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# **Please don't go**

**A comparative study on Identity Strain in short-term and long-term expatriates**

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## **Abstract**

The loss of human capital that is the result of repatriate turnover has plagued multi-national companies' expatriate programs for decades. In striving to avoid this outcome, many are today sending their employees on so-called short-term expatriate assignments for which the long term effects are unknown. This study attempts to remedy this using quantitative methods and the latest developments in Identity Theory, but falls short due to difficulties in gaining access to respondents.

Key words: Short-term Expatriation, Identity Theory, Repatriation, Turnover, Long-term Expatriation, Embeddedness, Job deprivation

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

### ***1.1.1 Expatriation***

For multinational companies, sending employees abroad as expatriates has long been a useful and necessary tool in running international operations, whether they be “green fields”, acquisitions or existing subsidiaries in need of change. Although the effects of the global financial crisis of 2008 temporarily reduced the number of new expatriate assignments globally, today the rate of new assignments has once again surpassed the record levels of 2008 and shows a continuing rising trend according to the 2012 Global Relocation Trends Survey Report (Brookfield Global Relocation Services, 2012). However, the crisis has affected a wide range of sectors and so many firms seek to cut costs in order to survive this harsher business environment of lower turnover, fiercer competition and a lower level of available credit.

### ***1.1.2 Expatriation and Repatriation***

A typical expatriate assignment spans multiple years (Wederspahn, 1992) and is commonly known as a long-term assignment. A long-term assignment is a costly project since companies often provide the expatriate with financial incentives in order to make the foreign assignment more attractive. This can include relocation support for the whole family, to offset the costs and effort involved in finding a new home and moving to a new area; hardship bonuses, if the country has a lower standard of living than the home country and wage boosts, to counter the effects of higher tax levels on the expatriate's real earnings. Wederspahn, (1992) estimated that a typical 3-year

expatriate assignment cost in excess of US\$1,000,000 in 1992. Since then inflation has served to increase that figure substantially making it clear that long-term expatriate assignments are projects which demand considerable resources from firms and so must deliver equally considerable returns to be worth it.

The long standing belief that long-term expatriates suffer from a high failure rate with basis in “early returns”-data has been successfully challenged by Harzing (1995) and proved unsubstantial. However, other research has documented difficulties related to the time *after* the assignment, when the employee returns home from abroad: The so-called repatriation phase. To begin with, it has been found that a large proportion of repatriates experience dissatisfaction after being repatriated and subsequently leave their current employer. Brookfield's Global Relocation Trends 2012 survey report (Brookfield Global Relocation Services, 2012) shows that some 24% of repatriates leave their job of their own accord within 1 year of repatriation and a further 26% within 2 years. This means that as many as 50% of repatriates will have left the company within 2 years of returning from their foreign assignment. Recent academic studies have shown similar results, such as Kraimer et al. (2009), Stroh et al. (1998) and Bossard and Peterson (2005) and support the notion that repatriates experience high rates of turnover. In addition, older studies by Black et al. (1992), Dowling et al. (1994) and Stroh (1995) have also found high attrition rates, showing that high attrition rates among expatriates is not a new phenomenon. There is also a mention in a paper by Brewster and Scullion (1997, p.35) of the same being observed by Nancy Adler in her book *International Dimensions of Organizational Behaviour* from 1986 which gives further weight to this idea.

### **1.1.3 Repatriate turnover**

These high rates of turnover are detrimental to the company for several reasons: Firstly, the company loses the service of the employee. According to Brookfield Global Relocation Services (2012), this means losing a long standing employee, since only about 3% of those sent on expatriate assignments are newly hired. Secondly, the lost employee would with high probability be considered as “high-potential” and likely to be in possession of specific or rare skills as the same survey (Brookfield Global Relocation Services, 2012) shows that 95% of the surveyed companies had “high-potential” as a criterion when searching for candidates for expatriation and 64% looked for specific or rare skills. A study by Earley (1987) found that 90% of surveyed companies selected candidates based on technical ability, further supporting this notion. To replace such an employee with the global competition for talent and ability as fierce as it is today can be both difficult and expensive. Thirdly, according to Lazarova and Cerdin (2007), any knowledge which the employee has acquired during the assignment will be lost to the company if the employee leaves before it can be disseminated. This includes explicit knowledge, such as knowledge about local conditions, political structures and technological developments useful for the organisation as a whole. It may also be the case that the knowledge is tacit in nature and thus difficult or impossible to transfer to others and so can only be of service to the company through this one person. Fourthly, according to research by Lazarova and Tarique (2005), Caligiuri and Lazarova (2001), Poe (2000) and Jana (2000) there is a strong tendency for the leaving repatriate to join a firm which is in competition with the original employer. Thus the loss not only weakens the original employer but also strengthens the competition. Finally, according to Feldman and Tompson (1993), the high attrition levels and the perceived reasons behind them also have the effect of dissuading other employees from applying for or accepting future expatriate assignments as many of them strive for promotion within the company and would see the assignment as a risk rather than an opportunity.

### **1.1.4 Short-term assignments**

The high cost associated with long-term assignments and the risk of turnover at its end gives managers good reason to continuously work to improve the policies and processes which support the expatriates, but also to seek alternatives.

During the past twenty years the short-term expatriate assignment has gained in popularity as such an alternative, something which has been observed by several researchers including Brewster and Scullion (1997), who saw the rising trend in its early stages. The two researchers cite the free mobility of the European Union as a driving factor along with improvements in travel, allowing for quicker journeys over longer distances at lower cost. More recent confirmations of the rising interest for short-term assignments has been provided by Tahvanainen et al. (2005) who list reports from consultancy firms, including PriceWaterhouseCoopers, Employment Conditions Abroad and GMAC Global Relocation Services (Now Brookfield Global Relocation Services). These firms each conduct annual surveys among multi-national companies and continue to track this trend. Tahvanainen et al. (2005) also give additional reasons for its increased use, such as perceived advantages in flexibility, simplicity and cost-effectiveness. Outside the scientific community, the increasing trend has also reached the public eye according to Starr (2009), who cites articles from the business magazine *Workforce* (Starr, 2009, p.286) which discuss this trend as a recent phenomenon.

### **1.1.5 Early research**

Despite the increasing popularity and use of short-term assignments little research has been conducted to learn more about their effect on the expatriates or the impact they have on the repatriation process.

Part of the reason for this lies in the comparatively short history of short-term assignments as



compared to long-term assignments. Early academic examples of re-entry literature include *The Homecomer* by Schuetz (1945), although this is by no means an earliest observation of the problem as Schuetz himself puts forward Odysseus' confused return to Ithaca in Homer's *Odyssey* as an even earlier example of humanities interest in the phenomena (Homer, 2007). However, in a work by Mayerhofer et al. (2004) the authors display an impatience which suggests that there may be a general lack of recognition for the field of repatriation:

*"There is no indication that more than limited attention and recognition has been given to the special needs of these employees, just as for many years the needs of expatriates were poorly understood."* (Mayerhofer et al., 2004, p.1374)

Tahvanainen et al. (2005) made an effort to remedy this with their exploratory paper by creating a new starting point. This they did by investigating how short-term assignments are used today and what those managers and employees who have experience in using them have to say about the strengths and weaknesses of this type of assignment. To accomplish this Tahvanainen et al. (2005) conducted surveys and interviews with staff at 11 Finnish multinational companies. Their resulting paper serves its purpose and has uncovered several trends, benefits and problems associated with using short-term foreign assignments. They found that there were indeed benefits to using short-term over long-term assignments with indications of lower rates of attrition and lower levels of stress related to cultural differences, however, they also found some indications of associated problems: In the case of these Finnish expatriates there was a tendency for increased rates of alcoholism, showing that although short-term assignments may carry benefits, there is also the potential for long-term problems which need to be addressed. While this small study was enough to generate new interest in the subject, it did not have a great enough scope to produce generally applicable results.

### **1.1.6 Current research**

Despite the efforts of Tahvanainen et al., (2005) at creating a new beginning, Szkudlarek (2010) found upon reviewing the re-entry literature in 2010 that the field as a whole, including both long- and short-term assignments, was still underdeveloped and had also become fragmented. According to Szkudlarek (ibid.), this disorganised state stems from two trends. Firstly, the research priorities are dictated by a multitude of interested parties who each have their own motivation. The interest of individual researchers, political agendas, public opinion and corporate interests in improving profitability and productivity are all factors pulling research in different directions. Secondly, Szkudlarek, (ibid.) argues that international companies remain fixated on the earlier stages of expatriation, presumably because they are critical to the success of the expatriate mission and thus directly linked to profit. Ergo, before considering the long term relationship with the employee, it is imperative that the company ensure the employee's performance abroad. Thus it is implied by Szkudlarek (ibid.) that the issues associated with returning home receive less attention from companies and therefore less pressure is directed towards researchers to investigate them. The end result, he argues, is that there are many voices professing the virtues of their own explanations and that little actual empirical research has been performed. The fragmentation also makes it difficult to pinpoint a single cause for turnover among repatriates, regardless of the duration of the assignment. Earlier attempts at consolidating the field have been made by Lazarova and Cerdin (2007) who have made some progress, arguably turning the fragmentation into a schism. In their attempt at unifying the field the authors have taken a wide range of established factors into account, grouping them into two fields known as the “Old”, traditional perspective and the “New”, alternative perspective, which each contains sets of causes and explanations for the phenomenon.

The traditional, or organisational, view takes the perspective that repatriate retention depends entirely on having the appropriate support programs in place. Expatriates require preparation before

going away in order to function at an optimal level while abroad, but also support during the assignment and once it is finished in order to manage the personal upheaval involved in moving home. When moving back home after an international assignment it is common to experience a “reverse cultural shock” similar to that experienced when moving abroad, something explored and developed by Onwumechili et al. (2003). This phenomenon is based on the notion that “one cannot cross the same river twice” Plato and Reeve (1998) without the river being different, but with the addition that the person crossing it also will have changed during the time since the last crossing. The main problems that the repatriate faces and which the support programs need to address according to this views are as follows: On returning home the repatriate may feel that their skills are being under used, that they are being given too little autonomy as compared to their time abroad, that they have limited career options because they have lost touch with the diplomatic game at the HQ and that there is a general lack of interest in what they have been doing.

The New, or individualistic, view focuses more on the individual interests of the expatriate. Here Lazarova and Cerdin describe a completely different view in which it is the expatriates career activism that drives up the rate of turnover. Upon returning, repatriates realise the value of their international experience and start to look around for more lucrative offers. These offers then “pull” repatriates out of the company rather than dissatisfaction “pushing” them out. From this perspective the support activities should be designed to satisfy repatriates' need for self-development and rewards in order to persuade them to stay.

Although there are strong proponents for both views, claiming that their way is the only way, Lazarova and Cerdin make it clear that both approaches fill a function and that only by being open to both possibilities can a way forwards be found.

### **1.1.7 Recent findings**

For short-term assignments, this is where the field stands today. The general lack of data and cohesion makes it difficult to understand the process which the repatriates go through as they come home. However, for long-term assignments, the field has seen more advances: Only two years after Szkudlareks (2010) review, Kraimer et al. (2012) published a paper on how they, through Identity Theory and quantitative research, have managed to establish a link between the development of what they term an “International Employee Identity” in long-term expatriates and the end-result of leaving the company upon repatriation. From the perspective of Identity Theory, turnover is the result of strain induced by discrepancies in the self-percieved identity of the employee and their identity as perceived by others, so called Identity Strain as defined by Burke (1991). Kraimer et al. (2012) proposed that an employee who has developed a strong identity as an expatriate, a so called International Employee Identity, will upon repatriation experience Identity Strain when that identity is no longer being reinforced. They also found that the positive relationship between International Employee Identity and Identity Strain was enhanced by what they call the employee's Perceived Job Deprivation, which they define as *“the belief that the organisation does not provide them with appreciable benefits relative to their colleagues who didn't complete international assignments”*, since it would help widen the mental gap between their International Employee Identity and their emerging identity as a repatriate. Finally, the authors found that the employee's International Employee Identity can be linked to their engagement with their surroundings in their country of expatriation when not working. This they termed Off-the-job Embeddedness. This approach uses a combination of the Old and New perspectives as defined by Lazarova and Cerdin (2007) since Identity Strain causes both a Push and a Pull effect in the repatriate. The experienced Identity Strain pushes repatriates to escape their situation and current workplace while also providing a Pull effect from situations or positions which reinforce their International Employee Identity, urging them to

seek out these positive experiences.

While their research was conducted on repatriates coming home from long-term assignments, the results are relevant to the field of short-term assignments since they explain the reasons that underlie the decision to leave the company and as such are relevant to the repatriate field regardless of the duration of the assignments duration.

## **1.2 Problem formulation**

In the previous section it has been established that the expatriate assignment is an important tool for modern multi-national companies but that these assignments are costly and result in high attrition among the repatriates. It has also been shown that the high level of turnover among repatriates has decidedly negative consequences for the company as the employee is often highly skilled, has gained valuable experience abroad and, in many cases, leaves for a direct competitor.

Furthermore, it has been observed that the short-term assignment has recently become a popular alternative to the traditional long-term assignment as a result of decreasing travelling costs, increased cross-border mobility and perceived advantages in cost-effectiveness, flexibility and simplicity. Evidence has also been presented, suggesting that short-term assignments may have advantages in producing lower rates of turnover among repatriates as compared to traditional long-term assignments.

However, despite the increasing interest in short-term assignments and their by now frequent use, there has been little research to confirm the perceived advantages and none to substantiate the findings of Tahvanainen et al., (2005). Thus companies are today sending valued employees on assignments for which the consequences are still unclear. This is a problem because the possible consequences include a risk of losing the services of the employee on repatriation.

Therefore there is a real need to explore what effects that short-term expatriation assignments have on the individual plane, with special regard to factors which lead to higher turnover, since this has been shown to be a common problematic outcome for employees returning from long-term assignments.

In light of the findings of Kraimer et al. (2012), using the perspective of Identity Theory and the factors associated with Identity Strain as a basis for this research would be prudent since this would also allow a direct comparison with between the experiences of repatriates from long-term and short-term assignments. This could serve to further the understanding of the similarities and differences between the two types of assignment and could perhaps help tie the two fields closer.

### **1.3 Research questions**

*How does the development of identity strain in repatriates after short-term assignments differ from the development in repatriates after long-term assignments?*

To further understand the experiences which lead to identity strain, and thus to turnover, additional sub-questions have been formed in line with the variables identified by Kraimer et al. (2012):

*Sub Question 1: What are the differences in perceived job deprivation between repatriates after short-term and long-term expatriate assignments?*

*Sub Question 2: How does the degree of development of an International Employee Identity differ between repatriates after short-term and long-term expatriate assignments?*

*Sub Question 3: What is the difference in expatriate off-the-job embeddedness between short-term and long-term expatriates?*

# 2 Theory

## 2.1 Expatriation

An employee sent on an assignment in a country different to the employee's home country is called an expatriate. There are many reasons for sending your employees abroad and traditionally the most important ones have been the following:

First of all, it can be a question of exerting direct control over a foreign operation. This was exemplified by Barlow (1953) in his study of a group of American-owned subsidiaries in Mexico. In this exploratory study, Barlow observed how the American companies managed their subsidiaries and found that a popular method was to send personnel from the company's home country as expatriates. These were put in managerial positions and were selected based on their experience with the company, their knowledge of their organisational practices and their knowledge of the foreign country. Kopp found in her 1994 paper that this is still a popular reason for using expatriates, especially in firms with ethnocentric tendencies. The ethnocentric mindset was explained by Perlmutter (1969) as an attitude of superiority directed from the home country towards other areas of the globe in which the company operates or aims to operate. According to Perlmutter (ibid.) this superiority is based on a belief that people from their own ethnicity are more capable, trustworthy and reliable than people from other ethnicities. Perlmutter (ibid.) states that companies with an ethnocentric world view tend to have control heavily centralised at the head quarters and tend to use practices such as setting global standards based on the situation at home; for instance sales quotas, using centralised training in the home country and, as mentioned earlier, providing international subsidiaries with managers from the home country. However, Kopp (ibid.) also found

that Japanese firms, who have a tendency to use ethnocentric practices, had more human resource management difficulties with regards to their international subsidiaries than European or US companies. Thus it is possible that this reason will become less important in the future.

Secondly, it can be a matter of filling a local requirement for a particular skill, such as managerial talent, technical expertise or salesmanship. Examples of this can often be seen in developing countries where it is not always possible to recruit the necessary competence as mentioned by Kogut and Zander (1995), however, examples can also be found in smaller, industrialised countries where there isn't enough demand for a particular skill or educational institution have a large enough student base for a particular subject.

Thirdly, repatriates can be used for reinforcing the company culture at a foreign subsidiary, a practice commonly combined with the earlier mentioned exertion of direct control as a form of accompanying indirect control which will function even after the expatriate has returned to the home country.

Fourthly, there is also a possibility of sending out an employee to develop its skills in a foreign location as explained by Kogut and Zander (1995). An employee could for instance be sent to a centre of excellence in order to learn from the best within the company or to a business cluster, such as Silicone Valley in California, in order to learn from the best within the industry.

Lastly, more recently research by Grosse (1996), Bonache and Brewster (2001) and Antal (2001) has shown that expatriates also provide knowledge transfer and organisational learning which is of great importance in modern multinational corporations (MNC's) where knowledge has become a key source of competitive advantage. Antal (2001) wrote about how expatriates are necessary for gathering and disseminating knowledge about complex local conditions and the way in which business is conducted in different cultures and markets. To disseminate the learnings within the



company to all relevant subsidiaries quickly and efficiently is a task which can be difficult to perform remotely depending on the nature of the information.

Furthermore, Lazarova and Cerdin (2007) relates research by a large group of academics, including Black, Caligiuri, DiSanto and Tung pushing the idea that expatriate assignments have become a source of personal and professional development as well, prompting those striving for promotion to seek out foreign assignments as a way of gaining valuable experience as well as material for their list of merits.

## **2.2 Short-term expatriation**

A long-term expatriate assignment is commonly agreed to be any foreign assignment that requires the expatriate to move abroad for more than 12 months. Conversely, an expatriate assignment shorter than 12 months is known as a short-term assignment. Petrovic, Harris and Brewster (2000) agree that any expatriate assignment of a duration shorter than 12 months should be classified as short-term, however, they also suggest that there are three types of short-term assignments. Firstly, they define the plain short-term assignment as a shorter version of the long-term foreign assignment; the expatriate moves fully abroad, perhaps bringing the family. The second type they describe is that of the International Commuter Assignment. During such an assignment, they explain, an employee commutes from the home country to a single workplace in the host country while the family, if present, remains in the home country. The authors set no firm limits on the time between commutes, but suggest that it involves going abroad for one or two weeks at a time. Lastly, Petrovic et al. (ibid.) name the third type of short-term expatriate assignment Frequent Flyer Assignments and defines it as when an employee lives in the home country and goes on frequent business assignments abroad, but unlike the International Commuter not to one single place, but to several different locations.

<p><b>Long-term assignment</b></p> <p>Assignment &gt;12 months Relocation One location</p>	<p><b>Short-term assignment</b></p> <p>Assignment &lt;12 months Relocation One location</p>
<p><b>International Commuter</b></p> <p>Daily cross-border commute No relocation One location</p>	<p><b>Frequent flyer</b></p> <p>Frequent business trips No relocation Several locations</p>

Figure 1. Types of foreign assignments

This investigation will be concerned only with the first interpretation by Petrovic et al. (ibid.): the short-term assignment. This choice has been made for two reasons. Firstly, because the Short-term Assignment, unlike the International Commuter Assignment and the Frequent Flyer Assignment, uses the foreign location as the expatriates locus rather than the home country. In other words, the employee is required to spend a significant amount of time in the host country, making themselves a new home and interacting with their environment. Thus they will become embedded in the new environment rather than constantly returning to a location in which they are already embedded. Secondly, the short-term assignment is situated in one location, not several. This avoids the added unpredictability of multiple cultures acting on the expatriate as well as the complications related to constantly visiting new places. Without these restrictions it becomes very difficult to conduct research since the varied environmental factors in different locations for the different types of assignment will necessarily have diverse effects on the expatriates, while living at home will dampen the impact of the visit abroad.

## 2.3 Identity Theory

As mentioned earlier, Identity Theory has been successfully applied to the repatriation process by Kraimer et al. (2012). The concept of Identity is best defined by Stryker and Burke (2000) as “*parts of a self composed of the meanings that persons attach to the multiple roles they typically play in highly differentiated contemporary societies*”. What Stryker and Burke (2000) mean is that a persons identity is a multifaceted thing drawing upon both the external views of people in the area and the persons internal view of itself to form meaningful identities with different ways of acting and interacting with other people. They also state that a person has many identities which they switch between depending on the surroundings and the circumstances. Those which are most important to a person are referred to as Salient Roles by Stryker (1980) and are often a persons professional identity, their identity as a parent, partner or friend; the roles which are most often assumed. Not only do people have multiple identities, the persons idea of the identity also changes depending on the situation and the people he or she interacts with. Thus the identity of a person is in constant change and can be viewed as a process rather than a something constant or a collection of masks. Identity theory is the theory of how these processes operate and tries to explain what factors influence our identity and how they operate. As Nicholson (1984) explains, these factors can help with understanding how work role transitions, like that which occurs when going abroad on an expatriate assignment, affect an individuals sense of identity and attitude towards people and related organisations, in this case the employer. Kraimer et al. (2012) add that the work role transition experienced during an expatriate assignment requires the expatriate to adapt to both the work environment and the possibly culturally different environment of the host country and that this and repatriation both puts a greater demand on the expatriate/repatriate to evaluate their identity.

### **2.3.1 International Employee Identity**

In their paper on repatriation, Kraimer et al. (2012) introduced the concept of an International Employee Identity as a product of the expatriates time abroad. They cite numerous papers where it has been established that the new environments and work roles induce change in the expatriate which leads to them developing a work role and identity different from that which they employed at home. The new identity is special in that it is based on experiences outside of the organisation in their home country where they are exposed to new cultures, ideas and social constructs from which they derive a role which is appropriate for the new setting. As this role is often rewarding, being associated with monetary bonuses, new responsibilities and freedoms and also social status as discussed in the introduction, the International Employee Identity can quickly become salient because of its positive connotations. Kraimer et al. (2012) thus defines International Employee Identity as *“the degree to which an individual's role as an expatriate has become central to her/his self-concept”*. The authors also stress that this identity often becomes strong enough to become central to expatriates, leading to them seeing themselves as International Employees also after repatriation to the home country. In their paper, Kraimer et al. (2012) managed to show a link between the development of an International Employee Identity and the concept of embeddedness. However, according to Kohonen (2008) a strong identity is developed through self-reflection and personal growth. These are processes which are iterative and take place over time and so this paper proposes the following:

**Proposition 1:** Repatriates who have been abroad on a short-term assignment will have developed a less strong International Employee Identity than repatriates who have been abroad on a long-term assignment.

### **2.3.2 Embeddedness**

Job embeddedness was introduced by Mitchell et al. (2001) as a way of describing a person's "stuckness" in their environment. This term "stuckness", as used by the authors, represents how connected a person is with his or her environment and how difficult it would be to leave it. Mitchell et al. define three factors affecting a person's embeddedness: *Links*, *fit* and *sacrifice*. They also make a distinction between on-the-job embeddedness and off-the-job embeddedness, yielding six factors in total.

*Links* represent the ties which a person forms with other people and activities. It can be relationships with co-workers but also with the people at the tennis club or the club itself. The more and stronger the links to the surroundings the harder it is to leave.

*Fit* refers to the perceived fit between the person and the organisation or the environment. The better suited the person perceives him- or herself to be to the company and the place of residence the closer the bond. An example of this could be people working in California because they like the climate or people working for a certain company because they like the flat hierarchy.

Finally, *sacrifice* represents what the person would have to give up in order to leave the organisation and the area of residence. This can include, for instance, stock options, job perks, recreational activities or status achieved in the community. The authors put in a disclaimer that it should be noted that off-the-job embeddedness is of limited influence when a job doesn't require a relocation, but also that a high off-the-job embeddedness can cause people to remove job options which require them to relocate.

Like the development of the International Employee Identity, becoming embedded in a new environment also takes time. Although it happens that people make meaningful friends, gain important positions within social groups and fall in love with certain climates or sceneries, it is

generally thought that such infatuations are not as deeply rooting as their developed counterparts. Thus this paper proposes the following:

**Proposition 2a:** Repatriates who have been abroad on a short-term assignment will have become less deeply embedded on-the-job than repatriates who have been abroad on a long-term assignment.

**Proposition 2b:** Repatriates who have been abroad on a short-term assignment will have become less deeply embedded off-the-job than repatriates who have been abroad on a long-term assignment.

### **2.3.3 Identity Strain**

Identity Strain is a concept stemming from the Social Stress concept promoted by Stein et al. (1960) and has since been reinterpreted by Burke (1991). According to Burke (1991) Identity Strain is the result of a broken identity process, that is the feed-back loop through which people express and modify their identities. According to Burke (1991), this feed-back loop consists of the following: a person acts out their identity in a social situation, thus affecting the environment. For this they receive feed-back which they compare with their identity standards, which are what they would expect from someone expressing that particular role or identity. The stress, he then argues, stems from so called interruptions to this process, such as messages that contradict the perceived identity or somehow does not match the persons identity standards. This will, according to the author, induce distress and cause additional outputs to try to conciliate the differences between their self-concept and the image which is communicated back. For the purposes of this investigation, the definition set down by Kraimer et al. (2012) will be used; that is to say that *“a person's feeling of tension associated with his or her international employee identity being inconsistent with the current environment.* In other words, if when returning home the International Employee Identity of

the employee is not being met with positive reinforcement there will be a discrepancy between how the employee views itself and how its surroundings view it in return. The resulting tension will then cause feelings of psychological strain and anxiety in the repatriate.

### **2.3.4 Perceived job deprivation**

In accordance with the theories of Burke (1991), a repatriate who is not receiving support for their International Employee Identity will experience Identity Strain as they address the situation.

Kraimer et al. (2012) found that job deprivation will have a further, moderating effect on the strain as the repatriates International Employee Identity is not only not being supported, but instead, from their perspective, actively “resisted”. This “resistance” against their International Employee Identity is exemplified by the authors as perceptions of not receiving the rewards which they believe they are due. This can be e.g. promotions, key assignments, financial rewards or social rewards which they believe themselves to have earned by during their time abroad. A common complement to this is when the expatriate becomes used to the often high standard of living and compensation which comes with the foreign assignment (Wederspahn, 1992).

Being away for a shorter time should give the expatriate less time to get used to a higher level of rewards and social standing and expatriates are often, according research on Finnish short-term expatriates by Tahvanainen et al. (2005), kept on the same salary, but with a “hardship” bonus, to keep expectations realistic. There is also an argument by Tung (1989) that being away from the main office for a longer time will trigger an “out of sight, out of mind” scenario, where others are promoted ahead of the expatriate based on local, office politics which are impossible to follow from abroad. While abroad much of the political capital held by the employee will slowly diminish as colleagues and contacts at the main office move on or are replaced. This should be mitigated by a shorter foreign assignment since considerably less time is spent away from the office and so “out of

sight” of the relevant managers. Based on this, there is cause for the following proposition:

**Proposition 3:** Repatriates who have been abroad on a short-term assignment will experience less perceived job deprivation than repatriates who have been abroad on a long-term assignment.

## 3 Method

In order to test the earlier propositions, a web based survey consisting of 80 questions was sent out to human resource (HR) departments, Vice Presidents and key employees at 80 companies with instructions to spread it to employees who had recently returned from foreign assignments shorter than 12 months. In light of the results it was also decided to conduct a number of follow-up interviews by phone and email in an endeavour to explain the findings. The interviews were aimed at the managers of foreign assignments rather than the expatriates themselves.

### 3.1 Quantitative methods

Quantitative methods is the name given to those data collection methods concerned with gathering numerical data. The method lends itself well to problems which can be solved using quantifiable measures and is according to Bryman and Bell (2005) deductive in its nature.

The decision to use a quantitative survey in this study was primarily made in order to ensure that the results would be compatible with those of the investigation made by Kraimer et al. (2012), as recommended by Glass (1981). Glass (1981) found that a comparison of studies which are too diverse is often meaningless and, consequently, the more alike two studies are the easier it is to integrate their findings. Thus, adhering to *ceteris paribus* as closely as possible, while considering the volatile nature of the subject of study, and applying the same measures as those used by Kraimer



et al. (2012), it would be possible to compare and contrast the experiences of long-term expatriates and short-term expatriates in accordance with the requirements of the research questions.

In more general terms, the use of quantitative methods is appropriate for this problem since the measures are well known and any generally applicable answers to the research questions would require a large quantity of data on which to base the analysis. It would take a prohibitively long time to accomplish this task using qualitative methods which would generate responses which take time to quantify and would also generate much unwanted data to sort through. A qualitative approach would involve interviews or letters which would need decoding and analysing while yielding relatively few responses and reaching relatively few respondents. The greater volume of responses ensures that small differences can be detected using analytical methods and that a greater portion of the population can be approached, both important if any predictions are to be made according to Hand (2007). Using a quantitative survey also avoids the possibility of introducing bias through the Interviewer Effect as described by Dijkstra (1983), however, only for the survey since it proved necessary to complement the study with a small number of interviews. Another important point is that the factors which were to be studied are not new concepts and so quantitative measures have been developed and tested already. This precludes the need for initial interviews through which a knowledge base can be established. The batteries of questions used by Kraimer et al. (2012) have all been tested by the authors in a preliminary trial and all measures are derived from earlier research. The batteries have a lowest Cronbachs alpha of 0,75, a highest alpha of 0,88 and an average alpha of 0,83, which is acceptable by most standards according to Bryman and Bell (2005). This should ensure that the questions measure what they are supposed to measure and that the findings have acceptable validity. The final version of the survey which was used can be found attached as Appendix 1 The Survey.

### **3.1.1 Survey Medium**

The choice to use an online survey tool, unlike the original survey by Kraimer et al. (2012) which was distributed in printed form, was made for two reasons: Firstly, online surveys have functional advantages over paper surveys. For example, questions can be made conditional so that the respondent cannot progress without answering all questions, thus helping to reduce the number of incomplete submissions. A digital survey also has the advantage that the answers take less time to process since the web based surveys can be made to output ready coded data in a format readable by spreadsheet applications. This avoids the tedious chore of manually reading and logging every single answer off of paper surveys.

Secondly, there is the environmental factor to consider. Using a web-based survey reduces the carbon footprint of the project since no questionnaires have to be printed and transported twice; once to be delivered to the respondent and once to return it to the researcher. This has the added benefit of saving costs in postage and printing for the researchers as well as time in posting the surveys, both for the researchers and the respondents. This also results in quicker response times. Since no time is lost in transporting the survey, which can sometimes take several days if delivered to the other side of the world, the turnaround time for a project can be reduced.

### **3.1.2 Survey sampling**

Since the survey for this study was distributed through a different medium than the survey in the original study by Kraimer et al. (2012) there may be concerns that the answers given by the respondents may differ depending on the medium used. However, in his paper from 1998 Tse compared, amongst other things, the quality of responses gained through digital questionnaires and the traditional paper version and found no appreciable difference in the accuracy of the data. Simsek and Veiga (2001) have come to the same conclusion according to their primer on internet

organisational surveys where they examined the results of several studies.

The survey was aimed at people who have been on a short-term expatriate assignment on behalf of their employer and have returned from said assignment within the last 24 months. The exclusion of repatriates who have been home for longer than 24 months was designed to limit the effect of errors caused by poor memory or ease of recall, the latter which was explained in depth by Bazerman and Moore in their book *Judgement in managerial decision making* from 2009. According to them bias due to ease of recall consists of a tendency for people to remember things more clearly the more vivid the information or event was or the more recently something brought it to mind. Bazerman and Moore continue by explaining that this leads people to ascribe more importance to the things they remember because of their clarity, not because of the importance of the information itself. Thus it would be possible, for instance, for a repatriate asked to recall social interaction to remember the single meeting with an important person or a person with whom they have spoken recently, but forget to mention their secretary or the people with which they had lunch occasionally. While the time limit is tight enough to ensure that people remember their experiences it also allows repatriates time to process their experiences according to Stevens, Oddou, Furya, Bird and Mendenhall (2006). As was mentioned earlier, a distinction has been made by Petrovic et al. (2000) between the different types of expatriate missions. For this study it has been decided to exclude people who were sent on Frequent Flyer Assignments and International Commuter Assignments by setting a qualifier of 14 days minimum duration.

To reach a large enough sample a selection of corporations and communities for expatriates were contacted and asked to circulate the survey internally. The companies were selected based on their international presence and on the pre-existing contacts available to the researcher. This led to a bias towards European countries, with the greater part of them localized in Sweden. The companies had in excess of one month in which to circulate the questionnaire and were sent reminders by email on

at least one occasion in order to prompt a greater number to participate.

## **3.2 Qualitative Methods**

In light of the poor response rate for the quantitative survey it was decided to complement the results with a few short interviews with relevant contacts at companies participating in the study as well as an additional contact with extensive experience with short-term expatriates. It was hoped that this could help explain the results and provide insights into how to avoid this kind of outcome in the future. The reasons for using qualitative methods to complete the information gained through qualitative means were as follows:

Firstly, since the desired quantity of answers was not attained for the survey it is imperative to learn why this is. This requires an inductive process for which qualitative methods are much more suited, according to Bryman and Bell (2005), as quantitative methods requires access to clearly defined measures to be effective. Because this inductive process must be exploratory, only qualitative methods, such as interviews, are able to answer the kind of open ended questions which were asked.

The call for interviews was sent out to the same population as was used for the survey, including those companies which had not replied. Thus the call was put to the same group of 80 companies with an international presence.

The interviews were conducted via email as this would ensure that the respondent would have time to think carefully about their answers and consult others within the company for additional information. The interviews were in some cases preceded by a short telephone conversation used to clarify the questions when necessary. Discretion and care was used to minimise the risk of introducing leading questions or explanations both in the emails and the phone conversations.

# 4 Results

## 4.1 Comments on Data Collection

### 4.1.1 *The survey*

Despite all the measures described in the previous section, the data collection did not produce the expected quantity of responses. Out of 80 approached companies the number of companies who felt able to participate was only 6 and out of those 6 companies only 1 company managed to produce more than 1 respondent. In total, only 7 respondents completed the survey. Of the 80 companies which were contacted, 28 found the project of interest. Of these 28 firms, 19 found that they had no employees who would be suitable as respondents and 3 found that they were already cooperating with other students and felt unable to participate in further studies for the moment. Thus 6 firms remained who were willing to participate and were actually able to provide suitable respondents. Of the other 42 companies who expressed no interest in participating 3 sent a direct reply stating clearly that they were not interested, 2 sent an automatic reply stating that they would reply as soon as they were able and 38 chose to send no reply at all. This gives a response rate of 7.5% as calculated from respondents per companies approached, which is well below what is recommended by meta-studies such as that by Baruch (1999) which concluded that an academic survey should have a response rate in the range of 60% +/-20 points depending on circumstances. Even if motivation for the maximum deviation were to be produced, the study would still fall under the bar for an acceptable response rate.

The responses that *were* collected show a varied group of people. The respondents come from Sweden, the United Kingdom (UK), India and Belgium, with the largest group counting 3

individuals coming from the UK. These have been expatriates in China, Sweden, the UK, Qatar, the USA, Germany and Switzerland and have been away for an average period of 19.57 weeks with the longest assignment lasting 28 weeks and the shortest assignment lasting 12 weeks. This puts the durations firmly within the time limits of being no longer than 12 months and no shorter than 2 weeks that were prescribed by Petrovic et al. (2000) as discussed earlier, and qualifies the assignments as Short-term Expatriate Assignments. The respondents were also all well within the 24-month limit since their repatriation and the mean time they had been home for was 12 months at the time of the survey.

#### ***4.1.2 The interviews***

For the interviews only 3 out of 80 approached companies were interested in participating. A further 25 replied that they were not interested and 42 companies did not reply at all. Of the 3 respondents, 2 were companies which had participated in the survey and 1 which had not. The companies were from different industries with one from the information logistics sector, one from the service sector and one from the manufacturing industry sector.

## 4.2 Data

Variable	Data by Kraimer et al.		Data by Möller	
	Mean	s.d.	Mean	s.d.
Identity Strain	2.70	1.04	1.71	0.16
International Employee Identity	3.78	0.80	3.39	0.27
Perceptions of Job Deprivation	3.11	0.76	2.82	0.23
Expatriate On-the-job Embeddedness	2.63	0.59	3.18	2.11
Expatriate Off-the-job Embeddedness	2.56	0.66	2.84	0.86
Repatriate On-the-job Embeddedness	2.30	0.60	3.86	2.87
Repatriate Off-the-job Embeddedness	2.38	0.79	3.71	0.31
Organisational Identity	3.18	0.82	2.83	0.25
Organisational Tenure Incl. outliers (years)	11.13	8.21	8.14	10.63
Organisational Tenure Excl. outliers (years)	11.13	8.21	3.83	1.34

Table 1. Comparison of Mean and Standard Deviation of Study Variables

One striking difference that can be seen is that of the first variable: Identity strain. The difference of just over 1 data point shows a decidedly lower level of Identity Strain in the respondents from the Möller survey as compared to that by Kraimer et al. (ibid.). It might be suggested that this is a result of the development of a weaker International Employee Identity by the short-term expatriates due to the comparatively short time spent abroad as there is less time for off-the-job embeddedness to take place and less time for the expatriate to develop and transition into a new role in the destination country. This follows the supported results from the 2<sup>nd</sup> hypothesis by Kraimer et al. (ibid.), which states that Perceived Job Deprivation affects the relationship between International Employee Identity and Identity Strain, since there is a corresponding difference in the International Employee Identity in Table 1 above, if only by 0.29 points. However, this lower average level of International Employee Identity among short-term expatriates shows a tendency not to agree with the notion that Expatriate Off-the-job Embeddedness leads to higher levels of International Employee Identity. This due to the fact that the average levels of Expatriate Off-the-job Embeddedness for the short-

term expatriates is substantially higher than those of the surveyed long-term expatriates. Again, this could be a result of the shorter mission duration as embeddedness takes time to develop both on the job and off the job.

Another feature of interest is that the average tenure with the organisation is substantially lower for the short-term expatriates at 8.14 years than the average tenure for long-term expatriates which was found to be 11.13 years. This difference becomes even larger when taking into consideration the existence of an outlier in the short-term expatriate data which has been with the same company for 34 years. Without this outlier the mean shrinks to 3.83 years with the company, as can be seen at the bottom of Table 1, suggesting an even greater difference in tenure.

This data seems to follow the trend found by Brookfield Global Relocation Services, (2012) which was discussed earlier in this paper and shows that there is today a tendency to send out employees with less experience. In addition, when taken together with the small difference in detected Organisational Identity between long-term and short-term expatriates this supports the notion that employees selected for foreign assignments have a well developed relationship with the company.

Among the companies with which contact was established 19 out of 31, almost 2/3, replied that they were interested but that they had no employees suitable for participating in the survey. When asked for the reason why this was the case, several claimed that working with few expatriates was part of their strategy. The reply of Alf Göransson, CEO of security company Securitas, serves as an example of a typical answer by a large MNC, in this case with 300,000 employees in 52 countries, showing how they have a very small ratio of expatriates among their employees:

*We have 300 000 employees in our international company with activities in 52 countries. We have only two persons who fit into your demands in this study. One executive have been abroad and have now left for another assignment in another country and is not suitable to ask. Another executive is*



*not representative since there are special circumstances surrounding him. Our strategy is to work with very few expatriates overall.*

*- Alf Göransson, CEO of Securitas, Sweden*

Another reoccurring explanation was that the company tries to work as far as possible using locals, as is exemplified by this quote from Per Samuelson, CEO of Strålfors communications company:

*Our corporation have activities in 7 countries and we have in total 1500 employees. We have few examples of expatriates since our strategy is to work with local executives and local employees in each country. Therefore we do not have these problems.*

*- Per Samuelson, CEO of Strålfors, Sweden*

This trend of using locals seems to be popular among the questioned companies and could be linked to the disadvantages of expatriates discussed earlier. The high cost of using expatriates as compared to locals means that a local with the same capabilities as an expatriate will be more cost effective in the long run. Similarly, the local knowledge that an expatriate would have to build up over time could be already present in someone hired locally, saving both time and decreasing the risk of making costly mistakes in the meantime. In addition, an interview with an HR manager at Volvo Sverige reveals that their single greatest reason for sending employees abroad on short-term assignments is to provide skills which *can't* be sourced locally. This is significant knowing that their department handles around 190 short-term assignments per year and, at any time, around 700 long-term expatriate assignments.

# 5 Analysis

The low number of respondents effectively precludes the use of the statistical analysis methods employed by Kraimer et al. (2012), including Logistical Regression and Hierarchical Multiple Regression for two reasons: Firstly, the number of respondents is too low to be considered a representation of the field as a whole and so any conclusions would not be generally applicable. Secondly, if the above mentioned statistical methods were to be applied to the current data, any existing correlation would be too small to detect. The same two reasons also preclude attempts at using Linear Regression Analysis. Had these methods been available direct comparisons with the data provided by Kraimer et al. (2012) would have been possible. Because these advanced forms of analysis are closed off, simpler methods have to be employed in comparing the two studies. One way of producing a meaningful comparison would be to examine the average values for the populations within each block of questions. It would also be possible to use this information in combination with the standard deviation of the same data to comment on the spread of answers within the groups. This would make it possible to suggest tendencies of similarities or dissimilarities between the two populations with regards to their characteristics as long-term and short-term expatriates and that way approach the propositions posed in this paper.

**Proposition 1:** Repatriates who have been abroad on a short-term assignment will have developed a less strong International Employee Identity than repatriates who have been abroad on a long-term assignment.

As can be seen in Diagram 1, the short-term expatriates have indeed developed a less strong International Employee Identity than those who have been away on long-term assignments. However, the difference in average International Employee Identity is slight and looking at the comparatively high standard deviation of the long-term expatriates gives an indication that there is a breadth to their answers that indicate that this difference could be well within the normal range

### Comparison of survey results

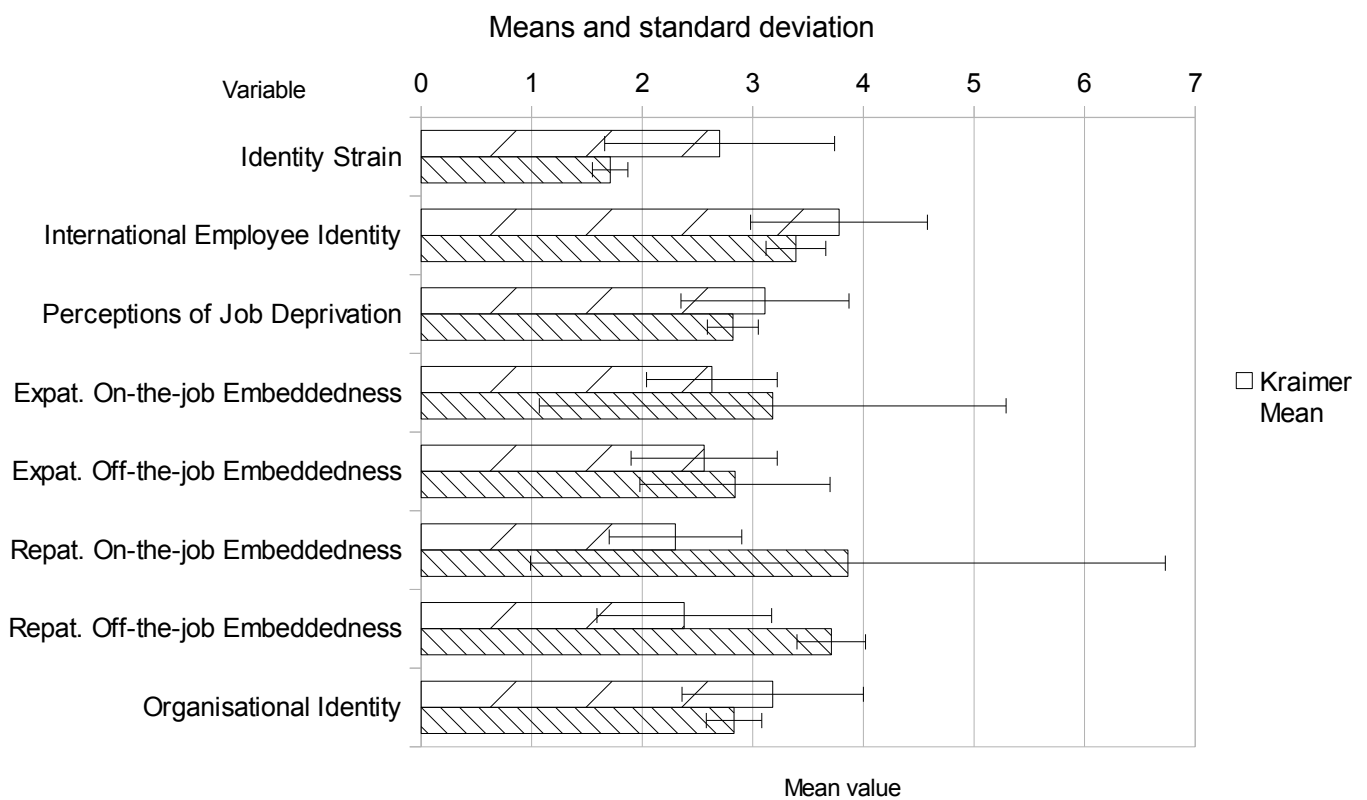


Diagram 1. Comparison of Survey Results

had the sample of short-term expatriates been greater. With no significant difference there is little support for this proposition apart from the slight tendency towards a lower level of International Employee Identity.

**Proposition 2a:** Repatriates who have been abroad on a short-term assignment will have become less deeply embedded on-the-job than repatriates who have been abroad on a long-term assignment.

**Proposition 2b:** Repatriates who have been abroad on a short-term assignment will have become less deeply embedded off-the-job than repatriates who have been abroad on a long-term assignment.

The next two propositions, propositions 2a and 2b, find little support in the survey results. The short-term expatriates seem to have become more embedded in less than a year, than the long-term expatriates have in multiple years. This would indicate a reverse relationship between time spent and the level of embeddedness achieved. A possible explanation could perhaps be that short-term expatriates experience the host country for a short enough time that the “honeymoon” period when everything is new and exciting does not end before they leave and that long-term expatriates grow tired of their host country. However, this would not match the findings of Onwumechili et al. (2003). In the end, it is important to point out that the large variance in the results from the short-term expatriates indicates uncertainties in this outcome.

**Proposition 3:** Repatriates who have been abroad on a short-term assignment will experience less perceived job deprivation than repatriates who have been abroad on a long-term assignment.

As for Proposition 1, there is some support for Proposition 3, but the variance in Job Deprivation shown in Diagram 1 is great enough that it does not carry real significance. Diagram 1 shows a lower level of Perceived Job Deprivation for short-term repatriates which would support Proposition 3, but taking the variance into account the two values are close enough to each other that the indication is very weak.

What may be significant though, is the fact that Diagram 1 shows the clearest difference between long-term expatriates and short-term expatriates in the Identity Strain factor. It is plausible that the small differences in the other factors add up to a larger, total effect in the resulting Identity Strain.

# 6 Discussion

## 6.1 Results

Based on the findings in the previous section it has been found that no propositions can be declared supported. There are indeed indications and tendencies which may point in the right direction, however, the great variances involved and the meagre amount of data upon which they are based makes it impossible to determine which point towards success and which to failure. With such weak answers to the propositions it comes as no surprise that the research questions must remain unanswered.

*How does the development of identity strain in repatriates after short-term assignments differ from the development in repatriates after long-term assignments?*

*Sub Question 1: What are the differences in perceived job deprivation between repatriates after short-term and long-term expatriate assignments?*

*Sub Question 2: How does the degree of development of an International Employee Identity differ between repatriates after short-term and long-term expatriate assignments?*

*Sub Question 3: What is the difference in expatriate off-the-job embeddedness between short-term and long-term expatriates?*

Nonetheless, the tendencies found, though weak, are as follows:

- 1) The development of Identity Strain in repatriates after a short-term assignment seems to reach lower levels after a completed assignment than after a long-term assignment. It is not possible to comment on the rate of development, however, if these indications are true, they should be no quicker for short-term expatriates than for long-term expatriates.

- 2) The experience of Perceived Job Deprivation in repatriates after a short-term assignment seems to be less than for repatriates after a long-term assignment. It is unfortunately not possible to discern anything about the relationship between Perceived Job Deprivation and Identity Strain in short-term expatriates the same way as was done for long-term expatriates
- 3) The degree of development of an International Employee Identity in a repatriate after a short-term assignment seems to be weaker than in a repatriate after a long-term assignment. It is unfortunately not possible to discern anything about the relationship between International Employee Identity and Identity Strain in short-term expatriates the same way as was done for long-term expatriates
- 4) The degree of off-the-job embeddedness in a repatriate after a short-term assignment seems to be stronger than in a repatriate after a long-term assignment. This goes against the prediction and is indicative of the difficulties involved in relying on any of these tendencies.

Despite failing to answer the proposed research questions, perhaps this study can serve as a small stepping stone towards a greater study of the experiences of short-term expatriates upon returning to the home country. The framework is laid down for future attempts at investigating the problems surrounding repatriation and path open for willing researchers. The following discussion will attempt to address some of the questions which remain at the end of this study.

## **6.2 Reflections**

Since it was not possible to collect the requisite number of respondents the most pressing question towards the end must be: Why were the response rates so poor? Since many factors govern these results it is difficult to immediately pinpoint the main cause, but through the process of elimination it is possible to come closer to the underlying reasons. Below are a few questions and attempts at

answers based on what has been learned during the process of producing this study. Perhaps they can be of use to a future researcher attempting to reach further in this field.

### **Did the fault lie with the survey?**

The survey itself is a natural starting point since it is the main tool in the process. Since the same set of questions have been used successfully earlier by Kraimer et al. (2012) and they in turn used questions which had already been used and tested by previous researchers as well as performed tests of their quality themselves it seems like a remote possibility that the questions themselves are at fault. Though initially the length of the questionnaire seemed daunting to the test group this apprehension was successfully mitigated by the inclusion of a suggested completion time and a text to let the prospective respondent know that the questions were of multiple choice type. The framing and the directions on how to complete the survey were created specially for this study and were found during testing to be easy to follow and understand. It seems unlikely that the survey itself would deter potential respondents.

### **Are there no short-term expatriates to be questioned?**

Judging from the interviews, the short-term expatriate is not as common as the long-term expatriate, but by no measure rare. As mentioned Volvo alone handles over 190 short-term expatriate assignments per year, as compared to their 700 employees who are on long-term expatriate assignments at any given time. Considering the prevalence of large, international corporations in Sweden, as detected by Fagerfjäll (2005), there should be no difficulties in finding companies that operate short-term expatriate assignments.

### **Was there low interest from respondents?**

Of the 80 contacted companies, 42 did not express any kind of interest in the project. Of these, 3 stated so clearly while 2 were automatic replies and 38 companies did not reply at all. While an

assumed non-interest from about half the population suggests that there is a low interest in general for this type of question the issue becomes more complex when examined closer. As mentioned in the Methods-section there were differences in the way which the companies were approached with the invitation to participate and this difference can be seen in the patterns of the response rate. Of the 28 companies that did express interest in the project, all but 1 had been contacted using cover letters from known third parties recommending the survey and/or been directed at CEOs or Senior Vice Presidents in Communications or Human Resources. Among the 38 companies who did not reply 100% had been contacted directly through the Human Resource department. Since the approached companies are all large, multinational companies they have correspondingly large Human Resource departments where it is possible that requests and invitations are filtered out along the way before they have a chance to reach the managers with authority enough to approve participation in a study such as this. Ideally, every company would have been contacted through a senior manager using a cover letter as an introduction since this seems to garner the most response. However, finding a suitable manager to approach is not always possible when there is a lack of knowledge about the internal hierarchy of the company so that the letter must necessarily be directed to a less specific address, such as the Human Resource department. Furthermore, finding a suitable agent from which procure a cover letter is even more difficult since it is dependent on the contacts available to the researcher.

Among the companies with whom a dialogue was established the vast majority expressed interest in the topic of the study. Out of 31 companies from which a non-automated reply was received, 28 declared that the company was interested in the issues surrounding repatriation. These figures suggest that the interest for the issue is considerably higher among multinationals than the aggregate data would initially suggest. Thus it is possible that a low interest in the subject was in fact not a major contributing factor to the low response rate and that the earlier discussed difficulties in



establishing a dialogue with a Multinational Corporation seems like the more probable explanation. Thus, the final recommendation must be to press on with this issue as it will likely be of interest to a great many companies who wish to retain their valuable employees and to repatriates who wish for greater understanding of what they go through and assistance in their striving to regain their former home.

## 7 Conclusion

As has become evident in this study, gaining access to repatriates is of paramount importance. The lack of respondents in this study is its greatest weakness and the main lesson which can be taken from this, as discussed in Chapter 6, is that access is difficult to gain without a recommendation or a cover letter, especially when the researcher is not well known. The fore-runners, Kraimer et al. (2012), showed that using a reward system and working over a longer period of time also can yield better results and more responses. For future research to be successful, securing access to a sufficient group of respondents must be prioritised.

Finally, although the original questions regarding the effects of short-term expatriation raised in this paper remain largely unanswered due to the lack of generalisable results caused by the low response rate, the tendencies suggested by the empirical findings are encouraging and indicate that repatriates experience lower levels of Identity Strain after completing a short-term assignment than after a long-term assignment. Thus the potential in this line of investigation remains promising and this paper could be used as support for further research. At the very least, this study serves as a review of current expatriation literature and provides a brief background of the field.

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# Appendix 1: The survey questions

## Cover letter

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study.

The survey is concerned with your experiences working abroad as an expatriate and your experiences after returning home from the assignment. You may complete the questions in any order you like, however to submit the form all questions except those marked "Optional" must have been answered. The questionnaire requires about 15 minutes to complete.

I am writing a Master thesis in Management of International Business at Uppsala University for which this survey will be the main empirical evidence. The aim of the thesis is to shed light on how to better support people returning from foreign assignments and this survey . Your help in responding to this questionnaire would be most appreciated.

To ensure your privacy the data will be anonymised upon completion of the collection process.

If you have any questions, feedback or wish to receive a copy of the study when it is completed you are most welcome send an email to [christian.moller.3192@student.uu.se](mailto:christian.moller.3192@student.uu.se).

Sincerely,

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# Survey

1. I liked the company members in my host country workplace.

Strongly disagree  2  3  4  5  Strongly agree

2. My expatriate job utilized my skills and talents well.

Strongly disagree  2  3  4  5  Strongly agree

3. I felt like I was a good match for my host company

Strongly disagree  2  3  4  5  Strongly agree

4. I liked the authority and responsibility I had at my expatriate job.

Strongly disagree  2  3  4  5  Strongly agree

5. I felt good about my professional growth while on the expatriate assignment.

Strongly disagree  2  3  4  5  Strongly agree

6. How many coworkers did you interact with on a day-to-day basis during your expatriate assignment?

7. How many coworkers were highly dependent on you during your expatriate assignment?

8. How many work teams were you on during your expatriate assignment?

9. How many different work committees were you on during your expatriate assignment?

10. I sacrificed a lot when I came back from my expatriate job.

Strongly disagree  2  3  4  5  Strongly agree

11. There were a lot of perks associated with my expatriate job that I do not get now.

Strongly disagree  2  3  4  5  Strongly agree



12. I incurred many costs when I left my expatriation job.

Strongly disagree  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

13. I really loved the place I lived when I was on my expatriate assignment.

Strongly disagree  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

14. The community in my host country was a good match for me.

Strongly disagree  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

15. How many close friends did you make during your expatriate (international) assignment?

16. How many of those close friends do you still interact with regularly (For example through e-mail, phone, or postal mail)

17. How much do you miss those friends?

Not at all  2  3  4  5 To a very large extent

18. How many social clubs/non-work organizations (i.e., churches, fitness/sports clubs, hobby-based clubs) did you take part in during your expatriate (international) assignment?

19. My neighborhood in my host country community was safe.

Strongly disagree  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

20. It was hard to leave my host country community.

Strongly disagree  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

21. I miss the life I experienced in my host country community.

Strongly disagree  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

22. I think of myself as an international employee.

Strongly disagree  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

23. My expatriate experience continues to be a very important part of my life.

Strongly disagree  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

24. To me, my (past) international assignment defines a large part of who I am.

Strongly disagree  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

25. What distinguishes me from others is that I went overseas to work for this organization.

Strongly disagree  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

26. Compared to colleagues with a role similar to yours but who have not worked internationally...

My promotional opportunities are better.

Strongly disagree  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

27. Compared to colleagues with a role similar to yours but who have not worked internationally...

I am on a faster track toward advancement/elevation in the company.

Strongly disagree  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

28. Compared to colleagues with a role similar to yours but who have not worked internationally...

I am seen as having greater potential for an upperlevel position.

Strongly disagree  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

29. Compared to colleagues with a role similar to yours but who have not worked internationally...

I get more respect from other people in the organization.

Strongly disagree  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

30. Compared to colleagues with a role similar to yours but who have not worked internationally...

My status/reputation in the company is higher.

Strongly disagree  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

31. Compared to colleagues with a role similar to yours but who have not worked internationally...

I have more autonomy to set my own work objectives.

Strongly disagree  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

32. Compared to colleagues with a role similar to yours but who have not worked internationally...

I have more freedom to act independently of my boss/supervisor

Strongly disagree  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

33. Compared to colleagues with a role similar to yours but who have not worked internationally...

I can take more responsibility for my own decisions.

Strongly disagree  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

34. Compared to colleagues with a role similar to yours but who have not worked internationally...

I have more responsibilities related to international issues.

Strongly disagree  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

35. Compared to colleagues with a role similar to yours but who have not worked internationally...

My overall compensation is higher.

Strongly disagree  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

36. Compared to colleagues with a role similar to yours but who have not worked internationally...

I get a better set of perks and benefits.

Strongly disagree  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

37. Compared to colleagues with a role similar to yours but who have not worked internationally...

My pay is above what others' get.

Strongly disagree  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

38. After coming back from my (international) expatriate assignment, I have been having trouble defining who I am here at this company.

Strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

39. Sometimes, I feel like my overseas experience doesn't fit my current job.

Strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

40. There are times when there seems to be a conflict between what I am asked to do now and what I had learned as an international employee.

Strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

41. There is a tension between who I am on my current job and who I was on my expatriate assignment.

Strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

42. I feel that my role as a former international employee is not compatible with my current role as a member of this organization.

Strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

43. The most important things that happen to me involve my current job.

Strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

44. Most of my interests center around my work at this organization.

Strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

45. Being a member of this organization is a very large part of who I am.

Strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

46. I am very much personally involved with this organization.

Strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

47. Being on my current job is a very important part of my life.

Strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

48. I like the members of my work group.

Strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

49. My job utilizes my skills and talents well.

Strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

50. I feel like I am a good match for this company.

Strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

51. I fit with the company's culture.

Strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

52. I like the authority and responsibility I have at this company.

Strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

53. I can reach my professional goals working for this organization.

Strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

54. How many coworkers do you interact with regularly?

55. How many coworkers are highly dependent on you?

56. How many work committees are you on?

57. How many work teams are you on?

58. The perks on this job are outstanding.

Strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

59. I am well compensated for my level of performance.

Strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

60. The benefits are good on this job.

Strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

61. I would sacrifice a lot if I left this job.

Strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

62. My promotional opportunities are excellent here.

Strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

63. I really love the place where I live.

Strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

64. The community where I live is a good match for me.

Strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

65. I think of the community where I live as home.

Strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

66. The area where I live offers the leisure activities that I like.

Strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

67. I like the family-oriented environment of my community.

Strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

68. Do you own the home you live in?

Yes  No

69. Are your family roots in or near the community where you now live?

Yes  No

Yes No

70. Leaving this community would be very hard.

Strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

71. People respect me a lot in my community.

Strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

72. My neighbourhood is safe.

Strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5 Strongly agree

73. Which country did you last work in as an expatriate?

74. What is your current country of residence?

75. Approximately how long is it since you repatriated (months)?

76. Approximately how long was your foreign assignment (weeks)?

77. How long have you been working in your current occupation (years)?

78. What is the name of the organisation you currently work for? (Optional)

79. How long have you been working for them (years)?

80. What is your highest completed level of education? Eg. Bachelor, Master, PhD

What is your full name?

81. (Names will only used to safeguard against duplicate answers. All names will be deleted before the answers are analysed)

## Finishing letter

Thank you for completing the survey!

If you wish to receive a copy of the end product, please send an email to christian.moller.3192@student.uu.se with your request.

Once again: Thank you for participating!

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