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Repatriation – Coming home and adjust

A multiple case study regarding the process of repatriation

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Abstract

Title: Repatriation - Coming home and adjust. A multiple case study regarding the process of repatriation

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Background and Problem: The final step of international assignments is the so-called repatriation process which tends to gain little attention from the companies, since the homecoming, according to many companies, is considered as a frictionless process without flaws. Yet, indications can be seen that repatriation processes are anything but free from obstacles.

Purpose: The purpose of this thesis is to facilitate a better understanding regarding what common obstacles that can occur when an expatriate is returning to the home country. Moreover, this thesis will investigate what factors that are relevant to include in a company's repatriation process, and why the factors can be considered as important.

Methodology: In order to collect empirical evidence, a total number of five qualitative interviews have been conducted with repatriates from two different companies. The empirical evidence has thereafter been compared to the theoretical framework through utilizing a deductive approach in order to find patterns of similarities or disparities.

Results and Conclusion: The thesis found that repatriates suffer from a poor conducted repatriation process. It is important that companies prepare their employees before they leave for their international assignment as well as take care of them after their homecoming in order to reduce and prevent obstacles regarding repatriation. Working with realistic expectations can in extent lead to better adjustments, which in the end will facilitate a well-functioning repatriation process.

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1. Introduction

The world is becoming more and more globalised as time goes by and in order to stay competitive in the market today, multinational corporations (MNCs) need to expand globally to a higher degree and increase the presence of expatriates (Nery-Kjerfve & McLean, 2012).

The purpose of sending employees abroad is according to research multifaceted (Webb & Wright, 1996). For example, it enables the expatriates to gain valuable knowledge and experiences that can be beneficial for both the organisation and the individual expatriate in the future, to gain managerial control and to fill positions and knowledge gaps in the organisation (Webb & Wright, 1996; Harzing, 2001; Clegg & Gray, 2002). Furthermore, it can reduce asymmetric information and communication costs between the headquarters and the subsidiaries that are placed abroad (Tan & Mahoney, 2006). However, it is important to emphasize the fact that these international assignments can imply problems for the organisation if they are not managed properly, which in turn can be very costly for the organisation in terms of both money and time (Black, Gregersen, Mendenhall & Stroh, 1999; Nowak & Linder, 2016).

This international assignment can be seen as an integrated circular process consisting of three main stages: selection and pre-departure, the actual foreign assignment and lastly, the so-called repatriation (Adler, 1986; Bonache, Brewster & Suutari, 2001). According to Cox, Khan and Armani (2013) and Kraimer, Shaffer and Bolino (2009), there is a disproportion between the focus on the expatriation and the repatriation. Additionally, this last stage of repatriation is according to Black et al (1999) often overseen by executives since they see the return of the expatriate as an unimportant issue. However, the return to the home market is according to research one of the most challenging parts and consequently, more emphasis needs to be placed on this specific stage (Nery-Kjerfve & McLean, 2012).

1.1 Problem discussion

In order to expand and establish business operations on new markets in foreign countries, many companies tend to send employees abroad (Nery-Kjerfve & McLean, 2012). Once the international assignment is finished, employees can hopefully have a smooth readjustment and in the best of worlds also contribute to the home company with for example knowledge and business contacts that are gained abroad (Chew & Debowski, 2008; Cox et al, 2013).

According to research, there is a lacking focus on the repatriation process in many companies and a smooth adjustment is often taken for granted since ideas exist about that the returning employees can manage this homecoming on their own without help from the management (Connolly, Jassawalla & Slojkowski, 2004). Consequently, the focus is often rather on the expatriation part than on the repatriation part (Black, Gregersen & Mendenhall, 1992; Solomon, 1995; Connolly, et al, 2004). This can further be an explanation of why companies are still having problems with the re-adjustment of their repatriates, despite the fact that repatriation is an old phenomenon.

However, repatriation does not seem to be a self-going process without flaws and challenges (Chew & Debowski, 2008) and according to studies, the repatriation does imply even more problems and issues than the expatriation (Paik, Segaud & Malinowski, 2002). Consequently, Hurn (1999) states that incentives for a developed structure regarding the repatriation exist, and further advocates an organized repatriation process.

Moreover, in case of a lacking focus on the repatriation process, this can according to research further lead to unwanted consequences. For example, a badly managed repatriation process can according to Herman and Tetrick (2009) lead to valuable and skillful repatriates leaving the company because of a disappointment on the repatriation process. A turnover of repatriates can further imply multiple problems. Firstly, the expatriates have gained important knowledge and experiences that could have been valuable for the company. Secondly, the company will lose a big investment since the cost of sending someone abroad as an expatriate is very high (Allen & Alvarez, 1998; Paik et al, 2002). Another implication of a bad management of the repatriation process is that a smaller amount of employees will be willing to go abroad for international assignments in the future when former repatriates experienced the repatriation process as lacking (Deresky, 1997). Consequently, it should be of interest for a lot of companies to take their repatriation processes seriously in order to ease the adjustment for their repatriates. Furthermore, general guidelines in which important factors of the repatriation are highlighted is considered to be useful in order to achieve a better adjustment for repatriates.

1.2 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this thesis is to facilitate a better understanding regarding what common obstacles that can occur when an expatriate is returning to the home country. Moreover, it will be investigated what factors that are relevant to include in a company's repatriation process, in order to facilitate the adjustment of the repatriates and why the factors are important.

1.3 Research Question

What factors are relevant to focus on in the repatriation process in order to facilitate the repatriation adjustment and why are the factors important?

1.4 Delimitation

The first delimitation that was made was to focus only on the repatriation process rather than on the whole international assignment. Furthermore, a second delimitation was to investigate the repatriation process at two Swedish companies in the empirical section.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Definition of repatriation

In order to understand what a repatriate is, the term expatriate first needs to be explained. An expatriate can be defined as an employee in an organisation who is a citizen in one country but for a period of time is working in another country (Hill, 2014). This same person later becomes a repatriate when returning from this international assignment to one's home company (Hodgetts & Luthans, 1997).

2.2 Initial explanation of the theoretical framework

To begin with, it is easy just to consider the repatriation as a process that starts when the expatriate has returned home to one's old workplace after accomplished services abroad. However, doing so can be considered as a mistake, since important steps to a successful repatriation process in that case will be ignored. In other words, the repatriation process starts before the actual return (Black et al, 1992; Howard, 1974; Kendall, 1981).

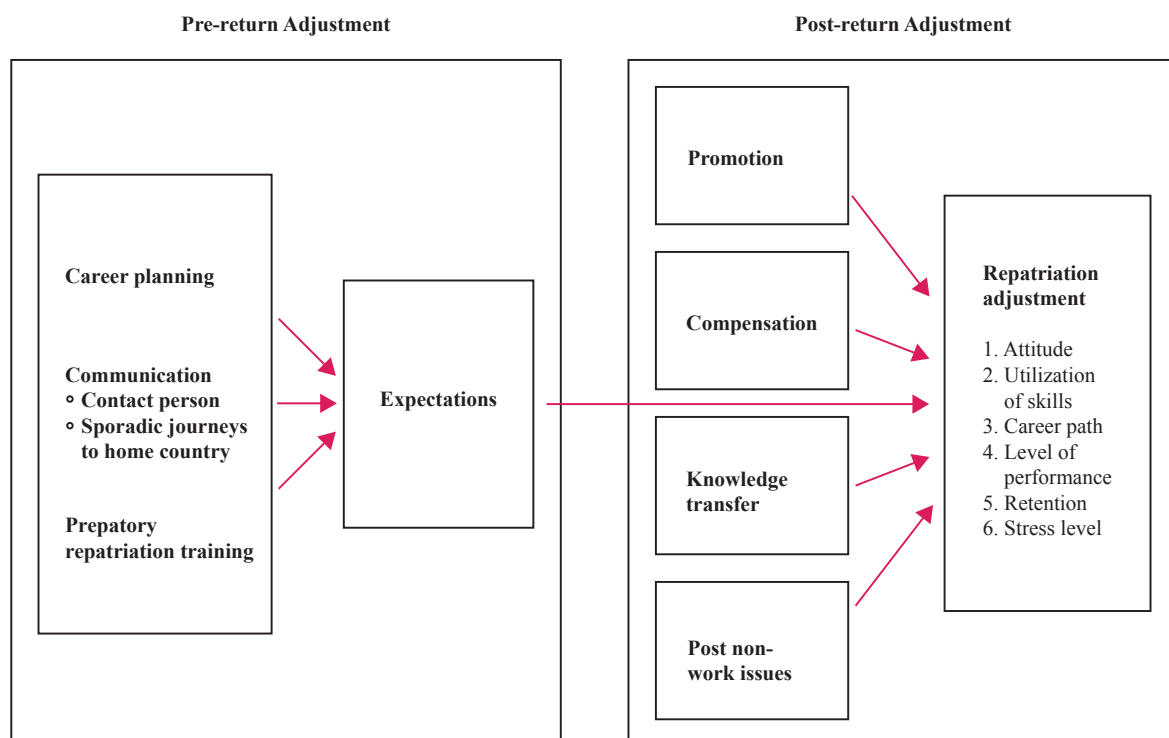


Figure 1. *The Repatriation Process*. Created by authors (Nordell & Tingström, 2017), with influence from Black, Gregersen and Mendenhall (1992, p. 230) and Feldman (1991).

Consequently, a fragmentation of the repatriation process can be made into two separate entities based on the actual timeframe in which the part of the process takes place, namely pre-return and post-return repatriation (Black et al, 1992), see Figure 1. Different factors are categorized in each of the two timeframes, where the division does not necessarily have to be 50% pre-factors and 50% post-factors (Ibid). The theoretical framework of this thesis is based on the model created by Black et al (1992) named “Basic Framework of Repatriation Adjustment”. According to this model, the factors in the pre-return timeframe will culminate in how well the repatriates’ expectations will be facilitated, which in turn, together with the post-return factors, plays a vital role in how successful the readjustment of the repatriate will be. Despite the fact that the box for the expectation factor is placed in the pre-return adjustment timeframe, this specific factor permeates the whole repatriation process (Black et al, 1992). Consequently, the decision is made in this thesis to emulate the example of Black et al (1992) through adding an arrow from the box of expectation in the pre-return adjustment timeframe into the box of adjustment in the post-return adjustment timeframe. In other words, expectations is the sub-target and a prerequisite for a successful final repatriation adjustment, which is the main target. Despite the fact that the main structure of the framework by Black et al (1992) was used in the thesis, the content of the different boxes is modified and inspired by inputs from other researchers.

All factors of the framework that lead to adjustment (pre-return factors, expectations and post return factors) will be differently labelled depending on whether they are work or/and non-work by their nature. However, it is important to keep in mind that it is sometimes difficult and less clear where to draw the line of distinction between whether one specific variable in the model is work or non-work related. The factors that will be discussed in the pre-return timeframe are: career planning (work-related factor), communication (work- and non-work-related factor) and preparatory repatriation training (non-work related factor). Furthermore, the factors that will be discussed in the post-return timeframe are: promotion (work-related factor), compensation (work-related factor), knowledge transfer (work-related factor) and post non-work issues (non-work related factor). Furthermore, some of the factors in the repatriation process are arranged procedures, such as career planning and knowledge transfer, and some of them are aspects that are important to take into consideration, such as whether the repatriate should obtain a promotion and/or higher compensation upon return.

Moreover, when it comes to the last stage of the process, namely adjustment, a decision is made to use the adjustment variables stated by Feldman (1991). Feldman (1991) provides an explanation consisting of six categories in order to understand and analyse the valuable factors regarding the repatriation adjustment. These targets are: to create positive work attitudes (attitude), create opportunities for utilizing the experiences and skills developed overseas (utilization of skills), to be able to sustain a career path that is at least comparable to colleagues not taking an international assignment (career path), to reach a level of performance at quality and quantity expected by superiors (level of performance), to remain or intend to remain in the organisation after the homecoming (retention) and lastly that the stress level of the repatriate is not dysfunctionally high (stress level) (Feldman, 1991). Those categories are used in this thesis and will be abbreviated as: attitude, utilization of skills, career path, level of performance, retention and stress level.

2.3 Obstacles and solutions related to repatriation

2.3.1 Pre-return repatriation

As mentioned, it is of great value to try to predict and minimize the potential risks related to repatriation by initiating the process of repatriation before the actual homecoming (Black et al, 1992; Connolly et al, 2004). This initial process of repatriation will in this thesis be referred to as the pre-return repatriation process or the pre-repatriation process. Because of the central role that the expectations play in the chosen framework and because of the fact that, according to Black et al (1992), a well-managed pre-repatriation process will result in well-facilitated expectations, the term expectations will be presented and explained first in a separate section. Thereafter, a number of pre-repatriation variables will be investigated.

2.3.1.1 Expectations

Before a selected employee is sent abroad, the prospective expatriate is starting to create own projections about the upcoming future. A similar process occurs when it is time for repatriation, as a repatriate is visualizing about how his or her homecoming will look like (Cox et al, 2013; Pickard, 1999). These expectations can be divided into work-related expectations and non-work related expectations (Black et al, 1992; Hurn, 1999). Examples of work-related expectations are for example expectations about: future salary, interaction and the reception from managers and co-workers, new assignments and how one's learned skills, knowledge and business contacts will be transmitted and utilized by the company (Black et

al, 1992; Hurn, 1999). Furthermore, examples of non-work related variables are: housing, school for children, employment for the spouse and friendly relations (Black et al, 1992; Hurn, 1999).

One problematic aspect is that both the motives and the expectations of sending away an expatriate to another country differ between the individual repatriate and the organisation (Paik et al, 2002). The motive of the individual repatriate is often to develop as an individual and gain new knowledge. In contrast, the motive of the company is rather to be able to compete internationally by doing business on other markets. In other words, a gap between the different motives and expectations exists, which needs to be reduced in order to reach a well facilitated repatriation adjustment (Ibid). According to Cox et al (2013), the repatriate's expectations about the return do influence the retention rate of the homecoming expatriates and whether their return according to themselves was successful or not. How well these expectations are met will further in extent be reflected to the commitment of the repatriate. Moreover, a high degree of commitment to the company leads to low turnover figures concerning their repatriates and vice versa (Stroh & Reilly, 1997).

2.3.1.2 Career planning

One part of the repatriation process that, according to Cox et al (2013) and Ratnam and Sansom (1995), should occur before the homecoming and thereby also should be included in the pre-return part of the repatriation process is so called career planning. The career planning involves discussions between the manager about what will happen to the employee in conjunction with the homecoming in terms of job and career aspects. Here, a clarification and a discussion can be made about whether the employee should expect e.g. an equivalent assignment or a promotion when coming back (Ratnam & Sansom, 1995). According to Bossard and Peterson (2005), the expatriates often do not know whether there is a position for them within the home company upon return. If a repatriate possesses too imaginative expectations with no realistic connection to the actual reality about job factors such as role within the home company and compensation upon the return, there will be a risk that the repatriate will be chocked or negatively surprised when returning to the home company which in turn thereby will hinder a well-functioning and successful readjustment (Stroh, Gregersen & Black, 1998). A well facilitated career planning will then ultimately reduce the gap between the expectations and the reality regarding work aspects (MacDonald & Arthur, 2005) and in extension create commitment to the company which will make the repatriates

want to stay in the organisation after coming home from services abroad (Stahl, Miller & Tung, 2002). Through this, the fifth target in Feldman's model can be considered, which is to retain the employees within the organisation upon the return (Feldman, 1991). Furthermore, except from retaining the repatriates within the company through this part of the process, the target of positive job attitudes can according to Feldman (1991) be taken into account by a well facilitated career planning.

2.3.1.3 Communication

As mentioned, expatriates tend to create own "mental maps" based on expectations on how their lives will be when they arrive back home (Black et al, 1992). These expectations are to a certain extent built upon information or lack of information about the prevailing working conditions at the home-based company. Being abroad for a longer period can lead to old perceptions about how things "used to be" at the company in the home country. However, when being abroad, life does not stop at the former workplace. Instead business is going on which often leads to changes in the organisation such as termination of earlier coworkers, major political reforms and organisational changes because of acquisitions (Hyder & Lövblad, 2007). Consequently, many researchers emphasize the importance of communication. One of them is Adler (1981), whose study pointed out the fact that employees who were constantly informed during their stay abroad have a smaller amount of unmet expectations which in turn lead to higher retention rates of repatriates. Furthermore, Shilling (1993) claims that organisations that are successful in their repatriation process attribute their prosperity to the well-developed interaction with the expatriate and his or her family. Except from keeping the expatriate updated of potential changes in the home organisation, the communication also fills a purpose of not making the employee feel forgotten since one of the common fears that is expressed by the repatriates is the loss of visibility (Allen & Alvarez, 1998). Two examples of how the communication between the repatriate and the home company can be facilitated are through a contact person or through sporadic journeys back home (Allen & Alvarez, 1998; Stroh et al, 1998).

2.3.1.3.1 Contact person

In order to facilitate the adjustment for the repatriates, a continuous exchange of information can be practiced by a contact person (Black et al, 1992; Cox et al, 2013; Stroh et al, 1998). This contact person, who can be both formally or informally assigned, is provided with the task to keep the expatriates updated about changes within the home company (Black et al,

1992). For example, the utilization of informative work-related newsletters is emphasized as a method for the contact persons, since it increases the possibility to keep the returning employee updated with different changes in the company (Crocitto, Sullivan & Carraher, 2005).

According to Allen and Alvarez (1998), a distinction can be made between the two terms mentor and sponsor. The sponsor is considered as being responsible for the success of the repatriate and the responsibility of the mentor is limited to the communication with the repatriate (Allen & Alvarez, 1998). As can be seen by these two definitions regarding mentor and sponsor, there is a theoretical overlap between the explanation and utilization of the two terms. Since the literature has not been consistent considering those definitions, the decision is made to label both of them as contact person throughout the thesis.

2.3.1.3.2 Sporadic journeys to home

Another strategy for keeping contact with the home company is through visits to the home country before final homecoming (Allen & Alvarez, 1998; Black et al, 1992). The sporadic visits can lower the degree of confusion at the definitive homecoming for the repatriate and its family or partner (Black et al 1992). This further provides the expatriate with the opportunity to meet his or her former and future co-workers face to face and the interaction between them will expose potential changes, e.g. in the organisation, which therefore will come as no surprise when the repatriate finally makes it home and is trying to adjust (Black et al, 1992). Furthermore, occasional home visits offer the repatriate the possibility to meet relatives and friends, that also contributes to a better re-adjustment (Black et al, 1992).

2.3.1.4 Preparatory repatriation training

Preparatory repatriation training is offering the repatriate and his or her family a chance to be prepared for future non-work challenges when returning home. This occasion takes place before the homecoming and aims to increase the possibility for a smooth repatriation adjustment with realistic expectations (Black et al, 1992). The preparatory repatriation training works as a tool to create an awareness of for example different cultural aspects and codes among friends and colleagues (Ibid). Other researchers that emphasize the importance of arranging a session before the return home with the purpose of enlightening the repatriation adjustment is Stroh et al (1998) who instead call this repatriation training. However, even though a comprehensive and accurate information gathering regarding

cultural rules, codes and values are made, mistakes can occur but maybe not so often thanks to the preventive work that this specific session will imply (Black et al, 1992).

2.3.2 Post-return repatriation

However, not all critical aspects are, as mentioned, related to the timeframe before the actual homecoming. When an employee returns from his or her international assignment, there are often still challenges remaining before the main target of a successful repatriation adjustment can be reached. In parity to how the pre-repatriation variables were culminated into well-facilitated expectations, the post-repatriation variables will, at its best, result in repatriation adjustment (Black et al, 1992). Therefore, the definition of a repatriation adjustment and what, according to this thesis, can be considered as a successful repatriation will be explained below, before the post-return aspects will be accounted for.

2.3.2.1 Adjustment

The final phase in the model created by Black et al (1992) is the repatriation adjustment, which furthermore is the final goal in the repatriation process. However, before evaluating whether a repatriation process was well-facilitated or not, it is necessary to formulate what characterises a successful repatriation. How a successful repatriation process can be defined differ between different researchers. For example, Connolly et al (2004) claim that when the repatriate is satisfied with the process, an effective repatriation is reached. However, a theoretical framework made by Feldman (1991), mentioned in section “2.2 Initial explanation of the theoretical framework”, is chosen when defining a successful repatriation in this thesis. Feldman’s theory of adjustment is considered as applicable, since his theory can be considered to be diversified with many different variables (Feldman, 1991) that are useful to utilize when analysing the upcoming empirical evidence. If Feldman’s targets (attitude, utilization of skills, career path, level of performance, retention and stress level) are reached, the repatriate will adjust to his or her work assignments in the home company and also be able perform well on them (Ibid). However, before achieving repatriation adjustment, also the post-repatriation aspects must be taken into account (Black et al, 1992). These will be presented below.

2.3.2.2 Promotion

A common phenomenon is that expatriates accept an international assignment with the hope of promotion in conjunction with the homecoming and that their stay abroad will have a

positive impact on their careers (Black, et al, 1992; Borg, 1988). How these expectations are dealt with through for example career planning in order to facilitate the repatriation adjustment was discussed in the pre-repatriation timeframe. However in this section, the issue regarding whether the repatriate should be promised a position within the home company or not upon return will be discussed and also what the hierarchical level of this position will be in comparison to the one the repatriate had before leaving.

Firstly, opinions are divided regarding whether a promotion in the organisation is the right way to manage the homecoming of the repatriates and whether this will facilitate the repatriation process. Examples of researchers that emphasize the importance of promotion upon return is Dowling, Schuler and Welch (1994) who claim that if the repatriate is promoted within the organisation upon return, this repatriate will see the assignment abroad as an advancement in their career. Furthermore, in some cases, the repatriate is returning from a position with high status in the company abroad to a role in the home company that is lower profiled. Thereby, the repatriate often go through a shift from having a big responsibility and constantly new challenges to feeling underutilized and bored (Hammer, Hart & Rogan, 1998).

Furthermore, there are researchers that claim that an alternative on the most appropriate way to facilitate the repatriation process regarding whether to provide the homecoming employees with a job with higher status or not, is to put the repatriates in a comparable position to the one they had before leaving for the international assignment. By doing this, the repatriates will still feel low uncertainty about the repatriation process, however without being promised the earth by the home company (Allen & Alvarez, 1998; Black, 1992; Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001). To put the repatriate in a position that is at least comparable to the one they had before leaving can according to Feldman (1991) further help in achieving the third of his targets, that in this thesis is referred to as “career path” (Feldman, 1991). Furthermore, Borg (1998) claims that experiences that the expatriates gain on their stay abroad in many cases are of little value for their job in the home company. Therefore, both Adler (1986) and Borg (1988) claim that organisations should not make promises to their repatriates about giving them specific positions when they return, since it is very hard to predict all possible changes that can occur in an organisation, such as people leaving their jobs and general reorganisations. The uncertainty about supply and demand regarding positions in the workplace is thereby the most important argument for not making guarantees about promotions to the repatriates.

However, sometimes it is not possible to put the repatriate in an optimal position in the workplace as soon as they come back to the home organisation. One possible solution to this problem is according to Allen and Alvarez (1998) to put the repatriate in a so called “holding job” until an appropriate position that is equivalent to the qualification of the repatriate is available. However, according to research, it is important to have a strict timeframe for this holding job and it should involve a value-adding contribution to the organisation (Allen & Alvarez, 1998). A temporary holding job (either in the home or host country) can thereby function as a bridge until an appropriate position in the organisation is found (Allen & Alvarez, 1998).

2.3.2.3 Compensation

Another well-discussed, work-related aspect related to the post-repatriation timeframe is how the compensation should be affected by being an expatriate. Furthermore, there are different opinions regarding whether there is a correlation between an increased compensation and an improved repatriation. For instance, Gomez-Mejia and Balkin (1983) claim that an increased compensation reduces the turnover intentions for repatriates. Another argument for increasing the salary of a returning repatriate is the fact that they received both a basic salary but furthermore also different financial benefits such as bonuses, currency protection, income tax allowance etc. while abroad. When the repatriate then returns to the home organisation, and these different allowances disappear, this can lead to a shock for the employee, which consequently can have a strong influence on both their job satisfaction and their financial situation (Dowling et al, 1994; Dulebohn & Martocchio, 1998). Another researcher that emphasizes the correlation between compensation and job satisfaction is Price (1977) who claims that higher levels of compensation increases the job satisfaction and that low levels of compensation will lower the job satisfaction. According to Black et al (1992), a higher adequate repatriation compensation from the organisation makes the firm more dependable which in turn will lead to a higher commitment from the repatriates towards the firm. According to these arguments, two of the conditions for a successful repatriation adjustment formulated by Feldman (1991) above are considered, namely the ones focusing on the retention of repatriates within the firm (retention) and an improved job satisfaction (attitude).

However, PWC (2006) did not in their study find any correlation between a payment of higher allowances or base compensation to the repatriates returning from an international assignment and top performance. In a survey, PWC tested whether the multinational firms

that paid higher compensation and allowances to the repatriates had less problems with the retention and adjustment of their repatriates to the home organisation. However, no strong correlation of this was found and in this study, it is rather claimed that other factors influence the adjustment and retention more than this aspect (PWC, 2006).

2.3.2.4 Knowledge transfer

Another work-related factor that can be referred to the post-return timeframe is the transfer of knowledge gained by the repatriate abroad back to the home company. According to Nery-Kjerfve and McLean (2012), the transfer of knowledge gained by the repatriate during his or her time abroad is in many cases not optimised and utilised in the home organisation in the aftermath of the time abroad. However, Chew et al (2008) and Cox et al (2013) emphasize the importance of utilizing the network of new business contacts that the repatriate has gained abroad. Since organisations make big investments in the expatriates in general, this lack of focus is important to change. The organisations both need to identify the skills acquired abroad and also be able to use and integrate this knowledge into the organisation (Adler, 1986; Deresky, 1997).

According to research, this lacking knowledge transfer can be attributed to both the repatriate him or herself and the organisation. Chang, Gong and Peng (2012) claim that repatriates in some cases deliberately avoids to spread the knowledge they have gained abroad in order not to lose their relative advantage they have relative to their colleagues in the home organisation. However, Nery-Kjerfve and McLean (2012) focus more on how the organisation and its managers hinder the knowledge transfer. For example, they argue that one problem is to place the repatriate in a position where the repatriate is unable to use and spread the gained knowledge in an optimal way.

One possible solution to this problem is, according to Nery-Kjerfve and McLean (2012), to create an environment in the organisation that is open for new knowledge that can create value for the organisation. Furthermore, the creation of social networks is an important tool for the facilitation of knowledge transfer. This comprises the creation of a platform at which all actors in the organisation can meet and share new, important knowledge (Crowne, 2009).

Another important measure for improving the knowledge transfer is according to Ratnam and Sansom (1995) and Adler (1986) to give the repatriates a higher job responsibility when they return, which then will improve the effectiveness. Furthermore, except from giving them high

responsibility, the country-specific knowledge they have gained abroad should be used in an as large extent as possible (Ratnam & Sansom, 1995; Adler, 1986).

Furthermore, another way to enlighten the adjustment for the repatriates is to train the home country managers in recognising and developing cross-cultural skills. In this way, they will be able to assess the acquired skills and match those skills with eventual future demand in the company (Ratnam & Sansom, 1995; Adler, 1986). A relevant term in this area is “validation” which according to Adler (1986) is the quantity of recognition that the former expatriate receives when coming back to the home organisation and this is according to Adler (1986) one of the most important management techniques to use in order to maximise the knowledge transfer in the repatriation process. According to research, the repatriates that are recognised both in terms of future potential and overseas work are the ones that become most successful (Adler, 1986).

Another possible solution to the problem of lacking knowledge-transfer is so called debriefing. This process involves questions from the management to the repatriates about how they have experienced their time abroad and what they have learned (Adler, 1986). According to Adler (1986), this specific segment fills many different functions such as letting the repatriate being able to share his or her experiences, expertise and information so that it can be utilized in the organisation. According to Ratnam and Sansom (1995), it is of very big importance for the organisations to learn from the repatriate’s experiences in order to continually evaluate, develop and question both how the internationalisation of the business is conducted and also the management of expatriates and repatriates. By having a well-functioning knowledge transfer, the second target and definition of a good readjustment process is achieved, namely the one named “utilization of skills” in this thesis, which includes the possibilities for the repatriates to be able to utilize one’s gained knowledge and experiences in the home organisation (Feldman, 1991). Furthermore, according to the theory made by Feldman (1991) about adjustment, a poor managed knowledge transfer can result in higher turnover rates, which means that the company will not succeed to retain their repatriates, which is the fifth aspect i.e. “retention”.

2.3.2.5 Post non-work issues

However, not all critical aspects related to the post-return timeframe are of work-related nature and as mentioned in section 2.3.1.4, some of these non-work variables can be managed

already before returning home in the pre-repatriation timeframe (Stroh et al, 1998). However, not all of them and there will most definitely be a gap between the expectations of the repatriate and the reality (Hurn, 1999). One example of a non-work issue related to the repatriation is the reverse culture shock. Since post non-work issues that need to be dealt with upon the return can be of very different nature, this factor or section will be very differentiated and include several types of issues, such as issues regarding housing, school, culture shock etc.

Despite the fact that the repatriate has spent the majority of his or her life in the home country, this same country can seem a bit alien when returning back after an international assignment. This phenomenon is called reverse cultural shock (Black et al, 1992; Borg, 1988; Shilling, 1993). This cultural shock can be explained by for example salary benefits that expires, the shift to a lower living standard in comparison to the one the repatriate had abroad, practical readjustments such as housing and schooling for both the spouse and the children etc. (Hammer et al, 1998). Another explanation of the reverse culture shock is the shift in social status. According to Clague and Krupp (1978) and Black et al (1992), this downward shift in social status in conjunction with the homecoming often leads to an increased anxiety, both for the repatriate and his or her family. As a consequence, this downward shift in social status is negatively related to the readjustment of the repatriate. A third problem is the fact that the repatriate often only remembers the good parts about the home country and creates an idealised view about it, which in turn often can lead to a collision with the reality which then makes the return even more problematic (Borg, 1988).

As mentioned, the family of the repatriate must deal with several problems not related to work upon return such as problems connected to schooling for the children and working opportunities for the spouse. However, also civil registration regarding taxes, new bank accounts, expenses for traveling, insurance etc. are factors that can affect the repatriation adjustment (Dickmann, Sparrow & Brewster, 2008; Black et al, 1992; Baruch, Steele & Quantrill, 2002). Furthermore, another non-work problem is the fact that the repatriates often encounter problems regarding housing as a consequence of the international assignment. Examples of raised concerns regarding housing are: what area that is most appropriate to move to, whether there are any housing that according to the repatriate is comparable to the one they had abroad that is available, that they can afford it and what the family will do with their house when they are away if they do not want to move because of the stay abroad

(Clague & Krupp, 1978; Kendall, 1981). According to Clague and Krupp (1978), less good housing conditions upon the return in comparison to the host country will be negatively related to the adjustment of the repatriate.

One solution for these issues is to have a so-called repatriation course, that is held after the return. This is a tool for preparing the repatriates for the readjustment process. Examples of how these “courses” can be arranged are through seminars, group discussions etc. (Hurn, 1999). Examples of issues that can be dealt with are education for the children, spouse issues such as updating of CVs and job search, the reverse culture shock, changes that has occurred in the workplace etc. (Hurn, 1999; Howard; 1974). By managing these non-work variables in a good way, the target of keeping the stress level low can be achieved. Furthermore, the targets of creating good work attitudes and to reach a level of performance that the superiors expect from the repatriate will be reached (Feldman, 1991). Moreover Feldman (1991) states that the longer a repatriate maintain overseas, the more likely it is that the repatriate will suffer from reverse culture shock once the repatriate is arriving home and the repatriate will therefore also have more problems regarding the adjustment.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Method

3.1.1 Qualitative Method and Justification of the Choice of Research Method

When writing a thesis, the nature of the methodological approach can either be qualitative or quantitative (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). The qualitative method, which is the method that is used in this thesis, can according to Collis and Hussey (2014) be described as a technique that is useful both in collecting information and to analyse the information collected. In short, a qualitative research approach is appropriate to use when there is a need to gain a deeper understanding and insight (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Using a qualitative method when gathering information is helpful, as it often utilizes face-to-face interviews (Larsen, 2009), since Larsen claims that face-to-face interviews reduces the risk of obtaining meeting cancellations from the prospective respondents. Furthermore, conducting a qualitative method by performing interviews reduces the risk for misinterpretations, which according to Larsen (2009) provides the researcher a better understanding of the phenomenon which is about to be investigated. Qualitative research is also more applied than the quantitative research when it comes to executing business research (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Eriksson & Kovalainen (2008) further claim that a qualitative research method can be used in many varying ways depending on the chosen research object. One purpose of using a qualitative research method is that one can look at the chosen issue from the respondent's point of view (Bryman & Bell, 2013), which seems challenging but can in the end result in a deeper understanding of the topic. Anyhow, a qualitative research approach also has its drawbacks. According to Bryman and Bell (2013), a qualitative research consists of generalized assumptions regarding an isolated situation which might be inapplicable to use in other contexts. Furthermore, Bryman and Bell (2013) emphasize that some researchers claim that qualitative research lack objectivity, since it consists of subjective standpoints regarding the collecting and analysis of information made by the author.

Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) claim that the justification of the research method: “primarily should be based on what you want to know on the basis of your research and not so much on other reasons” (p. 4). The decision was therefore made to use a qualitative instead of a quantitative method. This was the most appropriate method for this thesis because of the complexity of the chosen topic. Furthermore, the qualitative research method is according to

Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) flexible and enable to gain a deeper understanding of the topic. Moreover, the qualitative research method was a useful alternative because of this method's possibility to gain and comprehend opinions and experiences (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008) that was needed to address in order to fulfil the purpose of this thesis. Conducting a qualitative research regarding repatriation has also been used by other researchers such as Paik et al (2002). Furthermore, the researchers Oddou, Osland and Blakeney (2009) state that there is a need for additional qualitative research regarding different aspects of the repatriation process, although qualitative repatriation research has been done some years earlier e.g. by Fink, Meierewert and Rohr (2005). However, Shen and Hall (2009) claim that a qualitative research is a valuable method to use when investigating repatriation. Taking earlier researchers' studies and advices into account further motivated the utilization of a qualitative research in this thesis.

3.2 Research Approach

3.2.1 Deductive approach

Collis and Hussey (2014) claim that a researcher can choose between two different approaches when doing research, namely the inductive and the deductive approach. Furthermore, a combination of the two exists, namely the abductive approach (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). By using the deductive theory approach, one is able to determine the validity of a theory by doing empirical studies (Holme & Solvang, 1997). In order to facilitate the process of developing an analysis and conclusion part in this thesis, a deductive approach has been utilized by applying collected theoretical aspects on the gathered empirical evidence. According to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008), "deduction rests on the idea that theory is the first source of knowledge" (p.22). This further indicates that a deductive approach has been utilized in this thesis. Furthermore, another definition of a deductive research approach that is in conformity with this thesis is made by Collis and Hussey (2014). They claim that the gathering of empirical evidence is based on variables that the theoretical framework highlights as important. However, Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) claim that the majority of social research is not strictly deductive by its nature. Theory development might be considered as a non-deductive element (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Since the analysis of this thesis includes a sense of theoretical development, this thesis cannot be seen as a strictly deductive one.

3.3 Developing the Theoretical Framework

3.3.1 Literary Sources

When mentioning the qualitative method, it is also useful to highlight the different ways of how one can collect data. There is mainly a distinction between two categories of data, namely primary and secondary data (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Primary data is collected by the researcher and according to Sekaran and Bougie (2013), this type of data can be considered as a first-hand information source and can by other words be mentioned as the original source (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Collis and Hussey (2014) further claim that primary data is possible to gather by for example conducting interviews and making surveys. Secondary data on the other hand is a collection of other researchers' data which is already published, e.g. in other theses and reports (Larsen, 2009). The theories used for this thesis are consisting of obtained secondary data and sources, mainly from other academic theses, journals and literatures that are dealing with a similar topic as this thesis. According to the library at the Umeå University (Umeå Universitetsbibliotek, n.d), primary sources are based on primary data that are published for the very first time. They further claim that such sources are scientific articles, literature and theses. Secondary sources refer to one or several primary sources.

3.3.2 Literature Gathering

In order to find established academic theses, Google Scholar was used. Google Scholar is a search engine developed for an academical purpose to share knowledge and make it more accessible. Theses that were often cited by other researchers were prioritized, since that might be an indication of a well-established information or theory. The library of the School of Business, Economics and Law at the University of Gothenburg has also been a very useful tool for gathering relevant information, since the majority of the printed books and journals have been borrowed at this library. The National Library of Sweden has provided the possibility to borrow relevant literature from other libraries all over the country. The library in Gothenburg also provided free access to databases and other chargeable academic journals and publications. Keywords such as "repatriation", in different combinations, have been utilized during the whole literature gathering in order to search for appropriate information and exclude inapplicable information.

3.4 Method for Empirical Material Collection

3.4.1 Empirical Sources

In order to gather primary data for the empirical part of the thesis, interviews were conducted. This opened up the possibility to collect unique first-hand research information, which reduces the risk of getting inaccurate information that might have been garbled or misunderstood by other researchers along the way. Performing the interviews gave the opportunity to immediately ask supplementary questions towards the respondents, which gave the empirical part a greater depth of understanding the process and experiences of repatriation. This so-called empirical evidence, which is based on one's observations and experiences (Collis and Hussey, 2014) was of great value when writing the analysis and conclusion of this thesis in order to elaborate the phenomenon of repatriation. Secondary data gathered from each company's web pages were used to be able to understand the context of the chosen companies and their historical background as well as how they conduct business today. Furthermore, it was also used to support or contradict the collected primary data.

3.4.2 Sampling Method

To be able to make a coherent verdict regarding repatriation, the most desirable way would be to interview the complete population consisting of repatriates and companies with abroad assignments (Collis & Hussey, 2014). However, since the time for conducting research for this thesis was limited, a sample was more suitable. A sample is a more realistic and efficient alternative for collecting and analysing data (Collis & Hussey, 2014) and was therefore used in this thesis in order to gain important information for the empirical part. Since this thesis includes a multiple case study, two different companies were investigated and analysed in order to compare them and thus find possible similarities or differences regarding repatriation (Bryman & Bell, 2013). While facing immense and repetitive difficulties regarding getting in touch with the human resources departments of the chosen companies, the decision was therefore made to utilize a so-called snowball sampling in order to get in touch with employees in the firms (Ibid). Snowball sampling is used by exploiting one's network of friends, co-workers etc., which makes this sampling a bit biased since the respondents are not chosen randomly (Collis & Hussey, 2014; Bryman & Bell, 2013). The snowball sampling was performed both in order to pick companies and in order to get in touch with repatriates, by talking to acquaints working at the specific companies, who in turn contacted suitable colleagues or ex-colleagues who have been going through the repatriation process. This

turned out to be a very successful method since it facilitated the process of finding people willing to be interviewed. The option to be anonymous throughout the thesis was offered to all respondents in order to increase their incitements to participate in an interview and as well to make them answering the questions more freely and honestly. According to Bryman and Bell (2013), it is hard to define an appropriate number of respondents which represent the sample. Furthermore, they state that a large sample provides a broader perspective when analysing a phenomenon. However, they clearly emphasize that the size of a sample is a question of time and money. By taking this into account, a total of five different Swedish respondents were interviewed at two different companies. All interviews were qualitative and semi-structured ones. Semi-structured interviews include a kind of frame and sequence order for the questions that will be asked towards the respondents and entails a possibility to ask follow-up questions (Bryman & Bell, 2013; Larsen, 2009). Semi-structured interviews facilitate the possibility to map out and compare the results of the interviews, since the respondents will answer the same questions and where follow-up questions facilitate a profound research (Bryman & Bell, 2013).

3.4.3 Choice of Sample and Justification of the Choice of Sample

As the chosen topic of repatriation is in the centre of focus in this thesis, the first step in choosing a sample of respondents was to look for companies that to some extent are conducting global business and have international assignments abroad in order to find repatriates. Since a snowball sampling method was utilized, both repatriates who were still working at one of the specific companies or the ones who have retired or are now working for another employer were relevant to interview. However, the second criterion except from having worked abroad was that the respondents must have accomplished a repatriation process since it is a criteria for reflecting on one's own experience of the repatriation in order to retell its challenges and obstacles when trying to readjust. Whether the companies had many employees or held large economic funds were less relevant, even though the process of repatriation is time and money consuming (Black et al, 1999; Nowak & Linder, 2016) and that having many employees mathematically increases the possibility of getting in touch with several numbers of repatriates. What matters is if the companies had any repatriates or not. Since the process of writing this thesis had a time-limit, companies that have offices with repatriates within a nearby radius of Gothenburg were prioritized, which will be the third criterion when choosing sample respondents. Face-to-face interviews were also a key in order to avoid a misinterpretation of the respondents' answers. Thus, nearby located companies that

are doing business on a global level were suitable. When taking criterion one, two and three into consideration, the decision was made to interview a total of five persons that have gone through the repatriation process, more specifically three persons at Volvo Cars and two persons at Volvo Group. The intention was to interview one additional respondent at Volvo Group, but the respondent was unfortunately abroad due to private matters and could not be contacted even further.

3.4.4 Empirical Material Collection and Execution of Empirical Material Collection

Gathering the primary data was done by conducting face-to-face interviews at locations demanded by the respondents. The interviews were so-called open observations (Larsen, 2009), where the background of the thesis' authors and the purpose of the study were distinctly explained for the respondents. Each semi-structured interview required almost one hour in order to collect answers and ask possible follow-up questions. Every respondent was informed about the pledges of the thesis regarding collecting primary data. They were guaranteed complete anonymity, the possibility to skip answering specific questions and were offered a preview access to all material before final publication. Furthermore, this thesis and the process of it also aimed to keep the respondents unknown to each other's participation in the process of gathering primary data. However, in the groundwork before conducting the interview, 29 questions (see Appendix, 8.1 Interview questions) were formulated by endorsement from the selected theoretical framework and its secondary data. The questions were handed out in advance to the respondents in order to prepare them for the interviews, which took place in April and May anno 2017, in order to give them a chance to think through their own experiences of repatriation. The questions were structured and designed in a way to avoid receiving only "yes" or "no" replies, as it may entail with the result of non-reflecting respondents (Bryman & Bell, 2013), which this thesis highly strived to prevent since deep and thoughtful answers were desirable in order to facilitate a better analysis of the repatriation process. All respondents approved sound recording during the interviews, since the promise was made not to provide any outsider access to the recording and its transcription. Sound recording is very useful since typing notes during an ongoing interview may result in that some important parts will be forsaken (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Sound recording on the other hand reproduces exactly what has been said and allows to be listened to over and over again, which facilitates the narratorial process when transcribing the

interviews (Ibid). In the process of writing this thesis, transcription turned out to be valuable since it facilitated the ability to compile the different answers from the interviews when formulating and analysing the empirical evidence. The decision was made to form the empirical evidence into two separate sections with each respondent categorized in one's present or former company where the repatriation process took place. A short background of the companies and the repatriates was presented in order to clarify the context of each repatriation. Also, the division and categorization of the empirical evidence will make it more perspicuous.

3.5 Method for Empirical Material Analysis

3.5.1 Template Analysis and Execution of the Analysis

Analysing qualitative data can be tricky since there are no clear stated rules regarding how to perform the analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2013). However, in order to provide some sort of guideline and structure to the analytical part of the thesis, a template analysis can be utilized (Ibid). According to Bryman and Bell (2013) a template analysis discourses with indistinct and linked techniques for analysing qualitative data. But anyhow, they further proclaim that one aspect of template analysis in particular can be emphasized which is themes. In order to utilize themes, this thesis categorized the analysis into different sections similarly to the ones in the empirical part. All sections do not have to be of equal importance for the repatriation process. However, some structural modifications regarding the matching between the empirical part and the analysis part may occur but the aim is to achieve conformity to the extent it is appropriate and applicable.

Since objectivity is key in doing a good research (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013), this thesis aims to avoid using own personal values when analysing the collected data. As some modifications are made when categorizing the data, one might object that subjectivity does appear in this report. Anyhow, this thesis strives for letting the facts collected from the primary and secondary data speak for itself without any further interference. Because according to Sekaran and Bougie (2013), research that is done in an objective way, will by itself become more scientifically correct, accurate and reliable. According to Larsen (2009), it is necessary to realise that no research can be fully objective, since the researcher always is making assumptions and standpoints when formulating a research question, selecting data and drawing conclusion. However, Larsen (2009) highlights that the analytical part of a thesis

should be a reduction and summation of the collected data in order to facilitate the analysis of it. Therefore, this thesis includes a multiple case study where the analysis will be an execution where the respondents of each company will be examined and compared with each other in order to find possible patterns of similarities and disparities. In other words, the repatriation process of each company will be set against each other. When performing the analysis, it is important to have the research question in mind in order to keep focus on trying to understand the nature of the chosen topic. Thus, it is of great value to utilize the chosen theoretical framework when examining the empirical evidence in order to achieve a better analysis. Moreover, secondary data and sources were used to support or oppose statements from the respondents.

3.5.2 Credibility of the findings: Reliability and Validity

Conducting research may be difficult and hence, it is useful to keep the terms reliability and validity in mind during the process of writing a thesis. Many researchers define reliability in different ways. Bryman and Bell (2013) have chosen to define reliability as stability and whether the study is reliable. Collis and Hussey (2014) on the other hand are using descriptions such as accuracy and precision when defining this term. There is also a similar variety when it comes to validity. Larsen (2009) phrases validity in a refined way as relevance. Bryman and Bell (2013) give a more developed formulation regarding validity, as they describe it as an indicator of to what extent the result of the study reflects the chosen phenomenon or topic. Sekaran and Bougie (2013) define validity as how well the result of the research reflects the gathered data and if it can be applied on other contexts. Moreover Sekaran and Bougie (2013) claim that a well explained methodology that in detail explain the process of your research leads to a higher validity, since the coherence of it will be clearer. However, qualitative data is often consisting of a large amount of personal reflections from the respondents e.g. expressions and other exhaustive reviews (Collis & Hussey, 2014). That was one of the reasons why the decision was made to conduct interviews with pledge anonymity towards a third part, with the aim to obtain reports from the respondents that are as truthful and accurate as possible in order to enhance the reliability. Furthermore, this thesis obtains extra reliability since semi-structured interviews were utilized. Thus, Bryman and Bell (2013) claim that non-structured interviews do not obtain reliability. With regard to increase an uphold validity, Larsen (2009) states that it is of great value to gather relevant data. Taking that into consideration, it is important that information collected from the interviews is applicable on the chosen topic of the thesis, since properly conducted interviews

are a prerequisite for being able to accomplish a neat analysis. All questions to the respondents in this thesis were therefore formulated with reference to the theoretical framework which emphasizes valuable factors of a repatriation process, in order to achieve a higher level of validity. Validity demands research that is derived from a strong and obvious theory advocated by other researchers (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008). In order to be transparent when it comes to explaining how the primary data was gathered, the interview questions can be found in the appendix (see Appendix, 8.1 Interview questions).

3.6 Ethical Position

It is inevitable not to interfere with ethical aspects when conducting research (Larsen, 2009). Larsen (2009) claims that critical situations of ethical issues will appear somewhere either when choosing topic, gathering data, utilizing data or at the publication of the research (Ibid). Many different researchers point out that ethics must be applied cautiously in order to conduct research in an honest way with dignity (Collis & Hussey, 2014; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008; Bryman & Bell, 2013, Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). Furthermore, Larsen (2009) states that four different ethical guidelines should be taken into consideration when performing research. Those guidelines include aspects such as informing the respondents about the purpose of the study and the background of the authors, voluntary participation, confidentiality and a clarification about who will get an access to the final published thesis (Larsen, 2009). When working with this thesis, all the ethical guidelines made by Larsen (2009) were seriously taken into account. Every respondent in this thesis participated by free will and will always remain anonymous towards third part. No outsider will gain access to the unpublished research material and the correspondence with the respondents, since it otherwise would reveal the identity of the respondents. Both the background of the authors of this thesis and where this thesis will be published were in an early stage clarified for the respondents. Each respondent gained the possibility to refrain from answering specific questions and also to give their final approval before the publication regarding “sensitive” data collected from their own interview. This thesis aims to protect its respondents from any possible reprisals from their present or former employers and the one who tries to reveal the identities of the respondents is doing so in vain.

3.7 Method Critique

Sources that have been quoted many times by other researchers were prioritized in this thesis. However, despite the fact that a source is well-quoted, this does not have to imply that a source is relevant and accurate. Maybe the process of collecting secondary sources would have been more balanced if also more unknown research material with low rates of peer reviews was taken into consideration. Since both the companies and the respondents of this thesis are situated in Gothenburg and its vicinity, one might object that this research is not applicable on other companies in Sweden and other parts of the world. Interviewing foreign companies and repatriates could have given this report another perspective, since the repatriation process may differ in other countries overseas. Some of the repatriates did their repatriation many years ago and that increases the risk that useful information about their experiences from the repatriation can have been forgotten and also that the repatriation process of the organisation could have been altered markedly since their repatriation. On the other hand, it is possible that repatriates who returned not long before their interviews for this thesis was made, may not have settled down enough since the homecoming, and therefore not yet have got the chance to really reflect on their repatriation. One major disadvantage when conducting qualitative research by interviews is the immense amount of time needed (Larsen, 2009), and this limits the number of possible respondents. A greater number of respondents would have given the report more empirical evidence in order analyse the chosen topic. Despite that this thesis strives to obtain validity, Bryman and Bell (2013) question whether validity is important at all for qualitative research, since they claim that validity is more connected to quantitative research. However, every repatriate in this thesis has arrived back home from doing service abroad in countries in either East Asia, North America or Europe. It may be the case that repatriation differs a lot for employees returning home from other parts of the world. Thus, it may could have been helpful to interview repatriates who have returned from abroad assignments in e.g. South America. Getting in touch with the human resources departments of the companies examined in this thesis turned out to be unsuccessful. However, it would have been of great value to find out about the companies' opinions about their repatriation processes regarding their own employees. Furthermore, using older theories that were published before the widespread revolutionary digitalization (Kättstöm, 2016) might be less advantageous since some useful technological inventions are not analysed and taken into account. For example, one might question if sporadic journeys to home before final homecoming should still be practiced by companies, since helpful technological

communication programs such as Skype enables video calls and free interaction (Ernst & Young, 2006).

4. Empirical evidence

4.1 Presentation of the companies and the respondents

4.1.1 Volvo Group

Volvo Group is a multi-diversified company with its headquarter located in Gothenburg, Sweden. They are offering many different products and services such as trucks, buses, marine products and components, military goods, construction vehicles, financial services etc. Volvo Group has a total amount of 100 000 employees and they have production plants in 18 countries. Their products and services are for sale on a global level (Volvo Group, 2017).

4.1.2 Volvo Cars

Volvo Cars was until year 1999 part of Volvo Group. However later that year, Volvo Cars was purchased by Ford Motor Company (Volvo Group, 2017). But today, Volvo Cars is owned by Zhejiang Geely Holding (Volvo Cars, 2017a). Volvo Cars describes themselves as a premium producer of cars in different segments. Their headquarter is based in Gothenburg, Sweden. They are providing a wide range of products and services, such as manufacturing, design, marketing, design etc. (Volvo Cars, 2017b). Volvo Cars has a total number of approximately 33 000 employees. During the first quarter of 2017, Volvo Cars manufactured nearly 153 000 cars (Ibid).

4.1.3 Respondents

Below is a summary of the respondents who participated in the empirical interviews, see Table 1.

Respondent	Employer	Repatriating from	Date of Service Abroad	Gender
Person 1	Volvo Group	Bangalore, India	2012-2014	Female
Person 2	Volvo Group	Shanghai, China	2010-2015	Male
Person 3	Volvo Cars	Shanghai, China	2016	Male
Person 4	Volvo Cars	Gent, Belgium	1993-1997	Male
Person 5	Volvo Cars	Rockleigh, USA	1996	Male
		Gent, Belgium	2008-2012	

Table 1. *Description of respondents.* Created by authors (Nordell & Tingström, 2017).

4.2 Volvo Group

4.2.1 Pre-return repatriation

4.2.1.1 Expectations

Both of the respondents clarified that they had expectations regarding their homecoming to Sweden and that some of the expectations emerged already before going on the overseas assignment. Person 1 claimed that her motive for going abroad mainly consisted of the chance to experience something “new” and challenging after several decades of working at the headquarter in Gothenburg. She thought that the abroad assignment was the last missing part in her jigsaw puzzle in order to be able to take the next step up the hierarchical ladder when arriving back home and she did not have any expectations about getting a higher salary. The work-related expectations of hers were rather to gain further business related experiences through working on another market.

However, Person 1 stated that her expectations about the homecoming was a gradual process increasing in intensity during her stay in India. Before the actual homecoming, Person 1 got aware of a negative mentality towards her and her international experiences from the Swedish

human resource office. According to her, their mentality could be formulated as: “You should not believe that you are anything special just because you have been abroad”, which she experienced as diminishing. After being in India for a two-year period, Person 1 had experienced a great amount of freedom to make valuable and revolutionary decisions since the Swedish headquarter was located far from her office in Bangalore. This freedom came with a great responsibility. However, she did not consider this as a burden. The days were long at the office but the working environment was mentioned as aspiring and fun which lead to great dedication for her work tasks. When taking her great amount of freedom and decision-making power that she had achieved into account, a feeling of anxiety arose within her before the actual homecoming. She described her feeling about the job upon the return to Sweden as: “How should I feel committed and consider this job as something funny?”. Coming home would mean that her perceived freedom and power would be reduced since the geographical distance to the Swedish management team would disappear, and as she mentioned it she would once again “feel like one in the crowd”.

Furthermore, Person 1 had expectations about that the company would be interested to utilize her gained new knowledge and business contacts that she developed during her time in India. Person 2 had heard from fellow colleagues about the upcoming repatriation process and it was described as something cumbersome and that one should not expect either to reach a higher position within the home organisation or a good reception. He further claimed that he was fully aware of the issues that could appear when returning home. But, despite this awareness, a feeling of stress started to grow within him when thinking about how the upcoming repatriation would be for himself but also for his wife and kids. Furthermore, Person 2 expected, in consensus with Person 1, that an abroad assignment could be a tool for making the next move on the hierarchical ladder within the company when coming home. Regarding the repatriation of Person 2, he stressed that some expectations rather were a state of realization as he before coming home understood that he would not live exactly the same type of life when coming home. The family had adapted to another lifestyle while living in China through e.g. eating dinners at restaurants on a frequent basis, a lifestyle he considered as impossible to maintain when coming home to Sweden. Furthermore, he knew he was promised a job when coming home after five years of doing service in China. However, he felt a bit of uncertainty about whether it would be an “upgrade” or not compared to the type of job he had before leaving Sweden. In retrospect, Person 2 could see that the job he received when coming home from China was not a degradation compared to the one he had

before starting his journey to the abroad assignment. However, the job he obtained when coming home compared the one in China was a clear hierarchical downgrade.

4.2.1.2 Career planning

Whether there usually is a career planning function in conjunction with the final homecoming in Volvo Group is according to Person 1 hard to tell, since a massive restructuring of the Volvo Group organisation in Sweden took place when she was about to go come home. Because of this reorganization, all of the employees had to reapply for their jobs, which in extent meant that nobody was guaranteed to keep his or her job at the considered departments of Volvo Group. Furthermore, Person 1 also claimed that the reorganization probably was the reason why no career planning was executed regarding her return to the company, since the company naturally focused on other organizational issues. However, she claimed that if she would have asked for a career planning, she would probably have obtained one. The situation for Person 2 was quite similar to the one of Person 1, since he was not offered any career planning meeting about the time he was starting his journey back home. Instead, he had a career planning meeting before his journey to China with the human resource department and his assigned contact person, in which they discussed expectations regarding future salary and work tasks connected to his stay abroad. They also promised him a future job at the home office when finalizing his upcoming five years stay in China. About the time he arrived home, he felt poorly informed about the help that the human resource department was offering the repatriates. Once he got to know about the actual support that the human resource department could offer, he tried to book a meeting in order to arrange a new career planning. He then summarized Volvo Group's attitude regarding the career planning as: "It feels as they do not do more than what is absolutely necessary".

4.2.1.3 Communication

Almost to the very end of Person 1's stay abroad, she thought that she was going to receive an extension of her contract and thereby her stay in India for another year. But since she was not offered further suitable job assignments, she took the decision to return back home. She further recalled that she had sporadic management communication with her boss about her upcoming repatriation. However, she did not consider those calls as a way of structured communication and does not remember if she at that time wished for a better structure. Further on, she spoke about her contact person in India, which was a bought, outsourced service. This contact person was supposed to facilitate their stay abroad by helping to fix

problems that occurred during the stay such as tax-payments and installation of broadband. Having a stable Internet access at the accommodation was considered as an essential prerequisite for maintaining contact with her relatives and the office in Sweden. Furthermore, she stated that she was very dissatisfied with her assigned contact person since he appeared to be anything except from what they wished for. The functioning of the contact person was so bad that Person 1 and her husband sometimes had to set their job aside in order to do the job of the contact person such as applying for a new bank account. Person 1 expressed a feeling of frustration regarding the contact person. Having a contact person was supposed to be a structured support provided by Volvo Group. However, it turned out to be the opposite. The bad performances of the contact person were something that Person 1 frequently communicated to her company but she only received poor responses regarding this lack of support. This further contributed to her negative perception about the provision of support from Volvo Group, since Person 1 believed that she too often had to be the one who had to solve the problems that occurred and too often had to monitor the support in order to keep it going. She stated: “There is some sort of inertia” when analysing the support from Volvo Group. For example she outlined the difficulties to find a suitable housing even though Volvo Group was supposed to ease such issues by both financial support and support from the contact person. Even though she appreciated the help from Volvo Group with the shipment of belongings when moving back home, she clearly pointed out that she was the one who almost every time had to make the initial contact with the human resource department regarding her homecoming. However, Person 1 also spoke about her frequent journeys to Sweden during her time in India. Since she at that time was an important member of a management team at her office in Sweden, she was obliged to be present at the meetings every second month and stay in Sweden for one week each time. According to Person 1, video calls were a useful tool in order to keep in touch with colleagues in Sweden. However, the sporadic journeys back home meant more on a private level for Person 1 as she then was provided with the opportunity to meet her loved ones whom decided to remain in Sweden during her stay abroad.

Person 2 claimed that communication is a key aspect to include in the repatriation process since being away from the office at home easily makes one unaware of important changes at home, such as structural reorganisations with new managers or fellow old colleagues whom decide to leave the company. Furthermore, Person 2 claimed that a reorganisation can affect the repatriation negatively when the person who sent the repatriate abroad leaves the

company in conjunction with the reorganisation. Contrary to Person 1's experiences, he saw the support from Volvo Group as a more structured and better established support. He further claimed that he received help from two to three assistants who were considered to be his contact persons. They were taking care of schools for the children, visa, bank account and chauffeur. However, Person 2 did not have a contact person in Sweden during his stay in China and before the journey home. However, he claimed that he still did not miss any news about possible large changes within the company since he was part of a global department with well-developed internal information channels. Moreover, he claimed that, because of his own high hierarchical position, he could easily get in touch with his boss and the management team in Sweden. He went on sporadic journeys 2-3 times a year in order to visit his former workplace in Sweden. Furthermore, he took his family with him on non-work related journeys to Sweden every summer.

4.2.1.4 Preparatory repatriation training

None of the respondents at Volvo Group participated in any preparatory repatriation training. Person 1 stated that nobody mentioned anything regarding preparatory repatriation training. However, Person 2 on the contrary obtained language lessons in basic Chinese and lessons regarding Chinese culture before going abroad. Furthermore, Volvo Group also provided prepaid English lessons for his kids.

4.2.2 Post-return repatriation

4.2.2.1 Promotion

Person 1 claimed that she returned to a job with less power after being abroad, which she experienced as very hard. During her time in India, she was "the face of the company" with a lot of freedom and she often had the last and conclusive word when decisions were about to be made. Upon the return to Sweden, she received a new job at the same hierarchical level as her old job before going abroad to India. In other words, her job in Sweden was a downgrade compared to her job in India. She was quite sure that she would have been able to obtain the job she got when returning home without her accomplished assignment in India. Furthermore, she said that she was disappointed that she was not promoted as a gesture of appreciation from the company for her achieved efforts in India. When Person 2 arrived, he was not guaranteed a specific role at the home office. However, he aimed to get the job of his boss. Unfortunately that was not possible. He had a clear intention to advance within the company when returning back. Moreover, he believed that he did not get endorsement from the

company in order to reach a higher hierarchical level at the company and because of that, he had to utilize his new network of friends and colleagues within the company in order to find a job that, according to him, was more acceptable. He also felt limited when returning back home to Sweden as his new job was a hierarchical downgrade compared to his job in China. Person 2 also considered the job he received when coming home as no different from a hierarchical point of view in comparison to the one he had before going abroad. The job he received at the time he returned home did not require an accomplished foreign service. However, he believed that his stay in China today has contributed to a better track record which consequently makes him a more attractive employee which in extent can be a massive door opener to future challenges. Furthermore, Person 2 requested some sort of structured process for the repatriation, suggesting a type “honeymoon” were the repatriate is given the opportunity to settle down with all new routines at the home office. He labelled this as a holding job, and this job would have reduced the level of stress he felt during the first period of time since coming home. Furthermore this holding job would imply an adjusted amount of work in order to ease the adjustment of the repatriate.

4.2.2.2 Compensation

Person 1 and Person 2, did not obtain any higher salary when they came back to their old office at home. They therefore considered themselves as not being financially compensated despite their fulfilled efforts abroad. However, Person 1 did not have any expectations on a higher salary as a consequence of the expatriation upon the return.

4.2.2.3 Knowledge-transfer

When Person 1 arrived home, she hoped to use her new knowledge and business network at Volvo Group in Sweden through being placed in a role in which her experiences could be utilized. However, the company did not show any interest for her improved competence. Person 1 summarized Volvo Group’s approach to her by saying: “I really feel that my service abroad did not mean anything to them”. She further elaborated on this statement by reflecting on the fact that Volvo Group had invested a lot money and yet, the company seemed to lack a plan of how to take care of the repatriate’s knowledge. Person 1 further claimed that she does believe Volvo were satisfied with her efforts abroad. However, once a repatriate arrives home with new knowledge and business contacts, Volvo Group tends to fail taking care of their competences. It appears as strange to her that a structured plan of how to transfer the competences is not implemented in Volvo Group. She felt let down about Volvo Group’s

disinterest regarding her new developed knowledge and claimed that this was the first time in her almost 30 years long career at Volvo Group that she wanted to leave the company. She was not far from being headhunted and accepting job offers from other companies which were more interested in her knowledge and business network. However, she further stated that she has used her knowledge and business contacts from India almost every day since coming home, and she hopes that Volvo Group some day realise that such valuable knowledge and business contacts are not utilized enough within the company. Person 2 reflects about Volvo Group's interest in taking care of his knowledge and business contacts as a waste of money. He further talked about the lack of attention he obtained from Volvo Group regarding his new developed knowledge and business contacts from his stay in China. He claimed that Volvo Group did not have an intention to bring home new and valuable competence back to Sweden and that the motive of the company rather was that the employees should go abroad just to execute assigned assignments and nothing more. Furthermore, he said that he is using his new gained knowledge and business network on an everyday basis on a professional level and that it is useful. He further claimed that: "If someone ask for a certain business contact in China I will arrange that contact within a minute". He further said: "Volvo Group does not even know about my gained business network in China" and he wished to be placed in a role where his experience could be utilized by Volvo Group. Overall, Person 2 felt disappointed of how the company took care of him when he arrived home and their unconcern regarding his new gained knowledge. Consequently, Person 2 applied for jobs at other companies for the first time in his entire career at Volvo Group.

4.2.2.4 Post non-work issues

Person 2 claimed that coming home was not the easiest thing to do. Especially returning with his wife and kids made it more difficult on a private level than expected, since he was not the only one who had to adjust. He said that finding a suitable school in which his kids could thrive took a while which badly affected his own ability to adapt and adjust to his former lifestyle in Sweden which further resulted in a lot of stress. According to Person 2, the well-being of his family members had a huge impact on his own adjustment. Therefore, coming home was considered as a bit of a reverse culture shock for him. During his family's stay in China, he was assigned some benefits such as subsidy for housing, consulting in order to find a suitable school for his kids, private chauffeur and prepaid home trips every year. It was therefore a reconversion for his whole family when they were back in Sweden, since they had

to face a new daily life with routines that were dissimilar to the life they were used to in China. Person 2 further stated that he often missed his old life in China about the time he arrived home, but that today, his old life in China is more a beautiful memory of his past. Person 2 believed that his family developed an even further awareness and acceptance of different types of cultures during his duty overseas, and he was proud to claim that they all benefit from this today in their lives in Sweden. However, in retrospect, he criticized the lack of help from Volvo Group when he asked for help to find a new house back in Sweden, a situation which he considered very stressful. Indeed, Volvo Group temporarily financed the rent of a department during a short period of time, but he further stated that he often had to nag on repeated occasions in order to obtain support from Volvo Group which he considered as a bit strange. On the other hand, the company was quite fast to provide him with a new company car. His spouse got a job in Sweden that she liked but the children faced some difficulties at their first new school in Sweden. However, when they later changed to another school, things slowly turned to the better. He saw his life in China as privileged and even though he and his family had to go through a stressful reverse culture shock in Sweden, he would gladly do the journey over and over again.

Person 1 and her husband arrived back to the kids back in Sweden, who did not live in India during Person 1's duty abroad. Although she missed her kids during her stay in India, it was a bit easier to find a suitable apartment since she and her spouse did not have to worry about finding a new and good school for the kids as they stayed in Sweden. When Person 1 arrived in Sweden, she did not have to worry about finding a new home again since the children maintained living in her old house during her service overseas. Volvo Group helped her by shipping her furnitures and belongings from India back to Sweden, which was a service she appreciated. However, Person 1 had a private driver every day around the clock in India and paid housekeeping. She also had great spare time with travels to exotic and nearby located destinations and she also played a lot of golf. She described her non-work life in India as something completely else compared to her life in Sweden. Although Person 1 lived life to the fullest, she did not consider it as a problem, that this luxurious and privileged lifestyle ended as a consequence of coming back to Sweden. She really appreciated her lifestyle in India, but once she was back in Sweden she felt very glad to be back. Person 1 enjoyed being able to iron her own clothes again, having the possibility to work in the garden and being able to spend time with her old friends. She further stated that it might would have been harder to return to her normal lifestyle in Sweden if she had stayed for an even longer time in India

since she therefore would have been more used to that kind of life. However, she believed that the only reverse culture shock that appeared to her was that she was approached by a languid and tedious attitude when coming up with suggestions. In other words, a complete different attitude compared to the positive attitude in India. Apart from this attitude at her workplace, she thought that coming home to Sweden was a wonderful thing and she stated this adaption as: “It is nice to live in a country with fresh and clean air and not living among honking cars around the clock”.

4.3 Volvo Cars

4.3.1 Pre-return repatriation

4.3.1.1 Expectations

The expectations of the different respondents differed to some degree. The expectations of Person 3 were to develop a network of contacts, handle new challenges, achieve an understanding of how they work abroad and what Volvo Cars in Sweden can learn from them. Furthermore, another expectation was that he would be able to utilize these experiences and gained knowledge when coming back to the home organisations. According to him, all of these expectations were met. Person 4 did not have much expectations more than that he had hopes that his stay abroad would be beneficial when arriving back to the home organisation and for his future career in general. Person 5 did not have any expectations regarding job factors such as compensation. However, he had in similarity with Person 3 expectations about being able to experience new cultures and meet new people that could be beneficial in the future. All of the respondents agreed on the fact that the expectations of the company and the expectations of the repatriates did differ. Person 3 claimed that the expectations from the company and the purpose of sending him abroad was that he would go there and do a specific assignment, then return. Person 4 answered similarly to Person 3 and added that sending away employees abroad should also work as a tool to develop them, which could later be good for the company, which also Person 5 agreed upon.

Person 5 was a bit fragmented when answering this question. On the one hand, the specific manager that sent him abroad had individual thoughts of how the experiences gained by Person 5 could be beneficial for the organisation when coming back. But on the other hand, since this manager left the organisation during his stay, nothing happened because of the fact that the organisation did not have a specified process for this.

4.3.1.2 Career planning

For two of the respondents (Person 3 and 4), there was an established process that according to them can be referred to as career planning. According to Person 3, Volvo Cars nowadays has a system that is called PDC (People Development Committee) in which you discuss what the expatriate's next step will be in the organisation when returning back to the home company after the expatriation and what they will do in order to retain them in the organisation. Person 3 claimed that this system worked very good. Person 4 mentioned that this process in his case started six months before homecoming. However, he emphasized that this communication between the home manager and the expat needs to continue throughout the expatriation and not just in this early phase. In the case of Person 5, he did not have an established procedure of this kind. However, he meant that the former manager that sent him abroad had a very clear vision about his specific future and their discussions regarding the next step took place three months before returning back home. However, when this manager left the organisation and was replaced by another one, there were no clear plans and ideas about the future of Person 5. As a consequence of this, he got what he perceived as "shameful offers" that he declined. Those offers furthermore made him think about leaving the organisation. Consequently, the job he has today was found by himself on an own initiative through getting in contact with the customer service.

4.3.1.3 Communication

Two out of three respondents had some kind of contact person abroad who helped them with practical issues and facilitated their stay. However, not all of the respondents thought it worked out properly. According to Person 3, the contact person they had abroad did not do her job properly, which they reported to the management. After that, it became better. In the case of Person 5, having a contact person for expatriates was a purchased service that Volvo Cars bought from another company. According to him, this worked out properly. However, there was a high turnover of staff.

Furthermore, all of the respondents had contact persons in their home organisations as well. In the case of Person 3, there was one person who had the responsibility to send out information to the expatriates, give global updates and keep him updated with changes in the organisation. He was however disappointed with the fact that his manager only contacted him twice during the stay abroad. This made Person 3 feel a little bit forgotten. He had also hoped for a better communication with the contact person in Sweden. The contact person for Person

5 was his home manager. However, just like in the case of Person 3, this contact was lacking. One reason for this was according to the respondent that the home manager that sent him out left the organisation, and that this new one was not as interested in his expatriation as the one that sent him abroad. Person 4 emphasized the importance of having regular meetings since it is otherwise easy to feel vulnerable and lose important networks of contacts. Despite the fact that Person 4 did not have much contact with his home manager during his stay, he had contact with his colleagues at home 2-3 times a week, which was important. However, he claimed that the process of communication was lacking.

Both Person 4 and 5, that in contrast to Person 3 were abroad many years ago, emphasized the digitalization and today's use of social platforms as a tool that could have been facilitating the communication between the home company and the expatriates. Person 3 did never go back to Sweden during the stay abroad. However, both Person 4 and 5 did. Person 5 did not go back during his first stay abroad, but during the second one, he went back 20 times a year because of both job and private related reasons. Two of the respondents (Person 3 and 4) did mention the time difference as an issue for the facilitation of the communication.

4.3.1.4 Preparatory repatriation training

None of the respondents had any preparatory training in which different socio-cultural aspects in the home country were discussed. The only cultural training mentioned in these interviews where that both Person 3 and 5 had linguistic and cultural training about the Chinese and American culture respectively.

4.3.2 Post-return repatriation

4.3.2.1 Promotion

Two of the respondents were rewarded positions within the Volvo Cars organisation that they were satisfied with and that they saw as a good step in the career as a result of the expatriation. Person 5 got shameful offers when coming home, but later got a better job because of own initiatives. Person 3 was the only respondent who mentioned what role he achieved and he was promoted 7-8 months after the homecoming and became responsible for a purchasing department. Person 3 further pointed out that it is not enough to stay abroad, you also have to do a good job in order to be promoted within the firm. Person 4 got, in conformity with Person 3, a position within the company that was better from a hierarchically

perspective. However, this was not the case for Person 3. However, he was satisfied with the role he got within the firm.

All of the respondents were promised a job within Volvo Cars when coming home since they were still employed by Volvo Cars. However, no promises of a specific role within the company were made. Only Person 3 had a holding job when coming home. He then worked with a temporary job in Olofström for 7-8 months. Furthermore, all of the respondents saw their expatriation as an experience that will be important for their future careers and as a necessity for being able to proceed up the hierarchical ladder. However, Person 3 and 5 also mentioned that he also saw this opportunity as a chance to see something new and meet new people. Both Person 3 and 5 has used their networks that they created abroad and feel like they nowadays fill a special role in the company that they did not do before leaving. Furthermore, Person 5 expressed wishes about how the future regarding potential roles within the company after an expatriation could look like. He mentioned that Volvo Cars has a center of excellence that he thinks should work more as link that can report to the organisation about expatriates that are returning home and match them with appropriate tasks within the organisation so that his knowledge and experiences can be spread in an optimized way.

4.3.2.2 Compensation

Two of the respondents (Person 4 and 5) did get a higher compensation in conjunction with the homecoming as a result of the time abroad. Person 3 had the same salary before leaving as the one he had after coming home. The salary was a little bit lower during the stay abroad. However, since he had different types of allowances (about 500-600 kronor per day) during this time, it was comparable to the total compensation he had in Sweden. Person 4 claimed that his salary was positively affected by the expatriation and that he could demand more as a result of the stay abroad.

4.3.2.3 Knowledge-transfer

All of the respondents agreed on the fact that they to some degree could spread their knowledge within the organisation in conjunction with the homecoming but that there was no structured process for this. Person 3 and 5 further mentioned that their biggest knowledge contribution to the home company was through their gained network abroad. Person 3 emphasized the importance of having met these people and today have a good relationship with them, both on a professional and on a private level. This has led to the fact that he

nowadays much easier can get in touch with these people abroad which is important in many cases for the home company. Person 3 further claimed that in order to improve the utilization of the repatriates even more so that the company can gain from it to a higher degree, some kind of workshop would be preferable. Person 5 claimed that except from having the big network he achieved when abroad, he could also contribute in his new job because of the fact that the specific tasks he had abroad were much more detail oriented than the equivalent section in Sweden. Consequently, people were very interested in hearing about how they did specific things abroad. However, he said that there is no specific process for this and that he finds this peculiar since the company invest so much money in the expatriates. However, this indirect knowledge transfer was according to him possible because of the fact that the role he had abroad was very similar to one he got when coming home. Furthermore, all of the respondents mentioned directly or indirectly the importance of being placed in a role in the company in which their gained knowledge and networks could be utilized.

4.3.2.4 Post non-work issues

None of the respondents experienced a high degree of reverse culture shock. Both Person 3 and 5 claimed that the main reason for this was the fact that they worked very much while abroad, which they also do in the home country, which meant that their lifestyle was similar to the one they had at home. Person 5 further claimed that the cultural adaptation for the rest of the family was more problematic than expected. The children experienced linguistic issues because of the fact that the whole education abroad was in English in contrast to when they returned. Furthermore, the spouse, who was not working while abroad, had to return to her old job, which she considered as a major adaption. Even though Person 3 did not have any what he experienced as reverse cultural shock when he returned, some factors that he perceived as strange in the beginning was for example to not anymore live in a hotel and to make his own food again. The only help with practical issues in conjunction with the repatriation mentioned in the interviews was that the company hired a moving company for Person 3 in order to facilitate the move back home.

5. Analysis

5.1 Pre-return repatriation

5.1.1 Career planning

On the question about whether the respondents had any career planning before returning to the home organisation, two of the three respondents at Volvo Cars and one of two respondents at Volvo Group claimed that they had some form of career planning with their managers before coming home. The two persons who did not have any career planning were Person 1 and Person 5. During the period when Person 1 was about to return to the home organisation, she did not have any career planning, since Volvo Group was going through a massive reorganization which resulted in a lack of attention towards the homecoming. According to Person 5, his career planning was also lacking because of reorganisations, in conformity with Person 1. From this comparison, an indication can be seen that when reorganisations within the home organisations take place during the international assignment of a specific employee, this employee can easily be forgotten and thereby be negatively affected by a lack of focus.

This lack of career planning made Person 1 and 5 very dissatisfied which supports the reasoning made by for example Cox et al (2013) and Ratnam and Sansom (1995) about the importance of a career planning in order to facilitate the repatriation adjustment. Without a career planning, it appears to be hard for the repatriates to have realistic expectations about what the work-related future will look like for him or her when coming home. This can further according to Stroh et al (1998) lead to a negative shock, which in turn can hinder a successful readjustment. Feldman (1991) also pointed out the value of a clear career path for repatriates as a prerequisite for adjustment.

Despite the fact that three out of five respondents claimed that they had some form of career planning, indications can still be seen that this specific part of the process can still be improved. For example, Person 4 claimed that the communication about the future of the repatriate between the home company and the individual could be extended and not just take place at one occasion six months before homecoming. Furthermore, Person 2 claimed that Volvo Group does not have the intention to do more than what is absolutely necessary for the repatriates and that it should be more prioritized.

Person 4 was the respondent who most recently repatriated and he was also the respondent who was most satisfied with the repatriation process. From this fact, a hint of a developing repatriation system, at least in Volvo Cars, can be seen. Person 5, who was the respondent in Volvo Cars who did not have a career planning, further described what the consequences of this lack of career planning were. In conjunction with the homecoming, he was offered what he perceived as shameful offers, which in turn for the first time in his career made him think about leaving the organisation as a consequence of lacking commitment. This reasoning by Person 5 further supports the theory made by Stahl et al (2002) who claim that a lacking career planning can lead to lower commitment towards the company and further create intentions among the repatriates to leave the organisation. One of the six targets mentioned by Feldman (1991) named “retention” can also be highlighted, since a correlation between the absence of career planning and a higher turnover rate of repatriates can be seen.

Three of the respondents claimed that they obtained some sort of career planning before returning home. However, four of them stated that they were promised some sort of job within the home company after their accomplished overseas assignment. This pattern contradicts the theory made by Bossard and Peterson (2005) about that expatriates in general do not know whether they will be guaranteed a job in the home company when they return home.

5.1.2 Communication

Regarding the facilitation of a contact person, a discrepancy was found between the theoretical framework and the empirical data. The only form of contact person mentioned in the theoretical framework was the home country contact person. However, in the empirical data, the respondent also mentioned a contact person in the host country with the purpose of easing their daily life and facilitate their upcoming repatriation process e.g. through helping them with practical issues during their stay. Hence, these two types of contact persons will be handled differently in the analysis.

Three of five respondents had some sort of contact person in Sweden during their overseas assignments. All of these three respondents were sent abroad by Volvo Cars which indicates that the facilitation of home country contact persons is more common there than in Volvo Group. However, all of these three respondents were still dissatisfied with how this service was conducted and asked for improvements. For example, Person 3 and Person 4 were

dissatisfied with the fact that this contact person only contacted them a few times when they were abroad, which made them feel forgotten and not up to date with changes in the organisation. This thereby supports the fact mentioned in the theoretical framework that the purpose of communication is twofold. It supports both the theory made by Allen and Alvarez (1998) who claim that one purpose of keeping constant contact with the employee abroad is to avoid the loss of visibility and also the theory made by Hyder and Lövblad (2007) who claim that another purpose of keeping constant contact is to keep the repatriates updated regarding changes within the organisation in order to facilitate their expectations.

However, one indication of that a development regarding the facilitation of home country contact persons can be seen is the fact that Person 4, who was the respondent who did his expatriation and repatriation most recently, also was the one who had the most developed communication system with his home company during his stay abroad. He had, unlike the other respondents, a specific contact person who was a formally assigned individual provided with the task to support the repatriate, which more reminded of a so-called mentor that is mentioned in the theoretical framework (Allen & Alvarez, 1998), instead of having his manager as contact person. Moreover Person 4 and 5 stressed out that they see a clear difference in how communication channels have been positively developed since they had their repatriation many years ago. Furthermore, another sign of improvements found in the empirical data was that according to Person 1, 4 and 5, today's digitalization has increased the possibilities to stay in touch with loved ones as well as colleagues, since the technical development facilitates a more frequent and easier way of communicating.

Four out of five respondents had a contact person in the host country. Despite this fact, only two of them were satisfied with this service. Whether the function of a contact person in the host country is well developed or not seems to be an individual matter rather than a common pattern based on whether the contact person is executed in a specific country or company. Similarly, in what way the contact was handled was also differing between the respondents. In two of the cases, the service was acquired from another company as opposed to the other three where the contact person was hired by the company. When the contact person in the host country did not fulfil his or her assigned duties, Person 1 had to set her job aside in order to fix the issues by herself. She felt unhappy with the fact that she often had to execute the job the contact person should do for her. Thereby, the aspect in the model made by Feldman

(1991) named “level of performance” can be considered to be affected negatively by a lacking contact person in the host country.

Four of five respondents did go back during their expatriations which indicates that conducting sporadic journeys are of great value either for the company or the repatriate him- or herself in agreement with Allen and Alvarez (1998) and Black et al (1992). Furthermore, it indicates that video calls are not able to substitute the physical presence all the time at for example meetings with the management team. This can be proved by the fact that Person 1, who lived far from Sweden, still had to fly home every second month on request of the management team in which she was a member. Moreover, despite the fact that Person 1 is an exception from this contention, another pattern that can be seen regarding sporadic journeys is that respondents that are located in a country closer to the home country are able to make those sporadic journeys more often, and thereby stay in touch with the home company by this mean. Support for this argument is that both Person 4 and 5, who was located in Europe in contrast to the other respondents, went home more often. Also journeys of a more private nature were facilitated by the companies, since Person 2 obtained a prepaid journey for him and his family by Volvo Group one time each year. This indicates that companies have realised the importance of sporadic journeys also from a private point of view and that this is also important in order to facilitate the repatriation adjustment. Person 1 and Person 5 also utilized their sporadic work journeys to spend time with relatives and loved ones. When taking all aspects of sporadic journeys into consideration, it appears as Black’s et al (1992) emphasis of the value of conducting sporadic journeys to the home country before and upon the final homecoming has an importance for the repatriation process.

5.1.3 Preparatory repatriation training

None of the respondents received any preparatory training before they returned back home to Sweden after their fulfilled overseas assignments. Both Stroh et al (1998) and Black et al (1992) pointed out the importance of preparatory repatriation training in order to make the future repatriate aware of for example new codes and values. This will in further extent reduce the risk for a reverse culture shock since the homecoming repatriates become more aware of what lays ahead and therefore ease a smoother readjustment. However, it seems as a discrepancy can be seen between these theoretical assumptions and the empirical data, which in turn indicates of a lacking focus on this specific segment in reality among companies. However, since both Person 2 and Person 5 experienced more family-related issues and in

particular regarding schooling for the kids than expected, this is an indication of that preparatory repatriation training could have been needed for a better repatriation adjustment.

5.2 Post-return repatriation

5.2.1 Promotion

On the question about whether the respondents got promoted in conjunction with the homecoming, the answers differed between the two companies. Two of three respondents at Volvo Cars got a position that was better from a hierarchical point of view upon the return. In contrast, none of the respondents at Volvo Group received a hierarchical promotion after their homecoming, which made them feel dissatisfied and restricted. Hammer et al (1998) support these perceptions of dissatisfaction as they state that changing from a high hierarchical position with great responsibility to a lower one will result in a lack of motivation. However, even though not all of the respondents got a promotion after returning home, all of them got a position within the firm that was at least comparable to the one they had before, which further supports the theory by Allen and Alvarez, (1998), Black (1992) and Lazarova and Caligiuri (2001) that the best way to handle this issue is to put them in a role that is at least comparable to their former role within the organisation. Thereby, also one of the aspects in the definition of a successful repatriation made by Feldman (1991) called “career path” is thereby taken into consideration.

Since two of the three dissatisfied respondents also were the ones who had a lack of career planning, a pattern can be seen that lacking career planning leads to dissatisfied repatriates because of unmet work-related expectations.

Regardless of whether the respondents wished for a promotion upon the return, all of the respondents emphasized the importance of putting the repatriates in a role in the company where the gained knowledge and networks can be utilized, which further is consistent with the theory of Ratnam and Sansom (1995) and Adler (1986), that a higher job responsibility will improve the effectiveness.

Only one of the respondents had a holding job upon the return. Furthermore, a discrepancy could be seen between the theoretical framework and the empirical data regarding the motive of the holding job. The only motive for this phenomenon mentioned in the framework was

that a holding job could be a good temporary job to put the repatriate in before a matching job can be found. However, Person 2 expressed wishes about having one since the period upon the return was stressful because of both practical work issues that had to be dealt with and different family issues regarding for example school for the children. He also claimed that a holding job could reduce this stress immensely by then receiving less work tasks during the first period of time when coming home. This indicates that a higher amount of non-work issues that have to be dealt with for the repatriate upon return enhances the importance of a holding job, which is an additional contribution to the advantages of a holding job mentioned by Allen and Alvarez (1998) in the theoretical framework. Since both Person 2 and Person 5 brought their families with them and both highlighted the importance of a holding job upon return, this indicates that holding jobs seem to be especially important for repatriates who are returning back home with their families including children.

5.2.2 Compensation

In total, two of five respondents got a higher salary upon return. Both of these two respondents work at Volvo Cars. Thereby, according to our empirical evidence, Volvo Cars appears to financially reward homecoming employees after they have accomplished their duties overseas, in contrast to Volvo Group. The two respondents of Volvo Group who did not receive a higher salary or were financially rewarded when coming home after their fulfilled overseas assignment did also express that they applied for other jobs at competing companies. This can be an indication of that companies might should increase the salary for repatriates in order to enhance the job satisfaction of the repatriates and thereby reduce the turnover rates. This reasoning is supported by other researchers such as Dowling et al (1994), Dulebohn and Martocchio (1998) and Feldman (1991).

5.2.3 Knowledge transfer

The knowledge transfer in Volvo Cars was according to the interviews better functioning than the one for Volvo Group since all of the respondents in Volvo Cars were able to contribute to the company with knowledge and experiences in contrast to the respondents in Volvo Group. However, they all emphasized the fact that there was no structured process for this. Person 5 claimed that the main reason that he was being able to spread his knowledge was because of the role he got upon return, that implied a higher responsibility. This further supports the theory by Ratnam and Sansom (1995) that the knowledge transfer could be

facilitated through giving the repatriates a higher job responsibility upon return. However, this role in which his gained knowledge was needed and thereby could be spread naturally was not provided by the company in conjunction with his homecoming. Instead, he had to put a lot of effort in getting this particular role, which indicates that it was rather his merit than the company's that this knowledge could be spread.

Furthermore, the empirical evidence indicates that repatriates are the ones who try to share and transfer their knowledge and business contacts through being placed in a position where their knowledge can be spread and thereby develop as individuals through having a higher responsibility. However, the companies do not seem to facilitate the possibility of doing so enough. This is an indication of the discrepancy mentioned by Paik et al (2002) between the motives of the company, which is to compete globally and the motives of the repatriates, which is to develop as an individual. Thereby, it should be in the interest of the company's to put them in a position upon return where this knowledge can be spread instead of just putting them in a random position within the organisation.

The theoretical framework states that there is a value for companies to use the repatriates' business networks and knowledge (Cox et al, 2013; Feldman, 1991). However, since the knowledge transfer was almost non-existent at Volvo Group, both Person 1 and Person 2 felt as if their gained knowledge and business contacts just were a waste of money. Person 5 also mentioned that a poor executed knowledge transfer can be considered as a waste of money. Moreover, the lack of knowledge transfer made the two respondents from Volvo Group apply for other jobs for the first time in their careers. This further supports the assumption made by Feldman (1991) that a badly managed utilization of skills might result in lower retention rates for the company since their repatriates tend to apply for other jobs elsewhere. This could also lead to the fact that competing companies would be the ones to benefit from the repatriate's gained knowledge and business networks. This would thereby imply a double loss for the company that sent the employee abroad, since they first did not succeed in taking care of and transfer the knowledge and business contacts of the repatriates but as well lose an employee to a potential rival. It would be good if companies such as Volvo Cars and Volvo Group could illuminate these drawbacks of a poor functioning knowledge transfer and realize its potential consequences.

In the theoretical framework, it is mentioned that Chang et al (2012) make a difference between whether the lack of knowledge transfer is a result of unwillingness to spread it and that some repatriates by purpose do avoid sharing their gained knowledge with the home office because of selfishness. However, since the empirical data in this thesis shows that all respondents claimed that they very much wanted to transfer their knowledge with the company at home, there is no evidence for this statement made Chang et al (2012). Rather, the problem seems to be an issue caused by the companies.

5.2.4 Post non-work issues

Only two of the six respondents, Person 2 and Person 5, experienced a reverse culture shock upon return. Person 3 claimed that the main reason for why he did not experience any reverse culture shock was that he worked very much and consequently had a lifestyle similar to the one he had in Sweden before going abroad. However, Person 5 claimed that he was indirectly affected by a reverse culture shock since the cultural adaption was harder for his family, which in turn lead to a higher stress level for him as well and consequently a worsened level of performance in accordance with the theory of Feldman (1991) about how high levels of stress can lead to poor work performance. In accordance with Person 5, also Person 2 mentioned that the reverse culture shock of the rest of the family affected him by proxy. This further supports the theory by Feldman (1991) in the theoretical part that it is important to have some form of occasion in conjunction with the homecoming in which not only the issues of the employee should be emphasized but also the issues of the family. Person 1 believed that she might would have suffered from a reverse culture shock if her stay in India maintained for some more years. This supports the argument made by Feldman (1991) that staying abroad for a long period might increase risk for getting a reverse cultural shock.

Person 2 was the only person who had issues regarding housing as he could not regain access to his house in direct connection to his homecoming, since it was rented by another family during his stay abroad. Because of this, he and his family had to live in a temporary apartment for a specific period of time, which he experienced as toilsome and stressful. However, this temporary apartment was provided and paid by the company. Another example of practical support facilitated by the company was that Volvo Group and Volvo Cars hired a moving company for both Person 1 and 4, when it was time to return. This was appreciated by the repatriates which supports the arguments from Clague and Krupp (1978) who emphasized the importance of housing supports for repatriates.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Empirical and Theoretical Contributions

The purpose of this thesis was to facilitate a better understanding regarding the repatriation process. Furthermore, obstacles that can occur in the repatriation process were examined and factors that are relevant for the repatriation were analysed in order to find out why they can be considered as important for the repatriation process. According to our findings, all of the mentioned factors in the theoretical framework are of importance for the repatriation process. Furthermore, many of the factors are in place in the companies that are included in the empirical data. However, to what extent these specific factors are well-functioning and how satisfied the respondents are regarding the different factors do differ.

As mentioned in the analysis, the contact with the home company is often lacking and thereby, important factors can easily be forgotten, such as career planning. Furthermore, also reorganisations within the company seem to reduce the focus on for example career planning, since the companies tend to prioritize other issues than taking care of their future repatriates. The reason for why the career planning according to this thesis is an important factor to include in the repatriation process is that it can facilitate realistic expectations for the repatriates. In the absence of a career planning, the repatriates will create unrealistic expectations of how their return will be, which in turn will hinder a successful repatriation. Thereby, this factor is important to include in a repatriation process.

Another obstacle that can occur in the expatriation and repatriation process is that employees that are sent abroad easily feel abandoned and not enough updated during their stay abroad, both on a social level but also in their home company, which was confirmed by our respondents. Thereby, different changes, both socially regarding friends and family and within the home office, in terms of different reorganisation can lead to skew expectations since the future repatriate becomes unaware of what is going on at home. Hence, communication needs to be conducted, either by a contact person or through sporadic journeys to the home country, in order to ease realistic expectations and thereby achieve a proper repatriation adjustment. In order words, communication is key in the repatriation process.

It is common to think that the only existing cultural shock occurs when leaving the home country for the host country. However, it is important to mention that returning to the home country after many years abroad also can be experienced as problematic. One obstacle and problematic aspect that can occur is the naive notion of that the homecoming will be free from problems. Furthermore, it appears to be a lacking focus on the preparatory repatriation training in reality. However, we still believe that preparatory repatriation training should be applied within companies and included in the repatriation process in order to facilitate the expectations, since it makes the repatriate to be aware of potential cultural shocks when coming home which thereby will ease the repatriation adjustment. Another indication of this is the fact that two of the respondents experienced more non-work issues upon the return than expected. This is a problem that could have been reduced by a preparatory repatriation training.

It can be considered as an obstacle to a well facilitated repatriation process when a repatriate is placed in a position within the company in which the repatriate cannot spread their gained knowledge and networks properly. It is therefore according to our research important that repatriates receive a position in which they feel appreciated for the job they have done abroad. Thereby, this is an important factor to take into consideration when managing the repatriation process. However, according to the respondents, a better job from a hierarchical point of view do not seem to be the solution. However, to be placed in a position that is at least comparable to the one they had before and in which their experiences from abroad can be utilized seems appreciated. Furthermore, a holding job seems to be another solution for easing the adjustment of the repatriate, both from the company's point of view but also from an individual's point of view.

It is considered as a problematic issue for the repatriates if they are not financially rewarded as a consequence of the expatriation. This is supported by our findings since the respondents that achieved a higher compensation upon the return felt a higher satisfaction than the ones who did not. Thereby, the correlation between compensation and commitment can be seen, which can further decide whether the repatriates choose to stay within the company after coming home and thereby have what can be considered as a successful repatriation adjustment. As a result of this mentioned correlation, we consider this factor as important to take into account in a well-functioning repatriation process.

One potential obstacle that can occur in the repatriation process is that the companies do not enable their repatriates to spread their gained knowledge in the home company. According to our findings, a slight majority of the repatriates were able to spread their knowledge when coming home. However, all of the repatriates were more or less dissatisfied since they often faced difficulties when trying to spread their knowledge and business contacts. Therefore, they requested a more structured procedure within the company for doing so. Furthermore, our research showed that a lacking possibility for repatriates to transfer their new knowledge and networks was another major reason for why they wanted to leave the company when coming back home, in similarity with a low compensation upon the return. We believe that this shows that knowledge transfer should be more facilitated by companies in the repatriation process in order to maintain their valuable repatriates. Otherwise, higher turnover rates will be the reality since repatriates seek other job possibilities elsewhere at competing firms. Consequently, the companies will suffer through losing both knowledge and the money they invested in the repatriates. Researchers such as Chang et al (2012) claim that repatriates by purpose try to avoid sharing their knowledge when coming home. However, our research indicates that such an assumption is incorrect. According to many of our respondents, it was rather the repatriates themselves that showed a great will to transfer their knowledge and network within the company.

When coming home as a repatriate, not just work-related factors need to be taken into account in order to facilitate a smooth adjustment. Also the cultural adjustment and practical non-work issues need, according to our thesis, to be dealt with. According to our findings, the phenomenon of reverse culture shock does not seem to be an absolute consequence of repatriation. The reason for this can be considered as being twofold. Firstly, the high amount of workload which in extent reduces the amount of spare time for the repatriate and thereby the chance to be exposed for cultural changes. Secondly, the time of the stay abroad is considered to have an influence of how massive the cultural shock will be. Our findings thereby support the similar statement made by Feldman (1991) that overseas assignments that last for a longer time results in major reverse culture shocks. Moreover, other practical non-work issues such as housing, job for spouse and schools for children are obstacles that should be highlighted in the process of repatriation. Our research shows that respondents that return home with their families suffer from higher stress levels to a higher extent since they have to deal with non-works issues. Furthermore, the results from our research indicate that these high stress levels tend to affect the level of work performance in a bad way, which in extent

should be a worrying sign for companies. We therefore believe that companies must pay attention to non-work aspects if that is requested by the repatriate. Consequently, this will hopefully ease the adjustment for the repatriate.

6.2 Suggestions for Future Research

In order to achieve an even more accurate conclusion, future research should include a greater amount of respondents. Additionally, it should include respondents from a wider range of companies. The sample method should also not be conducted through performing a so-called snowball sampling since this is not as impartial as random selection process of respondents. Furthermore, also respondents from humans resources departments at different companies ought to be included in the sample, in order to examine the company's experiences and opinions regarding the repatriation conducted at their offices. The future research should also include respondents from a wide variety of countries in order to find out if it is possible to find indications of a global pattern of similarities and differences regarding the repatriation. It might be the case that new obstacles and relevant factors of repatriation will be identified.

Moreover, one can investigate the importance of the country the repatriates were assigned to and see for example whether some obstacles regarding the repatriation process are more tangible when returning from one country in comparison to another.

6.3 Implications for Practitioners

The findings of this thesis mainly address future repatriates and companies conducting overseas assignments. Furthermore, we try to stress out valuable aspects to keep in mind and to utilize in order achieve a better repatriation process. Hopefully this thesis can facilitate a better understanding to both companies and repatriates about what to expect from the repatriation and what consequences one should be prepared for in conjunction with a poor executed repatriation process. Moreover, this thesis should not be considered as a panacea regarding the repatriation process. Instead, companies and repatriates should read this report as a guideline in order to possibly obtain a better functioning repatriation process. Furthermore, since many of the respondents expressed suggestions on possibilities for improvements regarding the repatriation process, we believe that companies could benefit from assimilating the opinions from former repatriates in order to further develop the repatriation process.

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8. Appendix

8.1 Interview questions

1. When did you do your international assignment?
2. For how long time were you abroad?
3. When did you get home?
4. Where were you?
5. What was the purpose of the expatriation?
6. How did you experience your time as an expat?
7. How did you experience your repatriation?
8. Do you think that the repatriation process can be improved? How?
9. Did the company have a well-structured and developed process for the repatriation?
10. Did any form of career planning take place?
11. Do you think that the company utilized your gained experiences when you returned? How do/did you transfer your knowledge?
12. Did any form of evaluation process take place upon the return?
13. Do your former/current colleagues show any interest in your gained knowledge and experiences from abroad?
14. Did you get a higher hierarchical position, a better compensation and greater responsibility when you returned?
15. Did you have a holding job?
16. How did the company manage your expectations?
17. Did your expectations match the reality?
18. How was the communication conducted with the home company during your stay abroad?
19. Did you want to change job in conjunction with your homecoming? Why?
20. Have you received any job offers upon the return thanks to the international assignment?
21. Have you applied for other jobs since you returned from the international assignment?
22. What would make you change job?
23. Would you say that the company had similar expectations as you on your expatriation and repatriation?
24. What privileges did you receive abroad?
25. Did you receive any preparatory training?
26. Was your family with you on the international assignment?

27. If yes, how was their readjustment to Sweden?
28. Did the company support you with any practical issues upon the return?
29. Was it hard to readjust to the home country upon the return?