

***An Investigation into the Learning, Organisational and  
Personal Issues Impacting upon the Expatriation and  
Repatriation of Employees***

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Personal Issues Impacting upon the Expatriation and  
Repatriation of Employees***

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## *Abstract*

As global competition intensifies, organisations are sending employees abroad to generate new perspectives on the international business environment, and develop the skills required to work effectively across cultures. However, organisations continue to underestimate the complexities involved in global staffing. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the learning, organisational and personal issues impacting upon the expatriation and repatriation of employees.

A qualitative methodology was employed in achieving the study's research objectives. Eight semi-structured, personal interviews were carried out with expatriates from a myriad of organisations. The use of semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to ascertain in-depth, detailed information, relating to the international experience gained by the expatriates.

Analysis of the primary research findings revealed that the provision of pre-departure training is extremely important for an expatriate and their family, as they are exposed to a whole new learning environment while abroad. Furthermore, it was found that communication remains a neglected aspect throughout an international assignment. Moreover, it was uncovered that the repatriation process is still severely neglected, with employees noting a lack of recognition from the organisation on their return.

This study extracted a number of conclusions, amongst them the claim that the input of previous expatriates should be utilised to design an effective pre-departure training programme for employees sent to a similar location. Additionally, it is claimed that the organisation should provide an expatriate with a mentor while abroad, in order to reduce the impact of culture shock and keep the communication channels between the employee and the domestic organisation open throughout the assignment. Furthermore, it is fundamental for organisations to make the repatriation of an employee a key element of the overall process.

## *Acknowledgements*

## *Ethical Declaration*

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## *List of Acronyms*

CCT	Cross Cultural Training
Expat A	Expatriate A
Expat B	Expatriate B
Expat C	Expatriate C
Expat D	Expatriate D
Expat E	Expatriate E
Expat F	Expatriate F
Expat G	Expatriate G
Expat H	Expatriate H
HR	Human Resources

# **Chapter One**

## **Introduction**

### **1.1 Overview of the Study**

The contemporary business environment requires organisations to compete on a global scale. As competition intensifies, it is imperative organisations encourage their staff to work abroad and become globally oriented in order to understand the international business environment, and develop the skills required to work effectively across cultures (Collings et al., 2007). Therefore, the current study is primarily concerned with the learning, organisational and personal issues impacting upon the expatriation and repatriation of employees.

### **1.2 Rationale behind the Study**

The effective management of human resources (HR) internationally is increasingly recognised as a major determinant of success or failure within the arena of international business, yet organisations continue to underestimate the complexities involved in global staffing (Dowling and Welch, 2004; Scullion and Starkey, 2000). Due to increased globalisation, and the fundamental need for businesses to compete successfully in a global marketplace, organisations are sending a growing amount of employees abroad, who are capable and willing to develop professionally (Beutell, 2009).

Repatriation, which is the last step of the expatriation cycle, is an area with inherent problems which have been addressed to a certain extent in the literature, however, numerous problems continue to persist and inhibit a successful repatriation process (Beutell, 2009; Suutari and Brewster, 2003). The high failure rate of international assignments remain constant, with repatriated employees leaving for numerous reasons, the most prevalent of which is the absence of career advancement, following their return from an international assignment. Organisations are failing to recognise as Hurn (1999) observes that the repatriation process is often documented by employees as the toughest assignment of all.

The literature often views the expatriation and repatriation of employees as two different processes, instead of expatriation being the start of the process and repatriation the end of the process. This study hopes to investigate the international process as a whole, showing how learning, organisational and personal issues are all integrated and have an impact on the successful expatriation and repatriation of employees. This study will look at the international process from the perspective of an expatriate, as a large amount of the current literature is based on an organisation's viewpoint. The aim of this research is to represent a critical interpretation of the overall process.

### **1.3 Research Question and Objectives**

The central tenet of this research attempts to examine the different issues impacting upon the success of an international assignment, and therefore the research question which encapsulates the overall aim of the research is as follows:

*What are the learning, organisational and personal issues impacting upon the expatriation and repatriation of employees?*

The following research objectives have emanated from the review on the literature and also from the overarching research question:

***Objective One:*** To explore the importance of pre-departure training for the expatriate, their spouse and family;

***Objective Two:*** To examine the communication process in existence between employees and the organisation prior to going on an international assignment, throughout the assignment and during post assignment re-integration;

***Objective Three:*** To investigate how organisations can capitalise on the experience gained by their repatriated staff members'.

#### **1.4 Research Methodology employed in the Study**

For the purpose of this study, the researcher decided to employ a qualitative approach to achieve the objectives outlined. The primary data was collected through the use of semi structured, personal interviews, conducted with eight expatriates from an array of organisations. The use of semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to ascertain in-depth, detailed information relating to the international experience gained by the expatriate. A full assessment of the research methodology employed in this study is provided in chapter four.

#### **1.5 Benefit of the Study**

The issue of expatriate management is an important and topical issue, and it is hoped that this research can provide benefits on a practical and an academic level. From a practical standpoint, it is anticipated that this research will present an up to date assessment of expatriate management in the global economy. An exploration of the characteristics of successful international assignments should help an organisation to understand the ingredients necessary for success. This has an implication for expatriates themselves, and their employing organisation to ensure they protect their return on investment. From an academic view, the aim of this dissertation is to modernise the literature surrounding international human resource management, and act as a tool to aid future research in the area.



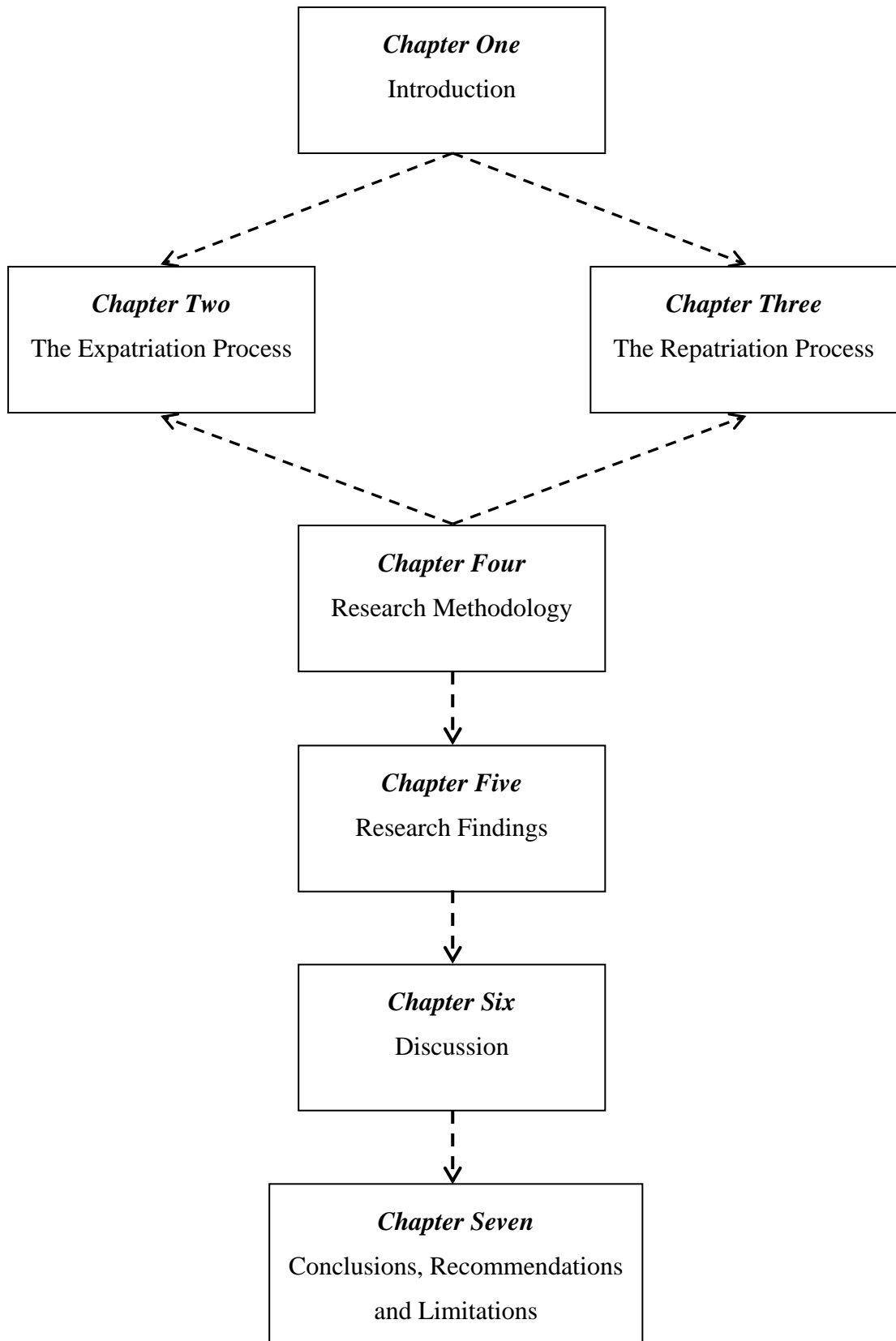
## **1.6 Structure of the Dissertation**

This dissertation is divided into seven chapters as illustrated in figure 1.1. This chapter provides an overview of the study, and an outline of the research question and objectives. Chapters two and three are composed of the existing literature pertaining to the subject area. The context for the study is developed in chapter two, by defining and distilling the expatriation process. Chapter three examines the literature concerning the repatriation process. Following on, chapter four describes the research methodology employed in the study. The findings of the primary research emanating from the eight semi-structured interviews conducted are outlined in chapter five. Chapter six, the penultimate chapter of the dissertation, provides a critical interpretation and discussion of the research findings, with explicit reference to the existing literature. Finally, chapter seven presents the conclusions that have been drawn from the research, and a number of recommendations for practice and future research are proposed.

## **1.7 Chapter Summary**

The rationale for undertaking the current study was highlighted in this chapter, as organisations need to understand that the different elements of the international process all work together to ensure success, guaranteeing a strong competitive advantage going forward. In addition, this chapter provided an overview of the research topic, the research question and objectives. The anticipated benefits of the current study are outlined, and a full structure of the dissertation provided. Chapter two will address the relevant areas of literature pertaining to the expatriation process.

**Figure 1.1 Overview of Dissertation Structure**



## **Chapter Two**

### **The Expatriation Process**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

The rationale behind this chapter is to explore the literature supporting the process of expatriation. It will investigate the emerging importance of international assignments in the global economy, which have a significant impact on the overall competitiveness of an organisation. Furthermore, the importance of pre-departure training in the expatriation process will be highlighted. Followed by an exploration of the phenomenon of culture shock, and why the inclusion of the expatriate's spouse and family are of critical importance in the success of international assignments.

#### **2.1 The Process of Expatriation**

International business is playing an increasingly significant role in the success of organisations attempting to attain global reach (Lee, 2005). With international expansion occurring at an intense pace, organisations are attempting to pursue strategies in order to remain competitive within the changing dynamics of the world economy (Sims and Schraeder, 2004). As organisations continue to globalise their operations, the need for more global, strategic perspectives is escalating (Lee, 2007). Therefore, the need for cross-culturally capable and internationally experienced managers continues to grow (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1989; Shumsky, 1999).

It has been suggested by Scullion and Starkey (2000) that the effective management of HR internationally is increasingly recognised as a major determinant of success or failure within the arena of international business. The process of expatriation is the practice of sending home country employees to locations across the globe (Downes et al., 2007). Furthermore, an expatriate is commonly referred to as a person who is temporarily living and working in a foreign location (Andreason, 2003; Dowling et al., 2008). Although expatriation is an expensive strategy for organisations to pursue, it remains one of the most viable methods of increasing an organisations understanding of its international operations (Lee, 2005).

Currently, organisations are sending employees on international assignments for them to contribute both to the overall business strategy of the organisation, and to develop a more enhanced global perspective of the organisation's business (Derr and Oddou, 1991). Additionally, international assignments are increasingly utilised for the opening up of new markets, information sharing, knowledge transfers and the setting up of new technologies (Halcrow, 1999; Lee, 2007).

### **2.1.1 Motives for Accepting an International Assignment**

According to Dowling et al., (2008), expatriates consistently list two motivators for accepting an international assignment, the first is career advancement, if an employee believes that their performance abroad would be rewarded on repatriation, they would be motivated to accept the international assignment (Stroh et al., 2005). The second reason is financial gain, due to the lucrative packages which are offered to employees in order to accept the position abroad.

### **2.2 An Effective Approach to Expatriation**

It has been suggested by Black and Gregersen (1991) that three main points need to be taken into consideration for the effective management of expatriates. Firstly, organisations need to concentrate on knowledge creation and global leadership when opting to utilise international assignments. Secondly, organisations need to choose candidates whose cross cultural abilities correspond, or ultimately exceed their technical abilities when assigning overseas positions to employees. Finally, organisations need to end international assignments with a purposeful repatriation programme. It has been claimed by Black and Gregersen (1991) that returning home is a time of upheaval for returning employees. Consequently, it is necessary to provide employees with career assistance and opportunities to put their international experience to work, for the greater good of the organisation (Harris et al., 2003).

### **2.2.1 Preparation in Advance of an International Assignment**

The selection process is a critical element in ensuring that an organisation sends the right employee on an international assignment (Simms, 2006). According to Black and Gregersen (1991), employees that participate in international assignments should be willing to communicate freely with local people and be prepared to establish social ties with local residents rather than rely solely on other expatriates. Additionally, they ought to be flexible to the other culture, understanding that different cultural norms have value and meaning to those who practice them and they also need to have a collaborative negotiation style as opposed to one that is confrontational (Black & Gregersen, 1991).

However, this selection criteria is quite often neglected, and many expatriates experience a wide range of cultural, social and environmental problems while abroad (Simms, 2006). It has been argued by Vance and Paik (2002) that these problems lie with an expatriate's difficulty in adjusting to their new culture. For that reason, Harris et al., (2003) emphasise that one of the key ways in which organisations can support employees is through the provision of pre-departure preparation, taking the form of a mixture of training, visits and briefings on the country.

### **2.2.2 Pre- Departure Preparation: The Importance of Cross Cultural Training**

Cross cultural training (CCT) is asserted by many scholars as a means of facilitating more effective interaction (Black and Mendenhall, 1990). CCT can be defined as the educative processes used to improve intercultural learning via the development of the cognitive, affective and behavioural competencies needed for successful interactions in diverse cultures (Morris and Robie, 2001). A comprehensive framework for CCT has been developed by Mendenhall et al., (1987), which comprises of three different levels:

***Level One:*** Information Giving Approaches: Employees are provided with area and cultural briefings on issues such as climate, housing and schooling for children. They may also be provided with books and videos on the host country;

***Level Two:*** Affective Approaches: Employees are given cultural training and participate in role plays. Moderate language training tends to be included in this approach, along with cultural assimilator training;

***Level Three:*** Immersion Approach: Employees may be given field experience, where they would undergo some of the emotional stress of living and working with people from a different culture (Forster, 2000). Employees may also have to participate in sensitivity training and cultural simulations.

A further assessment of the three levels is provided in appendix B. In addition to this, expatriate families should visit the country prior to going there on assignment. Although it is an expensive strategy for organisations to pursue, it may be worth it if an assignment is successful (O' Keeffe, 2003).

#### **2.2.2.1 The Importance of Language Training**

According to Harris et al., (2003), language proficiency may facilitate the employee in overcoming culture shock more effectively. The ability to speak the language of the host country may also improve the employee's effectiveness and negotiating ability. It has been emphasised by Gudykunst et al., (1996), even if an employee is unable to become fluent in the language, the ability to exchange common courtesies in the host language will demonstrate interest in the host nationals and the culture.

#### **2.2.3 Cross Cultural Training: An Alternative Perspective**

It has been suggested by Vance and Paik (2002), in order to increase the validity of pre-departure training for employees, the input of previous expatriates could be utilised via designing a pre-departure training programme for new employees assigned to a similar foreign location. The experience of the previous expatriate may provide the employee with more specific information than traditional forms of training, and it may also better prepare the employees for the unique work demands of their assignment. However, this approach may not be viable as the potentially valuable knowledge of experienced expatriates and the experience gained from the international assignment are quite often not effectively shared within the organisation, or quite frequently they are lost altogether (Vance and Paik, 2002).

#### **2.2.4 Family Inclusion in the International Assignment**

It has been highlighted by Halcrow (1999) that the relatively low priority of family issues in the decision-making process is somewhat surprising, as expatriates that are accompanied by their spouse and children are slower to become productive and therefore, tend to leave their organisations in greater numbers after repatriating. In addition, the morale of an expatriate can be affected by a spouse or family member not coping in the host country (Anderson, 2005). According to Simms (2006), the inability of families to adapt to their new environment is also one of the principal causes for the premature return of expatriates.

Furthermore, Simms (2006) asserts that issues regarding dual career couples are becoming more problematic due to the perceived interruption to careers. Additionally, disruption to children's education is also seen as a major barrier to international mobility (Mayrhofer and Scullion, 2002). It is necessary that organisations provide adequate training and social support for families during the process (Harvey, 1997), especially as families are less willing to accept the disruption of their personal and social lives associated with international assignments (Forster, 2000). It is also important that interviews take place with the spouse and older children before a decision on the assignment is made, these interviews may also be beneficial in assessing the adaptability of the family members (Anderson, 2005).

### **2.3 The Significance of National Culture**

According to Morris and Robie (2001), poor pre-departure training for expatriates and the inability for them to adjust to new cultures are seen as vital HR issues. In order to adapt and live in another country, it is necessary to understand and respect differences among cultures such as the use of personal space, gestures, appropriate etiquette and conduct in dealing with both men and women (Forster, 2000). One of the key thinkers in the field of national culture, Geert Hofstede, demonstrates that there are national and regional cultural groupings that affect the behaviour of societies and organisations, and that these are persistent over time, skills in cooperation are vital for common survival. It has been stated by Hofstede (1984), that the core of a culture are issues actually hidden in its unconscious values. Furthermore, Gerhart and Fang (2005) consider that differences in national culture matter a great deal, and an expatriate ignores them at their own risk.



## 2.4 The Phenomenon of Culture Shock

It has been argued by Sims and Schraeder (2004) that every expatriate passes through stages of adjustment as they attempt to become familiar with the nuances of their new culture. Culture shock is described as:

An emotional and psychological reaction to the confusion, ambiguity, value conflicts and hidden clashes that occur as a result of fundamentally different ways of perceiving the world and interacting socially between cultures.

Solomon (1994: 58)

Culture shock can be instant and be both overwhelming and exhausting, or it may have a creeping effect, evolving slowly as the expatriate begins to experience more of the culture within the host country (Solomon, 1994). It has been highlighted by Marx (2001) that the symptoms of culture shock may include feelings of isolation, anxiety and helplessness, with an expatriate also experiencing a reduction in job performance. Culture shock was first recognised by the anthropologist Oberg who developed a generic model based on an expatriate's adaptation (Marx, 2001). This model highlights what an expatriate is expected to feel when things go according to plan, and is inclusive of four main phases:

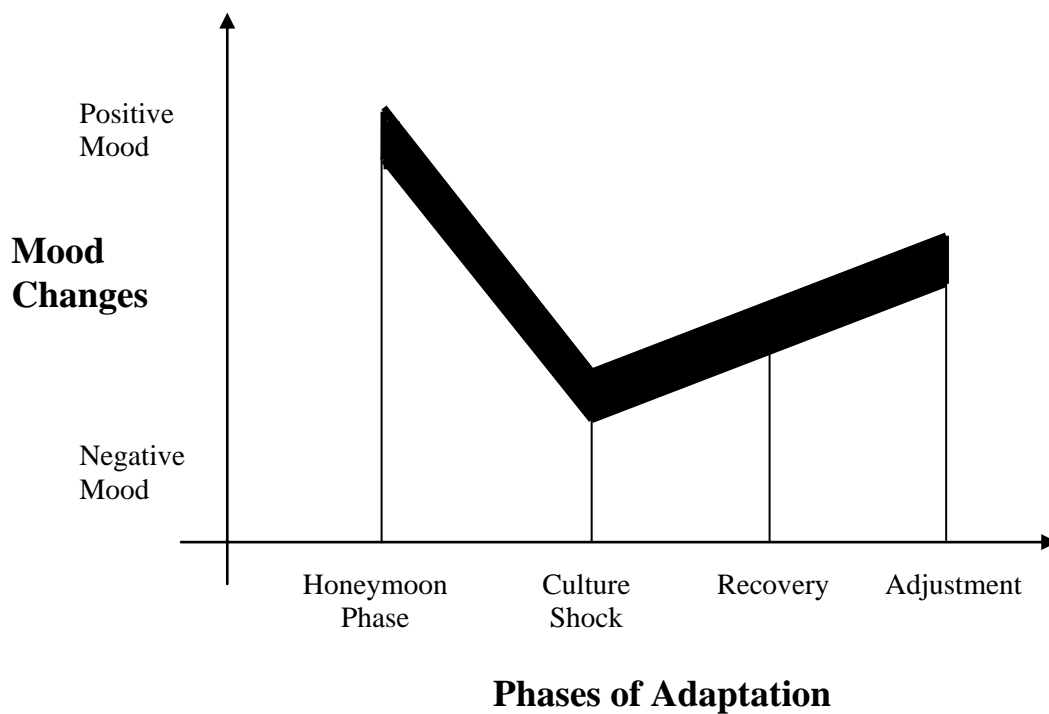
**Phase One:** The honeymoon phase, all encounters for the expatriate are viewed as exciting and positive. The expatriate tends to be more open to the new environment and accepting of any differences;

**Phase Two:** Culture Shock, it tends to set in with the expatriate beginning to have feelings of foreignness and have negative feelings towards the host country;

**Phase Three:** The recovery stage, expatriates are more accepting of their problem and work out how to fix it. They know they must compromise between feeling and thinking the honeymoon stage and the culture shock phase;

**Phase Four:** Adjustment, the expatriates begin to work effectively in their new surroundings. They also become aware of their new skills. Figure 2.1 illustrates the different phases of adaptation and the mood changes associated with these phases.

**Figure 2.1 The Culture Shock Triangle**



*Source: Marx (2001: 9)*

However, it must be acknowledged that not everything goes to plan and many expatriates fail to reach the adjustment stage. It has been claimed by Dickmann and Mills (2010), that culture shock is the primary cause of expatriate failure, as job performance can be dramatically reduced or the assignment may be abandoned altogether. The location of the international assignment also has an impact on the level of culture shock an employee is likely to experience. If an employee is moving from a developed country to a developing country it is considered to be more traumatic than an employee moving between developed countries. (Dickmann and Mills, 2010).

## **2.5 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has provided a brief overview of the expatriation process. It has highlighted the emergence of international assignments, and how organisations are increasing their use in order to facilitate future competitiveness. The chapter also provides an insight into the concept of culture shock, and how effective pre-departure training may aid in reducing it. It has also shown how important the family is in the expatriation process, and how they need to be consulted at every stage of the decision making process. Following on from this, the next chapter will attempt to provide the reader with a deeper insight into the repatriation process.

## **Chapter Three**

### **The Repatriation Process**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

In chapter two, the process of expatriation and the phenomenon of culture shock were examined in detail. This chapter endeavours to develop both of these concepts through the exploration of the repatriation process. The importance of having a strong communication process throughout the international assignment will be highlighted. Additionally, this chapter will provide insights into the reasons why international assignments fail, and consequently, the implication of failure for organisations.

#### **3.1 The Process of Repatriation**

The allure of a foreign location is often key to securing the agreement of an employee to accept an international assignment, however, the return home is not always rosy (Cryne, 2009). Repatriation, is the reintegration of an employee into the home organisation on completion of an international assignment (Allen and Alvarez, 1998), and is quite often a forgotten element of the overall process (Larson, 2006). Repatriation is quite complex, generating similar issues to those encountered when managing expatriation, yet many organisations continue to adopt an ad-hoc approach towards it (Stroh et al., 2005; Swaak, 1997). The process is often identified as the toughest assignment of all and falling short of employee expectations (Hurn, 1999).

The defining objective of the repatriation process should be to bring back an employee who will be a valuable addition to the organisation in its domestic setting (Harvey and Novicevic, 2001). It is necessary for organisations to use the returning employee's knowledge and skills effectively in new assignments. However, if an organisation does not have a defined role in which an employee can return, they may end up losing the benefits associated with an expensive HR investment (Bolino and Feldman, 2000). Increasingly, repatriation is seen as the final link in an integrated, circular process, that connects the initial recruitment, selection and cross-cultural entry of expatriates with adequate in country support, and finally successful reintegration into the country and organisation (Andreason and Kinneer, 2005).

### **3.2 Bringing Repatriates Home**

The repatriation problem is complex and can be influenced by numerous reasons including the number of years the expatriate has spent abroad, the overall objective of the assignment and the foreign location (Linehan and Scullion, 2005). According to Clague and Krupp (1978), repatriates face three problematic areas on their return. Firstly, readjusting to the organisation itself, as a repatriate believes the level of responsibility given to them is not comparable to that which they enjoyed overseas. Secondly, the repatriate's readjustment to the broader environment, as their family may have become accustomed to the foreign environment and customs. Finally, the psychological reactions to the repatriation process, as the repatriate and their families may have become used to a certain standard of living while abroad, due to housing allowances and generous bonuses (Clague and Krupp, 1978). Additionally, people at the home organisation find it difficult to imagine repatriated employees need help readjusting after a few years away. They do not understand why people, who have been given an extended period abroad to explore a new culture, should get a hero's welcome (Black and Gregersen, 1999)

#### **3.2.1 Minimising the Impact of Reverse Culture Shock**

The literature has established that culture shock upon returning to the home country is more stressful than entry to the initial assignment country (Czinkota et al., 1989). Furthermore, Kendall (1981) highlights a number of problematic areas common to most repatriation cases, including leaving the expatriate social and cultural lifestyle, trouble with cash flow or disposable income, difficulty with home country housing, educational continuity issues and problems in relation to job shock. The final problem is the most prevalent reason, while the employee was working abroad, they would have had a degree of responsibility much greater than they had prior to leaving. The employee should have increased their knowledge pool while abroad and the home organisation may not have moved as far in the same period of time (Czinkota et al., 1989).

It is speculated by Adler (2002), that while employees are abroad they quite often idealise their home country, remembering only the good aspects of home, in essence, they attempt to create something to dream about. Therefore, on their return home inaccurate expectations have arisen and there is a considerable gap between idealised memories and reality (Andreason and Kinneer, 2005). The expatriate and family may also end up experiencing reverse culture shock as a result of creating false comparisons, by glamorising the life they left behind in the foreign country (Dowling and Welch, 2004).

### **3.2.2 The Importance of a Repatriation Programme**

According to Andors (2010), there is a huge amount of literature in relation to what the repatriation process should look like, yet only about half of organisations with expatriate employees have any type of formal repatriation programme. It is fundamental that a concrete repatriation programme is established prior to the employee leaving on assignment, which incorporates a natural career development plan (Andors, 2010; Shumsky, 1999).

It has been documented by Linehan and Scullion (2002) that training is of critical importance for the repatriation process. This training should help the expatriate, their spouse and family re-adapt to the domestic environment, and the new reality which they need to readjust into. For this reason, Hurn (1999) has recommended the need for reverse culture shock training to be contained within a repatriation programme. Additionally, the programme should include elements on stress management techniques, the possibility of a mentoring programme, and also spouse and family assistance at all times. It has been stated by Allen et al., (2003), if an employee receives good support upon repatriating, they may be less inclined to leave and will possibly feel much greater affinity towards the organisation.

### **3.3 The Communication Process**

Most repatriation problems can be solved through more effective planning and better communication channels while the employee is abroad and on their return home (Harvey and Novicevic, 2001). If a poor communication process is in place, an employee may lose their sense of belonging to the organisation (Cryne, 2009).

#### **3.3.1 Communication Prior to Commencing the International Assignment**

During the initial stages of the expatriation process, it is important that organisations provide employees with the rationale for undertaking the assignment abroad (Black and Gregersen, 1999). Additionally, the objectives of the foreign assignment should be communicated clearly by the organisation before the employee accepts the position (Harvey and Novicevic, 2001). Furthermore, it is necessary that organisations realise how much employees rely on them while abroad, and a personal touch while on assignment has a huge impact on the success of the assignment (Tyler, 2006).

#### **3.3.2 Communication during the International Assignment**

If an international assignment is to be successful, Kendall (1981) emphasises how important it is for an organisation to keep ongoing contact with the expatriate and their family. This should succeed in reminding them of the differences between life in the host country and life back in their home country. However, this appears not to be the case, as Black and Gregersen (1999) highlight the only time organisations pay particular attention to their expatriates is when something goes wrong, and by then it is too late and the assignment may result in failure.

While abroad, many expatriates suffer from a lack of recognition from their domestic organisation, resulting in the 'out of sight, out of mind' syndrome (Harvey and Novicevic, 2001). They are removed from formal and informal communication channels that keep them in touch and give them visibility with home country colleagues and potential future supervisors (Feldman and Thomas, 1992). Upon return, many expatriates find that because of the 'out of sight, out of mind' syndrome, their careers have actually been in a holding pattern while their peers are promoted ahead of them (Feldman, 1991; Harvey, 1989).

If there is a lack of communication, an expatriate may experience both personal and professional isolation from the domestic organisation which in turn makes it difficult for them to adjust to their new environment (Harvey and Novicevic, 2001). Organisations should maintain strong, regular communication with the expatriate while they are on assignment. They should seek to develop in-country communications by creating newsletters containing both general organisation news and information targeted directly to the needs and interests of the expatriate (Tyler, 2006). Additionally, a connection to the organisation computer networks, internet and e-mail should be established (Hauser, 1998).

#### **3.3.2.1 The Provision of a Mentor**

In order to reduce feelings of isolation and the impact of culture shock, organisations should assign a mentor for the expatriate (Simms, 2006). The provision of a mentor may be an effective remedy to reduce stress and reduce the 'out of sight, out of mind' syndrome (Dowling et al., 1999: Harvey and Wiese, 1998: Webb, 1996). Ideal mentors should possess good listening and communication skills, have an in depth knowledge of the organisation and the ability to read and understand others (Allen and Poteet, 1999). Ultimately, the role of a mentor should be to help an expatriate adjust to the foreign culture, provide a sympathetic ear while on assignment, reduce uncertainty and career related stress and help returning expatriates settle back into the home country (Feldman and Thomas, 1992: Harvey and Weise, 1998: Swaak, 1997).

#### **3.3.3 Communication during Post Assignment Re-Integration**

Communication surrounding the repatriation process is a major issue and probably the most neglected (Hauser, 1998). It has been argued by Tyler (2006), that organisations should require employees to make home visits while on assignment, and encourage them to use these visits as an opportunity to network. This will help employees to stay connected with their own culture (Tyler, 2006). According to Andreason and Kineer (2005), when employees return from an international assignment they are confronted with a lack of the various support networks which they were able to utilise overseas, such as pre-departure training and mentor systems. As neither the organisation, nor the employee are expecting adjustment problems upon return, comparable forms of support are conspicuously absent.



### **3.4 The Failure of an International Assignment**

According to Black and Gregersen (1999), international assignments can end badly for a number of reasons. Employees and their families usually return home to find that both their personal and professional lives have changed considerably (Keogh, 2003). While abroad, the employee is less likely to be considered for a domestic promotion and therefore, upon return employees find their peers have been promoted to superior positions (Harvey and Novicevic, 2001). Many employees view their position on return as a demotion, with a severe lack of opportunities to put their international experience to work (Black and Gregersen, 1999).

Difficulty in readjusting to the domestic organisation is a defining reason for why international assignments fail (Harvey and Novicevic, 2001). Instead of being the leader, the repatriate is forced to be just another member of the organisation (Harvey and Novicevic, 2001). Although employers give little thought to their return, repatriates believe that a successful assignment is an achievement that deserves recognition (Black and Gregersen, 1999). The repatriate believes a promotion is due as they have sacrificed their normal career progression as well as their family's comfort to take the assignment. Additionally, the repatriate may believe they have a lot to offer the organisation based on their experiences abroad, whereas the HR department may not know how that experience fits into the organisation's objectives (Tyler, 2006). Ultimately, many international assignments fail due to a lack of planning for the repatriation of the individual or for how the international experience fits into their overall career path (Harvey and Novicevic, 2001).

According to Klaff (2002), almost one third of repatriates end up leaving their job within two years of returning from an assignment abroad. This represents a significant issue for organisations due to the direct (e.g. salary, training costs, travel and relocation expenses) and indirect costs (damaged relations with host country organisations and loss of market share) associated with expatriate failure (Dowling and Welch, 2004).

The most prevalent reason for repatriates leaving an organisation is the absence of a concrete career path in place, with a natural progression from the international assignment (Klaff, 2002). Furthermore, Kendall (1981) highlights a trend showing that repatriates are coming back to lower level jobs. Organisations are not capitalising on the skills gained by their repatriates, and therefore they do not feel stimulated by their domestic environment upon returning home. Consequently, the repatriated employee is a major target for a recruiter due to their knowledge and skills of international markets, and will often accept a job with a competitor. This competitor will know how to put the global knowledge and skill base of the expatriates to use (Shumsky, 1999).

In order for these challenges to be overcome, it is necessary to have a strong repatriation programme in place. It has been identified by Shumsky (1999) that organisations are not maximising the benefit of an expatriate's competitive advantage on their return from an international assignment. Not only are these organisations losing on the skills gained from current international assignments, but they also risk losing the skills that expatriates will acquire on future assignments.

### **3.5 Implications of Failure for Organisations**

According to Harvey and Novicevic (2001), there are ultimately two reasons why organisations should be interested in whether or not international assignments fail. Firstly, if the returning expatriate is no longer motivated by a new domestic position they are more likely to leave the organisation. As a result, organisations are losing valuable employees that they have invested heavily in. Secondly, if other employees recognise the problems experienced by those who take up international positions they are more likely to be resistant in accepting overseas positions.

Many organisations are beginning to experience difficulty in attracting employees to accept foreign assignments (Harvey and Novicevic, 2001). One of the contributing factors in this reluctance to go abroad is the ambiguity surrounding the employee's career upon repatriation. It is estimated that the cost associated with an assignment is between three and five times an employee's home salary per annum (Selmer, 2001). It is therefore necessary for organisations to realise that expatriates are actually a considerable investment, and they should take the necessary steps to ensure they protect that investment (Kendall, 1981). After spending a considerable amount of money on an international assignment, many organisations make the mistake of undervaluing their returning employees. The results of which for the expatriate can be low morale and job dissatisfaction, leading many of the returning expatriates straight out the door and into the arms of a welcoming competitor. This has been cited as an expensive way to do business (Hauser, 1998).

Many problems can be avoided if organisations developed a repatriation plan before the employee takes the overseas position (Harvey and Novicevic, 2001). The lack of a concrete repatriation programme can restrict the effective deployment of scarce resources to critical projects. It can discourage others from taking on an assignment after seeing how the company supports workers returning from overseas and it can lead to a loss of critical knowledge in the organisation (Cryne, 2009; Salzman, 1986).

### **3.6 An Effective Approach to Repatriation**

Successful repatriation is likely to create positive externalities in the home organisation (Harvey and Novicevic, 2006). Successful organisations will already have effectively set goals and project costs, they will also have a plan in place for the return trip of the expatriate (Keogh, 2003). Many organisations have a plan in place before the assignment even begins, recognising that repatriation is part of the overall developmental process, however, many organisations do not begin formal repatriation discussions until two to six months before the end of an assignment, and amazingly many others do not conduct repatriation discussions at all (Keogh, 2003).

Research has shown that integrating international assignments into a career plan is beneficial to both the employee and the organisation. It not only reduces employees' increasing concerns about their future after the assignment, but it also enables organisations to manage more effectively the strategic importance of international assignments in the development of global managers (Stahl et al., 2002). According to Cryne (2009), it is fundamental that organisations integrate the international assignment and the subsequent repatriation process into the overall career path of the expatriate. Additionally, it is essential organisations recognise that expatriates, while on an international assignment, will have significant prestige in their role while abroad. Therefore, when they return to the domestic organisation they may find this prestige has vanished and they are in positions of lower authority. From an organisation's viewpoint, Cryne (2009) highlights that there is little point in investing a considerable amount of time, energy and financial resources only to perceive unhappy and unproductive employees on their return to the home organisation.

A fundamental stumbling block to the effective management and development of international assignees is the frequent lack of recognition of the value of their foreign experience and expatriation (Briscoe et al., 2008). In order for an assignment to be successful, organisations need to find ways of applying the returning employee's international knowledge to their domestic operations, as there are an abundance of new skills that an employee will have acquired that can generate huge benefits for an organisation (Cryne, 2009). According to Downes et al., (2007), expatriates learn a great deal about business practices specific to regions where they have been assigned, the accepted business attire, and the appropriate ways to communicate and socialise with co-workers and local people in general. It may also be advantageous for an expatriate either while on assignment or upon repatriation, to share information with the domestic organisation regarding issues such as local infrastructure, housing conditions within the country, and transportation systems (Downes et al., 2007).

Upon repatriation, it is necessary for the organisation not to forget the needs of the family. The transition back to the home country can be quite a traumatic experience for the expatriate, their spouse and children. They have to return to a life free from chauffeurs, domestic help and private schooling. It is a time of great stress for everyone concerned, as the support networks in place prior to departure have changed or disappeared (Cryne, 2009). According to Keogh (2003), it is necessary that organisations look at what they offer employees post repatriation. For the expatriate, repatriation counselling and a career plan are of particularly importance.

### **3.7 Chapter Summary**

This review of the literature has argued the need for having a concrete repatriation programme in place before an employee departs for an international assignment. This chapter has provided reasons why assignments fail, and the subsequent implications of failure for organisations. Overall, it has been established that with enough insight and preparation, employees abroad can have a productive experience, along with a relatively smooth transition back home. The international organisation, in turn, can reap the benefits of acquiring more global experience and developing a cadre of effective international managers (Andreason and Kinneer, 2005; Cryne, 2009).

## **Chapter Four**

### **Research Methodology**

#### **4.0 Introduction**

The previous chapters reviewed the literature informing the current research. Consequently, this chapter will endeavour to provide a comprehensive assessment of the research methodology utilised. Initially, a brief overview of the research process will be given, outlining the research question and objectives. The research design will then be discussed, and an in-depth analysis of qualitative and quantitative research provided. Additionally, the data collection methods utilised will be highlighted, and the chapter will conclude with a brief overview of the ethical considerations that ought to be kept in mind throughout the research process.

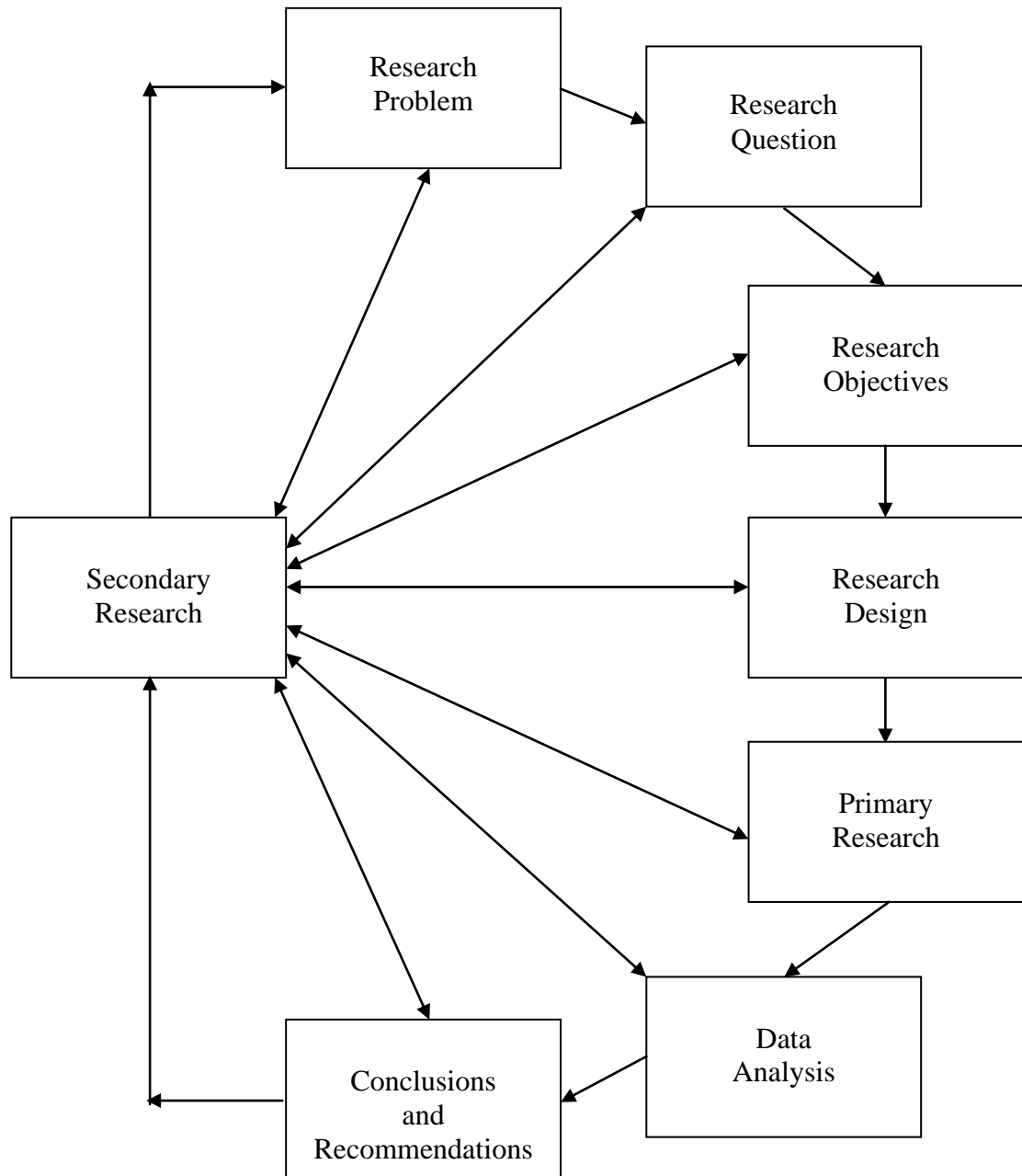
#### **4.1 The Research Process: An Overview**

The research process, as illustrated in figure 4.1, presents an overview of how the research progresses from one stage to the next. It identifies the stages of activity which must be worked through in carrying out and completing the research, and how all of the elements come together to address the central research question and objectives. It has been identified that the first stage in the research process is the identification and formulation of the 'problem' (Cohen and Manion, 1994).

#### **4.2 The Research Problem**

According to Sekeran (1992), the research problem or anomaly, is the starting point for all research studies, and suggests it is the point at which the researcher identifies a possible need for the research and problem solving. This study aims to examine the issues impacting upon the expatriation and repatriation of employees. With organisations continuing to take an ad-hoc approach towards international assignments, they are losing out on a key competitive advantage. Therefore, it is important to identify what organisations should be doing to ensure international assignment success.

**Figure 4.1 The Research Process**



*Adapted from Sekeran (2000: 121)*

#### **4.2.1 Research Question**

The research question is described by Cooper and Emory (1995) as a single question that most accurately states the purpose of the research. It has been acknowledged that *"research questions are crucial"* (Bryman, 2004: 31), they serve to guide the entire research exercise, from searching the literature through to data analysis. A good research question is clear, easily understood and specific in nature (Punch, 2005). Therefore, the primary research question of this study is:

*What are the learning, organisational and personal issues impacting upon the expatriation and repatriation of employees?*

#### **4.2.2 Research Objectives**

Research objectives are classified as *"clear, specific statements that identify what the researcher wishes to accomplish as a result of doing the research"* (Saunders et al., 2003: 610). In light of this, three key research objectives have emanated from the research question;

***Objective One:*** To explore the importance of pre-departure training for the expatriate, their spouse and family;

***Objective Two:*** To examine the communication process in existence between employees and the organisation prior to going on an international assignment, throughout the assignment and during post assignment re-integration;

***Objective Three:*** To investigate how organisations can capitalise on the experience gained by their repatriated staff members'.



### **4.3 Theoretical and Philosophical Framework**

An understanding of the philosophical issues is important in the research process for numerous reasons. Firstly, it helps to clarify research designs, what kind of evidence is gathered from where and how this evidence is interpreted in order to provide adequate answers to the central research question. Secondly, an understanding of the philosophy can support the researcher in recognising a design that will best facilitate the research. Finally, the knowledge of philosophical concepts can assist the researcher in selecting or modifying a design due to their greater understanding and knowledge (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991). Depending on the approach to research undertaken, there are four basic assumptions that will frame the debate: the Ontological Argument, the Epistemology Debate, the Human Nature Perspective and finally, the Importance of Methodology which are discussed further in appendix D.

### **4.4 Research Design**

According to Jackson and Trochim (2002), research design provides the glue that holds the research together. Therefore, it is important for the researcher to reflect on the most appropriate design which will serve to answer the underlying research question and assist in achieving the objectives. For the purpose of this study, an exploratory approach is adopted, as it allows the researcher to be flexible with the research methods utilised.

Prior to adopting any one research design, consideration must be given to the nature of the actual research itself and the extent to which this encompasses as exploratory, causal or descriptive (Domegan and Fleming, 2003). With exploratory research, there is little known of the central issues, the research will, to some extent uncover and reveal patterns that were previously unknown and lacked understanding (Zikmund, 2000; Kumar, 2005). The causal approach seeks to identify 'cause and effect'. It is characterised by the generation of quantitative data and derived from large samples (Domegan and Fleming, 2003). The descriptive approach tends to be of particular relevance when addressing issues for who, how, when, where and what. The principle features of each approach are further illustrated in table 4.1.

**Table 4.1 Key Features of the Different Approaches to Research**

	<b>Exploratory Research</b>	<b>Descriptive Research</b>	<b>Causal Research</b>
<b>Data Type</b>	Qualitative	Qualitative or Quantitative	Quantitative
<b>Aims</b>	To Explore, Chart, Identify	To Describe, Quantify	To Establish Cause and Effect
<b>Nature of Variables</b>	Unknown, Undocumented	Known Associations and Documented	Known exactly, Clearly supported
<b>Degree of Formality</b>	Relatively little	Some to Extensive	High Mathematical Content
<b>Data</b>	Literature Review, Expert Surveys, Focus Groups, In-depth interviews	Literature Review Surveys Observation Panels	Literature Review Expert Survey Experiments Surveys Observations
<b>Sample Size</b>	Small	Small or Large	Large
<b>Question Types</b>	Probing, Response Driven	Some probing, Interviewer Driven	No Probing
<b>Hypothesis</b>	Generates, Develops	Tests and/or generates Develops	Tests

*Adapted from Domegan and Fleming (2003: 66)*

#### **4.5 Qualitative Research versus Quantitative Research**

It is important, while attempting to find the correct method to answer the research question and meet research objectives that both qualitative and quantitative methods are taken into consideration. Qualitative research tends to focus on the depth of the sample whereas quantitative research focuses more on data collection from very broad samples (Albert and Healy, 2000). It is necessary before deciding on which approach to adopt, that the researcher asks themselves how deeply they wish to explore the situation in order to understand it and explain it.

##### **4.5.1 Qualitative Research**

Over the past number of years, qualitative analysis has become increasingly popular with researchers, it is *"an unstructured, primarily exploratory methodology based on small samples, intended to provide insight and understanding"* (Malhotra and Birks, 2000: 156). Furthermore, Drummond (1989) highlights that qualitative research is concerned with developing explanations, rather than the prediction of the subject under investigation.

##### **4.5.2 Advantages of Qualitative Research**

The principal strength of qualitative research lies in its capacity to provide depth, while at the same time equip the researcher with contextual information that is applicable to real life (Sarantakos, 2005). Qualitative research is deemed to be most effective for the discovery and creation of new ideas, with the methods utilised inclined to be flexible, and as a result, data collection methods can vary considerably (Amaratunga et al., 2002).

##### **4.5.3 Disadvantages of Qualitative Research**

As qualitative methods are quite difficult to measure, inconsistencies may appear within the data (Denscombe, 2000). Furthermore, qualitative research can lead to misinterpretation, due to the possibility of bias associated with both the researcher and the respondent (Miles and Huberman, 1984). Additionally, qualitative methods tend to be quite labour intensive, and expensive for the researcher.

#### **4.5.4 Quantitative Research**

Quantitative research has been identified as a research methodology that attempts to quantify data, and apply some form of statistical analysis. It normally incorporates large samples, and is quite often utilised to measure how many people feel, think or act in a particular way (Maholtra and Birks, 2000).

#### **4.5.5 Advantages of Quantitative Research**

Quantitative research tends to bring strict and controlled enquiry to the overall research process (Chisnall, 2001). The main advantage of quantitative research is it provides researchers with information which is accurate and up to date. It usually comes from a large sample, and can be analysed easily (Sarantakos, 2005).

#### **4.5.6 Disadvantages of Quantitative Research**

The adoption of a quantitative approach may ultimately result in driving researchers away from actually understanding human perceptions and happenings (Palys, 1997). Quantitative studies are often deemed to be beneficial or appealing however, this is not always the reality, as they are often quite deceptive and uncertain (Palys, 1997).

#### **4.5.7 Rationale for Choosing Qualitative Research**

The researcher decided that due to the nature of the research, a qualitative approach would be most suitable to adopt. This approach would provide the researcher with flexibility, and the ability to gain new knowledge. The qualitative approach ensures that any issues could be discussed at hand, and may uncover wider issues which have not yet been recognised. It is also necessary for the researcher to get inside people's heads and understand how they comprehend their surroundings (Palys, 1997).

## **4.6 Primary and Secondary Research**

It is important to recognise that data sources can be primary or secondary in nature, with the following sections addressing the specifics of primary and secondary data collection.

### **4.6.1 Primary Research and Data Collection**

Primary data can be defined as *"data that is collected from the problem situation firsthand, in order to analyse them and find solutions to the problem being researched"* (Sekeran, 1992: 371). For the purpose of this dissertation, the researcher will primarily depend on qualitative analysis, conducting this research through the use of semi-structured, personal interviews.

### **4.6.2 Interview Methodology**

According to Easterby-Smith et al., (2002), interviews provide the researcher with an opportunity to probe deeply and uncover new clues that may assist in gathering answers to a specific problem. They can also assist in securing vital, accurate, inclusive accounts based on personal experiences. Additionally, Cassell and Symon (1994) indicate that it is the most widely used qualitative method in research as researchers tend to feel more comfortable using the interview process. It is viewed as highly flexible and can be used in many different scenarios to secure a deeper understanding, and interviews also offer an opportunity to explore issues further (Denscombe, 2003: Lindlof and Taylor, 2002).

According to Robson (2002), interviews are often classified with regard to their degree of structure, with three structures that can be adopted; the fully structured approach, the semi-structured approach and the unstructured approach. A fully structured interview tends to have a set of pre-arranged questions with fixed wording. They are quite formal, with the tone kept constant throughout. Unstructured interviews tend to be quite informal, with the interviewer letting the conversation develop without a need for a pre-defined structure.

#### **4.6.3 Semi-Structured Interviews**

For the purpose of this dissertation, a semi-structured interview methodology is employed. Semi-structured interviews provide an opportunity for *"social encounters where speakers collaborate in producing retrospective (and perspective) accounts or versions of their part (or future) actions, experiences, feelings and thoughts"* (Rapley, 2004: 16). The researcher is provided with a certain degree of flexibility in the interviewing process, as it allows for an exploration of issues that arise over the course of the interview, while still using the interview guide to both structure and drive the dialogue (Bryman, 2004; Denscombe, 2003; Silverman, 2006).

#### **4.6.4 Personal Interviews**

The decision to conduct personal interviews was made for a variety of reasons. Firstly, personal interviews are suited to open-ended questioning, probing and clarifying (David and Sutton, 2004). Furthermore, Sekeran (1992) ascertains that the interviewer can adapt and change questions when necessary and it is easier to build up a relationship with the respondent. However, there are difficulties associated with this method as the interviews may be quite intrusive and require a huge amount of valuable time resources, and difficulty may arise in locating respondents for call backs.

#### **4.6.5 Telephone Interviews**

The researcher conducted interviews with interviewees A and B by telephone due to time constraints, and for their convenience. Although telephone interviews are widely accepted as a genuine source of primary data, there are a number of limitations associated with them. Telephone interviews take control away from the interviewer, as the respondent could terminate the interview without prior warning or explanation. Additionally, they leave the interviewer with an inability to read non verbal clues (Sekeran, 1992). Fortunately, the researcher did not experience any of these limitations when conducting the telephone interviews.

#### **4.6.6 Sample Selection Criteria**

For the purpose of this dissertation, the sampling frame consisted of eight expatriates from large organisations, who were not confined to a particular gender, religion, marital status or age group. It was hoped these expatriates would enable the researcher to gain satisfactory information to answer the research objectives. The researcher acknowledged that some of the participants had been on more than one international assignment, however, for the purpose of the current study, the researcher decided to discuss the participants' most recent international assignment, to obtain the latest data pertaining to expatriate management.

#### **4.6.7 Generating the Interview Questions**

As interviews were the only source of obtaining primary data, the researcher had to ensure that the questions would generate open responses. The advice of Kumar (2005) was useful in developing interview questions, as they advised that the questions would have the potential to operate well with the respondents where they are open-ended, non-leading and have clarity. During the interview, initial closed questions were followed by half-open questions to obtain the required data because this format *"allows respondents to express themselves at some length, but offers enough shape to prevent aimless rambling"* (Wragg, 1975: 10). All interviews followed a common order but additional questions were asked of some participants when further expansion was required. The interview questions utilised by the researcher are provided in appendix C.

#### **4.6.8 Interview Schedule and Operational Details**

The researcher made initial contact with expatriates by means of a letter outlining the purpose of the research and requesting their permission to participate in the study. The letter also guaranteed confidentiality to participants (appendix C). Subsequently, a series of semi-structured, personal interviews were carried out with eight participants. The details of the interview schedule are contained in table 4.4. As requested by the participants, all identifying information has been removed.

The *"first few minutes of an interview are decisive"* (Kvale, 1996: 128) as it sets the tone for the interview. To alleviate any fears and lay a foundation for trust, a briefing is recommended (Kvale, 1996). Keeping this in mind each interview began with an introduction that included the interviewer thanking the interviewee for their time. The research objectives were reiterated and a confirmation of confidentiality.

**Table 4.2 Interview Schedule**

Interviewee	Position	Date	Length
A	General Manager	17 <sup>th</sup> June 2010	35 minutes
B	General Manager	17 <sup>th</sup> June 2010	30 minutes
C	Operations Manager	22 <sup>nd</sup> June 2010	45 minutes
D	Recruitment Specialist	23 <sup>rd</sup> June 2010	50 minutes
E	Plant Manager	24 <sup>th</sup> June 2010	35 minutes
F	General Manager	24 <sup>th</sup> June 2010	40 minutes
G	General Manager	25 <sup>th</sup> June 2010	30 minutes
H	Operations Manager	28 <sup>th</sup> June 2010	45 minutes

#### **4.6.9 Recording the Interviews**

An interviewer should not rely on memory alone when conducting an interview, as the information recalled may be inaccurate or incorrect, therefore, recording the interview should eliminate this error (Sekeran, 1992). It has been stressed by Yin (1994), while there are many other methods of data collection, none are as accurate as using a dictaphone to record an interview. Consequently, a dictaphone was used in conjunction with note taking throughout the interviews to obtain accurate interpretations of the data. For the purpose of recording the interviews, the interviewer sought the permission of each of the participants. However, interviewees D, E and G wished to disregard the use of a dictaphone.



For the purpose of the telephone interviews, the researcher used a Skype recording application to allow the conversation to be recorded. However, a severe limitation of this was the duration of the recording, which was a maximum of thirty minutes. Additionally, the researcher asked all participants if they wished to view the transcripts of the interview, with Expatriate D preferring to see it. Furthermore, each of the participants requested to have a copy of the research once completed.

#### **4.6.10 Secondary Data and Data Collection**

Secondary data is essentially classified as any data developed for some purpose other than solving the specific problem in hand (Tull and Hawkins, 1984). While conducting this research, multiple sources of secondary data were utilised: relevant literature and reports were obtained through the library holdings and the online databases of Waterford Institute of Technology including Business Source Premier, ABI Inform and Emerald Fulltext. The online databases of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development were also utilised throughout the research process.

#### **4.7 Ethical Considerations**

Maintaining the highest of ethical standards should be central to conducting research (Saunders et al., 2003). Keeping this in mind, the interviewer fully briefed the participants of the research objectives prior to commencing the interview. Additionally, permission to record the interviews was sought from the participants. All information received by the researcher was continually maintained in the strictest of confidentiality, and the anonymity of the participants was also strictly upheld.

#### **4.8 Chapter Summary**

The aim of this chapter has been to provide a synopsis of the research methodology employed. It began by providing an overview of the research process, outlining the research question and objectives, which identified what the researcher wants to accomplish as a result of the research undertaken. Furthermore, the differences between the qualitative and quantitative approaches to research were highlighted. The chapter then progressed to examining the primary research method utilised in the study, the use of semi-structured personal interviews. The researcher justified the selection method, by providing the benefits and challenges of using such interviews. A visualisation of the methodological path selected for this study is provided in appendix D. The next chapter will attempt to keep to the specifics of the methodology employed.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Research Findings**

#### **5.0 Introduction**

The previous chapter highlighted the methodology employed in order to address the research question and objectives. The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings from the primary research undertaken. As stated in chapter four, the findings were arrived at by undertaking a qualitative approach through the use of personal, semi-structured interviews. In order to maintain the anonymity of individual expatriates, all identifying information has been removed.

#### **5.1 Profile of Expatriates**

It was outlined in the previous chapter, that eight semi-structured, personal interviews with expatriates had been conducted. Table 5.1 provides a demographic profile of each expatriate interviewed. For the purpose of the current study, the researcher decided to discuss the expatriates' most recent international assignment, in order to obtain the latest data pertaining to the processes of expatriation and repatriation.

**Table 5.1 Profile of Expatriates Involved in the Interview Process**

<b>Expatriate</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Length of Assignment</b>	<b>Country of Experience</b>
A	39	Male	Three Years	South Africa
B	33	Male	Two Years	Thailand
C	29	Female	Two Years	Israel
D	45	Male	One Year	Afghanistan
E	48	Male	Three Years	Israel
F	34	Female	Four Years	United Kingdom
G	23	Male	Six Months	Spain
H	30	Male	Three Years	Brazil

## **5.2 Motives for Accepting the International Assignment**

Although financial incentives are cited as being a contributory factor in convincing the expatriates to accept a position abroad, there are also a number of other motives which influenced their decision. According to expatriate A, a motivating factor in accepting the position was to give his two children the opportunity to "*gain international exposure by mixing with people of different cultures and backgrounds*". Although expatriate D has undertaken numerous assignments, the most recent was cited as "*a huge challenge that could not be turned down*". Furthermore, expatriate F describes wanting "*a new challenge in my career*", and expatriate G felt it would be a "*significant stepping stone on the road to a successful career*". It was stated by expatriate H, the intent had always been to work abroad, and felt that it would be the perfect time to do so as his spouse had been made redundant and they each wanted to "*experience a new culture while the opportunity was available*".

## **5.3 Pre-Departure Training**

The following section seeks to explore the findings relating to the pre-departure training received by the expatriates and their families. In doing this, the findings pertaining to the following research objective will be addressed:

*To explore the importance of pre-departure training for the expatriate, their spouse and family.*

### **5.3.1 Preparation in Advance of an International Assignment**

The expatriates acknowledged that an enormous amount of preparation goes into an international assignment, requiring a significant amount of planning from the organisation, and commitment from the expatriate involved. The sentiments of each expatriate highlighted that the decision to accept an international position is not accepted without serious consideration. Despite the huge amount of preparation in advance of an assignment, it has been recognised that "*there are some things you have to experience first-hand*" (expatriate B). While in Thailand, it was difficult for the expatriate and their spouse to adapt quickly to their new culture. They found out early in the assignment that there are "*huge cultural differences between Irish people and Thai people*" (expatriate B).

### **5.3.2 Pre-departure Training for the Expatriate**

Some form of training had been provided to each of the expatriates prior to departure. It was found that expatriate A, along with their spouse, had travelled to South Africa on an orientation visit five months prior to the move, while there, they got a "*taste for the culture*" and decided to accept the position. Similarly, expatriate E was sent on a seven day trip to the area with his spouse, to experience the culture before committing to the assignment. An intensive language course was completed by expatriate D prior to departure, with immersion training also compulsory. Other elements of pre-departure training were extended to expatriates C and H, as they were required to complete a three day intercultural training course, to learn about the new culture and what to expect on arrival. As the assignment for expatriate G was short-term, no language training was available. A number of the expatriates were given area briefings and lectures prior to commencing the assignment. Topics covered included information on housing, education, and entertainment. A further assessment of the pre-departure preparation received by the expatriates is summarised in appendix E.

### **5.3.3 Family Inclusion in the International Assignment**

It is outlined in table 5.2 that five of the eight expatriates were accompanied by their spouse, and a further three were accompanied by their children. As a result, the researcher posed questions to the expatriates surrounding the form of pre-departure training and support which may have been received by the family.

From the responses generated by the expatriates, it was apparent that a supportive spouse was a decisive factor in whether or not the assignment was accepted. Each of the expatriates claimed that spousal assistance was a source of major concern. Expatriate E noted that employee assistance programmes were in place within the organisation and provided enormous benefit to his spouse. Additionally, expatriates B and E highlighted that their spouses had received some form of foreign language training, and were informed of support networks available within the host country. The spouse of expatriate F was the only one to work throughout the duration of the assignment, with the location providing an opportunity to gain employment easily.

**Table 5.2 Summary of Spouse and Family Accompaniment on Assignment**

Expatriate	Marital Status	Number of Children	Accompanied by Spouse/ Partner	Accompanied by Children
A	Married	Two	Yes	Yes
B	Married	One	Yes	Yes
C	Single	None	_____	_____
D	Married	Three	No	No
E	Married	Three	Yes	Yes
F	Married	None	Yes	_____
G	Single	None	_____	_____
H	Married	None	Yes	_____

When asked about pre-departure training for their children, expatriates A and B highlighted that no formal training was provided due to their relatively young ages. While expatriate E noted that some language and cultural sensitivity training was provided for his children. In addition to this, each expatriate emphasises the importance of having more support in regard to selecting the right school, and assistance in adapting to the different school systems. Despite training being provided for his children, expatriate E highlighted that there were some *"teething problems"* associated with moving abroad, as the children were not happy leaving their social networks and schools.

#### **5.3.4 The Impact of Culture Shock**

When asked if the pre-departure training was relevant and useful, each of the expatriates had differing answers. Although the training provided is useful in telling you what you can expect, *"learning by doing is still the best way to go"* (expatriate A). This is further emphasised by expatriate C who commented that the training received is quite often conducted by people who have never lived in the particular country, and it is therefore extremely *"difficult for them to re-create the culture"* in terms of cultural simulations and role plays. The findings show that an expatriate needs to be *"flexible and open-minded"* (expatriate B), as it is extremely difficult to adjust to a new culture in such a short period of time.

The host country culture was described by expatriate D as totally different and *"exceptionally hard to adapt to"*, no matter how much training is received. The beginning of the assignment was described as extremely difficult, expatriate H found it difficult to interact with the local people due to a lack of knowledge of the language. This expatriate observed *"huge cultural difference in day to day life"*. With expatriate G quoting feelings of loneliness and *"not feeling at home"*, not being able to speak the local language presented the expatriate with feelings of isolation during the assignment. Contrary to this, expatriate F experienced a limited amount of culture shock, feelings of isolation existed for a number of weeks, however, there were no language barriers and it was easier to integrate into the culture.

In terms of family adjustment, expatriate E had older children so it was more difficult for them to adapt. At the beginning, it was like a holiday nevertheless, the distance between them and their friends started to grow quite considerably. Additionally, the expatriates noted their spouses had adapted considerably well to the foreign culture, however, they believe this was due to the spouse wanting to go on the assignment in the beginning.

### **5.3.5 The Significance of Language Training**

It has been highlighted throughout the interviews that knowledge of the local language plays a critical role if an assignment is to be successful. The importance of language training was encapsulated in the comment: *"unless you learn the local language, you will always be considered an outsider and never be able to fully participate in what the local culture has to offer"* (expatriate B). Additionally, expatriate E commented *"the experience of living abroad is greatly enhanced if you attempt to learn and communicate in a local language"*. Furthermore, *"a lack of knowledge of the local language actually prevents people from fully integrating into Israeli society"* (expatriate C). Prior to departing on the assignment, expatriate H had received little language training, and therefore enrolled in an intensive Portuguese training programme upon arrival along with their spouse, believing *"it was imperative to learn the local language for social and professional reasons"*.

## **5.4 The Communication Process**

The following section seeks to explore the findings relating to the communication process prior to the international assignment, throughout the assignment and during post assignment re-integration. In doing this, the findings appropriate to the following research objective will be addressed:

*To examine the communication process in existence between expatriates and the organisation, prior to going on an international assignment, throughout the assignment and post assignment re-integration.*

### **5.4.1 Communication Prior to Commencing the International Assignment**

The findings portrayed a mixed range of views in relation to communication prior to leaving on assignment, with a number of expatriates noting flaws existed in the communication protocols. Pre-departure briefings were made to each expatriate on what was expected during the assignment. However, for expatriates A and C, concrete objectives were not clearly communicated. However, expatriate G was aware of what was expected on their role abroad. Additionally, expatriate D highlights that due to the location of the assignment, a risk management programme was in place in the country. Similarly, expatriates A and B described how a plan for an emergency evacuation was in place, if a natural disaster was to occur. The interviews ensured continuity in that each of the expatriates agreed that a lot of informal communication protocols were in place such as a company intranet, and taking their own initiative in maintaining personal links within the company.

### **5.4.2 Communication during the International Assignment**

It was emphasised by expatriates A, B and F that communication from the organisation during the assignment was sporadic with an odd email received. The expatriates felt quite distant from the organisation, and like they had left completely when they departed for the international assignment (expatriate B). Additionally, it was acknowledged that the company intranet portal was a valuable resource, keeping them informed of changes occurring. However, regular emails had been received by expatriates C and H, informing them of any major developments regarding the organisation, along with an electronic version of the organisation newsletter, which was sent on a regular basis.



However, none of the expatriates were adequately informed of any promotion opportunities while they were on assignment. The organisation's online recruitment system kept expatriate C informed of job opportunities available within the domestic organisation.

A mentor was provided for expatriate H while on assignment. This mentor was an employee who had previous experience of working in Brazil, and was therefore able to provide the expatriate with specific information on the country. The mentor kept the expatriate up to date with organisational changes on a regular basis. During the interview, the mentor was described as a "*comfort blanket*" (expatriate H), putting the expatriate's mind at ease, and making the subsequent re-adjustment to the home organisation easier.

#### **5.4.3 Communication during Post Assignment Re-Integration**

The provision of a mentor while abroad helped expatriate H keep up to date with any organisational changes, and a discussion interview also took place a number of weeks after their return. The interview, eluded to by expatriate H, discussed numerous facets of the assignment including the value received from the period abroad, what skills they envisage they could contribute to the organisation and any improvements they feel need to be made to the process. Contrastingly, quite a pessimistic view was adopted by expatriates A, B, C, E and F, who noted that there was no clear communication after the assignment, they were simply expected to get on with it. According to expatriate A, there was no proper communication of objectives now that they are back at the home organisation, while expatriate B had expected to have an in-depth discussion with the organisation upon their return, but that failed to materialise. A further assessment of the communication process throughout the assignment is outlined in appendix E.

#### **5.4.4 The Importance of Technology**

It was alluded to by each of the expatriates that advancements in technology have played an immense role in the communication process. Expatriate D has been on numerous international assignments and has found that the growth of Skype and the use of webcams have facilitated easier interaction and it is now easier to keep in touch with family and friends. The use of email is also playing an ever increasing role in keeping in touch with the home organisation. Expatriate A also acknowledges that the use of email, MSN and Skype have helped *"to bridge the distance"* between home and abroad.

### **5.5 Capitalising on Employee Experience**

The following section seeks to highlight the main findings relating to how organisations can capitalise on the skills gained by their key employees on international assignments. In doing this, the findings relevant to the following research objective will be addressed:

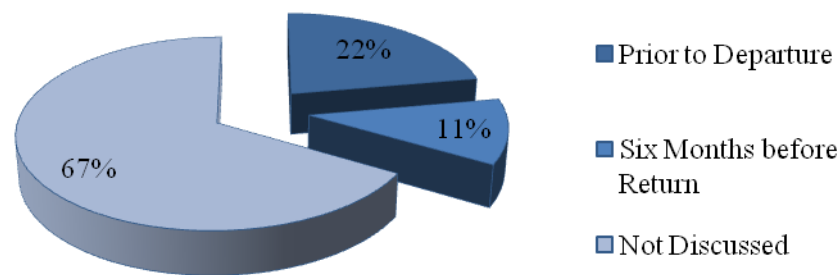
*To investigate how organisations can capitalise on the experience gained by their repatriated staff members'.*

#### **5.5.1 The Repatriation Process**

A recurring theme throughout the interviews was the inherent lack of a concrete repatriation programme. This was alluded to by expatriate C, who describes being put into a *"holding position"* upon return, and has yet to be provided with an opportunity to put their experience to work. Additionally, expatriate B considers that their position is an exceptional come down and has found it extremely *"difficult to reconnect with the home organisation"*. It was highlighted by expatriate A, that prior to leaving on assignment, the organisation failed to discuss possible job opportunities that would be available upon return, or even acknowledge if a job would be available at all, which was a huge source of stress and anxiety while on assignment. Moreover, it was indicated by expatriate F that the organisation failed to discuss how the assignment would fit into their overall career path within the organisation.

Figure 5.1 illustrates that only two of the eight expatriates had the repatriation process discussed prior to departure. Expatriate D had a discussion on the role that would be available upon their return, and the specific objectives that needed to be achieved while abroad. Additionally, expatriate G, due to the short-term nature of the assignment, had a discussion on what they could expect upon their return. It was acknowledged by expatriate H, that repatriation discussions with the organisation took place approximately six months prior to the completion of the project, where the intended position the expatriate would return to was discussed.

**Figure 5.1 Discussion of the Repatriation Process**



### 5.5.2 Organisation Recognition

Throughout the interviews, it was acknowledged that there is a need for greater recognition during and after the international assignment. It is believed by expatriate A that they should have received more recognition, while expatriate B describes being "*swept aside upon return*". Moreover, expatriate E highlights that it was quite difficult returning to the organisation, which was made more difficult by the lack of encouragement shown by the organisation. Additionally, expatriate C emphasised that the managerial skills gained via the period abroad are still not being fully utilised by the organisation. Similar sentiments were expressed by expatriate A, who feels they have been demoted since returning from the period abroad. This expatriate echoed they had "*more autonomy and power in the overseas assignment*" than the position they have returned to. A further evaluation of the repatriation process, and recognition received by the expatriates is outlined in appendix E.

### **5.5.3 The Impact of Reverse Culture Shock**

The interviews uncovered that the transition back home was not as easy as expected, being described as *"probably the most difficult phase of the international assignment"* (expatriate F). Expatriate A missed the various friendships that had been formed abroad, while expatriate C missed the lifestyle they had become accustomed to. Furthermore, *"something as trivial as the climate was difficult to adjust back into"* (expatriate B). Whereas, expatriate E noted that their children had found it difficult to readjust back into their new surroundings, away from new friendships that had been formed. In terms of readjusting to the organisation, expatriate A remembers feelings of concern about the lack of job security upon return from the assignment, with expatriate C mentioning that the job status was less than they had enjoyed during the period abroad. It must be highlighted that no formal training was provided for any of the expatriates on their return home.

### **5.5.4 Management of the International Assignment**

Upon reflecting on their period abroad, each of the expatriates acknowledged that there were some perceptible flaws in the management of the international assignment. The view of expatriate A is that the assignment was managed adequately. However, the area which the expatriate felt was not managed appropriately surrounded the repatriation process. Similarly, expatriate F highlighted that the absence of a proper repatriation process *"flawed the end of what had been an enjoyable process"*. It was also pointed out by expatriates B and E that organisations should allow the expatriate have more of an input into the expatriation process. According to expatriate H, the *"provision of a mentor is a valuable asset for any expatriate"*, and organisations should attempt to provide a mentor even if it is just to monitor the performance of the expatriate on a regular basis.

## **5.6 The Career Contribution of the International Assignment**

A number of the expatriates interviewed have yet to see a significant contribution of the international assignment on their professional career. Due to a lack of recognition from the home organisation, expatriate B is actively searching for a new organisation that will capitalise on the international experience accumulated. Over the course of the interviews, it became apparent that the expatriates had gained an enormous amount from the international assignment, and no expatriate cited it as just a period in their lives that had to be endured. A common response was that "*international exposure will be a valuable asset as I go forward with my career, even if the organisation that I am presently employed with are failing to see it*" (expatriate A). While expatriate E acknowledged that exposure to a new culture had "*reignited a desire to travel*", and intends to explore options for international positions in the future.

## **5.7 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has presented and highlighted the key research findings from the eight semi-structured, personal interviews conducted. The findings of this study will contribute to the growing body of literature in the area of expatriate management. The contents of this chapter and that of the literature review form the basis for discussion in the following chapter.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Discussion**

#### **6.0 Introduction**

Forming the penultimate chapter of the dissertation, the primary research findings will be investigated to see if they are congruent with the literature review. For the purpose of ensuring continuity, the chapter is structured around the three research objectives, with related themes discussed under each, corresponding with the headings used in previous chapters.

#### **6.1 Pre-Departure Training**

The following section seeks to explore the themes relating to the pre-departure training received by the expatriates and their families, and if this proved to be effective in addressing initial culture shock. In doing this, the following research objective will be addressed:

*To explore the importance of pre-departure training for the expatriate, their spouse and family.*

##### **6.1.1 Pre-Departure Training for the Expatriate**

According to Harris et al., (2003), organisations can support employees undertaking an international assignment through the provision of pre-departure preparation, taking the form of a mixture of training, visits and briefings on the country. This is reflected in the findings, as each of the expatriates acknowledged that they had received some form of pre-departure preparation.

The findings of this study align with the comprehensive framework for CCT which was developed by Mendenhall et al., (1987). The information giving approach was received by each of the expatriates interviewed, while the affective approach was extended to expatriates C, D, E and F. In addition, the immersion approach was afforded to expatriate D, who took part in immersion training. The work of O'Keeffe (2003) resonates with the findings of this study, as expatriates A and E had orientation visits to the host country before accepting the assignment to gain exposure and a *"taste for the culture"* (expatriate A).

The findings extend the work of Vance and Paik (2002), who propose that the input of previous expatriates into the design of a pre-departure training programme may succeed in providing employees with more culture specific information prior to departure. This will possibly avoid the inherent problems associated with training being administered by someone who has never lived in the foreign location, as it is *"difficult for them to re-create the culture"* (expatriate C) in terms of cultural simulations and role plays.

#### **6.1.2 Family Inclusion in the International Assignment**

The work of Anderson (2005) is contrary to the findings of this study, as no indication was given from the expatriates that their spouse or children were interviewed prior to a decision on the assignment being made. It was left to the expatriate to inform them on the particulars of the assignment. Additionally, most of the spouses' who accompanied the expatriates on assignment were provided with adequate social support during the process, and basic training. This finding is interesting as it contradicts the literature which emphasises there is a relatively low priority of the family in an international assignment (Halcrow, 1999).

According to Forster (2000), families are less willing to accept the disruption to their personal and social lives associated with international assignments. The findings echo these sentiments as all expatriates indicated that a supportive spouse at all stages of the assignment was a necessity, and the decisive factor in whether or not it was ultimately accepted. Expatriate E noted that employee assistance programmes were in place within the organisation, and expatriates B and E acknowledged that their spouses' were informed of support networks available within the host country. Furthermore, Mayrhofer and Scullion (2002) ascertain that disruption to children's education is seen as a major barrier to international mobility. Therefore, organisations need to make more education support available to families with children. It was recognised in the findings that each expatriate was provided with help in selecting the right school for their children, however, they do indicate that more could be done.

The work of Simms (2006) articulates that issues regarding dual career couples are becoming more problematic, due to perceived interruption of the spouse's career. Although the majority of expatriates interviewed acknowledged that issues surrounding dual career couples can be quite challenging, they did not have any such problems due to the spouse not wanting to work abroad. The only spouse to work was that of expatriate F, and due to the location, there was no problem in gaining employment. The results from the current research have signalled that families are no longer entirely neglected by an organisation in the preparatory stages of an international assignment, however there is still scope for more to be done. Ultimately, this may result in more assignments being successful, as the morale of an expatriate can be affected by a spouse or family member not coping in the host country due to a lack of pre-departure training (Anderson, 2005).



### **6.1.3 The Impact of Culture Shock**

The work of Sims and Schraeder (2004) resonates with the findings of this study as the expatriates did pass through stages of adjustment, and the training received was relevant and useful in lessening the impact of culture shock, however, if an expatriate is to be successful they need to be *"flexible and open-minded"* (Expatriate B). According to Marx (2001), the symptoms of culture shock include feelings of isolation and anxiety. The research findings agree with this to a certain extent, as the expatriates did feel a certain amount of this, but it was primarily due to inadequate training at the beginning of the assignment, or a lack of communication from the organisation during the assignment. This is an interesting finding as it indicates that adequate pre-departure training can actually lessen the impact of culture shock for expatriates and their families.

### **6.1.4 Language: A Barrier to Entry**

Language proficiency may assist the expatriate in overcoming culture shock more effectively (Harris et al., 2003). The findings support this contention, with expatriates acknowledging that experience of the local language plays an extremely important role in an international assignment, Expatriate B considers that without the local language *"you will always be considered an outsider and never be able to fully participate in what the local culture has to offer"*. Additionally, Gudykunst et al., (1996) highlight that even if an employee is unable to become fluent in the language, the ability to exchange common courtesies in the host language will demonstrate interest in the local culture. This was mirrored in the findings as expatriate H believed *"it was imperative to learn the local language for social and professional reasons"*.

## **6.2 The Communication Process**

The following section seeks to explore the themes relating to the communication channels in existence over the course of the international assignment. In doing so, the following research objective will be addressed:

*To examine the communication process in existence between expatriates and the organisation, prior to going on an international assignment, throughout the assignment and post assignment re-integration.*

### **6.2.1 The Communication Process Prior to the International Assignment**

A number of expatriates emphasised that flaws existed in the communication protocols prior to the international assignment. The work of Harvey and Novicevic (2001) is contrary to the findings of this study, as concrete objectives were not clearly communicated to expatriates A and C prior to the international assignment. In addition, the findings advanced this study to include that informal communication protocols were in place such as a company intranet, email and the expatriate maintaining personal links within the organisation.

### **6.2.2 The Role of Communication throughout the International Assignment**

According to Kendall (1981), it is necessary for an organisation to keep ongoing contact with the expatriate and their family throughout the assignment, however, this is contradicted in the findings as expatriates A, B and F felt that communication from the organisation was quite sporadic. The results of the research support the literature in that the only time organisations pay particular attention to their expatriates is when something goes wrong (Black and Gregersen, 1999). Expatriates A, B and F emphasised that the communication protocols on the international assignment were quite sporadic, with the expatriates feeling distant from the organisation, emphasising the 'out of sight, out of mind' syndrome, which was also alluded to by Feldman (1991): Harvey (1989) and Harvey and Novicevic (2001). If there is no strong communication process in place, an expatriate may experience both personal and professional isolation from the domestic organisation (Harvey and Novicevic, 2001). These sentiments were supported in the findings as expatriate B felt like they had left the organisation when they departed for the assignment.

The importance of maintaining strong, regular communication with the expatriate while they are abroad, and ensuring they have timely access to industry news and programme changes is recognised by Tyler (2006). In addition, Hauser (1998) indicates that a connection to the organisation's computer networks, internet and e-mail should be established. This findings support this contention, as expatriates A and H emphasised that the organisation's intranet portal was a valuable resource while abroad, keeping them informed of changes. Furthermore, regular emails were sent to Expatriates C and H informing them of major developments at home, along with an electronic version of the organisation's newsletter, provided on a regular basis.

#### **6.2.2.1 The Mentoring Process: Keeping the Communication Channels Open**

In order to reduce the impact of isolation, organisations should attempt to assign a mentor for the expatriate, keeping them informed of changes and developments on an ongoing basis (Simms, 2006). The mentor ought to help the expatriate adjust to the foreign culture, reduce uncertainty and career related stress and help the expatriate to settle back into the home organisation (Feldman and Thomas, 1992: Harvey and Wiese, 1998: Swaak, 1997). The research findings reassert this thinking as expatriate H was provided with a mentor while abroad, who kept them up to date with organisational changes on a regular basis and was described as a "*comfort blanket*". In addition, the mentor succeeded in putting the expatriates mind at ease, and the subsequent re-adjustment to the domestic organisation was made considerably easier.

#### **6.2.3 Communication during Post-Assignment Re-Integration**

It is suggested by Hauser (1998) that communication surrounding the repatriation process is a major issue and probably the most neglected. This is mirrored in the findings as expatriates A, B, C, E and F acknowledged that they had no proper communication from the organisation in communicating a new role that would fully utilise their international experience, they were simply expected to get on with it. It was noted by expatriate B that they had expected to have an in-depth discussion with the organisation upon their return, but that failed to materialise which is detrimental to the over-riding success of an international assignment.

However, the findings did uncover a good communication process in place for expatriate H. The findings resonate with the work of Dowling et al., (1999): Harvey and Wiese, (1998) and Webb, (1996) in that the provision of a mentor while abroad had helped the expatriate keep up to date with organisational changes. A discussion interview also took place a number of weeks upon their return. The interview, according to expatriate H, discussed numerous facets of the international assignment including what value the expatriate had received from the period abroad, what skills they feel they could now contribute to the organisation and any improvements they feel need to be made to the process.

### **6.3 Capitalising on Experience**

The following section seeks to explore the themes relating to how organisations can capitalise on the skills gained by their employees on international assignments. In doing this, the following research objective will be addressed:

*To investigate how organisations can capitalise on the experience gained by their repatriated staff members'.*

#### **6.3.1 Undervaluing the Experience gained by Expatriates**

Many organisations make the mistake of undervaluing their returning employees, with a number of repatriates coming home to positions of lower authority (Cryne, 2009; Hauser, 1998). It is essential for organisations to recognise that employees while abroad will have significant prestige in their role. This is mirrored in the findings, with expatriates A, B, C, E and F acknowledging there is a need for greater recognition both during and after the assignment. Additionally, expatriate A feels like they have been demoted since returning from the period abroad and had *"more autonomy and power in the overseas assignment"* than the position they have returned to. It has been argued by Shumsky (1999) that organisations are not taking full advantage of an expatriate's competitive advantage on their return, the findings support this contention as expatriate C emphasises that the managerial skills gained via the period abroad are still not being fully utilised by their employer.

#### **6.3.2 Provide Employee Recognition**

A fundamental stumbling block to the effective management and development of international assignees is the frequent lack of recognition of their foreign experience (Briscoe et al., 2008). The findings mirror these sentiments as Expatriate A believes they should have received more recognition, while Expatriate B describes being *"swept aside upon return"* from assignment. The research findings show that organisations are still failing to recognise there are an abundance of new skills that an expatriate will have acquired while abroad that can generate huge benefits and create a sustainable competitive advantage for an organisation upon their return (Cryne, 2009).

### 6.3.3 A Concrete Repatriation Programme

Many potential problems can be avoided if organisations develop a repatriation programme before the employee goes abroad (Harvey and Novicevic, 2001). Contrary to the position advocated in the literature, the findings highlight a recurring theme throughout the interviews was the lack of a concrete repatriation programme for employees. While the work of Keogh (2003) argues many organisations have a clear plan in place before the assignment begins, recognising that repatriation is a fundamental element in the overall process, the research findings tend to contradict this contention, with all but two of the expatriates having a clear repatriation programme in place before leaving on assignment. The absence of a concrete repatriation programme, *"flawed the end of what had been an enjoyable process"* (expatriate F).

The body of literature examined has argued the importance of organisations integrating the international assignment and the subsequent repatriation process into the overall career path of the expatriate (Cryne, 2009). However, the findings would suggest that organisations are failing to discuss possible job opportunities available to employees on their return. In addition, discussions on how the international experience would fit into their overall career path within the organisation are seriously neglected. According to the research findings, expatriate C describes being put into a *"holding position"* since their return and has yet to be provided with an opportunity to put any international experience to use. Additionally, Expatriate B believes that the position on return from assignment is an exceptional come down and has subsequently found it extremely *"difficult to reconnect with the home organisation"*.

However, the findings do indicate there are some exceptions to this, as Expatriate D emphasises a discussion took place where they were informed of the clear objectives of the international assignment, and the role that would be available upon return. As further evidence of this, Expatriate G had a discussion prior to their assignment on what would be expected of them upon their return to the organisation.

#### **6.3.4 Repatriates: Returning home to leave the organisation**

The body of literature examined has argued that many repatriates leave an organisation on return due to the absence of a concrete career path with a natural progression from the international assignment (Klaff, 2002). This echoes the sentiments of research findings with many expatriates yet to see a significant contribution of the international assignment on their professional career. Organisations are not capitalising on the skills gained by their employees overseas, and therefore employees do not feel stimulated by their domestic environment upon returning home and are more likely to leave the organisation (Kendall, 1981: Harvey and Novicevic, 2001). This is mirrored in the findings, as Expatriate B informed the researcher that they are actively searching for a new organisation that will capitalise on the international experience accumulated.

#### **6.4 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has offered an interpretation of the primary research findings arising from the study with reference to the literature review. The discussion was primarily focused around the research objectives, and the concurrent themes which ran through the literature review and findings. In the next chapter, the key conclusions and recommendations arising from the research will be presented, along with the limitations associated with the current study.

## Chapter Seven

### Conclusions, Recommendations and Limitations

#### 7.0 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the findings from the primary research and investigated if the results were congruent with the literature review. This chapter will present the conclusions that have emanated from the discussion, in relation to the overall research question and objectives. Additionally, the limitations associated with this research will be identified, before concluding with recommendations for practice and future research.

#### 7.1 Research Question and Research Objectives

This study has sought to answer the following question:

*What are the learning, organisational and personal issues impacting upon the expatriation and repatriation of employees?*

Furthermore, a number of specific research objectives have been addressed as a result of this:

**Objective One:** To explore the importance of pre-departure training for the expatriate, their spouse and family;

**Objective Two:** To examine the communication process in existence between employees and the organisation prior to going on an international assignment, throughout the assignment and post assignment re-integration;

**Objective Three:** To investigate how organisations can capitalise on the experience gained by their repatriated staff members'.



## **7.2 Conclusions: Pre-Departure Preparation**

The body of literature examined argues that one of the ways in which organisations can support employees undertaking an assignment is through the provision of pre-departure training for the employee and their family (Harris et al., 2003). The research findings add weight to this contention, emphasising that employees do value the pre-departure training provided for them, and it does result in minimising the impact of culture shock for the employee and family. However, the findings also specify that *"there are some things you have to experience first-hand"* (expatriate B).

Additionally, Vance and Paik (2002) argue that the input of previous expatriates could be utilised in designing a pre-departure training programme for new employees assigned to a similar location, the findings add weight to this argument, as the expatriates mentioned training is quite often administered by someone who has never lived in the host country, and it is therefore difficult for them to re-create cultural simulations. To increase the validity of pre-departure training for employees, the input of repatriated employees is necessary, and it also ensures that their skills gained abroad are recognised by the organisation.

## **7.3 Conclusions: The Communication Process**

Broadly, the findings of the study indicate that there are inherent flaws in the communication process while an expatriate is abroad, and on their return home. Organisation needs to realise how much an employee relies on them while abroad (Tyler, 2006). However, the findings indicate that communication is often a neglected part of the international process. In order to improve the communication channels, and reduce feelings of isolation, a mentor should be provided for an expatriate (Simms, 2006). The findings add weight to this contention, as expatriate H highlighted that the mentor reduced their career related anxiety while abroad, and made the subsequent re-entry to the home organisation easier.

#### **7.4 Conclusions: Repatriation, How can Organisations Capitalise?**

The findings of this study conclude that organisations are still failing to capitalise on the skills gained by their employees overseas. It is necessary for an organisation to set out clearly how the employee's experience will fit into the organisation's objectives on their return (Tyler, 2006). Additionally, failure to recognise the achievement of the expatriate is detrimental to the overall success of the assignment. One of the most significant conclusions from this research is the absence of a concrete repatriation programme in place for the expatriate, which needs to be established before the assignment commences. The findings show that the inherent lack of a repatriation programme results in employees feeling unhappy with the overall management of the assignment. If an assignment is managed well, it can be a huge source of competitive advantage for an organisation, as the repatriated employee can bring an abundance of new skills back to the domestic organisation, thereby reaping the benefits of acquiring more global experience.

In order to have a successful period abroad, the expatriation and repatriation of employees needs to be recognised as an integrated process as outlined in figure 7.1. It is not enough to provide good quality training for the employee, if there is a lack of opportunities for them to put their international experience to work on their return.

**Figure 7.1 Expatriation and Repatriation: An Integrated Process**



## **7.5 Limitations of the Research**

The researcher has identified that the current study has a number of limitations:

- i. Due to time constraints, only a small pool of expatriates could be interviewed. Additionally, this dissertation had to be completed over the summer months, the holiday period for many employees, so it was difficult to locate expatriates willing to give their time, as a result, the researcher had to rely on a lot of personal, professional contacts;
- ii. Only one method was used to gather the primary research, where as data triangulation may have been more beneficial, and further increased the validity of the study;
- iii. A complete analysis of the topic would need the contribution of the organisations which would present a more balanced analysis, as this research only examined an expatriates perspective, and did not take the specific organisations into account;
- iv. The threat of respondent bias may be a possibility due to the sensitive nature of the research topic. The responses may not provide an accurate reflection of experiences, as certain information may have been withheld in the interview process.

## **7.6 Recommendations for Practice**

A number of recommendations for practice have become apparent upon completion of this research:

- i. The skills of repatriated employees should be utilised to design pre-departure training programmes for employees sent to similar locations;
- ii. It may be beneficial to provide a mentor for the employee while abroad. This ensures ongoing contact is maintained with the employee, reducing the 'out of sight, out of mind' syndrome, quite often experienced by employees;
- iii. Ensure that a concrete repatriation programme is in place before the employee goes abroad, as it may reduce job-related anxiety for the employee and make them aware of where they fit into the organisation's objectives.

## **7.7 Recommendations for Future Research**

A number of opportunities for further research have become apparent during the course of, and upon completion, of this research:

- i. This research has focused predominantly on expatriates from larger organisations. It may be beneficial if future research looked at small to medium sized enterprises, and the extent to which they utilise international assignments, and the policies and procedures they use;
- ii. This study took the expatriates perspective and their view on the international assignment process. Future research should study the role of organisations to determine whether differences in perspectives actually exist;
- iii. The lack of data triangulation due to reliance on a single source of primary research was already outlined as a limitation. It is therefore suggested that a similar study is conducted which would draw upon multiple sources of primary data. As a result, such a study would greatly enhance the internal validity of the research.

## **7.8 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has presented a range of conclusions drawn from the research undertaken. The limitations of the current study were outlined and recommendations for practice and future research in the area were presented.

This study has investigated the international process as a whole, showing that expatriation is the start of the process, and successful repatriation of an employee is the end of the process. The importance of pre-departure training and maintaining regular communication with the expatriate while abroad cannot be underestimated. The inherent flaws still in existence in the repatriation process need to be recognised for organisations to maintain a sustainable competitive advantage going forward. Ultimately, this study has shown how learning, organisational and personal issues are all integrated and have an impact on the successful expatriation and repatriation of employees.

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# ***Appendix A***

## ***Personal Reflection***

## *Personal Reflection*

At the beginning of the MBS programme, the prospect of completing a dissertation was quite daunting, as I had come from a background with no experience of undertaking one. The most difficult part was quite possibly starting, although I knew that I wanted to base my dissertation in the area of International Human Resource Management, however, trying to narrow down the focus was extremely difficult. A provisional title was established, yet it looks nothing like the final one.

The submission of a research proposal was extremely beneficial, as it provided an opportunity to get to know the literature surrounding the research area. It was also an opportunity to construct a good foundation for the literature review, so the concept of providing 5,000 words did not appear to be too daunting. The literature review helped develop my skills in critiquing literature, and I also became familiar with key authors in the research field.

The methodology chapter was the most straightforward to write. However, conducting the interviews was one of the most difficult aspects of the process, it was quite intimidating, interviewing people with a huge amount of experience in your subject area, and also trying to manage the interview and time appropriately. However, the experience of conducting interviews will be hugely beneficial as I go forward with my career. The findings chapter provided me with an opportunity to critique my own primary research findings. I had to decide what elements from the interviews would be most beneficial in answering the overall research question, and as I had generated a huge amount of information, I had to decide what to leave out. My analytical skills were hugely strengthened throughout this process.

The discussion chapter was probably the most difficult to complete, reviewing the findings from the interviews with that of the existing literature. It was difficult comparing and contrasting different elements, and ensuring the research objectives were answered. My writing skills were hugely enhanced completing this chapter. From the discussion chapter, the conclusions and recommendations were relatively straightforward, again enhancing my interpretation and writing skills.

If I was to complete the dissertation again, there are a number of things I would do differently. In general terms, I would like to manage my time better, as it tends to slip away easily. I would construct a detailed timetable at the beginning of the process, and set myself SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely) goals for the different stages. Also, in regard to time management, I would attempt to organise my interviews to take place towards the end of May. I conducted my interviews throughout the third week of June, and it somewhat limited my flexibility in terms of following up with the respondents in order to obtain additional information.

Towards the end of the process, I began to realise that writing a section of the dissertation, and taking a step back from it for a few days was beneficial. It allowed better proof reading of the material, and provided me with an opportunity to better critique my own work. If I was to do this again, I would go back and do this regularly. Quite a trivial thing that I would do differently is reorganise the folders on my laptop and have a folder for each section. Towards the end of the dissertation, it was frustrating as I had a single reference missing and it eventually appeared in a folder I was using just before Christmas. Little things tend to have a huge impact on the stress levels when you are so close to completion.

The process of completing a dissertation was a very rewarding experience. I learned a huge amount about myself which will stand to me as I progress with my future career. I learned that I work quite well on my own initiative, and it has also progressed a number of key skills including the ability to think analytically, synthesise complicated information, writing well, working independently and organising my time. This will be of immense value when I enter an organisation, as being able to work on your own initiative is extremely important, and being able to manage time effectively in order to achieve results in a timely manner is essential.

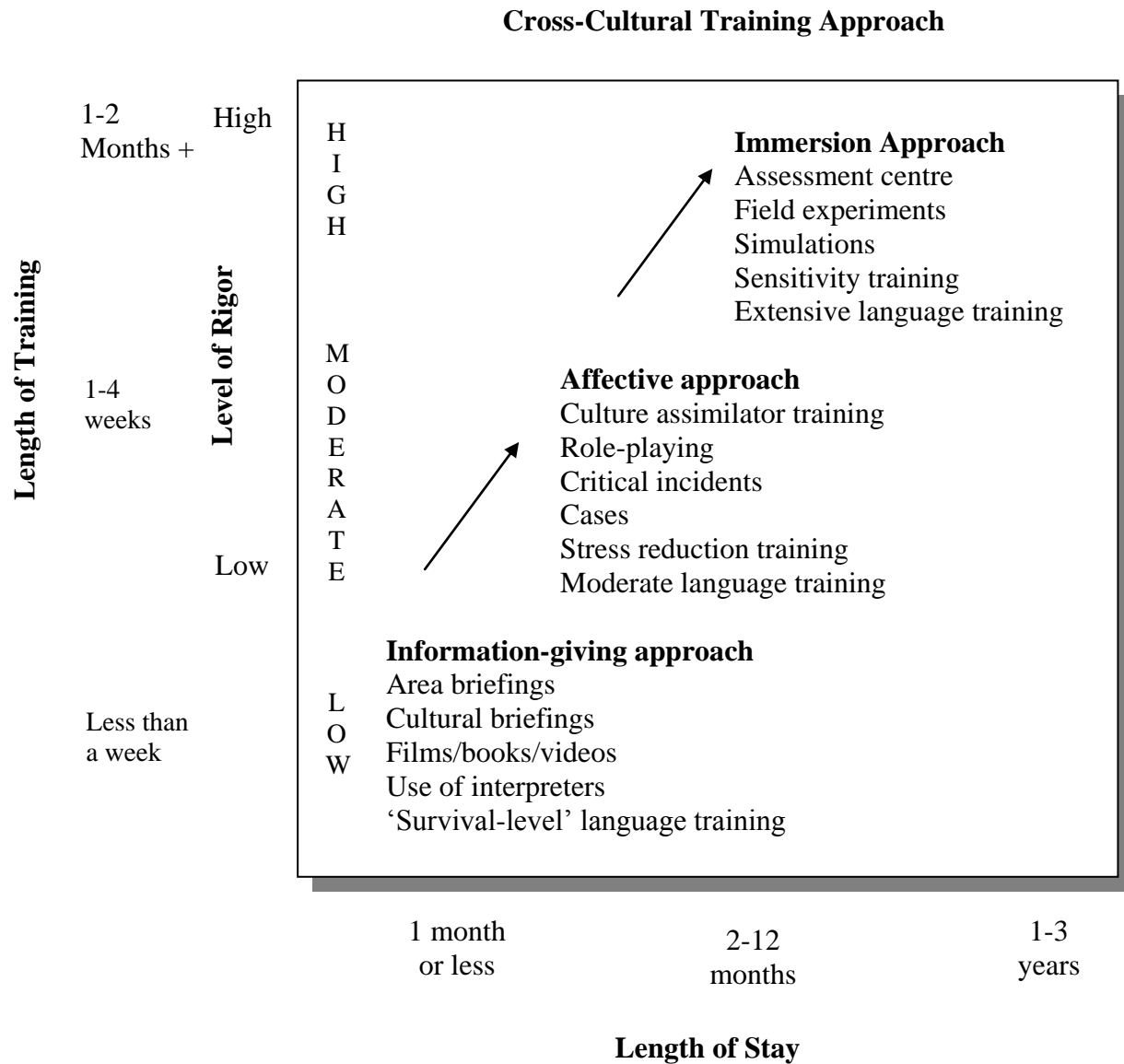


Additionally, this research has facilitated further learning in an area of immense personal interest. The most difficult aspect of conducting a dissertation is the huge amount of independent work involved so it is quite a lonely process. Of course the supervisor is there and will guide you in the right direction, but ultimately the dissertation is wholly your own responsibility, which is beneficial entering into an organisation as it shows you can handle the responsibility of undertaking relatively large research projects. Overall, the process was hugely beneficial, and worthwhile, I hope to bring the skills I have gained with me as I embark on my career.

# ***Appendix B***

***The Mendenhall, Dunbar and Oddou  
Cross-Cultural Training Model***

## The Mendenhall, Dunbar and Oddou Cross-Cultural Training Model



*Source: Mendenhall, et al., (1987: 338)*

# ***Appendix D***

## ***Methodology Documents***

#### **4.3.1 Ontological Argument**

Ontological assumptions "*concern the very nature or essence of the social phenomena being investigated*" (Cohen and Manion, 1994:6). Furthermore, De Burca (1995) states that ontological assumptions give us our beliefs about the world. It has been suggested by Bryman (2004), that the ontological position will be reflected in the research question and will therefore influence the overall design of the research and data collection.

#### **4.3.2 Epistemological Debate**

As explained by Cohen and Manion (1994: 6) epistemological assumptions are concerned with the "*nature, form, acquisition and communication*" of knowledge. Further to this, Epistemology is concerned with the study of the reliability of knowledge itself (De Burca, 1995). Epistemological questions involve the concepts of knowledge, evidence, reasons for believing, justification, probability, what one ought to believe, and any other concepts that can only be understood through one or more of the above (Fumerton, 2005).

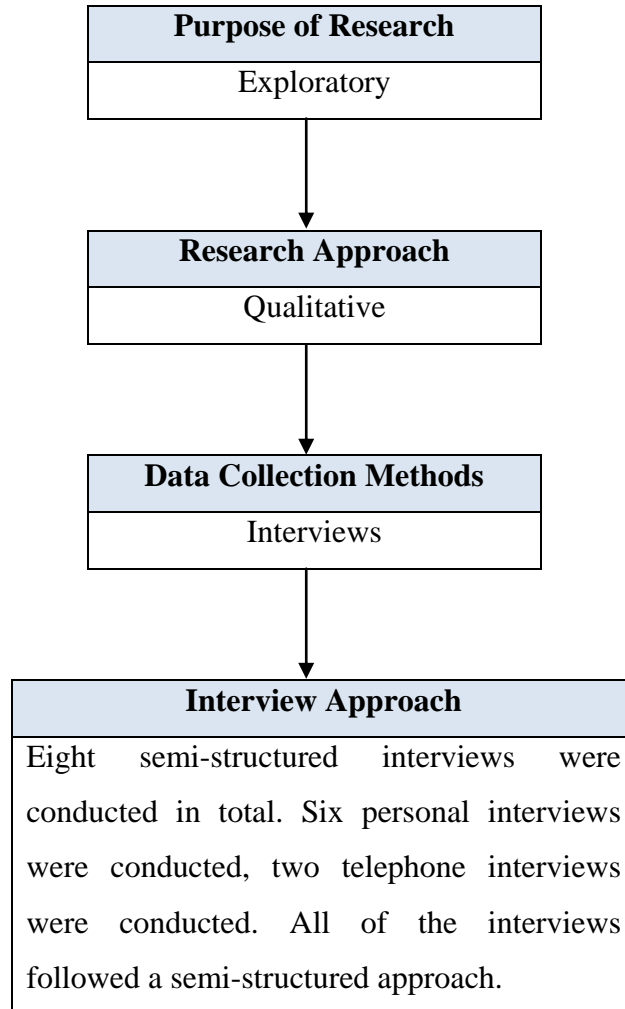
#### **4.3.3 Human Nature Perspective**

At a fundamental level, this concerns the assumptions regarding how individuals relate to their environment. According to Burrell and Morgan (1979), there are two major positions which can be taken: Determinism and Voluntarism, and the researcher attempts to make distinctions between both. The determinant position is based on an individual's activities in response to external stimuli in the environment, one thing determines another. The alternative viewpoint, voluntarism, argues that individuals interact autonomously with their environment, resulting in individuals having the free will to determine their activities.

#### **4.3.4 The Importance of Methodology**

The final domain deals with the approach to research and the techniques used to investigate a situation. According to Gill and Johnson (1997), these methods can be either theory testing, nomothetic, or theory gathering, ideographic. The nomothetic approach tends to be primarily quantitative in nature (Falconer and Mackay, 1999). The ideographic approach uses qualitative techniques in search of meaning, and developing ideas through induction of data (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002).

## Summary of Methodological Path Chosen by the Researcher



# ***Appendix E***

***Summary of the Primary  
Research Findings***

### Summary of Pre-departure Training for the Expatriates and their Families

	Expat A	Expat B	Expat C	Expat D	Expat E	Expat F	Expat G	Expat H
Provision of Orientation Visit	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
Pre-Departure CCT	Partial	Partial	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Pre-Departure Area Briefings	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partial	Yes	Yes
Language Training provided for expatriate	No	Partial	Partial	Yes	Partial	No	No	Partial
Post- arrival CCT for Spouse/ Family	Partial	Partial	_____	_____	Partial	No	_____	Partial
Post-arrival Language training for Spouse/ Family	No	Partial	_____	_____	Partial	No	_____	Partial
Assistance with Children Schooling	Yes	Yes	_____	_____	Yes	_____	_____	_____



### Communication throughout the International Assignment

	Expat A	Expat B	Expat C	Expat D	Expat E	Expat F	Expat G	Expat H
Clear Communication of Assignment Objectives	Partial	Partial	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Formal Mentoring Programme	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Regular Communication: Emails/ Phone Calls	Sporadic	Sporadic	Yes	Frequent	Frequent	Sporadic	Frequent	Yes
Provision of Organisation Newsletter	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes
Access to Organisation Intranet	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Informed of Job Opportunities while abroad	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No

### The Repatriation Process

	Expat A	Expat B	Expat C	Expat D	Expat E	Expat F	Expat G	Expat H
Pre-departure Repatriation Discussions	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Home Visits during Assignment	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	At own expense	No	At own Expense
Position upon Repatriation guaranteed	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Pre-return Training for Expatriate and Family	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Perceived Organisation Recognition of Skills gained	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Upon Repatriation, informed of changes in Organisation	Partial	Partial	Partial	Yes	Partial	Partial	Yes	Yes

# ***Appendix F***

*Summary of the Sources  
used in this Dissertation*

### A Summary of the Sources used in this Dissertation

Source	2000-2010	1990-1999	1980-1989	Pre 1980	Total
Academic Journals	33	18	5	1	57
Texts	28	10	5	2	45
Reports	1	1			2
Total	62	29	10	3	104