



**GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET
HANDELSHÖGSKOLAN**

**An Analysis of the Pre-Departure Preparations of
Expatriate Managers in Swedish-Based MNCs:
Focus on China**

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Bachelor Thesis

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Abstract

Summary:

The contemporary global nature of today's economy has increased the competition among large companies around the world, where international assignments have emerged as a necessary and highly recognized method of distributing employees and adjoined know-how. However, due the differences between home and host country, international assignments may not turn out to be as successful as expected, enhancing complexity involved in considering profitability of sending expatriates on international assignments. The expatriation process can be seen as a series of steps, where the first steps include selection and training of the person in question; building the foundation on which the expatriate stands upon arrival. In this qualitative study, one takes part in a comparison of theory and practice in Swedish-based MNCs that send expatriate managers to China; a fast growing market with inexorable differences to the western living- and working environment. Through our investigation we do not only provide an analysis of our results, but also a suggestion of future improvements of the process in order to prepare expatriates with immaculate results.

Title:

An Analysis of the Pre-Departure Preparations of Expatriate Managers in Swedish-Based MNCs: Focus on China

Course:

Bachelor Thesis, International Business II.

Authors:

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Research Questions:

To what extent do Swedish-Based MNCs apply selection and training processes a head of International Assignments in China?

Why are the processes applied in this distinctive way?

Purpose: As previous studies within the subject have had a substantial theoretical association, we identified the need to investigate whether or not theory of pre-departure preparations of expatriates is applied in Swedish-based MNCs and why they are performed in a distinctive way. The main purpose is to identify the differences of theory and practice, but also unravel the conundrum of what is necessary and advantageous for MNCs to invest in at the pre-departure stage.

Abbreviations: IA – International Assignment
MNC – Multi National Corporation
HR – Human Resource

Target Group: Swedish-based MNCs who send expatriate managers on IAs to China

Methodology: We have conducted a qualitative study where empirical findings derive solely from interviews.

Key Words: Expatriate, Training, Selection, MNC, Interview, China, International Assignments, Manager.

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1. Introduction

In this chapter we will provide an extensive introduction. Through this chapter one will receive a well-defined foundation of the subject expatriation and the complications accompanying it. We will furthermore provide an explanation of our research questions and the purpose of our study.

1.1 Background

Today, we look back at a 30-year period of development where a rather rigid economy has transformed into a highly mobile and globalized economy. The subsequent effect of this development has implied significant alterations regarding the distribution of labour and capital within MNCs; which have served as the main drivers of globalization (Sakho, 1999). As a result, we have witnessed an increasing demand of international managers in MNCs; companies which now see international experience as something essential when it comes to reaching senior management positions. Therefore, we have now witnessed an increase of expatriates that, through engaging in international operations, gain useful personal experience and provide control and knowledge transfer for the parent-company (Harris & Brewster, 1999). An expatriate, according to Deresky (2003, p.551), can accurately be defined as “*one who works and lives in a foreign country but remains a citizen of the country where the employing organization is headquartered*”. Peltokorpi & Froese (2009) further identifies two different types of expatriates, namely: *Organizational Expatriates*, those employees that are sent out on an International Assignment (IA), by the home company, often by an MNC to operate in a related unit and accomplish a specific objective during a limited time period, and *Self-Initiated Expatriates*, those who by their own initiative or choice choose to work abroad, and hence not are assigned to work abroad. Self-initiated expatriates tend to perceive their experience of working in a foreign country as personal development, where they not follow the often organized career-path of organizational expatriates.

As the globalization has accelerated extremely quickly, many companies have had troublesome experiences in regards of the adequacy of expatriate managers within the company's realm for international assignments. For an expatriate manager to be successful in the complex global environment of an MNC, he is required to possess not only technical and organizational skills, but also the social and cultural competencies. A collection of all the competencies necessary is somewhat difficult to find in a manager, and its presence in a MNC

can be seen as a core component of being competitive in contemporary, global economy of a hypercompetitive nature (Harvey, Novicevic, 2001). The complexity involved in sending expatriate managers further enlightens the risk involved. When speaking of cost for the company, the international manager can cost up to three times as much as a home-country manager in regards of related costs and salary. Furthermore, the failure rates, including premature returns and the risk of under-performance can definitely turn out to be expensive for the company in question (Harris, Brewster, 1999). With this said, one has to place emphasis on the preparations of sending expatriate managers; highlighting the importance of choosing the most suitable individual in order to eliminate risks associated to international operations.

It is evident that the risk of failure is, and has been, a prevailing topic of interest when looking at previous studies; many of which also claim that we have seen high failure-rates historically. Christensen & Harzing (2004) claim that “the ideal expatriate life-cycle” is a quasi-distorted version of what we can see, and have seen, in practice; often characterized by not going as planned and premature endings to the operation. However, they highlight the complexity involved when defining what can be seen as a “failure” and the subsequent rate of failure in MNCs. Therefore, one shall rather place emphasis on reaching expatriate success. One can categorize expatriate success in three different parts, namely the fact that the expatriate remains in the operation until the job has ended, the expatriate’s ability to adjust to the living conditions associated to the new cultural environment and the expatriate’s ability to perform at a satisfactory level on the job (Kraimer & Wayne, 2004). Successfully improving the expatriate lifecycle by sending expatriates that possess necessary characteristics, in order to reach previously mentioned expatriate success, is essential to bring down historical failure-rates as well as boosting a company’s competitive supremacies.

1.2 Problem Discussion

Sending expatriates abroad to perform international assignments requires crucial adjustments to the host-country environment, in order to be able to perform the strategic objectives of the parent company, and prevent underperformance and premature returns, as previously stated generates high company costs (Black *et al.* 1992). The expatriate manager needs to confront several challenges both in the business environment of the host-company, and further adapt to the foreign civilization, in which they inhabit (Mendenhall *et al.* 1987), making the expatriation process, as a whole, rather complex. According to Mendenhall *et al.* (1987),

important factors affecting the expatriate are; culture, different norms, housing and health care, the spouse's ability to adapt, to state a few. Particular focus has been aimed at the cultural aspects of the host country, affecting the performance of the expatriate, where previous studies have explored the link between cultural aspects and efficient leadership (House *et al*, 1997; Livermore, 2010). Bhawuk (1998), further examine how to develop cross-cultural training, using the individualism and collectivism concepts, indeed having an impact on the expatriate's ability to perform. The way in which a MNC handles these difficulties is a necessity to unravel the conundrum that is successful expatriation, and makes the topic somewhat interesting to investigate.

There are several ways in which one could categorize the different stages of an international expatriate operation. Berthoin-Antal (2001) argue that expatriation could be characterized by a circular procedure reflecting different stages, beginning with the international assignment and selection, ending up with the repatriation and knowledge transfer.

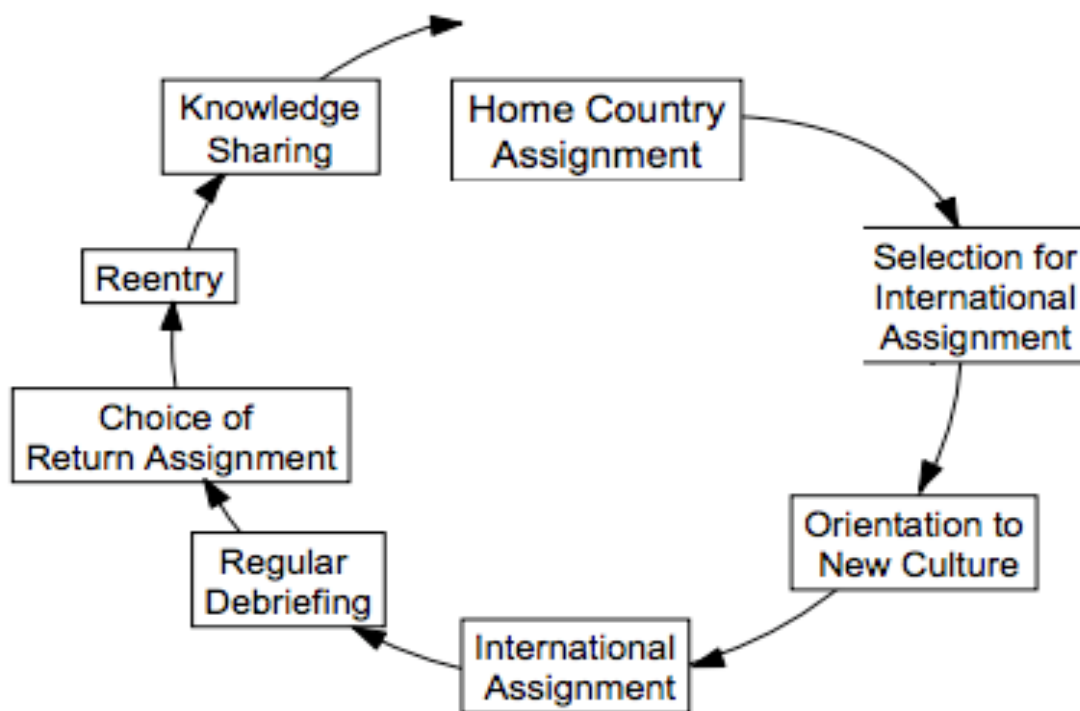


Figure 1. Berthoin-Antal, p.27 (2001)

Each of the different phases requires specific attention, as they in the end affect the outcome of the international assignment, with possible benefits for both the company (organisational learning) and for the individual expatriate (career development) (Berthoin-Antal, 2001). Several previous studies portray expatriation as a process with different phases reflecting this

circular course (Black *et al.*, 1992; Berthoin-Antal, 2001, Harvey & Moeller, 2009), where there have been numerous researches in many of the phases. We argue, observing this circular model, that there are many stages after departure for the international assignment, where focus on pre-departure activities may be neglected. Instead, we want to focus on the one step that represents the pre-departure procedures, since successful preparations are reflected throughout the whole course of expatriation and are correlated with positive results post-expatriation.

Explanations to the relatively common number of failures have been suggested to be the use of modest methods of selecting the appropriate expatriate (Harvey, 1996; Tye & Chen, 2005). Furthermore, Tye & Chen (2005) emphasises the importance of specific factors taken into account by Human-Resource professionals when selecting the suitable expatriate. Moreover, Black *et al.* (1992) argue that training is a vital pre-departure activity; learning people to adapt, act, and behave the right way. This further emphasizes the importance of precautionary measures by considering substantial efforts from the company in selecting and preparing expatriates judiciously in order to eliminate risks of failure when the international operation commences. Companies do in fact have formal steps in the process of pre-departure preparations that definitely seem to be of adequate proportions. However, one must consider the gap between theory and practice, which according to Harris and Brewster (1999) is of substantial measures.

Furthermore, when looking at previous studies, the work of Black *et al.* (1992) seems to be of seminal character and widely credited amongst expatriate academia. In this work, a substantial proportion of the work seems to be tightly connected to the characteristics of North American MNCs. This is also emphasized by several other prominent scholars within the field who also claim that the selection theory of manager expatriation and all that it encompasses is heavily biased by North American approaches (Dowling *et al.*, 1994; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985). Furthermore, in the previous studies, one encounters more theoretical analysis rather than an investigation of how practice relates to theory. We argue that there are significant differences between countries when it comes to adaptability and management style, which may alter the way theoretical frameworks can be applied in MNCs from different countries of origin. Along with the lack of academic investigation within this field and country, we argue that Sweden is a country that serves as a home base for several prominent MNCs in the global economy, which makes studies of their expatriation highly

relevant. Furthermore, as the development of China in the global economy becomes recognized and commonly accepted, the studies within the field of expatriation to China is increasing. China is, in addition, a country of different cultural values and managerial styles compared to Western countries, which further complicates the process of adaption for the expatriate (Yao, 2013; Holman *et al*, 2003). Throughout the last three decades there has been a remarkable increase in foreign direct investment in China, due to the economic reforms initiated in 1978. As a result of all the reforms, new markets and geographical locations has appeared for businesses in China where increasingly companies send expatriates to work in different settings in China, in order to take advantage of the resources provided (Selmer, 1999). China has become Sweden's largest trading partner in Asia and the trade between the two countries has increased steadily recent years, mostly as a result of China's entrance in WTO in 2001 (Embassy of Sweden, 2012). We further witness an increase in number of small-and medium sized enterprises in China. The main reason for this trend is argued to be the presence of many large Swedish companies, who have been active in China for many years (Embassy of Sweden & Swedish Trade Council, 2009). Subsequently, we argue that investigating expatriation from Swedish MNCs to China does not only cover inadequately researched fields historically, but serves as a complement to modern research of the contemporary market of China.

1.3 Purpose and Research Questions

With the previous background and problem-discussion in mind, one cannot neglect the importance of MNCs having competent international managers available for expat-operations in foreign countries. In addition, the majority of previous studies have covered the analysis of post-departure adaption and training as well as focusing on expatriates from American companies. We would rather place emphasis on analysing the pre-departure procedures that serve as a base when selecting and preparing managers for operations abroad. Furthermore, we intend to focus on Swedish-based MNCs that send expatriate managers to Chinese subsidiaries. Thus, the purpose of this study is to, through qualitative methods, investigate the pre-departure procedures within Swedish-based MNCs and unravel the conundrum that is the distinction between theory and practice. Furthermore, we will investigate why the companies in question perform their procedures in a distinctive way. Hence, our research questions are formulated as followed:

- To what extent do Swedish-Based MNCs apply selection and training processes a head of International Assignments in China?
- Why are the processes applied in this distinctive way?

1.4 Thesis Disposition

We start our thesis with the *Introduction* where we provide a background to the topic as well as present the purpose of our study. Following the introduction, we present the theory on which we base our study on in the *Theoretical Framework*. In the third section, *Methodologies*, we present how we have collected our data as well as motivating our choices. The next section in our thesis is the *Empirical Findings*, where we provide the results gathered from the interview respondents. An *Analysis section*, where we analyse our data on basis of theory previously included, follows the empirical findings. The final part of our thesis is the *Conclusion*, where we present our results and findings and answer our research question. We will also provide a future outlook.

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter provides us with the theory surrounding our subject and serves as a foundation on which we build our research questions and investigation. Furthermore, it will serve as a comparison to our empirical findings in the subsequent analysis. In the chapter we, in a detailed manner, provide theoretical models and postulations from prominent researchers and professors within the field of expatriation within the field of expatriation; specifically selection and training processes.

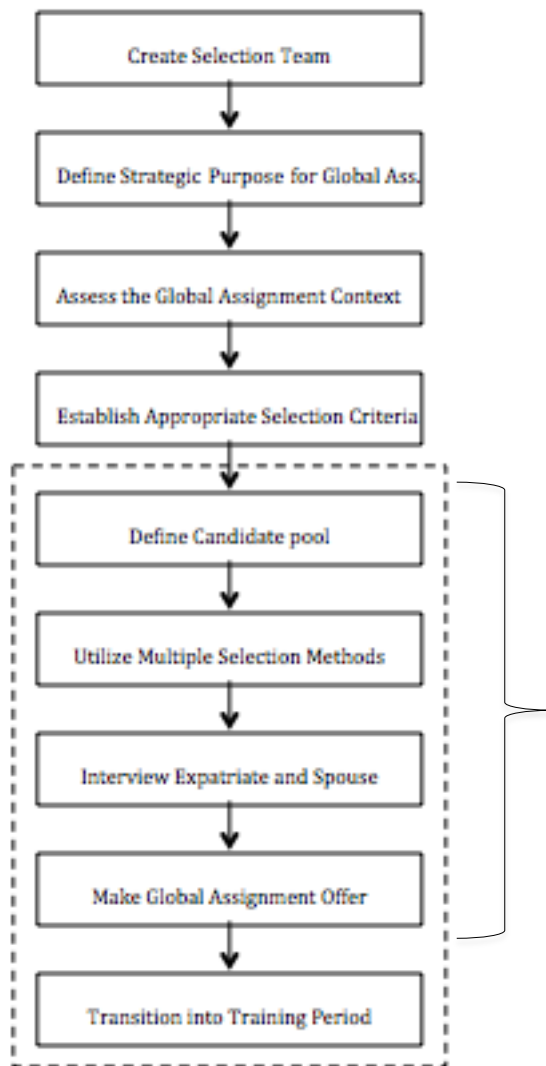


Figure 2. Black *et al*, p.83 (1992)

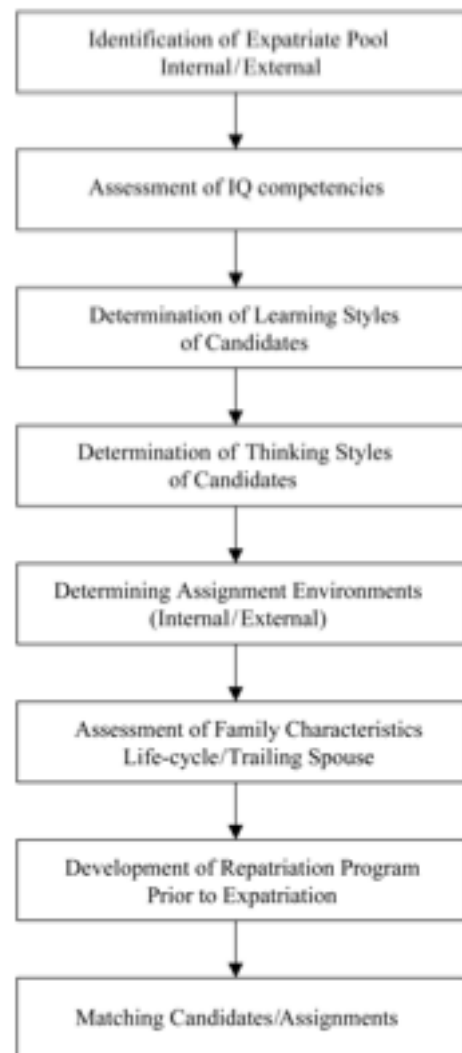


Figure 3. Harvey & Novicevic, p.79 (2001)

2.1 Background

In Figure 2, one can observe the categorization of pre-departure procedures according to Black *et al* (1992). We are going to focus on the process of selecting and training expatriate managers and therefore we will highlight the last five stages in the model. The first 4 stages incorporate the process of selection theory, which we will cover first. In Figure 3, we can see

the proposed selection-model in accordance to Harvey and Novicevic (2001), who have categorized the process into eight steps leading to an appropriate selection. When the selection theory is covered, we will cover the theory of pre-departure training as shown in the last stage of Figure 2 (Black *et al.*, 1992)

2.2 Selection Theory

Traditionally, when selecting expatriates for global assignments, focus has been primarily aimed at the assignees technical and functional abilities (Mendenhall *et al.* 1997; Harvey & Novicevic 2001). Further research has moreover attempted to identify a suitable selection model with several personal characteristics of the candidate as a base, which could increase the chances of successful performance during the assignment (Tung, 1981, Evans *et al.* 2011). The selection decision of a suitable candidate for an international assignment is crucial in several ways. First of all it is important that the international assignee is appropriate for the assignment in order to complete the mission set up by the company. Errors in the selection of a candidate could have negative impact throughout the overseas operation both for the company and for the assignee, in terms of cost and career development (Briscoe *et al.* 2009). Briscoe *et al.* (2009) further argue that the most important abilities of a candidate is the technical skills to perform specific tasks and moreover ones cultural awareness in order to perform successfully in a different cultural setting. Harvey & Novicevic (2001) argues that previous studies have explored specific factors having an impact on the outcome of the expatriate; however, no one has by identifying these issues invented a methodical model of the selection process. The authors developed a model more systematically reflecting selection process with eight different stages; viewed in figure 3.

2.2.1 Identification of Expatriate Pool

In this stage emphasis is stressed at deciding whether the expatriate for the global assignment is to be chosen internally or externally (Harvey M. & Moeller, 2009) Throughout recent years the majority of the expatriates have come from within the company, for obvious reason; in general lower costs, employees have an already existing knowledge of the company culture and the strategic objectives of the company (Harvey & Novicevic 2001). Black *et al.* 1992 argues that after defining the measures of selections an enterprise can use not only internal references but further global candidate data bases in order to find the most appropriate

expatriate fitting the global assignment. Harvey & Novicevic (2001) identifies both positive and negative aspects of selecting externally. The benefits enjoyed for the company is a broader talent pool, increasing the chances of finding the right candidate, able to perform in a heightened competitive global market. Some negative aspects for the company are to find the right amount of candidates to a realistic cost, and low degree of trust, due to lacking interaction with other employees within the organisation.

2.2.2 Assessment of IQ Competences

Using multiple IQs as a measurement tool can assess the competence of each potential candidate. The series of IQs work as a framework for the selection team in matching the expatriate's competences with the requirements for the global assignment (Harvey & Novicevic, 2001). Harvey & Novicevic (2001) describes different sets of IQs, derived from previous research by Sternberg (1985, 1996), where three different main categories of IQ are stated: *Analytical Intelligence*, *Practical Intelligence*, and *Creative Intelligence*. *Analytical Intelligence* is associated with the candidates' ability concerning planning activities, the ability of solving complex problems, and the ability to reason, in other words the intellectual part. Furthermore the ability to use one's emotional state, coordinated with the state of other employees, to reach the specific objectives set up by the company (Wechsler, 1950; Cooper & Sawaf, 1997; Goleman, 1995). *Practical Intelligence* is reflected in one's ability by common sense and knowledge adept to the new environment. Moreover to exert power in the organisation, both formal and informal, by having a profound understanding how the company operates and the ability to manage inter-organisational interactions, in order to achieve objectives. Another competence falling under the scope of practical intelligence is one's ability and understanding of the societal settings and norms, and the way one is socialized within this context (Sternberg & Smith, 1985). *Creative Intelligence* is reflected in abilities to find innovative and unique solutions in complex problems without past experience (Sternberg & Lubart, 1996).

2.2.3 Determination of Learning Styles Of the Candidates

Harvey & Novicevic (2001) argues that by assessing the favoured learning styles of different candidates future change in requirements are easier approached, both by the enterprise and the individual. Jensen & Kolb (2000) states a process of learning consisting of four different phases: *Concrete experience*, *Observation/Reflection*, *Developing concepts and*

Generalizations, and Hypothesis to be tested in future actions. Four different learning styles have been identified, using Kolb's model, throughout years of research in the area (Harvey & Novicevic, 2001): *Divergent Learning Style*-reflected by looking at situation from different perspectives, with a focus on learning by observing things. Harvey & Novicevic (2001) describes this learning style as optimal for global complex assignments, as the expatriate is most efficient with managerial issues by utilizing numerous different solutions. *Convergent Learning Style*-The individual that possess this learning style is able to consider a concept without thinking of a specific case and by this concept learn both the actual problem and the context/environment of the problem. *Assimilation Learning style*-An individual having an assimilation learning style learn by concepts as the "converger", except that when problems arise the "assimilator" use reasoning based on induction to solve them. *Accommodative Learning Style*- The individual that learn through the accommodative style put a lot of stress in accomplishing things.

2.2.4 Developing an understanding of individual thinking styles

In order to utilize the competences of the potential expatriate the company has to consider methods how the expatriates' competences are implemented, in relation to the required assignment. Assessment of thinking styles can be appropriate when selecting appropriate candidates, making sure that company strategies are performed in accordance with existing objectives. The nature of the assignment has obviously an impact on the link between an expatriate's manner of thinking and the implemented strategy. It is important for a company to have in mind that learning styles can change during a stay abroad, as the expatriate adjust to the new society and culture (Harvey & Novicevic, 2001; Sternberg, 1997).

2.2.5 Defining Assignment Environments Internal/External

Determine the nature of the task and the nature of the environmental context is crucial in order to match a candidate with the appropriate task, and for the expatriation to be successful. An assignment might be creative, computational, or coordinative, having levels of complexity and difficulty. Certain variables further affect the external operating environment such as dissimilar culture between the host country and the home country, political and economical factors. Internally, an enterprise must consider in what kind of management style or

organisational environment the assignment will be performed and different characteristics of operational market *et cetera* (Harvey & Novicevic 2001).

2.2.6 Assessment of family characteristics Life-cycle/Training spouse

Common reasons for expatriate failure and premature returns are associated with non-working factors, i.e. regarding spouses and children. In some occasions the spouse need to quit his or her job due to the move, and a lot of things have to be sacrificed moving abroad (Fish & Wood, 1997; Caligiuri *et al.* 2009). Before sending an expatriate with family abroad, the company must have a profound understanding in what stage of the life-cycle the family is in and make further family oriented considerations. This is in order to avoid issues affecting the performance of the expatriate and further develop certain compensation packages (Harvey & Novicevic, 2001).

2.2.7 Development of a repatriation program prior to the expatriation and Matching candidates with assignments

The repatriation process plays a significant role for the expatriate when re-entry adjusting to the home country, not only regarding individual aspects but also aspects of knowledge transfer within the company. (Black *et al.*, 1992; Berthoin-Antal, 2001).

Before the transition into pre-departure training for the expatriate, the final step of the selection process takes place where the most suitable expatriate is matched with the specific assignment. Up to this point specific traits, competences, family situations, thinking and learning styles *et cetera* have been evaluated in order to find appropriate expatriates (Black *et al.* 1992; Harvey & Novicevic, 2001).

2.2.8 Procedures of Selection

According to Briscoe et al. (2009) companies put a lot of emphasis in their selection processes of expatriates for IAs, with variations dependent on the type of assignment, type of company and national culture. The most common procedures are *Interviews, Formal Assessment, Committee Decisions, Career Planning, Self-Selection, Internal job postings and individual bid, Recommendations, and Assessment centres*. People from both the parent- country and the host-country conduct personal Interviews. Formal Assessment tests often evaluate a

candidate's cultural awareness, flexibility, adaptability *et cetera*. MNCs often have a committee containing people from the HR-department, host-country director, director of development *et cetera* selecting the expatriate for an IA. Career Planning could be explained by that the selection of the expatriate for an IA could already be pre-designated for the expatriate with the MNC, as a step one in the expatriate's career development. The aforementioned procedures are argued to be the ones most performed but in the end it is up to the expatriate (self-selection) to choose whether he or she would be appropriate for the job, having the technical skills and suitable traits required. Furthermore the assignee could be assigned through internal job postings or be recommended by other people for the job. The last procedure identified is selection through assessment centres. On the other hand, this process is rarely used by MNCs for different reasons.

2.3 Training Theory

2.3.1 Areas of Training

Shen (2005), who has engaged in studies within the subject of expatriate training, chooses to divide the training into three parts, one of which includes the "preparatory training for expatriates". Even though there are several reasons as to why many companies do not offer training, for example the fact that many operations are temporary and that many companies have the belief that the technical skills are of adequate proportions to carry out the assignment at hand (Eriksson & Köbin, 2007). However, Shen (2005) is highly confident that training that improves cultural sensitivity and specific knowledge within the industry, definitely will help the expatriate overcome the traitorous difficulties of being a global manager.

Baker et al (1996) further emphasizes the importance of having pre-field training that can help the expatriate and his family further adapts to the new environment and culture and can also serve as a complement to the previous selection process, since one can examine the expatriates' abilities and give them the opportunity to withdraw. Baker et al (1996) summarizes the different types of training that would be advantageous in a pre-departure context in Figure 4, "pre-field orientation".

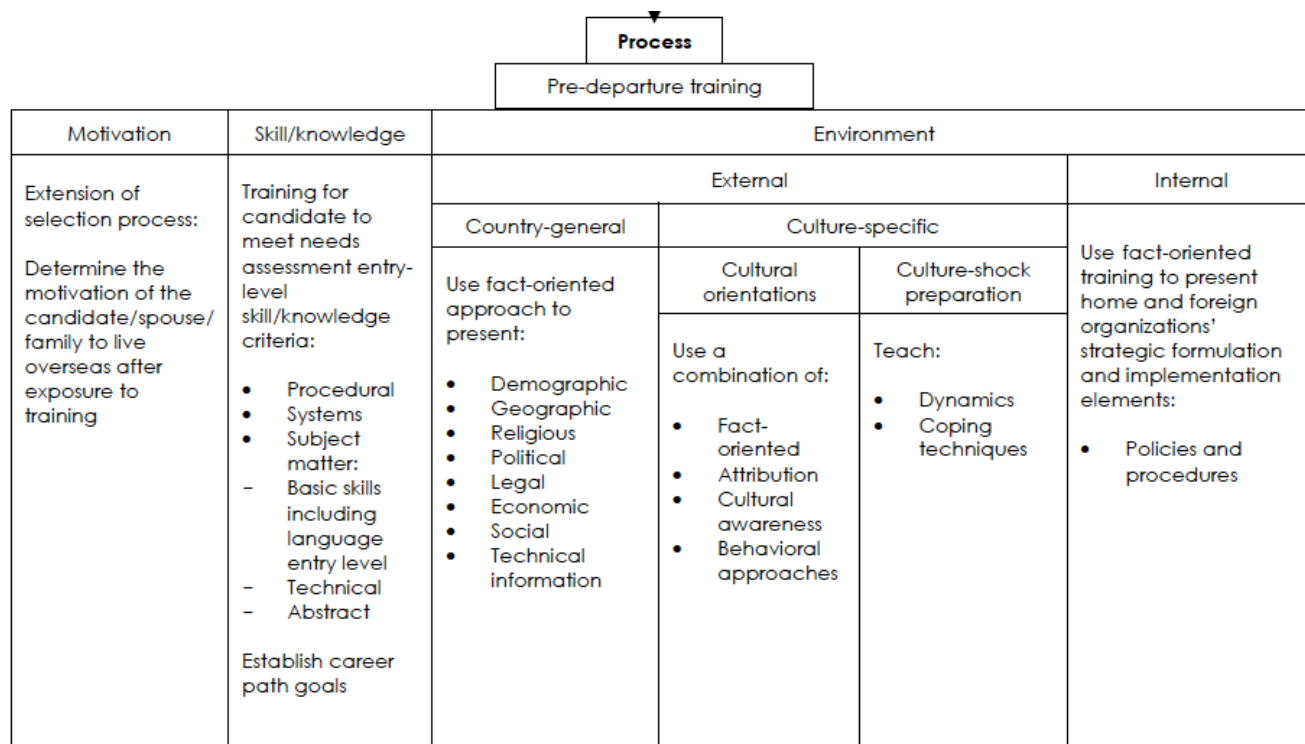


Figure 4. Baker *et al* p.37 (1996)

When looking at the model one can observe that Baker *et al* (1996) emphasizes training in cultural, national, motivational and organizational complexities. One may argue the methods in which one may practice and train in a pre-field context, since companies may often have alternating methods to apply. Garvey *et al* (2004) claims that the pre-field training includes training responsibilities from the individual as well as the company; where the individual should visit the country in question to receive a realistic perspective of the country and build own expectations. He also claims that the company has the responsibility to select candidates carefully, and therefore select managers who have the skills and motivation to follow through with the operation. Therefore, we argue that the cultural and country-specific knowledge is the area that needs furthest training. Eriksson & Köbin (2007) also highlights that expatriate failure is rarely due to lack of technical skills, it is rather the expatriate's and their spouse's inability to adequately adapt to the new cultural environment; further emphasizing the weight of effective cross-cultural training. In addition, cross-cultural training is said to boost cross-cultural adjustment, quickens the cultural competences of the expatriate (Black & Mendenhall, 1990) and add value to the performance of the managers (Morris & Robie, 2001).

2.3.2 Cross-Cultural Training

When it comes to the training to adapting to the new cultural environment, Harrison (1994) highlights, in Figure 5, two specific stages in the training, namely the general orientation, divided into self-assessment and cultural awareness, and the specific orientation, divided into knowledge acquisition and skills training.

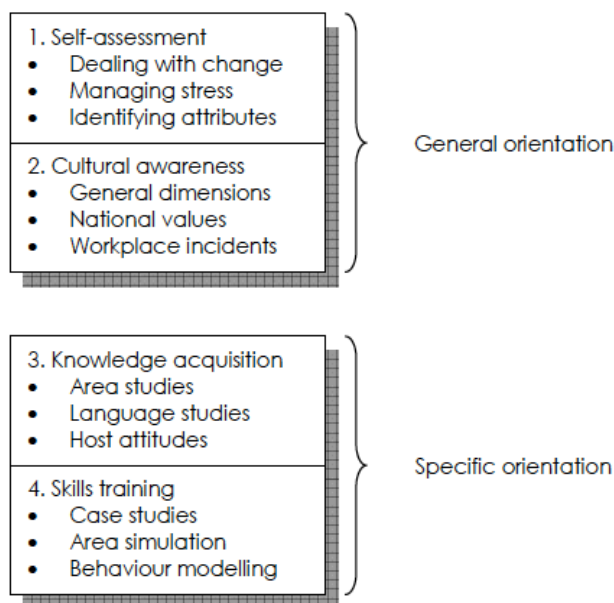


Figure 5. Harrison p.20 (1994)

In the general orientation, one shall teach the expatriate about the operation in question as well as preparing them for the cultural change awaiting and the possible stress involved. Furthermore, one shall teach the expatriate, through awareness of ones own culture in comparison to other cultures, to accept and recognize possible differences (ibid.). The importance of being able to keep relationships with, and non-judgmental towards people of different cultural backgrounds is something that is

essential in regards of becoming a successful expatriate manager, which further clarifies the significance of the general training (Webb, 1996).

In the specific orientation, one shall learn more about the specific host-country in question. This is done by area studies such as briefings and programmes about the country's culture, learning the language and how one is expected to communicate when interacting with an individual of the native culture. Furthermore, the expatriate receives more practical training by being informed or exposed to situations that may occur during their international operation, which is carried out through area studies and simulations and subsequent complementation by reviews and useful insight (Harrison, 1994).

2.3.3 The Duration of the Assignment

As previously stated, there are numerous ways in which companies can train their employees ahead of a cross-cultural assignment abroad. Companies encounter continuous difficulties in evaluating and achieving desired results of expatriate operations, making the amount of

investment in, for example training, crucial regarding the decision of whether or not an expatriate assignment is advantageous for the company. It is the responsibility of the human resource directors to fund the training of the employees, and therefore they have the responsibility to the trade-off in question, with specific consideration to the most effective spending of the company's resources (Mendenhall *et al*, 1987).

One approach as to how a company can consider this trade-off is shown in Figure 6, and primarily refers to the correlation between how much a company shall invest in training and the duration of the operation in question. It is clear that even though the host-country is rather similar to the parent-country, some sort of cross-cultural training is

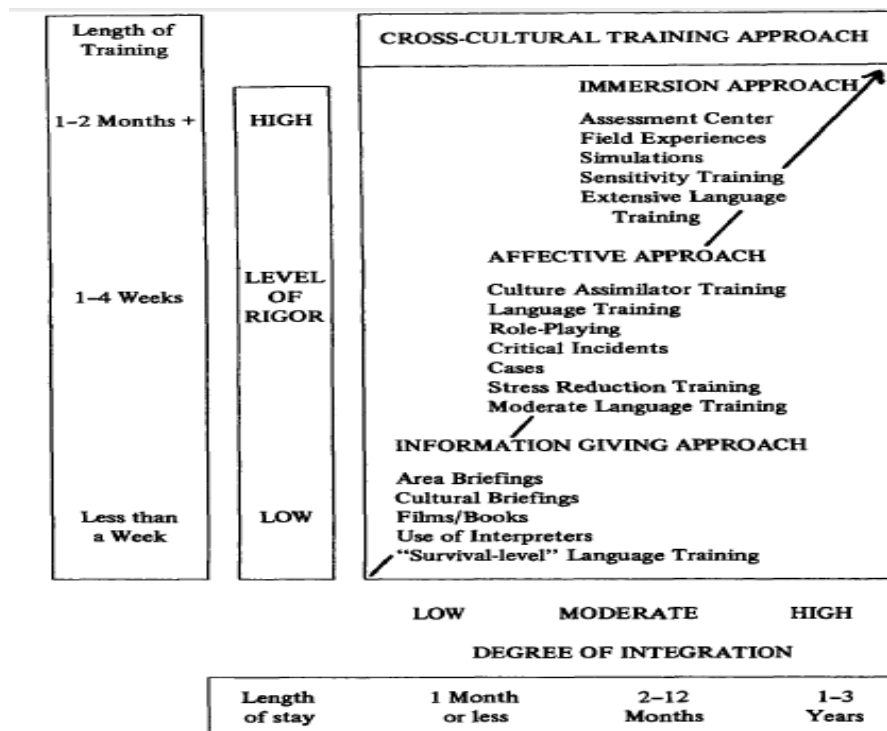


Figure 6. Mendenhall et al p.340 (1987)

essential when speaking of long-time operations, at least an affective approach. However, very often the cultural differences are immense, and depending on the length of the stay, the level of integration becomes more and more important for the subsequent productivity of the expatriate (*ibid.*). Mendenhall et al (1987), illustrates in Figure 6 how the length of the operation affects the procedures of training, including what type of training should be done and for how long the training shall commence. As the duration of the operation is longer, the amount of training that the company should invest in shall increase and the forms of training shall develop from a strictly information-based training to training characterized by the immersion approach.

3. Methodologies

In this chapter we provide a detailed description of how we prepared and performed our investigation. We reveal an analytical approach as to why we chose certain types of approaches to attaining information. Furthermore, we provide a description of how we handled the information received as well as how we reflect upon the ethical aspect and limitations of our study.

3.1 Research Layout

We chose a qualitative approach in our study on the basis of the complexity of the topic of research where our research questions demand both factual and experiential information. A qualitative approach facilitates the researcher when examining a problem of high complexity, in a profounder context (Jacobsen, 2002). Furthermore, qualitative research is best suitable when prior understandings about a phenomenon are modest (Jacobsen, 2002; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Moreover qualitative research aims to describe, from the participants' point of view, complex phenomena from the inside out, giving the researcher different perspectives of how people perceive certain things (Flick *et al.* 2004). When analysing existing theories to measuring different variables a quantitative approach is often motivated by its ability to give the researcher data that can be statistically analysed. However, through a qualitative, exploratory method we are able to gather as much information as possible, with different perspectives and values, from a small amount of participants. We argue that this is the most appropriate method in order to succeed in getting a comprehensive understanding in the subject, and best answering our research questions.

Furthermore we decided to use a deductive approach with the purpose of confirming previous research in order to enrich the research in the context of pre-departure preparations in the process of expatriation. A deductive approach starts with existing theories, as the first cradle of knowledge, this knowledge works as a base for the researchers when formulating research questions or hypotheses, and finally fall into the empirical study (Jacobsen, 2002; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). We argue that since the research in expatriation, with emphasis on Swedish MNCs in a Chinese context, is relatively unexplored, this approach was advantageous for our study in order to get a clear picture of what specific field to examine. On the other hand, when using a deductive approach danger lies in the complex process during the study since there is room for versatile interpretation. The researcher has its own interpretation of the subject from the beginning and if not appropriate questions are

questioned to the participants in the research, the outcome will be based on the researcher's interpretations (Jacobsen 2002). However, in order to get a deeper understanding of our subject we will conduct a case study interviewing people with experience in the field of selection and training and the subsequent processes of expatriation. Yin (2009) states that the strength of a case study is that it generates a deeper understanding in a subject through real-life examples. We argue that by asking the "right" questions to the participants in our study, we will overcome danger stated above.

3.2 Companies and Selection Criteria

As mentioned previously we decided to use a case study approach as one of the main sources of data collection, where the objective was to attain as much information as possible from sampled interviews. Yin (2009) emphasised the importance of identifying an appropriate case or candidate prior to the actual collection of information. As our aim was to investigate pre-departure preparations of Swedish-based MNCs sending expatriates to China we wanted to find people with experience within this field, both as an expatriate and people involved in the selection procedure in the company. Jacobsen (2002) and Yin (2009) further argue that prior to the screening of the data, a researcher should set out specific criteria in order to be able to match a possible candidate with the purpose of our research. By setting out specific criteria in accordance with our objectives the research become more relevant. In addition, it is important to keep in mind the trustworthiness of the people that gets interviewed in order to attain reliable information (Jacobsen, 2002). Since we wanted to investigate the selection process and the pre-departure training we argue that by choosing employees involved in the selection and the planning of the training, along with people that participated in the selection process and training and further actually went abroad as an expatriate, we can attain reliable information. In accordance with previously stated argumentation we set out criteria:

Swedish-based MNC where the candidate is of Swedish origin.

The people we interviewed had to be or have been employed by a Swedish-Based Multinational Corporation and further be or have been involved in pre-departure preparations of expatriation with some sort of Chinese orientation. We argued that MNCs have more complex Human Resource systems since they have to manage people across countries, while simultaneously maintain a unified corporate setting. The candidate must have been of

Swedish origin, born and raised in Sweden and have spent most of its life in Sweden, working. We argued that this would ease our interpretations when it comes to cultural aspects for instance, since we both are of Swedish origin. Furthermore, the candidate should have, for obvious reasons, completed all of the pre-departure processes, including selection and training.

3.3 Data Collection

3.3.1 The Process

As we previously stated, we engaged in research in accordance to the deductive style, which implied the use of a theoretical framework as research-base. Jacobsen (2007) enlightens the importance of secondary data in regards of informing the reader about the subject; secondary data provides the reader a chance to interpret the subject with previous studies as a base. Furthermore, when conducting research with secondary data, it is incredibly important to evaluate the credibility and reliability of the sources (*ibid.*). This is something we took into consideration when we collected and analysed our secondary data sources. First, we collected all of our secondary data through academic, scholar articles within the field of expatriation. We argue that the credibility goes hand-in-hand with providing a relevant information-base from which the reader can interpret the subject. Therefore, we chose to use articles written by commonly accepted, prominent, authors within the field; for example Black *et al* (1992) and Harvey and Novicevic (2001). In their work we collected models, which we used as the base of our theoretical framework; later complementing the models with discussions that include theory and facts from other scholars and articles.

When our theoretical framework was in place, we could start to plan our interviews, interview questions and selected candidates; that is, collect our primary data through interviews. Rubin & Rubin (1995) emphasizes the importance and usability of interviews when engaging in case-study research, and also claims that interviews can create a fluid process in the consistent line of enquiry that one has, rather than a rigid one. This is something we wanted in our interviews, as we wanted to have an informal interview where one could exchange both more factual questions, but also experiential and emotional questions. Therefore, our questions go hand-in-hand with two of Silverman's (2001) three types of interviews; namely the positivist interview, factual, and the emotionalist interview, experiential. As we aim to unravel the

conundrum of pre-departure preparations in practice, we argue that the informal and fluid structure of our interviews were essential to gain the different types of information, namely both factual information about the companies strategies as well as experiences stated in a credible manner.

When it comes to the structure of our questions, we, in accordance with the different types of questions proposed by Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008), tried to use open-end questions and subsequent secondary questions in our interviews. Since we aimed at gaining qualitative information about the process itself, we wanted to gain as much information as possible through our interviews and therefore our will to include open-end questions and secondary questions was essential in this conquest. However, Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) claim that interview shall be constructed in a structured manner when interview questions are open-ended. This is something we had in mind; we had to incorporate our fluid and informal feeling to our interviews with a clear structure in order to not slip away from the purpose of our questions. Therefore, we aimed at a structured interview with clear protocol as to what we wanted to receive, however keeping in mind the informal feel that the interviewee can feel comfortable and cooperative in.

When it comes to locations and situational circumstances involved in our interviews, we tried to arrange face-to-face interviews. Jacobsen (2002) emphasizes the importance of face-to-face interviews when trying to retrieve information of experiential nature, since it provides a genuine and personal environment. Therefore, we did all our interviews at the companies in question with face-to-face interaction with the interviewees. The following candidates were chosen.

Company X Automobile Company	Company Y Global Technology Provider
Individual 1 Global Mobility Partner at the HR-Department Göteborg, Age: 27, Sex: Female Personal Interview	Individual 3 HR Shared Service Specialist – HR Business Support Göteborg, Age: 51, Sex: Male Personal Interview
Individual 2 System Project Manager Göteborg, Age: 40, Sex: Female Expatriate Manager in Shanghai, China, for 2.5 Years Personal Interview	Individual 4 Director – Business Development Göteborg, Age: 51, Sex: Male Expatriate Manager Experience From Several Operations, Primarily Shanghai, China Personal Interview

3.3.2 Introduction of the respondents and companies

3.3.2.1 Company X

Company X is a leading actor in the automobile industry worldwide, with a strong geographical base in Sweden, where the management and operations is heavily influenced by Swedish values. Therefore, the company is highly relevant in our research, where Swedish-based MNCs serve as the core of our investigation. When it comes to our interviews, Individual 1 is the Global Mobility Partner at the HR-Department. In her regular day of work, she constantly interacts with employees within the company exposed to international operations, including operations in China. As she regularly deals with processes, all the way from pre-departure preparations of the expatriates to repatriation adjustment, she does not only possess a professional expertise regarding our investigation of Company X, but also serves as a reliable source when it comes the phenomenon that is expatriation. Therefore, we believe that she was a perfect individual to contact when investigating the pre-departure preparations of expatriates at Company X. Individual 2 is a System Project Manager at Company X. In order to not solely receive the HR-departments take on how the company deals with our topic; we managed to schedule an interview with an individual who worked as an expat-manager in Shanghai for two and a half years. As she engaged in operations that included a start-up of a new office and constant interaction with her staff consisting of Chinese workers, we believe she was a perfect candidate for our investigation. By having both interviewed, we could extract significant and professional information regarding how Company X deals with pre-departure preparations; looking at it from both the HR-departments standpoint as well as the international managers standpoint.

3.3.2.2 Company Y

Company Y is a Swedish leading global technology provider with operations in several different technology areas. We argue that the company, with its vast economic prominence, Swedish heritage and its headquarter located in Sweden, is highly pertinent in our research. When it comes to the interviews, Individual 3 is the HR Shared Service Specialist in the HR Business Support department. With her 14 years within the company, and several years of experience of managing international operations, including China, she has not only developed a significant level of professional expertise within the field we are investigating but also has a

tremendously reliable insight in the operations of Company Y. She is therefore a perfect candidate for our investigation when it comes to the how HR operates. Individual 4 has for several years been Director at Business Development in China, stationed in Shanghai. With his 27 years within the company, several being on international grounds, he has a substantial amount of experience when it comes to how Company Y actually prepare their expatriates for foreign operations as well as other information regarding expatriation. Furthermore, Individual 4 is of high rank within the company and has served as a top manager in China for several years, therefore definitely fulfilling our categorization that includes manager status. Therefore, by having both interviewed, we could extract significant and professional information regarding how Company X deals with pre-departure preparations; looking at it from both the HR-departments standpoint as well as the international managers standpoint.

3.4 Data Analysis

One cannot escape the fact that a qualitative research technique implies a less structured form of the collected data. When engaging in quantitative research methods, the data is somewhat pre-structured whereas all the structuring and organizing in qualitative methods requires post-retrieval procedures (Holme & Solvang, 1997). In our analysis we first of all transcribed our interviews to receive our clear structure and overview for the subsequent analysis.

Transcription is a time-consuming activity, but we argue that it was essential in structuring and analysing our data. Transcription can be done in several ways depending on what type of content you want to attain from your research. Very often in business context, however, transcription is done merely by writing down exactly what was said during the interview and possibly pauses and behaviours (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). This is what we did in our transcription process, we did not only write down exactly what was said, but we in some cases further enlightened certain behaviours and signals that may have altered or highlighted the actual meaning of a statement.

When analysing our collection of interviews, we argued the importance of analysing trends that correlate over all interviews and specific details of the specific interviews. Eriksson & Kovalainen (2008) claim that it is important to familiarize with all the collected data in order to see the clear patterns in the data. This is something we acknowledged when we looked at patterns in the answers of all interviews in order to easier retrieve a clear perception of the “big picture”. Further, Holme & Solvang (1997) provide a form of textual analysis where

analysis can be divided into a overall analysis and a detail analysis; namely an analysis of the general standpoints and answers amongst the candidates and the analysis of certain parts of the specific candidates' answers. We adopted their view of textual analysis as we too, tried to analyse more than just the general correlation between the candidates, but also the specific answers of a candidate that we argue may indicate possible differences in regards of time, sector and industry.

3.5 Ethical Reasoning

When conducting research ethical consideration is of great importance, especially when a qualitative approach is undertaken, since interaction with people through different methods is a common way of collecting data. Even though the purpose of a research often is well intended, one has to be careful that no one is harmed unintentionally (Beauchamp & Bowie, 2004). In our case we collected our data through interviews with several business people from two different MNCs, where we made sure that both the interviewees as well as their companies remained anonymous in order to avoid the leakage of confidential information. The confidentiality in our thesis was crucial to consider since we investigated an extensive process within the two firms.

3.6 Source Credibility

When conducting qualitative research, in order to create a level of consistency and an establishment of research providing a correct description, frequently applied concepts are reliability and validity. However, these concepts can be somewhat unclear and oblique when applied in the elaboration of research (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Lincoln and Guba (1985), with their seminal work translates these aforementioned concepts into "trustworthiness" comprehending four different features; *Transferability*, *Dependability*, *Conformability*, and *Credibility* with the purpose of assessing the quality of a research. We argue that, by using, these four aspects generate an overall "trustworthiness" and a clear evaluation of our study is provided.

Since the aim of our study was to, through qualitative methods, investigate pre-departure preparations of Swedish-based MNCs sending expatriates to China, and make a contribution to existing research; the transferability in our study is of distinct nature, as previous research

has not particularly been focusing on the preparation of Swedish expatriates' sent for IAs in China. In order to achieve appropriateness though, our background and theoretical framework presents previous researchers' thoughts in a broader perspective and we further combined these thoughts to develop a base in our qualitative research method, which moreover is shown in the relationship of the theory and empirical results in the analysis section. In order to strengthen the dependability of our study we present the methodology section, which describes the process of our investigation in a detailed manner, step by step. Moreover, the interviews that we conducted were first recorded and then transcribed so that our interpretation would be as accurate as possible. To further improve the dependability in our research, all information gathered and used is documented and disclosed. By having a well-defined connection between our data/findings and interpretation, conformability is increased. Throughout the paper our clear disposition provides a systematic data interpretation easily understood by the reader. The credibility of our study is reinforced by using previous research by authors well familiarized and experienced within the subject, which further increases the trustworthiness in our study. Moreover, the creditability is strengthened by the fact that previous research, through an extensive process, has been investigated and examined.

3.7 Limitations

When speaking of the limitations in our study, one may question the amount of interviews conducted. Often when conducting a qualitative, the quantity of interviews is essential in regards of reflecting and comparing answers and we do not neglect the limitation's presence in our thesis. However, when conducting our thesis interviews, we were sure to conduct interviews of significant relevance to our target; namely Swedish-based MNCs. In regards of the time at hand we had two companies based in our geographical area we considered to be MNCs with a noteworthy connection to China. Therefore, it was evident that we would include these two companies in our thesis. As to how many were to be interviewed at the company, we felt no need to interview more than one individual from HR and one expatriate at every company in order to get a deep understanding of the pre-departure processes. Since all expatriates at the companies are comprised in the same process, further interviews would primarily be unnecessary and time-consuming. However, we do acknowledge the fact that further interviews would provide more experiential data and personal reflections about the processes, which we now merely touch upon through the eyes of our 4 candidates.

Another limitation may have been the theoretical contributions our thesis provided upon completion. Since we confined our research to MNCs based in Sweden with Assignments in China, the significance of our findings in regards of theoretical contributions, reached out to a rather small crowd compared to if we were to investigate international assignments to a larger area or from a larger area. However, despite this limitation, we argued that our topic varied a vast amount among regions, especially in regards of cultural aspects, leadership and know-how in both companies and society; making generalizations somewhat inaccurate. Furthermore, since we both are Swedish and acknowledged the somewhat substantial differences in China, we were interested in Swedish-based companies sending managers on international assignments to China; and subsequently investigate a complex case of international operations.

4. Empirical Findings

In this chapter we provide a purely informative summary of what information was received during our interviews. We will present every interview individually where we provide data regarding the process, as well as reflections upon what factors can influence it.

4.1 HR Specialists

4.1.1 Company X

HR at company X describes the selection in the expatriation process as a very important part of the company's operations since the company operates on a global level. Due to the relatively new Chinese ownership, however maintaining the Swedish base, where many expatriates were sent to China for different reasons, the importance of these selected expatriates are stressed:

“It is somewhat of a start-up in China where we built new factories, then we need people with the right qualities/skills and experiences, in order to operate in accordance with our objectives” – HR at company X

Looking at the selection process of expatriates, independent of what destinations are set, the assessment and decision falls under different responsibilities. The recruitment acts as the first step in the process, where it all starts with a need or demand from the company; for instance an evaluation and build-up of a new factory or a management project. She explains that this demand develops from a dialog between the “domestic director” and the “host director”, where they after demand is settled, look internally for candidates. She further explains that specific factors highly influence the decision of recruiting internally, such as costs, control, and administrative paper work, in particular when it comes to China, where the candidate must have been employed by the company for at least one year. The directors may use internal job-postings were they put up advertisements of the International Assignment and its requirement or they may look in the company's job-forum online where people address their demand for new jobs and assignments. The directors choose one or two candidates suitable for the assignment and then the Human Resource Department of the company takes over the responsibility of the pre-departure process. She explains that:

“The assessment, made by the Human Resource department, is often performed on the two final candidates” – HR at company X

She further highlights that the assessment all depends on the director’s opinion, how well his assessment of the candidate is, for instance previous experience abroad of the candidate, in general how suitable he or she thinks the candidate is. The actual assessment, where specific tests are performed, is made by a department within Human Resource labelled *Talent Management*. The tests are performed through interviews of the candidate(s) and each candidate further performs digital tests online.

“In these tests we assess different levels of IQs, and how the candidate implement and operate in accordance with the company’s objectives. Overall it is questions regarding assignment matters and personal matters, in order to get a clear picture how the individual works, thinks, and acts in specific situations” – HR at company X

She further stresses the importance of non-work variables, in particular the family situation, when assessing the candidate, to see if there possibly could be any issues.

“In order to raise the thought, within the family questions like: Are you ready to put your kids in school for two years abroad? or speaking of China, Are you aware of the heavily polluted environment? are questioned to the candidate, which hopefully will bring the discussion home” – HR at company X

She explains that the tests or questions asked might differ dependent on which location set for the IA, because of different cultural aspects or issues from one country to the other. However, ones performance is not assessed in particular; rather ones suitable traits for the assignments, and further ones accordance with the criteria of work experience within the company for at least one year. The decision of the suitable candidate is under the responsibility of the director as previously mentioned. When asking her about how the duration of time for the IA influence the selection process or the assessment of the candidate she explains that most of the IAs that they handle are longer, at least 6 months or longer and the assessment is performed in the same manner independent of the duration of time. However, what may differ is the administrative pre-departure work process of sending expatriates with regards to different local regulations, between countries.

When the “Talent Management” is finished with their assessment, “Global Mobility” takes over the subsequent process of developing a compensation package. She explains that “Global Mobility” handle all of the company’s expatriates, and when the compensation package is set the candidate along with potential spouse are invited for a briefing where the package is described and the company policy is explained. When it comes to pre-departure training, Individual 1 describes that no training is performed or provided before departure. On the other hand, training is provided, particularly cultural training, during the stay. Local Human Resource employees perform this form of training but it is not mandatory for the expatriates. The reason for having all forms of training in the host country, she describes, as work related as well as a lot of administrative and logistical issues.

“The reason why we don’t perform the training prior departure, I think, is because the period before you move is really intense. It’s the process of getting a visa, several paper works, and they simultaneously need to complete their work at home, as well as all their cargo to bring. Some sells their accommodation; some makes it available for rent. There is a hell of a logistic there”. – HR at company X

However, she further explains that the company provides a pre-visit for the expatriate along with family, where they briefly gets to experience the city, look for potential apartments and schools for the children, visit the local office *et cetera*. When asking about what impact the duration of time, designated for the IA, has on the amount of pre-departure training she explains that for short assignments there is no particular training performed. When it comes to IAs longer than 6 months there is comprehensive training is provided, though not pre-departure as mentioned previously, but the amount or characteristics of the training does not alter in correlation to duration of time. When reflecting upon the success of their pre-departure procedures discussed above she highlights their relatively low degree of failure in regards of their expatriates, where few return pre-maturely.

4.1.2 Company Y

When we show HR at company Y proposed models of the selection process, developed by researchers, in regards to expatriation, she gives a hesitant impression. She explains that this process of assessment, in accordance with the proposed theoretical procedures, is much more focused on the individual that is sent out to work abroad.

“What we do at company Y is that we identify a need of some sort, it could be a build up of a new factory or that we see a lack of technical expertise somewhere in our operations. Subsequently, our company is divided in different departments where we know the skills and experience of our employees, so we simply ask a person: You have the suitable technical skills and several years of experience in the business for this IA, would you be interested?” - HR at company Y

She further explains that they do not identify a candidate pool or perform any kind of selection procedure, rather look internally for people who perform well, know the company and its procedures, company culture and company values. In accordance with company Y's policy an employee sent to work abroad for an IA must have been employed at least one year. According to her, company Y place significant emphasis on the family situation of the expatriate, in order to increase the chances of a successful assignment. When the most suitable employee is chosen for the IA, the expatriate and potential adjoining family are invited to a briefing by the “Global Mobility”-department where compensation, company policy, along with other topics are covered. She further explains that company Y has a Global Group Policy covering guidelines when it comes to expatriation and that selection procedures do not differ in regards to length of stay or country host for the assignment, given that the IA is of long-term characteristics. In addition she says that the company recently sent factory employees for an IA, and that the selection procedures may be more like the proposed theoretical procedures, in comparison when sending a manager for an IA.

When it comes to pre-departure training, she explains that cultural training and language training is provided before the arrival at the host country but it is not mandatory or comprehensive.

“It is often a tight time-schedule and a lot of administrative things to be fixed, both in regards to work, as well as non-work factors, before departure, so the pre-departure training is seldom implemented pre-departure, rather when in the host country” – HR at company Y

Upon arrival at least one or two days of culture training is offered, as well as a maximum of 130 hours of language training. She further tells us that all forms of training are performed by external consultants and that the training is independent of the type of assignment or length of the stay. In addition the company offers a pre-visit for the expatriate along with family (if brought) where they get to meet people from the local Human Resource department as well as other directors and employees. They get to see the city and possible apartments to live in et cetera. When speaking about the number of failure-rates at company Y she confidently explains that she does not know someone that has returned home before the IA was completed, because of their performance, rather because of personal issues.

4.2 Expatriates

4.2.1 Company X

When it comes to the expatriate's experience of the international manager operation for company X in China, she confirms some sort of correlation between proposed theory and the practice. As a matter of fact, when presented with the theoretical selection-model in figure 2 and 3, she argues that it is somewhat linked how company X operates, but not in such a strict manner. When it comes to who can be selected in a candidate pool, which is presented in the theory, company X allows employees to apply for international operations. Systematically, chosen candidates move through a process in the HR-department where several criteria are tested and taken into account, for example spouse, IQ and learning styles, as presented in the model. Rather than a step-by-step procedure, it is generally an interlinked general assessment through tests of the candidates. In the later stages of the model, she emphasizes the lack of repatriation preparation way ahead of time and believes that an inadequate amount of information for the expatriate is somewhat a weakness in the operation. Whether or not the process differs depending on time and country is hard for the individual in question to say but is definitely implicit with the fact that most expatriates are for managerial positions.

Regarding the pre-departure training at company X, she didn't receive any intercultural training at all. However, company X ensured that expatriates had the possibility of

participating in private language tutoring, but she highlighted the fact that it is somewhat time consuming given how much work the operations imply; therefore choosing not to participate.

When it comes to the overall assessment of her operation in China, there was never a time in the operation where the person in question felt the will to leave prematurely, rather the opposite. There were of course cultural and managerial difficulties associated to the differences of interacting with Chinese employees, but where over a short period of time dealt with automatically; subsequently being minor problems and insinuating the unimportance of inadequate training. However, she enhances how important the new pre-departure processes at Company X, namely the feedback of previous expatriates to outgoing expatriates. Since expatriation to China is somewhat contemporary today, both HR and the expatriates are inexperienced in how to deal with the expatriation process. The feedback provides not only useful information for the HR-department in future operations, but also useful information in preparing expatriates for what is to come. She further reflects about on the return on investment in terms of failure-rates at company X where few of those who are sent out return before the IA is completed. They sent approximately 80-100 expatriates to China when she was assigned for the IA and out of those expatriates there were not more than a handful that returned prior completion.

4.2.2 Company Y

When it comes to how expatriate at company Y perceived the pre-departure preparations of his international operations in China he acknowledged a significant difference from the proposed theoretical procedures. According to him, in the selection process, there was no candidate pool as such, and no assessment what so ever regarding different IQ's and learning styles by doing tests and such. On the contrary, he emphasized a more simplified version in practice, where general assessments dictate and the skills to perform the job at hand come to determine whether or not you are suitable for the international operation. Furthermore, he also enhances the fact that repatriation processes are often neglected, particularly before departure.

“We are global in that we don't send swedes out, we send people around, we send management around, but its not an expatriation program; it's a program to find the right people for the right job” - Expatriate at company Y

He further emphasizes that the Swedish home base is constantly decreasing and that company Y has rapidly developed into becoming a global company. Subsequently, he highlights that you are not capable of really improving your career at company Y if you cannot be able to go abroad. So, basically, international operations are determined to a great extent on your necessity for the operation in question, and the general assessment includes family, cultural adaptation etc. but is not a determining factor as such, regardless of country. Furthermore, in order to reach top manager jobs at company Y, you are pretty much expected to be available for international operations of some sort in such a global company.

When it comes to the importance of training and how it is performed at company Y, he has had significant experience and explains that it is not a huge investment at the company. There does in fact exist an outsourced, intercultural training program that consists of interaction between expats and the Chinese, which is conducted in China. The overall knowledge of how the training is conducted is questionable among the employees. Furthermore, he did not notice any kind of intercultural training before his arrival in China, but he yet opposes the fact that it can be considered inadequate since hardship of arriving and living in China has drastically decreased in the latter stages of the 20th century up until now. He, furthermore, chose to not participate in the training procedures. There was also language training available, but he was eager to highlight the amount of time necessary to really learn the level at a good level, and therefore opposes that more training is necessary since time often is an issue for managers. However, he emphasizes that phrases and words have definitely earned him respect at meetings and social events, insinuating some sort of importance at least. Overall, he believes that he did his job to a satisfactory level on his mission abroad.

In regards of the failure-rates at company Y he emphasizes that the most common reasons for failure, in terms of pre-mature returns, is the family's or spouse's ability to fully adapt to the foreign environment. It could be issues regarding finding an appropriate job or finding other activities to do off work.

"I maybe have two or three cases out of my 70 expats in China, so it's nothing that really disturbs me and it was very much on personal levels why it didn't work out". – Expatriate at company Y

5. Analysis and Discussion

In this chapter we will provide an analytical comparison between our findings and the theoretical framework provided in chapter 2. In the analytical discussion one will be inexorably consumed by the conundrum that is the difference between theory and practice. Furthermore we will discuss different factors influencing the process.

5.1 The Pre-Departure Process

When investigating Company X and Company Y with the models presented in the theoretical framework as a base, one clearly sees that their pre-departure preparations, to a certain extent, deviate from what is proposed by the theory. We will in the next sections analyse the empirical findings collected on the basis of theories included.

5.1.1 Selection

From our accounts, we can see that company X and company Y to a certain degree deviate from the model of systematic selection procedures, proposed by Harvey & Novicevic (2001) in figure 3 in the theoretical framework. In the first step of selecting a candidate pool, where emphasis is placed on whether to select the expatriate internally or externally, both companies recruit candidates internally; in line with Harvey & Novicevic's (2001) study that most expatriates assigned by MNCs for IAs are chosen internally. Underlying factors having an impact on the decision is according to HR at both companies, that when selecting expatriates internally the assignee is already familiar with the company culture, company policies, and company values. Moreover, administrative aspects were also involved, such as restrictions in regards of time employed at the company when signing contracts and applying for visas to the host-country, in this case China. Some other aspects of significance are the way candidates get on the consideration list for the assignment at the two companies. At company X people often apply internally at different forums or job-postings whereas at company Y it rather is a question of the director asking employees regarded to be suitable for the IA, based on technical skills or performance.

When evaluating the two companies' procedures of assessing the candidate's IQ, in regards to the IA, we clearly identify different procedures performed and further deviation from theory proposed to a different degree. Company X tests the candidate's different abilities, for instance practical and analytical skills through different methods. Further evaluation of cross-cultural suitability is performed in different ways in order to judge whether the candidate

would manage to operate in a different environment. This is in consensus with second step of Harvey & Novicevic (2001) systematic model of selection, assessment of IQ competencies. The methods most commonly used at company X for assessment is personal interviews and digital tests online, partly aligned with the procedures of selection proposed by Briscoe et al. (2009). When interviewing the people at company Y we got the sense of that when it comes to the selection of candidates for IAs a lot of the requirements are based on performance and skills, knowledge of which the director or HR- specialist involved in the process already know prior to the selection. This aspect goes partly in line with “The coffee-machine system”, (Harris & Brewster, 1999) which tries to describe how the actual selection procedures are performed in practise, where the authors picture the selection taking place over chit-chat during the coffee break, giving the reader a rather informal view of the procedures in comparison with the formal procedures proposed by the majority of previous studies (Black et al. 1992, Harvey & Novicevic, Dowling et al. 2008, Briscoe et al. 2009).

When it comes to the third and fourth step in Harvey & Novicevic (2001) systematic model of selection, emphasis is put on learning styles and thinking styles in order to get to know how the potential expatriate thinks in different situations and how he or she learns in real-life situations et cetera. Also here the two companies clearly differs; according to HR and expatriate at company X, company X evaluates these competences, not as a complete step in the process but these traits are covered through certain questions and tests in someway, however not as thoroughly as described by the theoretical research model (Harvey & Novicevic, 2001). Again, as HR & expatriate at company Y clearly states, company Y deviate from theory and from company X in that sense that these traits are said to be known by employers prior to the selection or not that thoroughly considered when selecting the expatriate since a lot of emphasis is put on the technical skills often the requirement of highest significance at company Y.

Among the two companies when it comes to defining the assignment and environment it became evident, interviewing all of the interviewees, that this is the first step in both companies. A need of different characteristics is elaborated within the company and the nature of the task is developed; subsequently the process of finding the most suitable starts, hence not completely align with Harvey & Novicevic (2001). All administrative work that comes due to cultural norms, political factors in the host country when the expatriate has been selected is taken care of by the HR-department (HR at both companies).

In regards of the expatriates' family situation both company X and company Y place significant emphasis on these factors. According to HR at company X the family is of high priority for the IA to be successful. Where the family gets to attend meetings where the company have a short briefing of the IA, the company policy and furthermore the compensation package offered. This is in line with previous studies (Dowling et al. 2008, Briscoe et al. 2009, Evans et al. 2011), where the expatriate's family matters is one of the highest factors having an impact on the IA in regards of completion and return on investment. Failure in family adjustment or provided compensation in regard of cultural and language training could cause a pre-mature return in other words an expatriate failure. According to HR at company Y, company Y also put the family of the expatriate as one of the factors strongly correlated with a successful expatriation. The HR-department evaluates the situation and further provides training for the whole family. The placed emphasis on the family situation is shown by both companies as they provide pre-visits for the expatriate along with potential joining family where they all get to know the city, look at potential apartments, visit the local premises of the company et cetera.

The two final steps in the systematic selection model (Harvey & Novicevic, 2001) is the development of a repatriation program and matching the most suitable candidate with the IA. According to expatriate at company X, this is a part of the expatriation cycle that needs to be improved by the company X, where the interviewee felt that not much was prepared for the re-entry in the parent country in regards of working related aspects as position and further career development. According to HR at company X, company X now works with different tools from the beginning of the IA where the director of the parent company and the expatriate follow through the development of the expatriate in order to smooth the process of the expatriate re-entering the parent company/country. This aspect of improving or put more emphasis on the repatriation process is in consensus with Berthoin-Antal (2001), where she stresses the repatriation part of the expatriation cycle in order for the re-entry to be as smooth as possible as well as the knowledge-sharing to be as accurate and comprehensive as possible. According to HR at company Y we got the impression that there is room for company Y to further develop and improve their ability to consider repatriation prior to the IA.

Evans et al. (2011) cover special traits or profiles of the expatriate manager argued to be appropriate for IAs both core skills, like cultural adaptability and communication skills, and

augmented skills, such as effective delegatory skills and international business skills. When interviewing people from both companies it comes to our accounts that company X rather use the assessment tools for finding the most suitable candidate with the IA as the main base, in comparison with company Y where they, though as the IA as a base, rather ask an employee subjectively regarded as having the skills and abilities appropriate for the assignment. In regards of designated time for the IA no one of the companies alter their selection procedures given that the assignment is 6 months or longer.

5.1.2 Training

From our accounts both Company X and Company Y describe expatriate training as an important procedure preparing the expatriate manager for an assignment abroad. Shen (2005) and Baker et al. (1996) argue that preparatory training for the expatriate and his or her family improves cultural sensitivity and knowledge within the industry and further helps to smooth the cultural adjustment process coming to a foreign country, hence having a significant impact of the outcome of the assignment. In figure 4, Baker *et al* (1994), one can further summarize the different types of training that would be advantageous having in a pre-departure context

According to the HR at Company X preparatory training is provided at their company, in forms of culture training and language training. However, none of these forms are performed prior departure, but rather when in the host-country, hence not in consensus with what Baker et al (2004) propose to be advantageous. The main reason for not having the training at home is argued to be work-related, not having enough time to perform preparatory training before departure. When it comes to preparatory training at Company Y they provide cultural training and language training prior to departure, but the training is seldom performed at home rather in the host country. Again work-related factors affect the ability to conduct the training prior to departure, having limited time to finish assignments at the parent company.

So, as a whole they do not offer a substantial amount of training at any company, in particular at the pre-departure stage. Furthermore, the training is outsourced at both companies and HR seems to have a rather limited knowledge about the contents of the training. So in regards of accordance to figure 5, Harrison (1994), some types of training may have correlated, but is nothing that the company considers or has significant knowledge about. When it comes to the

participation of concerned parties, both expatriates at the companies chose to not participate in the cultural training offered, which could be connected to lack of motivation, time and energy. Furthermore, speaking of other kinds of training proposed in figure 4, Baker *et al* (1994), not connected to cultural aspects and language, no training is offered at company X and Y as the selection process requires skills associated to the task at hand. As a whole, there is a cultural training-programme available at the companies. However it is of a non-compulsory nature that isn't correlated to factors including length of stay or position of the expatriate, which in our case are managers.

As aforementioned Mendenhall et al. 1987 (figure 6) emphasise the correlation between investment in training and the duration of the IA, where the investment ought to increase and become more comprehensive the longer time designated for the assignment. Neither of company X or Y alters their procedures due to the length of the IA. These patterns are not aligned with the model proposed by Mendenhall et al. (1987). As the reader acknowledge the companies do not put particular investment in training prior to departure, which were of our focus. In the next section we will discuss different factors having an impact on why these two companies deviate from theory.

5.2 Factors determining the process

Looking at reasons why the two companies, company X and company Y, to a varying degree deviate from themselves and from theory, we consider the fact that company Y is more Global in its operations with the home base not as large as company X base. This aspect even brought up by expatriate at company Y:

“I think that if you go to company X, and some other Swedish companies, they have a very big Swedish base and some people go out and come home...They have difficulties in other countries to get people to go from their home-base because it's so big and important that if you go on a foreign assignment you kind of off-pist, you might lose out on the big race out home...” - Expatriate at company Y

This could be one reason why company Y is not as close to the theory as company X since company Y is more global in their operations. As a result the employees at company Y could be argued to possess more global traits even prior the recruitment. This also becomes evident

when looking at the products of company X as they are to a higher degree associated with Swedish values and aspects. Moreover an interesting aspect of the two companies is the number of failure rates given by HR at company Y and expatriate at company X where both of them describe the failure rates as very few of all of them sent out as global managers to China.

“I would say that we’ve been bad at measuring return of investment, however of all of the expatriate we send out on global assignments a very few have returned home pre-maturely”. – HR at company Y

“We have actually very few expatriates who return pre-maturely, surprisingly few actually. On the other hand some, though countable on both hands, has returned home” – HR at company X

When investigating factors why the companies’ pre-departure procedures are performed in this distinctive way two main factors become evident: *time* and *cost*. The time aspect of the procedures is heavily affected by a tight schedule before departure, where certain things need to be taken care of. For the respective company administrative issues like visa applications, accommodation, and compensation packages have to be settled, while for the expatriate issues like completing the current job at home, family considerations, and further prepare mentally for the IA. This limited time schedule gives not much room for pre-departure training, where several things are prioritized a head of training. So, as just stated, the selection and training procedures demand a lot of time, and subsequently cost a lot of money for the company. An extensive selection and training process is deemed to cost more money than a short process. Therefore, to minimize cost, one should strive for having as little selection and training processes as possible for achieving desired results.

6. Conclusion

In this chapter we will provide a short conclusion of the findings in our investigation by quickly answering our research questions. Furthermore, we will, with our empirical findings as a foundation, provide proposals for future research and give constructive advice for employees and industry.

6.1 Theoretical Contributions

As a conclusion to the investigation we have commenced in two Swedish-based firms, we have fundamentally found substantial differences between theory and practice regarding pre-departure preparations of expatriate managers in China. If we look back at the problem questions, they were as follows:

- *To what extent do Swedish-based MNCs apply selection and training processes ahead of International Assignments in China?*
- *Why are the processes applied in this distinctive way?*

When it comes to the selection process, which is the initial step of the pre-departure preparations, it is evident that both company X and company Y have a considerably less formal and strict structure to the process, as well as in many cases, neglecting many steps of the process which are highlighted in the theory. However, the level of similarity to the theoretical propositions is somewhat different between company X and Y, where company X has an obvious process in which a pool of candidates are selected and examined for the international operation and where company Y merely focuses on the suitability of a candidate's capabilities in regards of the assignments at hand. Both HR-employees at the companies, however, had a confident feeling to their selection methods and believed that suitable candidates are selected in the process.

The same thing can be summarized about the training; its significance is unquestionably neglected by the Swedish-based MNCs. Linguistic and cultural training are offered to a certain extent, but not in such a structured and extensive manner as in theory, where a variety of simulation activities and readings are proposed and where training differs depending on length of assignment. Company X and Y have a somewhat more loose approach to the training where they have outsourced the main parts, not really having a clear idea of its contents. Furthermore, none of it takes place before the expatriate arrives in its new

environment. However, none of the expatriates in question believed that the offered training was inadequate nor of unsatisfactory proportions in educational outcomes. In fact, the training that was offered was neglected by both expatriates at company X and Y, stating that lack of time, need and motivation was a determining factor when it comes participating in the training. Furthermore, none of them believed that they were unprepared or not successful in their assignment due to lack of training.

In regards of why the pre-departure process is applied the way it is in these Swedish-based MNCs, several factors seem to affect its characteristics; mainly time and cost factors. It seems that both companies have acknowledged the fact that an extensive process is an investment, therefore placing emphasis on the input - output relationship. Will the investment the company put in the process help the expatriate in his assignment enough for a profitable outcome? For example, the fact that the expatriates interviewed have the opinion that the training offered is not inadequate, may explain that an extensive pre-departure training process is somewhat unnecessary from a cost-perspective. Also, in the selection process cost is a factor, where companies, for an as low cost as possible, should strive for an as short process as possible in finding the perfect candidate. In regards of the time-aspect, expatriates believe that they don't have time for training ahead of preparing for departure, which doesn't only undermine the motivation of participating, but also puts strains on other things that needs time. Furthermore, in our interviews, we also encountered further factors that may affect the process, which includes factors such as size of home base.

So, as a summary of our answers to our research questions; when Swedish-based MNCs select and train managers for international operations in China, there is a clear difference between proposed theory and what is done in practice in regards of the extent of the process. The MNCs have a somewhat looser standpoint to the subject, where differences may arise between companies due to size of home base in Sweden, global reach etc. Furthermore, we wanted to investigate the specific characteristics of the process in regards of operations in China. However, both companies apply the same structure of training- and selection processes to all operations abroad as well as all timeframes. Furthermore, as to why the process is applied in this way, several factors, including available time and cost are significant factors.

6.2 Managerial Implications

When it comes to the managerial positions, it is evident that there can only be a certain amount of candidates suitable for the international operation. Therefore, we argue that it is up to the company to choose how detailed and extensive the selection process should be. It is also a question of cost, which is strengthened by both HR-managers interviewed. An extensive selection process, including a variety of tests and assessments is certainly not inexpensive for the company. Which means that Company Y, having no process in specific, save a lot of money and still believe that they successfully select appropriate managers for the operations at hand. Company X, however, have an extensive selection process, but the outcome seems to be somewhat the same; both the company and the expatriate turned out to be satisfied of the outcome of the operation upon return in Sweden. The same goes with the training, where both offer some, but were most of the expatriates in fact choose to not participate and nonetheless feel pleased with their assignment even after years abroad. The proposed low failure-rates at both company X and Y also strengthen this.

With this said, we argue that the extensive selection process and the availability of intercultural training is something that should not be of significant importance when preparing expatriates, since its immediate correlation to doing a good job seems to be distorted in this case. Therefore we argue, alongside what we extracted from our interviews, that there are other ways in which expatriates can be prepared for their international operations, in ways that make the person in question feel more comfortable in their new position. Both HR-employees and expatriates at company X and Y have encountered the problem that is uncertainty of their career upon return to Sweden; that is the repatriation. Neither company X or Y have any kind of dialogue with the expatriate about what is to happen when they return. Very often, it seems as if the expatriate expects some sort of advancement in their career upon return, evident by for example promotion. For example HR-employee at company Y stated the following about statements from expatriates acting as managers abroad:

“When I come home to Sweden...I’ve had, I’ve had such a top job, then I should have a similar job when I return” - HR at company Y

In fact, it is said in the companies that many people have left the company when they come back due to the company’s inability to find the appropriate job. This is something that we argue could affect the results of expatriate managers and their motivation during the

assignment. In the future there may be more focus on the repatriation before the operation to enable conformity and avoid uncertainty for the expatriate. Company X has started to develop their take on this by constantly having close dialogue with the expatriate throughout the international operation about what is being done and what shall be done upon return. This is something we argue to be effective from a motivational standpoint.

Furthermore, we argue that the classic theoretical type of preparation using simulations and books is ineffective as such that people don't even bother to participate in it, or even feel that it would have benefitted them in any way. Instead, preparations that would actually benefit the impending expatriate could be in the form of pre-visits and feedback from previous expatriates. For example company X have started to offer expatriates time to sit down with previous expatriates to discuss experiences and knowledge that may be helpful or the previous expatriates saw as an inconvenience. In that way one can target specific problems often encountered rather than ignorantly funding cultural training that may not be of substantial importance for the progress of the assignment. Both HR and expatriates at company X claim that this opportunity is helpful for company and employee. The relatively new phenomenon of expatriation to China is somewhat unravelled by the exchange of experiences according to Company X's interviewees; merely strengthening the knowledge and experience of both company and employee for future international operations. In fact, both HR and the expatriates need more experience within the subject:

"We were a bit like guinea pigs, there was no one who had been there to start up a new office. So HR had at least as little to come with when we left to know what it meant to lead Chinese people, to be in China." – Expatriate at company X

6.3 Future Research

As our empirical data suggests, one may select managers for international operations in different ways, all in which the company feels satisfied with the decision. Tests may apply if the company in question believes to be uncertain of the best decision, though very often the company has sufficient information about the individuals available and their subsequent ability to do the task. Therefore, its versatile nature implies hardship to study in what ways selection, in the big picture, can be improved and studied. However, we argue that preparation involving training ahead of moving to a new cultural environment is something that can be

improved and explored further. Also, with our empirical data as the foundation, we argue that one must, in the future, determine the necessity of the present training ahead of international operations today. Therefore we strongly recommend the realisation of extensive quantitative research within the subject, enabling an overview of how expatriates perceive training today and its necessity in their assigned operation. In the future we would favour further research to enable improvement of the experiential exchange between co-workers within the company; as portrayed in Company X. Further research in improving this type of preparation can serve as a cost- and effort-tightening compliment to today's training, where experiences serve as the main knowledge source about the relatively new expatriation phenomenon in China. Furthermore, in order to extend the reach of our theoretical contributions, which we mentioned in our limitations, studies of notably similar characteristics can be made in different regions and companies in regards of size and location.

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Appendix

Interview Guide

Motives:

Knowledge about the pre-departure process at Company X & Y
 Differences between theory and practice
 Personal opinions in regards of process effectiveness
 Alterations to improve the process

Respondents:

Expatriate

Former expatriate to China
 Age/sex irrelevant
 Manager on International Operation
 From Swedish-based MNC

HR-Employee

Handle the pre-departure process
 Age/sex irrelevant
 From Swedish-based MNC

Questions:

Selection

The process compared to theory
 Differences depending on length of stay, country and position
 Internal or external candidates

Training

How training is planned and conducted
 Which is of high importance?
 It's importance in the eyes of the company
 Differences depending on length of stay, country and position

General

Failure rates at the companies
 Influencing factors
 Development of the process
 Future of expatriation in the companies

To the Expatriate

Thoughts about the process and outcome
Adequacy of preparation in their IA
Thoughts about the outcome of their IA
Complementary measures to the process