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Repatriation in Swedish companies

Perceptions, underlying factors and improvements

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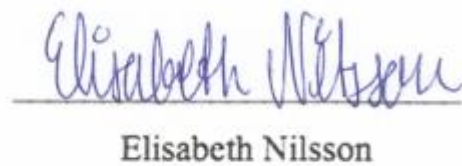
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Abstract

Companies today are becoming increasingly globalized with operations in different locations across the world. This international increase has led to changes in the companies' human resource management due to a larger workforce operating abroad. Moving employees between countries can impose a number of work-related and personal difficulties, especially when moving employees back home since people generally are less prepared for this transfer, compared to when going abroad. Handling the employees' return, the repatriation process, in a poor manner could lead to undesirable outcomes such as employee turnover, which in turn could harm the company. Making sure that employees are satisfied upon return is therefore highly important and an area in need of further research and improvement.

This thesis has investigated the repatriation process in several Swedish companies to examine whether these companies have the same difficulties regarding repatriation as companies in previous studies from other countries, as well as if the underlying factors affecting the outcome are the same. What consequences arise depending on how a company handles these factors have also been examined. The study was performed by interviewing five different companies with one company representative, and one or two repatriates, from each.

The result of our investigation showed that Swedish repatriates tend to be content with their repatriation processes, even though the companies do not provide all the suggested aspects from previous literature. All investigated factors were found to be significant for successful repatriation but some of them, namely Job arrangements, Use of knowledge attained abroad and Development, were the most important ones. A conclusion was made that despite being content with the process, there is room for improvement in all the studied companies to make the repatriation process more flourishing. We have taken these issues into consideration and constructed a normative model that we believe could help companies, regardless of size and country of origin, towards successful repatriation.

Key words

International Human Resource Management, expatriation, expatriate, repatriation, repatriate, Swedish companies.

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Thesis structure

The thesis consists of six main chapters, namely; introduction, method, theory field and literature review, empirical findings, analysis and conclusion. References and appendix will be found at the end of the thesis.

Introduction: The introduction provides background information about repatriation and the issue of many companies not paying enough attention to the repatriation process is discussed. The aim of the study is presented as well as the research question. Lastly, delimitations of the thesis are presented.

Method: Each step in the process, from selecting a suitable topic towards a complete thesis, is carefully described in the method chapter. Explanations of how the theoretical framework was composed and how the empirical data was collected and handled as well as motivations for the chosen methods are included. This to ease any future replications of the study. Additionally, credibility of the research and the ethical position are presented.

Theory field and literature review: This chapter displays theories and models regarding the repatriation process, and what affects the perception of it, found in existing literature and in studies performed in various countries. Lastly, a conceptual model for analyzing repatriation, which is constructed by us and based on previous theories, is presented.

Empirical findings: In this section, the results from the interviews with company representatives and repatriates are compiled.

Analysis: The analysis chapter evaluate the theories and empirical findings of the report, and similarities and differences between the two are analyzed using our conceptual model. Lastly, a revised version of our conceptual model is presented.

Conclusion: In the last section of the thesis, conclusions based on the analysis are presented. Lastly, future research suggestions and our normative model, which aims to supply companies and repatriates with information and suggestions of how to best handle repatriation, are introduced.

1. Introduction

The introduction of this thesis begins with describing the background of repatriation and the problems this field is currently facing. Moreover, this section explains the reasons for further investigation of repatriation, the aim of this thesis and states the research question. Lastly, the delimitations of the study are presented.

1.1 Background

Due to the increasing globalization of world markets, more and more companies are starting to focus on international business. To have an international presence today is considered vital for companies to be able to compete on a global level and gain market shares. The globalization of firms inevitably has an impact on the human resource management of a company since it increases the part of the workforce that is located abroad (Dowling, Schuler & Welsch, 1994). This is a challenge for companies since they need to manage an international staff that covers a larger geographical area and integrates with many different cultures (Dowling, Festing & Engle, 2008). The international staff often contains expatriates or international assignees which could be defined as "an employee who is working and temporarily residing in a foreign country" (Dowling et al., 2008, p. 4). These expatriates could come from the parent country, the host country or a third country (Dowling et al., 2008), but in this thesis the focus will be on expatriates from the parent country. The company could use expatriates to transfer knowledge and technologies across borders, to enter new markets by starting up and running subsidiaries abroad, and to enhance communication in the entire organization (Debrah & Rees, 2011).

According to Dowling et al. (2008) the expatriation process can be described in four different phases, namely; recruitment and selection, pre-departure training, on assignment and re-entry or reassignment. The last phase regards when the foreign assignment is completed and the expatriate either return to the home country, called repatriation, or continue to a new assignment abroad (Dowling et al., 2008). The international assignees who return to the home country are called repatriates and they usually experience certain adjustment problems upon return, for example involving changes in the organization and the career transition (Harvey, 1989). These problems are often similar in their characteristics to the ones experienced at

expatriation (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, in: Reiche & Harzing, 2015). Repatriation includes both the personal re-entry and the professional re-entry (Linehan & Scullion, 2002), but the focus in this thesis will mostly be on the professional re-entry. To ease the professional repatriation a number of human resource practices can be used by the company, namely; a frequent communication system, a mentor, training before the return, fair compensation and career planning (Cox, Khan & Armani, 2013).

1.2 Problem discussion

The problem regarding repatriation is twofold, the limited research in the field and the lack of implementation of the existing theories in practice. Much of the focus in previous studies and existing literature of International Human Resource Management regard the selection and preparation of expatriates, and relatively little attention is paid to repatriation. Either the management believe that no assistance during the repatriation process is needed and that the repatriates can handle this procedure on their own (Jassawalla, Connolly & Slojkowski, 2004), or the management is aware of the issues of repatriation in theory but fail to implement the solutions in practice (Dowling et al., 2008). Several authors highlight the importance of repatriation but also point out that the process often is misunderstood and poorly managed (Dowling et al., 1994; Bossard & Peterson, 2005; Briscoe, Schuler & Tarique, 2012). In smaller firms with less international focus and revenues, repatriation rarely receive much attention since managers in the home office either consider the foreign operations and experiences as less valuable to the firm or do not have enough resources to handle repatriation effectively (Jassawalla et al., 2004). Another problem in companies of various sizes is that the management sometimes is unwilling to accept that repatriation is not easy and that the repatriates might need help with this procedure (Vermond, 2001). For example, the study performed by Bossard and Peterson (2005) show that very few American multinational corporations plan repatriation in advance or have any formal policies for handling repatriation. This gap indicates that more research about repatriation and which strategies that are working, as well as models regarding how to implement repatriation policies effectively in practice, is needed (Jassawalla et al., 2004). It exists an increased academic interest in the research field of repatriation in recent years (Harzing & Pinnington, 2015) and the area has been improved by the development of the model by Jassawalla et al. (2004) which focuses on effective repatriation. A second model by Dowling et al. (1994) regarding the four phases of

repatriation is also a contribution in this field. However, based on our investigations, there does not seem to exist a model that list the most important factors to consider regarding repatriation and to what degree these aspects could be pursued depending on the company's resources.

Failing to effectively take care of the returning repatriates can lead to problems such as loss of knowledge (Gregersen & Black in: Jassawalla et al., 2004), high turnover rates of repatriates if their expectations are not realized (Cox et al., 2013) and make it difficult to find new employees willing to work as expatriates in the future (Gregersen & Black in: Jassawalla et al., 2004). A high turnover rate of repatriates is costly since the company loses both their financial investment in sending the employee abroad as well as the investment in human capital that the repatriate has developed (Reiche & Harzing, 2015; Briscoe et al., 2012). If the company is to gain any benefits from what the repatriate have learnt abroad, the repatriate must stay in the company and share his/her experiences (Briscoe et al., 2012).

The challenge of repatriation includes both readjustment and reestablishment (Borg in: Harzing & van Ruysseveldt, 1995). The readjustment means getting back to normal and adapt to the native culture of the home country after being abroad (Borg & Harzing, 1995). One important aspect to consider is that the repatriate could experience a reverse culture shock when coming home and it might be hard to cope with such a shock since it is often unexpected (Dowling et al., 2008). The reestablishment on the other hand refers to finding a suitable position in the home company where the repatriate feel like he/she can use his/her new skills acquired abroad. Both of these factors need to be achieved for the repatriate's readjustment to be successful (Borg & Harzing, 1995). According to Jassawalla et al. (2004) the most important aspects for a repatriate when coming home is to receive credit for his/her foreign assignment, to be able to choose some of his/her job assignments and to use his/her new skills in the new position. Despite studies concluding that these aspects are important, some companies do not use the knowledge and skills of the repatriates in an efficient way (Bossard and Peterson, 2005; Jassawalla et al., 2004; Harvey & Novicevic in: Cox et al., 2013) and believe that the process of coming home should be handled by the repatriate himself/herself (Jassawalla et al., 2004).

Based on the research conducted for this thesis, to the best of our knowledge, there seems to be a lack of studies regarding repatriation performed in Sweden, as well as a lack of Swedish

literature regarding the same topic. Moreover, we believe that much of the previous research regarding repatriation (Jassawalla et al., 2004; Riusala & Suutari, 2000; Bossard and Peterson, 2005; Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001) can be considered biased since it only highlights the repatriates' own views on the repatriation process and little attention is payed to the opinions and perspectives of the management. This could be misleading due to differences in expectations between the repatriate and the company as well as differences in personality between the repatriates themselves. Furthermore, in the studies that do include both the companies' and the repatriates' perspectives (Johnston, 1991; Paik, Segaud & Malinowski, 2002) it was difficult to distinguish between the two. Therefore, this study aims to fill some of the existing research gaps by presenting both the views from the management as well as from the repatriates, and investigate why the repatriation process is perceived successful, or unsuccessful, in certain Swedish companies.

1.3 Purpose of the study

This thesis aims to contribute to a larger understanding of repatriation in Swedish companies based on both the repatriates' and the management's perspectives, and possibly fill some of the existing gaps in this research. Furthermore, we aim to, at the end of our thesis, construct a normative model that highlights, according to us and based on the findings in this study, some of the most important factors for successful repatriation.

1.4 Research question

Why is the repatriation process perceived successful, or unsuccessful, by Swedish companies and repatriates? What consequences does this perception lead to?

1.5 Delimitations

This thesis is delimited to studying the repatriation process in five Swedish companies. The choice of using Swedish companies originates from the fact that there, to the best of our knowledge, is a lack of research regarding repatriation in Sweden. Additionally, using Swedish companies in the case study seems relevant since Sweden has a high level of international businesses relative to the size of the country's economy (The Swedish-American Chambers of Commerce, n.d.). The empirical findings are based on the answers from one

representative of management and one or two repatriates from each company. The choice of these delimitations is based on that they minimize the scope of the study while simultaneously providing a base on which to make conclusions regarding repatriation in Swedish companies. It also provided us with a chance to investigate each company more closely. The focus in this thesis is to study the professional part of repatriation, related to work, since this part is considered the one the management has power to affect. Some aspects of repatriation, such as family life, are therefore not included in this study. Although we understand that these aspects largely influence the repatriation process, we do not believe that the company has much influence in these areas.

2. Methodology

The methods used when conducting the research are carefully described in order for other researchers to repeat the study and additionally to provide the research with a higher level of credibility.

2.1 The research process

We began with deciding on a topic, namely repatriation, and phrasing a preliminary research question and aim of the study. A multiple case study was the appropriate design of this thesis since we wanted to investigate a number of companies' repatriation processes by interviewing both company representatives and repatriates from each of the companies. In a case study one particular situation, place, person or organization is investigated, hence in a multiple case study numerous, in this case organizations, are examined (Bryman & Bell, 2014). Bryman and Bell (2014) state that the reason for using a multiple case study is usually the entailed ability to compare the different case studies. They say that a multiple case study is classified as a comparative research design when the researchers aim is to contrast the cases. Although there is some comparison between the cases in this thesis, the main focus is on investigating why the repatriation process is perceived successful or unsuccessful in different Swedish companies. Therefore, the design of the study is a multiple case study rather than a comparative research.

The way the study was performed, starting with existing literature and investigating if it could be applicable on empirical findings in a Swedish context, indicates that a deductive approach was used (Collis & Hussey, 2014). The deductive approach implies that the theory is the starting point from which it is decided what kind of empirical data will be selected (Bryman & Bell, 2014). The result received in form of the empirical data is then compared and analyzed in regard to the theoretical framework and the theory can lastly be altered if the results show a different reality (Bryman & Bell, 2014). The research process is described below in three different steps.

2.1.1 Step 1 - Literature research and company selection

The first step included reading of existing literature within the area of international human resource management and studies performed in different countries. We used secondary sources such as articles in databases and physical books provided by the university library (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Search words such as international human resource management, expatriation and repatriation, was used to find relevant articles on the subject. This in order to find appropriate theories and models which would be applicable in the study. During the literature review the research question and the aim were slightly altered since we gained a larger insight of the topic and learned more while reading the existing literature and studies. When reading, it was noticed that almost all the literature and studies highlighted the same aspects of repatriation and factors that affected the process of returning home after an international assignment. The most common aspects concerning the company's influence on repatriation was selected to design the theoretical framework of this thesis. Those aspects, in combination with factors we consider to be lacking in existing literature and studies, constitute the conceptual model we created, which was later used to analyze the empirical data. Factors, such as the repatriate's family, were not included since the focus of the study was the relationship between the company and the repatriate and what the company can do to improve the repatriation process. Furthermore, interview questions were prepared using the information from the literature and the studies, and relevant companies and repatriates were contacted.

Large and medium-sized companies were selected according to European large and medium-sized criteria, which are presented in Table 1 below. Both large and medium-sized companies were chosen in order to investigate if there exist substantial differences between them and also to make the findings of the report appealing and useful for a wider range of companies. Swedish companies were in focus in the study, since there, to the best of our knowledge, hardly exist any research on Swedish companies in regard to repatriation. It was decided that businesses are classified as Swedish if they were founded in Sweden and still have their headquarters located in Sweden.

Company size	Number of employees	Turnover	or	Balance Sheet Total
Large	> 250	> 50 million euros	or	> 43 million euros
Medium	50 – 250	10 – 50 million euros	or	10 – 43 million euros

Table 1: Company Criteria. Our compilation, based on the European Commission's criteria.

Inquiries were sent to 25 large and medium-sized Swedish companies, some in which we already had contacts who had returned from an international assignment, hence indicating that a convenience sampling was used (Bryman & Bell, 2014). The reason for this was that some difficulties in finding companies willing to participate was experienced. The initial emails that were sent included a presentation of us, information about the topic and the aim of the research and what was expected from the company in case they chose to engage in the research. Four companies answered that they simply were not interested in taking part in the study while two said that they were already involved in other research projects, and four did not send employees abroad. Moreover, ten companies did not reply at all. Five suitable companies wanted to participate and were selected to take part in the study. This indicates that a qualitative research method was used. Qualitative research is performed using a carefully selected small sample which is being studied in depth and typically aims to give indications of how it *could* be, not stating definite truths (Patton, 1990). The qualitative approach was chosen because it enabled us to conduct individual interviews with the participants and gain a deeper understanding of the repatriates' and the company representatives' answers through follow-up questions. Detailed answers and a deeper level of comprehension were necessary in order to investigate why the participating repatriates feel their repatriation was successful or not, and why the companies' policies are designed the way they are.

Although findings from a larger number of companies would have provide a better picture of what the repatriation process in Sweden looks like overall, five companies still present an example of it. Furthermore, it was decided that interviewing one repatriate from each of the five companies was going to be sufficient, even though from one company two repatriates participated. Interviewing two repatriates from one company created the possibility of comparing them to each other as well as demonstrate that personality can affect the perceptions of the repatriation process. Although a larger number of interviewed repatriates from each company might have contributed to higher validity, some of the selected

companies, due to few completed international assignments, could only provide one repatriate. The repatriates taking part in the study had returned to Sweden, and gone through the repatriation process, between one and a half and eight years ago. The time frame allowed the repatriates to have gone through the entire repatriation process and still have it relatively fresh in mind.

2.1.2 Step 2 - Interviews and empirical findings

Step number two consisted of conducting interviews with company representatives and repatriates at the different businesses. Simultaneously, the compiling of the empirical data gained from the interviews began and the literature was reviewed.

Interviews were conducted with representatives from the companies, responsible for the expatriation and repatriation process, and at least one repatriate from each company. Before the interviews an additional email, containing an interview guide, was sent to the interviewee. The interview guide displayed more closely within what areas the questions would be but did not contain the exact questions (Bryman & Bell, 2014). This in order for the participants to be able to prepare for the interview without becoming too set on one particular answer. The questions used in the interviews were based on the literature we read while compiling the theoretical framework. Questions posed to the repatriates were concentrated on their perceptions of the company's repatriation policy and of how they were treated upon return, and on what they thought was important for repatriation to be successful. Questions directed to the representative from the company focused on what repatriation policies, if any, they have and why they are designed the way they are. In composing the questions, making sure that there was a combination of direct and indirect questions (Bryman & Bell, 2014) was of importance since we wanted the interviewees to feel that they could speak openly and convey all their opinions.

The goal with the interviews was to gain as much information as possible in regard to the repatriation process and the perceptions of it. Therefore, semi-structured interviews were performed where follow-up questions were a possibility (Bryman & Bell, 2014). The interviews were conducted face-to-face, over Skype or over telephone and lasted between 30 minutes and 60 minutes. Our aim was to perform all interviews face-to-face or over Skype, since it gave us the possibility to see the interviewees' facial expressions and body language

(Bryman & Bell, 2014), but due to the interviewees' circumstances three interviews were held over telephone. Each interview started with a few practical questions, regarding anonymity and recording of the interview, and some background questions before it was continued by focusing more on the repatriation process. Moreover, the interviews were all in English in order to not lose any information in translation. However, the interviewees were presented with the choice to answer in Swedish if they did not feel comfortable expressing themselves in English. A total of eleven interviews were conducted, five with representatives from the companies and six with repatriates, between April 3rd and May 3rd. Information about the different interviews is found in Table 2 and 3 below. Repatriate A1 and Repatriate A2 repatriated to Company A and the same letter connection applies for the other repatriates and companies.

Interviewee	Company A	Company B	Company C	Company D	Company E
Interview manner	Telephone	Skype	Telephone	Skype	Skype
Length of interview (approx.)	30 min	40 min	40 min	30 min	30 min

Table 2: Company representatives interviewed. Our compilation.

Interviewee	Repatriate A1	Repatriate A2	Repatriate B	Repatriate C	Repatriate D	Repatriate E
Interview manner	Telephone	Skype	Face-to-face	Skype	Skype	Skype
Length of interview (approx.)	30 min	30 min	60 min	30 min	50 min	60 min

Table 3: Repatriates interviewed. Our compilation.

Both of us were present at all but one interview and it was decided in advance that one would pose the questions and the other one would take notes. It was believed that one person fully concentrating on what the interviewee said while the other was writing down the answers would give the best possibility to pose follow-up questions when felt needed. In order to use the material collected through the interviews in the best possible way they were all, with the interviewees' consent, recorded. Bryman and Bell (2014) argue that recording the interview

can intimidate the participants, making them less likely to give their honest opinion. However, since all interviewees were given the option of being anonymous it was not perceived as a problem. Simultaneously, the existing literature and studies were revisited since a better understanding of the theories and models could be achieved once having the information and knowledge the interviews provided in mind. We began to interpret and compile the answers from the first interviews before all of them were conducted since it is more likely that the understanding of the data is better shortly after the interview (Bryman & Bell, 2014).

2.1.3 Step 3 - Analysis of the empirical data and conclusion

In the third step, the empirical data was compiled, compared and analyzed, and conclusions were drawn when applying our conceptual model from the theoretical framework. Only primary data, which is collected from initial sources such as interviews (Collis & Hussey, 2014), was used in our empirical section since we felt that the personal interviews provided us with sufficient material to answer the research question. When compiling the data, we listened to the recordings of the interviews and although both Bryman and Bell (2014) and Greener (2008) argue that it is best to transcribe the interviews, they were not fully transcribed, since the language the respondents used was not in focus in the thesis and none of the participants requested a transcript for approval. We did however, quite carefully write down the interviewees' answers while listening to the recordings. The text that in this way was created was used as a foundation for the empirical chapter of the thesis.
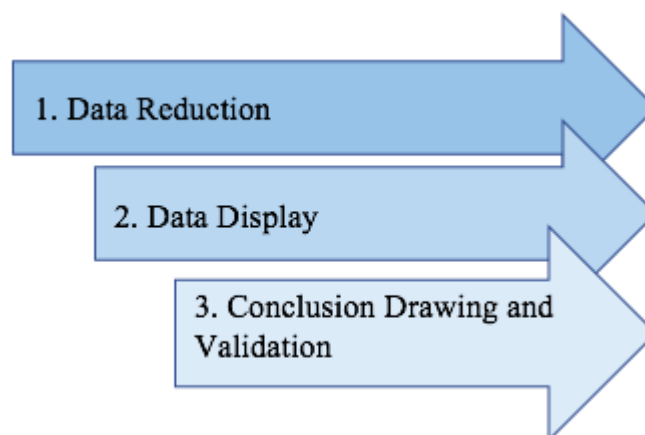
Figure 1: Qualitative Analysis. Our illustration based on Collis and Hussey's (2014, p. 158) interpretation of a model by Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 12).

When analyzing the data, a model by Miles and Huberman (1994) was used (Figure 1) since it clearly shows the different steps of the analyzing process and is easy to follow. The first step in the model is data reduction and it implies that the data is focused and scaled down to only be relevant for the aspects present in the thesis. This was done throughout the entire research process but maybe more specifically when compiling the data and trying to find information in the interviews which would answer our research question. Additionally, we sent emails with follow-up questions to the participants during this time as we realized that further information was needed. The second step is called data display in which a constructed presentation of the reduced data is made (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The information we were left with after the reduction was organized and introduced in a structured way. This presentation of data was eventually used to draw conclusions in step three of the qualitative analysis model, called conclusion drawing and validation (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The conclusions were made when we utilized the different factors in our conceptual model and investigated if the theory was applicable and if the same influencers affect the successfulness of the repatriation process in Swedish companies.

Lastly, based on the suggested improvements the repatriates and the companies provided and factors the repatriates said contributed to the successfulness of their repatriation, a normative model was constructed.

2.2 Credibility

It is important to maintain a high level of credibility when conducting research and this report, in regard to its trustworthiness, will consider reliability, validity and a critical review of the sources used.

2.2.1 Reliability and Validity

The credibility of a research report can be measured through reliability and validity (Collis & Hussey, 2013). According to Collis and Hussey (2013) and Goetz and LeCompte (1982) reliability is reached when a study or research can be replicated, while validity concerns how well the conclusions of the thesis endure criticism and if they can be used in different contexts. Moreover, validity can be measured by considering if the study answers the research

question and if what is supposed to be investigated is in fact investigated (Collis & Hussey, 2013).

In order to achieve reliability, the methods used and choices made are carefully described, and the questions posed at interviews with the company representatives and repatriates are attached. The fact that all participants are anonymous can counteract the attempt to make the research reliable since it makes it difficult to find the same companies and repatriates for a replication of the study. On the contrary, anonymity could also contribute to more truthful answers. Moreover, the Code of Ethics (in Bryman & Bell, 2014) recommends that a third party revise the thesis before publishing it in order to make sure that no one is hurt by the information it contains. In regard to this and to validity, the thesis has been reviewed by other students and a supervisor before final submission. Furthermore, contributing to higher validity, the findings of the report can be of use for numerous different businesses since the participating companies are not limited to one certain sector or size. Lastly, the theoretical framework was reviewed to ensure that it only contained information relevant to the research question and the interview questions were based on the updated framework.

2.2.2 Critical review of sources

Close to all the sources used in this thesis are scientific journals and textbooks. The sources have all been carefully reviewed and read with objective and critical eyes to achieve high relevance and ensure trustworthy information throughout the report. Although some of the sources are written over 20 years ago they are still believed to contain relevant information since many newer sources reference them to gain support for their own findings.

2.3 Ethical principles

According to Bryman and Bell (2014) and Collis and Hussey (2013), ethical principles and rules often include voluntariness, integrity, confidentiality and anonymity. Moreover, sharing information about the aim of the study with participants and only using the information gathered for our ongoing research are important ethical factors (Bryman & Bell, 2014).

Upon initial contact with companies and repatriates, inquires of voluntary participation in the study was included and before conducting interviews the interviewees were provided with the

aim of the research. At the same time, they were given the choice of being anonymous. Although Bryman and Bell (2014) note that it can be difficult to keep the participants completely anonymous in qualitative studies, they argue that it is important to work hard to make sure that respondents are as anonymous as possible to prevent any harming consequences for them. According to the American Academy of Management's Code of Ethics (in Bryman & Bell, 2014) anonymity must be assured if the participant requests it. During the interviews the participants were assured that their answers were only going to be used for this study. These things were done to ensure that the ethical principles were followed.

2.4 Limitations to the selected method

A limitation to the method is that repatriates' loyalty to the corporation might affect the answers they provide. Additionally, the company might be worried that the information they present in the interviews could harm the company and its reputation, hence providing answers that are not completely accurate. Therefore, the interviewees were given the choice of being anonymous. Furthermore, the memory of the repatriates can be a restriction since people tend to forget details as time passes. For that reason, a time limit for how long it had been since the repatriates returned to Sweden was set. Even so, the way the companies handle repatriation can have changed since the repatriates went through the process. Moreover, the exact same repatriation process can be perceived and experienced differently due to the repatriates' personalities.

The qualitative research method has received criticism from quantitative researchers regarding transparency, subjectivity and replicability (Bryman & Bell, 2014). Transparency since they argue that the method used can be hard to follow and leave out important factors. Through carefully describing the procedure used in this thesis we argue that this problem can be overpowered. Qualitative research is said to be too subjective since the researches develop personal bonds with the interviewees and only investigate subjects they argue is important (Bryman & Bell, 2014). Due to companies becoming increasingly global they might be sending a greater number of employees abroad hence we believe that repatriation is a topic of interest for numerous people. Lastly, some researchers state that qualitative research is hard to replicate since it is unstructured and to a large degree affected by the researcher's opinions and interests (Bryman & Bell, 2014). This is overcome by

describing the method in detail and by arguing that we are not the only ones interested in the topic of repatriation.

3. Theory field and literature review

In the following section, previous literature and studies regarding repatriation will be reviewed. The results and conclusions from these sources will be presented with each paragraph focusing on specific factors which affect repatriation. Together these aspects and our conceptual model will constitute the theoretical framework for this report.

3.1 Factors influencing repatriation

Numerous authors believe, or have concluded through research, that focus on repatriation must be present in all phases of expatriation, i.e. before the expatriate goes abroad, during the international assignment and upon return, to make the repatriation process as successful as possible (Briscoe et al., 2012; Jassawalla et al., 2004; Dowling et al., 2008). Among others, Jassawalla et al. (2004) and Dowling et al. (1994) have constructed models that view repatriation as a process rather than as a single event and emphasize the importance of pre-planning in order to achieve effective repatriation. Jassawalla et al. (2004) even state that aspects regarding the repatriates' return should be decided already prior to their expatriation. However, despite the existence of these models, assistance from the home office during the entire process is not always provided in practice (Bossard & Peterson, 2005; Jassawalla et al., 2004). Vermond (2001) provides a possible reason why when citing a study performed by KPMG, stating that almost half of the companies participating start planning for repatriation only a few months before the return or do not plan at all. Moreover, the author found that there was a resistance from the management towards accepting that it can be hard to come home. Most of the different factors listed below, which affect repatriation, are therefore discussed in regard to the concept of focus on the repatriation process before, during and after the repatriate's assignment abroad.

3.1.1 Formal policies and repatriation programs

Briscoe et al. (2012) state that a prerequisite for companies to reap the benefits of what the repatriates have learnt abroad and to share this knowledge in the organization, is to design well-functioning mentoring programs and training sessions. Also, according to the study by Black, Gregersen and Mendenhall (1999) the repatriates themselves believe that repatriation programs are useful. However, according to the findings by both Briscoe et al. (2012) and by

Bossard and Peterson (2005), very few American multinational corporations have formal policies or training programs for handling repatriation. And where the programs exist they tend to be inefficient and unhelpful. One aspect of a repatriation program that is considered important is to have a sponsor, who is personally involved in the repatriate's success, or a mentor, who only provide information (Jassawalla et al., 2004; Dowling et al., 2008). However, despite this theoretical opinion, having a sponsor/mentor in practice is rare according to Bossard & Peterson (2005).

Dowling et al. (2008) argue that one way to improve the repatriation process is to invite the repatriates themselves to help with creating and improving the repatriation program. This could ensure that the policies are relevant as well as show the repatriates that the company value their opinions and their help. Based on their own and other previous studies, Dowling et al. (2008) present a table with the aspects a repatriation program should include or take into consideration and these will be listed in Table 4 below.

Preparation, physical relocation and transition information (what the company will help with)
Financial and tax assistance (including benefit and tax changes; loss of overseas allowance)
Re-entry position and career path assistance
Reverse culture shock (including family disorientation)
School systems and children's education, and adaptation
Workplace changes (such as corporate culture, structure, decentralization)
Stress management, communication-related training
Establishing networking opportunities
Help in forming new social contacts

Table 4: Topics in a repatriation program. Our compilation, based on the table by Dowling et al. (2008), p. 206.

3.1.2 Expectations and motives

According to Cox et al. (2013) there exists a connection between the repatriates' expectations upon return, their turnover intentions and their feelings of a successful repatriation. What expectations the repatriate has affect how he/she perceive the repatriation process (Riusala & Suutari, 2000). The main problem is that the repatriate's expectations upon return often differ from what is provided in reality (Cox et al., 2013), regarding for example promotion (Bossard & Peterson, 2005). If the repatriation does not meet the repatriate's expectations, he/she is likely to feel dissatisfied and might leave the organization. Another problem is the difference in motives between the company and the repatriate regarding the expatriation process. The company's motives for sending an expatriate abroad is for example to compete on a global scale and to bring the company culture to all parts of the organization, rather than that the repatriate should engage in the local culture. However, the motives of the expatriate are usually to develop, both personally and professionally, through involvement in the local culture. It can therefore exist a gap in the motives for the expatriate and the company and to reduce this gap is a key for a successful repatriation (Paik et al., 2002). The expectations are influenced by the repatriate's personal characteristics as well as the characteristics of the international assignment. One way to ensure attainable expectations is through communication and career planning between the home office and the repatriate (Cox et al., 2013; Dowling et al., 2008). The company should be aware of the repatriate's expectations before, during and after the foreign assignment in order to make sure that they are realistic, being met (Cox et al., 2013) and are in accordance with the company's expectations (Paik et al., 2002). Dowling et al. (2008) argue that differences in expectations can be reduced through re-entry counselling sessions called debriefing. Even so, evidence of debriefing in practice is scarce (Bossard and Peterson, 2005; Riusala & Suutari, 2000).

3.1.3 Job arrangements

In a study by Bossard and Peterson (2005) results showed that American expatriates are often sent on international assignments without knowing if there will be a job available for them at the company upon return. In another study by Peterson, Napier and Shul-Shim (1996) it was concluded that the same was true for British repatriates while German and Japanese repatriates were assured a job in the home country. Many of the American respondents said that they wanted to know what job they were going to have in the home country before going

back home (Bossard and Peterson, 2005). This statement is supported by a Finnish study conducted by Riusala & Suutari (2000), in which it was discovered that the participating repatriates considered job arrangements after returning to the home country the most important factor for a successful repatriation process. A clear job description before going abroad, or at least a few months before repatriation, was believed to ease the process of coming back home. Additionally, career management and career planning was found to have a positive effect on repatriates' contentment with the repatriation process (Vidal, Valle & Aragon, 2008) and their turnover intentions (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001).

3.1.4 Use of knowledge attained abroad

Common for most of the studies performed within repatriation, and articles regarding the same topic, are the findings and conclusions stating that companies do not fully take advantage of the new knowledge and skills the repatriates have acquired during their employment abroad (Bossard & Peterson, 2005; Jassawalla et al., 2004; Harvey & Novicevic in: Cox et al., 2013). Support can be found in a study by Bossard and Peterson (2005), where the participating American repatriates experienced that they had gained new expertise and insights during the time spent abroad but did not perceive management to value the new-found knowledge and felt that they were not using the knowledge and skills in the position they received when returning to the home country. On the contrary, Johnston (1991), when studying repatriates from the UK, concluded that the participants used the knowledge in their jobs in the home country. In a study by Riusala and Suutari (2000), a job where new-found skills were utilized was considered to ease the repatriation process.

Global companies need to make better use of the knowledge and international experiences repatriates acquire on international assignments in order to keep their market position and remain a global competitor (Briscoe et al., 2012). However, support for the opposite behavior, namely companies being indifferent to repatriates international competences, is found in numerous studies and articles (Bossard & Peterson, 2005; Briscoe et al., 2012; Jassawalla et al., 2004; Harvey & Novicevic in: Cox et al., 2013). Briscoe et al. (2012) argue that managers and colleagues recognize and value domestic knowledge instead of international knowledge since they do not have international experiences themselves. This in combination with lack of long term planning, due to some companies, albeit unconsciously, applying the concept of "out of sight, out of mind", are possible reasons for firms not valuing and utilizing repatriates'

significant expertise. Repatriates feeling undervalued and holding positions at the company in which they are not able to use the knowledge and skills they learnt while working abroad can cause the repatriates to look for jobs elsewhere (Reiche & Harzing, 2015). A possible improvement of this problem is presented by Briscoe et al. (2012), who state that international assignees with the possibility to visit the home country during their foreign assignment can share their knowledge more easily and reduce the risk of being forgotten.

3.1.5 Development

The development the expatriate achieve abroad could be both personal and regarding his/her career. However, in practice, the international experience rarely improves the employee's professional development and career advancement (Bossard & Peterson 2005; Jassawalla et al., 2004). This finding has large negative implications since many employees accept foreign assignments in order to advance in their careers (Bossard & Peterson 2005). One reason for why the professional development of the repatriates is slowed down is because the company fail to recognize the value of their foreign experience and does not evaluate their progress (Briscoe et al., 2012). In the study by Riusala & Suutari (2000) as well as the one by Jassawalla et al. (2004) the authors found that few of the interviewed repatriates received support regarding their career development and did not know prior to departure what influence an assignment abroad would have on their future. The Finnish repatriates felt that they had developed by being abroad, but that they didn't get a chance to evaluate and demonstrate their new skills in their home organization (Riusala & Suutari, 2000).

Sometimes the repatriate's colleagues in the home country have advanced in their careers while the repatriate has been abroad (Vermond, 2001) which might cause the repatriate to perceive his/her foreign assignment as a waste if he/she lose the chance of a promotion and must come back to the same position as he/she held before expatriation (Bossard & Peterson 2005; Jassawalla et al., 2004, Briscoe et al., 2012). The study by Riusala and Suutari (2000) showed that a majority of the Finnish repatriates were assured a job at a similar level upon return, as opposed to the study by Bossard and Peterson (2005) where some American repatriates were demoted upon return, getting lower positions in the home country than before the foreign assignment. What position the repatriate is given in the home office shows how important the management regard an assignment abroad to be. If the position is a promotion, the repatriates' colleagues and the repatriate himself/herself might interpret the international

assignment as a career advancement, and vice versa if the repatriate is demoted or discharged. The last-mentioned scenario could discourage other employees from working abroad in the future (Dowling et al. 1994). If the repatriates are dissatisfied with their future possible career development in the home organization, or feel that there exist bigger possibilities for advancement in another company, they might leave the organization (Bossard & Peterson 2005). However, not all findings regarding development is negative. Unlike the previously stated results from the US and Finland, a study from the UK (Johnston, 1991) shows that expatriates believed the home office would use their new skills upon return and that the foreign assignment could lead to career advancement at home.

3.1.6 Status and pay

When an employee works abroad he/she often finds it to be exciting and developmental since it includes new working assignments in a new environment with new colleagues. The expatriate is often valued for his/her unique perspective and the knowledge he/she brings from the home country (Briscoe et al., 2012). Usually the expatriate therefore receives more responsibility (Dowling et al., 1994; Bossard & Peterson, 2005) and higher status, called "kingpin", in the host country (Dowling et al., 1994; Dowling et al., 2008). While being abroad the employee often receives more compensation than he/she did at home and can therefore have a better standard of living in the host country (Briscoe et al., 2012). Due to the mentioned benefits, the assignment abroad can be considered a promotion. During repatriation, the employee must adjust back to the responsibility, status (Jassawalla et al., 2004; Dowling et al., 1994) and living standards in the home country (Briscoe et al., 2012), which usually is a negative experience for the repatriate and can cause readjustment problems (Dowling et al., 1994). According to a study performed by Riusala and Suutari (2000) a suitable living standard and salary after repatriation are among the four most important factors for a successful repatriation process. However, there exist no unified proof that poor compensation in the home country undoubtedly lead to high turnover upon repatriation since several studies have reached different results in this matter (Vidal, Valle & Aragon, 2007; Gregersen & Black, 1996; Gomez-Mejia & Balkin in: Cox et al., 2013).

3.1.7 Managing re-entry and reverse culture shock

According to Johnston's article (1991), and the research performed by Riusala and Suutari (2000), the majority of the studied repatriates experienced a reverse culture shock when returning to their home country. Gullahorn and Gullahorn (in: Reiche & Harzing, 2015) argue that the challenges repatriates face upon return are comparable to the ones they must handle when moving to a new country. Furthermore, the reverse culture shock can sometimes be perceived as more demanding than the one experienced when going abroad. Therefore, a similar training program as before going abroad is needed upon return (Briscoe et al., 2012) but companies usually fail to understand the importance of this (Dowling et al., 1994).

Numerous factors affect the severity of re-entry and reverse culture shock. These factors can be divided into two groups, i.e. job related factors and social factors. Examples of job related factors are career anxiety, work adjustment and loss of status and pay, while the social factors include family adjustment, social networks and the effect on the partner's career (Dowling et al., 2008). In addition, length of assignment is said to affect readjustment upon return. The longer the international assignee has been abroad, the more changes could have taken place in the home office, which could possibly have a negative effect on readjustment (Cox et al., 2013). Brislin & Van Buren (in: Cox et al., 2013, p. 7) state that "When employees live and immerse themselves in a foreign environment for an extended period, they are likely to adopt patterns of thinking and behaving that are characteristic of the foreign culture, creating stress and readjustment difficulties when they return home". Johnston (1991), however, did not share this belief, saying that differences in culture and country do not have an impact on readjustment. Instead she suggests that personality of the repatriate, the characteristics of the assignment and the level of assistance when repatriating are the largest influencers. The aspect of personality is supported by Cox et al. (2013), who in their article write that individual characteristics influence how repatriates perceive their repatriation, which in turn affects readjustment. Moreover, they argue that a lack of measures provided by the home office to ease readjustment could increase employee turnover.

3.2 Consequences of how repatriation is handled

Evidence of a connection between how the different factors that influence repatriation are handled and consequences such as repatriate turnover rates and the degree of severity in

finding employees willing to accept an international assignment, can be found in the literature reviewed (Cox et al., 2013; Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001; Dowling et al., 1994; Reiche & Harzing, 2015). Companies must make sure that the repatriates stay with the company to receive all the advantages of sending an employee abroad (Briscoe et al., 2012).

If repatriates regard their repatriation as unsuccessful they are more likely to search for another job shortly after returning home (Cox et al., 2013). Especially companies in the US have problems with retaining repatriates (Bossard & Peterson, 2005). According to Reiche and Harzing (2015), the company lose both human capital, in form of knowledge and skills the repatriate hold, and financial capital, in form of investments in sending the employee on an international assignment, if the employee leaves the company. The lost financial capital is usually a rather large sum since expatriation, due to high compensation, is an expensive process (Cox et al., 2013; Hill, 2014). Furthermore, Reiche and Harzing (2015) inform that the loss of employees and their expertise can cause knowledge spillover which may benefit competitors. Additionally, repatriate turnover possibly has harming effects on finding other employees willing to take on an international assignment (Kamoche, 1997). Dowling et al. (2008) argue that this could impair the company's foreign operations.

In today's society, people, Americans even more so than Scandinavians (Paik et al., 2002), are less likely to be loyal to one single company and to stay with the same company their entire career (Parker & Inkson, 1999). Moreover, as companies are becoming progressively global, the attractiveness of employees with international expertise increase, causing job offers from outside of the company to become more common (Suutari & Brewster, 2003; Cox et al., 2013; Lazarova & Tarique, 2005). Briscoe et al. (2012) as well as Harzing and Christensen (2004) argue that, not only returning home earlier than planned and not finishing the assignment abroad, but also repatriate turnover should be considered a type of expatriation failure. Some multinational corporations are trying to cut down on the costs of these expatriation failures by using short-term assignment instead of sending expatriates to more permanently live and work abroad, developing better processes for selecting expatriates with high openness towards international careers, give them better preparation for the foreign assignment, provide more support services abroad for both the expatriate and his/her family, and improve the repatriation processes (Briscoe et al., 2012).

3.3 Our conceptual model

After reviewing existing literature and previous studies, several recurrent factors influencing repatriation can be noted. Certain authors such as Gregersen and Black (1996), Bossard and Peterson (2005), Jassawalla et al. (2004), Dowling et al. (1994), Dowling et al. (2008), and Riusala and Suutari (2000) are prominent in many of the studies and articles regarding repatriation. They all cover, according to them, essential factors to repatriation and provide evidence that for example job arrangement, development and use of knowledge attained abroad are important factors to consider when the employees return to the home country. Since these aspects receive much focus in existing literature we reason that they largely influence the repatriation process, and therefore they are included in the conceptual model. Other elements such as status and pay and the repatriate's own responsibility during repatriation are, according to us, also important but receive less, and the second next to none, attention in the studied material. As a result of this, those factors are also included in the model. The most prominent authors for each factor can be found in the model.

While reading the literature we got the impression that depending on how companies handle the repatriation process, positive or negative consequences can follow. One consequence frequently discussed in the literature is defection upon repatriation. Another consequence, that is mentioned less, is the effect it can have on recruiting employees for future jobs abroad. Due to companies' increasing need to be global in order to be competitive (Dowling et al., 1994), we reason that it should be imperative for companies to make sure that repatriation within the company has positive consequences. Accordingly, a connection between the influencing factors and the consequences is displayed in the model.

The presence of the companies' perspectives regarding repatriation, which we consider relevant, is perceived to be lacking throughout most the literature and studies reviewed. Therefore, the model is constructed in a manner which enables it to be applied from the perspective of both the repatriate and the company separately. The idea behind the conceptual model is to weigh each influencer equally when applying it on the empirical data and when analyzing the results, to investigate if they all have the same importance for repatriation or not.
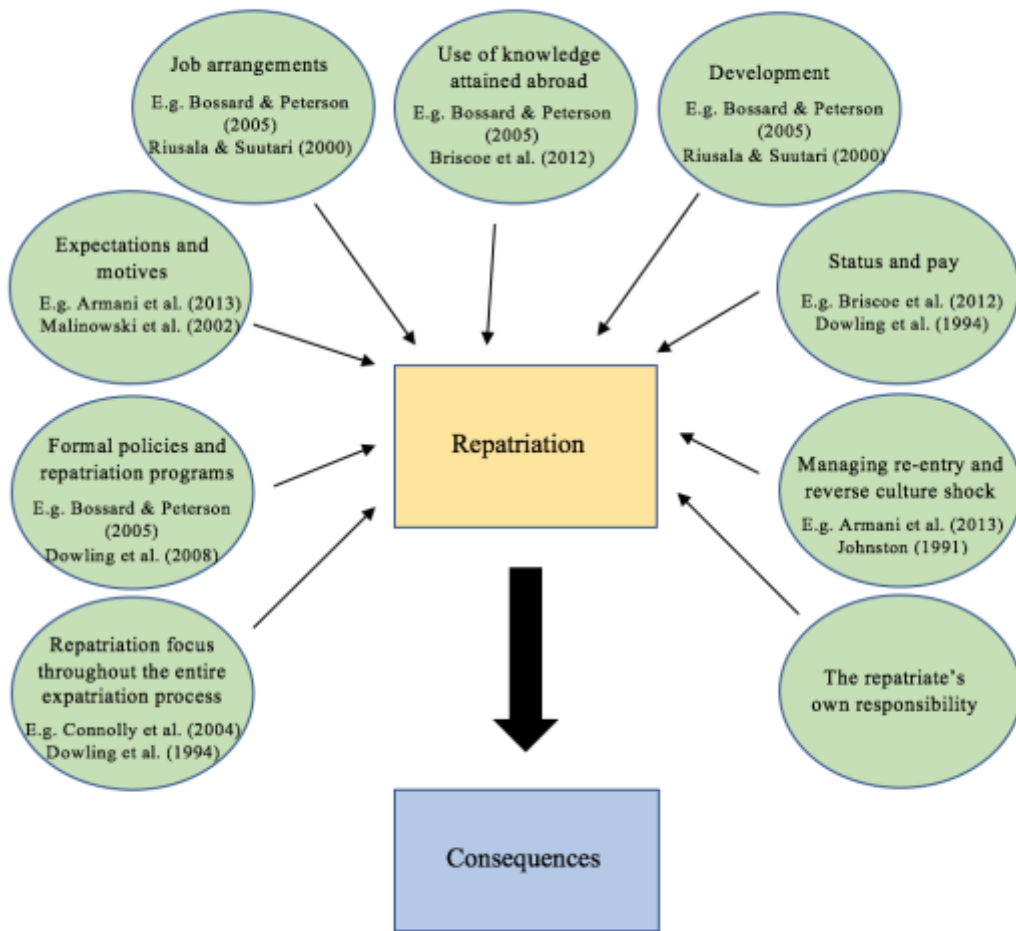
Figure 2: Repatriation - Influencers & Consequences, version 1. Our illustration.

4. Empirical findings

In this part of the thesis the replies received in the interviews are presented. A compilation of answers on background questions, such as titles, time abroad and what country the repatriates expatriated to, are found below in Table 5 and Table 6. The empirical data is presented using the influencers and consequences of our conceptual model as a structure.

Interviewee	Company A	Company B	Company C	Company D	Company E
Company size	Large	Medium	Large	Medium	Large
Title	Team Manager	Sales Director	Group Global Mobility Manager	CEO	Head of International Assignment

Table 5: Participating company representatives. Our compilation.

Interviewee	Repatriate A1	Repatriate A2	Repatriate B	Repatriate C	Repatriate D	Repatriate E
Country / Area	East Asia	Japan	Spain	Australia	Hong Kong	Singapore
Time abroad	4 years & 6 months	4 years	6 years	2 years & 8 months	7 years	5 years
Title abroad	Local Marketing Manager	Distribution Service Manager	Head of Technical Department	Production Unit Manager	Global Sourcing Manager	Head of IT for Asia

Table 6: Participating repatriates. Our compilation.

4.1 Factors influencing repatriation

4.1.1 Formal policies and repatriation programs

Company A, Company C and Company E are, out of the interviewed companies, the most experienced in sending employees abroad since they have been doing it for approximately 50 years, 30 years and 40 years respectively. Despite this, only Company E has formal policies for handling repatriation. In Company A the reason for not having formal policies is that the foreign assignment end while the employee is still abroad and he/she therefore do not necessarily come back to the office in Sweden. This choice of repatriation system is based on

the company's belief in the "do it yourself" - mentality and that the employees are responsible for their own development. The Team Manager in Company A has ambivalent feelings towards this way of handling repatriation and stated that it is a transparent and honest system since they do not give the repatriate a false sense of security, which might be the case in companies with more "traditional" repatriation processes, but at the same time it might imply a bigger risk for the employee himself/herself. She said that "there can be fancy documents but nothing to come back to". Moreover, the representative from Company A explained that this system is currently changing towards a more "traditional" approach with a home-base and employment in Sweden. This statement is supported by Repatriate A1 who said that the system is changing since the previous way of handling repatriation was not enough for all the employees and some, for example Repatriate A2, wanted more support from the company. Despite not having any formal policies, Repatriate A1 was satisfied with the support she received.

Company C on the other hand, has a checklist for both managers and employees during repatriation and thinks this is sufficient when handling the process. The Group Global Mobility Manager believes that no need for formal policies exists since the repatriates know that they will come back to their local job in Sweden. The checklist contains different practical factors they need to consider upon return, such as getting back into the system, insurances, tax assistance and moving household goods, and it was developed based on the company's own experience regarding repatriation and certain requests from repatriates. The company also has procedures to follow when sending employees on short term assignments, which last between three and five months, since they have increased the amount of these lately.

In Company E's policies the different parties', the company's and the repatriate's, responsibilities are stated. The Head of International Assignments explained that the company for example offer temporary housing upon return and at least six months before repatriation initiate a discussion regarding what will happen once the repatriate is back in Sweden. Moreover, Repatriate E added that the company makes all the arrangements necessary to enter Sweden again. According to Company E, they looked into studies and surveys to find out what is considered best practice regarding repatriation when designing the policies, and then adjusted them a bit after the conditions of the company. Repatriate E argued that having policies is important because it makes things clear and fair and it can prevent arguments.

Company E agrees that it is important to have some guidelines for how repatriation should be handled but said that since every repatriation is different there must also be room for individuality. Furthermore, Company E, like Company C, mentioned that there has been an increase in short term assignments within the company.

Company B and Company D have started to send expatriates more recently but out of the two, Company D is a bit more experienced and has a few formal policies compared to Company B who has none. The policies in Company D for example concern help with housing and taxes if needed and a phone and a car is provided upon return. However, despite the fact that these policies did not exist when Repatriate D returned to the home office almost seven years ago, he stated that the company still helped with for example signing for a phone and computer since all records of the repatriate had been deleted five years after expatriating. According to Repatriate D, this help from the company is the most important aspect for a successful repatriation. Moreover, the CEO of the company explained that the repatriation process is quite individualized rather than having many formal policies. He also added that the repatriates can just ask if there is something else they need help with since Company D is rather small. This statement is partly supported by Repatriate D who said that the company helped if there was a need for it but otherwise he was expected to manage the repatriation on his own. Further, Company D explained that the repatriation policies are designed the way they are because the CEO has been an expatriate himself and knows from own experiences that the process of coming home is better when policies are implemented. Repatriate D also believes that it is good that they have formal policies now, even though he received much of the same help without policies, since he thinks it otherwise can be hard for repatriates to know what they can expect from the company. Therefore, Repatriate D believes that it is good that former expatriates help develop the policies since they know what assistance a repatriate desires.

The first repatriate that was ever sent from Company B, Repatriate B, went abroad seven years ago by his own initiative and not because the company planned it. The Sales Director at the company stated that it was not until three to four years ago that the company started to consider expatriation as a part of the company's strategy and two more planned expatriates, who are yet to come home, were sent. Company B has therefore only recently started discussions regarding establishing a program for expatriation within the company, however, not one for the repatriation process. Even so, the Sales Director at Company B now realizes

that this aspect also must be included in the discussion. Having a structured way of handling repatriation in form of a policy or a program makes the process better according to Company B. The company will talk to experienced sales partners when developing the program and it will consist of guidelines, since the Sales Director argued that there are many things to think about, but still be individual due to the severity in finding one way that works for every repatriate. Repatriate B said that the lack of policies during his return was not a problem since people within the company help each other even without formal policies and because they are like family he received all the help he needed.

4.1.2 Repatriation focus throughout the entire expatriation process

Common for all companies interviewed is the lack of focus on repatriation from the start of the expatriation process. Three of the interviewed repatriates, as well as one company representative, stated that there currently is more focus on expatriation than repatriation and that going abroad therefore was handled better than going home. Repatriate A2 argued that this contributed to that he experienced stress regarding his repatriation since it was hard to get in touch with people at home and arrange meetings for his return due to the large time difference. According to Repatriate A2, the most important thing for a successful repatriation would be to receive information of what the process of coming home will look like.

The only thing regarding repatriation that is promised and planned before expatriation is a job in Sweden after the international assignment, from four of the five companies. Apart from this, the companies, at the earliest stage, start to plan for repatriation first a while before the repatriate is leaving the host country and continue to help, more or less, with repatriation until the repatriates have been home for a while. An example of this is Company C, who only provides their repatriates and their managers with the checklist right before the return home. Moreover, Company B does not yet have any formal policies for handling repatriation but the Sales Director of the company believes that when such policies are enforced it is sufficient to only enforce them at the time of coming home and not through the entire process, since "our feeling is that, when they [the repatriates] come home, then they just come home...". Furthermore, Repatriate A2 and the representatives from Company B and Company E were the only ones who mentioned that the repatriates have the possibility to visit the home country a few times during the assignment abroad.

The repatriates from Company B and Company D stated that they had continuous contact with the home office while abroad but that they did not talk much about repatriation. Company A on the other hand, did not initiate any contact with the expatriate. This was also the case for Repatriate C who stated that although he did have contact with the home organization when being abroad, it was his own responsibility to pursue it. Company C however said that they encourage the employee to keep contact during the time abroad and to book meetings with managers, in which they can plan for the return, when they visit Sweden. So does Company E. Furthermore, it was only the repatriates from Company A who had mentors during their time abroad and they believe that it was an important aspect for both their personal and professional life.

4.1.3 Expectations and motives

The reasons for the companies sending employees abroad are similar and involve creating new sites, spreading knowledge and the company's culture and values to other parts of the world, and the need of an employee to develop. Moreover, the CEO of Company D and the Head of International Assignments at Company E added that Swedish employees are sent abroad when local employees do not hold the skills required for the job. Lastly, Company B explained that being a company that send expatriates attracts new employees.

The repatriates' motives for accepting an international assignment were quite comparable. Most of them mentioned interest in the country and the excitement of living and working abroad as main motivators. Repatriate D, compared to the other repatriates, did not have a job before he expatriated due to difficulties in finding one within his field and this pushed him towards accepting an international assignment.

The repatriates' expectations on coming home included expectations on the positions they were going to receive upon return and the use of their new-found knowledge. Their expectations were realized to different degrees. Repatriate A2's expectations to use his new knowledge was realized while the same expectations held by Repatriate D were not. Repatriate C's main expectation on a higher position upon return was not quite realized but he was aware that this might have been the result of the foreign assignment finishing four months before scheduled. Moreover, Repatriate E stated that the reality was even better than his expectations but that it could be due to him doing many things on his own. Company E

argued that "it is also extremely important to continue to set the expectations in the right way. That is always, both when people ... leave and when they come home, so everybody knows what will happen, why it will happen, who is responsible and so on".

4.1.4 Job arrangements

There were some differences regarding if there was a job in the home organization after completing the international assignment. Company A said that the employment with the company ends when the time abroad is over and therefore there is no promise of a job upon return. This was also shown in Repatriate A2's answer when saying that it is up to the repatriate to apply for the job he/she wants. He also believes that the fear of not having a job to return to could stop people from going abroad. However, the Team Manager of Company A said that not assuring a job upon return has never been a problem since the company is growing and often focuses on international recruitment, hence job opportunities in Company A almost always exist for the expatriates that want to return to Sweden. Nevertheless, this way of handling repatriation is about to change according to Repatriate A2. Repatriate A1 said that first two months before coming home she knew that there would be a job for her in Sweden. "It would have been nice to know a bit longer in advance", Repatriate A1 said.

The other four companies all answered that they have an agreement with the repatriate stating that a job in the home country will be available upon return, although only two of them specified that it would be a job at a similar level or position. The CEO from Company D argued that it is important to have a job upon return and "that they [the repatriates] are accepted to the old organization they come from and that they have a place to fulfill" to achieve a successful repatriation. Therefore, the employees are still employed in the home organization and have a job waiting for them when they come back. Expatriates in Company E are also employed in the home country while abroad, hence a job upon return is basically guaranteed. However, neither Company C nor Company E promise a specific position since things change fast in the organization and it is difficult to know what will happen in the future. Instead Company C starts discussing the job aspects with the repatriate twelve to six months before the return. However, Repatriate C said that he had no idea what he would work with until rather close to going back home, maybe because his assignment was finished early. According to Repatriate D, there was not a job upon return included in the contract he signed before going abroad but the policies have changed since then. This did not cause any stress

according to Repatriate D who said that before returning home he did know that there was a job for him in the organization.

4.1.5 Use of knowledge attained abroad

Common for the companies interviewed was that they all valued the knowledge the repatriates attained while on their international assignment. The majority of them said that they try to find positions for the returning employees in which they can use their new knowledge. This aspect was agreed upon by all the repatriates as being important, and by Repatriate A1 as being the single most important factor for a successful repatriation. She said that "it is really important especially to be able to use the talent of that person coming from that country and to use that [the knowledge attained abroad] back in the Swedish organization". While the Group Global Mobility Manager from Company C emphasized that using the knowledge gained abroad contributes to employees feeling important, the Sales Director from Company B and the CEO from company D mentioned that repatriates utilizing the new-found knowledge in the home organization is a return on the investment the company made in sending them abroad.

Even so, the knowledge used in practice was quite different. Repatriate B said he mainly use the native language and knowledge about the country he had worked in while Repatriate C answered that it is primarily the knowledge regarding the tasks he performed abroad that is used in the job in Sweden. Repatriate C said, "we had to close down a factory in Australia and now I'm working with closing down factories". Repatriate A1, Repatriate A2 and Repatriate E said that the company definitely used and valued their new knowledge while Repatriate D answered that he did not get a chance to use the knowledge and skills attained on the foreign assignment. The repatriate said that although it was disappointing not using the expertise of the Asian market, it was also good in a way since he needed to learn more about the European market.

4.1.6 Development

The Group Global Mobility Manager in Company C and the Head of International Assignments in Company E believe that one purpose of sending employees abroad is for them to develop and later to use their new knowledge in the company in Sweden. Company C

therefore stated that, although a higher position is not guaranteed upon return, it is considered very important for both the repatriates individually and the company as a whole, and Company E said that the employees who have developed abroad usually receive a higher position upon return. Furthermore, Company B and D sign a deal with the repatriate that they receive a similar position in Sweden as they had before. The Team Manager from Company A believes that if you do a good job abroad you could find a new, good position within the company after the international assignment. Company C also stated that the position the repatriates receive upon return depends on who they are. If they are high performers and are developing, they are offered a good position. Moreover, Company E sometimes shorten or extend the international assignment if a desirable job opportunity emerges before or after the scheduled return.

There exist some differences between the repatriates in regard to what position they got in Sweden after repatriation and if this position was higher, lower or similar to the one they held before. Repatriate A1 got a similar position upon return compared to Repatriate A2, Repatriate B, Repatriate D and Repatriate E who reported that they got higher positions back in Sweden. However, Repatriate E said that it was he who actively networked for the position. Moreover, Repatriate B believe that if he had come back to the same position as before, he would have felt depressed and that he had not advanced in his career during the time of the overseas assignment. This statement is supported by the Group Global Mobility Manager of Company C who said that "it [the satisfaction with the repatriation] varies depending on what position they [the repatriates] have or they get … if they go back to the same position I would say they could be a bit disappointed". She explained that performance discussions are held in Company C every year where managers and employees, including repatriates, can talk about their developments. Both Company C and Repatriate B emphasized that being able to develop within the company is the most important aspect for a successful repatriation. The only repatriate who felt that he received a position that was a bit lower than before was Repatriate C. Additionally, the repatriate explained that coming home is more forced than expatriating since people go abroad because there is a job in another country but come home because they want to, not always because there is a suitable job in the home office. Moreover, common for all repatriates, regardless of what position they received upon return, is that they were all satisfied with their new job in Sweden, even if the position was not better than the one they held before going abroad.

4.1.7 Status and pay

When it comes to the question regarding appreciation of the time the employee spend abroad, the answers provided by the interviewed companies varied quite a bit. Company B showed gratitude by giving the repatriate a chance to explain the significance of working abroad in the form of an internal presentation and a flower is placed on their desk upon return. According to the Sales Director at Company B, showing appreciation for returning repatriates is important to achieve successful repatriation. "When they come home you need to… use all these fantastic skills and get that knowledge into the company. So, that means giving them time to sit and talk with different departments, tell them their story, so they feel that they can contribute to the company's development", he said. Company C, Company D and Company E on the other hand, answered that they do not have any formal ways of showing appreciation. Moreover, Company D mentioned that there has been a cake just like when someone has a birthday.

According to the repatriates, most of the appreciation shown by the company was by receiving a higher position in the home office or a position in which the new-found knowledge and skills could be used. Other than this, Repatriate E was chosen to represent the company when Company E was asked to participate in interviews and different events. Repatriate D mentioned that "when you come home it is not fair to the other employees to treat one person special just because they have been living outside for five years or something like that".

Regarding compensation and pay, the repatriates had different experiences. Repatriate A1 answered that the pay became somewhat lower upon return but an increase in the social benefits made it feel equivalent. For Repatriate C and Repatriate E the salary was higher in the host country while Repatriate B and Repatriate D said that the pay and the status was higher in Sweden.

4.1.8 Managing re-entry and reverse culture shock

Four of the six repatriates interviewed, namely Repatriate A1, Repatriate A2, Repatriate D and Repatriate E, answered that they experienced a culture shock when coming home to Sweden. Even so, Repatriate A1 said that coming home was not very difficult and Repatriate

D believe that it would be harder to come back if you have lived abroad for a longer time. Repatriate D also revealed that "it [the culture shock] was quite annoying but it was much shorter compared to when going out…" and that he did not expect to experience one upon return. Neither did Repatriate E who said that it was hard coming back both to Sweden as a country and to the job in the Swedish office. Not being mentally prepared for a difficult readjustment is rather common according to Repatriate A2. On the other hand, Repatriate C explained that he did not face a reverse culture shock. Since Repatriate B returned to another city than the one he left when going abroad, he was not sure if what he encountered was due to coming back from a foreign country or just moving to a new city, but overall the repatriate did not believe that it was very hard to return to Sweden. He said that colleagues from Sweden came to visit in Spain, hence he still felt like a part of the company. Moreover, Repatriate A2 believes that the severity of the reverse culture shock is affected by what country the repatriate lived and worked in.

When interviewing the companies and repatriates, Company C and Repatriate E stated that, during the expatriation training for going abroad, the possibility that the expatriates might experience adjustment problems upon return is mentioned. However, most of the focus during the training is to prepare the expatriates for going abroad, not for coming home, since the company believe that when the expatriates are returning to Sweden they already know the culture so there is no need of any training. This approach was agreed upon by Repatriate D who felt that it was easy to come back to Sweden since he had a lot of contacts and knew the language. The only problematic aspect was that, since he was the first expatriate from the company, he did not have anyone to talk to about the experiences.

Common for all the repatriates was that they, to various degrees, experienced a difference in the organizational culture and how the company was operated. The differences were mainly related to the structure and the managing style of the company, where the Swedish office in all cases was referred to as the flat organization as opposed to the more hierarchical ones abroad. Repatriate A1 believes that the two structures entail both positive and negative aspects respectively. She also mentioned that there existed differences in work moral between the two countries. Other differences included work hours which for Repatriate D was shorter in Sweden.

4.1.9 The repatriate's own responsibility

All the companies and repatriates participating in the study agreed that the responsibility for the repatriation process is a dual one. The company has certain responsibilities and so does the employee returning to the home country. For example, Company C, Company E, Repatriate A1 and Repatriate E answered that it is the repatriate's responsibility to decide what the next step in their career will be and to work towards the development he/she desires. This was supported by Repatriate C who said that "the responsibility should be on the expatriate itself in the sense of finding the right position and also keep in contact with the right person during the stay abroad". Moreover, the CEO at Company D mentioned that the repatriate is trusted to adapt to the Swedish ways and culture on his/her own. In Company A the repatriates are expected to do most of the things themselves and they, and the repatriates in Company D, must ask the company for the help they need. Additionally, the Group Global Mobility Manager of Company C said that the repatriate is responsible for insurances and finding a school for their children and a place to live.

4.2 Consequences of how repatriation is handled

4.2.1 Definitions of a failed international assignment

When asking the participating companies what was considered a failed international assignment the most common answers were an expatriation ending before scheduled and employees leaving the company after repatriating. All companies did not mention repatriate turnover upon return as a failure but according to Company C, "if somebody leaves the company that is very much a failure … The biggest loss is when somebody leaves the company right away and goes to a competitor because it [sending employees abroad] is a big investment". Additionally, Company C stated that an employee who is not happy at work is not a good ambassador for the company and this is also seen as a sort of failure.

4.2.2 Repatriate turnover and defection

Although only one of the companies said that they have experienced a little higher turnover rate among repatriates than among employees who have not been abroad, all of them, as well as the majority of the repatriates, believe that a poorly handled repatriation can lead to employees leaving the company. The Group Global Mobility Manager at Company C and the

Head of International Assignments at Company E consider the repatriate receiving a job which he/she is not satisfied with and that the returning employees are more attractive for competitors as possible reasons for leaving the organization. Moreover, high turnover rates in Company A are not experienced since, as the Team Manager from Company A said, the company's "co-workers are very loyal" and, as Repatriate A1 states, "the people that go out with Company A are probably loyal … otherwise they would not be supported because it is a lot of work and a lot of money involved in sending people around the world and I think people are careful with who they send out". This statement is supported by Repatriate D who believes that employees feel special when staying with the same company for a long time and therefore they do not want to leave upon return. Furthermore, the Sales Director from Company B said that they have not had many repatriates leaving the company since they are just starting to send expatriates. Additionally, the Sales Director believes that a promise of receiving the same position upon return lower the risk of turnover.

Among the rest of the repatriates there was a larger uncertainty when asked if they thought the turnover rate of returning employees is high. Repatriate C suspects that the turnover rate is high in Company C whereas Repatriate A2 said that in his network most employees stayed with Company A after repatriating. Moreover, although three of the repatriates have considered leaving the company themselves after returning to Sweden, none of them considered it due to a bad repatriation experience but rather due to offers from other companies and the current project coming to an end.

4.2.3 Resuming an international career

After having worked abroad at least once all the repatriates said they would consider another international assignment if the opportunity was given in the future. Two of them were even scheduled to go abroad again within the next few months and one has already expatriated to a new country. Repatriate B argued that "Once you have taken that step it is not that difficult anymore". Furthermore, everyone believes that how the repatriation process is handled could affect the willingness of accepting a position abroad. Repatriate B however, said that after a while the repatriation process will be forgotten and people might go abroad again regardless of how the repatriation was handled.

4.3 Success factors and improvements

4.3.1 Reasons for a successful repatriation

Three of the six repatriates specified that the success of their repatriation was due to their personality. Repatriate A1 said that having a positive attitude and being flexible and open minded contributed to the repatriation being successful, as well as the help the company provided regarding getting a job in which she could use her knowledge. Repatriate B listed things like receiving a car and knowing that there was going to be a job for him upon return as important reasons for his repatriation being successful. Repatriate D also said that having a job upon return added to the successfulness of repatriation as well as being able to travel a lot in his new job in Sweden. In the case of Repatriate C, the successful repatriation was due to the manager he had and the fact that he did many things regarding repatriation himself. Company C as a whole did not contribute to the success. Moreover, Repatriate E said that the biggest part of why coming back was successful was that "I got a position that I really enjoyed and they used my knowledge and experience and it [the job] was a bit of a challenge".

4.3.2 Improvements

When it comes to improvements in the repatriation process the Team Manager in Company A thinks that it would be good to start discussing the repatriation 12 months before repatriation instead of it being the expatriates who must contact the company before returning. Moreover, Repatriate A1 wishes that the company would have a better collaboration between different business areas within the company so that the expertise held by the repatriate can be used in the best possible way throughout the company. The repatriate said "a knowledge bank I think would be good if Company A could arrange", which can help in matching employees with certain skills to positions that require those skills. Furthermore, she believes it would be good to have meetings with other repatriates in the organization. Repatriate A2 on the other hand, believes that a great improvement would be to assure that the repatriate has a job to come home to since the lack of such guaranties might prevent people from daring to go abroad in the first place. Additionally, the repatriate argued that a little more help over all from the human resource department when repatriating would be an improvement.

According to the Sales Director at Company B, they want to improve repatriation through establishing policies. Furthermore, it is believed that having a person focusing specifically on expatriation and repatriation would improve the experience. Repatriate B said that an improvement would be if the company reminds the repatriate of things that need to be done in conjunction with the return and make sure that promises are kept.

The Group Global Mobility Manager in Company C answered that an improvement would be to not only look at one business area when trying to find a suitable position for the returning employee, but in all the company's business areas. Repatriate C explained that his repatriation would have been better if more information about what was going to happen and what help would be supplied was provided earlier in the process, maybe even before expatriating. Additionally, more focus on the return and having a mentor with international experience was seen by the repatriate as ways to improve repatriation.

The CEO of Company D mentioned more formalized policies as possible improvements to the repatriation process but also said that it is not as important in a smaller company like Company D. Moreover, Repatriate D argued that a checklist, with things such as arrangements that need to be done and instances the repatriate must visit, and a specific person who works with international assignments and assignees would improve the process. Repatriate D added "one thing that would help is if you had arranged activities … outside of work … because I think you need activities and meet friends and get into the culture part quite quickly".

Company E said that they could improve their repatriation process by planning it a bit better and by having a better view of who is coming home. The Head of International Assignments does not think that there is something completely lacking in regard to repatriation but that certain aspects could be enhanced. Furthermore, Repatriate E believes that the process of coming home would be better if certain things were documented before going abroad. Moreover, he thinks that the repatriate should not have to search for a suitable position completely on his/her own.

Lastly, only one of the six repatriates received an opportunity to formally evaluate his repatriation process and Repatriate B, Repatriate C and Repatriate D had informal talks with the management. Having an opportunity to formally evaluate the process, according to four of

the five repatriates who did not receive such an opportunity, and two company representatives, is an important improvement that the company should take into consideration in the future.

5. Analysis

This section of the report will present an analysis made by applying the theoretical framework and the conceptual model on the empirical data retrieved through interviews. Each influencer, and the consequences of how these influencers are handled, in our conceptual model is analyzed on its own and differences and similarities between them and the empirical data are demonstrated and evaluated. Lastly, a second version of our conceptual model, presenting what influencers are the most important based on the analysis, is displayed.

5.1 Factors influencing repatriation

5.1.1 Formal policies and repatriation programs

Black et al. (1999) and Briscoe et al. (2012) found that repatriation programs are important for companies to obtain the benefits the returning employees bring, yet only two of the five participating companies have some formal policies regarding repatriation. However, this does not seem to be a great problem since the repatriates felt they still received help upon return. Not having strict, formal policies regarding every aspect of repatriation could leave room for a more individual configuration which might lead to repatriates perceiving the return as more successful since they receive a program based on their wishes and needs. Furthermore, having a more individual approach seems easier if the amount of returning employees is low. One reason for not sending numerous employees abroad could be that the company is rather small. For example, Company B and Company D mentioned that their repatriation processes are quite individualized since they have only sent a small number of expatriates. Moreover, it is reasonable to state, like the Team Manager from Company A, that it is better to not have formal policies than to have fancy documents and policies which make promises the company cannot keep. Even so, having some form of official guidelines, for example regarding elements from Dowling et al.'s (2008) repatriation program such as tax assistance and job upon return, in combination with an individual approach might enhance the success rate. This since important aspects of repatriation otherwise can be overlooked.

Furthermore, one of the companies that said that they have some formal policies, Company D, said they have them due to the CEO believing that it makes coming home better. The CEO's opinion is based on his own experiences of being on international assignments. Having a manager who has international expertise designing the repatriation policies could be

beneficial since that person probably knows what kind of help the repatriates need. On the other hand, the manager might base the policies only on his own experience without taking other repatriates' opinions into account.

The companies participating in this study said that they mainly used their experience within the area of repatriation when creating checklists, policies or a repatriation program. Therefore, it is reasonable to state that companies, especially those like Company B who create policies after just having sent and taken back few repatriates, must consider the possibility that future repatriations might not look like previous ones and that policies therefore might have to change once more experience is attained. The policies have changed in several of our case companies over the last decade, or is about to change in the near future. This could indicate that the companies are trying to improve the process, and make it more successful, as they become increasingly experienced.

5.1.2 Repatriation focus throughout the entire expatriation process

In accordance with the arguments of Bossard and Peterson (2005) and Jassawalla et al. (2004) that companies do not pay enough attention to repatriation before going and while being on foreign assignment, all the companies interviewed appeared to lack severe focus on repatriation before the expatriates went abroad since the only thing that was planned, by the majority of them, was a job upon return. Some of the repatriates in our study said that they wished they had received more information about repatriation earlier in the process. Another thing mentioned in the interviews was contact during the time abroad, but that the contact was not usually conducted with the purpose of planning for repatriation. Nevertheless, the contact might facilitate the repatriation process since the employee is kept informed about aspects in the home office.

In conformity with the study by Bossard & Peterson (2005), saying that only few companies provide mentors in practice, mentors were rarely used within the interviewed companies. Jassawalla et al. (2004) and Dowling et al. (2008) argue that having a mentor is an important aspect of the repatriation program. Even so, there might be difficulties in finding a person willing to take on the job as a mentor, especially if the international assignment is scheduled to last for several years or if the mentor does not understand how he/she calling to check in will ease the process of returning home. According to the repatriates' answers, having contact

with someone who has international experience and receiving plenty of information regarding repatriation seemed more important than having one specific mentor appointed throughout the process.

Some of the companies and repatriates said that having the possibility to visit the home country during the time abroad could facilitate different aspects of the return. Briscoe et al. (2012) agree, saying that the risk of being forgotten is smaller if the repatriate visit the home country. However, providing trips back home might be a problem for companies with less resources. In these cases, it could be even more important to keep contact during the time abroad. Moreover, the company must decide how many trips it is reasonable for the repatriate to receive since too many might prevent them from assimilating into the foreign country. Having a hard time adjusting in the host country could possibly affect the work performance negatively, hence become a bad consequence for the company.

Just like Vermond (2001) mentions, the companies seem to, due to their lack of long-term planning, not want to fully accept that it can be hard to come back home. Because of this, they might not see the value of focusing on repatriation throughout the entire repatriation process. What the companies might fail to realize with this reasoning is the employees' desire to receive information early on. Just as Jassawalla et al. (2004) believe that focusing on repatriation throughout the entire expatriation process will entail a more successful return to the home country, taking the international assignees' opinions regarding information earlier in the process into consideration, will probably increase the positive perceptions of their repatriation.

5.1.3 Expectations and motives

Paik et al. (2002) stated that it is more likely that repatriation is perceived successful if the company's and the repatriate's motives and expectations are the same. In our study, some of the interviewed repatriates felt that the expectations they had regarding repatriation were not realized upon return. This indicates that a difference in expectations existed since the company did not fulfill everything the repatriates wished for, or that the repatriates expected more than what the company thought was reasonable to supply. The problematic aspect of this is, as Paik et al. (2002) stated, that failing to fulfil expectations could make repatriates unsatisfied. However, one also must take into consideration the reasonableness of it all.

Maybe it is far-fetched to believe that the company and the repatriate automatically should have the exact same expectations on the repatriation since they, among other things, have different experiences in the matter. Like Cox et al. (2013), who mention that communication and career planning between the home office and the repatriate ensure attainable expectations, we also find that the problem of having different anticipations could possibly be solved through discussions between the management and the repatriate, where the first mentioned provide information about what help the company will provide and what will happen when the repatriate return. Through discussions it is reasonable to believe that expectations become more similar since the participants receive an understanding of the wants and needs of each other.

The motives of the companies for sending expatriates and the motives of the employees for going as expatriates somewhat differ in the empirical data. This aspect, compared to expectations, might be harder to get uniform since, despite understanding the other party's motives a person might still have their own motives. As long as the different parties are aware of, and show understanding of, what motives the other party has, and try to fulfill them alongside their own, having dissimilar motives might not entail a failed repatriation. It seems like most of the interviewed companies and repatriates were attentive of the other party's motives. For example, the repatriates worked hard with the tasks they received abroad while most of the companies provided opportunities to advance in the career.

5.1.4 Job arrangements

As opposed to the theoretical findings by Bossard and Peterson (2005) and Peterson et al. (1996) that stated that American and British repatriates respectively were not guaranteed a job on return before going abroad, most of our case companies promise a job upon return before the repatriates leave for their foreign assignments. Company D even stated that guaranteeing a job upon return is one of the most important factors for a successful repatriation. Nevertheless, as some case companies and case repatriates mentioned, a problem with promising a job upon return could be that it, in case of downsizing or other changes in the company, can be hard to keep this promise. Maybe it is better to, as it is done in Company A, not promise a job upon return instead of risking to break the promise. On the contrary, knowing what the job upon return would involve and what task they were to perform was important for the repatriates in order to ease the repatriation process, according to the study by

Riusala & Suutari (2000). However, as Company C and Company E recognize, a promise of a specific job or position is probably harder to keep since the company might have to appoint another person for the job in Sweden while the expatriate is abroad.

On the other hand, not promising a job upon return could, like repatriate A2 said, have a negative effect on the employees' willingness to accept an international assignment. The lack of job guarantees seems to be a larger problem if the company is not currently growing and flourishing since there presumably are more job opportunities in a growing company. The argument was supported by Company A who said that there has never been a problem of not receiving a job within the company since it is expanding. In cases where a job cannot be guaranteed before expatriating it seems important to try to provide information as early as possible. This was supported by Repatriate A1 in our study as well as the repatriates participating in the studies by Bossard & Peterson (2005) and Riusala & Suutari (2000), who stated that they would like to have known if there was a position available in the company earlier than they did.

5.1.5 Use of knowledge attained abroad

The case of companies not using the knowledge and skills the repatriates have attained abroad is displayed in some of the existing literature and studies (Bossard & Peterson, 2005; Jassawalla et al., 2004; Harvey & Novicevic in: Cox et al., 2013). However, this is not supported by Johnston (1991), who mentioned that the repatriates in her study had the possibility to use their knowledge in their new jobs, nor by the common findings of this thesis since five of the six repatriates could use their new knowledge upon return. Furthermore, both repatriates and companies in our study mentioned that securing a job in which the international expertise can be used is important, and the repatriates believe it to be one of the reasons to why they generally have a positive view of their repatriation. Despite this, it might be more important to receive a job at all, before taking into consideration if the job use the new knowledge or not. Eventually, a job which requires the new skills the repatriate has gained could open up and as Repatriate A1 said, establishing a knowledge bank could facilitate that matching process.

The reason for companies neglecting international knowledge could be because they fail to understand the importance of it. Briscoe et al. (2012) state that this could for example happen

if the managers and colleagues in the company do not have international experience themselves. In this case, it is possible that they might not value or not understand that the repatriate has developed during the international assignment and the manager therefore miss, due to lack of interest or knowledge, to provide the repatriate with a suitable job. Two of the five companies interviewed said that using the repatriates' knowledge is a return on the investment they made in sending them abroad. Failing to make use of this investment could be harming for the company in an increasingly global world (Briscoe et al., 2012). Additionally, as Harzing and Reiche (2015) mention, repatriates getting positions at the company in which they are not able to use the knowledge and skills they acquired abroad could make them feel undervalued and cause the repatriates to look for other jobs, which could be negative for the company. Moreover, it is also reasonable to believe that not being able to use the new knowledge upon return can make the repatriate feel that the company does not take proper care of them. As Company C recognizes, this could lead to the repatriate being a bad ambassador for the company.

Despite agreeing with the other companies in the study that using the repatriates' international knowledge is important, Company A does not assure a job upon return, hence not one in which the new-found knowledge is used, since the employment ends in the host country. That the two repatriates from Company A despite this received a job where their knowledge and skills are used therefore could be assumed to have nothing to do with the company, but rather with the repatriates' skills and possibly some luck. This system could be problematic if other repatriates are not this successful in their search for a new employment and end up in the undesirable state of unemployment.

Repatriate D stated that he does not use the knowledge he acquired abroad in his job in Sweden. Although it was expected by the repatriate to use it in his new position in the home office, he still thought the job he received was good due to the new knowledge and skills that he received in that position. This indicates that repatriation can be considered successful even though the international expertise is not used. Even so, it is possible that a job in which knowledge gained abroad is used contributes the most to the repatriates' positive attitude towards their repatriation since many of our participants stated that this was an important aspect, as well as Riusala and Suutari (2000) who believe that this eases the repatriation process. Maybe both using international knowledge and learning new things is the ultimate combination.

5.1.6 Development

What position the repatriate gets at home shows how valuable the management believe a foreign assignment is (Dowling et al., 1994). As opposed to the findings by Bossard and Peterson (2005) and Jassawalla et al. (2004), saying that going abroad rarely lead to career advancement, the majority of the interviewed repatriates in our study stated that the international assignment had improved their work position. This suggests that our case companies are good at recognizing and assessing the value of the repatriates' foreign experience. When talking to the interviewees, we did not get the impression that anyone regretted their overseas assignment or thought of it as a waste since all of them were satisfied and could consider going abroad again, even the ones who received similar or little lower positions back home.

Promising a certain position, at a similar level, upon return could be good in the sense that the repatriate knows what to expect and is aware that he/she will not be demoted once returned. On the other hand, it could also be bad due to the possibilities of receiving a higher position being removed. As Repatriate B and Company C mention, this can make the repatriate feel like he/she has lost the possibility of promotion when spending the last few years abroad. The best way might be to promise the expatriates *at least* a similar position upon return but aim to find a higher position that also match the repatriate's new knowledge. It is possible that it could be hard to find a higher position if the expatriate already has a high position from the start, but this does not seem to have been a problem in the studied companies since many received a promotion. Moreover, a promise of a higher position might not always make the repatriation process successful. The position must still be a good fit and coincide with the repatriate's wants, needs and abilities.

According to Riusala & Suutari (2000) and Jassawalla et al. (2004), career planning and support is uncommon. In our study career planning seems more common since two of six repatriates knew that they would come back to a similar position in the home office prior to their leave and the representative from Company C mentioned that they hold performance discussions between managers and employees every year to discuss their development. As Briscoe et al. (2012), Jassawalla et al. (2004), Dowling et al. (2008) and numerous interviewees have mentioned, planning for repatriation is important, and therefore knowing ahead what the foreign assignment could do for your career might contribute to a better

repatriation with less uncertainty and disappointment. However, it is possible that planning the career, and stating certain implications an assignment abroad will have on it, already before expatriating could be difficult since it is hard to know how much the expatriate will develop and what knowledge and skills he/she will acquire while working abroad.

As Repatriate C states, coming back home is usually more forced than going abroad since people tend to return because they want to live in Sweden again, not because an interesting position suddenly appeared back home. Because of this phenomenon there might not exist a desirable job for the repatriate back home when he/she decides to return, even if the company tries their hardest to put the employee in a suitable position. When the repatriate additionally returns earlier than expected, as in the case with Repatriate C, it might be even harder for the company to provide an appropriate job. In these situations, the repatriate might not be able to have the same demands or expectations upon return as he/she did have regarding going abroad. Company E explained that they sometimes offer a possibility for the repatriate to shorten or extend the foreign assignment if there is a suitable position available before or after the scheduled return. This could indicate that the company makes an effort in finding an appropriate job for the repatriate. On the other hand, it might not always be possible to let the repatriate return earlier, due to for example that the job in the host country must be completed, or stay longer, due to for example there not being another foreign assignment the expatriate can receive.

Repatriate E mentioned that he actively networked for the position he later received upon return. Hence, securing the position was not solely due to the company but to the repatriate's own actions. In doing this, the repatriate had a better chance to affect his future and make sure he received the job he desired. It might seem unreasonable that the company should have the entire responsibility of finding and offering a suitable position to the repatriate. Most companies, like Company C and Company E, argue that the repatriate himself/herself has some obligations in regard to finding an appropriate job. Even so, some help from the company is probably appreciated since they presumably have better insights in the company and better intel of what positions are available. It is possible that a combination of efforts regarding job opportunities is the best solution.

5.1.7 Status and pay

Other than receiving a suitable job, usually at a higher position, three of the companies show a little extra appreciation of the repatriates' time abroad right after the return to Sweden. It does not seem like this is something the repatriates expect to receive from the company, possibly due to, like one repatriate mentioned, the unfairness of treating one employee differently that the others. It could be hard to find a balance between showing a bit of extra appreciation for the repatriate's homecoming in the beginning of the return, and at the same time not diminish other employees who might have done an equally good job in the home office. Furthermore, the investigated literature, to the best of our knowledge, lack a focus on the appreciation of the repatriate, which could be a reason to why firstly, not all companies manage this aspect and secondly, the repatriates do not expect them to. If there are no expectations of additional appreciation, not receiving it will most likely not affect repatriation in any way while receiving it, as most of our studied companies did, probably has a positive effect.

It is understandable that receiving a higher salary in Sweden upon return makes the repatriate feel better about repatriation. However, on the contrary of the findings in the Finnish study by Riusala and Suutari (2000) who state that fair salary is an important factor for successful repatriation, earning less money after repatriation must not necessarily entail that the process of returning home is perceived badly since other aspects, such as the social benefits in Sweden mentioned by repatriate A1, could outweigh this decrease.

5.1.8 Managing re-entry and reverse culture shock

Companies are somewhat limited when it comes to easing the reverse culture shock. According to Dowling et al. (2008), factors that affect reverse culture shock can be divided into job-related factors and social factors. It might be possible for the companies to influence job related factors, such as career anxiety and work adjustments, in order for the culture shock to be as small as possible. When performing the interviews, we found that only one of the repatriates who said they experienced a culture shock upon return mentioned a job-related factor as an underlying cause. This can be considered an indicator of the companies being successful in handling those factors. All the other repatriates who experienced a reverse culture shock only mentioned social factors as reasons for the difficult readjustment. The social factors seem harder for the companies to influence but they should be aware of the

difficulties the returning employee can face upon re-entry. It might be of even greater importance when, like in the case with Repatriate D and Repatriate E, the repatriate is not expecting to encounter a culture shock when returning to the home country. Moreover, most of the repatriates did not expect the company to help them with matters related to their social life which could possibly be a reason why the repatriates generally recognize their repatriation as successful.

Dowling et al.'s (1994) conclusion, that training programs before going home are rarely used, is supported by the findings of this thesis. None of the companies or repatriates said that they supply or have gone through such a program. Nevertheless, Company C and Repatriate E explained that reverse culture shocks are mentioned in the program the employees go through before expatriating. However, if the expatriate has been abroad for a long time it might be reasonable to think that he/she have forgotten what was said in that program. Not having a special training before return, or at least discussions regarding the possible difficulties upon re-entry, could signal that the company is not aware of these difficulties.

Cox et al. (2013) stated that the longer an employee has been on a foreign assignment, the harder it is to return to the home country. Repatriate D supported this statement, and the results from the interviews demonstrate a connection between length abroad and severity in re-entry by showing that Repatriate C, who had been abroad the shortest time, did not experience a reverse culture shock while Repatriate D, who had been on foreign assignment the longest, did. The length of the assignment is, compared to cultural differences, something the company more likely could affect, as in the case of Company C and Company E who have increased the number of short term assignments abroad.

Additionally, Repatriate A2 stated that what country the expatriates go to can affect the severity of readjustment. In the answers received through interviews some possible support of this can be seen since the repatriates have been working in different countries and experienced reverse culture shocks to different degrees. However, due to the fact that we only interviewed one repatriate from each country we argue that it is not possible to, based on our empirical data, determine what relationship exists between a specific country and severity of coming back home. Moreover, it is probably hard for the company to affect this aspect since they must send the expatriates to the countries they have sites in. Yet, it is reasonable to say that the companies should, as mentioned before, be aware of the difficulties that can accompany a

stay in a certain country. Moreover, Johnston (1991) does not agree that differences between countries affect re-entry but states that for example personality is one of the largest influencers. It is unreasonable to believe that the company can affect or change an employee's personality. Nevertheless, they could, in the selection process, choose people with a suitable personality for a foreign assignment and possibly adjust the help they provide to fit the expatriate's needs.

Some of the companies and repatriates mentioned that the possibility to visit the home country during the international assignment was given. Coming home during the stay abroad could have a positive impact on re-entry since it might give the repatriates a reminder of Swedish customs and culture and the differences that exist between the host and the home country. Moreover, it might have a positive effect on the entire repatriation process since coming home possibly provides the company with a remainder of the repatriate and that his/her return must be planed. This being said, it is probably important to find a suitable number of visits since, as mentioned before, too many could have a negative effect on the assimilation and work in the host country.

All the repatriates stated that they experienced a difference in the organizational culture between the host country and Sweden and that it was more hierarchical in the host country. It is possible that this cultural difference also affect the re-entry since, as in the case with Repatriate E, the way the repatriate operates and manages other employees might have changed toward the manner in the foreign country. A common reason among the participating companies for sending expatriates abroad is to share the company's culture and values. This could be an indicator that they have some sort of power to reduce the differences in the organizational cultures. It is imaginable that it could be hard to achieve the exact same culture in the two countries since local workers who are used to the organizational culture of businesses in the host country are employed in the office abroad. Hence, the company is probably limited in how much they can affect the business culture in the foreign country and some differences will most likely remain. Therefore, it is possible that the only thing the companies can do in cases where cultural differences cannot be completely eliminated, is to be aware that it can be difficult to come home to an office with another culture and be open minded towards new managing styles the repatriate brings from the foreign country.

5.1.9 The repatriate's own responsibility

The Swedish companies and repatriates all agreed that there is a dual responsibility when it comes to repatriation. They believe that the company has some obligations but so does the repatriate himself/herself. Despite this, most of the existing literature and studies only focus on what the companies should do to ease the return to the home country. The reason for not mentioning a dual responsibility is probably not that it is a Swedish phenomenon but rather that the researchers believe that it is too obvious to even mention. The company and the repatriate being in charge of different tasks upon return should not, according to the findings of this thesis, be a problem in practice since both parties are aware of the shared responsibility. Furthermore, it is reasonable to argue that the repatriates knowing that they have their own responsibilities, and what these include, has a positive effect on repatriation.

5.2 Consequences of how repatriation is handled

Briscoe et al. (2012) and Harzing and Christensen (2004) stated that repatriate turnover should be considered a type of expatriation failure. Even so, it was not viewed as a failure by all the companies in this study. When this is the case, or when the company does not see a connection between how repatriation is handled and turnover rate, it might be unnecessary to have a repatriation process, or to invest in giving the repatriates a good experience of returning to the company. The same reasoning could be valid if the company does not believe that a severity in finding new expatriates, or repatriates, willing to accept an international assignment is a failure. However, one problematic aspect of not realizing these failures could be that employees with international experience leave the organization which might benefit competitors if they start to work for them instead. The scenario could also be that the company *does* realize that turnover upon repatriation is a failure but has no possibility to influence it, for example because the returning employees are attractive for other companies who might provide them with better offers than the home company can due to lack of resources. Evidence of this has been found from Repatriate A1 who, in accordance with findings from previous studies saying that employees with international expertise are attractive to employers (Suutari & Brewster, 2003; Cox et al., 2013; Lazarova & Tarique, 2005), said that she considered leaving the company due to receiving an external offer.

Furthermore, as opposed to what Parker and Inkson (1999) found, that people are less likely to be loyal to one single company today, we found that Repatriate A1 and the Team Manager from Company A believe that the loyalty of their repatriates prevent them from leaving the company after the return. It is reasonable to believe that loyal employees still exist, who want to stay with the company for various reasons after return even if they are not fully satisfied with their homecoming. However, even those people will most likely leave the company if they are treated very badly.

If companies are afraid to lose their skilled repatriates to other companies it might prevent them from sending people as expatriates in the first place. One possible indicator of this is from Briscoe et al. (2012) who explains that companies have started to use short time assignments instead of letting employees live and work in a foreign country for a long time. This to reduce the financial losses caused by expatriation failures such as defections after returning home. Company C and Company E mentioned that they have increased the number of short term assignments lately. Therefore, it might be reasonable to wonder if expatriation and repatriation in the future will be completely replaced by shorter international assignments which are less costly and easier to handle. However, the likelihood of a company ending their expatriation process completely and not letting people go abroad at all could be questioned. This, because not sending employees abroad could be damaging for the home company in itself since their workers entirely miss out on the opportunity to develop new skills from abroad.

All the companies in our study, in agreement with Cox et al. (2013), Lazarova & Caligiuri (2001) and Dowling et al. (1994), believe that there is a connection between employee turnover rates and how repatriation is handled. Although not all the companies distinctly expressed high turnover rates as a failure, we got the impression that it is important for them to keep the repatriates in the company, especially since they all think it is important to use the knowledge the repatriates acquired abroad upon return. Additionally, all the participating companies and repatriates think that how repatriation is handled could affect the willingness of accepting a position abroad. When retaining employees, and finding new expatriates, is important, it is reasonable to believe that the companies probably work harder to have a successful repatriation process. Since none of the repatriates interviewed listed a poorly handled repatriation as a reason for their own increased turnover intentions or for not wanting to go abroad again, it could be feasible to state that the repatriates perceive the way the

companies handle the return as successful. Moreover, Cox et al. (2013) stated that repatriates are more likely to search for a new job if they view their repatriation as unsuccessful, and since most of the companies in this study did not experienced high turnover rates it could be another indicator of the successfulness of their repatriation.

5.2.1 Evaluation of the repatriation process

Only one of the companies provides an opportunity for the repatriates to formally evaluate their repatriation process. Not providing such opportunities could be questioned since it is probably in the company's best interest to listen to the opinions of the repatriates and make the process of coming home as good as possible to minimize defections and make it easier to find employees willing to live and work abroad. Dowling et al. (2008) argue that the repatriates' evaluations can help the company to receive insights of what can be improved in regard to repatriation. The choice of not having any formal evaluations could indicate that the company does not listen to the repatriates when designing and improving the repatriation programs. On the other hand, it might be difficult to take all the repatriates' opinions into account if the number of employees returning to the company is large. It can also be difficult if the repatriates have contrasting opinions. In smaller companies with lesser repatriates it might be of less importance to establish formal evaluations since it, as mentioned by Company B and Company D, is easier for the repatriate to communicate their feelings of the repatriation directly to the management.

5.3 Analytical summary

When applying the different influencers in our conceptual model on the empirical data we discovered that some of them seemed more important according to the interviewees. Factors regarding the job upon return, namely Job arrangements, Use of knowledge attained abroad and Development, appear to be the most relevant to attain a successful repatriation according to the repatriates and the company representatives. We base this finding on the fact that almost all the companies promise a job upon return, use the knowledge the repatriates gained while on the foreign assignment and usually give the returning employees a higher position than held before, as well as on the fact that most of the repatriates said that these factors are the most important for a successful repatriation. All the repatriates stated that they overall

were happy with their repatriation process, probably due to almost all of their expectations regarding these three factors being realized.

Three other influencers seemed to have a little less importance according to the participants, namely Repatriation focus throughout the entire expatriation process, Formal policies and repatriation programs and Expectations and motives. To have focus on repatriation earlier in the process appeared to be of greater importance to the repatriates than to the companies since many of the companies stated that they did not think it was necessary to plan the return before and during the international assignment. When it comes to formal policies neither companies nor repatriates mentioned having policies as one of the most important factors for a successful repatriation and the majority of the companies did not even have formal policies. Furthermore, expectations and motives did not receive large focus, probably since most of the expectations were realized and the repatriates and the companies seemed to consider and respect the other party's motives for going or sending people abroad.

The last three factors in our conceptual model, specifically Status and pay, Managing re-entry and reverse culture shock and The repatriate's own responsibility, were the ones that received the least focus in the interviews. A reason for the repatriates not concentrating on re-entry and reverse culture shock could be that they did not expect the company to provide assistance in this matter and the companies' reason could be that they are unable to largely affect this factor. Regarding status and pay and the repatriate's own responsibility, it appeared that receiving a suitable salary and the fact that both the repatriate and the company has responsibilities regarding repatriation were considered obvious and therefore believed to not impose any problems.

As our conceptual model states, the interviewees also believe that different consequences will emerge depending on how the influencers, especially those related to the job upon return, are handled. In accordance with the literature (Cox et al., 2013; Kamoche, 1997), most of them mentioned defections upon return and the severity in finding employees willing to work abroad as consequences.

Due to the findings, that certain factors appear to be more important than others in regard to repatriation, we now have a better understanding of why existing literature and studies

highlight certain factors, such as those related to the job after return, more than factors such as status and pay and the repatriate's own responsibility.
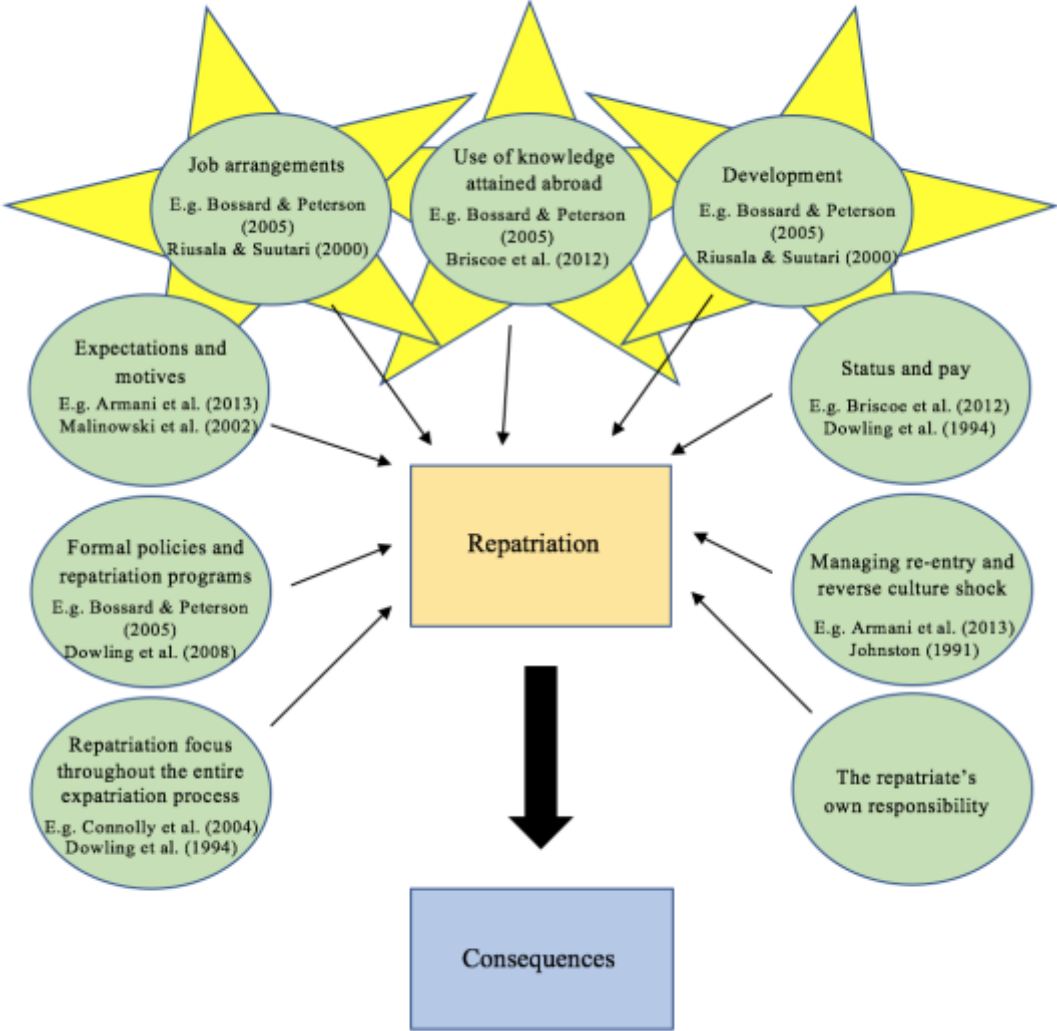

Figure 3: Repatriation - Influencers & Consequences, version 2. The most important factors for successful repatriation is indicated by stars. Our illustration.

5.4 Our normative model and its implications for practice

As the purpose of this thesis states, one of the aims of this study was to construct a model that promote the most important aspects the company and the repatriate need to manage regarding repatriation. These important aspects are based on our own arguments formed during the research process, the studied literature and the factors mentioned in the interviews with repatriates and company representatives. Both success factors and elements of improvement

from the empirical data have been taken into consideration. We decided to construct the model (Figure 4) as a staircase with three different levels, which means that in order for a business to attain a level two repatriation, Medium, they have already included the aspects of step one, Basic, in their repatriation process. The same applies, that all aspects of step one and step two must be included, for the company to reach an Advanced level repatriation. Some of the aspects are therefore only mentioned in the first levels, since they are expected to already be achieved when the company move on to the next steps. Moreover, the factors that are included in all the stages of the model become more extensive when moving from Basic to Medium and Advanced. Lastly, a few aspects are only present in the higher levels since they are considered something extra to make the repatriation prosperous, rather than something that should definitely be expected.

We believe that the model can be used by companies of various sizes and with different ambitions and conditions, to the extent they see fit. For example, it can be beneficial for smaller companies with less resources since it is easy to follow and apply when the most prioritized aspects for repatriation are in the first step and more detailed aspects later. Therefore, we believe that, based on our knowledge and arguments, the further up in the staircase a company is located, the more likely it is that this company will have a successful repatriation process. However, even though we advise companies to aim for the Advanced level if possible, we still believe that repatriation could be satisfactory at lower levels as long as both the company and the repatriates are in agreement of what will be provided, when it will be provided and by whom it will be provided. If used correctly by following each step, we believe that our model could contribute to a successful repatriation. A successful repatriation could, in our opinion, benefit both the company and the repatriates with possibly lower turnover rate of repatriates, and therefore also a higher return on investment in human capital, as well as satisfied and loyal repatriates.
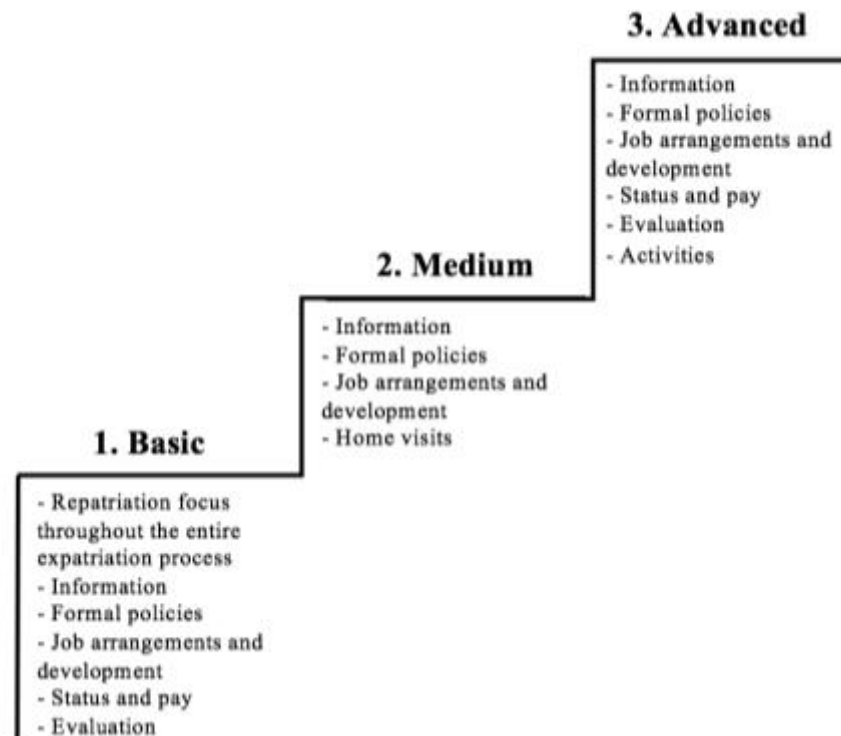
Figure 4: A model for successful repatriation. Our illustration.

1. Basic

This level states the most basic things that can be expected from the company and the repatriate respectively regarding repatriation.

- **Repatriation focus throughout the entire expatriation process:** The company must have a focus on repatriation through the entire process, i.e. before, during and after the assignment abroad. They should provide information and document the agreements of what the repatriation process will include, for example regarding job arrangements, even before the employee goes abroad as an expatriate, to prevent misunderstandings upon return.

- **Information:** The repatriate should receive information regarding what his/her repatriation includes, what is expected from the repatriate himself/herself during this process, and where he/she can turn to in need of further assistance. It is important that the company make sure not to make promises they cannot keep. If there arise any

additional problems in the repatriation process it is up to the repatriate himself/herself to contact the company in order to receive help and support.

- **Formal policies:** The company should, with acceptable notice, provide a checklist with reminders of things that the repatriate must arrange himself/herself in conjunction with his/her return. This could for example be a bank account, an apartment, tax-issues, insurances and other agreements the repatriate need to enter into, or instances he/she has to visit.

- **Job arrangements and development:** The repatriate should be guaranteed a job in the home organization upon return.

- **Status and pay:** The repatriate should receive fair salary when returning to the home office.

- **Evaluation:** There should exist a possibility for the repatriate to evaluate his/her repatriation in a survey in the home country since this information can be used to improve the process. It is important not to give the opportunity of evaluation before the repatriate has completed the entire repatriation process since it is not until then the repatriate knows what was handled better and worse in the process.

2. Medium

Apart from the aspects included in the Basic-level, the following elements must also be included for a company to achieve a Medium-level repatriation.

- **Information:** The company should have a person, preferably a mentor, focusing specifically on expatriation and repatriation. The mentor should provide information to the repatriate regarding the home organization and the repatriation process, as well as help with the repatriate's future career planning.

- **Formal policies:** The company should have formal policies and/or a program for repatriation, instead of merely a checklist. The repatriate must arrange the aspects included in the policies/program himself/herself, but the company should provide help if needed.

- **Job arrangements and development:** The repatriate is guaranteed a job in the home organization upon return and the job should be related to what the repatriate has been working with earlier.

- **Home visits:** The company should provide the repatriate with the possibility to visit the home country during the assignment abroad.

3. Advanced

Apart from the aspects included in the Basic- and Medium-level, the following elements must also be included for a company to achieve an Advanced-level repatriation.

- **Information:** The company should have a person, preferably a mentor, focusing specifically on expatriation and repatriation. The mentor should have own international experience.

- **Formal policies:** The company should have formal policies and/or a program for repatriation, as well as provide individually adapted repatriation practices to what each employee needs. The company should help the repatriate with all aspects in the policies/program, preferably before he/she has even thought to ask for it, and give thorough information about what additional support he/she can receive if needed. The company contacts the repatriate and not the other way around.

- **Job arrangements and development:** The job the repatriate is guaranteed upon return should be specified a while before the repatriate goes back home, and the job should be a promotion that makes use of the new skills and knowledge the repatriate has developed overseas. The company should also be open minded to look for a job in other parts of the organization from where the employee previously worked but where he/she could now contribute with valuable knowledge due to his/her newly acquired skills and experiences. Lastly, the company should keep an eye out for job openings during the employee's time abroad and, to the best of their abilities, enable the repatriate to return home a little sooner or later than planned if a suitable job opens up.

- **Status and pay:** The management of the company should acknowledge the repatriates return to the home office in some way that promotes his/her experiences and spreads awareness of these in the entire office in order for the other employees to know about it and be able to use and learn from him/her. The knowledge sharing could be achieved through for example creating a knowledge bank which matches the right employee with the right position in the company. Appreciation on the other hand could be showed by for example sending a "welcome home"-email to everyone in the organization, stating the repatriates return.

- **Evaluation:** The repatriate should be able to evaluate his/her repatriation process in a meeting with the management after the return to the home country.

- **Activities:** The company should arrange and encourage the repatriate to participate in activities in order to broaden his/her network back home and to get to know the colleagues in the home office. The activities could also help the repatriate to get back

into the Swedish culture. Furthermore, the company should arrange meetings between all the repatriates in the organization and make sure that previous repatriates help the new repatriates by for example sharing valuable advice.

It might be considered as redundant to construct a model for successful repatriation when the interviewed repatriates stated that they, overall, were satisfied with this process. However, we believe that our model could improve the repatriation process in the participating companies even further, as well as be valuable for other companies with less prosperous repatriation processes. Furthermore, the model is believed to be suitable in many different contexts since the factors included are important aspects both in Sweden and internationally.

6. Conclusions

In this thesis, we aimed to answer the question of *why the repatriation process is perceived successful, or unsuccessful, by Swedish companies and repatriates, and what consequences this perception lead to.*

One conclusion of this report, which answers our research question, is that repatriation is perceived to be successful in the investigated Swedish companies. We believe that this positive perception is due to most of the repatriates having a promise of a job upon return and receiving a higher position in which they could use their new knowledge when returning to Sweden, since these factors are concluded to be the most important ones. Our conclusion is also supported by the fact that changes in the policies, toward more secure employment upon return, has taken place in Company D and will take place in Company A in the near future.

This being said, that the repatriates overall are satisfied with their repatriation, despite the fact that all the influencers in our conceptual model were not handled in the most beneficial way, does not mean that some factors are not important, but rather that they are less important. Evidentially, as discovered when interviewing the repatriates, there were aspects of their repatriation that they were not happy with, for example at what time in the process information about repatriation was provided, which we most definitely believe should be improved. However, in the end it seems those aspects did not outweigh the good aspects of their returning process. We argue that improving the repatriation process benefit both the repatriates themselves but also the company as a whole since a more satisfied repatriate generally perform a better job in the organization.

Some of the factors influencing repatriation include the possibility to completely focus on only one of the factor's extremes, for example stating that either the company or the repatriate should have the entire responsibility of the repatriation or having formal policies regarding every aspect of repatriation as opposed to having none. After conducting this research, we have come to the conclusion that a combination of the two extremes in almost all aspects is the ultimate solution since it includes good elements from both alternatives.

Furthermore, with the findings of this thesis as a base, we conclude that most of the factors mentioned in existing literature and previous studies have the same importance for Swedish

repatriates to perceive their repatriation successful, as they have for repatriates in other parts of the world. For this reason, we do not see any large needs of establishing and implementing the aspects of the repatriation process in any unique way in Sweden. Rather, what needs to be done is to adapt the repatriation policies according to the specific conditions of the company. We have based these conclusions on the fact that there were differences in the repatriation processes between all the participating companies. However, we have not found a clear connection between how repatriation is handled and the characteristics of the company. For example, in our study, no evidence exists that a company of a certain size, with certain available resources or specific years of experience conduct repatriation in any special way compared to other companies. Either no such relationship exists in practice, or a study with a larger amount of participating companies must be conducted to detect such a pattern. The existing differences rather seems to depend on the combination between the opinions and preferences of the company.

Based on our research, we further conclude that the important thing does not seem to be solely how much the company plan and provide for repatriation, but that the repatriates and the company are in agreement regarding what and how much will be provided by the company, and what the repatriate is responsible for himself/herself. Having a clear agreement and discussions regarding this ensure that their expectations are similar which in the end affect not only the most important factors influencing repatriation, such as those related to the job upon return, but also all other factors of our conceptual model. Since all the repatriates stated that the home office has a flatter and less hierarchical structure than the office abroad, we reason that it in many cases is easier to ask questions and have dialogues and discussions directly with managers responsible for expatriation and repatriation in Sweden than in other countries and that this could be a contributing factor to why the repatriates in this study overall felt their repatriation was successful. According to us, clarifying how the responsibility is divided in such discussions further entails that the repatriates can be content with a lower level of support as long as they do not expect to receive more. This is believed to be the case in our study since the participating repatriates did not expect much more than what the companies provided.

6.1 Suggestions for future research

Our thesis contributes to the research field of repatriation with information about how the process is perceived by some Swedish repatriates and companies. During the research, other questions regarding repatriation surfaced which would be interesting to investigate further.

Short term assignments are becoming more common, as discovered in this study. Does this mean that expatriation, hence also repatriation, will be completely replaced by short term assignments in the future? Will the benefits of expatriation be outweighed by the benefits of sending employees abroad for only a few months? And what implications would this have on the employees of the company regarding for example their own responsibility? These are interesting questions to look further into in the field of expatriation and repatriation.

In the majority of the literature and the studies read when conducting this thesis, most of the repatriates seem dissatisfied with the way factors influencing their repatriation process were handled. On the contrary, the findings in our study indicate that Swedish repatriates are quite content with their return to Sweden. Is this only the case in the companies we have investigated, or are Swedish repatriates generally satisfied with their repatriation? Is it because companies in Sweden are better at handling the different aspects of repatriation, or do Swedish repatriates have lower expectations on what will be provided by the companies? These questions could be answered by repeating this study using other companies and repatriates, or a larger number of them, or by conducting a new study, where the same companies and repatriates are more closely compared to foreign ones.

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8. Appendix

8.1 Questions for the repatriate

- Why did you decide to go abroad? What country did you go to? What position did you have while working abroad? How long was your assignment abroad? How many years ago did you return to Sweden?

- Do you know if the company has any formal repatriation policies/a repatriation program? Or is your experience that management believe it is only for the repatriates to "come home" again and therefore do nothing upon their return? Alternatively, do the management adapt the repatriation-policies for each individual?

- If the company has formal repatriation-policies or at least try to ease repatriation in some way: Are they active in all three phases before, during and after the time abroad or when did you receive support? What support was given? Do you believe that your repatriation was better due to the policies the company implements? Why/why not?

- Did you have a mentor during your employment abroad? Did the mentor ease the repatriation? If yes, in what ways?

- Do you feel like you experienced a culture/readjustment shock when returning home? How bad was it compared to the one you experienced when going abroad?

- Did you experience any differences in the organizational culture abroad compared to the one in the company here in Sweden? If yes, what were they?

- What expectations did you have before coming home in regards to work? Were the expectations and the reality the same when you returned? If no, what was different? And why do you believe it was different? Could something have been done by the company to prevent this gap?

- Did you get to keep your previous position in the company or did you get a higher/lower position? Did you have more or less responsibility abroad? Did you know that there was going to be a job for you at the company upon return before you went abroad or at least before you came home?

- Does management value and take care of your new-found knowledge for example by providing you with a suitable position upon return (or other things)?

- Is there something more that could have been expected from the company upon return that they didn't do?

- What opportunities exist for you to evaluate your repatriation? A questionnaire, a meeting with the management, or nothing? Do you have any possibility to affect the future repatriation policies?

- Are you working/could you imagine working abroad for the company again? Do you believe that a poorly handled repatriation process could affect the willingness of going abroad again?

- Do you believe that there is a high turnover rate of repatriates in the company? If yes, why do you believe that is? Do you believe that a poor repatriation process could be a reason for employees wanting to leave the company?

- Has the likelihood of you leaving the company increased or decreased now after repatriation?

- Why did you think your repatriation was successful/unsuccessful? What aspects do you think are the most important and the ones that the company should prioritize when easing repatriation?

- Did the company arrange and/or pay for your flight home?

- Do you think it is entirely the company's responsibility to support the repatriate upon return, or does the repatriate have some responsibility himself/herself to arrange things?

- Was there a difference in compensation/pay and status in the host country and the home country? If yes, did the difference have a negative effect on your repatriation? In what way? In what country was the compensation/pay and status higher? Did the company show appreciation of your time abroad when coming home? If yes, how?

8.1 Questions for the management

- What is your exact title at the company?
- For how long has the company been sending/taking back expatriates/repatriates?
- Why do you send employees abroad?
- Does the management have formal repatriation policies or a repatriation program? Or is every case handled differently depending on the repatriate? If no on the first question: do they have any plans on establishing such a program in the future? If yes on the first question: What do they look like?
- When did you enforce these policies and have they changed anything in the last decade?

- Do the policies mostly focus on the time after coming home or is there equal focus on doing things to ease the repatriation during and before going abroad? Did the expatriates get any information about the repatriation during the process?

- Do you think the repatriation process is better due to the existence of these policies?

- Why are the repatriation policies designed the way they are?

- Do the repatriates normally get to keep their previous position in the company or do they get a higher/lower position upon return? Do you assure a job for them upon repatriation before they go abroad or at least before they come home?

- Do you see the repatriate's experiences as important and of value to their work and to the company? Do you do anything to show appreciation of the time they spent abroad?

- How does the management define a repatriate's success? What is a failure in regard to repatriation?

- What opportunities exist for the repatriates to evaluate their time abroad? For example, a questionnaire or a meeting with the management? Do the repatriates have any possibility to affect the future?

- Do you believe there is a high turnover rate of repatriates? Can the turnover rate be affected by how the repatriation was handled?

- Is there anything you believe your company could change to further improve the repatriation process? And/or what factors make your repatriation so successful?

- Did the company arrange and/or pay for the flights home?

- Do you think it is entirely the company's responsibility to support the repatriate upon return, or does the repatriate have some responsibility himself/herself to arrange things?