individual, but the most common motives were:

- *Personal Development* – the individual intends to gain knowledge, skills, and experience within the international arena.
- *Career Development* – the individual considers the expatriate assignment as a logical step in his/her career advancement.
- *Adventure* – the expatriate feels that the experience will be exciting and exploratory.
- *Better economic situation* – The expatriate believes that working abroad will provide him/her a better economic situation.

At the moment, Company X has become more cost focused; therefore, the economic benefits of the international assignments have been slightly decreased. Due to this, the last criterion for working abroad is not seen as a motivator to the same extent as in the past.

After identifying the reasons why the company sends out expatriates and why they accept the international assignments, the repatriation process of the company will now be presented.

4.3 The Repatriation Process at Company X

The department and line manager that sends out the expatriate is responsible for bringing him/her back, meaning that it is their responsibility to provide a job for the expatriate upon return. Of course the expatriate is free to look elsewhere within the company, but he/she is guaranteed a job upon return. However, in many cases it is hard to find an appropriate job that matches the repatriates' expectations. There are no formal guidelines for the repatriation process provided by the company. Each department handles the repatriation in their own way.

It is suggested by Company X that preparing for the repatriation of the expatriate should start at least six months before the planned return. In reality, most of our interviewees said that this process starts 2-3 months prior to repatriation.

Each department has groups that focus on personal development and career growth, in which possible job positions for the returning expatriate are discussed. More specifically, the objectives of these groups are to:

- Ensure development opportunities for all employees.
- Perform long-term succession planning for key positions.
- Match individuals' experience and ambitions with job requirements.

Source: Company X's public affairs folder, 2002, p. 21

This is a relatively new function at the company; therefore, it is more developed in certain units or departments than others.

The company has a supporting international human resource department, a unit dealing with the practical issues regarding international assignments, mostly concerning the preparation prior to the assignment. Furthermore, upon return, the local HR department of each unit is involved in organizing the practical issues of the repatriate's contract such as salary, benefits, and other rewards.

The international human resource department also gives the expatriate a folder containing practical issues regarding preparation for expatriating as well as repatriation. However, this folder emphasizes much more about expatriation than repatriation.

4.4 Interview Classification

Before presenting our empirical findings, we find it necessary to make different classifications regarding the interviews. As mentioned earlier we have conducted 28 interviews divided into five categories: Repatriates, Home managers, HR personnel, Mentors and Expatriates on their way. On a few occasions, the interviewed person falls into more than one category. For

example: a home manager could have been an expatriate. Moreover, we have decided to use the following terms for quantification within our empirical findings:

All:	100%	(of the interviewed persons within a certain area).
Most:	75-99%	
Many:	51-74%	
Half:	50%	
Some:	25-49%	
Few:	-24%	

4.5 Empirical Findings: Reverse Culture Shock

Some of the interviewees experienced reverse culture shock. The ones that did, stated that it was harder to come back home than to go abroad. There is significant preparation before leaving, but there seems to be less preparation for the repatriation. Prior to moving, practical issues are taken care of extremely well. Company X helps with everything from moving the furniture to finding a plumber in the relocation country. Emphasis on learning the new culture is also made before relocation. A formal education session about the new country and culture are usually held for the expatriate and his/her family. These issues were seen as something very positive among the interviewees. One repatriate said:

“The preparation before relocating was very well organized, Company X helped out with basically all practical things, such as renting out the house and finding schools for our kids. However, when we were about to come home there was almost no assistance at all”

Another repatriate stated:

“I actually thought we would get the same assistance upon return as when leaving for the international assignment, but it was nowhere near it”

In addition, the expatriates were given an “expatriate folder” which included practical things to take care of prior to relocating. The folder also included a

small section on issues to consider upon return. However, most repatriates thought it should be more extensive.

Some of the interviewees felt that the company and home country had changed during the time abroad. Technology changes, old peers had quit or relocated, old networks had disappeared or changed, old friends and neighbors had changed, and they realized that they themselves had changed while on assignment. Many of our interviewees stated that their lifestyle changed dramatically upon return. During the time abroad the expatriates generally had a very beneficial economic situation, which ended when they came home. Many of the repatriates interviewed stated that they missed a “re-entry program”, or some kind of preparation for the relocation back to the home organization and the home country. Two repatriates declared:

“I missed some kind of preparation for re-adjusting to coming home; my children especially had problems re-adjusting back to the school system. It has not been as hard for me as for my family since I am basically doing the same job as I was over there”.

“They had started using electrical attendance cards; before I left we used a regular time clock”.

Most of the managers agreed that the changes often cause problems upon repatriation. For example, one line manager stated:

“Often the biggest problem is that while abroad the expatriate “was someone”, they had more responsibility and autonomy, and when they get back they are part of the grey mass so to speak”.

Most departments recommend the expatriates not be out on international assignments more than four years at a time. The length of the international assignments varied among the interviewees. Many contracts lasted two plus one years, and many of the expatriates terminated the assignment without doing the third year. Other interviewees were on longer assignments from four to the longest eight years. The expatriates that were located primarily in Europe went home frequently since the nature of the work demanded that. On the other

hand, the expatriates located further away, such as in Asia or the U.S. did not go home that often, usually once or twice a year.

4.6 Analysis: Reverse Culture Shock

The people that experienced a reverse culture shock, stated that it was harder to come back home than to go abroad. This might be because there is basically no preparation for the repatriation, compared to the preparation before moving abroad. The assistance prior to locating is very well organized and prepared. Nevertheless, we think that in many instances the preparation for coming back after the international assignment is lacking. As suggested by Solomon (1995) and Paik et al (2002) in section 3.4, an accurately designed expatriate program should follow a circular process, starting with the initial assessment selection of candidates, followed by cross-culture preparation, global career management, and completion of the international business objective and finishing with repatriation.

The repatriation will include challenges, which require an equivalent amount of attention during and prior to the assignment. All the issues connected to re-entry have a direct impact on the expatriate, the family members, and the company itself (Paik et al, 2002).

The folder given to the expatriate before leaving includes lots of instructions for relocating but hardly anything for repatriation. In the folder, Company X should focus more on issues regarding repatriation. This is due to the fact that it is much more difficult to repatriate than expatriate (Paik et al, 2002).

Another important element, which will help to enhance a successful repatriation, is having a structured retraining and reorientation program upon return. These programs should deal with issues such as relocation assistance, short-term financial assistance, career counseling, orientation, etc. (Feldman, 1991). Most likely, the repatriates who go through a planned retraining program will have a more positive repatriation experience than repatriates who do not receive this kind of program.

Many of our interviewees claimed that they did not experience reverse culture shock. The ones that did not experience it were mainly expatriates located closer to the home organization as well as those visiting home frequently. One repatriate stated:

“I had no problems with coming home, the job was waiting for me, and since I went home frequently, the repatriation was probably smoother”

The external environmental changes in society will also affect the repatriation process. If a repatriate has been overseas for a long time and has not visited the home country regularly, it could result a reversed culture shock. Furthermore, expatriates having experienced repatriation in the past will be less likely to experience reverse culture shock (Feldman, 1999).

Many of our interviewees felt that the organization and the home country had changed during their time abroad. The interviewees that experienced this were primarily the expatriates who had been away for a longer period, more than 3 years, as well as the ones not visiting the home organization and country frequently. We can see a clear pattern regarding reverse culture shock. The expatriates that are far from the home organization and the people that are not visiting the organization frequently seem to be the ones that have a bigger problem with reverse culture shock.

The people that frequently return home get to experience the home organizational and country changes more than the expatriates coming home on home-leave visits once or twice a year. One repatriate stated:

“I was away for two and a half years and had bigger problems settling into the new country than returning home. The home organization contact worked out well. On average I came home once a month for job purposes”

Part of the reverse culture shock can be avoided if the communication between the expatriate and the mentor works out in an effective way during the assignment. For this to occur, it might be wise that Company X stresses the importance of the “mentorship” prior to departure. The mentor is chosen by the expatriates themselves, but it might be a good idea to inform the expatriate that

a mentor with international experience may serve as a better mentor since he/she has been through the same process.

4.7 Empirical Findings: Mentor

In order to ease the international experience abroad the expatriates are advised by Company X to choose a mentor. The mentor should be someone who looks out for the expatriate's interests when it comes to job positions when returning as well as notifying them about changes that occur within the home organization.

In many cases the line manager or closest boss are chosen to be the mentor. There are no guidelines for how the mentor should handle the process nor any criteria or guidelines for the line manager on how to act or manage when the expatriate is on the way home. According to the interviews, there was a lack of guidelines on how to manage the situation. Many of the interviewees claimed that the contact with the mentor did not work out as they would have wished. Some employees said that they did not see the importance of the mentor. Our interviews indicated that Company X needs to discuss the importance of a mentor prior to relocating. One expatriate stated:

“The contact with the mentor did not work at all; I hardly had any contact with him during my time abroad”

Furthermore, two managers stated:

“It depends on the individual if the “mentorship” works out or not, but I would say that in most cases it should work better”

“There is a need to provide guidelines for handling the repatriation process for the direct manager/mentor of the repatriate”

We asked our interviewees if a formal checklist or some instructions on regarding the mentors' role existed. The answer was no, but most of the interviewees agreed that it would be helpful.

4.8 Analysis: Mentor

The theory states that the mentor should also be the person who keeps the expatriate updated about changes within the organization. In addition, the mentor should promote the repatriates goals and opinions in his/her absence. This will hopefully result in the repatriate having a greater chance to sustaining career advancement. If the expatriate does not have a mentor or another good contact person at the home organizations, it is more likely that he/she will “lose touch” with the home company and his/her job network (Allen et al, 1998; Feldman, 1991). We believe that it might be appropriate to separate the two tasks; have one who looks out for jobs, and one who deals with the general information exchange.

The fact that some of the interviewees said that they did not feel that mentors play an important role shows that Company X needs to communicate the importance of having one. Good mentoring will most likely decrease the risk of a reverse culture shock. It is important that the employees understand the importance of a mentor. The mentor plays a more central role the further away from the home organization the expatriate is located. The same applies for people not visiting the home organization frequently. Many of the managers who had served as mentors thought it would be of major help to have some guidelines on how to manage their role as a mentor. One repatriate stated:

“The communication with the mentor seems to work well or frequently during bad times, however, during good times it tends to fall short”

In addition, some mentors feel that more assistance on how to deal with the mentorship would be helpful. As one mentor stated:

“It would be helpful to get some criteria on how to act as a mentor”

Some expatriates also felt that someone within the home organization needs to be responsible for ensuring that a new mentor is assigned if the old one quits or relocates. The theory (Allen et al, 1998) states the importance of a mentor in order to ease the repatriation process. It states that the mentor’s role is to be a

link between the expatriate and the organization, notifying them about changes as well as looking out for career opportunities and interests for the expatriate. However, we believe that the need of a mentor depends very much on the individual; some expatriates need a mentor more than others do. Some expatriates have, for example, wider personal networks and make frequent home visits in job purposes. On the other hand, some expatriates might not have a well-developed network or conduct frequent home visits. Therefore, the need for a mentor might be more important for these expatriates.

The theory of Feldman (1991), states that a mentor should notify the expatriate about changes within the home organization. At first glance, this might seem as a relatively uncomplicated task. However, we believe this could be problematic. The mentor experience gradual changes within the organization while the expatriate receives secondary information and is not present to experience the changes. Since the expatriate does not see and experience the changes, he/she will probably build up their own assumptions and expectations on what the situation looks like within the home organization. The expectation/assumptions usually do not match the reality and, therefore, the repatriate might experience a shock upon return. This could result in the expatriate believing the communication with the mentor to have been ineffective while the mentor assumes that the communication worked fairly well.

Furthermore, we believe that an internationally experienced mentor could probably aid the expatriate better, compared to a mentor with no international experience. We think a mentor who has experienced expatriation/repatriation will probably have a greater understanding of the expatriate's situation.

4.9 Empirical Findings: Career Development

Based on the interviews, it has been observed that many of the repatriates thought they deserved a higher working position when returning home. For instance, when a person who was on their way to an international assignment was asked about his expectations when finishing the assignment and returning home, he stated that he expected, among other things, higher payment, personal growth and a higher career position. Of course, there are examples of various

opinions. In fact, another person on the way to an international assignment stated,

“I have more in mind than just the career; there are many other things such as the experience itself that are more important”

Even though there are some individuals who are not career focused, many repatriates actually consider their career as important issue.

The interviewed repatriates that had grown career wise usually stated that they were satisfied with their careers; and the ones that did not grow significantly usually stated that it could have been better.

The truth is that not all the expatriates grow career-wise when returning. When asked about this issue, one manager stated:

“Some grow, some do not, some even go back to the same position they had before”.

There are many expatriates that do grow when they come home, but it is unsure whether this is mainly due to their expatriate assignment or whether it would have happened anyway. When asked if the repatriates got a better career position when coming home, another manager stated:

“I think the international employees do grow career wise.”

However, when the question was: “Could they have grown equally much if they stayed home?” the answer was: “Yes”.

Some years ago Company X introduced groups that focus on personal development and career growth. The groups basically are systems where all the superiors of certain individuals meet to discuss a person’s future career prospects; this has been further explained in section 4.3. Many departments of Company X use them thoroughly, but some interviewees did not even know that the groups existed. In other parts of the company they knew that the group existed, but according to some HR people, they did not fully implement them.

4.10 Analysis: Career Development

One important factor that assures repatriate satisfaction is career development of the individual. Many of the people being sent out for an international assignment expect a higher position when coming home. Company X actually guarantees the expatriate a job when coming home, but it is not specified what type of job he/she will receive. If the job is very similar or the same to the one he/she had prior to the expatriation, the work role transition will be easy in the sense that the individual knows how to do the job (Nicholson, 1984). However, many other factors may come into play and have a negative effect on the repatriation process. If this is the case, the individual could be unsatisfied because of the lack of career growth and new challenges.

Even though the organizations would like to, they cannot guarantee specific jobs one or two years before the repatriation due to the unpredictable, and constantly changing business environment (O'Sullivan, 2002). Due to this, there is always a risk for the international employee to end up in a temporary job assignment that probably will go against his/her desired career plan. One repatriate, who considered himself to be in a temporary job position stated:

“This situation feels confusing and frustrating, I do not exactly know what to do and the people around me do not know what I'm doing either”

In this case, the frustration is evident and the person does not know what is happening with his/her career. This brings negative consequences for both the company and the individual because it is not making use of the international knowledge as well as creating uncertainty and confusion for the repatriate. The repatriates feel that they deserve a suitable job which recognizes their experience and their acquired international knowledge (O'Sullivan, 2002), and Feldman (1991) believe that a definite job assignment will ease the re-entry process.

Sometimes the individual sees it as impossible to grow within the same section that sent him/her abroad. In these cases, according to the interviews, many expatriates would be prepared to change departments and start to work in

another part of the company. This represents a dilemma for the company because, according to the interviewed managers, the different departments that sent the individual abroad would like to keep the person in the same department to take advantage of his/her acquired knowledge. If the repatriate is not able to find a desirable job within that section, then he/she could feel forced to leave for another department.

Another problem noted in the empirical findings of this section is that the individuals often would have had the same chance to grow if they had stayed within the home organization. Allen et al, (1998) argue that problems occur when repatriates come home and discover that colleagues that had not made an international move have grown even more than they have. This shows a contradictory message from the company since the organization, according to an HR interviewee, wants to give the impression that an international experience will benefit ones career. Black (1991) argues that it will be difficult to recruit strong potential employees for international assignments if the employees do not perceive the experience to be an opportunity for career advancement. Therefore it is in the company's best interest that the repatriates that performed well abroad grow career-wise at home.

The personal development and career group seem to have a positive role where they are fully implemented. The people who were brought up in this group before repatriation seemed to have an easier time finding a suitable job position. Unfortunately, even though it would seem the company is getting better at it, the groups are not institutionalized in the entire organization. There were many people in the interviews who did not even know the groups' function, and according to one HR person, the career groups were not always used even in the departments where they were supposed to be fully established.

The rigidity of the contract is another issue that could influence the career development of the individual. One repatriate stated for instance:

“I broke my international contract because of an excellent offer in Sweden (home location) which I could not deny”.

In this case, even though it was stipulated that the expatriate would stay abroad for at least two years, he was able to break the agreement in exchange for a better position in Sweden that helped his career. The contract was flexible. The flexibility in the policy of the termination of the contract has an advantage for the employee, since it gives him/her the opportunity to leave the expatriate assignment when a really good career opportunity is vacant at home. With the exception of one isolated case that we encountered, Company X seems to be flexible with contracts.

The theory stresses the importance of having awareness of how the international assignment will affect one's career. If this awareness exists, the more likely the expatriate will be focused on learning new skills and competencies. The theory focuses much on the importance of career advancement after an expatriate assignment. Even if many expatriates view the international assignments important as a career enhancer, our findings show that career advancement is not as important among the interviewees as stated in theory. Instead, the opportunity to live abroad and experience something adventurous seems to be one of the main reasons for accepting international assignments. We believe that the reason for this contradiction is that much of the theory is from U.S. based studies and might not be applicable globally.

Despite these findings, we still believe that an organization should try to identify the expatriates' main reasons for accepting the international assignment in order to focus more on these issues upon return. Nevertheless, the expectations regarding career advancement might change when an expatriate is overseas. Therefore, there might be a need for the home organization to review the expatriates' career expectations during the assignment as well.

4.11 Empirical Findings: Proactive Behavior

In the interviews, all the repatriates that had a successful repatriation, stated that it was very much due to their own network or efforts. On the other hand, many of the ones that did not have a successful repatriation stated that the company could have done more to facilitate the transition.

Many interviewees, including the ones that experienced a positive repatriation, agreed on that the company could have helped more during the repatriation and that it often seemed confusing as to who was responsible for the different repatriation areas. One repatriate stated:

“I did not know who was responsible for the repatriation, the HR department, International Human Resource Department, or my former boss?”

In these cases, the individuals who practiced proactive behavior seemed to perform better in the repatriation process than the ones that did not.

Like any major multinational corporation, Company X offers many different communication channels the individual can take advantage of. There are possibilities for phone, video conferences, and an intranet system. Changes at the home organization and vacancies are regularly published on the intranet system. According to the interviews, many people are offered constant work trips to the home organization, especially if the individual works in a European location. It is also standard that the individual is offered a trip home with their family once a year.

As mentioned earlier, the suggestions given in the expatriate folder are useful but seem to lack guidelines on how to aid the job-finding procedure by taking initiative oneself and how to smoothen the repatriation process by enhancing proactive behavior. One repatriate stated:

“The folder included information on how to survive in the new country... maybe too much I think, I mean... I know how to buy a microwave oven in [country X], but it did not focus on how I should act in order to make the repatriation process easier”.

4.12 Analysis: Proactive Behavior

All of the interviewed repatriates who considered themselves to have had a successful repatriation process seemed to have practiced very proactive behavior during their foreign assignments. When asked about how they got their current job position, answers such as *“entirely through my personal*

network”, or *“thanks to me actively searching the vacancies through my mentor, contacts, or the intranet”* were very common among the successful repatriates. This indicates that their current career position depended to a large extent on their efforts and on how much they were prepared to take responsibility for their repatriation. In other words, they referred to themselves as the reason for their successful repatriation.

We can conclude from the interviews that the individuals that practiced an active proactive approach did it by applying some or all of the following behaviors: striving for constant contact with the sponsor/mentor and HR managers, developing contact with many other individuals that could inform them about vacancies or changes in the organization and developing a connection with managers that supervise positions that could be interesting for future job opportunities (networking), maintaining visibility, visiting the headquarters frequently (when possible), and being aware of the dangers of trusting the company too much.

In the cases where the repatriation was not as successful as the individual had wished, the results were mixed; some seemed to have practiced a proactive behavior while abroad, while some did not. One interviewee in this category said:

“The company could have done much more in order to make the repatriation process smoother”.

In these cases, the individuals did not see themselves as responsible, but instead blamed the company for the unsuccessful repatriation.

Repatriates being responsible for their own wellbeing and being able to change depending on the different circumstances is one of the goals of the protean approach (O’Sullivan, 2002). According to the theory, the relocation process will be easier if this principle is applied. This affirmation is confirmed since all the individuals that experienced a successful repatriation also practiced a “proactive-open to changes” attitude. By applying this behavior, the repatriate not only found a job in a relatively short time, but also suffered less from the changes that occurred within the individual’s home company and country.

Few individuals, even though they had been proactive, did not have a satisfactory relocation experience. This implies that a proactive approach, even though it is a helpful tool, is not always enough to assure a successful repatriation. This could be due to unmet or inaccurate expectations (O'Sullivan, 2003). Therefore, the individual should be able to constantly change his/her expectations. Protean stands for change, and being able to continuously alter expectations and other variables is one of the main points of the protean approach toward managing repatriation (Hall, 1996).

Many interviewees mentioned that they felt that the company could have done more to make the repatriation procedure easier, but out of those, the ones that showed a more proactive attitude were the most satisfied with the result.

There was one case where the actual sponsor (in this case the expatriate's boss) changed department. The expatriate had created an informal mentor-network with other individuals, which facilitated the mentor transition. It also gave the individual a larger network and a wider view about new working areas and positions. Some expatriates also developed a bond with several managers who supervised positions that could be interesting future job opportunities. This was very positive because then the expatriate did not have to wait for a job to be offered to him/her, instead he/she actively searched for a job position, and as soon as there was a vacant position, the managers would know that he/she had a desire to fill that specific job placement. Another effective proactive behavior practiced by some repatriates was to maintain visibility at the headquarters in order to assure that their colleagues did not "forget" who they were. This "visibility" is best achieved with constant home visits, but when this is not possible, then constant e-mails, phone calls, faxes, etc., should be a priority (Allen et al, 1998). The findings show that the individuals who practiced some or all of these behaviors encountered a much easier repatriation process than the ones who had a more passive approach.

Individuals can do much for themselves, but the company should also take measures to facilitate repatriation and to motivate proactive behavior. There has to be a balance between the responsibility of the company and the responsibility of the individual, but it is the individuals' duty to take advantage

of the possibilities that the company offers. The organization offers many different communication channels, and the one responsible for using those channels is the expatriate. It has previously been stated that to maintain visibility is a very important characteristic of a proactive behavior. Allen et al (1998) state: “Loss of visibility is one of the most commonly expressed fears of employees at all levels as they contemplate the possibility of being assigned to an area far from headquarters”. (Allen et al, 1998, p. 37). Company X provides the expatriate with all the facilities so as to not lose visibility, but it is his/her responsibility to take effective advantage of those facilities.

As previously mentioned, the relationship between the mentor and the expatriates plays a significant role in the repatriation process. This element is discussed in depth in section 4.8. However, concerning this section, the mentors should remember to constantly encourage proactive behavior in the expatriate.

One HR interviewee mentioned:

“The company stresses the importance of having an international career, but at the same time seems to forget about the repatriates when they come home”.

The company surely does not do this intentionally. It is an enormous company, and therefore it could be easy to sometimes “forget” a single individual. This could explain why many expatriates feel forgotten or abandoned. It is important for the expatriate not to entirely rely on the company. However, the company should motivate the individual to take their own initiative.

International human resource managers and researchers attribute a significant portion of the expatriate failure rates to poor selection of candidates for international assignments; therefore, the selection of candidates for foreign assignments must become high priority for multinationals (Harvey, 1996). This can also be applied to repatriation; many of the problems with coming home could perhaps be solved by selecting the right people from the beginning. By establishing proactive behavior as a selection criteria for foreign assignments, the company could improve the repatriation process.

A list of variables that contribute to success or failure on the job has been suggested in the research area of selection of personnel for overseas assignments (Tung, 1981). These variables are: family situation, environmental variables, technical competence on the job, personality traits or relational abilities. In addition, Feldman (1991) also identifies numerous variables for achieving a successful repatriation in section 3.5. If the selection criteria could be balanced between these points and not only focused on technical competence, then repatriation could be improved. Additionally, a company must also take into consideration the importance of the individual being proactive and using it as a selection criterion for the international assignment.

The theory of proactive behavior seems to be very beneficial for some expatriates/repatriates. At the same time, the company cannot solely rely on proactive behavior to create a satisfying repatriation. There needs to be a balance between the efforts conducted by the company and the expatriate.

4.13 Empirical Findings: Communication

Many of our interviews showed evidence that communication between the expatriates and the home organization was not enough during their overseas assignment. The expatriates felt that there was a lack of communication commitment from the home organization. Company X does not have any clear communication guidelines concerning the expatriation/repatriation area. Therefore, various departments have different amounts of communication with the expatriates. From the interviews, we can conclude that the information communicated between the expatriate and the home organization varies a lot. For example, some home managers seem to not only discuss work related issues, but also social happenings that occur within as well as outside the company.

Many expatriates felt they had problems establishing good communication with the home organization. A frustration also seemed to exist among some expatriates' which concerned their personal network almost vanishing during the international assignment. One former expatriate clearly stated:

“The more time I spent abroad, the less communication I had with the home organization. My personal network had almost disappeared when I returned to the home organization”.

The level and amount of communication among the expatriates differed a great deal. In many cases, the expatriates had to report to the home organization on a daily/weekly basis, while others reported as rarely as a few times a year. In addition, many repatriates travelled regularly to the home organization due to the nature of their job.

Restructuring and changes within the home organization often interrupt the communication between the expatriate and the home organization. According to our findings, this was shown in all the categories interviewed. For example, one person from the HR department stated:

“Despite instances of poor communication, I personally believe that the communication between the expatriate and the home organization has improved during the last year. However, I see that there are sometimes communication problems during restructuring times”.

In addition, many interviewees stated that when the mentor or the home line manager was changed, this complicated the establishment of effective communication. The new line manager/mentor did not know the expatriate and his/her work tasks.

Many of our interviewees also stated that there seems to be a lack of understanding of who is responsible for what regarding repatriation. One line manager stated:

“I have clear expectations and understanding of what International Human Resource Department does and its tasks, but I do not really have a clue of what HR is doing regarding the repatriation process”.

On the other hand, another line manager stated:

“As a line manager, I hardly had any contact with International Human Resource Department. Therefore, I do not really know what they do”.

Overall, in most of our interviews, people stated that more communication is needed between the departments involved.

4.14 Analysis: Communication

As stated in the theory part, one of the purposes of communication is to inform. In the expatriation process, the purpose of informing is indeed valid. To inform about the changes that occur within the organization as well as within the home country is important in order to make the repatriation as smooth as possible.

As will be illustrated in this section, communication is a crucial area in order to improve the repatriation process. We think that communication is a key factor in the repatriation process due to the fact that it plays a major role within all the sub areas (cross-culture shock, mentorship, career development, proactive behavior and evaluation). Since all problem areas are interrelated, effective communication is needed in order to combine them and improve them as a whole. However, it is important to note that a effective communication can be very hard to establish within a large and complex organization such as Company X.

Paik et al (2002) recognize poor communication as one of the major problems concerning repatriation. Without clear communication, there will be lack of understanding about the expectations and goals upon repatriation. In order to create an effective repatriation with a smooth adjustment process, clear and structured communication channels need to be established between all involved individuals within the organization (Feldman, 1991). As seen from our interviews, improved communication seems to be one of the most important issues in conducting a successful repatriation. However, it seems that not all expatriates have clear guidance from the home organization about the importance of maintaining good communication and a network with the home organization, while they work on an international assignment.

It seems that many expatriates do not see the value of maintaining their network with people within the home organization. When not required by the job assignment, some expatriates sometimes tend to just focus on the task overseas and forget to communicate with their HR department, line managers, and networks within the home organization. According to Allen et al (1998), maintaining the network will improve the repatriation process. Occasionally, this seemed to be a problem at Company X. Some people that were abroad and did not have much communication with the home organization felt that they were “out of sight – out of mind”. This creates a huge problem during repatriation. Relating to the theory, a reason for this communication loss could be that the physical distance and the different experiences act as an interference barrier. People without international experience could have difficulties understanding certain issues that affect international employees. This interference will lead to even more problems because if contact is lost, neither the company nor the individual will receive feedback from each other regarding their communication encoding and decoding interpretations. This leads to an even greater disparity in interpretation, making it even harder for the involved to have a similar level of understanding.

Often expatriates have to communicate on a daily/weekly basis with the home organization as part of their job. On the other hand, some international assignments do not require frequent communication with the home organization. We found that there was clear evidence that the ones who had to communicate with the home organization on a daily/weekly basis were the ones who generally experienced the most effective repatriation. Perhaps this is because constant contact enabled constant feedback, which made the communication clear since both the company and the individual could revise their encoding and decoding methods. If both parties share similar interpretations, then the changes that occur in the organizational and the individual will not be such a shock upon return since these alterations have constantly been examined and adjusted. This assumption is not only supported by the expatriates, but also by the line managers. One line manager stated:

“Since the expatriate frequently visited the home company and had to report to me on a weekly basis we never lost communication. During our conversations

we also discussed issues such as his development, his visions as well as restructuring issues within the headquarters (home organization)”.

In addition, the home organization needs to help the expatriates to stay in the loop. While working on an expatriate assignment, knowledge of what is happening within the home organization tends to be lost. According to Feldman’s theory (1991), this could be prevented by establishing good contact with the mentor/line manager. However, even if our theory supports good communication, we must be aware that Company X has had a lot of restructuring during the last few years, which makes it even harder for an expatriate to maintain contact. We found out that in a few cases the restructuring within the home organization made some expatriates lose both their home manager and their mentor. One line manager stated:

“During times of restructuring, there should be an even greater focus on communication. The expatriate needs to know what is happening within the home organization. Otherwise, the repatriation will be even harder to handle”.

Our interviews illustrated that there seemed to be some misunderstanding between HR and the line manager/mentor. In our interviews, we asked the HR staff if there existed a problem when the line manager or the mentor was changed. The answer was that many HR employees did not consider this to be a problem. They assured us that if these roles changed, new contacts would be established between the expatriate and the new line manager/mentor. However, the expatriates did not experience this at all. Instead, some of the interviews stated that establishing communication with the new manager/mentor was difficult. This proves the existence of different points of view between the expatriate and the home department. Therefore, communication must improve between the different departments within the home organization.

From our empirical findings, we could draw the conclusion that line managers had different perceptions about the communication between themselves and the employees. Some believed that they had very good communication with their expatriate. On the other hand, some thought that the communication needed to be improved. For example, one line manager stated:

“More structured and regulated communication channels are needed. What we need is to have continuous talks concerning development”.

Even though some people within Company X seem to have an understanding of what the responsibilities of the departments involved are (HR, International Human Resource Department and home unit), this is not clear within the whole company. It must be communicated to everyone involved, which department is responsible for the different repatriation stages. Many expatriates complained that no one seems to agree on who is responsible for what. Communication among different departments appears very limited. This can involve issues such as job positions, new managers, etc., but also practical issues. One former expatriate stated:

“When I returned I experienced a lot of practical problems. No one knew where I could get a new computer, a new phone... Every department said it was someone elses responsibility. It seems that the different departments need to establish better communication between each other”.

This statement shows that communication does not only have to be improved between the expatriate and the home organization. It also needs to be enhanced between the various departments involved.

4.15 Empirical Findings: Evaluation

Some home departments conduct an evaluation regarding the international assignment. The managers sometimes have a discussion with the repatriates about knowledge learned, skills gained, experiences and future goals. Even if these types of evaluations exist, it has been very difficult to establish from our interviews what kind of evaluation is conducted about the repatriation process. Moreover, some former expatriates have had little opportunity to give feedback, while others have been given no evaluation at all. According to our interviews it seems that neither HR nor the International Human Resource Department have a detailed evaluation for repatriation. Two former expatriate stated:

“When I repatriated, there were no meetings with HR, no exit chats, not even a form to fill out. How are they supposed to find out what we experienced during the expatriation and repatriation if they do not ask us?”

“No evaluation or discussion about my repatriation was conducted upon my return. To me, this seems strange because I believe that a lot of things could be improved.”

According to the interviews, all former expatriates agree on that a thorough evaluation process seems to be needed. Furthermore, all the former expatriates appear to be willing to share their problems as well as their positive experiences of the repatriation process. One former expatriate acknowledged:

“Very often, HR seemed to have a lack of understanding of what our problems were”.

From our findings, it seems that the HR departments and International Human Resource Department are aware that there is a need to improve the repatriation process at Company X. However, it seems that though the different HR units are aware of the problem, none of them know who is responsible for the evaluation. One employee from an HR department stated:

“There are no concentrated follow-ups on how the repatriation process was perceived among the repatriates... However, I think that there exists a need to have a structured evaluation.”

From our interviews, we understood that some of the home departments have an evaluation about the knowledge learned and the skills gained by the expatriate. However, home line managers do not seem to be interested in whether an evaluation is conducted concerning the actual repatriation, nor do they seem to be aware of who (if anyone) conducts the evaluation. One line manager stated:

“In our department we have an evaluation four times a year about the knowledge and the skills the repatriate has acquired. However, I am not aware

of if there is any evaluation made by HR or anyone else upon the repatriates return.”

4.16 Analysis: Evaluation

Recently, there has been an increasing willingness to improve the repatriation process among companies (Allen et al, 1998; Paik, 2002). This is often done by conducting a structured evaluation with the repatriates a while after they have returned (Hurn, 1999). Feldman’s (1991) repatriation process model suggests that it is important to be aware of the problems and experiences of the repatriates. Therefore, an evaluation seems to be needed within organizations in order to improve the repatriation process. It appears that many of the former expatriates are upset about the way human resource ignore the evaluation of expatriation/repatriation. In the interviews, we found that awareness exist regarding the need to create some sort of evaluation. However, it seems that no department has developed a process for evaluation.

If there is no form of follow-up or evaluation on what the expatriate experienced during the repatriation process, it seems to be hard for Company X to improve the process. Many people involved in the repatriation process appear to be aware of the benefits of a structured evaluation, but it appears that there is a lack of understanding on who (or what department) should be responsible for this evaluation. One line manager stated:

“If an evaluation is conducted properly upon return, it would be much easier to establish guidelines on who is responsible for what and what needs to be achieved.”

This statement shows that there exists an understanding about the need to establish an evaluation procedure upon return. However, as mentioned before, no one seems to know who should be responsible for this process.

To some extent, the lack of evaluation creates frustration among some of the former expatriates. When the expatriates felt they had stumbled upon problems regarding repatriation, many of them were amazed that there was no follow-up concerning their experiences in order to improve the process.

If an evaluation was conducted appropriately, HR would gain a greater insight into the problems that occurs. Furthermore, by using evaluations in order to establish guidelines, many of the problems could be discovered even before they occur. In order to prevent these problems, Company X must know what the expatriates consider a problem.

If a structured evaluation is conducted, the repatriation process will most likely be improved. In the long run, this could then mean that more and more expatriates would come home and experience the repatriation as effective and smooth. If they experience a smooth repatriation process, other employees will hear about this and might think of expatriation as a future possible career option.

This will hopefully enable Company X to send the right people with the right skills on expatriate assignments. It is important to note that an evaluation procedure will probably be time-consuming and costly. A lot of effort is also required from the responsible departments. Not only will it take time to collect all the data, moreover, a lot of work is necessary in order to analyze the data effectively.

The different theories a number of areas and factors that need to be properly handled in order to create an effective repatriation process. An evaluation conducted upon return is sometimes suggested. However, there is no explanations as to why companies are having difficulties conducting a proper evaluation. Even if we believe an evaluation is needed in order to improve the repatriation process, it is important to note that an evaluation will probably not hinder all repatriations related problems from occurring. Each repatriate will have experienced the return differently. There will probably never be a situation where the expatriates have the same views of repatriation. Furthermore, we believe that a solution to a problem for one repatriate might not be the appropriate solution for another. It seems that solutions cannot be standardized since all cases of repatriation are unique in one way or another.

We feel that, unless improvements based on a thorough evaluation are conducted; it may become harder to recruit expatriates in the future. We believe

is that in the near future, Company X might find it difficult to recruit employees to go on overseas assignments, due in part to the fact that the contracts are not as beneficial economically as they used to be. Therefore, we think that is important for Company X to focus on how to further improve repatriation.

5. Discussion

The empirical findings and the analysis of the different problem areas of repatriation have been presented. However, we believe that there is a deeper reason behind the current findings which may be the actual cause of the repatriation problem. It may be difficult to give recommendations on how to deal with these less concrete aspects of the problems. However, they are issues worthy of future academic study that the company should be aware of and, therefore, important to discuss.

For high-tech companies, such as Company X, to remain competitive in a constantly changing market environment, size is important. Customers are increasingly becoming more price-focused and the more companies can aim towards mass production and joint ventures, the more economies of scale they can achieve. Size, therefore, is an advantage, but it can also represent a hindrance for communication, especially if the organizational make-up of the company is complex. We believe the largest communication barrier is the complexity of Company X. Many of its departments are interrelated and dependent on each other. In small companies and organizations, where each department can represent a small separate entity, the communication is easy because there are few people to deal with. However, when a company has over 20,000 employees, each individual can easily become a number. Therefore, the complexity of a company can complicate the communication process, especially if the company is large.

It is impossible for a large company to have the same communication clarity as a small one. However, there is another type of communication that often occurs in organizations when there are many people involved, namely gossip. This type of informal communication, which can have a negative connotation, affects organizations in one way or another. Gossip can originate anywhere and the source is usually impossible to reach. Employees often interpret this information as formal communication statements by the company. For example: one person within Human Resources stated that there were cases where repatriates heard that other repatriates had been offered a company car upon return, and automatically assumed that they would be offered a car too.

This affects companies because individuals could get the idea that they were told something by the company when in fact it was just heard through the grapevine. The organization will later on not live up to that promise because it was never given. Instead it was a false personal interpretation based on rumors.

This will probably not be a problem until the expatriate comes home, because at this moment the expectations of the expatriate and the company are tried to to be matched.

We believe that one of the most difficult parts of communication between the expatriate and the home organization are the different contexts in which the communication is given and in which way it is interpreted. The people at the home organization express themselves in a way in which they think is clear, but without noticing, they are actually expressing what they interpret from their reality, their world. However, the expatriates interpret the information given to them based on their perspectives and their reality. This means that issues that are obvious for someone within the home company may not be as clear for an expatriate and vice versa.

When a person leaves the headquarters for an international assignment, at the beginning, the interpretation of the organizational context may be similar; however, this can eventually change. Both the people at home and the expatriates are influenced by subtle though constant changes that may pass unnoticed, but all these small changes add up to a big change, causing an unexpected difference in the experienced contexts. The dissimilarities in the experienced contexts may lead to different ways of interpreting information resulting in a hidden communicational mismatch. The way of interpreting information is based on the different understanding levels that individuals possess. The danger of this is that the expatriate and the company may think they understand each other clearly, when, in reality, they do not. This will add up to a collection of misunderstandings that may become a major issue in the individual's future repatriation.

It might be very difficult for the mentors and the line managers to communicate the changes at the home company to the expatriate. They will try to transmit the information as clearly as possible, but is it actually possible to transmit clear

information if most things we say and do are influenced by our perceptions? The interpretations of the individuals abroad are bound to be different than those of the individuals at home. It is one thing to live the changes but another one is to transmit them. It is difficult to communicate changes to someone who has not experienced them. Moreover, it is even more difficult to transmit a change based on a previous modification that has become status quo while the employee was abroad.

Since many mentors and line managers have not been expatriates themselves, it can complicate the situation even more. It is always easier to deal with a situation if one has previously experienced it.

Eventually, the expatriate comes home, but until then, both the people at home and the expatriate may think they have more important issues to deal with than to plan the repatriation. The expatriate's line manager has many other practical problems to deal with and may think it is not worth spending time on a long-term repatriation plan. The same thing may happen to the mentors. It is important to keep in mind that the mentors are not only mentors, but also employees of the organization, and, therefore, have many other tasks to take care of other than just the well-being of the expatriates they are advising. One HR employee stated:

“It seems that employees tend to prioritize the urgent issues and postpone long term tasks”.

Since repatriation preparation often is postponed until the last moment, problems can arise unexpectedly. This may sound strange because if the company knows that it historically has had repatriation problems, then the logical thing to do would be to prepare for those problems. Departments generally prepare for possible problems; they usually have risk assessments of different situations and even create diverse scenarios. The reason why it is difficult to prepare for possible repatriation problems could be because it is so personality related. Other problem areas usually have to do with numbers and statistical information from which different scenarios and arrangements can be formed. The outcomes of those preparations can then be measured and compared to the expected results. In contrast, it is very hard to establish a

measurable evaluation procedure in repatriation since it is difficult to know what factors should be measured. If the organizations do not know what to measure, then they will not be aware of the fundamental problems of repatriation, making it difficult to prepare for those problems in future situations.

It seems that many of the expatriates at Company X tend to choose mentors in very high positions within the organization. When asking one employee who will soon expatriate about the choice of mentor, he stated:

“I chose a person that has a good overview of what is happening in the company and one that I feel can help me with my career when I come home, but I have to admit I haven’t had much contact with him”.

Baughn (1995), states that the mentor should be a senior level individual who has the connections to find the expatriate a good job upon return. We disagree with this statement and instead believe that it is a dilemma for the expatriates to choose between a mentor in a high position or one at a lower hierarchical level compared to their own rank. To choose a mentor in a high position with whom the expatriate has not had regular previous contact could be risky. There is a danger that the contact between the mentor and the expatriate will be infrequent if the individuals are too unfamiliar with each other. The advantage is that the mentor could probably be a great aid in sense of job search when the expatriate comes home. However, if the expatriates instead choose as a mentor a person with whom they are familiar, communication will probably be easier. The contact would probably be more constant if they have previously worked at the same division. Moreover, the mentor is more likely to know the changes that the expatriate would like to know. Since they previously knew each other, the mentor will probably be more willing to promote the expatriate’s goals and opinions at the home company. The negative part of choosing a mentor at a similar hierarchical level is that the job support upon repatriation will probably not be as strong compared to a person who has more control over the vacancies. Who to choose as a mentor could therefore be a dilemma between good communication and future increased job opportunities. One option in order to solve this dilemma could be to have two mentors, one at each hierarchical level.

An additional aspect that might damage the communication between the expatriate and the mentor is that many international employees may not consider the mentor to be such an important factor. It might be easy for the expatriates to think that all the achievements so far have been reached due to their personal effort. The victories feel sweeter when reached by their own means, and in such cases, the mentor is just a burden. It is part of human behavior to think that every situation can be handled without external help. If successful, the feeling is remarkable, however, if problems arise, it might be too late to rely on the mentor for help.

As stated in section 4.5, the repatriates may experience reverse culture shock when coming home. Some reasons for this have been presented, and some suggestions on how to deal with this situation will be proposed in section 6.1. Nevertheless, it seems to be unclear why people experience organizational and social adjustment problems upon return.

According to Black et al (1992), the impression the expatriates have of the country in which they are going to work in is formed based on simple stereotypes rather than on personal experience. Due to this, the individuals' expectations are more flexible because they do not have any prior experience on which to base their expectations. In contrast, by definition, 100% of the repatriates have previously lived in the country they are coming back to. Consequently, their expectations upon return may be very rigid since they are based on their personal experiences.

As previously stated, the organizations undergo many small changes during certain periods. These changes may seem insignificant by themselves, but together they represent a great modification of the status quo. The expatriates have also experienced changes, but since they are in another country, they cannot examine the interplay between their changes and the environmental changes in the home country. At repatriation, these environmental and personal changes confront each other. When coming home, the repatriates may be very rigid with their expectations. Therefore, they can be shocked when they discover they have changed too much to fit into the current environment and that things at home have changed and are not as they used to be.

Simultaneously, the people at home may not understand the repatriate's confusion because, for them, the changes have passed gradually and, therefore, remain unnoticed.

One shock a repatriate might experience upon repatriation is to discover that his/her career growth has not been as expected. Evidence from the interviews show that it is possible to grow as much career-wise without having international experience. Many interviews have also stated that the international contracts have changed in the sense that they do not offer the same advantages as before. Therefore, in the future, the company may encounter a recruitment difficulty for international assignments, especially if the cases of repatriation dissatisfaction increase. It is, therefore, for the best of the company that the individual undergoes an adequate repatriation process.

One reason why it is difficult to grow career-wise during an international assignment might be that it is easy to lose ones personal contacts and networks. Most interviewed expatriates who managed to get a good job upon repatriation stated that it was mainly due to their personal contacts that they got the job. If those contacts no longer exist upon repatriation, it will probably be much harder to find a suitable job. There are many possible reasons why the personal network may be lost during an international assignment. It could be that the expatriates are too focused on creating a social life in the new country so they forget about their life at home. The old contacts are not as physically near as before, and, therefore, it is hard to meet them as often as before. In addition, the most common way of communication is by e-mail, which tends to be straight to the point and does not focus on relationship building. Another reason why it is easy to lose the established networks is because people tend to contact a person only when a "favor" is needed. While the expatriate is abroad, there will not be many favors needed until the repatriation day when the individual is searching for a job, but at this stage, the contact might have drifted away.

Since the contact between the expatriate and the company is often lost, it could perhaps be interesting to discuss the idea of having an "agent" at home. In addition to the mentor, this person could negotiate salaries and plan the career as if the individual was in the company. This function could be compared to sport agents; the agents look out for the athletes' interests while the individuals

do what they are good at: sports. This concept could be applicable to more cases than expatriation, such as when individuals temporarily leave the company due to sickness, accidents, or parental leave. The risk could be that the process could turn out to be too confusing and bureaucratic with both a mentor and an “agent” at home, making it difficult to know who is responsible for what.

Hall (1996) states in section 3.7 that the goal of a career is to achieve psychological success. Psychological success in a career is the feeling of pride and achievement when reaching personal goals. The goals may vary a lot depending on the individual. Perhaps growing vertically in the hierarchical pyramid is not the ultimate goal of an international employee. The U.S. is a very career focused country, and most of the expatriation literature comes from this nation. In contrast, the career does not seem to be the number one priority in Sweden, and this has been reflected in the interviews. Most of the interviewed employees on their way to an international assignment stated that the career was not such an important issue. Even though they expected career growth to a certain extent, they expected to grow more on the personal level. On the other hand, when interviewing the repatriates, a significant number of them stated that they experienced advancement in the payment level, but expected a higher career growth than they actually achieved. This expectation comparison between future expatriates and repatriates could reflect the typical “modesty” in expressed values concerning careers in Sweden (Jante-lagen). It could also be an indication that the increased career expectations are actually formed during the expatriate assignment. This could be an area for further long-term studies in which the same individuals are interviewed, prior and after their international assignment.

Even though most of the international employees get a career promotion, some career dissatisfaction would probably still exist among the repatriates. This is due to the difficulty of matching the company’s and the individual’s expectations and definition for career development. The individuals could, for instance, experience a career growth in the contract, but not in real practice. The expatriates may feel a great sense of responsibility and decision making liberty when they are abroad. If the expatriates come home and discover that they do not have those freedoms anymore, even though their contract states that

they are in a higher leadership position, they will perhaps perceive the work arrangement as a downgrade.

To know exactly what each individual expects from their career is impossible, especially if there is a lack of communication. The employee may even wish for success factors other than just traditional hierarchical career development. It has been noted throughout the paper that proactive behavior makes it easier for employees to reach their goals. Unfortunately, it seems very difficult for the companies to make the employees act in a proactive manner.

Before discussing these issues, it is important to keep in mind that there is a human tendency to take credit for successes, and blame others for failures. This could be a reason why most of the interviewed successful repatriates stated that much of their accomplishment was due to their personal proactive efforts and to their vast contact network. Furthermore, many of the employees that did not have a successful repatriation, stated that the company could have done more to support them. Even though it is impossible to know if the answers regarding this subject were objective (unless a clear scale for measuring company support and proactive individual behavior is implemented), proactive behavior among the employees should still be considered a major aspect of successful repatriation. Even if this issue is obvious for many individuals, it still has some dark elements to be explored.

If the company tries to force proactive behavior on the expatriates, they could interpret it as abandonment. It would be a contradictory message from the company as while they state that a job is guaranteed upon return, they are also saying that individuals should manage many things by themselves, including the constant job search. Furthermore, to be proactive or not is very much related to the individuals' personality. It is difficult to change the behavior of a person, and therefore, it might be wise to focus more on the individual's personal characteristics during the selection process.

Many companies take very good care of their employees when they leave the country, but forget about them when they return (Feldman, 1991). This excessive support at the beginning of the expatriation process could make the employees accustomed to being taken care of, and the repatriation

abandonment could, therefore, be a shock. While it is part of an employees personality to be proactive or not, if everything is served on a silver tray, these behavioral characteristic may become hidden.

Even though it would be great if all the employees practiced a proactive approach, it might sometimes not be welcomed by all the members of the organization. The expatriates' immediate superiors could, for instance, get uneasy if they discover that the international employee is looking for work outside of his/her original home department. This could represent a major dilemma for the employees since they feel the need to be proactive in order to achieve a successful repatriation, but at the same time do not wish to enter into a conflict with their superiors. This case was not observed at the studied company, but was not investigated either.

In section 6.6, it will be suggested that a good repatriation process should end with a thorough evaluation. Most repatriates have stated that an evaluation was not conducted upon their return.

A well-conducted evaluation might show that the company did not know what the expatriate expected from the assignment in the first place. The reasons for going abroad vary, for example: salary increase, career advancement, adventure, desire to step out from the routine, etc.,. If the organization is not aware of the reason why the employee accepted the international assignment, then there could be a divergence with the reason why the company sent the expatriate in the first place. The objectives of the company and the employee may be different. The company could for instance send an employee abroad to learn, to teach, or just to fill a vacancy, while the employee's objectives may be different.

An example of this could be a person sent to a production plant in a third world country with the mission of teaching the local employees how to build a certain product. When coming home, the individual has probably learned an extensive amount about the cultural values of that country, but the home organization may not value this as important as the employee may. The employee expects to put his/her international knowledge into practice, but the company did not send the individual to learn, but to teach. Since the production plant in the

expatriation country is not as advanced as the home production plant, there will not be any new technical knowledge for the repatriate to contribute with. Meanwhile, the company does not consider the cultural knowledge relevant to the individual's work role, resulting in frustration for the repatriated employee.

Since the expatriation benefits have decreased, the question comes to mind of whether it would be helpful for Company X to establish international experience as a requirement for fulfilling certain positions at the home organization in order to guarantee the expatriates' career growth and to motivate the employees to strive for an international assignment. However, if certain job positions could only be achieved by individuals with international experience, then there might be a risk that the best person for the task would not be assigned to the job. Individuals might be assigned to certain job positions only because they have international experience, without actually fulfilling the other needed requirements. There could also be competent employees who could have an excellent performance, but who are not assigned the job due to lack of international experience. Therefore, to favor one person over another because of the international experience could cause a problem for the company; it could encourage expatriation and improve repatriation, but at the same time, it might affect negatively the domestic employees.

The issues discussed within this section are our own viewpoints about the repatriation process and its elements. Our thoughts in this section are not supported by theories; they are based on our observations, assumptions and perceptions of the situation. Based on the empirical findings, the analysis, and the discussion within this part, some useful thoughts on how to improve the repatriation process will be presented in the next chapter.

6. Recommendations

In this section, specific recommendations for the company studied will be provided based on our findings. The recommendations will serve as guidelines on how the company could improve its repatriation process.

The different areas of recommendations that will be discussed in this section are reverse culture shock, mentors, career planning, proactive behavior, communication, and finally evaluation.

6.1 Reverse Culture Shock

We believe that Company X needs to implement a formal repatriation program starting about six months prior to return. This program could include a preparation for reverse culture shock. This part may perhaps deal with the psychological, emotional and physical symptoms of feeling like a foreigner upon return. Everything from external environmental changes to the adjustment to new schools for the children could be included.

Company X sends out a book regarding repatriation prior to return. It is important not to send it too far in advance since the expatriate probably will not start preparing for repatriating about a year prior. If it is sent out too late, the family will most likely be occupied with practical issues regarding repatriation.

The program could start with the book preparation, however, it is hard to get everyone to read and study it. In addition to the book, we recommend a pre visit home prior to repatriation where problematic issues regarding coming home are discussed in a formal meeting. This discussion might be conducted with the responsible HR department, the international human resource department, the expatriate, the home line manager and/or the mentor.

In addition to this, the company could offer the expatriate family assistance regarding different individual requests. The spouse has often quit his/her job which in some cases has resulted in loss of attraction on the job market. Thus, help with the job search, help with CV writing, and professional updating are

examples of issues the company could assist with. Additional assistance could be to offer re-entry counseling after repatriation, and offer educational counseling for children. It is important to note that each individual has different needs, and therefore the assistance should be tailor-made for the expatriate and his/her family needs.

These preparative actions might be more helpful for expatriate families that have been far away from the home organization and on longer assignments (3-4 years and longer) with few job related home visits. The expatriates who are on shorter assignments, closer to home and/or travel home on a regular basis for job purposes will probably not experience the same difficulties concerning reverse culture shocks.

6.2 Mentor

The mentors' tasks should be to stay in contact with the expatriate during his/her assignment and notify them about changes and restructuring issues within the home organization. Additionally, the mentor should promote the repatriate's goals and opinions in his/her absence.

It is essential that the company stresses the importance of the mentor relationship prior to the expatriate's departure. The fact that the mentor serves as a communication channel between the home organization, home country and the expatriate, needs to be clearly stated. In addition, Company X should be clear on why the relationship must work.

The organization should encourage the expatriate to choose a mentor with international experience. A mentor with international experience might be more supportive since he/she has already been through the process. Moreover, a training seminar where guidelines are drawn on how to manage the mentorship could be provided for the mentors/managers. One way to train or guide the expatriates could be to have a session where repatriates, former mentors, and international HR together sit down and discuss the mentorship, and outline some guidelines.

In order to motivate the relationship between the mentor and the expatriate, a small compensation for the mentor might be a solution. By giving compensation to mentors, they will be more eager to keep up the contact; after all, it is an increase of responsibility and duties.

The expatriate could also develop close contact relationships with “informal mentors”. Many times organizational changes may occur during an expatriate assignment, which may lead to people quitting or changing divisions. Having “informal mentors” decreases the risk of being without a mentor during organizational change.

If a mentor is relocated, Company X needs to have clear guidelines on who is responsible for assigning a new mentor. Even though it is a shared responsibility between the expatriate and the mentor, the new mentor must start to talk to the expatriate about his/her goals and future career planning. It is important that the new mentor understands the expatriate’s visions and goals about the repatriation.

Upon return, an evaluation on how the relationship between the mentor and the expatriate has worked should take place. Even though a person has been an excellent mentor, the repatriation could be a failure; therefore, when conducting the mentor evaluation, the company should only appraise the mentor’s performance and not the results of the repatriation process.

6.3 Career Development

The company could develop a joint career plan with the individual. It should include specific and realistic career objectives and goals. The individual should evaluate whether the international assignment is a logical step in his/her long term career plan. If the assignment is not something that will enhance his/her career, then it might be reconsidered (it should not be forgotten that perhaps the individual wants to accept the assignment for reasons other than their career). If the assignment is a logical step in the individual’s career, then the person should (together with the company), go over what the next step is after the international assignment.

The group focusing on career development should be used as much as possible. To take up each individual case in the group will probably help to facilitate the repatriation process of that person. It will most likely aid in finding a job position, which matches with the persons competences. The career development groups are not introduced in the entire organization, but in the departments where they are present, they should be used as much as possible in the repatriation process.

The expatriates should be clear all the time on what they want and expect in the future, and they should communicate their wishes. If the company has a clear picture of what the expatriate expects career-wise, then it will be easier to meet those expectations or to tell the expatriate in forehand that it will not be possible. On the other hand, the company should be clear on what it can offer. Promises of exceptional jobs should not be made unless the company is completely sure that it will be able to fulfill that promise.

Another recommendation for the organization is to continue with its flexibility on the termination date of the contract. If the person finds an excellent job that fits his/her career plan some months prior to the established repatriation date, the company should give the individual the opportunity to finish the international employment contract before it was stipulated. The company should be consistent with this policy, and the individual should be made aware of it. The expatriate should know that if he/she finds a good job prior to the last day of the contract, he/she will have the opportunity to terminate that contract in advance.

The temporary job positions should be avoided. This is easier said than done, but if the company and the individual work together in a realistic career plan then it will be easier to avoid a temporary job. If, in certain cases, it is impossible to avoid a temporary job position, then there has to be a strong priority to find a suitable job position for that individual.

If the organization says that it values international experience, then it should prove it. When the repatriates do not grow career-wise and/or they are given a temporary job position, then the company is sending contradictory messages, which could make the recruitment of other expatriates difficult (Feldman,

1991). Even though the employees seem to have many reasons for accepting expatriation other than just their career, it is still an important motivational factor. It has also been argued in section 5 that career expectations can increase while on the international assignment.

6.4 Proactive Behavior

Allen et al (1998), mention that individuals should not rely on the company and the HR department too much. The expatriates should accept all help, but put more trust in themselves than the company.

As stated in section 4.13, communication is of vital importance for the repatriation to be successful. The expatriates have many different communication tools available, but it is their responsibility to take advantage of them. Even though it is a shared responsibility, the expatriates should not expect the company to start communicating; employees should be proactive and start the communication with the individuals that they consider could help in the future. O'Sullivan (2002) states that the individual should not only have constant contact with the formal relations the company assigns, but with any individual he/she thinks could help in the future. Having a broad network will surely aid in being aware of the constant changes the home organization goes through and getting a better job when returning.

In addition, international employees should constantly look for new job possibilities at home and not limit themselves by starting to look six months prior to the repatriation.

The expatriates have to keep in mind that even though the company recommends starting to plan for the repatriation six months prior to the return, this is something that seldom happens; the planning usually starts two to three months prior to the repatriation. This is a very important reason for why the expatriate should be proactive and start to think about repatriation even before the company starts to think about it.

It has previously been suggested that the company should contact the expatriate when organizational changes take place in the home organization (e.g.

relocation of mentor or manager). Despite this, the expatriate should also take responsibility in this matter.

All the previous recommendations are aimed at the expatriate, but there are some actions that the company could take into consideration to enhance these proactive behaviors of their employees.

The company has to inform the expatriate about the advantages of proactive behavior. This can be done through the folder, seminars, the mentor, or the immediate superior. The company will of course try to help their employees as much as possible, but when a company is as big as the one studied, people can easily be forgotten. This is not done intentionally; it is just one of the risks of working in a large MNC. The company should, therefore, be aware of the risks that the individuals take when accepting an international assignment and not only inform the person about those risks, but also notify them about what they can actively do to avoid them. This information should not only be given out in a folder, but in seminars, through the mentor and/or through the expatriate's immediate superior.

An effective way to assure the proactive behavior of the employee could be to select the people with the right social competencies. The selection of the international employee should not be completely based on their technical skills. Their social competence should also be an important criterion. Perhaps social competence should be given more importance in the selection process, then there would probably be a greater chance that the selected individual would be one that practices a proactive behavior.

David Noer, as quoted in Hall (1996, p. 11) making reference to the advantage of the proactive behavior, states:

“The relationship is still a win-win, but it is more equal. The employee does not blindly trust the organization with his or her career. The organization does not assume the un-assumable burden”

6.5 Communication

It seems that Company X must stress the importance of communication and networking before the expatriate leaves for the international assignment. Company X must tell the expatriate that good contact will most likely improve the chances of having a smooth and effective repatriation. Improved communication cannot only be established by the expatriate. One of the HR employees clearly stated:

“Communication is a shared responsibility. Everyone needs to understand this in order to improve the communication”.

Therefore, efforts must be made by all parts involved. The mentor, the HR department, and the line manager need to have continuous communication with the expatriate. Everyone involved must see the benefits of communicating on a regular basis. If done correctly, the expatriate will constantly be updated about the changes to the home department.

If the mentor or the home manager should change position during the international assignment, it is crucial for Company X that the new manager establishes good contact with the expatriate. There is a need to have more communication of this type at Company X since in many cases, the new manager is not informed about the expatriate and his/her work.

It also seems that the repatriation discussion should start at least 6 months prior to return. One manager even stated:

“There is a need to start to communicate about the repatriation even earlier than 6 months before repatriation”.

If this can be done, the repatriation process will probably be better organized and planned in a better way.

If the communication between the home organization (all parts) and the expatriate occurs frequently, it will be beneficial for both sides. One of the expatriate stated:

“I personally received a lot of information about the home organization and what was happening back at the office. During my expatriate period, I had good communication with HR, my home line manager and with my mentor. I know that this made my repatriation more effective”.

This statement clearly shows the importance of a good and continuous communication. More effort must be made by those involved in order to improve the repatriation process.

6.6 Evaluation

In order to improve a company’s repatriation process, we believe there is a need to identify the well functioning and the problematic areas. This could be done by analyzing the repatriation process. In order to gather and evaluate all the repatriates’ experiences, a form could be sent out to all repatriates within the organization. This form could for instance include questions such as:

- Facts on the type of assignment, duration, and location.
- How did the communication work between you and the home organization during your assignment? How can the communication be improved?
- Did the mentorship work? If yes, how? If not, why? In your opinion, how can the mentor/expatriate relationship be improved?
- Did you experience reverse culture shock upon your return? Did you experience that the home organization had gone through organizational changes? Were there any changes in the social/external environment such as political, social and economic changes? Were you aware of these changes upon return? Did your family experience any problems upon return such as job searching, school integration, etc., or other practical things?
- Did you have a job position upon return? If yes, how were you assigned this job position and did it satisfy your expectations? How did you

acquire the new job? If not, how long were you out of a permanent job position? Did you use your gained knowledge from the expatriate assignment in your new job position?

- Had the company informed about your responsibilities regarding proactive behavior when you were abroad? Do you consider yourself being proactive during the expatriate assignment? If yes, in your opinion, did that help the repatriation? In what way?

After the results are analyzed, the forms could be divided into three different groups. The first group might include the individuals who generally experienced the repatriation to be difficult and experienced a lot of problems. The second group could possibly be the expatriates who seemed neutral about the repatriation (neither good, nor bad). The third group could include the repatriates that experienced a smooth and effective repatriation. After each group is divided, a discussion group could perhaps be formed including representatives from the first group as well as representatives from the third group. We think that these two groups are the most important since they can easily identify the problematic and the successful repatriation areas. The first group could identify the major problems within the repatriation process and the third group could share their effective experiences in order to try to establish solutions. In addition, clear guidelines on what the different departments' tasks are concerning repatriation should perhaps be established.

An evaluation is needed in order to improve the repatriation process. These forms and discussions cannot only solve problems in the short run; moreover, they can prevent problems from occurring in the future.

7. Conclusions

The aim of this thesis has been to evaluate Company X's repatriation process and see how it can be improved. This evaluation has been made through relevant theories as well as through empirical findings in the form of interviews of employees at Company X involved one way or another in the repatriation process. From this information, recommendations have been made. An understanding of the problems has been achieved from evaluating the process, leading us to more general conclusions on the subject, which will be presented as follows.

In order for companies to stay competitive in the global market, it seems as though they are forced to send employees on international assignments (Paik et al, 2002). Unfortunately, organizations seem to focus mainly on the expatriation process and more or less ignore the repatriation process (Harvey, 1982). Literature suggests that a well designed expatriate program should follow a circular process, starting with the initial assessment selection of candidates, followed by cross-culture preparation, global career management, completion of the international business objective, and finishing with repatriation. This circular process recognizes the importance of repatriation in completing the process. Most people believe that coming back home will not cause any problems, when it in fact can be more problematic than settling into the new host country (Paik et al, 2002).

Most of the interviewees stated that there was a lack of preparation for repatriation. They were very well prepared for going on the assignment, since Company X assisted with everything from renting out their house to finding a plumber in the relocation country.

The objectives of an international assignment differ between the organization and the expatriate. The main reasons for companies to send out expatriates are knowledge transfer, career development, and control over operations abroad (Baruch et al, 2002).

The primary motive of expatriates accepting an international assignment has to do with their own personal growth and the wish to get international experience. Higher compensation and cross-culture adventure are other motives (Paik et al, 2002).

According to our findings, Company X sends out expatriates for the following reasons: top management working with strategic issues, career development, knowledge transfer, project implementation and integration of processes and policies.

Higher compensation used to be a reason for expatriation; however, the contracts have changed, and according to the interview are no longer as beneficial as before. We are aware of the fact that having the same objectives is unrealistic, but it is important that both the expatriate and the home organization are open with each other.

Overall, we think that there are six main areas for improvement: reverse-culture shock preparation, mentorship, career development, proactive behavior, communication and evaluation. These areas have been discussed and analyzed throughout this thesis.

It seems like the expatriates that have sporadic contact with the home organizations are the ones that need more repatriation preparation. This category of expatriates is usually far away from the home organization and/or has a job situation that does not require frequent visits; therefore, special attention should be focused on these individuals.

There are ways the expatriate himself/herself can influence the repatriation. By being proactive and not relying too much on the organization the expatriate can avoid lots of frustration. Ways of being proactive are; staying in close contact with the organization by using the mentor frequently, constantly looking for available job openings, being visible at the home organization, maintaining the network at the home organization, etc. (O'Sullivan, 2002).

From the interviews on this matter, we can draw the conclusion that the expatriates who have taken a more proactive approach have been more

successful in finding a job that they are pleased with upon return. Expatriates that relied more on the company to find a position were more dissatisfied.

For companies to stay competitive in the future, it is of vital importance to have employees willing to transfer abroad. If rumors of bad repatriation are spread within the company, expatriate recruitment difficulties might occur. An improved repatriation process delivers a message that the company appreciates international experience, and therefore, strives to compete successfully in the global market. In the end, an effective repatriation process will probably result in a higher employee demand for international assignments.

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