

ERASMUS UNIVERSITY ROTTERDAM  
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Master Course HR and International Mobility

Repatriation and Retention:

***“Do the repatriation support programmes fail to reach the objective of a successful repatriation?  
If so, why do they fail and what can be done differently to attain a successful repatriation”.***

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

### *Motivation*

It is nearly 20 years since Mc Kinsey coined the term 'war for talent' (Communicaid, 2015). The war for talent refers to an increasingly competitive landscape for recruiting and retaining talented employees (Wikipedia). More recent McKinsey research (2012) suggests that by 2020 the world's businesses could be in crisis with 40 million too few college-educated workers, meaning that the war on talent continues and is just as pertinent as it was in 1997 (Communicaid, 2015). This is reinforced by PWC's 15th annual CEO Survey (2012), in which only 30% say that they have the talent they need to fulfil their future growth ambitions.

Therefore, the aspect of losing high performers after they have returned from an international assignment is a threat for enterprises at a time of war for talent and as global expansion continues (Cave, 2014; Cave, Chung and Choi, 2013). Companies need globally minded managers more than ever to exploit opportunities outside home markets (Alsop, 2014) and to remain competitive in today's dynamic business environment (Pimentel, 2015).

Even though, according to Brookfield Global Relocations Services, the attrition rate percentage of repatriates is in general 'similar to the overall attrition rate for companies, the number is a concern given the inordinate cost of the international assignments', says Diane Douiyssi of Brookfield.

Brookfield Global Relocation Services estimates that assignments typically cost between two to three times the expat's base salary, and for high-cost locations such as Japan and Hong Kong or for hardship locations, the expense can total as much as four times the expat's salary.

When repatriates move to other organisations, the enterprises' core knowledge and key resources also leave with them, which allows competitors to obtain successful techniques, financial resources and customer networks without extensive investment in time or money. As for the original organisation, it suffers equally in terms of lost investment in training and development of the employee. And not only this, scholars (Erdener and Torbiorn 1999; Gregersen and Black 1995; Lazarova and Caligiuri, 2001; Stroh, 1995) have also argued that repatriated staff can improve strategic capabilities when their international knowledge and expertise are leveraged during repatriation.

So if key talent unexpectedly leave the organisation upon return, the turnover represents a significant burden, and is detrimental. It imposes a costly expense in terms of time, money and human capital (Stahl, Chua, Caligiuri, Cerdin and Taniguchi, 2009). High turnover rates among repatriates could even have an impact on attracting high potential assignees (Stahl et al., 2009).

Statistics about the attrition rate of repatriates are well known. Brookfield Global Relocation Services' 2014 Survey stated that 55% of expatriate employees leave the organisation within two years after their repatriation, of which 29% left within one year of returning from the assignment, and 26% left between the first and second year after the assignment. Recently, in Brookfield's 2016 Global Mobility Trends Survey, 75% stated that there were no changes in post-repatriation attrition rate within 1 year of repatriation. Looking back, those figures have hardly moved for the past 30 years. In 2011, during the Human Capital Conference, EY presented a comparison between the attrition figures in 1995/96 and those of 2011 and concluded a status quo. The status quo of these figures captured my attention, and has been the motivation of this paper.

Since 1960 and across distinct academic disciplines, difficulties and challenges associated with re-entry transitions have been documented and researched. As an answer to those challenges, repatriation support programmes and practices have been researched and studied, with the main objective to retain talent. (Pimentel, 2015)

However, despite the establishment of support programmes and practices to ease the re-integration of returning employees, with the aim to retain those key talents, repatriate turnover continues to be a challenge and remains all too common as the status quo of the attrition rate shows.

### ***Problem and subquestions***

This brings me to the problem question of this paper:

“Do the repatriation support programmes fail to reach the objective of a successful repatriation? If so, why do they fail and what can be done differently to attain a successful repatriation”.

Yan, Zhu and Hall (2002) suggest that an international assignment is only truly successful if an organisation is able to retain its repatriated employees.

Three dimensions of repatriation have been identified to determine the success of a repatriation. These three dimensions consist of work environment, socio-cultural, and family (Baughun, 1995), and will be explained in paragraph 1.3. A successful repatriation requires an adjustment along these three dimensions, which will result in a lower attrition rate for the organisation.

To answer the problem question, I will formulate and answer the following sub-questions.

Chapter 2: What are the challenges repatriates encounter, which might lead to their departure?

Chapter 3: Which repatriation support programmes are typically offered? Which objectives do they serve?

Chapter 4: Are the three dimensions of successful repatriation addressed by these support programmes, and what undermines the effectiveness of these programmes?

Chapter 5: What can be recommended to improve the success rate of repatriation support programmes?

### ***Goals and Criteria***

To test if the repatriation practices and support programmes reach their main goal of successful repatriation, we will test the repatriation programmes based on the three factors:

- Work environment factor: this factor addresses the relationship between the expatriate and the home office and the expatriate’s career development.
- Socio-cultural factor: this factor examines the expatriate’s ability to reintegrate into the home country culture.
- Family factor: this factor deals with the impact of reintegration on the spouse and children.

### ***Justification***

Based on the literature, I will investigate if the repatriation support programmes are reaching their objective of a successful repatriation.

The structure of the paper is as follows:

Firstly the professional and personal challenges of repatriation will be explained in chapter 2. This will be followed by solutions to overcome those challenges in chapter 3, known as repatriation support programmes. Consequently, chapter 4 will test how those repatriation support programmes efficiently deal with the challenges and if the objective of a successful repatriation can be reached by those support programmes.

If not, suggestions for improvement and recommendations will be made in chapter 5. Chapter 6 will provide a conclusion.

### ***Limitations***

International assignments encompasses three distinct phases: the pre-assignment stage, the actual assignment and the post-assignment stage. This paper will focus on the attrition rate during the final stage of the cycle, i.e. repatriation. The conclusions of this paper are purely based upon literature study.

Even though the retention of repatriates maximises return on investment (ROI), the purpose of this paper is not to investigate the concept of ROI. The paper only focuses on the retention of high-performers, whose retention is the aim of an international assignment. On the contrary, turnover of poor performers may not always be unwelcome or costly and as such not a problem for the organisation.

Finally, the purpose is not to investigate which programme or combination of programmes are most effective. Rather, the purpose is to assess for each programme how they can best contribute to reducing attrition.

## **Chapter 2 Repatriates' challenges upon return**

### ***2.1. Introduction***

With the globalisation of business, international assignments are common practice and are even on the rise. An international assignment encompasses three distinct phases: the pre-assignment stage (selection and pre-departure), the actual assignment, and the post-assignment stage which is referred to as repatriation. (Bonache, Brewster and Suutari, 2001). Chapter 2 will look into the challenges a repatriate is facing at the last phase of the international assignment cycle.

Before going into the phase of repatriation, defined in paragraph 2.3., paragraph 2.2. will look into why organisations are sending out expatriates in the first place.

After that, paragraph 2.4. will address the challenges associated with repatriation. Upon return, repatriates experience a wide variety of issues, often similar to those encountered upon expatriation (Chew and Debowski, 2008). Even though many companies assumed that the move back to the home country would be simple (Stroh, Gregersen and Black, 1998), the opposite is true (Adler, 1981; Nikolaeva, 2010).

Repatriation is a period of major changes, as well professionally as personally. During the repatriation process, many former expatriates feel insecure and left behind (Feldman, 1991). If the challenges are not well managed and taken care of, repatriates might leave their organisation, which will be addressed in 2.5.

### ***2.2. Reason for sending out expatriates***

An expatriate (often shortened to expat) is a person temporarily or permanently residing, as an immigrant, in a country other than that of their citizenship. The word comes from the Latin terms *ex* ("out of") and *patria* ("country, fatherland") (Wikipedia). For the purpose of this paper, the term "expat" will be defined as an employee who takes up a foreign assignment or works at a foreign branch office of their organisation for several months or years.

For many organisations the purpose for an international assignment is twofold: (1) demand-driven (or task-driven) and (2) learning-driven or developmental (Pucik, 1992).

The demand-driven assignments are to meet specific business needs. People with special skills and/or experience are sent, in cases where the destination operation is lacking these skills. Typical cases are IT specialists and accountants (Baruch, Steele and Quantrill, 2002).

The learning-driven or developmental assignments on the other hand are those assignments where promising managers are sent to provide them with experience of management, autonomy and self-sufficiency. They are initiated for competency development and career enhancement (Stahl et al. 2009). Their international assignment is justified by the quality of the talent, even where there is local talent available (EY, 2013).

Caligiuri and Lazarova (2001) add two extra types: strategic assignments (also referred to as executive or global leadership assignments) and functional assignments (or tactical assignments).

The strategic assignments are usually filled by individuals who are being developed for high-level management positions. The assignees tend to be high profile (general managers, vice presidents) and the experience is viewed as both developmental and strategic. These individuals are not sent solely for developmental assignments; rather they are there to fill a specific need in the organisation. They are the core "critical" group of assignees (Caligiuri and Lazarova, 2001).

The functional assignment is similar to the technical assignment with one distinct difference: significant interactions with host nationals are necessary in order for the assignment to be deemed successful. As with the technical assignment, a person will be sent to fill a technical or managerial gap in a given host country. While they are there, they will need to interact with host nationals in order for the assignment to be deemed successful. These assignees are sent to fill a technical need. However, once they are there, they realise that cross-cultural skills are needed in order to be successful (Caligiuri and Lazarova, 2001).

As the Millennial generation of employees move into the workforce, a fifth one should be added: the self-initiated moves. Most Millennials are seeking positions which allow them to develop professionally and personally, which is why international assignments are attractive to them.

Those kind of assignments serve to provide cross-border experiences for employees seeking an international experience (Ellis-Jones, 2015).

### **2.3. Definition of repatriation**

While expatriation refers to the posting of professionals from the home country to a foreign country, repatriation is the opposite.

Repatriation (from Late Latin repatriare) is defined as the process of returning a person back to the home country.

### **2.4. Repatriates' challenges**

Repatriation can be experienced as a shock (Baruch et al., 2002; Paik, Segau and Malinowski, 2002; Cox, Khan and Armani, 2013). In fact, repatriation can present an even more difficult adjustment than expatriation (Cox et al., 2013; Foster 2000; Suutari and Brewster, 2003). The international assignment itself changes the assignee and their family. The entire experience will have affected their quality of life, their aspirations, their motivations for working and their overall psychology (Cartus, 2014). Therefore, it is not surprising that upon return repatriates are facing work-related and personal-related repatriation challenges.

#### 2.4.1. Work-related challenges

Whilst an employee is on an international assignment, many things can change in the office. Changes in the organisation, strategy, management, culture, etc. To find a “new” organisation upon return gives the repatriate a sense that he has been of “out-of-sight, out-of-mind”. During their absence, most expatriates are not kept up-to-date (Black, 1991).

It is not only challenging to settle back in a changed environment, to figure out how to utilise the new skills they have learned whilst abroad is too.

Bossard and Peterson (2005) claim that many companies assign repatriates to jobs that do not match their knowledge, abilities and skills developed and acquired abroad. (Bossard and Peterson, 2005; Cave et al., 2013; Cox et al. 2013; Harvey and Novicevic, 2006). This might result in a feeling of boredom and under-utilisation. Many expatriate jobs are highly challenging, very autonomous and often with a high-status. Finding yourself in a new job with less autonomy, authority and significance compared to the international assignment and in which the repatriate is no longer “special” or different from fellow workers is disturbing. The same counts when career opportunities have declined as a result of working abroad, and as a consequence, repatriates are placed into a temporary job because no permanent position is available or they are placed in the same job as before they left. EY's global Mobility Effectiveness Survey 2013 states that 37% of repatriates return to their previous position.

#### 2.4.2. Personal challenges

When expatriates are overseas, they receive not only a basic salary, but also overseas allowances, bonuses, income tax allowances, currency protection, moving allowances, school allowances and other supplements such as insurance, return visits,... When they return, most of these allowances are discontinued. This has an impact on the financial situation of the repatriate and his family whom are challenged by a lower standard of living. Besides this, practical readjustment problems such as housing and schooling, as well as a reverse culture shock occur when they re-enter the home country (Hammer, Hart and Rogan, 1998; Chew et al. 2008).

“Reverse culture shock is experienced when returning to a place that one expects to be home but actually is no longer, is far more subtle, and therefore, more difficult to manage than outbound shock precisely because it is unexpected and unanticipated” says Dean Foster, founder and president of DFA Intercultural Global Solutions.

Robin Pascoe, author of *Homeward Bound*, writes: “Re-entry shock is when you feel like you are wearing contact lenses in the wrong eyes. Everything looks almost right.”

Such reverse culture shock also results from unrealistic expectations of how easy it will be to fit back in, not taking into account the challenge of social readjustment as friends and family relationships have changed (Stroh, Gregersen and Black, 1998; Paik et al., 2002). Moreover, the repatriates themselves have changed, which, in turn, produces an even wider gap between his/her expectations and their reality upon return (Black, Gregersen and Mendenhall, 1992).

Another factor to take into account is the repatriate's spouse's career. The so-called trailing spouses often leave careers behind, either because of work permit restrictions in the host country, or for practical family considerations. Re-entry into a career back home can be challenging (Arman, 2009).

### ***2.5. Main reasons for leaving the organisation upon return***

According to Diane Douiyssi, Director, Global Consulting at Brookfield Global Relocation Services: "Once assignees return from assignment, the reasons they leave were frequently focused solely on their satisfaction with the work they were doing upon return or with the management of their career post assignments."

This had already been recognised by Gomez-Mejia and Balkin in 1987 who indicated that the major problem of repatriates is that these employees are not satisfied with their repatriation, suggesting that in any study of turnover intention, the concept of job satisfaction becomes extremely important as an overriding concern.

Literature pointed out that the job satisfaction depends on matches between employee abilities and knowledge on the hand and job content or tasks on the other (Robbins, 1998).

Previous studies have suggested that being placed in non-challenging jobs, lack of promotion opportunities, lack of future career plan, lack of support from managers and colleagues, and slow career advancement affect whether expatriates remain with their organisation upon return (Abueva, 2000; Black et al., 1992; Cave et al., 2013). Being unsatisfied with their job, the repatriate's commitment to the organisation is affected, resulting in repatriates leaving the organisation.

Expatriates who accept an international assignment often have high expectations. Most employees believe that an international assignment will help them advance in their careers and organisations (Kraimer, Shaffer, and Bolino, 2009; Stahl, Miller and Tung, 2002; Suutari and Brewster, 2003). They believe that their organisation will consider them as valuable and as special employees and treat them with due respect. These expectations are developed long before they repatriate, during the international assignments and sometimes before them leaving for the assignment (Stroh et al., 1998). If those expectations are not fulfilled the repatriate may perceive this as a breach of their psychological contract with the organisation, again resulting in less commitment and, if other opportunities arise, leaving the organisation.

A psychological contract is an indirect, unwritten and often unspoken agreement about how each expects to be treated. It is informal and subjective. It refers to the employees' perceptions and expectations of the mutual obligations that exist between themselves and the employing organisation (Rousseau, 1989). Mc Nulty (2014) says that "fulfilment of the psychological contract comes down to an employee's perception as to whether promises and obligations have been met, and his or her trust that they will continue to be met".

According to Yan (2002) it is suggested that career development is the most important long-term concern of the individual in formulating his or her psychological contract with the organisation in the context of an international assignment.

Another factor which has an impact on the psychological contract is family support. Even though the spouse or partner has no employment contract with the organisation, it is according to Mc Nulty (2014) not unreasonable that they also have expectations. If those expectations are not taken care of or not met, this might negatively impact the work relationship between the repatriate and the organisation.

Besides job dissatisfaction, unmet expectations and as a result a breach of the psychological contract, we should not forget the repatriate's belief in a "boundary-less career". Repatriates might think that their assignment has helped them for their personal development and growth, but not necessarily for career advancement within their organisation (Bossard and Peterson, 2005). Some repatriates are open to accept external job offers with the aim of steering their careers towards better opportunities while focusing on their professional development rather than organisational commitment (Bossard et al., 2005; Lazarova and Caligiuri, 2000; Lazarova and Tarique, 2005; Arman, 2009).

This new type of global employee has a work history that is characterised by frequent employer changes and a set of work values that favour intrinsic motivation and identification with a profession, expertise or skill set rather than a particular organisation (Wittig-Berman and Beutell, 2009).

## **2.6. Conclusion**

Repatriates face many challenges upon return. As paragraph 2.3. explained, those challenges are work related as well as personal. Some of these challenges affect the repatriate more than others and might trigger them to decide to leave the organisation.

Unmet expectations, lack of career-advancement, job dissatisfaction, a breach of their psychological contract and “boundary-less” careers were the main factors described in paragraph 2.4. why repatriates look for opportunities outside their organisation, and eventually leave their organisation.

## Chapter 3 Repatriation support programmes and their objectives.

### 3.1. Introduction

In the past, organisations only focused on the expatriation process and more or less ignored the repatriation process (Harvey, 1982). Over time, organisations realised that unsuccessful repatriation led to high attrition rates amongst repatriates, representing a significant loss. With the aim to reduce the attrition rate, organisations established repatriation support programmes. Such programmes are introduced during all phases of the international assignment cycle and not only upon return, which have also been supported by research findings, such as by PWC and Crane School of Management. To be beneficial, the repatriation support programmes already have to start even before the employee leaves for his international assignment. Paragraph 3.2. will discuss the most common used support programmes. A distinction will be made between the support programmes during the pre-expatriation phase, during the assignment itself, preceding the repatriation and after repatriation. Such programmes are aimed to deal with the challenges the repatriate is facing upon return home, and at the same to enhance the repatriate's commitment to the organisation which eventually should result in a lower attrition rate amongst repatriates.

### 3.2. Repatriation programmes and their objectives to support the re-integration of a repatriate and to enhance the commitment of the employee towards the organisation

#### 3.2.1. Repatriation support programmes during the pre-expatriation phase

Before the employee sets off on his international assignment, a **repatriation agreement**, between the employee and the home country organisation, is developed to help manage the employee's goals and expectations (Chew, 2004).

A repatriation agreement consists of the following components: a specification of the assignment period, incentive payment to compensate for dislocation effects, a guarantee of a job equal to or better than the one held before leaving, a provision for re-entry training and a repatriation programme to support the repatriate and help the family to readjust upon return to their home country. The specification of relocation support such as repatriation house-hunting, school registration, and shipment of personal goods further strengthens the agreement (Allen and Alvarez, 1998; Bonache, 2005; MacDonald and Arthur, 2005; Chew et al. 2008). Such an agreement is signed prior to departure, providing the employee with an assurance of fair and equitable support on return (Chew et al., 2008).

#### 3.2.2. Repatriate support programmes during the international assignment

Reinforced by theory (Allen and Alvarez, 1998) is the importance of appointing a **mentor** in order to ease the repatriation process. The mentor's role is to be a link between the expatriate and the home country organisation. The mentor serves as an adviser and confidant (Chew et al., 2008). The mentor is usually in a more senior position than the expatriate, from the sending organisation, and often knows the expatriate personally. The rationale behind the use of a mentor is to alleviate the "out-of-sight, out-of-mind" feeling through the provision of information on a regular basis, so that the expatriate is more prepared for changed conditions faced upon re-entry (Gupta, 2013). A mentor is meant to ensure that the expatriate is not forgotten when important decisions are made regarding positions and promotions. A mentor is likely to alert the firm with regard to the imminent return of the repatriate and this influences the provision of a suitable re-entry position. Furthermore, the mentor promotes the repatriate's goals and opinions in his/her absence (Dowling, Festing and Sr. Engle, 2013). Without a mentor, it is most likely that the expatriates will lose communication with their job network.

On top of the communication with the mentor, the maintenance of a strong, regular communication with the home country in general is key. **Home-visits** are offered to facilitate this. It offers the employee the opportunity to network in their organisation and to stay connected with their own culture, which could help to smoothen the reverse culture shock (Tyler, 2006).

### 3.3.3. Repatriate support programmes preceding repatriation and after repatriation

Starting 6-12 months before the end of the assignment, the home country organisation is taking care of **career planning and guidance**, whereby a plan is in place before the repatriate returns home. Poor career planning may result in repatriates being placed in a holding pattern and assigned jobs that may or may not match their abilities and preferences (Harvey & Novicevic, 2006.), affecting the repatriates' feelings, satisfaction and commitment to the organisation. Career planning gives the employee a sense of security regarding his/her future with the organisation (Lazarova and Caligiuri, 2002).

This also aims to reduce the risk of employees, believing in a "boundary-less" career, from moving from one organisation to another for better opportunities for their professional development. As discussed in paragraph 2.5. those employees are more committed to the development of their own careers than being committed to their organisation. With an adequate career plan the organisation's goal is to offer opportunities for professional growth and career advancement.

In addition to a career guidance, repatriates and their family get **re-entry training and reorientation** upon return. This deals with issues such as relocation assistance, short-term financial assistance, career counselling, orientation, etc. (Feldman, 1991). It helps to prepare for a reverse culture shock, and to adjust back to a lifestyle without the additional allowance of the expatriation position.

Such programmes also address spouse issues (such as job search, CV's and professional updating) and the children's' education (standards, procedures and school entrance) (Hurn, 1999). Re-entry training focuses on helping the repatriate and spouse to align expectations with the situation that will be encountered, both within the professional context, and more broadly within the social environment, especially for expatriate families who have been assigned far away from the home organisation and/or for a long period of time (Bonache, 2005; Hammer and Hart, 1998).

When employees with an outstanding track record prior to their expatriate assignment are nurtured and well-positioned upon their return, this is providing a sense of career continuity, and it demonstrates the **value the organisation places on expatriate assignments** (Allen, 1998; Black, 1992; Mon, Born, Willemsen and Van Der Molen, 2005; Swaak, 1997; Chew et al., 2008).

### **3.3. Conclusion:**

With the objective to take care of the challenges a repatriate is facing upon return, organisations realised the importance of repatriation support programmes, as well before, during as after the international assignment. Paragraph 3.2. discussed the most common used support programmes, which are repatriation agreements, the appointment of a mentor, home-visits, career guidance and planning, re-entry training and reorientation, and the recognition of the value international assignments.

## **Chapter 4 Assessment of the repatriation support programmes**

### **4.1. Introduction:**

Yan, et. al, (2002) suggest that an international assignment is only truly successful if an organisation is able to retain its repatriated employees. In the previous chapter the most common used repatriation support programmes have been discussed. This chapter will now examine what undermines the effectiveness of these programmes.

Together, the repatriation support programmes should cover all three dimensions of repatriation. These consist of work environment, socio-cultural, and family (Baughun, 1995).

In paragraph 4.2., the support programmes enabling the adjustment to the work environment will be addressed. This dimension addresses the relationship between the repatriate and the organisation and the career development of the repatriate. The second dimension, socio-cultural, will be addressed in paragraph 4.3. This paragraph will discuss the support programmes helping the repatriate to reintegrate into the home country. Finally, the family dimension will be discussed in paragraph 4.4., and specifically the support programmes having an impact on the reintegration of the spouse and the children.

### **4.2. Work environment**

#### 4.2.1. Relationship between the repatriate and the organisation

Not to be kept in the loop, not to be aware of changes in the organisation and to miss career opportunities because the organisation had forgotten about the assignee whilst on assignment, have been mentioned as challenges in chapter 2.

To overcome those challenges the organisation assigns a mentor to maintain strong, regular communication. But what happens when a mentor resigns, relocates or retires? The expatriate might end up with no mentor. And, do all the expatriates need a mentor? An international management Master thesis by Elenius, Garvik and Nilsson (2003) concluded that it all depends on the individual: some expatriates have, for example, wider personal networks and make frequent home visits and for which a mentor is not as important as for expatriates who might not have a well-developed network or conduct frequent home visits (Elenius et al., 2003).

The theory of Feldma (1991) states that a mentor should notify the assignee about changes within the home organisation. However, this could be problematic. The mentor experiences gradual changes within the organisation while the assignee only receives secondary information and is not present to experience the changes. Since the assignee does not see and experience the changes, he/she will probably build up their own assumptions and expectations on what the situation looks like within the home organisation. The expectation and assumptions usually do not match the reality and, therefore, the repatriate might experience a shock upon return. This could result in the repatriate's believing the communication with the mentor to have been ineffective while the mentor assumes that the communication worked fairly well (Elenius et al, 2003).

Whilst to maintain a strong, effective and regular communication has its benefits, it can be very hard to establish within a large and complex organisation (Elenius et al., 2003). Also research has shown that many expatriates do view communication as less important. They felt that it is an extra burden added to their already challenging responsibilities and they did not have the time to pursue such lines of communication (Paik et al., 2002).

#### 4.2.2. Career planning and development.

In a perfect world, an organisation creates a complete career plan prior to the expatriation which would cover what the employee should do when he/she returns, preferably a suitable job which recognises their experience and their acquired international knowledge.

However, such a career plan has its own downsides.

Who is actually taking care of such a career plan and development? This is a challenge for organisations where the talent management team is responsible for the career development of the home country population and does not feel responsible for employees working in a foreign country. And, at the same time, the person responsible for international human resources or global mobility will not have the capacity or knowledge for developing the expatriates' career (Kreng and Huang, 2009).

Even if a career plan is set out, Reiche, associate professor of managing people in organisations at IESE Business School in Spain, said: "Promising a position far in advance is tricky. Not only do companies change fast, but an international experience also change employees' expectations of where they want to be in three or four years." The same was also stated by O'Sullivan (2002): "the international business environment is unstable, unpredictable, and constantly changing which makes it difficult for organisations to keep the promises they have made two or three years prior to the repatriation." On top of this, a joint career planning with the expatriate is often overlooked since the organisation is often more concerned with immediate issues rather than long-term planning (Elenius et al. 2003).

Organisations might have the best intentions, research by Cox et al. (2013) showed that sometimes a disconnect between the reasons stated by companies for assigning international assignments and the actual transfer of knowledge and utilisation of newly acquired global expertise upon the employee's return to the organisation exist. Companies might not be utilising the repatriate's newly acquired skills because there is actually no need for the skills that the employee acquired during the international assignment (Cox et al. 2013).

This is also related with the fact that, as addressed in Chapter 2, not all international assignments are intended to be equal in term of their strategic importance to the organisation whilst repatriation support programmes most of the time lump all international assignments in one category (Caligiuri and Lazarova, 2001). This is not realistic in a typically complex organisation with many employees serving different purposes.

Whilst it is important to have a good career plan and guidance, it is not unusual that there is a gap between the employee's expectations and the reality upon return home. On the one hand organisations claim to value international assignments as a way to build a pool of global knowledge and increase the international skills of their employees. On the other hand, many organisations place repatriates in jobs upon return home that do not utilise the global skills and knowledge acquired during the assignment. This gives a wrong message to the repatriate and the future expatriates (Cox et al., 2013). Such gaps result in a breach of the psychological contract.

### **4.3. Socio-cultural**

If reintegration in the corporate culture is considered a challenge, the ability to reintegrate into the home country culture has been proven even more of a challenge by the repatriate (Paik et al., 2002). As discussed in Chapter 2, a reverse culture shock is not uncommon.

To prevent or to lessen such a reverse culture shock, re-entry training and reorientation upon return can be offered. Despite the recognised advantages of such organisation, Preeti Bhaskar (2014), assistant professor at Symbiosis International University, said in 2014 that: "recent research indicates that the majority of organisations have no formal repatriation programme to help repatriates readjust on return home." To her, typical reasons were lack of the requisite expertise, programme cost, and lack of perceived need by top management.

Another issue that needs attention is the way in which the repatriate support programmes and practices are actually valued by the repatriate. Do they serve the purpose they were intended for? According to Vidal et al. (2008), culture plays an important role in how those organisation are valued.

For example, repatriates from Spain and Japan - cultures that have been found not to feel comfortable with uncertainty (high uncertainty avoidance) - valued “clarity in the repatriation practices and programmes” of their firms more than the U.S and Finnish repatriates - cultures ranked low in terms of uncertainty avoidance. Lee & Liu (2007) suggest that Taiwanese expatriates may experience greater culture shock and reverse culture shock due to their collectivist culture. In a collectivist culture, individuals belong to only a few in-groups that are stable over time. These groups tend to be rigid and inflexible, making movement from group to group difficult. Therefore in those cultures, individuals may have difficulty adjusting to shift in-group memberships. Taiwanese repatriates may feel very isolated from their in-group colleagues during expatriation, making it difficult to re-establish these relationships after repatriation. It also seemed that Finnish repatriates adjusted easier back home than American repatriates, because Finnish repatriates visited their home countries more frequently compared to Americans (Gregersen and Stroh, 1997). For example, American expats did not seem to take as much advantage of the offered home-visits as the Finnish, resulting in creating a greater distance from their home country and a higher chance of a reverse culture shock.

#### **4.4. Family**

Providing assistance to family needs during readjustment to the home culture is important, since family adjustment and adjustment of the repatriate influence each other reciprocally (Arman, 2009). However, the following examples prove that also for this a “one fits all” approach seems inefficient. Cross-cultural differences need to be taken into account as they play a role in the way in which repatriates and their families adjust back home.

Results from a research by Paik et al. (2002) showed that Scandinavians view family issues differently than Americans do. Scandinavians do not find intervention in family issues by outside parties necessary, in contrary to the Americans.

Also Scandinavian governments provide social welfare benefits via taxation, meaning that Scandinavians do not have to worry about such things as health coverage and retirement benefits. US citizens on the other hand, rely on the organisation's benefits and place much more value on the assistance to family offered by the organisation (Paik et al., 2002).

Earlier studies of Black et al. (1992) suggested that many Finnish spouses make significant career sacrifices in order to go on global assignment and find it difficult to return to work after repatriation. In addition, Gregersen and Stroh (1997) found a strong spill over effect among Finnish repatriates and their spouses, which implies adjustment of spouse was significantly influential on adjustment of repatriate.

Therefore, it can be concluded that one type of support programme might not fit the job. That one programme does not fit all, has also been supported in the literature (Cox et al., 2013). Different needs depend on the family and marital status, as well as on the culture of the employee and its family.

#### **4.5. Perception about the repatriation support organization and practices.**

While the implementation of a particular repatriation practice is an objective fact (i.e. it is either offered or not), the individual perception about the value and usefulness of a given practice are more subjective. According to Lazarova and Caligiuri (2001) this is an important distinction. It is the repatriates' subjective perceptions of their organisation's support, rather than an objective assessment of whether certain practices exist, that will have greater influence on whether they will remain with the organisation upon return.

Repatriates will mentally calculate an equity equation: comparing their perceptions of the rewards and recognitions the organisation has given them for taking the assignment, relative to the sacrifices and contributions they have made for their organisation during the assignment. In this mental equation, the greater the perceived equity, the greater the likelihood that they will remain with the organisation upon repatriation (Lazarova and Caligiuri, 2001). This suggests the psychological contract, discussed in Chapter 2.

Rousseau said, “the psychological contract is based on the employee’s overall perceptions of the long-term exchange of fairness with the organisation, rather than on any specific (and quantifiable) obligation” (Rousseau 1990).

#### ***4.6. Conclusion:***

Paragraphs 4.2., 4.3. and 4.4. discussed the challenges of the most common repatriation support programmes, within the three dimensions of work environment, socio-cultural and family. Those challenges undermine the the re-adjustment upon return at work and back home and the re-adjustment of the family. The status quo in the attrition rates of repatriates indicates that these programmes are not executed effectively and as such fail to lead to a successful repatriation. We also investigated the influence of cultural and personal perception in the relative importance of the programmes and the repatriates’ expectations towards these programmes.

## **Chapter 5 Recommendations to improve the success rate of the repatriation support programmes**

### **5.1. Introduction**

“An effective solution to the repatriation problems seems to be the avoidance of repatriation in the first place”, suggested Wittig-Berman and Beutell (2009) half-jokingly.

Reduced reliance on the “classical” expatriation model in favour of alternative international assignment strategies is a tactic to achieve this. Increasingly, companies make use of alternative strategies such as local recruiting, the hiring of third-country nationals, flexible and short-term assignments as well as international commuting. All of these practices have proven themselves to be less disruptive to the employees’ family and work life and also less costly to the firm. Yet, the classical expatriation model is still considered the most important international staffing strategy as far as the transfer of a firm’s knowledge and its culture is concerned (Wittig-Berman and Beutell, 2009).

Chapter 4 discussed the challenges of the existing repatriation support programmes according to the work-environment, socio-cultural and family dimensions. The conclusion was that the support programmes, if not executed effectively, could not guarantee the re-adjustment at work, culturally back home and of the entire family. Paragraph 5.2. will discuss how the support programmes can be improved to increase the chances of a successful repatriation, and as a consequence to lower the attrition rate of repatriates.

### **5.2. Recommendations**

#### 5.2.1. A well-structured career plan

Even though the existence of career planning or career management reduces the turnover rate among repatriates (Lazarova and Caligiuri, 2001; Stroh, 1995) as well as increases the satisfaction with the repatriation process (Black et al, 1999), Chapter 4 explained what undermines those career plans. To be effective, it is important to integrate the assignment into a larger and more meaningful career path (Stahl et al., 2009) as well as to conduct the career plan with care and from a realistic perspective with regard to repatriation (Arman, 2009).

This requests the following:

Firstly, to manage the career of the employee well, the organisation's role is to ensure that each expatriate understands what type of assignment he/she is undertaking and what career opportunities he/she can expect upon return (Cagligiuri and Lazarova, 2001). Depending on the type of assignment, different type of skills are acquired. With the help of the repatriate they can be detected and used appropriately (Cox et al. 2013).

- For the technical assignments, a repatriation system for these assignees would assess technical skills and determine where the skills are needed most in the organisation.
- For the developmental assignments, extra measures should be taken as expatriates in this category are more inclined to leave their firms upon return (Cox et al. 2013), despite the fact that repatriates who had been sent on assignments that were developmental were more likely to get ahead in their organisations (Kraimer et al., 2009). The reason being the belief of those employees in a “boundary-less” career.
- Strategic/executive assignments are the core “critical” group, often considered the highest human-capital investment. Organisations must ensure that these individuals have appropriate levels of autonomy and job discretion upon return (Cagligiuri and Lazarova, 2001).
- Functional/Tactical assignments pose the greatest challenge for the organisation. This assignment has an unintended developmental component. As such, these employees are the ones most likely to feel unfulfilled upon repatriation. For those, the organisation should assess the additional developmental skills gained during the assignment. Those should be acknowledged and rewarded (Cagligiuri and Lazarova, 2001). If those skills and competencies are not needed upon return, then the repatriates should be given the realistic expectation prior to accepting the global assignment.

This brings us to the second requirement, in which the organisation should be clear in what it can offer.

Promises of exceptional jobs should not be made unless the organisation is completely sure that it will be able to fulfil that promise. The best recommendation is honesty. If an individual will not be needed upon repatriation, then they must be given a realistic preview of the global assignment process, stating the “no guarantee” reality of the position (Caligiuri and Lazarova, 2001).

Thirdly, the organisation needs to manage the employee’s expectations, and as such the psychological contract. This can be done by identifying the expatriates’ main reasons for accepting the international assignment in order to focus more on these issues upon return. Nevertheless, the expectations regarding career advancement might change when an expatriate is overseas. Therefore, there is need to review the expatriates’ career expectations during the assignment as well. An expatriate should be clear all the time on what they want and expect in the future, and they should communicate their wishes. If the organisation has a clear picture of what the expatriate expects career-wise, then it will be easier to meet those expectations or to tell the expatriate in forehand that it will not be possible. This helps to close the gap between the expatriate expectations and reality (Cox et al., 2013).

On top of the above, especially for those employees on a development track, to make the most of the skills the employee acquired when the assignment ends, the organisation should create a formal talent programme for assignees together with the talent management team (Alsop, 2014).

As described in chapter 4, whilst the talent management team is in principle responsible for the career development of the home country population and the person responsible for international human resources or global mobility without the capacity or knowledge for developing the expatriates’ career, it means that the employee on an international assignment just drops out of the organisation's talent management process during their time abroad. To avoid that the employee is put into a vacuum, both HR functions need to work together to tackle this issue. When global mobility and global talent management are aligned, the expatriates are chosen for their growth potential in the organisation, given a chance to build intercultural skills, coached during the assignment, and their knowledge and newly built skills are valued enough to be transferred to the organisation (Hogan, 2009).

Helena Wennberg (2014) said “mobility programmes of the future need to be closely linked to overall talent management. When international assignments are better tied to overall strategic talent management practices, early discussions regarding next career moves will be more natural and will be not be done last minute with the repatriated employee more or less standing in the doorway.”

What if a suitable job is not available upon return?

A more open re-entry time frame will increase the likelihood that an appropriate position can be found for the expatriate. The expatriate will have the flexibility to explore and select job possibilities. While the certainty of a specific re-entry may be comforting, as we discussed earlier, the flexibility to exercise greater choice over the return time and position he/she accepts may be welcomed by both employee and his/her family (Chew et al. 2008).

Another option is to allow for the possibility of cross-divisional moves. The sending division may feel temporarily unhappy by this approach since it would lose the services of a valued employee. However, the organisation as a whole would continue to benefit from the effective retention of a valued employee – who may at some point return to the original division (Allen and Alvarez, 1998; Morley, 2003; Chew et al. 2008). The creation of a temporary holding job (either in the home or host country) may also provide solution for an expatriate until a suitable position is found. They can be temporarily placed in consulting capacities within the organisation or assigned to a special project. However, this must be implemented with care or the holding position could become indefinite, causing the eventually departure of the employee from the firm. This can be addressed through the establishment of a strict time frame and a clear set of objectives associated with the assignment. The assignment should involve a substantial, value-added contribution to the organisation that will offer an opportunity for the employee to maintain visibility and credibility within the organisation (Allen and Alvarez, 1998; Forster, 2000; Scullion and Brewster, 2003; Chew et al., 2003).

Research has actually shown that appreciation of global assignments is of particular importance to repatriates, so even when the organisation is not able to promote repatriates, it is important to appreciate their experiences.

One way to organise this is to provide forums where they can share their experiences (Cox et al., 2013). There must be a genuine feeling that mobility is supported by top management, that successful assignees are rewarded and recognised for their efforts and that their expectations are openly discussed and understood. Only then can organisations keep their repatriates (Mc Nulty and Brice, 2014).

### 5.2.2. Mentor program

A mentor is only effective if assigned before he/she sets off on an international assignment, in order to allow sufficient time to establish a rapport between the mentor and the employee (Chew et al., 2008).

A screening and training programme aimed at mentors, where guidelines are drawn on how to manage the mentorship, should be carried out to ensure consistency. Those training programmes benefit the most if developed by repatriates, former mentors, and international HR (Elenius et al., 2003).

Characteristics associated with successful mentors include personal international experience. Elenius et al. (2003) believe that an internationally experienced mentor could probably aid the expatriate better and has a greater understanding of the expatriate's situation, compared to a mentor with no international experience. The mentor also needs sufficient influence to advocate for the expatriate and needs the dedication to keep in contact with the expatriate (Swaak, 1997).

On top of this, organisations should stress the importance of the mentor (Elenius et al., 2003).

If the mentor leaves the organisation, retires or relocates, the organisation should have clear guidelines on who is responsible for assigning a new mentor. Even though it is a shared responsibility between the expatriate and the mentor, the new mentor must start to talk to the expatriate about his/her goals and future career planning. It is important that the new mentor understands the expatriate's vision and goals about the repatriation.

The mentor aims to reduce the out-of-sight, out of mind feeling by keeping expatriate informed. At the same time, the mentor should ensure that the expatriate stays on the radar of the organisation's succession planning and is not forgotten when important decisions are made regarding positions and promotions. According to Jeff Schwartz and Gardiner Hempel (Deloitte, 2011) this could even be reinforced by the mentor representing the assignee in the talent management process (e.g. performance reviews and end-of-year evaluations) and by working with the home country's talent management group to find an appropriate position for the returning assignee, as well as monitoring the assignee's progress toward development goals.

### 5.2.3. Home-visits

The fact that some expatriates do not take advantage of the home-visit offered by the organisation, and the consequence of such decision, has been discussed in Chapter 4. One way to address this issue, is for the organisation to require to make use of the offered home-visit. This might be experienced as too much interference in the private life of the expats. However the advantage of going home regularly, should be stressed when making the home-visit mandatory.

### 5.2.4. Family support

To overcome the hurdles addressed in paragraph 4.4, organisations should be careful not to intervene in those issues that returning expatriates feel are internal to their family (Paik et al., 2002). A way to support the family (spouse/partner and/or children) is to listen to their needs and expectations. Being flexible as an organisation, for example by letting the repatriate choose from a menu of support resources, goes a long way. Varying support programmes with the family and marital status is a manner to meet the needs of the repatriate and his family. As such, the organisation manages the expectation and the family's psychological contract with the organisation.

### 5.2.5. Proactive behaviour of the employee

O'Sullivan (2002) states: "it remains unclear whether the repatriation problem is indeed due entirely to organisations' difficulties in managing the repatriation process, or whether it is also due in part to the repatriates' lack of initiative in attempting or to secure such support."

When an employee takes on an international assignment, it has been discussed that he/she can easily be forgotten and that repatriation might encounter several challenges as discussed in Chapter 2.

The organisation should therefore inform the employee about these risks and notify him/her what they themselves can do to prevent this.

It is recommended for the repatriate not to put all their faith in the hands of the organisation, but it is also his duty to take advantage of the support programmes offered and to take action on his/her own (O' Sullivan, 2002). There has to be a balance between the responsibility of the organisation and the responsibility of the individual.

According to Elenius et al. (2003), actions of the employee may include: striving for constant contact with the mentor and HR managers; developing close relations with many other sponsors that could provide information and with any individual he/she thinks could help in the future (O' Sullivan, 2002); developing a connection with managers who supervise positions that could be interesting future job opportunities; maintain visibility; visit headquarters frequently; beware of trusting HR too much (Allen et al, 1998); be proactive in career development (Arman, 2009).

An effective way to assure the proactive behaviour of the employee could be to select the people with the right social competencies. The selection of the international employee should not be completely based on their technical skills. Their social competence should also be an important criterion. Perhaps social competence should be given more importance in the selection process, then there would probably be a greater chance that the selected individual would be one that practices a proactive behaviour. This confirms again that repatriation should be seen as part of an integrated, circular process that connects good selection and cross-cultural training with completion of their term abroad and reintegration into their national organisation. Each of those links are equally important to result in a successful international assignment.

#### 5.2.6. Measuring, tracking, reviewing and analysing.

As each organisation is unique and operates in its own way, in order to improve an organisation's repatriation process it is believed that there is a need to identify what is going well, as well as to identify the problematic areas. This could be done by analysing the repatriation process.

It is good business for any organisation to gather data and metrics regarding their global talent pool. But collected data also needs to be analysed and acted upon if it is to add any real value (Wennberg, 2014).

An evaluation is needed in order to improve the repatriation process. These forms and discussions cannot only solve problems in the short run, moreover they can prevent problems from occurring in the future and they can help to retain repatriates upon return and delivers a message that the organisation appreciates international experience, and therefore strives to compete successfully in the global market (Elenius et al., 2003).

Therefore, it is important to incorporate a post-assignment interview with the expatriate and spouse to review their experiences and identify any repatriation issues that the firm should address (Fieldman et al., 1992; Ruisala and Suutari, 2000).

The evaluation should address the following questions and gather data accordingly: What is the impact of the support programmes on retention? What is the impact on job satisfaction and commitment? Are the processes effective? And are their gaps that should need to be addressed? Also benchmarking of the overall strategy against other similar business, is a way to evaluate the repatriation success (Black, 1992).

Also, keeping a database helps to track other important information on international assignments, such as length of stay, length of stay after return and career movement of repatriates. Without a database, without measurements, an organisation does not know their position on repatriates (Chowanec and Newstrom, 1991; Suutari and Valimaa, 2002).

Besides evaluating and measuring, "the implementation of a tracking system to record expatriates skills and experience data for the purpose of building a pipeline and succession planning might help to" says Linda Lange (2012). Ideally, the talent management and succession planning processes should have full visibility into the total population of assignees (Schwartz and Gardiner, 2011).

### 5.2.7. Repatriation Manager

To make the repatriation programmes effective, it is recommended to appoint a repatriation manager. The manager is then responsible for tracking individual repatriates, providing specialised support and re-entry programmes, and assessing the adequacy of the support programmes and practices and their implementation. The appointment of a specific contact person ensures that someone is accountable for the success of the repatriation programme (Chew et al., 2002).

### **5.3. Conclusion**

Paragraph 5.2. made recommendations on how the repatriation support programmes should be improved so they can contribute to a successful repatriation.

Those recommendations addressed adjustments to the career plan, mentor program, home-visit and family support. In addition to those adjustments, it has been recognised that also the employee has a role to play in making the repatriation successful.

As each organisation is unique, it is important to review and to analyse if the support programmes are working for its group of global talent. This is done through a good, continuous, evaluation process.

A repatriation support programme can only be effective if somebody can be hold accountable for the success. Therefore a repatriation manager should be appointed.

## Chapter 6 Conclusion

This paper aims to find an answer to the following question:

“Do the repatriation support programmes fail to reach the objective of a successful repatriation? If so, why do they fail and what can be done differently to obtain a successful repatriation?”.

To find an answer to this question, subquestions were formulated.

*What are the challenges repatriates encounter, which might lead to their departure?*

It has been recognised that repatriation presents an even more difficult adjustment than expatriation. The challenges which the repatriate encounter, can be divided into work-related challenges and personal challenges.

Work-related challenges encompass the sense of “out-of-sight, out-of-mind” by not being kept in the loop of changes in the organisation, not being satisfied with the job or with the career-advancement upon return, leading up to a breach of the psychological contract because of unmet expectations.

Personal challenges on the other hand are inflicted by a lower standard of living upon return, by practical re-adjustment problems with housing and schooling, by difficulties experienced by the spouse to re-entry into a career back home and by a reverse culture shock.

On top of the belief in “boundary-less” careers of some employees, those challenges ensure that repatriates are not hesitant to leave the organisation for another organisation if they find a better opportunity for their personal development.

To overcome those challenges, with the aim to retain key employees, organisations have implemented repatriation support programmes, which led to the following subquestion:

*Which repatriation support programmes are typically offered? Which objectives do they serve?*

The repatriation support programmes encompasses the three phases of the international assignment cycle. Repatriation agreements are signed before the employee sets off on his international assignment. This agreement is intended to manage the employee’s goals and expectations, as well as to assure a fair and equitable support on return.

Whilst the employee is on assignment a mentor is appointed. The objective of a mentor is to assure that the employee is kept informed about the changes in the organisation, to maintain communication with the home country and to make sure that the assignee is not forgotten when decisions are made regarding promotions and positions. Preceding the return of the repatriate a career plan and guidance is taken care of, with the goal to give the repatriate a sense of security regarding his/her professional future within the organisation.

Upon return, the organisation is offering re-entry training and reorientation. This helps to deal with a reverse culture shock, and to help with the adjustment of the employee and his family back home.

Despite those repatriation support programmes, the attrition rate has not been changed over the last 30 years. This brings us to the investigation of the next subquestion:

*Are the three dimensions of successful repatriation addressed by these support programmes, and what undermines the effectiveness of these programmes?*

It has been mentioned that a successful repatriation means that the organisation is able to retain its repatriated employees. The repatriation support programmes would only be fully efficient and support a successful repatriation if they guarantee the re-adjustment of the repatriate upon return within the three dimensions, mentioned in chapter 4, which are work-environment, socio-cultural and family.

It can be concluded that even though the repatriation support programmes address in general all three dimensions, important challenges within the support programmes have been discovered which undermine the repatriation support programmes, failing to lead to a successful repatriation.

Even if those programmes are offered, a lack of attention to the culture of the repatriate may prevent the repatriate to value it and experience the benefits of it.

The same counts for the family. This leads to the final finding that offering repatriation support programmes as such is not sufficient. How the employee perceives the programme decides is just as important, or even more so.

This lead to the next question:

*What can be recommended to improve the success rate of repatriation support programmes?*

To improve the career plan and development, the assignment needs to be integrated into a larger career plan. Especially for those employees on a development track, linking talent management with global mobility would help with the integration of the assignment into a larger career path.

Before the employee sets off on the assignment, it needs to be clear what type of assignment he is undertaking and what career opportunities he/she can expect. During the assignment, the expectations of the employee need to be well managed at all times, a well established mentor programme needs to be in place, home-visits to be made mandatory and family support should be offered “à la carte”.

Preferably the organisation should pursue to offer a job upon return taking into account the skills acquired whilst abroad. If a suitable job is not available, organisations should be flexible with the return date, with cross-divisional moves and with meaningful temporary jobs limited in time. At all times, the organisation must genuinely value mobility, by rewarding and recognising the employee’s efforts.

On top of the repatriation support programmes, because of the uniqueness of each organisation, the measurement, tracking, review and analysis of the repatriation data is a must. This will increase the accountability of the repatriation manager for the success of the programme.

Finally, it should be said that the employee also has a responsibility and his/her proactive behaviour helps is as equally important as the support offered by the organisation.

Through this literature study on the retention of repatriates and the impact of the support programmes, we also come to the conclusion that more quantitative research is needed.

First, all papers studied start from a causal relationship between failing repatriation programmes and attrition. However, we have discussed that other social phenomena, such as “boundary-less” careers and Millennials, also influence retention. We cannot determine without more analysis the extent to which these phenomena affect attrition rates. This would be our first suggestion for additional research.

Secondly, a lot of observations and recommendations are based on narrow quantitative studies or empirical evidence. We do not question the validity of the findings presented in the papers, but it would add to their relevance if the statements could also be tested more broadly. Such analysis would additionally allow us to determine what the effect is of each recommendation individually. This could be helpful, e.g. for professionals, to better assess the programmes they are managing and how to deploy their resources most effectively.

Notwithstanding the above, it is fair to conclude that the repatriation support programmes generally fail to reach their objective of a successful repatriation and that adjustments are needed.

It is the management of the psychological contract with the employee as well as with the family that will impact the success of the repatriation the most.

The main recommendation is therefore that both the organisation and the assignee have to understand and reconcile the motivations and expectations of the international assignment, and have to reach a compromise between personal and organisational goals.

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