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Managing the repatriation: challenges and opportunities

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1) Introduction

1.1) Background

Through the last half-century, we have witnessed an impressive globalization process among countries and companies. Firms had had more possibilities to enlarge their business over their own borders, exploiting new international strategies and modes of entry in new markets in order to beat and overcome their competitors.

Mostly in the last decades, this phenomenon has shown an exponential increase due to the removal of some entry barriers by the major part of the countries in the world. So, it had been possible for many MNCs to make mergers & acquisitions, joint ventures with other companies or establish new subsidiaries in foreign countries.

However, this increased internationalization leads entail relevant challenges for the MNCs. Without a direct and an immediate connection between the head-quarter and the subsidiaries, the whole organizations would face a problem of communication and transfer of knowledge, without considering an effective control about the performances of the plants in the foreign markets. Moreover, many firms believe that, if they hire local people to cover important position in the subsidiaries without global and efficient skills and without knowing the company's culture, it would be more difficult to success in the market and, added to the all things considered before, to lose their competitive advantages against rivals.

To fix those problems, MNCs have some solutions, one of those is the "*international assignment*". With this term we refer to the period of work (that can be few months or many years) experienced by an employee, called expatriate, sent by the company to cover a managerial position in the foreign subsidiary, usually in exchange of better work conditions, major responsibility or career improvement. Thanks to the study by Edström and Galbraith (1977), there have been found three main reasons about the international assignment, by the study of. The first one is fill positions, which refers to the transfer of technical and managerial knowledge. The second reason is a management development; the expatriate managers obtain an international experience that it will be helpful for them to get future managerial skills. The last motive concerns a collective goal that is organization development, which consists in a socialization of both expatriate and local

managers into the corporate culture and the creation of a verbal information network that provides links between subsidiaries and head-quarter¹.

Any international assignment implies several procedures and organizational process that a company has to do to achieve an effective expatriation.

It is usually required a proactive process of planning and training, which has to be attended by the employee in question, prior the departure in the foreign country and let him/her, eventually accompanied by the relative spouse or family, to adapt with the best manner in the new contest. The whole process of adaptation and adjustment doesn't stop when the employee starts to work in the subsidiary, but it keeps working to help the managers to overcome any kind of problems that may occur, which can affect negatively their performance during their permanence in foreign plant.

The *repatriation* is the final step of an international assignment. When the pre-determined period of job is accomplished by the worker, the enterprise prepares all the procedures and steps that will help the expatriates to come back in their home country, making some readjustments that are straightforward to make a match again with the employees and the company's culture and organization, without incurring in the risk of losing their talents.

1.2) Purpose of study

Lots of studies and researches has been done during those last three decades about the entire world behind the expatriation, encompassing all the reasons that push a company to send their employees abroad and the whole process that has to be done in order to achieve an effective expatriation program. Not only, but several surveys and questionnaires were sent directly to the expatriates and the HR managers that has been useful to understand what are the main benefits that each of them attained thanks to the international assignment, and what were the main efforts they faced during that period and what they did in order to fix all those problems.

Nevertheless, it has been recognized that the reentry phenomenon is widely neglected, usually leading in some misunderstanding. First of all, the reentry term refers not only to employees' repatriation process, but it is very fragmented with some studies that focus on different aspects and variables. The other cause is that the publications by researchers that argue about the issue of the reentry process sometimes differ too much. Then, this

¹ Harzing A.W. & Reiche S., 2009, "*International assignment*", International Human Resource Management.

diversification may lead to a wrong interpretation of the studied results, until to become meaningless, as argued by Glass, McGaw and Smith (1981)².

So, from those conclusions the purpose of this thesis begins. The main goal is to study and understand in the clearest way all the repatriation phenomenon (from the pre-departure step to the readjustment in the head-quarter and the loyalty issue), summarized all the past researches, highlighting what are the common issues in the articles and in what they diverge. In the end, they will be analyzed the surveys and questionnaires asked to a specific target of repatriates, in order to have more empirical results, which may confirm the theoretical framework regarding the reentry process.

1.3) Outline of the thesis

This thesis will be structured in this way.

After the introduction, in **Chapter 2** it will be analyzed the **theoretical framework**. Here we are going to study in a more detailed and clearer way the repatriation process, what are all the features that characterize the reentry and what are the aspects that may affect positively or negatively the reentry process. They will be highlighted the main practices that a firm usually does in order to achieve an effective repatriation, exploiting all the benefits deriving from that. In the end, it will be discussed the repatriate's loyalty concern, which is a very hot topic for the majority of the firms that promote the international assignment.

Chapter 3 will focus on the **methodology and analysis** of the data collected. Here, it will be explained how we have managed to collect the data necessary for our research. After that, it will be shown the frameworks of the interviews done, making questionnaires both for the repatriates and the HR managers, which let us know what are the procedures employed by the HR department to follow the repatriate in all the stages, and what were the benefits or efforts that the employees have encountered during the phases and if the final outcomes fit their expectations and the agreements done before the departure in the host country.

Whereas, in **Chapter 3** we are going to analyze in depth this phenomenon by taking as example **the case of an Indian MNC**, which is one of the world's leading integrated steel and mining firm. We'll have the possibility to see directly how a MNC behaves and works

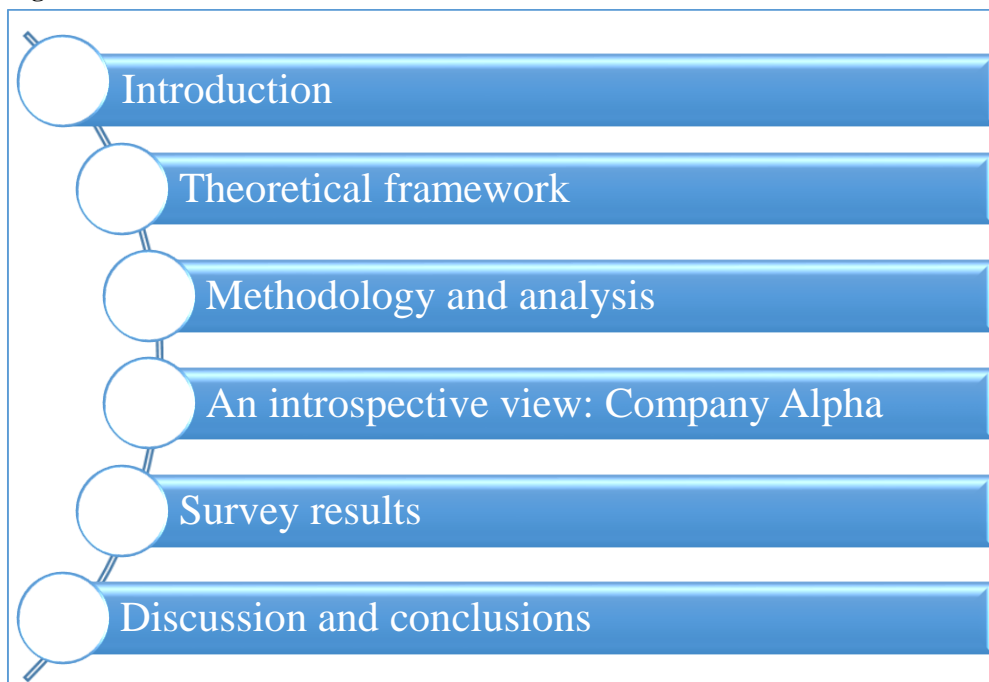
² Szkudlarek B., 2009, "*Reentry—A review of the literature*", International Journal of Intercultural Relations.

when it has to deal with the reentry process of its expatriates, and we will do it making a general assessment of the international assignment policy of this company. Due to the its corporate's privacy, I can't quote the name of this MNC in my dissertation and share their articles and documents, therefore from now on we will call this firm *Company Alpha*.

Instead, **Chapter 4** will regard about the **survey results**. Thanks to the analysis of data gathered from the surveys sent to the "Forum for Expatriate Management" and from the interviews, we will be able to draw the last thoughts that encircle the repatriation phenomenon and discuss about the empirical findings, determining if the empirical results match the variable and assumptions stated in the theoretical framework chapter.

In **the final chapter** will be written the **conclusions** of this work, making the last considerations concerning the issue taken in consideration in this thesis and, possibly, provide suggestions for further researches on this field.

Figure 1: Outline of the thesis



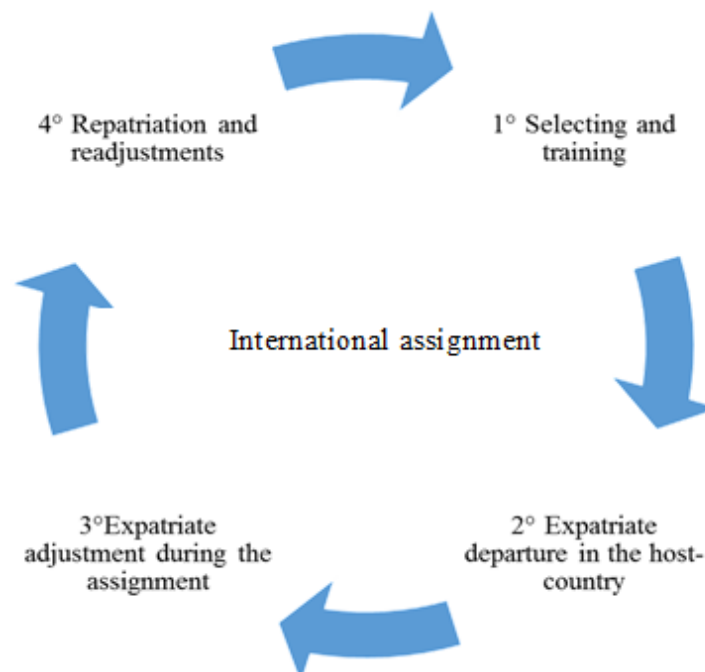
2) Theoretical framework

2.1) The repatriation phenomenon

As we read in the introduction chapter, the repatriation phenomenon is a fragmented and complex subject to assess and consequently understand it in all its aspects. However, even if it is not yet fully and accurately studied, we have enough resources, given by the several researches in the last years, to draw a straightforward framework, which lead us in tracing the guidelines of this kind of process.

When we talk about repatriation, we refer to a process that belongs to an enormous and complicated organization management, which hiding behind the international assignment. Corporates sometimes may incur in the terrible mistake to consider the expatriation and the repatriation as two independent and separated operations, but it is completely wrong. The expatriation is at the beginning of the international assignment, while with the repatriation the whole process ends up (obviously, there are other phases between these two steps, which must to be conducted in order to accomplish an effective international assignment program).

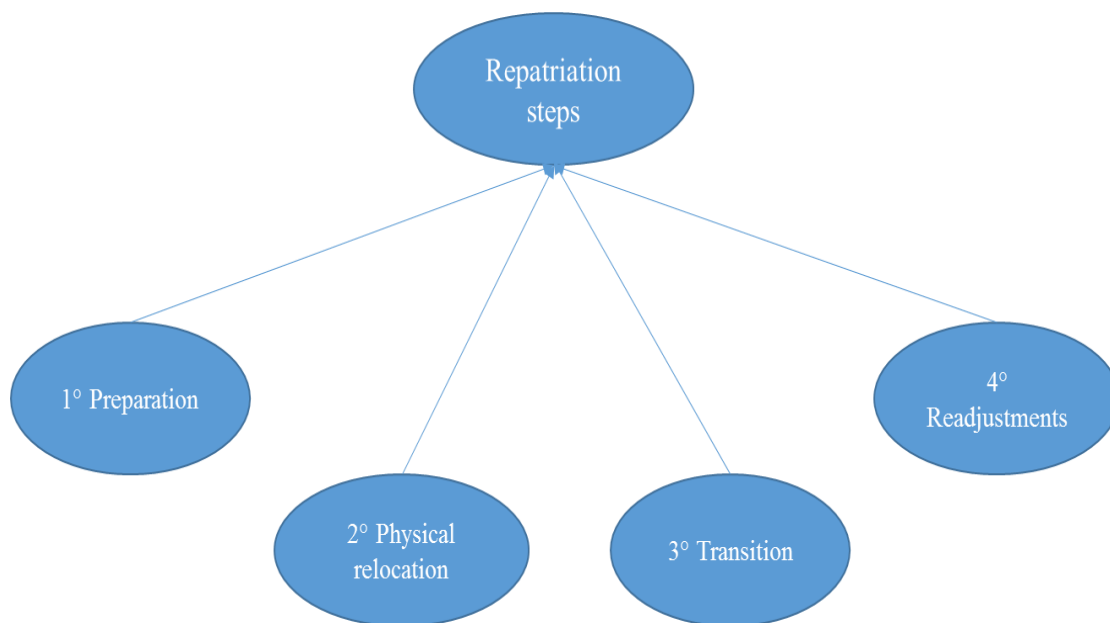
Figure 2: International assignment cycle's framework



As clarified in the figure above, the repatriation is the final steps of this cycle (sometimes it doesn't end with the reentry in the home organization, but another international assignment may be committed immediately to the assignee).

With the term “*Repatriation*” we generally refer to all the operations (among these reentry practices and readjustments in the home country) involved in rendering the assistances necessary to the expatriates (eventually with his/her family) when they return to the home country, after having accomplished their missions in the host country³. Analyzing it in a more detailed way, we observe that is structured by four phases:

Figure 3: Structure of the repatriation process



- **1° Preparation:** In the first stage the plans for the future are developed. Here, the expatriate may collect information about the new position that he/she will cover in the head-quarter.
- **2° Physical relocations:** After the decisions of the plans for the future, it skips to this step. It deals with the removal of personal affects, breaking ties with colleagues and friends, and traveling to the home country. It is easy to understand that is a tricky stage, because some of the challenges affecting the repatriates stem from the operations described, if they are not supported by a comprehensive and efficient relocation program promoted by the organization.

³ Arman G., (2009), “*Repatriation Adjustment: Literature Review*”, Journal of European Psychology Students;

- **3° Transition:** In the third stage the company sets a temporary accommodation where it is needed, with the relative arrangements for the family (house and school), and performing necessary administrative tasks.
- **4° Readjustments:** In the last step the company has to face with the reverse cultural shocks and expatriates' career demands that occur with the reentry in the home organization. Those challenges depend heavily by how the countries' cultures differ among them (if they are too culturally dissimilar, the repatriation process will be more difficult). The process will be even harder if the expatriate has experienced a successful environment in the host culture.

The international assignment should be perceived as an ongoing process till the end that will promote a performance improvement, either for the company and the employee's career itself. The repatriates play a key role in helping the firm to establish and expand its international businesses globally, owning all the information gathered in the foreign market and checking how the company is perceived abroad. Indeed, that is established since they cover an irreplaceable role in the organizational learning, given that they are able to accelerate the transfer of knowledge from host countries to head-quarters, and vice versa, with the repatriate as an intermediate (this concept will be analyzed further as a consequence of an effective repatriation process)⁴.

According for what has been written, it is common to assume that it is a huge important human capital investment that is strictly needful for a corporate. Consequently, a company should be interested in implementing a successful repatriation program for many reasons.

First of all, an international assignment requires a considerable charge for the company in terms of money and time, and the risk of losing the skills and knowledge acquired by the expatriate is very high without a proactive repatriation program. Secondly, if the organization neglects all the challenges that may occur during the repatriation, the scope of the international assignment may fail, incurring in a lack of willing by other employees to go abroad. Then, it would entail negative implications of international expansion in a global scale, with the risk of losing its competitive advantage against the rival.

However, all the benefits stem from the repatriates tend to be ruined if there is a mismanagement in the repatriation process. Many companies don't seem to pay particular attention and efforts to the repatriation phase, which contributes to a rise of the attrition

⁴ Caligiuri P. & Lazarova M, (2001), "*Retaining repatriates: The role of organizational support practices*", Journal of World Business

rate about the international assignment. Indeed, it is sometimes neglected compared to the other steps of the international assignment, while it is indispensable to transfer the information and expertise collected abroad. Defiance may stem due to a negative match between of the repatriate's expectations about the role position with the organization when returning at home. Moreover, it may happen that many HR managers haven't ever had the opportunity to experience an international assignment during their career, then they are not capable to understand fully the challenges addressed by repatriates⁵.

It is obvious that firms have to improve their management repatriation process in order to not incur in these conflicts and increase the rate of retention (in the last years we have witnessed an alarming trend regarding the retaliation rate, the repatriates tend to leave the company seeking other, and probably, better opportunities). But before going ahead, we should accurately understand what the factors that mark the reentry process are.

2.3) Factors affecting the reentry process

The major part of the challenges faced by the organization in the repatriation process stems from the all factors that characterize the repatriates. We stated that companies sometime don't fulfill an efficient program, which is due not only to a negligence for this step of the international assignment but also for the several and different aspects that may affect the repatriates when returning at home. Then, it is clear that a firm can't adopt a universal standard strategy to solve those conflicts, so it is forced to take in consideration all the factors that may influence the reentry of the expatriates and, after that, imply the correct practices and readjustments. Those features can be divided in two main categories⁶:

- The individual repatriates' characteristics;
- The external situation variables.

⁵ Paik Y., Segaud B. & Malinowski C., (2002), "**How to improve repatriation management Are motivations and expectations congruent between the company and expatriates?**", International Journal of Manpower.

⁶ Szkudlarek B., 2009, "*Reentry—A review of the literature*", International Journal of Intercultural Relations.

2.3.1) Individual repatriates' characteristics

We start from this category, which probably is the most influencing in the repatriate's readjustment. Several studies have already focused on the sojourners' characteristics, highlighting that the distress upon the return may derive from the anxiety and uncertainty experienced by repatriates, based on the individual features⁷. In turn, in this group we find many characteristics:

- **Gender:** It is usually frequent that this variable is the most studied compared the others to assess the level of distress upon the reentry. Even if there are few existing literatures available on the potential effect of gender on the repatriation conflicts, a significant number of them have stressed how men and women tend to perceive the return differently. The recent researches have shown that generally women tend to report more problems at the reentry adjustments than their men colleagues (this issue gets a higher dispersion if we compare single female sojourners with female-spouse sojourners). Anyway, the main concern regarding the female repatriates derives from the fact that women are less likely to be assigned for an international assignment, then they serve as a pioneering model for future repatriates, since their expectations and challenges may not be well perceived by the organization due to a lack of role models⁸. However, not all studies converge themselves. In effect, as stated by Sussman (2001), it has been noticed that there is a not significant relationship between gender and reentry challenges, suggesting a necessity of further studies to get clearly the connection between gender and reentry problems⁹.
- **Age:** Concurrently to the gender characteristics, the age is a frequently researched variable. Thanks to the various studies it was found out a positive correlation between age and reentry adjustments, associating a less reentry distress with older repatriates. As studied by Cox (2004), this indicator is used also to verify the level of social difficulties experienced upon returning at home. Younger expatriates tend to have higher cultural learning abilities and adjustment skills, who are more inclined to adjust themselves to radical cultural identity changes during the assignment, but that obviously leads to more difficulties with readjustments in the home organization. The organization

⁷ Arman G., (2009), "*Repatriation Adjustment: Literature Review*", Journal of European Psychology Students.

⁸ Arman G., (2009), "*Repatriation Adjustment: Literature Review*", Journal of European Psychology Students.

⁹ Szkudlarek B., 2009, "*Reentry—A review of the literature*", International Journal of Intercultural Relations.

reacts differently depending on the age of the repatriate, because different reentry concerns will be related. For example older repatriates may attempt to take care about work and career anxiety, while youngers may be more interested to rebuild personal relationships¹⁰.

- **Personality:** This is probably the most characteristic variable. Indeed, with personality we refer to the repatriates' private traits and how can influence the repatriation. It is clear that it is too peculiar and each repatriates differ one to one, making the readjustment process a very difficult task for the companies. Previous empirical researches have attempted to analyze better this feature by structuring in three main traits: openness, positivity and personality strength, discovering that employees owning these features figure out an efficient self-image and self-consciousness are less inclined to incur in reverse culture shock. In addition to this statement, O'Sullivan (2002) claims that repatriates who show strong personality attitudes, which are included openness, extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness and emotional stability, tend to adapt successfully in the reentry in the home organization. Thanks to these strong personality traits, they point out a more positive and proactive reentry behaviors¹¹.
- **Religion:** Every company has to treat religion variable with extremely caution. Some expatriates may acquire different and liberal behaviors and values expressed by the religion professed in the host country in which the international assignment is accomplished. This may result in a conflict with the values and creeds shared by the family members or other colleagues (this fact happens mostly when an employee belonging from the Middle-East culture experiences an international assignment in the western countries).
- **Marital status:** The family context can have simultaneously a positive and negative impact for the reentry process. Past researches, from that mainly Cox (2004), have demonstrated that single expatriates experienced higher social difficulties upon the reentry, characterized by a greater depression than their married colleagues that is due also by a stronger identification with the host-culture. In addition it explains in his studies that married repatriates are usually

¹⁰ Szkudlarek B., 2009, "*Reentry—A review of the literature*", International Journal of Intercultural Relations.

¹¹ Cox L. P., Khan H. R. & Armani A. K., (2013), "*REPATRIATE ADJUSTMENT AND TURNOVER: THE ROLE OF EXPECTATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS*", REVIEW OF BUSINESS AND FINANCE STUDIES;

helped by their spouses, who can play a considerable supportive role in the repatriation program since they share similar reentry challenges and they can understand and support each other during the transition¹². Nevertheless, in the other a married expatriate involves notable efforts spent by the company. As a matter of fact, the organization should provide an accommodation also for the spouse, every adjustments that concern the housing, working and insurance policies (a poor adjustment of spouse sometimes corresponds to an early returning home of expatriates before have finished the assignment), and this journey ends only with the reentry of both of them, which implies more costs for the company to guarantee the readjustment in the home country for the couple¹³.

- **Prior intercultural experience:** This last feature needs more empirical research to have an adequate reliability. Martin and Harrell (2004) hypothesized that workers who have already experienced other international assignments and dealt with the reentry distress should react positively on the consecutive cultural transitions. However, Cox (2004) indicated that there is no relationship between prior intercultural experiences and reentry satisfaction or difficulties experienced.¹⁴

2.3.2) External situation variables

- **Culture distance:** Each company has to take care about the existing culture in foreign countries when it develops an international expansion strategy. This procedure is worth in each department, in particularly in the HR department. An excellent international human resource management must verify what is the culture in the country in which the assignment will be done and how differs from the home country. Numerous studies recognized that the difference between the home country and the host country culture may have a huge influence on the repatriation's course, affecting the degree of change within the expatriate. The difference in norms and values between the environments can have a substantial impact on the repatriation adjustment, which is due to the degree of cultural learning theory. If a sojourner is open mind to new cultures

¹² Szkudlarek B., 2009, "*Reentry—A review of the literature*", International Journal of Intercultural Relations.

¹³ Cox L. P., Khan H. R. & Armani A. K., (2013), "*REPATRIATE ADJUSTMENT AND TURNOVER: THE ROLE OF EXPECTATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS*", REVIEW OF BUSINESS AND FINANCE STUDIES;

¹⁴ Szkudlarek B., 2009, "*Reentry—A review of the literature*", International Journal of Intercultural Relations.

he/she may acquire new behavioral aspects that are expected in the host country. Consequently, this can lead to a replacement of the old values from the home country in favor of the new ones got abroad. Therefore, the greater the cultural distance among the countries, with a divergence in norms and values, more difficult will be the reassessment in the home country where the repatriates have to relearn and familiarize again with the home culture. This consequence is known as the “*reverse culture shock*”, by which the repatriate feels like a foreigner in the own country due to the culture identity change occurred during the international assignment. Some empirical studies have been conducted to assess the differences among returnees coming from different countries. However, Gregersen & Stroh (1997) argued this thesis, explaining that the heterogeneity of the countries in question contribute to lower significantly the influence of the cultural distance among them¹⁵.

- **Length of intercultural sojourn:** As mentioned in the previous chapter, an international assignment can have a duration that goes through from 3-5 months to many years. Obviously, the assignment’s length may obstacle the reentry adaptation. Many studies found out that with a big length of sojourn, the individual tends to better integrate to the host country environment, making the returning adjustment more complex¹⁶. Also Forster (1994) has reached similar results, discovering that repatriates with a short-term assignment have encountered less challenges compared to their colleagues attending a long-term assignment. Other researches are incoherent with the studies already mentioned, such as those of Gregersen and Stroh (1997), which have pointed out that Finnish returnees and the relative spouses experienced some of the greatest readjustment dares, although the length of the assignment had haven’t a significant role in that distress¹⁷.
- **Time since return:** For the major part of the experts, the time passed since an individual’s return from abroad follow the same pattern of the length of the sojourn, as an indicator of reentry readjustment. It has been observed in the case of Spanish repatriates that the longer the time elapsed since their returns,

¹⁵ Szkudlarek B., 2009, “*Reentry—A review of the literature*”, International Journal of Intercultural Relations.

¹⁶ Sussman M. N., (2002), “*Testing the cultural identity model of the cultural transition cycle: sojourners return home*”, International Journal of Intercultural Relations.

¹⁷ Szkudlarek B., 2009, “*Reentry—A review of the literature*”, International Journal of Intercultural Relations.

more work-related difficulties emerged for them (pushing the HR managers to invest in practices that strive to shorten the period of readjustment process)¹⁸. Instead, Cox (2004) argued this theory explaining that there is no a significant relationship between the time since return and the readjustment process¹⁹.

- **Contact with host-country individuals:** An expatriate concern deals with the settlement in the new country, in which an individual feels out of place. It has figured out a positive correlation of a good quality and huge amount of contacts with host-country individuals with the expatriation adjustment. Therefore, it can be argued that a more interaction with host-country individuals should make easy the integration in the new context, bringing an easier adaptation of new values and norms, changing in this way the cultural identity. Then, it is predictable that a good frequency and quality of contacts is negative correlated with the readjustment process, because the returnees will feel more tied with the host-country²⁰. However, further researches are needed to prove this relationship, like suggested by Hammer et al. (1998), who didn't find in their empirical researches a direct correlation between the host-country contacts and the reentry challenges faced by repatriates²¹.
- **Contact with home-country individuals:** Instead we notice an opposite pattern regarding the keeping touch with home-country individuals. It has been examined that maintaining personal contacts with individuals in the home-country during the assignment it can be related to a fewer reentry distress. Brabant et al. (1990) and Black et al. (1992) have shown that a good frequency of visits home tends to reduce the level of anxiety and stress that are usually correlated with the repatriation process. According with this statement, Cox (2004) reached in his study a higher level of reentry distress in repatriates who had visited less the home country, but he stressed the greater importance of the contacts' quality rather than their quantity. Just few years ago this was an uneasy process, but nowadays people are abler to keep in touch due to the

¹⁸ Sanchez Vidal M. E. et al, (2007), "*Repatriation adjustment process of business employees: Evidence from Spanish workers*", International Journal of Intercultural Relations.

¹⁹ Szkudlarek B., 2009, "*Reentry—A review of the literature*", International Journal of Intercultural Relations.

²⁰ Sussman M. N., (2002), "*Testing the cultural identity model of the cultural transition cycle: sojourners return home*", International Journal of Intercultural Relations.

²¹ Szkudlarek B., 2009, "*Reentry—A review of the literature*", International Journal of Intercultural Relations.

technological improvement, which has boosted the communication tools within and outside borders. Thanks to mail, social networks and other method of internet communications let the individuals to stay more connected, which has been reported as very easy and satisfying for maintaining existing relationship²².

- **Housing conditions:** This last external variable is a crucial factor affecting the reentry process. When an employee decides to undertake an international assignment program, besides a certain wage in the agreement are included several benefits that are helpful for a better adjustment during the period of assignment, from that also the high-comfort housing. At the same time, this benefit is strictly needed by the repatriates upon the return in order to readjust themselves in the home country. According to Black et al. (1992), a company has to provide an adequate housing condition arrangements for its returnees, which should facilitate the reentry process.²³

2.4) Reentry practices and readjustment

We have just seen how a repatriate employee is widely affected by a great extent of variables (internally and externally at the same time), which force the organization to develop an effective repatriation program if it doesn't want to see its investment to be wasted. Even if there are several existing literatures available regarding the challenges influencing the reentry process, there are few resources analyzing the practices involved to achieve an effective repatriation, nay there are but they lack of empirical investigations. The repatriation process should be addressed by the company that provides support practices, managing all the repatriates' expectations already prior to departure until the readjustment in the home environment. However, it is not a rare case that these individuals are left alone in those steps. As a matter of fact, a survey of KPMG's Global Assignment Policies and Practices about more than 600 companies worldwide, highlighted that less than a third of the surveyed firms offered standard repatriation benefits, such as mentoring programs, counseling, and internal career planning and job

²² Szkudlarek B., 2009, "*Reentry—A review of the literature*", International Journal of Intercultural Relations.

²³ Szkudlarek B., 2009, "*Reentry—A review of the literature*", International Journal of Intercultural Relations.

placement, to their global assignees²⁴. This neglect leads to a two inevitable consequences. First of all, due to the repatriation mismanagement the firms may encounter a high risk to lose its valuable talents carrying with themselves all skills and knowledge gained abroad, obtaining a competitive advantage by leveraging them. Secondly, in the last years we have witnessed the “*self-initiated repatriation*”, by which repatriates return to the home country on their own behalf and without any company supports. So, we are going to observe, one by one, in a more detailed way the reentry practices employed by the firm and the “*self-initiated repatriation*”.

2.4.1) Company support

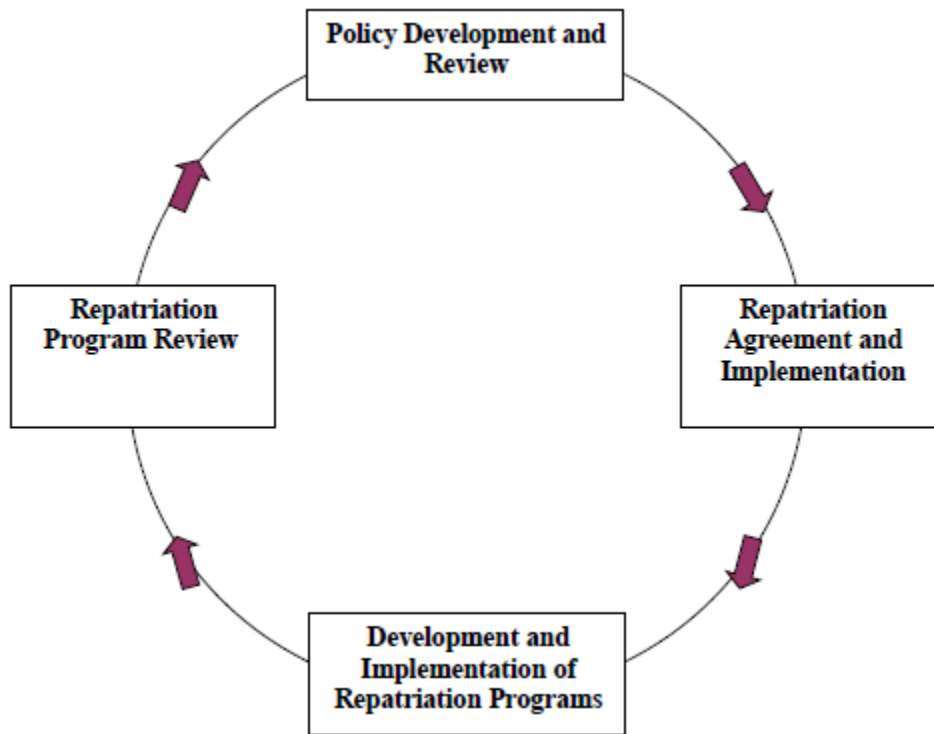
An international experience normally brings to the company and to the individual a valuable set of skills and knowledge, with a notable opportunity to grow, both culturally and managerially. The repatriate’s growth will be obtained if it will be ensured the fully satisfaction of its needs, that must be retained at the moment of returning at the home organization. Multinational companies may affect the employees’ commitment by developing successful repatriation strategies, which can substantially reduce the high repatriation turnover due to the implementation of policies and practices. Anyway, many firms seem to neglect this step, sometimes they don’t consider repatriation a phase of the international assignment and, consequently, they lack of careful planning and implementation. Doing this, the repatriates may feel neglected by the company, while it must take them in high consideration if it wants to retain its valuable talents.

An international company willing to achieve this goal and accomplish an effective repatriation strategy must follow a model, which is subdivided in four stages and they are cyclical in nature. Those four steps are illustrated in the figure below.²⁵

²⁴ Bilek-Portalla E., (2015), “*Repatriation Best Practices Benefit Both Employee and Employer*”, Bloomberg BNA.

²⁵ Chew J. & Debowski S., (2008), “*Developing an Effective Repatriation Strategy for MNC: A Model and Tools for International Human Resource Management*”, Journal of Comparative International Management;

Figure 4: The cyclic process of developing a repatriation strategy



Chew J. & Debowski S., (2008), *“Developing an Effective Repatriation Strategy for MNC: A Model and Tools for International Human Resource Management”*, Journal of Comparative International Management

In the first stage the organization plans and develop the policies for the implementation of the international strategy. In the second step, the strategy must be translated into a formal documented agreement. The third phase consists in the implementation of the repatriation program through organizational supports and practices. In the end, it should be taken a review of the final process in order to assess if there are some areas that are needed of interventions by HR department.²⁶But let’s see in detail those four steps:

- **Policy development and review:** A company that attempts to retain its employees after an international assignment must plan the repatriation program just before the actual return at home. It should reduce the level of distress and anxiety experienced by expatriates generally associated with the repatriation. In this planning, there are constructed the policies that should provide the guidelines necessary to guarantee that the repatriates will be treated fairly during the international assignment. The initial draft of the policies can be

²⁶ Chew J. & Debowski S., (2008), *“Developing an Effective Repatriation Strategy for MNC: A Model and Tools for International Human Resource Management”*, Journal of Comparative International Management.

developed by conducting a benchmarking of the previous repatriates' interviews, with the consultation of the IHRM experts and searching the previous literatures about it. Several elements may be included in a policy²⁷:

- 1) A statement recognizing the possible stress that may be caused by the repatriation, and which support will be provided by the firm during the transition;
 - 2) An affirmation of the value of expatriates to the employer, and the importance of their skills upon their return.
 - 3) A review of all the repatriates' rights during the reentry process;
 - 4) An outline of the degree to which the employer accepts responsibility for family settlement on return to the home country;
 - 5) The acknowledgment of the special support services that can provide assistance to the repatriates during the transition step.
- **Repatriation agreement and implementation:** Once having develop the policies for the international strategy, they must be translated into a documented agreement. The relevant agreement is made, or it should be, at the beginning of the international assignment, which let the company to reach better the expatriate's goals and expectations, making easy the leveraging of the skills acquired by the repatriates upon the return. In a such typical agreement are comprised every guidelines for the assignment period, the incentive payment, a sure positioning better or equal than one held before, any detailed instructions for the reentry and a repatriation program that provide assistance to the repatriates and their family to the readjustment upon the return²⁸. In the next page, there are summarized the main components that lead to an effective repatriation agreement.

²⁷ Chew J. & Debowski S., (2008), *"Developing an Effective Repatriation Strategy for MNC: A Model and Tools for International Human Resource Management"*, Journal of Comparative International Management.

²⁸ MacDonald S. & Arthur N., (2005), *"Connecting career management to repatriation adjustment"*, International Journal of Career Management.

Figure 5: Elements of an effective repatriation agreement

Agreement Components
1. Specify the overseas posting period.
2. Incorporate a return incentive payment to compensate for dislocation effects.
3. Provide assurance that, on return, a job will be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mutually acceptable • have greater responsibility than that held previously • is a promotion from that held previously
4. Six to twelve months prior to returning, arrange networking visits for the expatriate and family to return home in order to increase visibility with line and HR managers.
5. Develop repatriation programs to enable a smooth transition back into the work setting.
6. Provide relocation benefits including pre-repatriation house hunting and school search.
7. Shipment of personal goods should be expedited.

Chew J. & Debowski S., (2008), *“Developing an Effective Repatriation Strategy for MNC: A Model and Tools for International Human Resource Management”*, Journal of Comparative International Management.

The considered agreement should be signed prior the departure for the international assignment, which guarantees the expatriates a fair and equitable support upon the return. This would be probably the first important task to retain the good talents and to see its investment be well capitalized.

- **Development and implementation of the repatriation program:** A HR division can develop a repatriation agreement within policies aimed to assist the repatriate with any necessary benefit, but it doesn't worth nothing if the agreement will not be implemented in the moment of reentry. Not only, but the organization must guarantee that the international assignment favors the individual career of the repatriate, it should provide to the repatriate a position that requires the newly acquired skills and, in particular, that ensures a better improvement career than the employees don't decide to perform the international assignment. To fulfill those duties, the employers exploit all the reentry practices useful for the best re-adaptation and retention of the repatriates.

According with the existing literature, the most common used practice for the repatriation strategy is the reentry **training and coaching**. As well as the company provide a training

to the employees prior the departure, the same procedure must be applied starting some months before the return, if it wants to obtain a successful repatriation. The training session should be concentrated primarily in assisting the repatriates and the relative family to align their expectations with the new actual conditions that they are going to face, both within the home organization, but also mainly within the home environmental²⁹. An interesting empirical investigation was conducted by Szkudlarek (2008), who interviewed 31 trainers and coaches and she analyzed their relative training program. In this study the training has been distinguished on the base of timing, location, duration, group composition and methodology³⁰. The outcomes were unsatisfactory. In fact, according to the responses this practice was largely neglected not only by the organization, but also by the repatriates themselves.³¹

Another useful reentry practice regards the exploitation of **the mentors**. A mentor is a sort of advisor and confidant, and its core role is to maintain an efficient contact between the assignees and the home organization. A company that strives to fulfill a successful repatriation should provide a mentoring program onset the international assignment, and not only at the closure of that. In this way, it would be possible to allow the expatriate to feel more connected to the home-country and, then, experience a less distress upon the return. At the reentry, the mentor, with the supervision of the HR manager, seek the best job opportunities suitable for the new repatriates' expertise.³²

That operation is strictly connected with the policy mentioned above. Indeed, one of the component to achieve an effective repatriation agreement is to ensure a work position that will be more rewarding than the position held before. So, the organization has to guarantee the type of job offered after the oversea assignment, which lead to two results. First of all, it would incentive the employees to undertake an international assignment project. Secondly, having issued a guarantee the company will consider and take all the necessary steps to assist them in the repatriation phase, reducing the level of stress and anxiety experienced by the returners upon the reentry³³.

²⁹ Bonache J., (2005), "**JOB SATISFACTION AMONG EXPATRIATES, REPATRIATES AND DOMESTIC EMPLOYEES. The perceived impact of international assignments on work-related variables**", Universidad Carlos III de Madrid.

³⁰ Szkudlarek B., 2009, "**Reentry—A review of the literature**", International Journal of Intercultural Relations.

³¹ Szkudlarek B., (2008), "**Spinning the Web of Reentry. (Re) connecting reentry training theory and practice**", Erasmus Research Institute of Management;

³² Chew J. & Debowski S., (2008), "**Developing an Effective Repatriation Strategy for MNC: A Model and Tools for International Human Resource Management**", Journal of Comparative International Management.

³³ Caligiuri P. & Lazarova M, (2001), "**Strategic Repatriation Policies to Enhance Global Leadership Development**", Journal of World Business.

The communication is a crucial mean in the repatriation strategy, as well as during the whole period of assignment. Here, for communication we don't mean only between the two parties (i.e. the repatriates and the company), but also with other repatriates. To let it all be possible, there should be established a **network** among former expatriates in order to facilitate and encouraging the interactions. Moreover, the implementation of a database would be useful to gather information about specific details of the international assignment done, such as the percentage of completed assignment, what are the causes behind an early repatriation, the degree of repatriates' retention after the assignment. In the end, the repatriates with their families can be used as a tool of training and preparation for then new expatriates that are going to experience an overseas assignment. In the next page, there is illustrated a table where there are summarized the most common used practices for a repatriation strategy³⁴.

Figure 6: Practices for a successful repatriation program

Repatriation Program Features
1. Mentor program comprising the pairing of an expatriate with a home office senior management colleague who will ensure effective contact is maintained between the home office and the expatriate.
2. The provision of a support structure to facilitate family reintegration into the home country.
3. A separate organisational unit and repatriation manager that accepts primary responsibility for the specific needs of all expatriates, and plans for their return in the future.
4. Provision of flexible career placement process, career tracking and pathing systems that recognise and reward returning employees.
5. The conducting of a post assignment interview with the expatriate and spouse to review their views of the assignment and address any repatriation issues.
6. A company managed social event to welcome and recognise the employee and family.
7. The provision of repatriation counseling or workshops to ease adjustment (include family).
8. The provision of repatriate directory network to establish contact with other repatriates.
9. The maintenance of the individual's personnel files, and efficient transfer of these any new work location.
10. The use of repatriates as trainers for future expatriates.

Chew J. & Debowksi S., (2008), *"Developing an Effective Repatriation Strategy for MNC: A Model and Tools for International Human Resource Management"*, Journal of Comparative International Management.

³⁴ Chew J. & Debowksi S., (2008), *"Developing an Effective Repatriation Strategy for MNC: A Model and Tools for International Human Resource Management"*, Journal of Comparative International Management.

- **Repatriation program review:** This last phase is extremely important to determine the success of the repatriation strategy adopted. The achievement of an effective repatriation can be evaluated by analyzing four components: The effect on the outcome measures (job commitment, satisfaction and repatriate retention); the process evaluation (the assessment of the effectiveness of the several repatriation practices implemented); the deficit audit (the evaluation of the gaps existing in the process that should be fixed); the quality assessment (compare the own strategy with the several companies operating in the same market). In order to get those information, the organization may conduct reviews (that could be both interviews and surveys) to the repatriates, which will be extended to their relative spouses approximately two months after the return. The final outcomes will be useful for the company to review and change some policies in the agreement and how and when intervene to solve all the challenges that may incur during the transition³⁵.

2.4.2) Self-initiated repatriation

Where it is not developed an effective repatriation program or there is the fully neglect about this step, we may deal with the “self-initiated repatriation” phenomenon. With the term “self-initiated repatriation” (SIR) we refer to the reentry process of the former expatriates who start the return on their own behalf and without company support³⁶. We have already addressed the importance of the assistance to the repatriate. In effect, upon the reentry the repatriates may experience a reverse cultural shock, which is even more characteristic in repatriates that decide voluntarily to come back without company aid. The main concern about this field is that remains a very few studied subject. Thanks to the reentry practices, the organization may be able to solve the difficulties encountered by the former expatriates during the transition and after the return, but only if the company manages to intervenes early implementing even a documented agreement prior the departure in the foreign country.

³⁵ Chew J. & Debowski S., (2008), *“Developing an Effective Repatriation Strategy for MNC: A Model and Tools for International Human Resource Management”*, Journal of Comparative International Management.

³⁶ Andresen M. & Walther M., (2012), *“Self-Initiated Repatriation: A Cross-Country Comparative Study Between Denmark, France, and Germany”*, Department of Business Administration, Social Sciences and Economics, University of Bamberg.

Said that, it is easily to suppose that SIRs risk to face more challenges compared to their colleagues that are helped by the firm, which constitutes a barrier for any interventions by the reentry staff and for any exploitations of the knowledge acquired by the employee abroad.

There have been already conducted some empirical research about this topic. For example, Begley et al. (2008) found out in their empirical research in Ireland that repatriates who initiate the repatriation process without company supports faced more challenges, leading to a higher concern regarding the following work adjustment in the home organization³⁷. Instead, Andresen & Walther (2013) discovered in their empirical study that the reception of the SIRs by the employment markets can differ substantially basing on the country analyzed (in this case Denmark, France and Germany)³⁸. In the end, an analysis ran by Guo et al. (2013) focused on the reasons behind the return by SIRs in China. They discovered that the career opportunity was the main motive that pushed them to come back in the home country, because they found more job opportunities in their country, whereas there was a lack in the host country. Moreover, they mentioned also the importance of the family and of their own culture regarding the reentry decision, in which they stressed the relevance to stay close to their aging parents and care about them³⁹.

However, it is obvious that this context needs further research in order to have more reliable data that confirm what we have already said and which other factors may affect the decision to start the return by own behalf. We may compare the theoretical assumptions with the empirical data collected with the surveys and interviews that we are going to analyze in the next chapters.

2.5) Benefits of an effective repatriation

The achievement of a successful international assignment, with an effective repatriation program, can bring notable advantages both for the organization and the individual.

³⁷ Begley A., Collings D. G. & Scullion H., (2008), *“The cross-cultural adjustment experiences of self-initiated repatriates to the Republic of Ireland labour market”*, Employee Relations.

³⁸ Andresen M. & Walther M., (2012), *“Self-Initiated Repatriation: A Cross-Country Comparative Study Between Denmark, France, and Germany”*, Department of Business Administration, Social Sciences and Economics, University of Bamberg.

³⁹ Guo C., Porschitz E. T. & Alves J., (2013), *“Exploring career agency during self-initiated repatriation: a study of Chinese sea turtles”*, Career Development International.

For the individuals.

The benefits that can be reached by the repatriates can be both professionally and personally. Talking about the professional benefits, the main reason for undertaking an international assignment is to get a career advancement and development. This task has been already discussed in the previous chapter when we said that a career improvement is usually a policy agreed in the repatriation program, which must be ensured by the company if it doesn't want to lose the employee and its skills. Consequently, with the certain provision of a higher rewarded position in the organization, the repatriate will feel more valued by its company and the repatriate's self-image will tend to increase. This recognition may result in a better commitment and feeling of trust to the company by the former expatriate, who will be more likely to remain within the corporate.

Furthermore, we had the possibility to observe from the existing literatures that the majority of the repatriates interviewed experienced a certain level of stress and anxiety upon the return. Such a distress is often the result of an unsuccessful repatriation program, or the totally neglect about that by the organization. Instead, if the company manage to develop an effective repatriation process with the adequate supports, the repatriates can perceive themselves more valued by the company that take in high consideration the international assignments experienced by them. Therefore, an efficient and proactive assistance may reduce the level of distress experienced by the repatriates, which facilitates and make easier the process of readjustment in the home environment. In the end, all of that may determine a better performance, assisted by the experiences and skills acquired abroad, which can lead to a higher satisfaction for the position covered.

Something that a company may neglect is that the repatriation process could be frustrating and stressing not only to the repatriates, but also to their relative spouses. In fact, it has been demonstrated a positive relationship between the readjustment of the spouse and the repatriate's work performance, as well as impacting positively to his or her productivity, satisfaction and commitment inside the organization after being returned.

One last positive factor that impacts the individual personally is that she or he becomes more open minded and flexible upon the return, which is due to their international experiences in foreign countries where the repatriates had to adapt themselves to the new environment and stand with different cultures. The final outcomes reported by the

repatriates are a greater respect for different norms and values and becoming more culturally sensitive⁴⁰.

For the organization.

As introduced at the beginning of this chapter, there are several reasons to whom a firm decided to undertake an international assignment. With certainty, the most desirable of them regards the international expansions of the own businesses, attract and get new markets and maintain the existing ones, gaining competitive advantages against the other rivals. In order to achieve this goal, the organization has to exploit all the skills and international knowledge acquired by the repatriates during the period of work abroad. But all of those expertise risk to be ruined if the company mismanages the repatriation process. In fact, this is a crucial step that determines the success or failure of the whole international assignment and consequently the utilization of the new knowledge learned in the foreign country.

A company that strives to promote the international assignment experience in the future has to take care about the all repatriation program. The supports given to the former expatriates and the guarantee of policies agreed upon the return are positive means to make the repatriates perceived highly valued. Therefore, it automatically shows how the former expatriates are treated by the company and which benefits they are going to attain, which consists in a positive promotion to the other employees to join an overseas experience if they are sure there will be a career improvement in exchange. Simultaneously, the organization can keep enhancing future international managers, developing global leaders who will be strictly indispensable to maintain a relevant position in the international market place and ensure a more efficient control of their foreign subsidiaries.

Last but not least, an effective repatriation process would imply a stronger retention of the own employees. For a MNC an international assignment requires a huge amount of efforts and money spent to achieve that investment, which will be necessary during all the phases. The main crucial concern upon the return regards the level of degree of repatriates' resignations. Losing the own employees, the company is going to lose not only their valuable talent and skills, who certainly could be needful resources both for the home organization and for the international strategic expansion, but also it is going to see its investment return completely wasted. Instead, as expressed in the existing literatures,

⁴⁰ Caligiuri P. & Lazarova M, (2001), "*Strategic Repatriation Policies to Enhance Global Leadership Development*", Journal of World Business.

it had been reported an increase of the repatriates' retention rate to the companies that manage to support in an efficient manner their former expatriates and provide them has more possibilities to retain them⁴¹. This is must be a critical factor that should be considered by the organizations, because a leaving of a former expatriate may consist not only to the loss of a valuable expertise but it can represent a potential competitive advantage for the rivals if the repatriate decides to leave the company to join a former organization's rival.

2.5.1) Knowledge transfer

At this point it is clear the mission that an organization strives to obtain through an international assignment. The expatriate management is an efficient tool in order to ensure a perfect coordination and communication among the head-quarter and the subsidiaries. All the skills and expertise gained in the foreign country represent the knowledge, which transferred in the home organization, it will be employed to improve the efficiency necessary to attain competitive advantages compared the rivals, which it will be helpful in the international strategic expansion context. That knowledge transfer can occur at different directions and take any levels within the organization, by which the company can exploit leads to "economies of knowledge"⁴². However, the company has to implement a straightforward and effective knowledge management perspective by handling the transfer and the existing knowledge in order to fulfill those goals.

Usually, a company adopts a knowledge management perspective for at least four purposes⁴³:

- It may shed light on the different expatriate policies and options.
- It can provide a list of different types of international transfer and learning.
- It is helpful to detect additional factors that may affect the expatriate performance.
- The repatriation concern assumes a broader perspective due to a knowledge management perspective.

⁴¹ Caligiuri P. & Lazarova M, (2001), "*Retaining repatriates: The role of organizational support practices*", Journal of World Business.

⁴² Persson M., (2006), "*Unpacking the Flow: Knowledge Transfers in MNCs*", Doctoral Thesis at Uppsala University.

⁴³ Bonache J., Brewster C. & Suutari V., (2007), "*Preface: Knowledge, International Mobility, and Careers*", International Studies of Management & Organization.

The critical issue referring the transfer knowledge regards the gap between what is learned by the repatriate during the international assignment and what is really utilized by the company. Such a gap exists due to the barriers that obstacles the knowledge transfer and an automatic spread of it within the organization is extremely difficult without efficient tools.

Therefore, the organization has to develop the right knowledge transfer tools if it wants to attempt to collect all the knowledge gained during the overseas assignment. In the existing literatures, it is noticed a set of means utilized by the corporations in order to manage better the knowledge transfer⁴⁴:

- **Transmission channels:** the ICT is the working basis of this kind of tool. Employees are kept in touch through the exploitation of formal integrative channels such as global forums, workshops, intranet systems, telephone conferences and permanent international committees. This particular system has the both functions to direct link the units between them with complementary abilities as well as to duplicate the knowledge in the units that have similar abilities.
- **Motivation channels:** it regards to the all mechanisms, such as mentoring programs and other activities, with the purpose of promoting the share of values, a common language and a corporate culture that are accepted by the employees despite their own background and culture within the organization in order to augment the knowledge transfer.
- **Socialization channels:** the last knowledge transfer tools deal with the incentives to the behavioral outcomes, which facilitate the intensification of knowledge transfer and sharing. Not only, but due to this rewarding the repatriates perceived their talent and knowledge appreciated and valued by the firm.

However, even with those channels the transfer can be easily hindered by some barriers. Knowledge can be categorized in explicit and tacit, where the latter is more difficult to codify since regards the “*know how*” and skills acquired abroad. The part of knowledge that consists of tacit elements belongs the repatriate’s mind, so it represents itself a bound that is difficult to penetrate. Considering that a tacit knowledge cannot be easily codified, the only way to analyze it is when the individual executes the won knowledge through

⁴⁴ Gooderham P. N., (2007), “*Enhancing knowledge transfer in multinational corporations: a dynamic capabilities driven model*”, Knowledge Management Research & Practice.

the practices, which obviously it will require time and money with the uncertainty to assess it correctly.

Another type of obstacle that may occur is the cultural and structural barrier. Sometimes, the elements necessary to support and facilitate the learning process are often neglected by the organization. Such a lack of interest about that issue leads to an inadequate cost of time and money to implement the rightful mechanisms necessary to manage efficiently the knowledge transfer overcoming the barriers.

Sometimes, a knowledge transfer barrier may stem from an inefficient process of organizational learning. The resulting obstacle can derive from a lack of interest, structures and initiatives oriented to the knowledge transfer and sharing. Consequently, the former expatriates are forced to spread their newly knowledge through their own ways, which could lead to disappointing results⁴⁵.

2.6) the repatriates' loyalty issue

I intentionally leave this issue at the end of the theoretical chapter because it represents a very topic regarding the repatriates' management concern. During those years all the scholars have discussed about the worrying repatriation's turnover rate upon the return after the international assignment, seeking to find the reasons that push the former expatriates to leave their organization for a better employment position in another companies, which many of times are competitors of the former. In the end, we are going to compare the survey's results with the theoretical framework in order to assess if there will be a match with the data collected in the past literatures.

It has been noticed in the recent studies a direct relationship between the repatriates' turnover rate and the level of distress experienced by them. Indeed, the challenges affecting the repatriation process that we observed before, such as the reverse culture shock, undervaluation of the newly gained skills and knowledge, a no guarantee of the career advancement expectations and problems relative to the family and housing conditions, can have the negative effect to increase the repatriate's resignation rate. In support of this theory there are data collected through surveys by the scholars, which they are anything but encouraging. A survey conducted by Lee and Liu (2007) pointed out that the 25 percent of repatriates decided to leave their parent companies within one year upon

⁴⁵ Berthoin, A., (2001), "*Expatriates contribution to organizational learning*", Journal of General Management.

the reentry due to the high level of distress experienced⁴⁶. And this trend is going to rise if we consider a broader range of time. In fact, according to the 2004 Global Relocation Trend Report, it was observed that this percentage increased until to reach the 44 percent of repatriates that left their company within the two years upon the reentry⁴⁷. The real concern related to the turnover regards not only the failure of the investment done, which required a considerable financial burden for the organization, but with the individual leaving we also assist the flow of the key resources and core competencies with them allowing the other competitors to gain those competitive advantages without a broad investment of time and money, wherein their skills seem to be more demanded and appreciated. In the end, all of those factors have a negative impact for the future international assignment projects. The organization will slowly lose the ability to recruit its employees to join an overseas assignment program because they perceive it as a negative working career, even if the truth is merely the opposite.

Anyway, we have already observed that the HR department should be able to prevent those challenges through the development of supportive practices and with the implementation of an effective repatriation agreement. Therefore, why do we continue to witness this negative trend?

It has been demonstrated that an ongoing communication system among the expatriates and the organization shortens the level of the repatriates' turnover rate. In particular, it was discovered that the repatriates' perception to the support practices influences mostly the turnover's rate, rather the support practices themselves⁴⁸. This study indicates that repatriates' resignation intention strongly depend on the level of appreciation and visibility given by the company for the global experience and the quality of the offered career planning sessions. We have to consider that the implementation of a reentry support practice is an objective fact, whereas the perceptions of the usefulness and quality of that practices are absolutely subjective. Therefore, while in the former the identification of the challenges affecting the repatriations' turnover rate is easier (here we have to assess the implementation or not of some specific support practices, in the latter

⁴⁶ Lee H.W. & Liu C.H., (2007), "*An examination of factors affecting repatriates' turnover intentions*", International Journal of Manpower.

⁴⁷ Kraimer M. L., Shaffer M. A. & Bolino M. C., (2009), "*The influence of expatriate and repatriate experiences on career advancement and repatriate retention*", Human Resource Management.

⁴⁸ Caligiuri P. & Lazarova M, (2001), "*Retaining repatriates: The role of organizational support practices*", Journal of World Business.

the distress experienced upon the return is located in the repatriate's mind and perception, which represents a sort of barrier for the repatriation adjustment in the organization.

Therefore, the HR managers should treat this particular concern in a psychological manner, nay they should evaluate it by imaging a psychological contract. By this concept we mean the individual's beliefs about the obligations existing between the employees and the company. Usually, the employees tend to compare their efforts and sacrifices done for the company during the international assignment with the perceptions of the rewards and visibility obtained by the organization for taking the assignment. The greater level of equity perception between the two parts, the greater the likelihood for the repatriates to remain in their company after the reentry⁴⁹.

The last but not least issue to take in consideration for this specific concern regards the level of the repatriates' loyalty towards their organization. The organizational commitment represents the degree of an employee attachment with a certain company, with its vision, mission and goals, and his/her perception of membership with it⁵⁰. There are recognized three types of organizational commitment:

- **Affective commitment:** it refers to the strong emotional attachment for the company and its values and for the working position covered within.
- **Continuance commitment:** it regards to the evaluation of the all costs and negative impacts associated with leaving the organization.
- **Normative commitment:** it can be considered a forced loyalty to the company, because the individual feels to be obligated to stay in the firm even if he or she is no more satisfied.

The level of organizational commitment is inversely correlated to the repatriates' turnover rate. The individual that perceive themselves more tied to the organization's culture and values, which feel a high emotional attachment, they will be less inclined to leave the company⁵¹.

By this point, it is extremely important for the organization to provide incentives that strengthen the individual's organizational commitment towards the company.

⁴⁹ Caligiuri P. & Lazarova M, (2001), "*Retaining repatriates: The role of organizational support practices*", Journal of World Business.

⁵⁰ Sreeleakha P. & Mohan Raj P., (2014), "*An Examination of Factors Influencing Repatriates' Loyalty*", Alliance University, School of Business, Bangalore;

⁵¹ Cave H. A., (2014), "*Analysis of Current Repatriate Retention Concepts and Potential Future Avenues*", International Journal of Knowledge and Innovation in Business.

3) Methodology and analysis

As clarified in the previous chapter, the repatriation phenomenon comprises a large number of divergent essays among the scholars regarding the element characterizing this issue, and it still remain a few studied subject. In order to give a better validity to this dissertation, a research should be necessary. Through the appropriate research methodologies, we will be to extrapolate the useful data from the right target group (in this particular case the repatriates and the HR managers), then we will compare the empirical results to the theoretical statements made in the second chapter. In this way, we are going to assess the eventually alignment or divergence with the previous literature about this issue.

3.1) Research approach

When we conduct a research we may exploit two methodological approaches, which are the quantitative and qualitative method. Our choice is strongly forced by the type of information we need, and it strictly depends on the purpose of our thesis.

Adopting the former methodological approach, it would be possible to collect a huge amount of data, which involves to a large number of several cases that they will provide a statistical significance, which allows us to compare with the theoretical variable and then draw the final conclusion with the relative comments due. Compared with the qualitative method, the quantitative approach is more structured and formalized, wherein the useful information is transformed to in numbers and quantities, and the researches will compute the average of those numbers for each topic, which are necessary for the empirical analysis.

Instead, when we work with the qualitative method we generally deal with a small sample of target area, which is studied in depth. Its usage is for an exploratory research reason, within it is possible to gather information to gain a deeper understanding of the problem studied. Interviews and focus groups to small groups are the main tools exploited to accomplish a qualitative research.

By this way, the data collected cannot be used for general conclusions and we will not make generalizations. In order to understand in a more detailed way the repatriation program used by the MNCs, we should endorse the qualitative approach. However, it

would be possible to gather very few data regarding this field following the qualitative approach.

Instead, with the other method we will reach more respondents, giving a better validity and reliability to the empirical research.

So, our tool will be a survey wherein all the necessary questions are put and the resulting data will be analyzed after the comparison with the theoretical data.

3.2) Collection of data

It had been possible to draw up this dissertation due to the collection of the necessary data. Those data can be gathered through documentations, existing researches, interviews and surveys. Each chapter, until the last paragraph, had been written with the own proper data collection method.

The collection of the useful data can be structured in primary and secondary data.

The former refers to the information that has been collected directly from first – hand responses. It means that the information is original and it is taken through various method, such as surveys, questionnaires and interviews. The purpose of this approach is to gather the information for a specific relevant study, in this particular case the examination of the repatriation outcomes, positively and negatively, both for the repatriates and the organization and the support practices employed by the company to obtain the benefits from an effective repatriation program.

However, this method presents some problems, the major of those is the willingness to respond to the survey that we'll put online.

Obviously, the next chapter that concerns the survey results will be drawn up by applying the primary research.

Instead, through the secondary data approach we collect and analyses existing data from sources as statistical abstracts or previous research studies (usually they are used as a helicopter view, but tend to be useless for a specific managerial need). Also in this approach we encounter some problems.

Indeed, when we gather information from previous articles, we should ensure the accuracy and the age of data collected, assessing their reliability over time.

Therefore, we apply both the data collection approach considering the main subject of each chapter.

In the first two chapters, we gathered data from existing studies conducted by the scholars in order to understand entirely the repatriation phenomenon and how the companies should behave to support their repatriates and achieve an effective repatriation process. Obviously, as written previously it still remains a few studied field, then sometimes we may encounter some divergent theories about the factors affecting the reentry program. Moreover, we analyzed only researches and articles published in this last decade, which gives us more reliability of the data over time and we collect more accurate information. Instead, we will deal with the primary approach to gather original data from our respondents due to the application of two surveys, targeted to the analysis of the outcomes achieved both by the repatriates and the organizations and which practices are employed by the HR managers to support their employees abroad until their return. Due this tool we will be able in the next chapter to assess the results of the surveys and, after having analyzed them, we are going to compare the empirical data with the theoretical ones, checking if there are convergences among them.

Moreover, we will exploit the information given by the Alpha company that it will let us to explore its international assignment policy, studying each phase of the international assignment and how this company behaves in each particular step. All of those it will be possible due to a first – hand information, collected by the company documents.

3.3) Sample selection

When conducting researches, it is extremely important the sampling process for our future analysis and comparisons.

In order to fulfill an efficient research and collect useful data for our analysis, we decided to pick up a MNC as the first sample. Obviously, if we wanted to catch how firms exploit their human investment to transform their international assignment into global competitive advantages, our selection fallen on a large company that is leader in its sector, but more importantly that operates in the international arena. This fact leads us to imagine how is crucial the overseas assignment for this organization, considering that it has several plants in each mainland, mostly in Europe.

Therefore, we are going to assess its international assignment policy, from the reasons to undertake this program until the reentry phase. Then we can compare what are written in the theoretical framework with the interesting real case.

In addition, two surveys will be put online in order to achieve the second sample. It consists of individuals that had already experienced an overseas assignment and they return at home after the period abroad, and the HR managers who had supported their employees during the international assignments. The results will be employed to make a comparison with the assumptions stated in the theoretical framework chapter.

In particular, through the survey for repatriates we are going to assess if the factors that affect our respondents' reentry effectively match the challenges highlighted in the second chapter, and what have been the final positive or negative outcomes achieved upon the return. While, the main aim through the survey for HR managers is to understand how the organization and HR department value the international assignment and their repatriates when they come back bringing all the knowledge and expertise acquired abroad, how they effectively support and assist their repatriates during the international assignment, mainly in the repatriation phase, and in the end what are the effects accomplished by the company due to the international assignment and, mostly, thanks to an efficient repatriation program.

3.4) Interviews' structure

Those two survey had been structured on the basis of the target selected. Even if there are some similar questions among the surveys (after all we deal with the same topic), many of them differ with the purpose to analyze in detail each aspect of this kind of phenomenon.

Then they differ in the amount of questions and issues treated. However, the framework is equal both for them. They are subdivided in three sections: General information; Expatriation process and Repatriation process. Even if the main subject of this dissertation focuses on the repatriation, we included also the expatriation process because it may happen that most of the challenges and final outcomes of the repatriation can stem from the management of the first stages of the international assignment, and then also the expatriation phase.

In the end of the dissertation, in the appendixes, there will be put the entire structure of the two surveys.

3.4.1) Survey for HR manager

This first survey consists of 16 questions, with the major part of those is in the Likert matrix. The closed questions are used to gather general information from the respondents, such as “have you ever experienced an international assignment” or “what is your company’s international staffing approach”, which let us know with whom we are dealing.

Instead, starting from the expatriation process part the questions are structured in the form of Likert matrix in order to assess if the respondent agrees with the statement and on which quantity. Through the Likert matrix we will be able to know for example if the respondent employs the support practices and how effectively he or she uses them.

The same pattern is followed in the questions part referred to the repatriation process. Also in the final part the majority of the questions are in the Likert matrix form, which let us know how the support practices impacted on the readjustment process for the repatriates upon the return. There are just few closed questions through them we will know if their repatriates had faced a reverse culture shock upon the reentry, and what is the resignation rate that occurs in the company after the end of the international assignment.

3.4.2) Survey for repatriate

Regarding about the second survey, we deal with 21 questions. It is longer than the first one, but we have to consider that it has more questions in the part concerning the General Information, whereby this survey will take the same minutes as the former one.

Also this survey is structured with closed questions, questions with more answers available and Likert matrix. At the beginning of the survey we encounter mostly closed questions, which are useful to know better and in depth our respondents. Subsequently, we notice the same pattern employed for the HR managers’ survey. Mainly, the questions are in the form of Likert matrix in order to assess for example how they perceived the support practices utilized to help them upon the reentry, and which outcomes (positive or negative) they achieved through the repatriation program.

At the end, we will collect together all the responses per each variable, we will draw the corresponding graphs and from that we will be able to state the final results that they are going to be compared with the theoretical data explained in the previous chapter.

3.5) Validity and reliability

It is well known that the validity of a survey or a questionnaire is based on the number of the responses accomplished. The higher the response rate percentage is, the more valid the survey conducted is.

The only real constraint for our analysis stem from our target choice. We already know that the repatriation issue needs to be more studied, because it still remains neglected by the scholars and, mostly, an undervalued process for the organization. Nowadays, due to the globalization we have witnessed to exponential international strategic expansions by the MNCs, which they employ more the international assignments program for the reasons already quoted before.

Nevertheless, the future assignees in a MNC represent a very few percentage of the total employees in the company. Moreover, without the allowances of the corporates it is forbidden the response by the employees to interviews done by people that don't belong to the organization, which is due to the privacy policies.

In order to overcome this barrier, the two surveys have been posted on LinkedIn, especially in the "Forum for Expatriate Management". This is the first major organization designed solely for Global Mobility practitioners⁵². Over 15.000 of professionals have joined this group, individuals that work for different companies and coming from different countries and culture. This could advantage this kind of analysis, because we are going to analyze the repatriation issue taking in consideration that the respondents belong to different organization and counties, hence we may encounter several different repatriation program approaches and factors fulfilled by the respondents and their companies. As a matter of fact, the results will tell us very few about the repatriation program management by the MNCs in the other countries if the respondents belong to the same nationality.

Moreover, we are going to exploit the various contacts of Company Alpha, which uses the international assignment program since it operates in more than 60 countries and it would be easier the research of the right target of interviewees.

In the end, in order to reach the highest possible number of respondents we sent the surveys directly to the HR managers of some MNCs, who they may forward those two surveys to their employees who undertook an international assignment.

⁵² <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/1056387>

4) An introspective view: Company Alpha

Through this chapter we are going to assess in depth and in a more detailed way an international assignment policy of one real case. As stated in the Introduction chapter, this company didn't allow me to mention its name in this dissertation due to the privacy policy. Therefore, from now on we are going to name this organization as "Company Alpha".

It is the leading multinational steel manufacturing corporation, and as a global business operating in more than 60 countries (mostly in Europe), needs to leverage the international mobility program and transfer its best skills and talents in order to have the right people in the right place at the right time, and to facilitate the development of its staff.

To accomplish those desirable outcomes, Company Alpha reviews the old terms and draws the new international assignment policy as a MNC should do if it wants to mobilize its human resources.

Here below we will check all the terms and policies comprised in this policy, and going to observe what are the drivers that push this company to promote an international assignment and how the benefits and the policies agreed differ according the type of international assignment stipulated.

4.1) International assignment policy

The purpose of this international assignment policy is to provide an overview of the terms and conditions for the future expatriates, as well as the norms governing the international assignments within the company.

What immediately stands out from this policy is the so called "Non – discrimination clause, by which Company Alpha points out that the international experience is an equal opportunity for all the employees, regardless the gender. So, the term "he" in the policy should be read "he or she".

This policy represents the full revision of the oldest one published in 2007, and the assignees have to follow the new guidelines if they undertake an international assignment after the 1st October 2014.

Like the others MNCs that mobilize their human resources, also Company Alpha is driven by five main pillars, which are shown in the figure below:

Figure 7: Company Alpha's drivers of change



The most important driver that pushes this company to exploit the international assignments is the strategic opportunity that stems from the mobility. In this way, the corporate has more possibilities to enter in new emerging and developed countries and strength its competitive advantages with the creation of value by combining the sharing of the best practices and knowledge across the group.

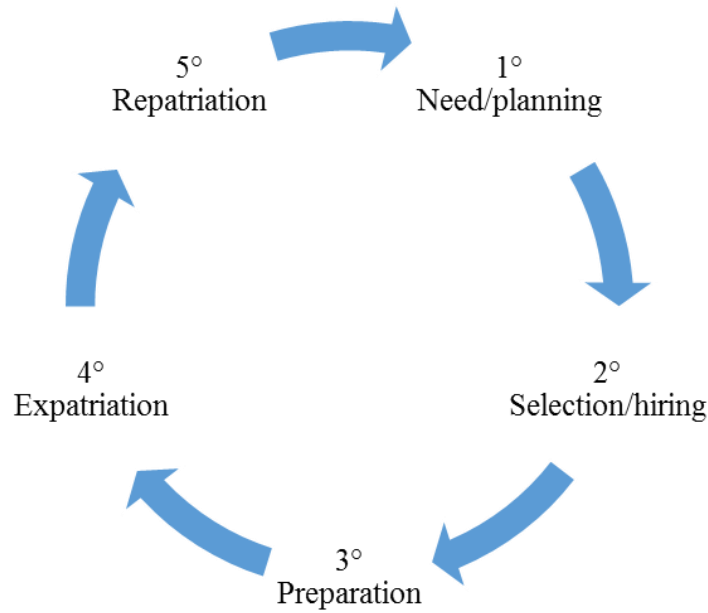
At the same time, this entails the development of the future global leaders. With this statement, Company Alpha doesn't mean the development of only managers belonging to the home country, but also the development of local people in the foreign countries. So, it doesn't build any barriers for the top position and it pursues a geocentric approach, therefore any employee could be designed for the top position, regardless their nationalities.

Last but not least, the investment done by the company for each international assignment must be set off against the expected outcomes of the mobility. A mobility must be seen as a project, similar to a capex project, with a required payback in term of people development or in added value for the investment by the company.

Indeed, the purpose of the international assignment is not to staff vacant positions that could be filled at a lower cost through local recruitment, in order to achieve a cost effectiveness.

Instead, regarding about the international assignment cycle we can observe from the figure below that is similar to the international assignment cycle shown in the Introduction chapter, by which we can make comparisons among them:

Figure 8: International assignment cycle of Company Alpha

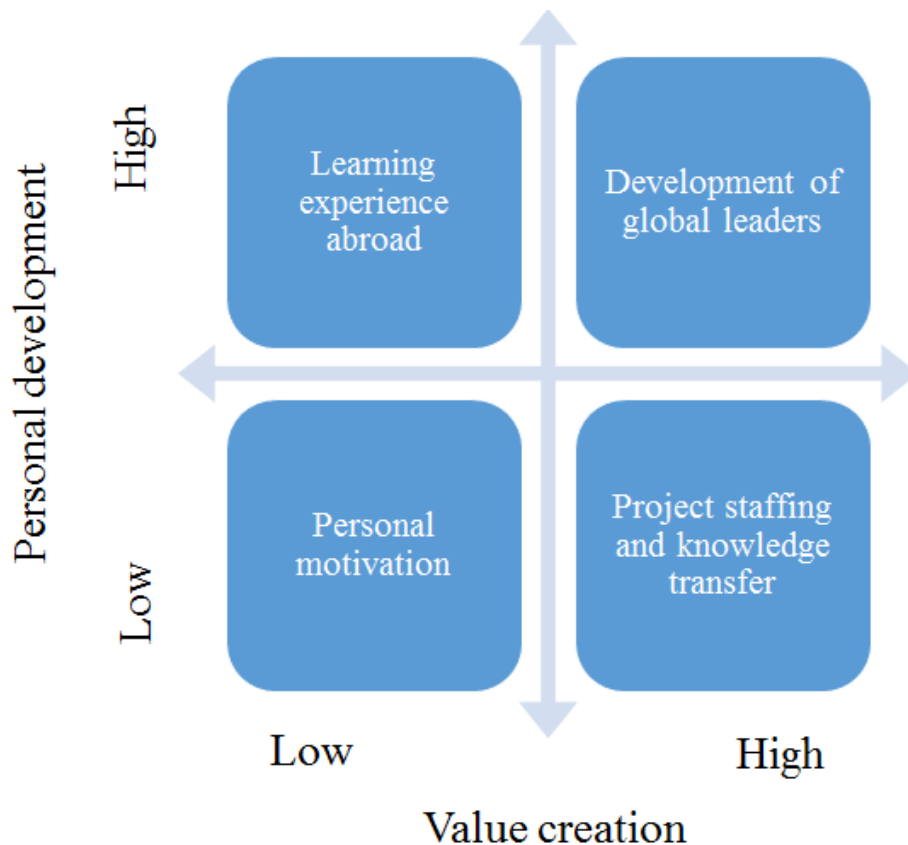


4.1.1) Mobility assignment needs and first steps description

Basing on the needs of the international assignment, Company alpha defines the type of assignment, and ultimately, the applicable mobility benefits. As declared before, there are many reasons for which a company should exploit the international mobility program, such as the acquisition and transfer of newly acquired knowledge and the development of the future global leaders. But, there are other drivers that strive an employee to undertake the international mobility, due to the personal motivation and the wish make an experience abroad (obviously the company will not satisfy those desires without profitable outcomes for itself).

Those needs could be summarized in a four – box model illustrated in the next page, with the main drivers are the Personal development and the Value creation:

Figure 9: Company Alpha's mobility assignment needs



The assignment will be done based on the motivation for the mobility. It is clear that the assignments for the aim of developing global leaders and knowledge transfer lead the highest and most immediate value for the organization.

A mobility driven by the **Personal motivation** is could be used to attain a first multi-cultural experience in the early period of the own career, to find answers for the own personal aspiration.

While the purpose of the **Learning experience abroad** consists to consolidate the career path. The assignee's ultimate ambition is to develop himself before a next step within his home country, and invest in the assignment to develop and improve business within the home area upon the return.

In conclusion, the added value for the company and the assignees are the two main pillars of our mobility policy. The balance between those two drivers will define the mobility conditions and benefits.

After having determined the mobility assignment need, the next step as explained in the previous figure consists in the selection of the incumbents. Company Alpha always makes

an accurate selection of its candidates, based on the mobility assignment needs both for the assignee and the organization.

In short, the process of hiring establishes a contract, that defines the conditions and terms of the mobility, mainly based on the added value of the mobility for the company. So, there is not a single standard package for the international assignment.

The next step concerns the preparation phase, where the firm and the business support the assignee, and his family when relevant, to face the possible difficulties that he may encounter abroad. Therefore, the incumbent receives an adequate formation that includes the cross-culture and language training, understanding the mission, the foreign environment wherein the assignment will be done, defining contacts, the time frame, defining the expected contribution and assessing any gaps that may occur.

In this stage, a specific development plan is defined, which also includes the personal development plan of the assignee according to his mission, his potential perspective and career path.

However, by this statement Company Alpha doesn't want to explain that the next role of the incumbent has to be perfectly clear before the beginning of the mission abroad, but targets and directions have to be tracked and updated accordingly.

4.1.2) Term sheets among short-term and long-term assignment

The international assignment package is a customized solution within a transparent framework and clear rules. Consequently, each type of assignment has its own peculiarities and term sheet.

Indeed, the term sheet defines the assignment, the compensation and the package, and all the elements will be bracketed in the table in the next page:

Figure 10: Company Alpha's term sheet features

Term sheet's elements
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assignment type• Assignment framework: localisation, short-term, long-term• Location• Duration• Mission targets and type• Status: incumbent with partner, with family or alone• Compensation: salary and bonus• Lump sum and allowances• School fees• Pension• Health• Tax• Working place and holidays• Completion bonus (if applicable)• Cost to company

Instead, regarding about the merit increases, promotions, changes in the mission and additional allowances have to be discussed and aligned with the home unit and the international assignment team before any decision is taken and any applications is made. The term sheet is prepared by the corporate international assignment team and it is based on the notice of international posting (“NIP”), which is prepared and submitted by the host HR. Besides to contain all the features quoted above previously, the NIP should also contain the expectations, objectives and key performance indicator (KPIs”) linked to each mobility assignment.

The host HR gets the responsibility on the implementation of the international assignment terms agreed, while the corporate international assignment team periodically reviews the correct implementation and application of the term sheet.

We already know that there is not a single standard contract and, accordingly to the type of assignment, the term sheet may differ a lot.

In fact, we can encounter two type of assignment: the short-term and long-term assignment.

At first sight, the main difference represents the duration of the international mobility. In the former the duration is from 3 to 12 months, while in the latter the assignment can last more than 12 months.

Another aspect focuses on the status of the incumbent, where in the short-assignment only the individual goes abroad, whereas in the other case both the single individual and the incumbent with his family are allowed to undertake the assignment.

Therefore, it could be reasonable to think that the short assignment type could be preferred by the company, because it involves less policies in the term sheet, which will lead to a minor intervention and assistance of the organization during the assignment, but more importantly it would entail less cost for this kind of project.

Moreover, the long-term assignments can be distinguished on the type of deployment:

- **Globally mobile employee:** incumbent hired specifically for placement in emerging markets without a home business unit, but generally to be globally mobile. An employee transferred to a developed market shall be localized in line with local remunerations level;
- **International temporary assignee:** a delegate moving out of his home country to work abroad, either as a bachelor (single civil status or moving without family) or accompanied. New entrants in Company Alpha cannot be considered as international temporary assignee in which case recruitment policy principles will be applied.

Generally, the duration of a long-term assignment should be three years. The duration is decided by the HR contacts and management of the host country aligned with the HR and management of the home country.

The long-term assignment can be extended twice, to a maximum period of five years in total.

Not only, the assignment benefits and term will differ when comparing the geography and the gaps between home and host location. Moving from USA to Canada, or from Germany to Spain is not the same as moving from USA to Ukraine or from Luxemburg to China. As a result, the mobility assignment will be different and those benefits will be less in the same geographical region.

The real substantial difference between the two types of assignment concerns the compensation. In the short-term assignment, the compensation framework includes:

- **Base salary:** the assignee shall continue to receive their regular salary in his home country

- **Mobility premium:** the premium is a fixed percentage of the net salary paid monthly as a net amount, which includes:
 - The **international mobility premium**, which is the 10% of the home net salary as cash incentive to encourage Company Alpha’s assignees to work abroad;
 - **Hardship allowances**, which is based on third party data, compensates the assignee for various constraints such as geographical, cultural and linguistic differences, as well as the political, social, economic and public health climate in the host country.

Over those, they are included also several benefits, such as housing and occasional return trips to the home country, until benefits for the achievement of specific, predefined KPIs at the end of the assignment.

Instead, in the long-term assignment we observe a different structure of the assignee’s compensation.

The host base salary is determined by using the home country net salary grossed up in the host country. This salary is agreed between home and host country HR. and it could be served as a “*sleeping base salary*” in the home country.

The **home country net expatriate income** will be calculated after the deduction of the home country social security contributions and income tax. Whereas, in order to determine the **gross host country salary**, the expatriate net income is converted, where necessary, into the currency of the host country using the average exchange rate over 12 months.

Obviously, the gross salary may be aligned accordingly with the salary levels of the host country wherein the assignment will be conducted (this usually happens when an assignee moves from an emerging market to a developed market).

When they deal with globally mobile employees, their salaries are paid on a net USD basis. But, this is not applicable when the employee is assigned to a developed market and specifically determined locations.

In cases of assignments in developed markets, this will be done applying local conditions without any mobility benefits (including school), with the exceptions of transfer as “global leader” or “project staffing/knowledge transfer” and in the case of temporary assignment limited to three years and commitment to return to an emerging market.

The **variable pay and bonus** are applied both for the international temporary assignments and globally mobile employees, but with a relevant difference. In fact, in the latter case

are eligible for the same variable pay or bonus schemes, wherever the exercise of their employment activity is. Whereas in the other case the same schemes will be applied, but only in the host country.

However, the most important peculiarity is the maintaining of a “*sleeping base salary*” for all assignees on an international temporary assignment during the assignment period. This salary is reviewed annually by the corporate international assignment team with the support of the host and home country HR, and it takes into account the following factors:

- The host country salary merit increase percentage (if applicable);
- The home country inflation percentage applied by the home country to local employees and approved by the Group Management Board. The inflation increase considered in the home country will not be applied on the sleeping base salary if the assignee doesn't have a salary increase in the host country.

The sleeping base salary is used for the calculation of the home country social security, pension plan and insurance where applicable. Moreover, it serves to keep the assignee informed about the level of his salary in the home country.

In the end, for all assignees will be paid some premium, more for whom undertakes an international temporary assignment. The premiums consist of the following elements:

- **International mobility premium:** it refers to the 10% of the home net salary and is a cash incentive to encourage Company Alpha's assignee to work abroad. It is determined at the beginning of the assignment and it cannot be increased during the assignment period. This is not applied to globally mobile employees;
- **Hardship allowance:** as explained previously, it is based on third party data, and it needs to compensate the assignees for various constraints, such as cultural and linguistic differences, as well as economic, political and public health climate in the host country. This is computed at the beginning of the international mobility and it is not usually reviewed. It is paid as a percentage of the home net salary, which will be grossed up using the host country tax and social security rate;
- **Cost of living differential:** it is applied to permit the assignee to maintain a purchasing power in the host country similar to the one in the home country, which is calculated on the portion of the salary typically spent on goods and services. It could be negative or non-existent;

- **Housing in the host country:** it is established a fixed housing budget by the corporate international assignment team, based on third party data and in alignment with the host country. If the assignee decides to rent a more expensive housing, he shall pay the additional cost himself. The housing budget can't be used by the assignee to finance the purchase of a property;
- **Home leave allowance:** the calculation is based on the costs of one economic class round trip to the home country per year for the assignee and all accompanying family members. The home leave allowance is paid to the assignee once a year and grossed up using the host country tax and social security rate, and it is always calculated at the time of the departure.

All premium and their applicability, according the type of assignment, are clustered in the table below:

Table 1: Applicability of the premiums accordingly the type of assignment

	International temporary assignment	Globally mobile employees
Cost of living differential	Applicable	Applicable
International mobility premium	Applicable	Not applicable
Hardship allowance	Applicable	Applicable
Housing in the host country	Applicable	Applicable
Home leave	Applicable	Leave travel allowance

4.1.3) Expatriation process and evaluation

After having determined the assignee and agreed on the term sheet related to the type of assignment going to cover (with the resulting base salary and premiums), the next step refers the expatriation.

Within the expatriation process, the induction of the assignee and his family is a key success factor managed by the host organization. Therefore, an efficient induction a success factor for the mobility.

Locally, peers or local HR contacts propose solutions to support the incumbents and their families, in order to help them and facilitate their sojourn in the foreign country.

The N+1 (the individual with a higher work position than the expatriate's one) gives feedbacks and coaches the assignee to optimize the benefits of the mission and help him to achieve the business objectives.

To keep maintaining an efficient communication among the expatriate and the organization and to assess the efficiency of the job done abroad, the performance and the development of the assignee are regularly shared with the home segment/unit through HR teams and/or during specific career committees.

Only the home unit and the corporate international assignment team have the right to discuss about relative merit increases, promotions, nominations and changes in the context of the expatriation such as prolongations. Each decision has to be discussed prior their implementation in order to ensure that these will not jeopardize the repatriation process or the potential next steps for the assignee.

Each doubt or question are always answered by the corporate international assignment team as well as the human resources contacts of the regions, which leads to a better adjustment of the expatriate in the host country and to make sure that the process is aligned.

But, the first main thing that extremely cares to the organization concerns the evaluation of the assignee's performance during the international assignment.

We have already said that the performance evaluation is kept assessed through the sharing of the development plan with the home unit. But Company Alpha makes use of a tool to evaluate the assignee's performance and potential, which is a survey conducted via online and hardcopy.

The first evaluation is accomplished through an online survey to the assignees wherein all the competences assessments and objectives to be fulfilled are represented, then made it again upon the return through a hardcopy way to estimate the outcomes attain during the international assignments. The assessment has to be fulfilled by the N+1 of the assignee, which generally is always the host manager, and he/she has to determine the eventual upgrade of the skills of the assignee and his relative achievement of the mission agreed with the home unit before the leaving. Therefore, during the mobility assignment

the assignee's assessment is periodically included and validated in the review process of the host segment.

Consequently, based on the evaluation of the assignee's performance they would be provided merit increases and promotions, but it still remains a host location duty. However, the corporate international assignment team has the responsibility to align the proposed merit increases with the home HR to guarantee that the assignees' remuneration remains within the home salary levels.

Instead, for globally mobile employees, the corporate international assignment team should coordinate the salary increases with the host segments.

In addition to previous tools described before, in order to evaluate the assignees' performance and any nominations it established an **expat career committee** by the corporate international assignment team and the corporate leadership development team, which shall meet at least once a year prior to the annual succession planning review.

The purpose of this committee is to review and discuss the performance and development of the expat between the home and host locations and to define the future/next role of the assignee. Nevertheless, the expat career committee shall not review the performance ratings of the assignee. The participants of this committee are:

- Home HR
- Host HR
- Corporate leadership development
- Corporate international mobility
- At least one senior management member of the home and host region

The resulting outcomes of the expat career committee shall be used by the host HR and manager for the development plan of the assignee and as an input for local succession plans and work force planning by the home HR and business management.

4.1.4) Company support practices and benefits

Company Alpha always strives to guarantee the best adjustment in the host country for all assignees during the international mobility program. As we saw in the previous chapters, the company's support practices are the main means to facilitate the integration of the own expatriates in the foreign countries, which brings to the organization a higher return on investment due to a more efficient performance developed by the assignees.

At this point, it is well clear that an ongoing communication is at the basis to make feel the assignees supported by the own home unit. Indeed, Company Alpha tries to keep maintaining a continue communication with its expatriates abroad.

In fact, the development and the performance of the assignee are regularly shared with the home unit through HR teams and during specific career committees.

The expat career committees have the main purpose to review and discuss about the performance and the development of the assignees, useful to determine the next future role, but at the same time to assess the presences of some challenges that could represent a barrier for the individual in the foreign environment.

However, in Company Alpha the main supportive work should be done by the host HR department. In fact, it should develop an induction program for all assignees and, whenever applicable, this program should also include the expatriate's families and partners. The aim of this program is to ensure that the assignees and their families get well integrated in the host country.

A dedicated HR contact for the international assignees should be named by the host HR. If necessary, he will receive an adequate training on the international mobility principles by the corporate international assignment team in order to assist in the best possible way the individual in the foreign country.

A "twin" should be designed for each assignee. The exploitation of a mentor should facilitate the integration of the expatriates and their families in the host environment. At the same time, whenever is possible, the "twin" should be an assignee who has been transferred to the foreign country previously from the same country or region as the assignee.

Instead, when Company Alpha specifically deals with assignees going abroad on assignments for the knowledge sharing and for development for global leaders, it recommends to assign a sponsor in his home location/segment.

A sponsor is an executive from the home unit who will support the assignee during his mission for relevant mobility cases. The role of the sponsor serves to maintain the contact with the assignee during his expatriation and to guarantee that the expatriate's personal development and experiences are known and considered by the home unit in order to facilitate the repatriation.

The assignee and the sponsor should have a formal contact at least twice a year, with at least one being held physically, e.g. during the home leave of the assignee.

When an employee goes abroad for an assignment, he often faces with the foreign culture and language difficulties. So, the assignee partakes in language training, whenever it is needed, for the language of the host country. He and his spouse/partner may be granted 40 hours of language training where necessary by the host country HR. Individual lessons may be set in agreement between the host HR and the corporate international assignment team. The company will also reimburse the costs of cultural training.

A crucial problem affecting the companies that exploit the international mobility program concerns the tax regulations adopted in the foreign country where the assignment will be done. All payments to the employee will comply the tax regulations of the host country. Company Alpha provides tax assistance for the employee in the year in which he departs, and in the year he returns to his home country for the tax declaration in his home country and for maximum three years in the host country.

If the employee delays the submission of information to the tax consultant and tax authorities resulting in penalties or interest payments, those are to be paid by the assignee. In the end, the assignee should involve his partner in his intended international move as early as possible, in order to make feel his spouse/partner more adjusted in the foreign country. Company Alpha always consider all situations that the partner could/will face during the assignment (career interruption, host country labour market, life style...).

So, if requested by the future assignee, the corporate international assignment team should coordinate a common meeting/call involving the assignee's partner and the host HR to this extent.

If we make a comparison with the support practices described in the second chapter, we may find some convergences on what we have already read. In the next page, there will be show the support practices employed by Company Alpha in order to facilitate the induction of its assignee in the host country and to help an easier readjustment process during the repatriation phase:

Figure 11: Company Alpha's support practices

Company Alpha's support practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A mentoring program during the whole period of assignment;• The use of a sponsor (specifically on assignment for knowledge sharing and for development as global leaders needs);• An ongoing communication tool to maintain the contact with the assignee and to ensure an efficient adjustment in the host country;• The same support practices used to help the assignee, are employed to assist his family and partner;• Visible signs that Company Alpha considers the assignee's personal development and experience;• A pre-departure briefing about what to do and expect during the whole international assignment, from the expatriation to the repatriation process;• Foreign culture and language course;• Tax and legal assistance.

We just analyzed the main support practices developed by Company Alpha in order to assist its assignees during the whole international assignment program, from the mobility assignment need until the repatriation process.

In addition, this company renders some benefits to whom undertake a mobility assignment, which they indirectly help the assignees for their adjustment in the host country. Obviously, those kind of benefits differ according the type of assignment an individual is going up to do. An employee who is going to do a short-term assignment program, he will never receive from Company Alpha any kind of benefits related for the children education, since the short-term assignment program consists in a maximum of twelve months and the assignee isn't allowed to be accompanied by his family or partner. In the case of long-term assignment, Company Alpha will provide to its assignees the **payment of school fees** only for dependent children from the age of three years old who accompany parents to the foreign country and to dependent children who remain in the home country, while both parents are in the host country. The company will be not responsible for any payment of university/college fees.

If the expatriate decides a private school for his children, which wasn't designed by the corporate international assignment team in alignment with the host HR, the full payment of the school fees will be not reimbursed by the organizations.

All aspects related to **social security** will be determined on a case by case basis by the corporate international assignment team taking into account the following principles:

- The host country HR department will enroll the assignee in the mandatory host country social security;

- Whenever the social security is not equitable to the home country social security, the corporate international assignment team will decide, in exceptional cases, whether a secondment⁵³ is to be applied or not considering tax and legal implications (such as permanent establishment issues), and the overall cost of such a secondment. In those cases, the assignee remains on a home country social security scheme.

Independently the type of assignment to be conducted, Company Alpha always provides a **private medical insurance**, including dental, is provided to all assignees and family members accompanying the individual on the assignment.

4.1.5) End of the assignment

The repatriation process gets the same relevance as the others in the international assignment program, if not more. In the second chapter, we found out that this last phase is sometimes neglected by the organizations, giving to it a lower emphasis that usually leads to the readjustment challenges experienced by the repatriates that we analyzed in the articles found. Instead, Company Alpha considers the repatriation a crucial step in the international mobility to reach successfully the goal prefixed.

Indeed, the company will always provide a home country return guarantee, in order to protect the assignee during the assignment. Not only, but Company Alpha apply this program either when the international mobility ends up due to personal reasons.

The home country return guarantee is limited to three years (or a shorter period if the assignment is less than three years). In case the assignment is prolonged, the home country HR should decide on the extension of the home country return guarantee.

So, at the end of the international assignment different scenarios can be applied. The assignment will either be prolonged, subject to appropriate approvals, or the assignee will be localized in the host country, be repatriated to his home country, or go on a new international assignment. However, in each case the decision should be taken no later than six months prior to the end date of the assignment and communicated to the assignee, the corporate international assignment team and the home HR.

⁵³ It means that the organization maintains the assignee on a home country contract.

If the assignee chooses to remain in the host country at the end of the assignment, his remuneration will be adjusted to host country remuneration levels. All assignment benefits should end at the time of the localization, such as medical insurance, assignment allowances and complementary pensions contributions by the company in the home country. Moreover, the assignee will be informed that his home country return guarantee ends with the localization. While, the host country should inform the corporate international assignment team of the localization conditions.

In the case of a new international assignment, all terms and conditions related to the previous assignment are discontinued. The corporate international assignment team will calculate the new assignment as if the expatriate was about to leave for the first time.

Instead, when an assignee has to be repatriated to his home country due to the end of the assignment, Company Alpha will pay all approved costs of repatriation, except in cases of gross misconduct. As written before, the assignee is informed by the company about the repatriation process at least six months prior the end of the assignment, providing to him all the information necessary for the reentry program and to make him ready in order to better readjust in the home environment and to not experience a certain level of distress upon the return.

The home management and HR contact, the sponsor and the corporate international assignment team are the key people to support the assignee and his family during this stage.

The assignee's repatriation must be prepared in order to ensure that the incumbent and the group ultimately receive the benefits of the international assignment experience. An appraisal is done to compare the original objectives and personal development plan and what was achieved during the expatriation. The legal and formal aspects of the repatriation process are coordinated by the corporate international assignment team and the home HR contact according to the assignment contract, the legal framework and the policy applied within the group.

The same pattern is followed for the family and spouse/partner of the assignee, who receive an adequate and equal assistance supplied to the assignee in order to facilitate their repatriation process.

We saw in the second chapter that the repatriation process comprises four different stages: preparation, physical relocation, transition and readjustment. Company Alpha follows the same pattern except for the third stage, the transition. In fact, it sets a temporary accommodation with relative arrangements for the family (such as house and school) and

performing necessary administrative tasks when it considers this phase as relevant for the assignee and his family. In the end, the same shipment conditions are applied by the organization for repatriation as it did for deployment.

4.2) Repatriation challenges

Nevertheless, also with an accurate international assignment policy is quite impossible for a MNC to prevent all challenges, which may occur during the whole assignment and, in our studied field, in the repatriation phase.

First, we still should consider that the reentry process remains a difficult step to be managed and assess by the organization, even if it is a MNC that operates in the worldwide context as Company Alpha. Secondly, there is a huge gap between the theoretical and practical approach on the reentry program.

Just making a distinction among the type of assignment we will be able to identify the main difficulties encountered by Company Alpha and its assignees during the repatriation.

Indeed, we witness an increase of reentry challenges from the short-term assignment to the long-term assignment.

The employee who undertakes a short-term assignment, he will stay abroad maximum for twelve months, without being accompanied by his family or spouse/partner. Therefore, it is easy to assume that the repatriation process for the organization will be easier and less expensive, because it does not have to care about their readjustment in the home environment and then it will require less investment. Moreover, from a culture identity change point of view, even if the assignee is likely to well integrate himself in the host culture, he would have few times to adapt to the foreign culture in full, which will involve a lower level of distress experienced by the repatriate upon the return due to the reverse culture shock.

Instead, those things are going to change in the case of assignees involved in the long-term assignment projects. The time of assignment is much longer than in the short-term assignment (the average period is about two years). In this case, most of the times the assignee is accompanied by the relative family, which leads to the organization having higher costs to assist both the assignee and the family. Consequently, this concern will be encountered by the organization also in the repatriation phase, and it will have to guarantee the adequate assistances to all of them (such as house and school finding, tax and legal assistances and sometimes job research for the assignee's spouse/partner).

In addition, if an incumbent shows a high level of adaptation with new cultures and values, his culture identity may change during the international assignment, accepting the new values and feeling himself more integrated with the new environment. At the time of reentry, he may refuse the old values owned about his home culture and he would experience a reverse culture shock.

But the main challenge faced by the organization and the repatriate refers the career plan. Usually, when an employee is asked to go abroad for an international mobility he responds with three frequent questions: Where? For how long? What will be my salary? What will be my new position upon the return in the organization?

Here again, in the long-term assignment the challenge associated with those topic is more problematic. When an incumbent is selected for an international assignment, after his leaving in the foreign country he doesn't leave only the home environment, but also his work position that remains vacant. So, Company Alpha has to overcome the job position that has been left vacant during the international mobility program by replacing the incumbent, and it usually does it by exploiting the organic system having a disposition.

It is from this point that the real problem starts.

When the reentry moment comes for the assignee, if it had not been possible to guarantee the path agreed at the beginning of the assignment, the corporate international assignment team has to find an alternative solution for the repatriate that should be at least equated to that covered previously. It asks to home organization if there is a job position free inside in, which checks if there are free new job positions or if the old working position held by the repatriate previously is still available.

Anyway, it is obvious that this last scenario makes a bit confusion among the corporate international assignment team, the home HR and the assignee.

Nevertheless, what already explained doesn't mean that Company Alpha has sometimes neglected its repatriates upon the return, indeed it has never done. In order to overcome this kind of difficulty, Company Alpha has always managed to find a new working position that was suitable for the new skills and responsibilities acquired by the assignee due to the international mobility, showing to the repatriate and to the other employees how the international assignment was well perceived by the organization. Meanwhile, it wasn't forced to downgrade the employee who replaced the old job position covered by the assignee before going abroad. Of course, it may happen that this problem gets some time to be solved. Indeed, for this reason the repatriation process always starts six months

before the assignment end in order to give enough time to the organization to find the right way to manage this step.

Of course, we have to take into consideration that the number of assignees who undertake an international assignment represent a very few percentage of the total employees working in Company Alpha, as in most of the MNCs.

Moreover, to overcome this problem, the corporate international assignment team may sometimes suggest the assignee to extend his assignment or begin another international assignment in another foreign country for a certain period of time, in this way it remedies this challenge. But this solution will work only in the short period, cause when the assignee will finish the other assignment, with most probability he will want to return at home, and the already described problem will occur again.

As a matter of fact, Company Alpha tends to prefer the short-term assignment due to the easier management in the moment of repatriation. Generally, employees who are sent abroad for a short-assignment, they will stay abroad for a maximum of twelve months with the personal motivation or the learning experience purposes.

Therefore, both the assignee and Company Alpha will encounter an easier repatriation process compared to the case of who experienced a long-term assignment. Indeed, over the advantages related to the support practices applied and the management of the repatriate's adjustment (who experiences a short-term assignment goes abroad without family and spouse/partners), the replacement appears easier for Company Alpha, wherein it would be possible to overcome the relative job functions left be vacant due to the international assignment for few months, and managed by the organization team in Company Alpha.

5) Survey results

The previous chapter was an interesting overview concerning the international assignment policy of a real MNC, which let us to understand in depth how a company may really implement and develop the international mobility program and how it really deals with the resulting repatriation challenges.

Now, it's time to analyze the responses to the surveys made, and gather any detailed information arise from both the questionnaires. To do that, we will start by studying the survey for repatriates, making particular attention point by point, which let us to compare with the data collected through the analysis of the previous scholars researches and draw the last conclusion. The same path will be followed also for the analysis of the survey for the HR managers.

Before going on, I would like to say something about the empirical researches made. Even if it had been quite difficult to reach the right people to make them do the compilation of the surveys, I obtained enough responses to make an accurate analysis of this phenomenon. However, they don't represent the general overview of this subject, inasmuch they need more interviewees and, mostly, it is a very peculiar field, wherein the experiences could be too different each other's, with a subjective point of view about this program from each assignee.

5.1) Repatriates' responses

The responses collected from the survey for repatriate amount of 24 answers, where it could be possible for each question to compare with the assumptions stated in the second chapter and make comments. The first part of the survey concerns the general information of the interviewee, which let us to assess what were been the major features that had had an impact (negatively or positively) since from the beginning of the international assignment. Part of the questions were structured in the Likert form, where basing on the type of the question 1= totally disagree/not achieved/ totally inefficient and 5= totally agree/entirely achieved/ totally efficient and 6= not applicable.

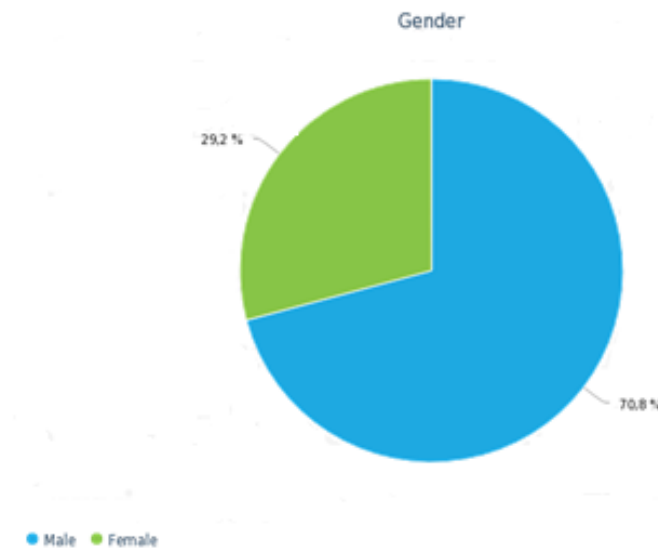
5.1.1) General information analysis

Repatriates' gender.

The first question refers the gender of the assignee.

The answers show that the 70,8% of repatriates interviewed are men, whereas the remaining part (29,2%) are women. Therefore, on 24 responses 17 are men and 7 are women, which show us that there is a disparity among the interviewees' gender that accomplished an international assignment. Here below, we can observe the graph about these data.

Figure 12: Interviewees' gender



In the second chapter, it was discussed that the main concern regarding the female repatriates stems from the fact that women are less likely to be assigned for an international assignment⁵⁴. But this doesn't mean that male employees are preferred than their female colleagues for an international experience, and we should also consider that some years have passed from this study, and now there could be no so much disparity from male and female colleagues to be assigned for an international assignment program, as explained from the figure below.

Even Sussman (2001) noticed in his studies that there were no significant relationship between gender and reentry challenges, which may lead the organization to prefer the male colleagues for this kind of project, suggesting the necessity of further studies in order to have a better knowledge about that⁵⁵.

⁵⁴ Arman G., (2009), "*Repatriation Adjustment: Literature Review*", Journal of European Psychology Students.

⁵⁵ Szkudlarek B., 2009, "*Reentry—A review of the literature*", International Journal of Intercultural Relations.

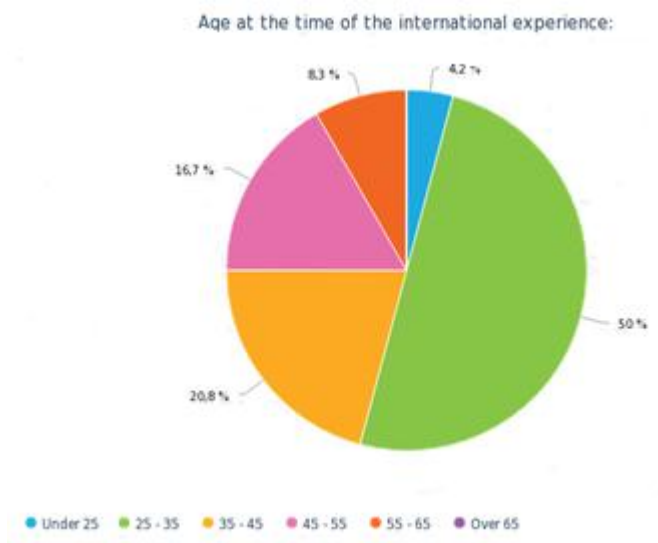
Repatriates' age at the moment of the international assignment.

The age of an assignee can tell us much about the decision to undertake an international assignment, and which type of assignment.

It has been noticed in the previous studies, that more frequently the young employees are assigned for an international assignment program rather than their older colleagues. This result stems from the reason that a MNC exploits the international mobility for two main purposes: the return on investment for the company's businesses and the career improvement for the assignee.

An employee's age range between 55-65 years or over is less inclined to join an overseas assignment due to the fact that he or she has already reached the best working position that could cover. Indeed, if we look the figure below, we can observe that there is a predominance of young individuals (50%), while there is a closeness among those who are aged between 35-45 (20,8%) and 45-55 (16,7%) and interviewees that are aged under 25 represents only the 4,2%.

Figure 13: Interviewees' age at the time of the international experience



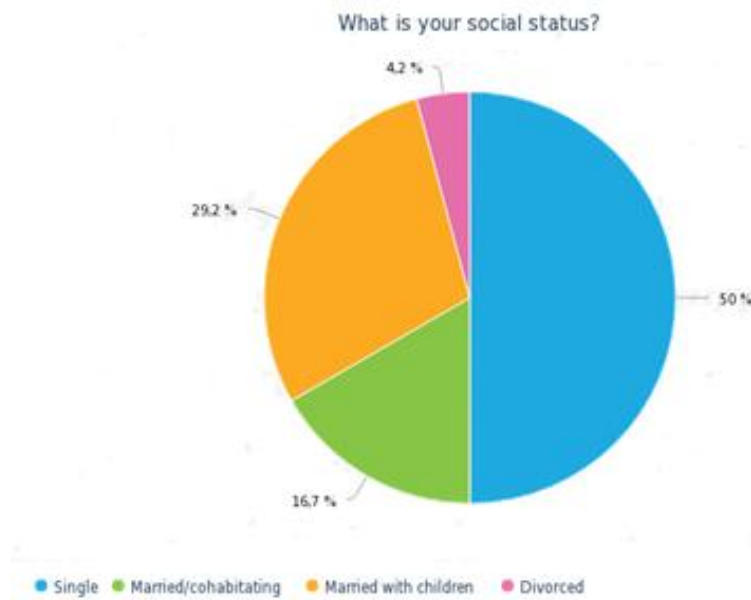
In support of what stated before, we can witness that only the 8,3% of the interviewees are aged between 55-65 and none over 65. This may stem due to difficulty to readjust upon the return those individual inside the organization again after the period abroad, considering also that he or she will be near to the age pension.

Repatriates' social status.

Sometimes, when a company sends an employee abroad for an international assignment, it has to take in consideration the assignee's family. Therefore, the social status represents a crucial variable to consider when an organization manages the international assignment

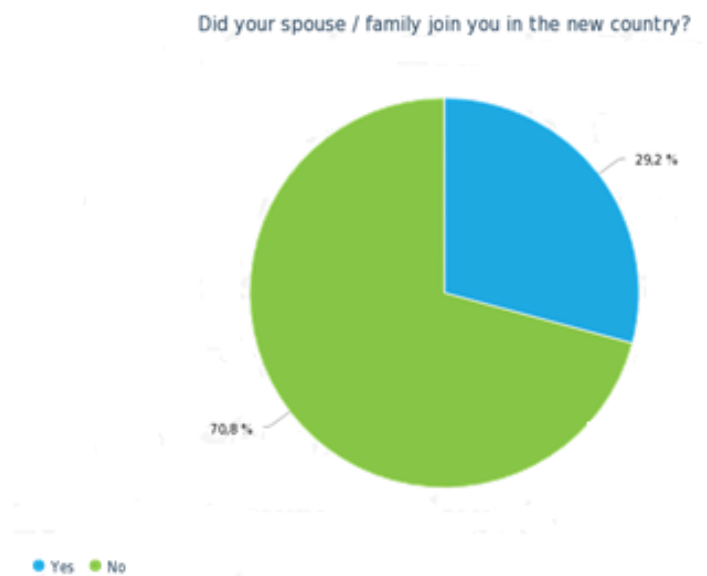
process, since the leaving for the foreign country until the repatriation. In the survey it has been noticed that the highest percentage is represented by the single assignees (50%) at the moment of the international experience:

Figure 14: Social status of the repatriate before the assignment



Whereas the remaining percentage are constituted by the repatriates that were already married/cohabitating (16,7%) and whom was married with children (29,2%) before leaving the home country. It is interesting to compare these responses with what was found out when they were asked if their spouse/family joined them in the host country:

Figure 15: Repatriate's spouse/family presence in the host country



As well showed in the figure above, the 70,8% of the interviewees went in the host country without be accompanied by their spouse/family, even if in the previous graph the repatriates that were married and having children are nearly the 50%. It could derive from

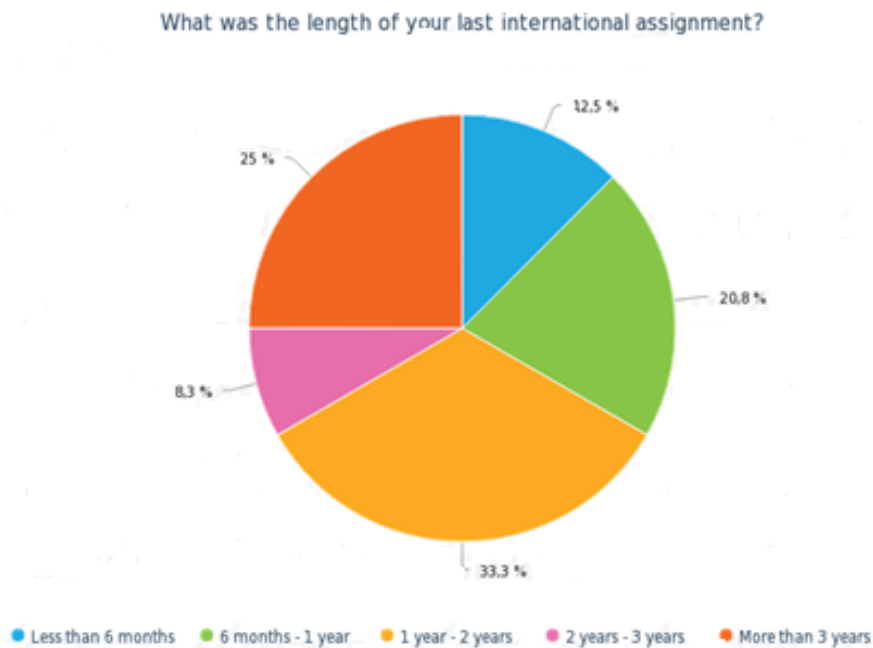
two causes. First, as claimed in the chapter concerning the international assignment policy of the Company Alpha for example, the assignee can be accompanied by his/her spouse/family on the basis of the type of the assignment. Indeed, in the case of short-term assignment only the individual goes abroad, and he/she isn't allowed to bring the family with him/her in the host country.

Secondly, sometimes it could happen that the family remains in the home country while the individual goes abroad, which could stem due to personal reasons (housing condition, spouse's job and the school for the children as examples).

International assignment's length.

Regarding the **type of assignment** (i.e. short-term and long-term assignment, based on the years spent abroad), it has been registered a fragmented scenario as described in the figure below:

Figure 16: Last international assignment length



The highest percentage (33,3%) refers to the repatriates who had experienced an international assignment between 1 year – 2 years. If we gather all the five possible answers in two main clusters, we may obtain a detailed analysis. As we already know, a short-term assignment lasts from 3 months to 12 months, while the long-term assignment lasts from 1 year to 3 years, where both of them could be extended at the end of the experience. Doing that, we may verify that the interviewees who had recently experienced a long-term assignment represents the 66,7 %, while who had recently experienced a short-term assignment counts the 33,3%. This could tell us that the companies may prefer

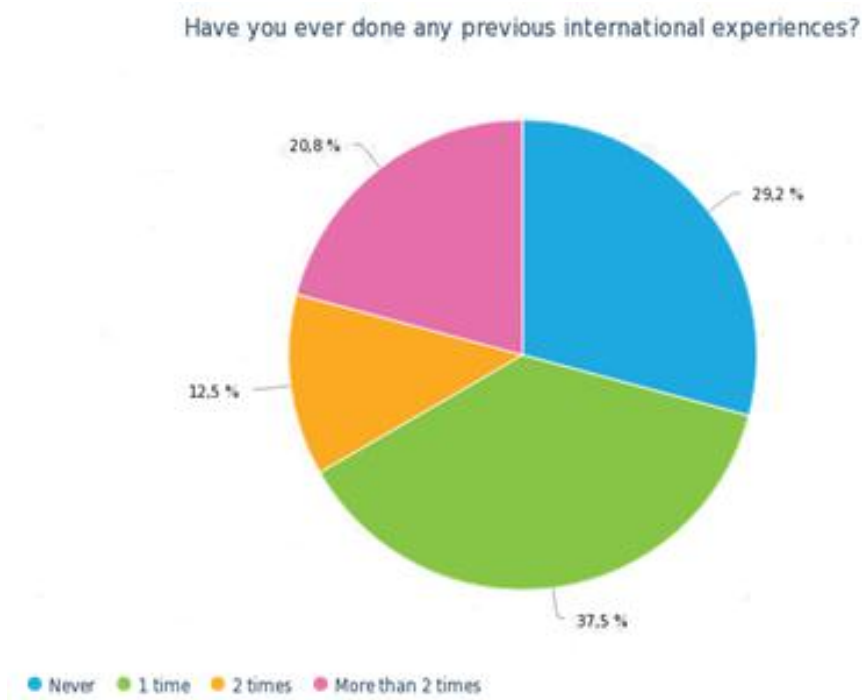
to exploit the long-term assignment in order to better achieve a higher return on the project in which they invest, and to ensure a higher rewarding career path for who undertakes an international experience.

Obviously, this statement doesn't mean that MNCs neglect the short-term assignment, considering that the interviewees who had recently joined a short-term assignment are more than 30%. Moreover, the short-term assignment has the advantage to be better managed by the organization, especially in the reentry process, as explained in the previous chapter about the repatriation challenges of Company Alpha.

An international experience represents a profitable opportunity for an employee to probably see an advancement career for his/her life, but sometimes it comprises challenges that may obstacle the whole international assignment.

In the second chapter, we discuss about having already experienced an international mobility program can have a positive impact for the success not only for the repatriation process, but for the whole assignment.

Figure 17: Previous international experiences



In the figure above, it is possible to observe that the 29,2% of respondents have never done any previous international experiences, but the 70,8% of them had already experienced at least one international experience before the last one. This outcome highlights the positive trend correlated with the international assignment program. The fact that the majority of the interviewees had already experienced at least one time an

international experience demonstrates the incremental exploitation of this program by the MNCs, and in addition the efficient management of whole period of the assignment.

Motivations behind an international assignment.

But for what kind of reasons an employee decides to undertake an international experience?

Through the analysis of the several researches done in the last years, we have verified that the decision by an assignee to pursue an overseas assignment can stem from many causes. The most important of them refers to advancement career path. Lots of assignees attempt to achieve this goal by spending a period in a foreign country in order to accomplish a company's project. This proposition is confirmed also by the result attained in the following graph:

Figure 18: Employees' motivation to pursue an international assignment



As showed here above, the main causes that strived the respondents to conduct an international mobility program is exactly the possibility to achieve a career improvement. Hand in hand, we register a high willingness by the interviewees to enrich the own personal and cultural formation, a result that is always attainable through an international experience. Anyway, there is something that it worth dwelling and concerns the low level of responses about the choice to join an international assignment in order to reach at the end a better base salary. Usually, the career improvement and a better reward are the main drivers that push an individual to conduct a period of job abroad for the own organization. Instead, in this case we can notice that it had represented the minor reason for the

respondents to undertake an international assignment, only two of them answered the “a better reward” was at the base of their decision.

However, it doesn't mean that the employees don't care about their salary increase when they pursue. We have to consider that an advancement of the own career is always accompanied by a rise of the correlated wage and an increase of the resulting new responsibilities.

Company where the repatriates had their last international assignment.

At the beginning of this dissertation, we asserted that companies and countries have experienced an intensive globalization process in the last decades. This leads to the MNCs to expand their businesses by entering in new markets and adopt the international assignment program in order to attain a more efficient communication and control on their foreign subsidiaries.

Depending on the size and the business of a company, the international assignment management may be diversified. A big multinational has more possibilities to exploit the international mobility program despite a smaller one, since it operates in more geographic areas and it could better manage to find a new working position inside the organization upon the return of the repatriate.

On the other hand, a small MNC having to deal with less international assignment processes may could be more facilitated in the management of the whole period of the assignment and of its assignees.

In the survey's results it was found out that the 80% of the companies mentioned represent one of the leading group in the relative business. In particular, what it needs to be stressed is the market wherein these organizations compete.

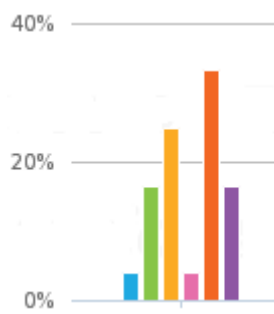
From these we find **Company Alpha**, which is the leading multinational steel manufacturing corporation, with an operative market in more than 60 countries (mostly in Europe). Another one is **Huntsman Corporation**, which is an American manufacturer and marketer of chemical products for consumers and industrial customers (such as Unilever and Procter & Gamble), operating in more than 30 countries. In the end **Groupe Renault**, one of the leading multinational automotive manufacturing company in the world, with plants in several countries for each continent. What unites these MNCs is the need for highly qualified personnel among the subsidiaries, such as the production engineer. It can happen that a subsidiary requires a qualified talent from the head-quarter who can contribute intensively in the value creation during the period of assignment, and

bring back with him/her upon the return all the newly knowledge acquired abroad and spread it in the home organization with the colleagues. Therefore, this could be a reason why companies like these exploit in a more intensive way the international assignment projects, despite companies that operates in the global mobile food delivery marketplace.

5.1.2) Analysis of the expatriation process

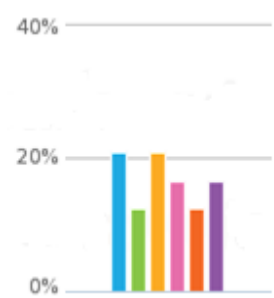
Even if the dissertation focuses on the repatriation field, I decided to examine also the expatriation process, because they are strictly correlated. Some of the challenges already described that may occur during the repatriation phase, they happen not only because the organizations neglect the last step of the whole international assignment, but many of the resulting difficulties may derive by a mismanagement of the expatriation process. Therefore, it had been conducted a deep analysis also for this stage.

My company selected candidates through a formal process with stated criteria



The first cutting of the previous picture refers to the selection of the candidates for the international assignment. The weighted average about the candidate selection measures **3,55**, which means the interviewees were been quite satisfied about the candidate selection selected. We register 25% of unbiased choices and 16,7% of non applicable choices, which may stem from the fact that some companies have a web platform wherein there are registered all the employees interesting in an international assignment (what type of assignment, in which country and for how long...), and for this reason the candidate's selection is not implemented because the company already knows the right employee for the right assignment.

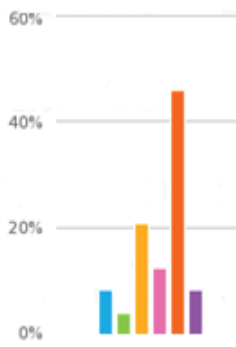
For each expatriate is given an efficient pre-assignment training



What figures out is a weighted average of **2,85**, which tells us the poor quality of the pre-assignment training provided to the our respondents. Not only, but the 16,7% stated that their companies did not implement a pre-assignment training program. This could represent one of the reasons behind possible adjustment challenges that may occur during the period spent abroad. In fact,

through an efficient pre-assignment training, the individual is more inclined to adjust better in the foreign contest and operates in a more efficient way in the foreign subsidiary.

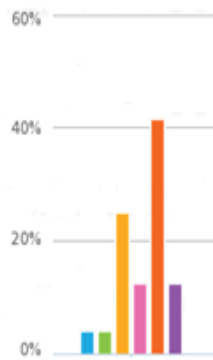
My company gave me clear indications about what I would have done abroad



Here, we witness a positive result. Indeed, its weighted average is **3,9**, therefore the needful indications were given by the companies before the leaving. Around the 60% of the respondents affirmed that their companies gave them the right information about what they would have done abroad. Without clear indications, the assignee may risk to incur in a difficulty adjustment process related to his/her job position, which may lead

to a failure of the project itself and the organization would see its investment completely ruined.

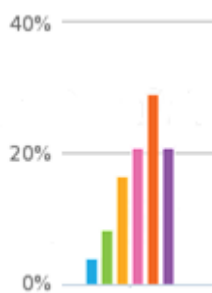
The organization informed me about the benefits that I would gained joining this program (Insurance assistance, housing conditions, family assistance...)



If we obtained a positive result in the previous chart, we should get a high weighted average also for this statement, since they are directly correlated. As a matter of fact, the value is **3,95**, which endorses what already written. More than 50% of the interviewees were well informed about the benefits that they would gained joining the assignment, while only the 8,4% of them declared that they did not know anything about the benefits they would

achieved. The individuals are less inclined to join an international assignment without good information about the assignment benefits.

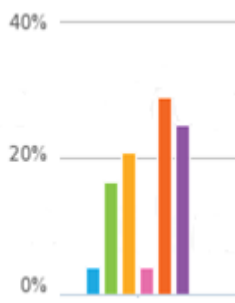
It implemented and developed a documented agreement for the international assignment, including the agreed policies for the reentry



As a demonstration of the results achieved before, this weighted average measures **3,78**. We found a positive direct relationship among the results of the last three charts. In fact, around the 50% of respondents claimed that their organization implemented and developed an efficient documented agreement before the leaving.

A report given by this picture refers that 20% asserted that there was not implemented any documented agreement before the leaving, including the agreed policies for the reentry. That is due probably because some organizations implement the policies for the repatriation during the international assignment.

My family was prepared for my international assignment



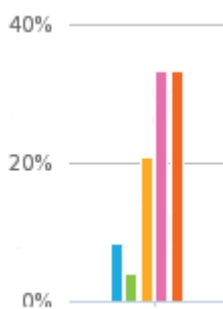
In this chart we find a light balance among positive and negative feedbacks regarding the pre-assignment training for the assignee’s family. The average value is **3,5**, so the repatriates’ families were enough prepared for the assignment. Obviously, there is a significant percentage about the non-applicability of this program (more than 20%), since more than 70% of respondents

went abroad without their spouse/family. There are more positive responses than negative (33,4% against 20,9%), but it still shows a neglect by the organizations on the assignees’ family preparation. We have to consider that many of the challenges related to the adjustment in the host country, occur due to the family/spouse’s difficulties encountered during the period abroad, which they may be solved since the beginning with an accurate family formation for the international assignment.

Features characterizing the period abroad.

After having analyzed the processes employed by the organizations that are needful for the selection of the right candidates until the implementation of the documented agreement, we are now going to assess what were the main outcomes and challenges occurred during the international assignment in the host country. This could be represented a tricky stage since many of the repatriation challenges may stem due to a mismanagement and inefficient assistances of the own assignees during their missions.

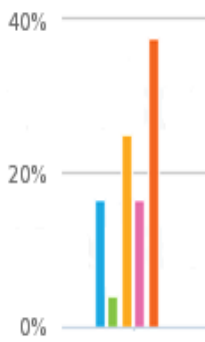
I adjusted myself easily and immediately in the foreign country



The main barrier encountered by the assignees during their international assignment concerns the adjustment in the foreign environment. What figures out from the chart on the left is an efficient adjustment experienced by the respondents in the host country. The weighted average of the choices made is **3,79**. More than 65% of interviewees affirmed to adjust their self easily and immediately.

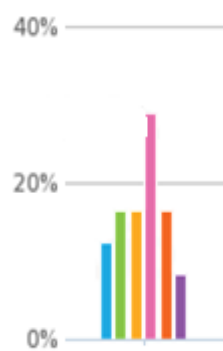
This positive result could derive from a good management of the first stage of the international mobility program, as witnessed in the previous charts.

The culture distance had no impacts on my adjustment



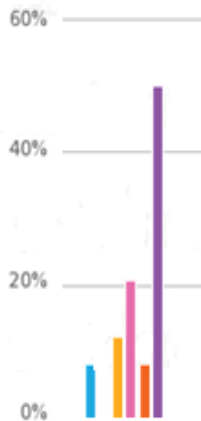
In support to the responses obtained to the question before, we find that the culture distance had not a huge impact on the interviewees' adjustment in the host country. **3,54** is the weighted average about the non-influence of the culture distance on the adjustment process, with more than 60% of respondents declared the culture distance did not affect their adjustment process. The culture distance may have a relevant impact on the expatriate's adjustment depending on the own culture identity change, and therefore on personal traits, and on the country wherein the assignment is done. The major part of the countries wherein these assignees did their international assignment belongs to the European area, and, considering that 80% of them comes from Italy, they did not find a new different type of culture than theirs. Someone of them spent their assignment in Algeria and China, where the culture is substantially different from the ours, and for that almost the 20% of them affirmed that the culture distance had a notable impact in their adjustment.

My company assisted me in the adjustment process in the host-country



During the whole assignment period, the organization plays a key role in order to guarantee the best adaptation in the foreign environment for its assignees. What we have here is an unbiased result, since the weighted average is **3,22**. Most of our interviewees (45,9%) asserted to obtain needful assistances by their companies in the adjustment process in the host-country. However, around the 30% of them claimed that the support practices employed by their organizations were completely useless, while the 8,3% answered that there was not implemented any assistance by their corporates during the period abroad. Without an efficient and promptly support to facilitate the adjustment process, it may lead to several challenges that may obstacle the assignee in his/her mission.

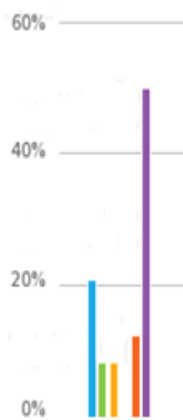
My spouse/family encountered adjustment challenges during the international assignment



When an assignee experiences determined difficulties to adapt in the host-country, the same challenges can be encountered also by the family/spouse. Therefore, an organization has to deal also with the assignee's family/spouse adjustment in the foreign environment. Since most of the interviewees affirmed to go abroad without their family/spouse, it has been registered a notable percentage of the "non-applicable" choice, more than 50%. Nevertheless, the weighted average of the responses measures **3,41**,

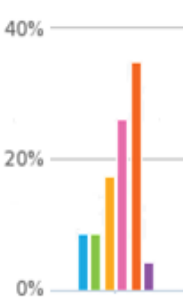
which tells us that in average these spouses/families faced many adjustment challenges during the international assignment. Consequently, a difficult adaptation experienced by the family in the foreign country may involve to an automatically challenge in the adjustment process experienced by the assignee, for which the organization should find a solution.

My spouse/family were supported by my company during the international assignment



A direct correlation of the adjustment challenges faced by the interviewees' spouses/families can be verified by seeing the chart on the left. Its weighted average is **2,5**, which means that their organizations did not assist the families with support practices or they were completely useless. Only 12,5% of interviewees had supports for their families/spouse. This result highlights how the companies deal with the expatriates' families/spouse adjustment process, where it is sometimes neglected.

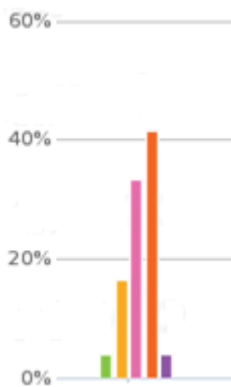
The cooperation and the contact with the host-country individuals were smooth and efficient



It has been demonstrated that an efficient and smooth contact and cooperation with the host-country individuals facilitate the process of adjustment. An assignee that manages to have a better cooperation with the foreign colleagues will be more inclined to easily adjust in the new context. The first graph told us that most of respondents adjusted themselves easily and immediately, and the chart on the left supports these answers. Indeed, around the 60% of them affirmed to had had a smooth

and efficient contact and cooperation with the host-country individuals and colleagues, with a weighted average of **3,56**.

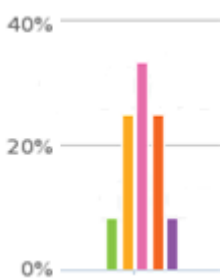
I kept in touch with home-country individuals



If an efficient communication with the host-country individuals may positively affect the whole assignment period, the same relevance is represented by an ongoing communication with the home country individuals. The average value corresponds to **4,17**, with around the 75% of these repatriates had kept in touch with home-country individuals during the international assignment. Keeping in touch with home-country individuals leads to two effects. The first one, the expatriate is always updated regarding

possible changes occurred in the home environment. The second one, with a continuing communication with the home colleagues the repatriate will be less inclined to experience a high level of distress upon the return, facilitating on this way the reentry process.

The communication with my organization was an effective and continuing tool



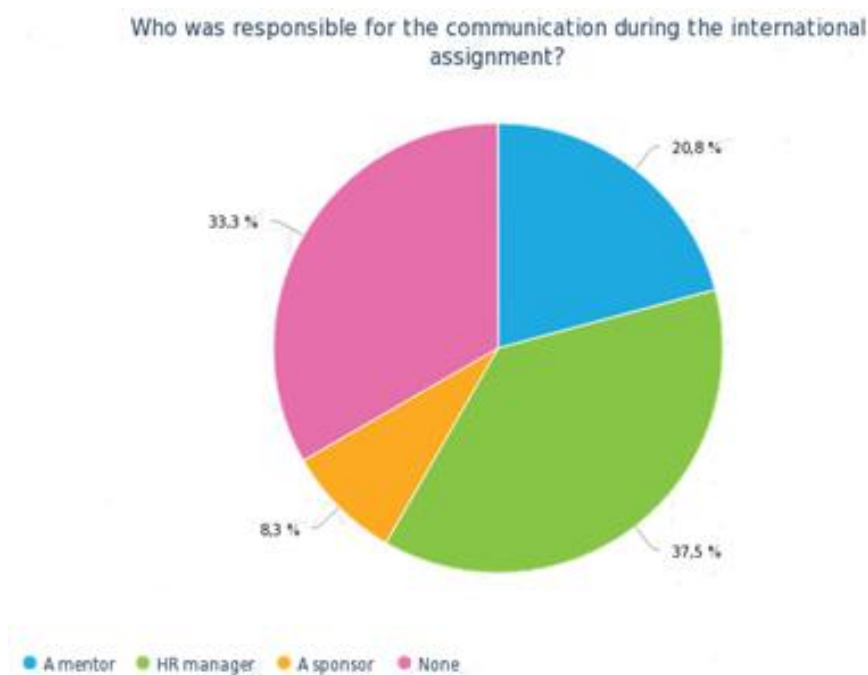
Already in the theoretical chapter we analyzed how an ongoing communication could be beneficial for the repatriate and for the success of the assignment. In the previous charts, we saw the positive feedbacks about the contact and the cooperation with home-country and host-country individuals, and how they are directly correlated with an easy and immediate adjustment process

in the host-country. As a demonstration of what said before, we find out a weighted average of **3,81**, where around 60% of interviewees had kept communicating with the own firm during the whole assignment.

Who was responsible for the communication during the international assignment?

We have already stressed how the communication represents a crucial tool in the repatriation strategy, as well as during the whole period of assignment. Usually, there is assigned someone to better manage an efficient contact among repatriates and organizations. The HR manager is the more inclined to cover this role, with the auxiliary of the mentors and the sponsors. Indeed, their main role is to maintain an efficient contact between the assignees and the home organizations.

Figure 19: Responsible for the communication during the assignment



Looking the graph above, we assert that the HR manager figured the main responsible for the communication during the international assignment. However, we witness a significant percentage who answered “A mentor” as the main responsible for the communication. If we take as example Company Alpha, it exploits the mentoring program in order to ensure the integration of the expatriates and their families in the host environment, serving as a maintenance of the contact with the assignee during the period abroad and to guarantee that the assignee’s personal development and experiences are known and considered by the home unit in order to facilitate the repatriation. The same role is got by the sponsor, but in this case it is implemented on the base of the type of the assignment.

About the sponsor, it has been found a low percentage (8,3%) of sponsor as the responsible for the communication, which may be less inclined to maintain the contacts or, like for the Company Alpha, employed only for specific needs of international mobility.

What it worth to be analyzed is the percentage (37,5%) of whom affirmed that none was responsible for the communication during that period. It represents the part of respondents that stated negative feedbacks about the communication tool described in the previous chart, which still remains a high percentage.

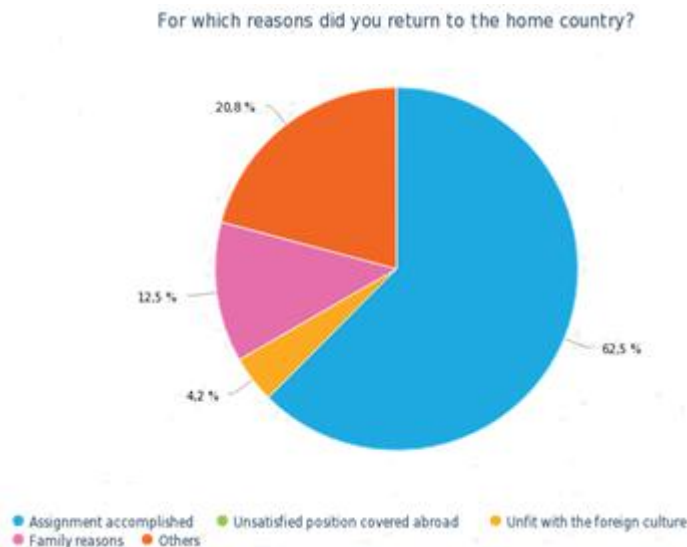
5.1.3) Analysis of the repatriation process

Finally, we are going to study in depth the hot topic of the analyzed field. Through the following questions, we will be able to understand what were the main challenges encountered by the interviewees upon the return, how they were supported by their organization and in which quantity, how they perceived the repatriation program applied and what were the final outcomes that they were able to achieve due to the accomplishment of the international assignment.

For which reasons did you return to the home-country?

Let's start with the end of the working period abroad. Usually, we are used to think that a repatriate returns to his/her home country after having accomplished the international assignment, but this only in part. Indeed, there are many reasons that may push the expatriate to interrupt the assignment and to return to the home environment, which may hide difficulties perceived by the assignees during the adjustment process. Here below there are summarized the main causes for a return to the home-country:

Figure 20: Reasons behind the return to the home-country



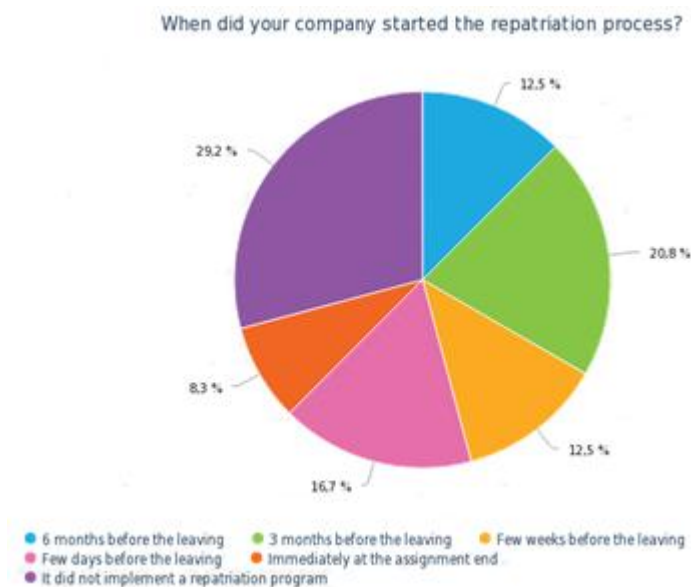
Obviously, the most common reason behind the repatriate's return is related with the accomplishment of the international assignment. As a matter of fact, 62,5% of interviewees returned at home due to the assignment end. However, we find other two causes: unfit with the foreign culture and family reasons. We witnessed in the previous subchapter that many of the spouse/family's repatriates encountered adjustment problems in the new context, which may force the assignee to return before the expected. The same pattern is followed by whom was not able to integrate in the foreign environment due to the culture distance (just think who experienced an international assignment in Algeria).

Therefore, these reasons may force the repatriates to return earlier in the home environment, entailing significant problems for the organization that has to reinsert the repatriate in the organization in a short time. About the “Others” choice, it can happen that the assignee does not reentry in the home-country, but he/she can be localized in the foreign country or can be assigned another international experience in another country. In fact, someone asserted that he/she did not return because she/he was localized in another country, while other two stated to have found a better working position in the foreign country in a new company.

When did your company started the repatriation process?

An organization has to implement the repatriation process if it wants to attain an efficient readjustment process and manage all the needful steps in order to assist its repatriates.

Figure 21: Implementation of the repatriation process

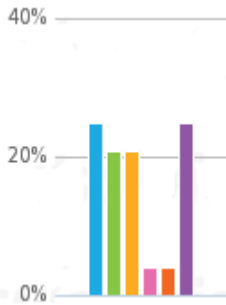


Usually, there is not a general rule and each company starts the reentry process differently from each other, as showed in the figure above. What figure out from this chart are negative and fragmented results. In fact, sooner the reentry process is implemented, the better the readjustment process will be faced by the repatriates and the organization. Instead, we see that only the 12,5% of the cases the reentry process was implemented six months before the leaving and the 20,8% three months before. Whereas, more than 30% affirmed that the repatriation process started just few weeks/day before the leaving, or immediately at the end of the assignment. The most arguable value here is the notable percentage of respondents who answered that there was not implemented any repatriation program. This negative result tells us that the companies tends to neglect and undervalue

this stage, like if they do not consider it as a part of the whole international assignment program.

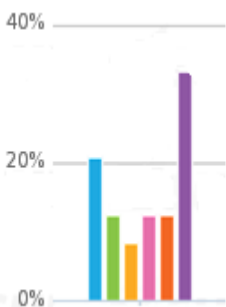
Repatriation agreement’s policies

Guarantee that I would have obtained a career advancement with higher responsibilities



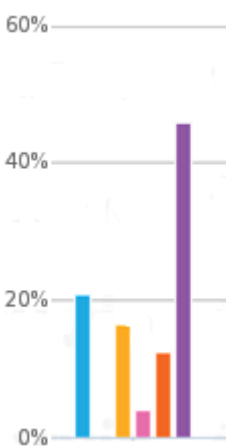
The weighted average about the choices on this statement is **2,2**. In short, very few companies guaranteed in the repatriation agreement that these repatriates would have obtained an advancement career upon the return. This doesn't mean that at end they did not manage to get a promotion, but simply that the organization can't guarantee this on a long-term view. Many variables may occur during the international assignment, such as a change in the organization system, which can't be predict by the company. Instead, the next role of the repatriate should be tracked and updated accordingly during the whole assignment.

The incorporation of a return incentive payment to compensate for dislocation effects



Even here, we found a negative weighted average (**2,75**). According to this result, in few repatriation agreements were included the return incentive payment, which are needful to compensate the repatriate for dislocation effects. In fact, if we do not consider the non-applicable responses, only the 37,5% affirmed to had the return incentive payment as a policy in the documented agreement.

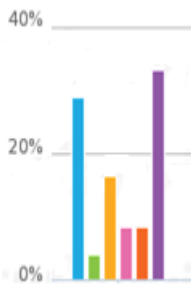
My company provided relocation benefits, Including housing and school search for the return



For this policy we should consider many variables. It's true that the weighted average is low (**2,76**), but it does not needs have a negative mean. Some of these benefits are provided for the assignees who go abroad with their families, but since most of them experienced their assignment alone there was not required to include many relocation benefits in the agreement, such as the school research for the children. Moreover, we should take into account that most of the times the repatriates do not need a house

upon the return because they already have it. Due these reasons also we witness a high percentage of non-applicable choices (45,8%).

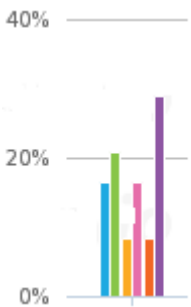
It developed a repatriation program to ensure an easier reentry into the work setting



In the end, we find a poor evaluation about the development of a repatriation program to guarantee an easier reentry in the home environment. Indeed, the weighted average is **2,43**. The neglect by the companies regarding this policy may concur to a more difficult management of the challenges that can occur to the repatriate during the reentry stage, which may affect negatively the readjustment of him/her in the work setting.

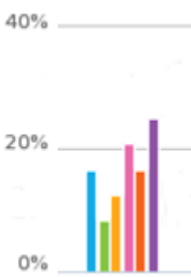
Support practices applied

Pre-departure briefing about what to expect during the repatriation process



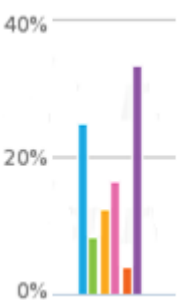
We can easily observe from the chart the big disparity among the positive and negative feedbacks about this first support practice. The weighted average is **2,7**, which states that few interviewees received a pre-departure briefing about the repatriation process. In fact, with the appropriate information the returner will be less inclined to experience a significant level of distress during the reentry process.

A mentoring program during the whole assignment



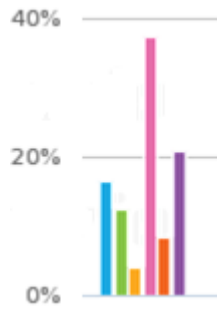
We are in a balanced situation. Even if the percentage of whom consider the mentoring program (37,5%) useful is higher than useless ones (25%), we notice a substantially indifference. Indeed, making the weighted average we verify that it measures **3,16**.

The reentry training and coaching



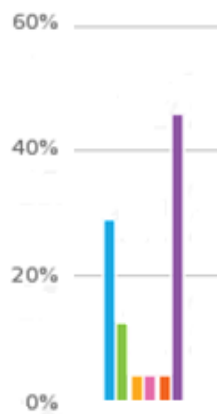
We can verify a negative trend correlated to the reentry training and coaching. We can notice a high percentage (33,3%) of whom did not received any reentry training and coaching, while who considers this support practice very inefficient reach the 33,3%. Our claims are supported also by the weighted average, which is **2,5** for this statement.

An ongoing communication tool with the home organization before leaving the host country



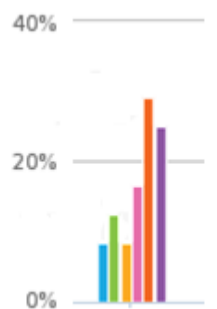
From this chart figures out that more than 45% of respondents affirmed that an ongoing communication resulted as an efficient tool for the repatriation process. Even if the weighted average results **3,1**, we find a positive reply in the chart about the communication's efficiency during period abroad, where the weighted average was 3,81.

The use of a repatriate directory network



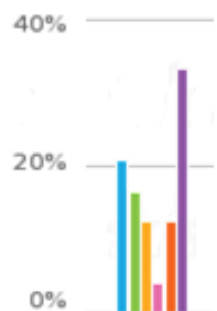
The repatriate directory network it is not a so common used practice to facilitate the reentry process. As showed in the chart on the left, the non-applicability of this practice represents the highest percentage (45,8%), while its low efficiency when it is used reach got the 29,2%. This negative data is also demonstrated by the weighted average, which measures **1,92**.

Visible signs that company appreciates the international experience



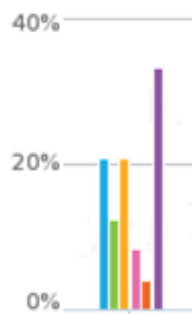
The weighted average about the choices on this support practices measures **3,72**. It tells us that most of the interviewees had receipt appreciations by their companies regarding their international experiences. It is easily notable by looking at the chart, where the efficiency of this support practices reaches the 45,9%. This issue may have positive impacts on the readjustment process of our respondents, and we will can find a reply on the next analysis.

An agreement outlining the type of position you will be placed upon the repatriation



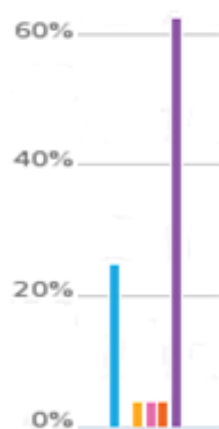
We have already analyzed the difficulty for an organization to include in the repatriation agreement the guarantee of a career advancement for the repatriate. The same result should be obtained also from this analysis. Indeed, the weighted average for this evaluation corresponds to **2,56**. It worth to be considered the high percentage (33,3%) related to the non-applicability of this support practice, which may stem from the same reasons described for the previous analysis.

Reorientation program regarding the possible changes occurred in the company



It may happen that some changes in the home organization occur during the international assignment. Therefore, it should be recommended to inform the repatriates about the eventual changes occurred. The highest percentage refers to the non-applicable choice that means it was not implemented maybe because no changes had occurred in the home organization during the assignment. However, the average value of the other choices is **2,43**, which states that most of respondents did not receive an adequate reorientation program about the changes in the company.

Support structures for facilitating the family reintegration upon the return



If a company does not provide supports to the assignee's spouse/family, it is improbable that it will do that in the repatriation process. Through the analysis of the management of the period abroad, it has been resulted a negative approach by the companies unto the assignees 'families. The same pattern is obtained also in this chart. Obviously, the highest percentage is represented by the non-applicable choices, since most of the families did not accompany the assignees abroad. Nevertheless, the weighted average shows us a low value of **2**, therefore the support practices employed to assist these repatriates' spouses/families were completely useless.

The reverse culture shock

It has been recognized that a notable difference among the home-country and the host-country culture may have an impact on the readjustment process. This effect depends not only on the culture distance among the two countries, but mainly on the culture identity change of the repatriate. An assignee that is more open minded is more likely to acquires the new values and norms of the different culture, replacing the old ones. This leads to a harder reassessment in the home country, where the repatriates have to familiarize again with the home culture, since he/she feels like a foreigner due to the culture identity change occurred during the international assignment⁵⁶.

⁵⁶ Szkudlarek B., 2009, "*Reentry—A review of the literature*", International Journal of Intercultural Relations.

Figure 22: Reverse culture shock experienced upon the return



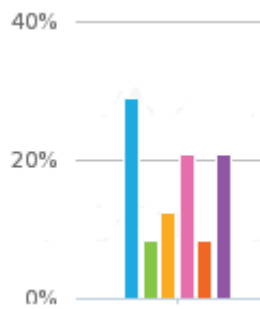
As showed in the picture above, around the 80% of respondents did not experienced a reverse culture shock. Reminding the main countries wherein these assignments were done, it is easy to ascertain this result. The most of the foreign countries belongs to the European area (Germany and France), and since the country of origin were mostly Italy, there was not a high culture distance enough to change the culture identity of the repatriates. As a consequence, a repatriate who does not experience a reverse culture shock will be less inclined to face readjustment challenges upon the return. Those who affirmed to had experienced a reverse culture shock state to feel very out of place upon the return, and it took a while to be back to old habits.

Repatriates' perceptions on the repatriation program applied

The support practices applied by the company to assist its repatriates are the main tool to guarantee an efficient and smooth reentry process. But, what has been found out in the last literatures is the repatriates' perception on the whole repatriation program, which influences mostly the turnover's rate, rather the support practices themselves⁵⁷. This study indicates that repatriates' resignation intention strongly depend on the level of appreciation and visibility given by the company for the global experience and the quality of the offered career planning sessions. What has been found out from these questions is a negative perception of the whole reentry program applied in order to facilitate their repatriation, as we can observe in the following charts.

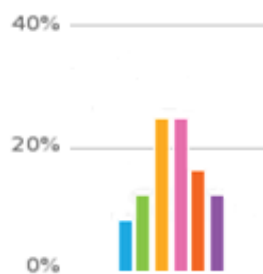
⁵⁷ Caligiuri P. & Lazarova M, (2001), "*Retaining repatriates: The role of organizational support practices*", Journal of World Business.

My company put enough attention on the repatriation process



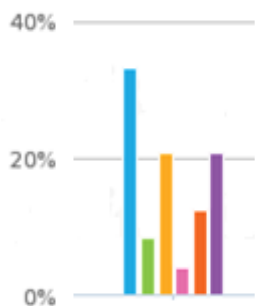
We witnessed the low level of interest about the reentry program when we analyzed the time in which was implemented the repatriation process. Here, we see a negative perception felt by the interviewees about the repatriation process. With an average valuation of **2,43** we can state that the respondents perceived a low level of attention spent by their companies on the repatriation stage. As a matter of fact, the highest percentage (29,2%) is represented by the first column, which means the strongly disagreement with the statement.

My newly acquired knowledge and expertise were valued by the organization



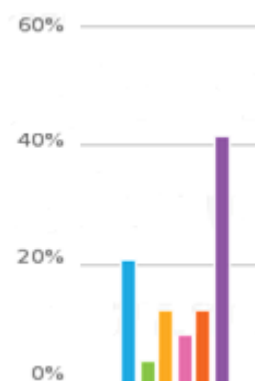
We can notice from the chart on the left a substantially balance from the answers given. The weighted average is **3,3**, so in short they did not have enough signs to affirm if their newly acquired knowledge and expertise were valued by the organization and see it shared with the other colleagues inside the home organization.

I experienced a relevant level of distress upon the return



As showed by this chart, most of interviewees did not experience a certain level of distress when they return in the home-country. The average value is **2,42**, which means that the major part of repatriates interviewed disagree with this statement, as highlighted by the first column of the chart. This positive outcome may be achieved due to the ongoing communication during the whole assignment and the non-change of their culture identity, since around the 80% did not experience a reverse culture shock upon the return.

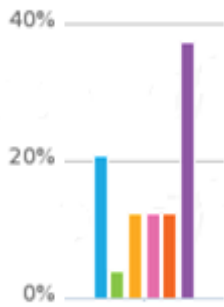
My family experienced reentry challenges



Since most of the repatriates went abroad without be accompanied by their spouses/families, it has been registered a high percentage of the non-applicable value. However, even if in the previous analysis we discovered that the companies did not implement support practices to assist the assignees' spouses/families during the assignment, or they were useless, we may observe that their family did not experience reentry challenges upon the return. In fact, the weighted average of this

evaluation is **2,73**, which means that the reentry process seemed to be smooth and easy for the assignees' family. This is an interesting fact, since a family that was not supported during the period of assignment is more inclined to experience challenges associated with the reentry in the home environment.

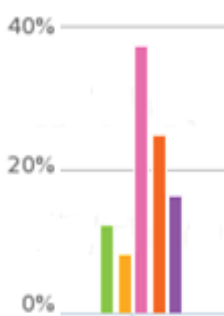
I perceived the supports practices employed by my company very useful



The first questions about the analysis of the repatriation process gave us information about the companies deal with the repatriation process. It has been resulted a high neglect by them on this stage of the international assignment. A company that tends to neglect the last step of the international assignment, also tends to not render the needful support practices for the reentry process, as witnessed by the

results on the left. Indeed, the average value corresponds to **2,86**, which means that the supports practices applied were useless, if implemented. In fact, around the 40% of interviewees affirmed that their companies did not intervene to assist them in the repatriation process.

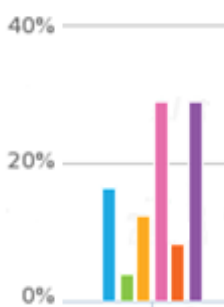
I felt myself more valued for my international assignment by my firm



Even if these companies tent to undervalue and neglect the reentry process, the assignees felt their selves more valued by their firms due to the international experience done. The weighted average of this perception is **3,9**, with more than 60% of respondents answered affirmatively. Repatriates that feel more considered by their organizations thanks to the international assignment may have the

effect to encourage other colleagues to undertakes the same program, and the firm can keep exploit the international assignment project.

I was satisfied about the repatriation program employed by my company



In the end, we arrive at the final evaluation made by the interviewees about the repatriation program implemented and applied by their organizations. If we take in consideration the evaluations gathered in the previous statements, we should find out an unbiased result. The average value here corresponds to **3,11**, which confirm the hypothesis already made. It is reasonable to have obtained this final

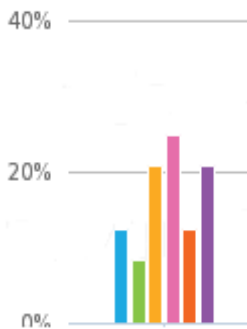
outcome. Even if they felt more valued due to their international experiences and they did not experience a high level of distress upon the return, including their families, we have to take into account about their disagreement about the usefulness of the supports

practices employed and the level of attention put in by their companies in the reentry process. Therefore, we can easily assume the validity of the final evaluation given by our respondents.

Outcomes achieved by the repatriates upon the return

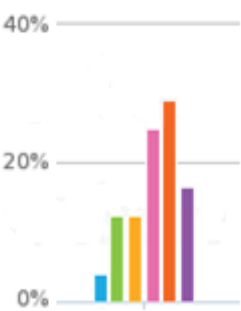
An international assignment serves as mean to achieve determined results by the organization. We have already seen that the decision to exploit an international mobility can stem from many needs. As for the Company Alpha, an international assignment is run in order to develop future global leaders, to acquire and share new knowledge and for the employees’ personal formation. About them, an employee may be pushed to undertake an international experience because through it he/she will be able to achieve desirable outcomes at the end. Below, they are listed the possible outcomes achievable by the repatriates due to an international assignment.

The level of compensation that I received



For the first outcomes mentioned we find an unbiased choose. Indeed, the weighted average of the answers given is **3,21**, therefore there is a balance between who was satisfied about the salary level obtained upon the return and who did not perceive a substantial change. In theory, the organizations provide a salary increase for whom joins the program in order to encourage the international assignment project, which remains unchanged during the assignment and does not undergo reductions upon the return. Therefore, many repatriates may not see an effective change in their salaries after the reentry.

My career improvement

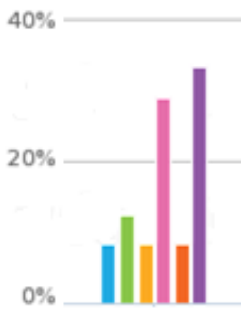


Without a doubt, the possibility to get an advancement career figures out as the most purview outcome from whom is willing to join an international assignment. Previously, we noticed the difficulty experienced by the firms to reinsert their repatriates in the organization and provide them a new job position that fits the new expertise and responsibilities acquired by the repatriates.

Looking at the chart we may assert that there is a quite satisfaction about the achievement of this result. As a matter of fact, the weighted average of the choose is **3,75**, since it

means that the major part of respondents reached to get a career improvement upon the reentry.

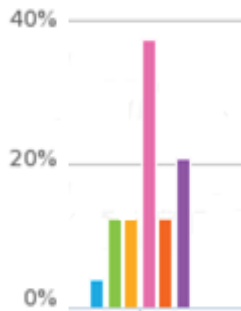
The new working position in the company



It is very interesting to analyze the respondents' choices about this statement. Making the weighted average, we find a value of **3,25**, which basically means an impartial choice given by the respondents on the new working position covered. This result diverges from the previous one gathered, even if there should be a direct correlation with the career improvement and the new job

position hold. An explanation to this controversy may stem from the fact that a career improvement does not mandatorily coincide with a new working position, but the repatriate may be assigned to a new project that requires the new responsibilities and expertise acquired by him/her during the international assignment.

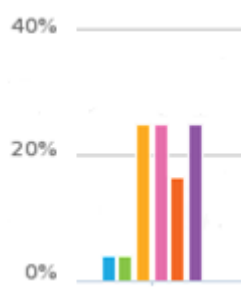
The spread of the newly acquired knowledge among the employees



The acquisition of new knowledge by experiencing an international experience represents an outcome with dual advantages. The repatriate will be able to exploit the newly acquired knowledge, which it can be useful for the new working position covered. In turn, this expertise can be shared among the other colleagues, who may learn new knowledge without the necessity to undertake an

international assignment. The average value of the spread of the newly acquired knowledge is **3,52**, therefore these repatriates are quite satisfied about the sharing of their knowledge with the other colleagues.

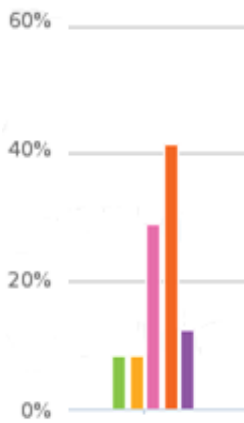
The level of responsibility related with my new job position



The weighted average of the level of responsibility related with the new job position covered is **3,61**. We witness a positive direct correlation with the career improvement's result, where it was **3,75**. For each new job position covered by the repatriate, the organization has to consider the new responsibilities hold by the repatriate during the assignment. After this assessment, the

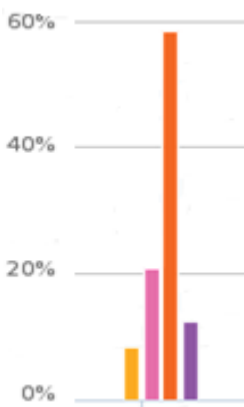
organization should provide a new job position that is suitable to the new responsibilities hold by the returner.

The level of visibility due to my international experience



Before we discovered a high weighted average of whom felt valued by the own organization due to the international assignment. Inevitably, we should obtain an equal result also for this statement. As a matter of fact, the average value of whom feels satisfied about the level of visibility attained is **4,2**. This high value tells us that these companies extremely take in consideration those who did an international experience, sending to them visible signs that may be read by the other employees as positive messages.

The level of personal and culture enhancement



The personal and culture enhancement figured out one of the main reasons that pushed the interviewees to undertake an international assignment. This is quite obvious that is the first outcome achievable by a repatriate, as showed in the chart on the left. Here, it is not even required to measure the weighted average since around the 60% of these repatriates are extremely satisfied about the fulfillment of the level of the own personal and culture formation.

Repatriate's loyalty rate

The last question refers to a very hot topic regarding the repatriates' management concern, which is the resignation rate. What are the main reasons that push a former expatriate to leave his/her organization upon the return? In the past literatures, it has been noticed a direct relationship between the level of distress experienced during the repatriation phase with the returners' turnover rate. If we consider the responses given by the interviewees regarding their perceptions about the whole repatriation program applied by their companies and the outcomes achieved at the end of the international assignment, we should be able to draw a picture about this final result.

After all, we may assert that there is a quite high satisfaction about the achievement of the final goals, whereas the perceptions about the repatriation program have registered more unbiased measures. Having said this, we should substantially obtain more respondents that did not decide to leave their companies.

Indeed, as showed in the chart below, around 60% of interviewees did not resign upon the return. The fact that most of them obtain a career improvement after the reentry, it can concur to a lower resignation rate. However, even if it has been registered a higher percentage of whom did not resigned, the turnover rate still remains high (41,7%). The most influencing reason behind the leaving of the own company has been resulted the possibility to get better career opportunities in other firms (at least the 20%). In this way, the former organization will lose its return on investment, but mostly the new expertise and knowledge acquired by the repatriates abroad, which can be exploited and leveraged by the firm.

Figure 23: Level of resignation rate



5.2) HR manager survey results

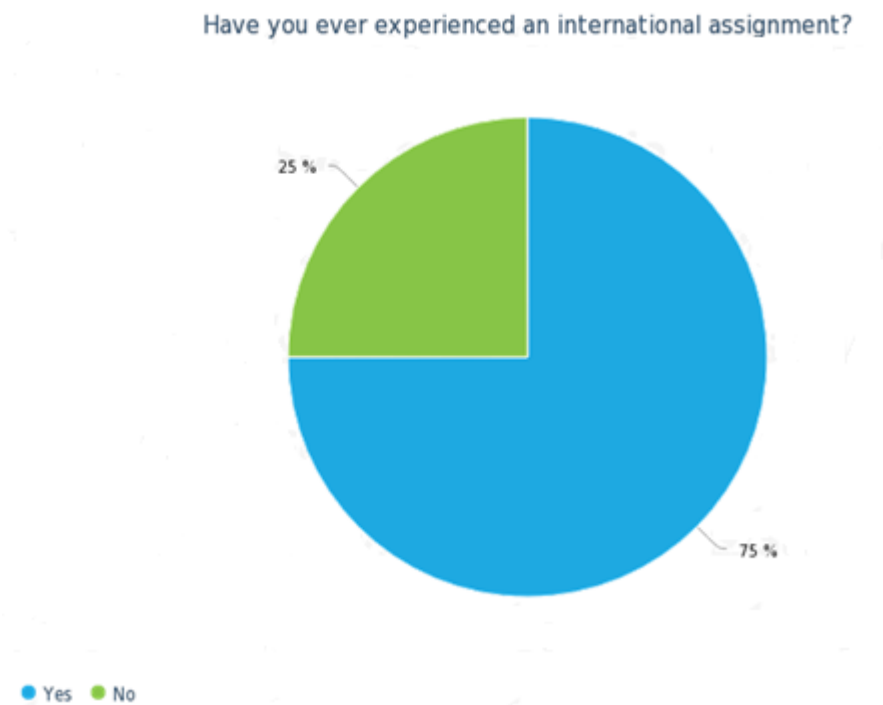
The responses collected from the survey for HR managers amount of 7 answers, where it could be possible for each question to compare with the assumptions stated in the second chapter and make comments. Also for this analysis, we will follow the same pattern employed for the repatriate survey analysis, where we begin with answers concerning the general information of the HR managers interviewed, which let us to assess what were been the major features that had had an impact (negatively or positively) since from the beginning of the international assignment. Then, we are going to compare the results between the two surveys, since most of the interviewees belong to the same organization.

5.2.1) General information analysis

Going on with this dissertation, we have had the opportunity to understand the reasons behind an exploitation of an international assignment, highlighting the main opportunities and challenges encountered by the organization and the assignee.

The international mobility program, especially the repatriation phase, carries several managerial dares to the HR managers, whom generally are required to have some specific expertise in order to fulfill efficiently the whole project, since the expatriation until the reentry. As a matter of fact, it was asked to the interviewees if they have ever experienced an international assignment, and the result is reported below:

Figure 24: International assignment experiences



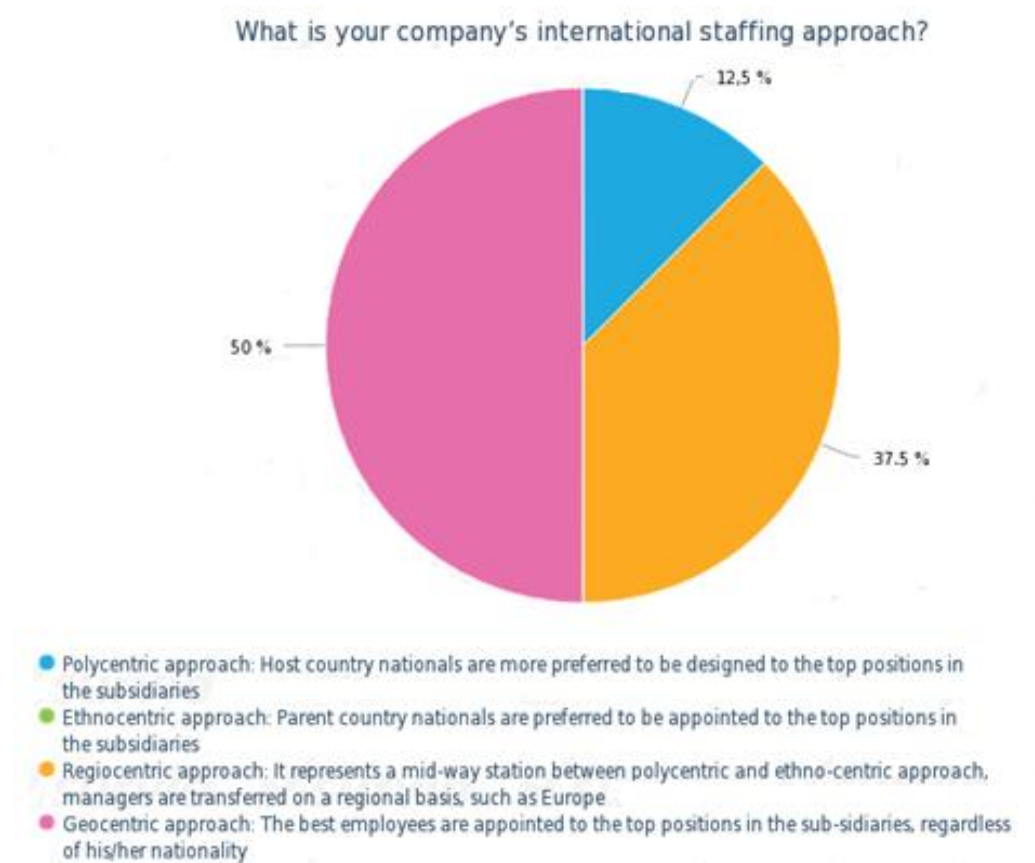
We can verify that the 75% of respondents already experienced at least one time an international experience. Having done personally an overseas assignment, the HR manager will be abler to manage the whole process, since he/she well knows what can be the main challenges that an assignee may encounter during the whole assignment. Therefore, having already experienced an international assignment should be a required task owned by the HR manager, and it is demonstrated also by the high positive percentage illustrated in the chart above.

International staffing approach

When a company experiences a worldwide expansion, it has to deal with the international staffing approaches. A MNC decides a determined international staffing approach on the

basis of strategic factors. In order to control and manage better the foreign subsidiaries, an individual could be assigned to the relative top position, sometimes implemented through an international assignment. To achieve this goal, the organization has to select the right person to cover this kind of role. We asked to our respondents which international staffing approach they consider the best one for their organizations. We can analyze the data on the chart illustrated here below:

Figure 25: International staffing approaches employed



The figure above tells us that most of the companies follow the geocentric approach (50%). It means that for the top position in the subsidiaries are appointed the best employees, regardless their nationality. Generally, this international staffing approach is followed by companies that pursue global integrated strategies and staff employees on a global basis. A company that strives to develop an international executive team and share new knowledge and expertise, useful for the achievement of the MNC's projects as a whole, should adopt this international staffing approach.

However, we witness a high percentage of regiocentric approach (37,5%). It is easy to find this approach when a company operates into geographical regions and transfer staff within those regions (as example an organization's division works in the European area and an employee is transferred from Italy to Germany). The main advantage is the culture

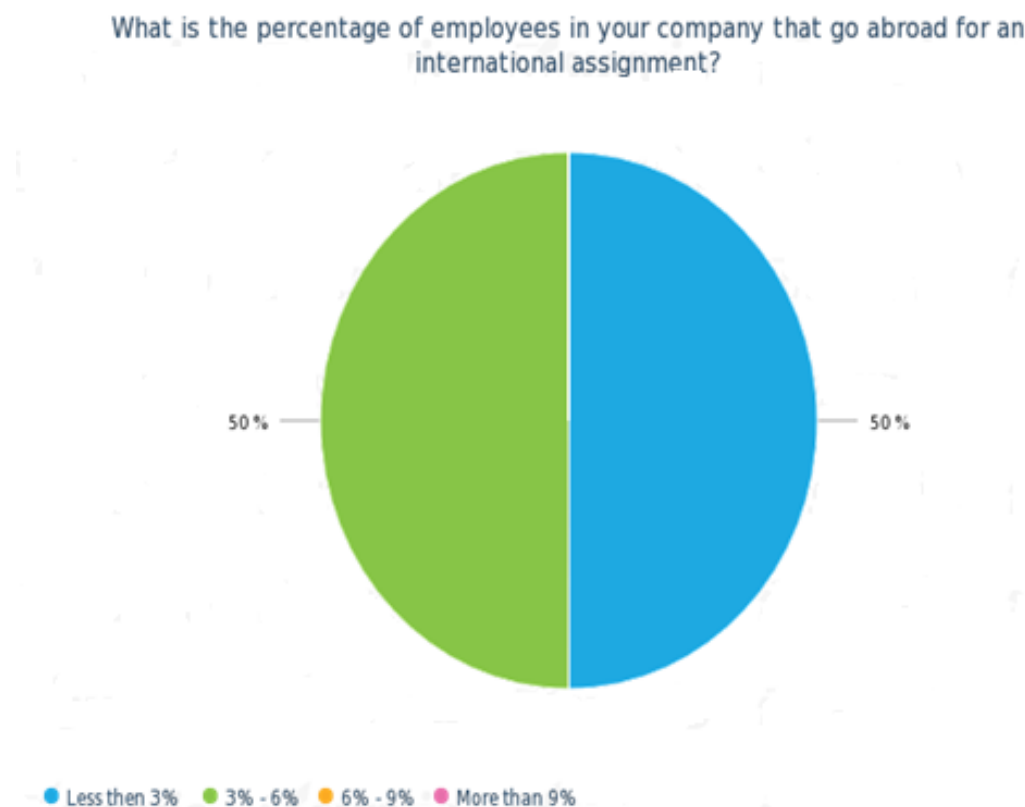
fit, since as witnessed in the repatriates' survey most of the interviewees become from the same country (Italy) and experienced an international assignment in another European country.

Employees undertaking an international assignment

Due to the intensive globalization phenomenon that we have experienced in this last decades, we have witness a contemporarily international expansion of the companies in a worldwide context. Since one of the main tool to achieve this strategic expansion is the international assignment, we are used to think that many individuals are engaging the international mobility program. But does it really work on this way?

The figure below gives us an interesting result.

Figure 26: Percentage of employees undertaking an international assignment

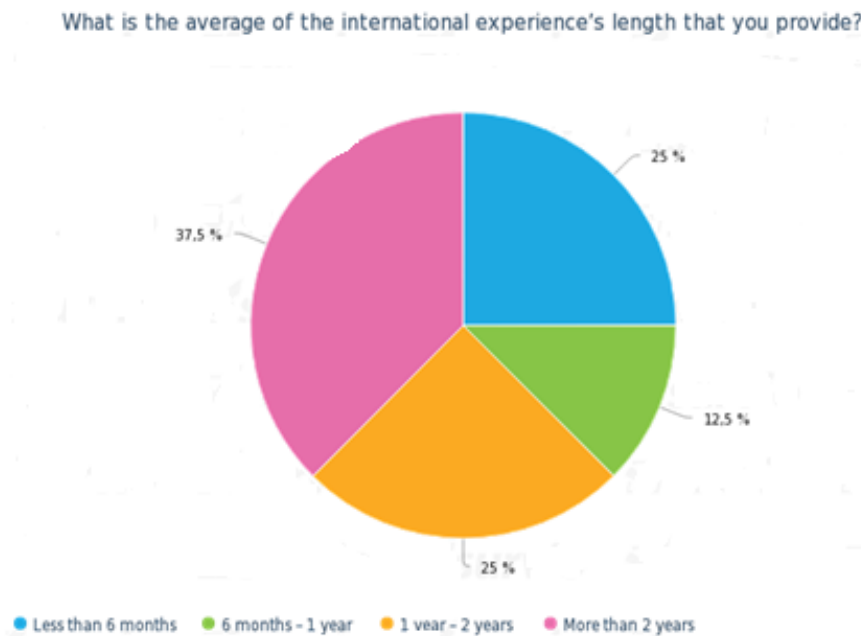


We can assert that none of the companies interviewed employ more than 6% of the won employees for international assignments. We witness an equality between the companies wherein a range of 3%-6% of employees go abroad for an international experience and the organizations that employ less than 3% of worker (both of them reach the 50%). Obviously, the number in question have augmented through these years, but we still consider that sending someone abroad for a determined period of time involves a notable effort for the company, and usually from the subsidiary it is required a limited number of assignees.

International assignment's length

From the graph below it is possible to determine which type of international assignment are more used by the companies surveyed

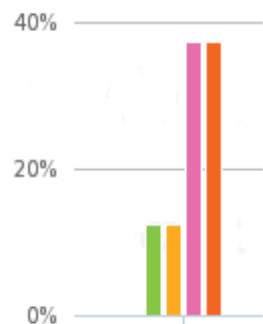
Figure 27: International assignment length



The 37,5%, the highest percentage, tells us that the companies interviewed tend to prefer investing in international assignments with an average length more than two years. Since a long-term assignment lasts from 1 year to 3 years, which could be extended, if we group the results in two main clusters we find that the long-term assignment is represented by the 62,5%. Here, we can notice a sort of match with the data gathered about the international assignment length in the repatriate survey, where it resulted 66,7%.

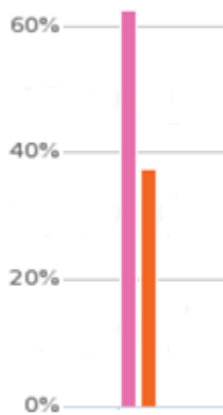
Management of the first phase of the international assignment

Candidates are selected through a formal process with stated criteria



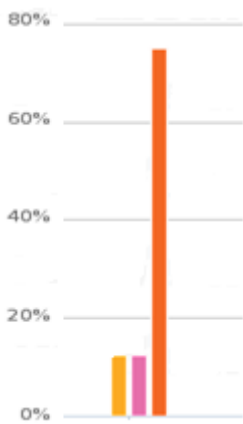
The weighted average measures **4**. Most of the companies select the right candidate for the assignment through a formal process with stated criteria. As illustrated in the chart, more than 70 % asserted to pursue an efficient candidate selection. We may notice a bit convergence among the candidate selection process employed and the perception felt about it by the assignees, where in the repatriate survey it was registered a weighted average of 3,55.

For each expatriate is given an efficient pre-assignment training



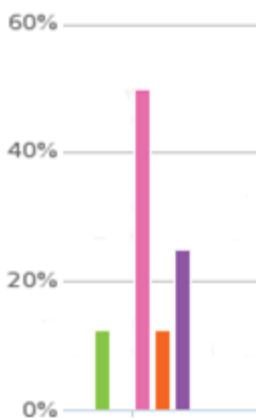
This chart tells us that these companies are used to provide an efficient pre-assignment training for their assignees before the leaving, and this is confirmed by the high weighted average of **4,37**. Making a comparison with the result achieved in the survey for repatriates about this step (2,85), we verify that, even if the pre-assignment training is considered useful by the organizations, it can be not perceived as well by their assignees.

There is an agreement before the leaving, including all policies agreed for the reentry



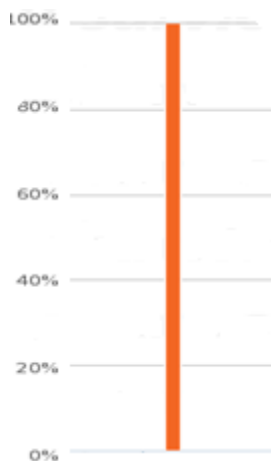
The implementation of the documented agreement is as useful as required for the beginning of an international assignment. In the previous survey, the weighted average measured 3,78, which highlighted a quite satisfaction by the repatriates about the agreement implemented. The same pattern is evinced by the chart on the left. The weighted average is **4,57**, which means that almost all the companies implement an efficient documented agreement, including all policies agreed for the reentry phase.

Every expatriate's spouse/family receives the adequate training to go abroad



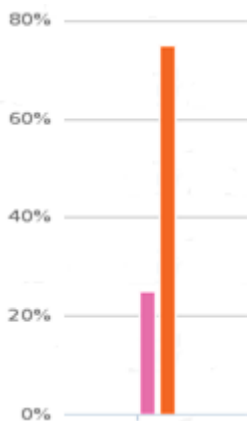
The weighted average about this statement results **3,8**. In short, the HR department provide enough and adequate training programs to go abroad for the assignees' families. Even here, we register a high percentage of the non-applicable choices, which may depend on the type of assignments provide by the organizations. The same results are obtained in the previous analysis, where the weighted average was 3,55 and it was registered a 25% of non-applicable choices.

Each expatriate is fully informed about what to do during the international assignment



In this case it is not required to calculate the weighted average of the choices. As a matter of fact, all the HR managers asserted that they well and fully informed each assignees about what to do during the international experience abroad. A good positive result was obtained also in the repatriate survey, where around the 60% stated to be fully informed about their role in the forest country before the leaving.

The expatriates well know what kind of benefits and right they gain due to the international assignment

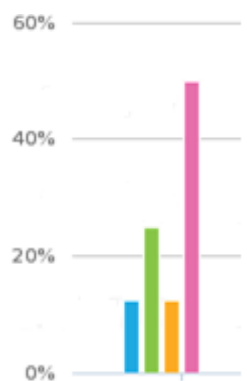


Each type of assignment has the won benefits. All these benefits should be always included in the documented agreement. The repatriates surveyed affirmed to know before the leaving what were the benefits they would have gained due to the assignment (with an average of 3,95). Here, we notice a weighted average of **4,75**, with all affirmative responses about this statement.

5.2.2) Analysis of the expatriation process

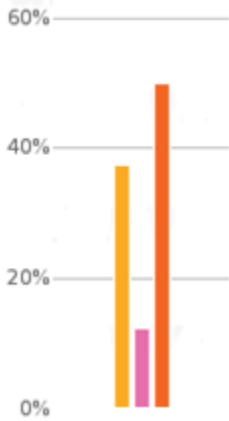
Features characterizing the period abroad.

Our expatriates generally experience culture shock problems and challenges related with the adjustment in the host-country



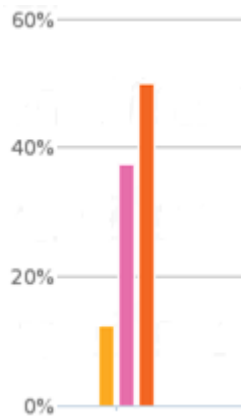
The weighted average about the adjustments challenges experienced by their assignees is 3. This unbiased result tells us that half part of the HR managers had deal with assignees that experienced culture shocks and adjustment challenges in the adaptation process in the host-country. As told in the previous analysis, this may happen in base of the country wherein the international assignment is done and how differ the cultures among the two countries (obviously a lack of assistance may cause these problems).

We provide supports to make the expatriates' adjustment easier during the period abroad



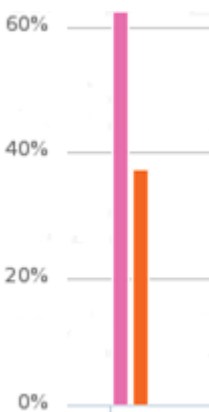
Most of the HR managers interviewed answered that they provide assistances in order to facilitate the adjustment process for the assignees. In fact, the 62,3% confirm affirmatively to had rendering support practices during the period abroad, while the 37,7% represent the unbiased choices. Despite the positive result, we still register a high percentage of indifference by the organizations regarding the support practices, since many of the difficulties encountered by the assignees stem from a lack of these assistances.

We steadily keep the communication with the expatriates



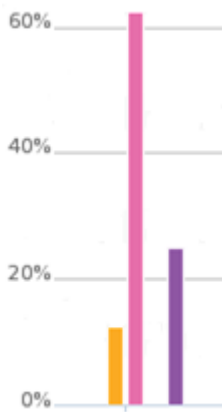
The communication has been resulted a crucial tool that may lead to the efficient accomplishment of the assignment. Before, we observed an ongoing communication between the assignees and their organization, with a weighted average of 3,81. In this case, we have a weighted average of **4,37**. This result shows us again that the communication represents a very effective and utilized tool in the international assignment projects.

We guarantee the expatriates' expectations (such as job position, housing conditions and tax and legal services)



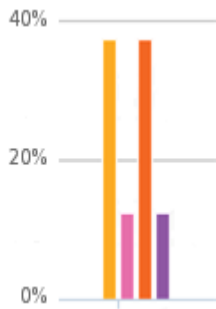
The company has the duty to ensure the policies and the rights agreed in the documented agreement. Therefore, the information about the new role to cover abroad and the correlated benefits should be guaranteed. Looking at the graph on the left, we can notice the high percentage of respondents that guaranteed the expatriates' expectations, with a weighted average of **4,37**.

We ensure that expatriate's spouse/family does not encounter adjustment challenges during the sojourn abroad



More than 60% asserted to have guaranteed an easy adjustment in the host country for the assignees' families/spouse during the assignment, and they did not encounter challenges during the sojourn. The weighted average here results **3,83**, with a percentage of 25% about the non-applicable choices. We have to consider that many assignees go abroad for an assignment without their families. However, making a comparison with the survey for repatriates, we can notice a disparity with the result achieved, where the weighted average is 2,5, a negative result.

None of our expatriates decided to stop early their international assignment



Here, we can ascertain a high percentage (50%) of whom affirmed that their expatriate returned to the home country after having finished the assignment in the foreign subsidiaries. However, if we compute the weighted average we find a value of **3,14**, which gives us an unbiased result about this statement. As a matter of fact, we can easily observe a high percentage (37,5%) of indifference in the chart (the yellow column).

5.2.3) Analysis of the repatriation process

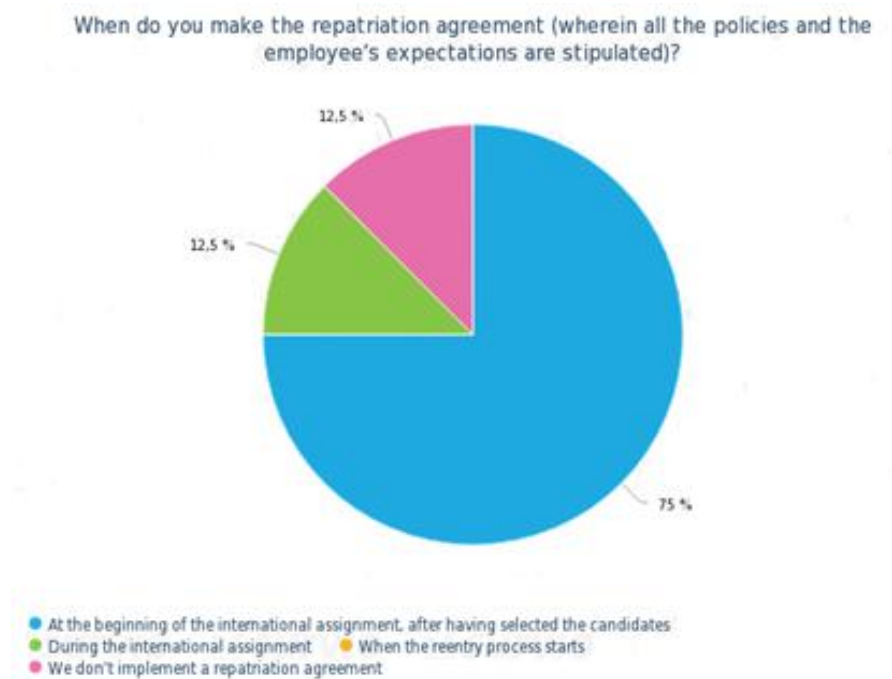
Implementation of the repatriation agreement

We have discovered how matters the implementation of the repatriation agreement, with all the information and policies about the reentry included, in order to facilitate the repatriation phase.

We analyzed that Company Alpha stipulates the repatriation agreement immediately at the beginning of the international assignment, whit the implementation of the whole documented agreement. In theory, the organizations should include the policies about the repatriation step as soon as possible in order to let inform the repatriates properly about their rights and benefits they would get during the reentry.

We can now verify when our HR managers interviewed make the repatriation agreement by looking at the graph below:

Figure 28: Implementation of the repatriation agreement

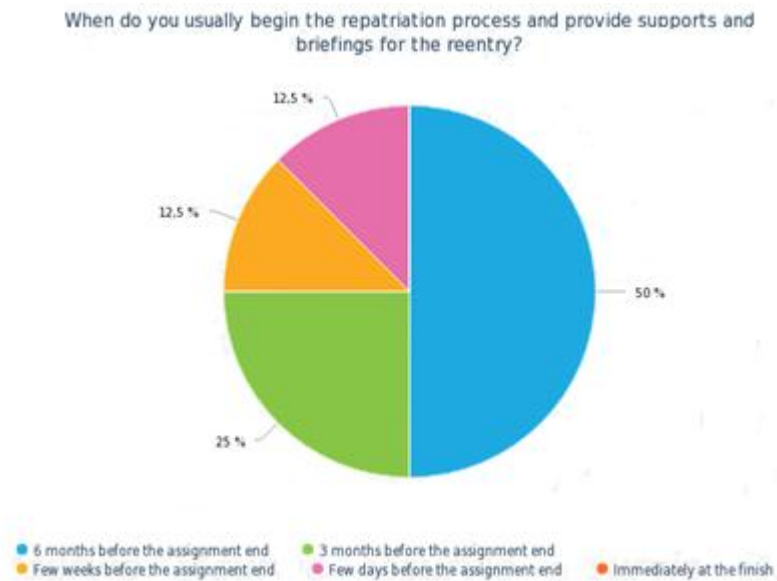


We can state a positive attitude by most of the interviewees towards the implementation of the repatriation agreement. The 75% of them confirmed to have included the policies and the employee's expectations in the documented agreement immediately at the beginning of the international assignment after having selected the right candidates. Instead, a 12,5% of respondents asserted to have made the repatriation agreement during the international experience, which may derive from the fact that companies tend to prefer stipulating these policies accordingly the variables that occurred during the assignment. However, we still witness a neglect from some companies regarding the repatriation phase since the stipulation of the correlated policies, since 12,5% of respondents stated to not have implemented any repatriation agreement.

Start of the repatriation process

In the previous analysis, we saw fragmented results regarding the begin of the repatriation process. Most of them were negative (just think that 29,2% of repatriates claimed that any repatriation program was implemented). In the past literature, we found out that a company should start the repatriation process 6-3 months before the assignment ends. In this way, the HR department has enough time to provide the repatriates of the needful information about the reentry step. The repatriates will be less inclined to experience a certain level of distress if they know in time what to expect during the repatriation.

Figure 29: Begin of the repatriation process

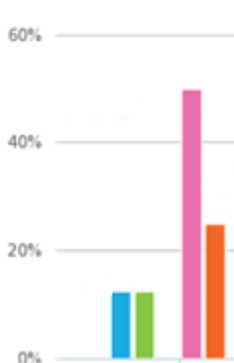


We can observe from the figure above a different scenario. In fact, the 50% of respondents let the repatriation program start 6 months before the assignment end, while a 12,5% of them let it start few weeks before. Only the 12,5% of HR managers let it start few days before the assignment end (it could bring a risk for the management of the reentry phase, because the repatriate may not be ready to begin the repatriation). Noteworthy is that none of the HR managers let the repatriation process start immediately at the finish of the assignment.

The four repatriation steps

In the theoretical chapter we discussed about the repatriation process and how it is composed. We found out that it comprises of four steps, where their efficient management are crucial for the repatriate’s reentry success. Therefore, we asked to our interviewees how they deal with the four repatriation steps, and if there is one or more of them that are neglected by the organizations.

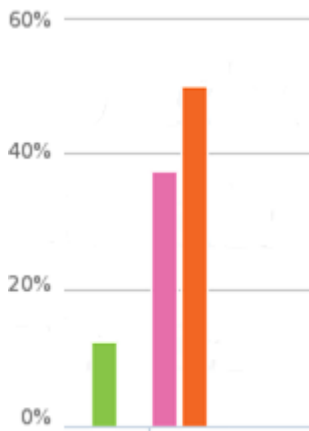
We use to prepare our expatriates for the new position by developing the plan for the future and giving them the right information before the travel



The weighted average about the first step results 3,62. It means that they substantially prepare their repatriates for the new position by developing plan for the future and giving them the right information before the travel. As a confirmation, we can notice that the 75% affirmed to well prepare the repatriates for the reentry. However, the remaining 25% asserted to not inform in fully their repatriates about the new position. This may stem from the fact that the new

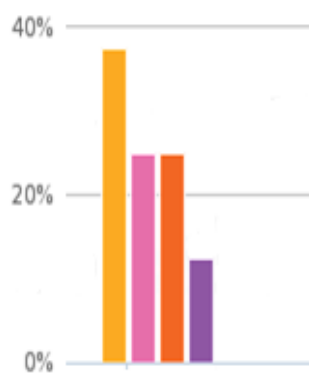
working position that the repatriate should cover is not yet determined by the organization.

We render the needful helps to the repatriates for the travel to the home country



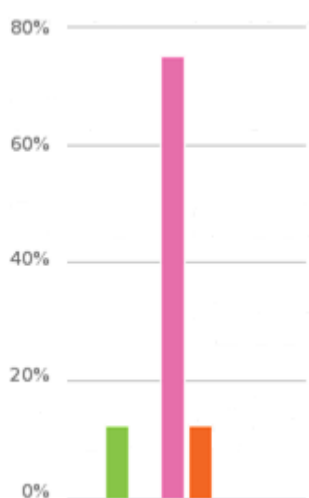
Computing the weighted average we find a value of **4,25**. In short, it tells us that almost all HR managers interviewed assist their repatriates with the necessary helps for the reentry. Only the 12,5% of them stated to not render the needful support practices for their repatriates. This scenario may imply efficient readjustment processes upon the return, leading a decrease of the resignation rate.

We guarantee the necessary arrangements for our repatriates and their family, in order to facilitate the period of transition upon the return



Essentially, we witness a weighted average of 3,85, which means that a quite agreement about the transition step by the interviewees. This is confirmed also by looking at the chart on the left where 50% of the respondents answered affirmatively. However, we can notice a high percentage (37,5%) represented by the indifference choices, which may stem from the fact that sometimes the arrangements for the repatriates and their families are not necessities.

We ensure to figure out the challenges that may occur upon the reentry, in order to guarantee a better readjustment in the home environment

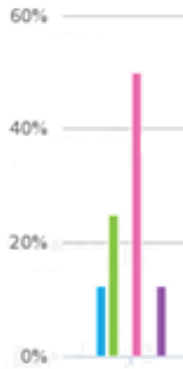


We can figure out a high propensity from our interviewees to solve all the challenges that may occur to the repatriates upon the return. As a matter of fact, more than 80% affirmed to figure out these problems in order to ensure the best readjustment process in the home environment. This result finds a confirmation also by the computation of the weighted average, where its value corresponds to **3,87**.

Factors affecting negatively or positively the reentry process

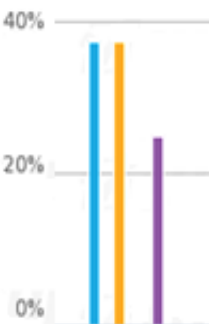
In the second chapter, we analyzed the features that can have positive or negative impacts on the repatriates when they return to the home country, and how they can affect their readjustments. Therefore, it was asked to the HR managers their opinions about these factors in order to compare the results with the theoretical data.

Young individuals experienced a higher level of distress upon the return compared to their older colleagues



The first of these factors regards the repatriate's age. In the previous literature it was found that young individuals tend to experience a higher level of distress upon the return because they are more inclined to a culture identity change. Here, we observe that the 50% of respondents faced more challenges with young repatriates rather than old repatriates. However, computing the weighted average we find an unbiased value of **3**. This is demonstrated by the negative percentage answers about this feature (37,5%). Therefore, it is required more detailed researches.

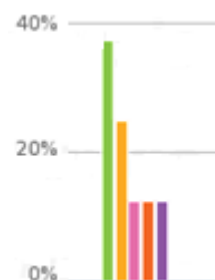
Female repatriates generally encountered more challenges upon the reentry than their male colleagues



The repatriate's gender represents a hot topic about the repatriation process. The recent studies have shown that female repatriates tend to report more problems upon the reentry than their male colleagues. This fact derives from the fact that women are less likely to be assigned for an international assignment. Indeed, we assessed in the previous analysis that the 70% of repatriates interviewed were men.

But that does not mean that women are more inclined to face readjustment challenges. As a matter of fact, the weighted average of this factor results **2**, which means that the HR managers interviewed disagree with this statement.

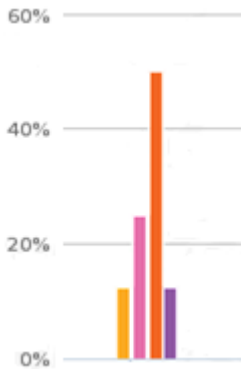
Your repatriates with their spouse/family experienced less distress than their single colleagues



It was analyzed that married repatriates are usually helped by their spouse, since they share similar reentry challenges and can understand and support each other during the reentry. What figures out from this chart is a controversy result. The weighted average is **3**, which gives us an unbiased choice of our respondents about this

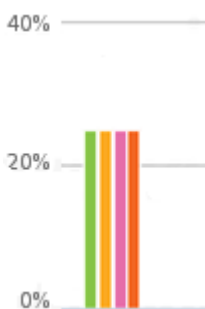
issue. In fact, it is true that repatriate and his/her spouse can support each other, but at the same time the organization has to provide readjustment assistances for both of them (in both situations we find pros and cons).

A repatriates with previous international experience faces less difficulties



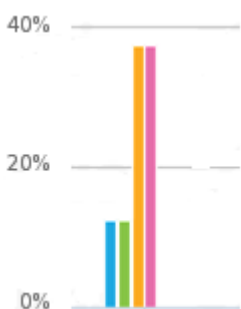
We can verify that our HR managers substantially agree that repatriates with previous international experiences face less difficulties at the reentry. The weighted average is **4,42**, which is highlighted by the high percentage (75%) of agreement with this statement. We find a convergence with previous literatures, where scholars analyzed that repatriates should react positively upon the return with having already experienced previous international assignments.

A long period of assignment affected negatively your repatriates



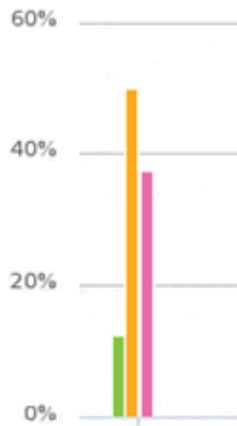
Computing the weighted average, we find a value of **3,5**. It means that interviewees are quite agreed regarding the negative impact of a long period of assignment on the repatriation process. Recent studies discovered that a long period of assignment may lead to a better adaptation in the host country, since the assignee has more time to integrate in the foreign environment. In turn, when the repatriation phase comes the repatriate may feel too integrated with the host culture, which can lead him/her to experience a certain level of distress upon the return.

A huge culture distance influenced negatively the reentry of your repatriates



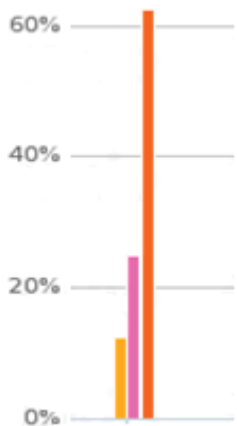
The result obtained in this chart is an unbiased outcome, since the weighted average is **3**. Obviously, a huge culture distance between the two countries can have a strong impact not only with the adjustment process abroad, but also with the readjustment process in the home country upon the reentry. This scenario strongly depends on the personal traits of the individual. If an assignee experiences a huge culture identity change during the period abroad, he/she may encounter readjustment challenges when he/she comes back to the home country.

The maintenance of contacts with host-country individuals sometimes hindered the reentry



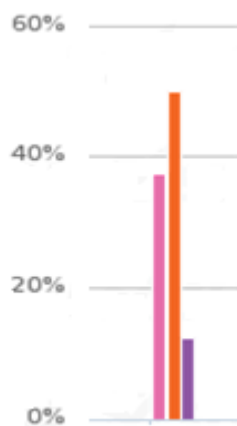
It was studied that a good quality and huge amount of contacts with host-country individuals can represent a double-edged weapon. Through the contacts the assignee can adapt more easily in the foreign context, but when the repatriate comes back to the home-country may risk to feel more tied with the host-country due to the maintenance of contact with the host individuals. The weighted average corresponds to **3,25**, a quite unbiased value. Therefore, most of our respondents think that keeping in touch with host-country individuals has no impact on the reentry process.

The contact with home-country individuals and organization facilitated the reentry process



Instead, in this situation we witness a different result. As illustrated in the chart, more than 80% of interviewees agree with this factor, which is confirmed by the high value of the weighted average that is **4,5**. This result finds a correlation with the theoretical data, which stress the importance of the contacts with home-country individuals since they can reduce the level of anxiety and stress that are usually correlated with the repatriation process. Moreover, the repatriate may be informed about eventual changes occurred in the home organization during the international assignment.

A good housing condition generally helps the repatriates to readjust better in the home environment

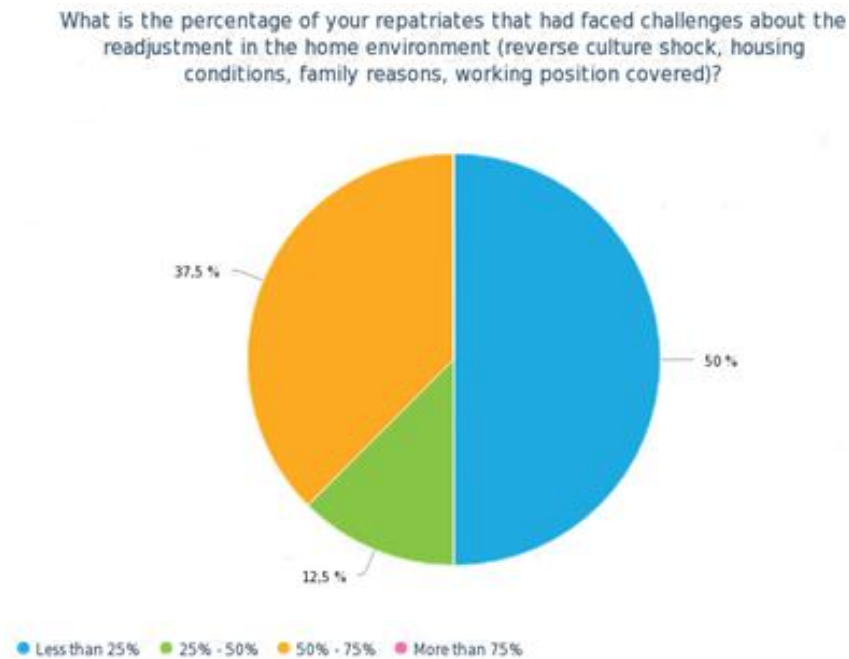


The weighted average of the last factor affecting the reentry process has a value of **4,57**. It confirms that almost the HR managers interviewed agree that a good housing condition can have a positive impact on the readjustment process for the repatriate. We find a confirmation also in the second chapter, where it was stressed that a company has to provide an adequate housing condition arrangements for its returnees (where it needs), which should facilitate the reentry process.

Percentage of challenges faced by their repatriates

During the repatriation process, the returner may encounter several challenges related to the readjustment in the home-environment. We already saw that these difficulties may represent a barrier for the success of the repatriation process, and so the entire international assignment. Unlikely, there is a long list of these challenges that may hinder the repatriate's reentry (such as the reverse culture shock, family reasons, new working position covered and housing condition), and it is not unusual to encounter these kind of problems in this international assignment step. Therefore, we asked to our interviewees what are the percentage of their repatriates that had faced readjustment challenges upon the return. The results are illustrated in the chart in the next page:

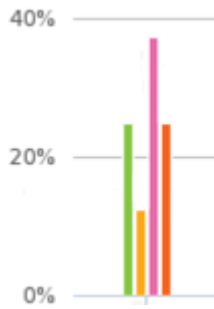
Figure 30: Percentage of repatriates had faced readjustment challenges



We notice that 50% of the HR managers asserted that less than 25% of their repatriates had faced at least one difficulty during the repatriation phase. However, noteworthy is the high percentage (37,5%) represented by who affirmed to having witnessed a range of 50%-75% of their repatriates that had faced readjustment challenges upon the return. It tells us that almost two-thirds of repatriates had encountered some difficulties, which can derive from personal reasons or a lack of support practices employed by the organizations.

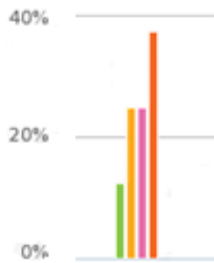
Support practices employed

The pre-departure briefing about what to expect during the repatriation process



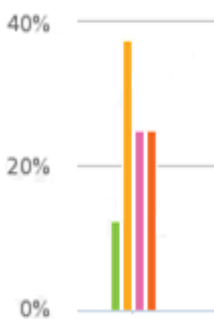
The weighted average about the first support practice results **3,62**. It means that the pre-departure briefing is a quite efficient support practice for our respondents, since more than 60% considers it efficient and needful for the reentry success. Instead, in the repatriate survey we witnessed a negative trend, where the weighted average was 2,7 and, therefore, meaning a poor quality of the support practices employed.

A mentoring program during the whole assignment



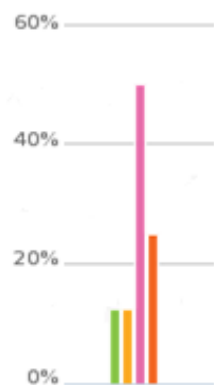
From the chart is easily to observe that the mentoring program is an efficient support practice. In fact, the weighted average corresponds to **3,87**, which means the most of our HR managers consider this practice efficient. Instead, in the survey for repatriates was attained an unbiased result, with a weighted average of 3,16.

The reentry training and coaching



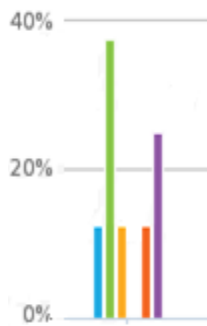
If we compare the positive and negative feedbacks, we notice that there are more HR managers that consider the reentry training and coaching efficient rather than poor. However, the highest percentage (37,5%) is represented by the indifference choice about this issue. The weighted average is **3,62**, which tells us that most of them consider this practice quite efficient. Instead, in the other survey we witnessed a weighted average of 2,5.

A continue communication tool with the expatriates before leaving the host country



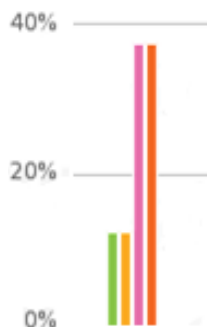
We can assert that the communication is at the base for the management of the repatriation process. As a matter of fact, the weighted average here results **3,87**, which means that our respondents consider this tool efficient in order to support their repatriates in the reentry process. In the previous analysis we found out positive replies about the communication's efficiency during the period abroad.

The use of a repatriate directory network



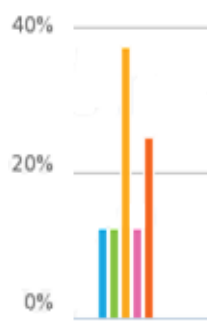
By this time, it is blown that the repatriate directory network it is not a so common used practice to facilitate the reentry process. In the other survey, we obtained a weighted average of 1,92. The same result is got here, where the weighted average corresponds to **2,5**. We can assess from the chart that this practice is not only considered inefficient by the organizations, but sometimes they are not aware about it, as a demonstration of the high percentage of the non-applicable choice (25%).

Visible signs that you appreciate the international experience



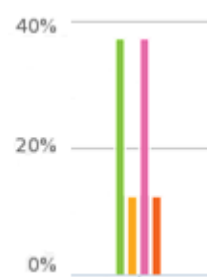
It is extremely important for a repatriate to feel himself/herself appreciated for the international experience, and we verify that also our respondents consider it important and efficient. In fact, the weighted average about this issue gives us a value of **4**, which means that the HR managers consider this practice efficient for the reentry success. A same result has been obtained in the other survey, where the weighted average was 3,72.

An agreement outlining the type of position the repatriates will be placed upon the repatriation



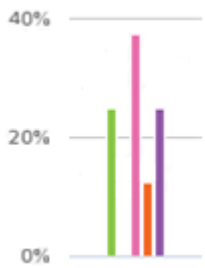
Here, we notice an unbiased result, since the weighted average gives us a value of **3,25**. This is confirmed also by the high percentage (37,5%) of the indifference choice about this support practice. In the previous analysis it was obtained an average value of 2,56. These results may stem from the fact that the HR manager can't stipulate an agreement outlining the new type of working position, because during the assignment many variables can change that can't be predict by the organization.

Reorientation program regarding the possible changes occurred in the company.



It is easily to notice a balanced situation among the choices about this support practice. Looking at the chart, we can observe the same percentage (37,5%) obtained both from whom consider this practice efficient and inefficient. This outcome is confirmed also by the weighted average, which measures **3,25**.

Support structures for facilitating the family reintegration upon the return

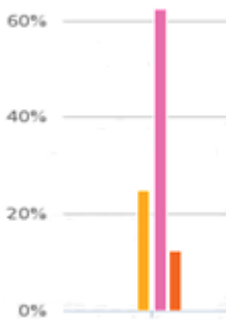


The weighted average for the last support practice is **3,5**. It is a value very close to the indifference outcome. Here, it states that our interviewees consider this last practice quite efficient for the readjustment success. It is obvious from the chart that the percentage of whom consider it efficient is higher than whom consider it inefficient. Moreover, we should consider the percentage of non-applicable choice, since many of their repatriates experienced the international assignment lonely and, therefore, it did not need a support practice for the families' readjustment.

Outcomes achieved due to the international assignment

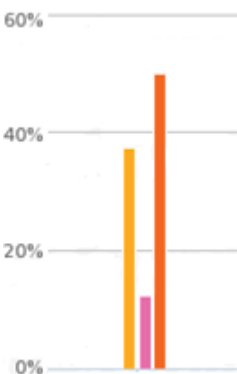
We are used to think that at the end of an international assignment only the repatriate is going to achieve successful results. But this is wrong, because thanks to an efficient management of the whole international experience the individual will be more inclined to share his/her profitable results, which in turn they bring to the entire organization successful benefits.

Job loyalty and commitment



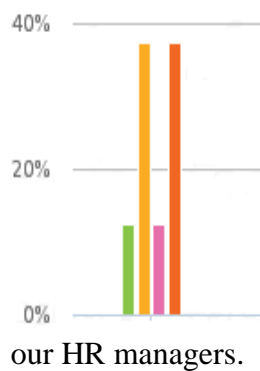
We can notice that our interviewees managed to achieve a good job loyalty and commitment from their repatriates. As a matter of fact, the weighted average gives us a measure of **3,87**. This goal can be attained due to an efficient management of the reentry process and when the repatriate feels satisfied about the whole international assignment program.

Performance efficiency improvement



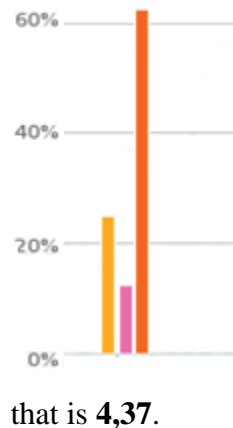
The weighted average of this outcome gives us a value of **4,12**. In short, it means that thanks to the efficient management of the whole period abroad, especially the repatriation phase, our respondents achieved a performance efficiency improvement, which is correlated also by the fulfillment of the job loyalty and commitment by their repatriates upon the return.

Attract future expatriates



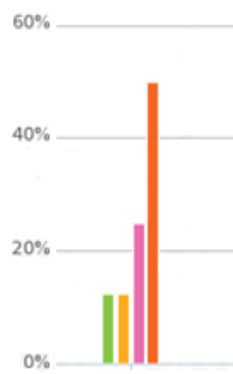
This outcome extremely cares to the organizations. A good management of the international assignment and positive satisfactions about it from repatriates may encourage other employees to undertake this program, which in turn can bring to the company major investments. The weighted average of this outcome is **3,75**, which means that this goal enough achieved by our HR managers.

Ensure the sharing of the transfer knowledge



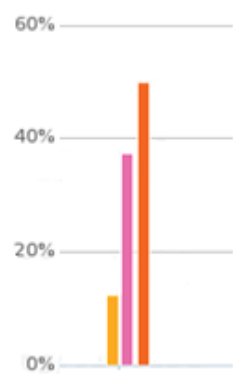
After having accomplished an international assignment, the repatriate brings with him/her the new expertise and knowledge acquired abroad. The duty of the organization is to let the spread of this knowledge among the employees. Here, we can observe that these HR managers managed efficiently to guarantee the sharing of the transfer knowledge acquired by their repatriates abroad. This statement is also confirmed by the high value of the weighted average that is **4,37**.

Retain and develop the newly skills



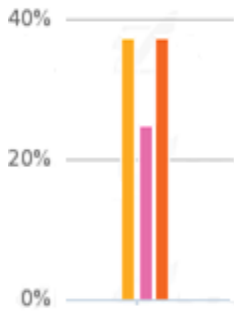
The development and the retain of newly skill go hand in hand with the previous outcome. The weighted average is **4,12**, which means that these managers were able to develop the skills acquired by the repatriates. Indeed, the HR managers should not only guarantee the transfer of the new knowledge, but also ensure that the newly skills are kept developed and retained in order to not lose them, which in turn can give to the organization more competitive advantages.

Develop global managers for competitive advantages



The development of future global managers represents one of the purpose to undertake an international assignment. We saw that this is one of the international assignment's needs for Company Alpha. We can assess a positive result from the chart on the left, where its weighted average corresponds to **4,37**. Therefore, our interviewees managed to achieve this goal that can lead them competitive advantages.

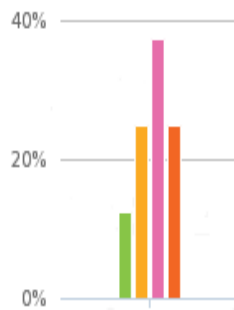
Return on investment



The weighted average of the last outcome gives us a value of **4**. This result tells us that these organizations achieved to accomplish determined projects through the international assignments and have a high return on investment. Here, they are included of course the achievement of the past outcomes, and if we go back we can notice a good weighted average in all previous outcomes.

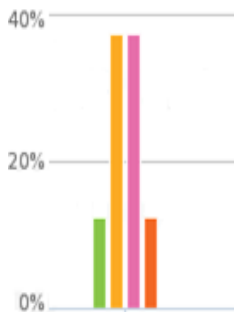
Repatriates' expectations met by the HR managers

We manage to ensure a smooth readjustment in the organization for the repatriates



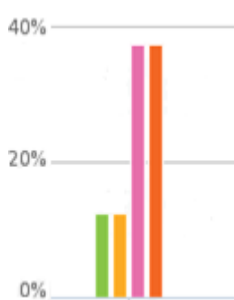
The weighted average about this statement results **4**. It means that the HR managers interviewed managed to guarantee an effective readjustment in the home organization for their repatriates. This positive outcome can be confirmed by the benefits achieved that we analyzed in the previous pages.

The new repatriate's job position matches the policies agreed



In this case, we find an average value of **3,5**, which is near to the indifference about the match of this expectations by the HR managers. In short, the HR managers may provide to their repatriate a job that suits with the new skills and responsibilities acquired by them abroad, but it is difficult to ensure a pre-determined job position. In fact, in the previous analysis we found out a weighted average of 3,25 regarding the agreement outlining the type of position the repatriates will be placed upon the repatriation.

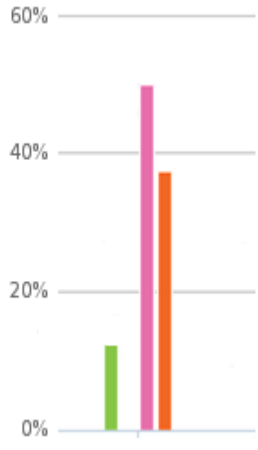
We extremely value and exploit the newly knowledge and expertise gained by repatriates



In the outcomes achieved analysis, we discovered that our respondents managed to guarantee the sharing of the transfer knowledge, with a weighted average of 4,37. Consequently, we should find a positive correlation about this statement. As a matter of fact, the weighted average is **4**, which means that these HR

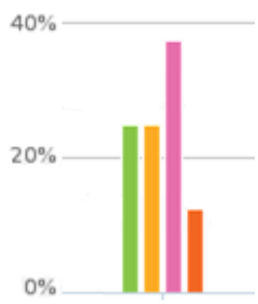
managers valued and exploited the newly knowledge and expertise gained by their repatriates during the assignment.

I always take in high consideration who returns at home after an international assignment



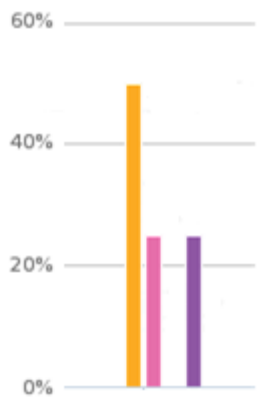
The same pattern is obtained also for this case. The weighted average for this expectation has a value of **4,12**, which means the interviewees appreciate and take in high consideration the repatriates returning at home after having accomplished an international assignment. This is confirmed even in the support practices analysis, where we noticed that they appreciate the international experience, since the weighted average corresponded to 4.

The repatriates feel satisfied about the repatriation program applied



Here, we notice a controversy in this case. Even if we have assessed the positive results in the last issues, in this case we obtain a weighted average value of **3**, which gives us an unbiased result. According to the previous results, we should collect a higher weighted average.

The repatriate's spouse/family did not encounter readjustment challenges



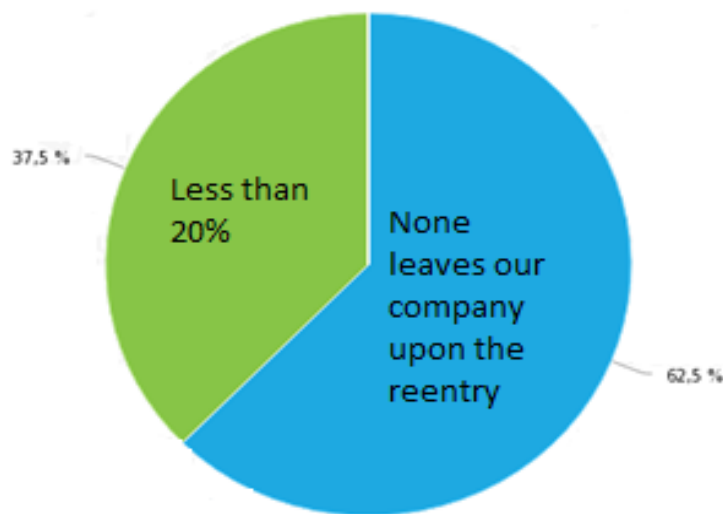
In this last statement, we find a weighted average value of **3,33**. It is quite close to the indifference value. This result may due from the fact that many of the repatriates undertook their international assignment without their families. This can be observed in the chart, where we register high percentage (37,5%) of the indifference choice (the yellow column) and a percentage (25%) of non-applicable choice (violet column).

Resignation rate by repatriates upon the return

As for the survey for repatriates, we wanted to ask to our respondents what is the resignation rate registered after the reentry of their repatriates.

In the other survey, we noticed a positive trend, where around the 60% of interviewees asserted to not have resigned after having accomplished the whole international assignment program. If we take in high consideration what we have analyzed so far in the survey for HR managers, we should obtain a low percentage of resignation rate, since most of the past questions have registered positive outcomes. Here below, it is illustrated the graph relative to the percentage of resignation rate experienced:

Figure 31: Percentage of resignation rate



As a matter of fact, we notice that 62,5% of their repatriates did not resign upon the return. It's true that who decided to leave the organizations represent a high percentage (37,5%), but we should also take in consideration that this percentage refers to less than 20% of all repatriates that experienced an international assignment. The efficient management on the whole international assignment analyzed before and the positive outcomes achieved both from the HR managers and the repatriates confirm this last positive result.

6) Discussion and Conclusions

This dissertation let us to focus in a detailed way the international assignment program, in particular the repatriation process. Since it remains a few studied topic and sometimes it is neglected by the organizations, we had followed a determined path to understand what is the repatriation and how it is structured and what are the features that characterize the management of this process. Consequently, we started by collecting all the data and information analyzed by the scholars in their literatures in order to have an overview about the management of the repatriation process. We have learned what are the main factors that may have a positive or negative impact on the repatriates when they return in the home environment and how the organizations can deal with these challenges by applying the relative support practices. In the end we have assessed what are the outcomes can be achieved both from the repatriates and the organization through an efficient management of the reentry process. In particular, we focused on the theme of the repatriates' loyalty, since the scholars analyzed a negative trend of resignation rate after the end of an international assignment, which is strictly correlated to an inefficient management of the whole international experience.

After having analyzed the theoretical framework concerning the repatriation process, we have conducted two empirical research. The first one refers to the study of a real international assignment policy in order to understand how a real company (Company Alpha) implements and develops the international mobility program, what are the benefits and the supports applied to assist its assignee, and how it is structured the repatriation process. It figured out several convergences with the theoretical data reported in the second chapter.

The second empirical research concerns the analysis of two surveys (one for the repatriates and the other one for the HR managers), which have been useful for us in order to study in depth this topic. Moreover, this analysis has been useful in order to find eventual divergences or convergences with what discovered regarding the theoretical data written in the second chapter.

In the next subchapter, there will be summarized the most important results that has been possible to gather through the two surveys, and we are going to make a benchmarking analysis with the issues described in the second chapter.

6.1) Overview of the results achieved

Surveys results and assessments

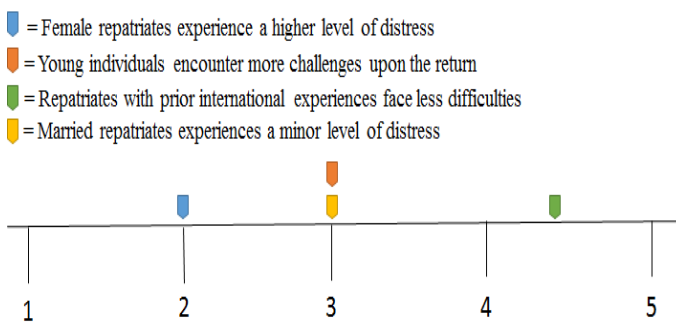
The purpose of this study was to investigate in detail the repatriation process and the factors influencing the repatriates. This analysis comprises of two surveys: survey for HR managers collecting 8 responses, the other one a survey for repatriates collecting 24 responses. Both the two surveys are structured in the same way: *General information*, *Expatriation process* and *Repatriation process*. The results gathered were compared to the theoretical assumptions stated at the beginning of the dissertation, in order to assess if they are in line or if there are some divergences among them. Moreover, it had been possible to understand which support practices resulted to be more useful and which were not, and what kind of outcomes they achieved at the end of the assignment.

Factors that influence the reentry process

In the survey for HR managers, we asked to the interviewees to say their opinions on the features influencing the repatriation basing on their experiences, in a Likert form phase, where 1=totally disagree and 5=totally agree.

All features characterizing the reentry process are labeled, and each label is reported in this line according the weighted average computed.

Figure 32: Repatriates' individual characteristics

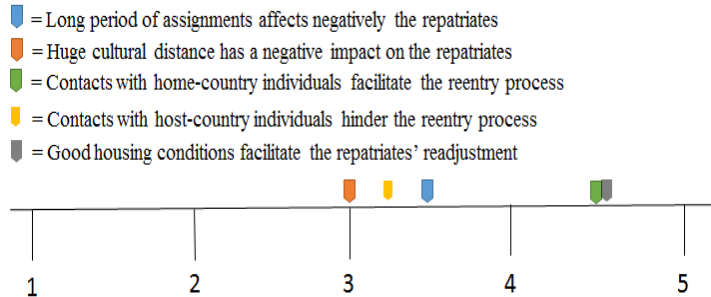


Looking at the blue label (2) in the first line, we immediately see a confutation since the interviewees disagree with the theory assumption which confirms the women are more inclined to experience a higher level of

anxiety and distress upon the return. This supposition may stem from the fact that some years ago the MNCs tend to discriminate women in favor of men, because they were considered unfit for this project. But now, companies select the right candidate for the international assignment project, regardless the gender. Instead, by looking at the green label (4,42), we notice a convergence with the theory assumption by which states repatriates with prior international experiences are more inclined to readjust their selves better in the home country in the reentry process. The other two labels (red and yellow=3) gave us an unbiased result, by which the marital status and the age of the repatriate can

impact on the repatriation phase. In both cases, it was reached a balanced result by positive and negative values, which in short asserts further researches are needed since we can't notice a convergence or divergence with these two suppositions.

Figure 33: External situation variables



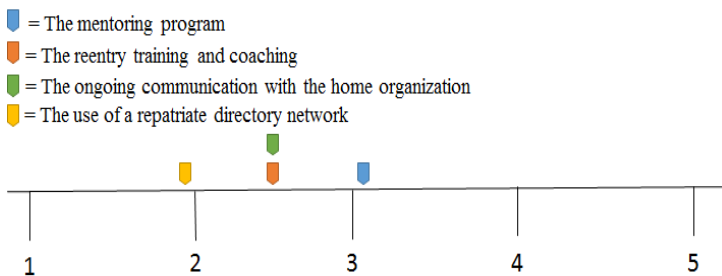
Regarding external situation variables, the same result was gained by the red label (3) and the yellow label (3,25). Interesting to observe that the red one is not in line with the assumption by which a huge

cultural distance can influence negatively the reentry process. This outcome may stem from the fact that this features is too related with the personal traits of the repatriates, and therefore it is uneasy to compute. The blue label (3,5) highlights that the interviewees quite agree with the theory by which a long period of assignment can influence negatively the reentry process. The assignee has more time to feel integrated in the host-country, which can lead to a reverse culture shock upon the return in the home-country. The last two factors (green= 4,5 and grey= 4,57) tells us that the interviewees totally agree that an ongoing communication and a good housing condition facilitate the reentry process, therefore we notice the convergences with the assumptions made by the other authors. After all, an ongoing communication represents one of the main support practices to let the best readjustment process for the repatriates.

Support practices employed perceived by repatriates

In both surveys, we analyzed the support practices employed by the organizations and how the interviewees perceived the efficiency of these tools. Even here, we studied these issues by exploiting the Likert form, where 1=totally inefficient and 5=totally efficient.

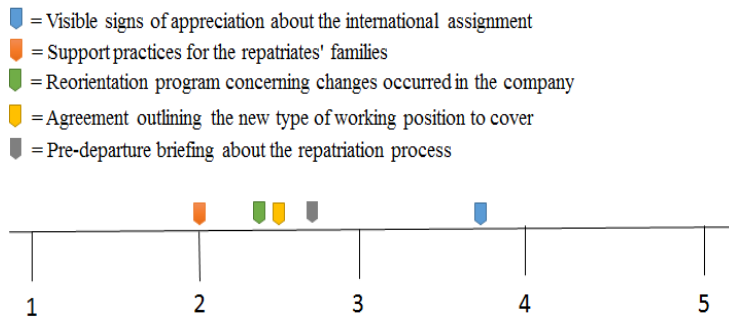
Figure 34: support practices perceived by repatriates



Substantially, we witness a negative assessment about the support practices perceived by the repatriates interviewed. A divergence with the theory stems from the evaluation

about *the reentry training and coaching* (2,5). In fact, we knew that it represented the most useful and utilized practice for facilitating the readjustment. Instead, we notice that our interviewees confute this theory since they might perceive their training useless. *The*

use of a repatriate directory network has been resulted the least efficient practices employed (1,92). The cause may stem from the fact that this type of support practice still remains quite unknown both from the two parties. Interesting to observe the unbiased results gained by *the mentoring program* (3,16) and *the ongoing communication* (3,1). The theories state that are the most efficient and used practices together the reentry training and coaching, but here we verify controversy results against the theories assumed.

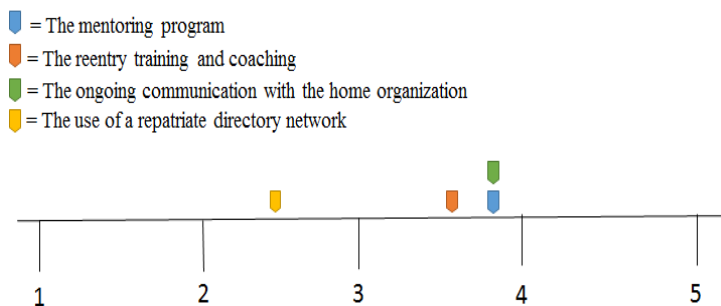


As a confirmation about what said at the beginning, the only practice perceived useful regards *the visible signs of appreciation about the international assignment* (3,72). Even *the support*

practices for their families (2) and *the reorientation program* (2,42) were perceived useless by the interviewees. *The agreement outlining the type of new working position* resulted inefficient (2,5), which is due from the fact that is complicated for an organization to ensure immediately a new working position at the end of the assignment, which does not give support to the repatriates and confutes the theory assumed about this practice.

Support practices employed perceived by HR managers

Figure 35: Support practices perceived by HR managers

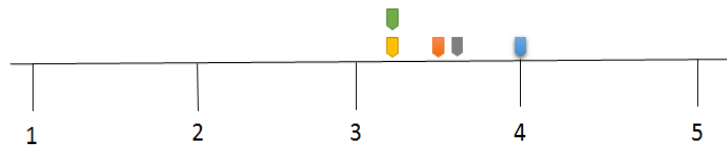


In this case, we notice a different outcome. In fact, most of the practices here were valued efficient by the HR managers interviewed. We find that both *the ongoing*

communication (3,87) and *the mentoring program* (3,87) were considered efficient and vitals for the repatriates' assistances, which are in line with theory assumptions. *The pre-departure briefing* has been resulted a quite efficient practice (3,62) in order to inform their repatriates what to expect during the reentry phase, and the same for the reentry training and coaching (3,62), which have confirmed what found by the other scholars. However, again we get the same results concerning the least efficient and used practice

and the most efficient and utilized practice. *The repatriate directory network* represents the least efficient and used practice (2,5), which may support our theory whereby this support practice still remains unknown by many companies to facilitate the reentry process. Instead, *the visible signs of appreciation* have resulted to be the most efficient support practices (4), like in the repatriate survey. Even the support practices for the

- = Visible signs of appreciation about the international assignment
- = Support practices for the repatriates' families
- = Reorientation program concerning changes occurred in the company
- = Agreement outlining the new type of working position to cover
- = Pre-departure briefing about the repatriation process



repatriates' families were considered quite useful (3,5) for a better readjustment, as a demonstration that these organizations do not neglect this particular case. In the

end, we can notice biased results for the reorientation program (3,25) and for the agreement outlining the type of new working position (3,25). In the latter case the reason may stem from the fact that at the beginning the organization does not know which kind of position the repatriate can cover at the end of the assignment, therefore it should not be used as a support practice. The former may achieve this result due to the ongoing communication during the whole assignment, which let the repatriate already informed about eventual changes occurred in the organization.

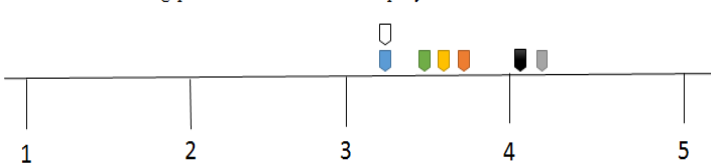
Outcomes achieved through the international assignment

In both surveys, we analyzed the outcomes achievable both from the repatriates and the organizations. Even here, we studied these issues by exploiting the Likert form, where 1= not achieved and 5= entirely achieved efficient.

Opportunities for the repatriate

Figure 36: Outcomes achieved by repatriates

- = The new base salary
- = The career advancement
- = The spread of the newly acquired knowledge among the employees
- = The level of responsibility related with the new job position
- = The level of visibility due to the international experience
- = The level of personal and culture enhancement
- = The new working position covered in the company



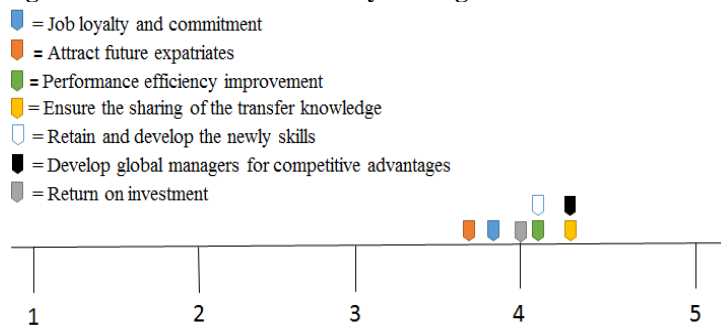
Most of them quite achieved a *career improvement* (3,75) after their reentry. Simultaneously, we notice a direct correlation with the quite achievement of *the level of responsibility related with their new job position* (3,6).

Even *the spread of the newly acquired knowledge* was quite achieved (3,5). *The level of visibility* has represented one of the most achievable outcome by the interviewees, with a weighted average of (4,2), which is in line with the only positive value obtained in the

support practices analysis. The only unbiased values were registered in *the level of the new compensation received* and *the new working position covered in the company*. However, in the latter we have already explained that a career improvement does not mandatorily coincide with a new working position, but with a new project that requires the new responsibilities and expertise acquired by the repatriate. While the former reached an unbiased value because the organizations provide a salary increase for whom joins the program in order to encourage the international assignment project, which remains unchanged during the assignment and does not undergo reductions upon the return. Therefore, many repatriates may not see an effective change in their salaries after the reentry. Even if the repatriation processes were not so well managed, as cleared by the results on the perceptions about the support practices employed, it figured out that most of the benefits were quite achieved by the repatriates.

Opportunities for the organization

Figure 37: Outcomes achieved by the organization



As saw previously, the HR managers asserted that the support practices applied were, in average, quite useful for the reentry process of their repatriates. What have been figured out from the

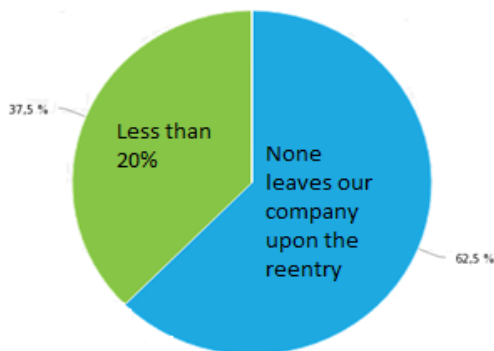
outcomes achieved supports the theories stated in the second chapter. Indeed, all the weighted averages of the possible outcomes to achieve exceed the value **3,75**. Noteworthy is that the most achievable outcomes concern *the sharing of the newly acquired knowledge and expertise among the employees (4,37)* and *the development of future global managers (4,37)*, by which these organizations can rise their competitive advantages against rivals. Moreover, these organizations managed to get a higher *job loyal commitment (3,87)* by their repatriates due to an efficient management of the repatriation process, which lead to an *improvement on the performance efficiencies (4,12)*. All these benefits had the positive impact to encourage other employees to join the international assignment program, which in turn gave more possibilities to these companies to exploit this kind of project. As a matter of fact, these organizations quite achieved to attract employees in order to join this kind of project (**3,75**), although this outcome has obtained the lowest weighted average compared to the other benefits.

Therefore, we may agree with the theories whereby an efficient management of the repatriation process can lead to achieve determined outcomes profitable for the whole organization with major probabilities.

Repatriates' loyalty

At the end of the analysis, we analyzed the resignation rate in both surveys. What we found out could be a starting point for further researches.

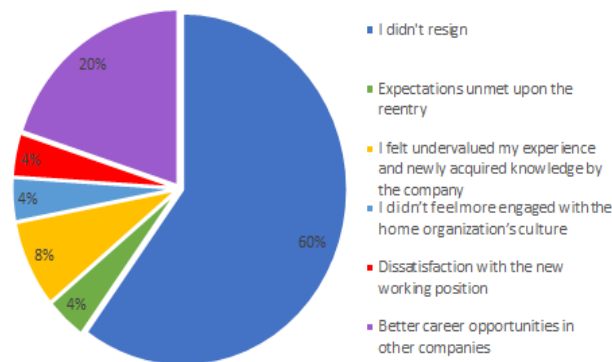
Figure 38: Resignation rate in HR survey



Immediately, we verify that the **62,5%** of interviewees asserted that their repatriates did not leave the organization after the reentry, while the **37,5%** stated that less than **20%** of the total repatriates decided to resign. If we have in mind the support practices analysis, we can have a convergence with the theory

assumption, since efficient support practices and positive perceptions about that influence positively the resignation rate. As a matter of fact, almost all the support practices were considered efficient for the reentry readjustment, obtaining a direct correlation with the figure above.

Figure 39: Resignation rate in repatriate survey



A similar result was obtained also in the repatriate survey, where **60%** of respondents did not resign upon the return and the remaining **40%** left their companies due several reasons. In this case we find a divergence with the theories. In fact, most of the

interviewees considered and perceived the support practices applied useless for their readjustment in the home organizations. Taking in consideration what assumed in the theory assumptions, we should have gained a higher resignation rate. The reason of this divergence could stem from the fact that we should consider the macroeconomic factors a country or more country are facing. Nowadays, we are dealing with a huge economic downturn, which have a strong negative influence on the employment rate. Even if a repatriate is not satisfied about the support practices employed, he/she will be less inclined to leave the company without the certainty to get another job with better career

opportunities. In fact, the main reason that pushed the interviewees to reign is exactly the having reached better career opportunities in other companies (20%). In the end, we have to consider that most of the repatriates managed to achieve the final positive outcomes. It is quite unreasonable to think that a repatriate decides to leave his/her organization after having got a career improvement. Therefore, we may assume that the turnover rate of the repatriates is strictly related to the outcomes achieved at the end of the assignment.

6.2) Limitation of the research

This study has several limitations that further research could address. As already repeated many times, we have witnessed a spread of the international assignment program due to the globalization process in these last decades, therefore there is few literatures about this theme, in particular about the reentry process. This outcome stems from the fact that the organizations tend to neglect the last part of the international mobility, which leads to a major difficulty in the analysis by the scholars. Consequently, through the own analysis of this theme I have registered many interesting statements about the argument, but it has been possible to assess that for many factors characterizing the repatriation process there are some divergences among the scholars regarding these theories. Therefore, I was forced to treat these data with extreme caution.

The second major limitation discerning this dissertation concerns the targets whom were applied the two surveys. Even if in the last years the number of employees undertaking an international assignment have augmented, the assignees still represent a few percentage of the total employees working in a MNC (as a matter of fact, in the HR managers' survey we noticed that no more than 6% of employees undertook an international mobility program). Moreover, these individuals are less inclined to fulfill in these types of surveys due to the privacy conditions imposed by their organization. Therefore, it is easy to get that the research of the right candidates for these surveys have been extremely difficult, which it was possible mostly thanks to the personal contacts obtained due to the internship done in the Company Alpha and to other contacts.

The total number of respondents that we managed to reach corresponds to 32 individuals (more repatriates than HR managers). Obviously, this number let us to make some benchmarking analysis, but we can't pretend that these results have a statistical validity enough to refute in fully what have been discovered by the previous scholars.

6.3) Future researches

We understood that the repatriation phenomenon needs more researches, since it still remains in part undiscovered. The further researchers will be free to follow these suggests in order to develop an efficient and comprehensive assessment about this managerial process.

First of all, we exploited various literatures where for the same factor different authors expressed different reasoning and conclusions, which may lead the reader in a misunderstanding. In particular, we have found these divergences in the features characterizing the repatriation process (in fact, it represents one of the limitations described previously). Therefore, it should be necessary more studies in order to gain more information about these issues and how the organizations can improve their support practices in order to achieve a successful repatriation.

Secondly, we must remember that the repatriation phase is a part of the whole international assignment program, and it should not consider as an independent step. So, it is recommended to make a depth analysis also for the first steps of the international mobility process, because from their assessment it would be possible to notice eventual repatriation challenges that can stem from a mismanagement of the other phases since all of them are strictly correlated.

Furthermore, most of the analysis made referred to large MNCs. With most probability, small and large organizations might manage the repatriation program differently from each other's, and they might experience different challenges. For instance, large companies may exploit the international assignment programs more than small companies and they can be advantaged when they have to reinsert again the repatriate inside the organization. On the other side, small companies may experience less difficulties during the repatriation process, since they deal with less assignees. More studies concerning the management of the repatriation process and the repatriates by small companies are needed.

In the end, the best way to get a deeper knowledge about the management of the repatriation process, with the relative opportunities and challenges, is the implementation of questionnaires/surveys and interviews. It would be recommended to do these investigations both for the repatriates and for the HR managers, by that you will might have two kinds of point of view about the management of the repatriation program applied

and you will have more chances to understand what are the main challenges and outcomes experienced by them.

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Appendix 1 – Introduction to the surveys

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Matteo Merlini and I am attending the master course in “International Management” at LUISS University in Rome. Right now I am writing the dissertation that focuses on “*the studies on the repatriation management and the resulting outcomes*”. The purpose of this thesis is to examine in a more detailed way the challenges and the benefits affecting the repatriates during the repatriation phases, and which support practices can be employed by HR managers to not lose them.

In order to do a more reliable thesis, I need to collect empirical data from HR managers and repatriates, therefore I kindly ask you to fill out my survey. I guarantee that your answers will be anonymous and extremely confidential, and the information gathered will be analyzed only by myself. This survey will take maximum 10 minutes of your precious time.

If you have any questions or concerns, do not hesitate to contact me:

merlinimatteo91@gmail.com

Thanks for your participation.

Kind regards,

Matteo Merlini

Appendix 2 – Survey for repatriates

Survey for the repatriates

Dear respondent,

Please take your time to fill out the following survey, as it will contribute to design a highly informative and effective scheme concerning the challenges and benefits that affect the repatriates upon the reentry. The survey is structured into three phases: General information; Expatriation process and Repatriation process.

I remind you that your answers will be completely anonymous and extremely confidential. There are not wrong or right answers, and the data collected will be analyzed only by myself. This survey will take maximum 10 minutes of your precious time.

Again, thank you very much for your time and support.

General information:

- 1) Gender:
 - Male
 - Female
- 2) Age at the time of the international experience:
 - Under 25
 - 25 - 35
 - 35 – 45
 - 45 – 55
 - 55 – 65
 - Over 65
- 3) What was your social status?
 - Single
 - Married/ cohabitating
 - Married with children
 - Divorced
- 4) Country of origin:
- 5) Name the last company where you had an international experience
- 6) What was the length of your last international assignment?
 - Less than 6 months
 - 6 months - 1 year

- 1 year – 2 years
- 2 years – 3 years
- More than 3 years

7) In which country?_____

8) Have you ever done any previous international experiences?

- Never
- 1 time
- 2 times
- More than 2 times

Expatriation process:

9) What were your motivations to undertake an international assignment? (more answers are available).

- Career improvement
- Better reward
- Company's incentives
- Enrich the own personal and cultural formation
- Others

10) Did your spouse / family join you in the new country?

- Yes
- No

11) Below you will find statements regarding the expatriation phase. Please read each statement carefully and select the level of agreement with the statement. (where 1 means strongly disagree and 5 strongly agree).

- My company selected candidates through a formal process with stated criteria
- For each expatriate is given an efficient pre-assignment training
- My family was prepared for my international assignment
- My company gave me clear indications about what I would have done abroad
- The organization informed me about the benefits that I would gained joining this program (Insurance assistance, housing conditions, family assistance...)

- There is an agreement before the leaving, including all policies agreed for the reentry

12) Below you will find statements regarding the working period in the host-country. Please read each statement carefully and select the level of agreement with the statement. (where 1 means strongly disagree and 5 strongly agree).

- I adjusted myself easily and immediately in the foreign country
- The culture distance had no impacts on my adjustment
- My company assisted me in the adjustment process in the host-country
- My spouse/family encountered adjustment challenges during the international assignment
- My spouse/family were supported by my company during the international assignment
- The cooperation and the contact with the host-country individuals were smooth and efficient
- I kept in touch with home-country individuals
- The communication with my organization was an effective and continuing tool

13) Who was responsible for the communication during the international assignment?

- A mentor
- HR manager
- A sponsor
- Former expatriates
- None

Repatriation process:

14) For which reasons did you return to the home country?

- Assignment accomplished
- Unsatisfied position covered abroad
- Unfit with the foreign culture
- Family reasons
- Others (please specify)

15) When did your company started the repatriation process?

- 6 months before the leaving

- 3 months before the leaving
- Few weeks before the leaving
- Few days before the leaving
- Immediately at the assignment end
- It did not implement a repatriation program

16) Below you will find statements regarding the policies of the repatriation agreement made at the beginning of the international assignment. Please read each statement carefully and select the level of agreement with the statement. (where 1 means strongly disagree and 5 strongly agree).

- Guarantee that I would have obtained a career advancement with higher responsibilities
- The incorporation of a return incentive payment to compensate for dislocation effects
- My company provided relocation benefits, including housing and school search for the return
- It developed a repatriation program to ensure an easier reentry into the work setting

17) Below you will find statements regarding the support practices provided to you. Please read each statement carefully and select the level of efficiency with the statement. (where 1 means extremely poor and 5 very efficient).

- Pre-departure briefing about what to expect during the repatriation process
- A mentoring program during the whole assignment
- The reentry training and coaching
- An ongoing communication tool with the home organization before leaving the host country
- The use of a repatriate directory network
- Visible signs that company appreciates the international experience
- An agreement outlining the type of position you will be placed upon the repatriation
- Reorientation program regarding the possible changes occurred in the company

- Support structures for facilitating the family reintegration upon the return

18) Had you experienced a reverse culture shock after the reentry?

- No
- Yes

(If yes, please explain the causes)

19) Below you will find statements regarding the repatriates' perceptions upon the return. Please read each statement carefully and select the level of agreement with the statement. (where 1 means strongly disagree and 5 strongly agree).

- My company put enough attention on the repatriation process
- My newly acquired knowledge and expertise were valued by the organization
- I experienced a relevant level of distress upon the return
- My family experienced reentry challenges
- I perceived the supports practices employed by my company very useful
- I felt myself more valued for my international assignment by my firm
- I was satisfied about the repatriation program employed by my company

20) Below you will find statements regarding the repatriates' outcomes upon the return. Please read each statement carefully and select the level of satisfaction with the statements. (where 1 means very unsatisfied and 5 very satisfied).

- The level of compensation that I received
- My career improvement
- The new working position in the company
- The spread of the newly acquired knowledge among the employees
- The level of responsibility related with my new job position
- The level of visibility due to my international experience
- The level of personal and culture enhancement

21) If you are working for another company, what were the main reasons that pushed you to resign? (more answers are available).

- I didn't resign
- Expectations unmet upon the reentry

- I felt undervalued my experience and newly acquired knowledge by the company
- I didn't feel more engaged with the home organization's culture
- Dissatisfaction with the new working position
- Better career opportunities in other companies
- Others

Appendix 3 – Survey for HR managers

Survey for HR managers

Dear respondent,

Please take your time to fill out the following survey, as it will contribute to design a highly informative and effective scheme concerning the support practices used by the HR managers to assist their repatriates. The survey is structured into three phases: General information; Expatriation process and Repatriation process.

I remind you that your answers will remain completely anonymous and extremely confidential. There are not wrong or right answers, and the data collected will be analyzed only by myself. This survey will take maximum 10 minutes of your precious time.

Again, thank you very much for your time and support.

General information:

- 1) For which company do you work?
- 2) Have you ever experienced an international assignment?
 - Yes
 - No
- 3) What is your company's international staffing approach?
 - Polycentric approach: Host country nationals are more preferred to be designed to the top positions in the subsidiaries
 - Ethnocentric approach: Parent country nationals are preferred to be appointed to the top positions in the subsidiaries
 - Regiocentric approach: It represents a mid-way station between polycentric and ethnocentric approach, managers are transferred on a regional basis, such as Europe
 - Geocentric approach: The best employees are appointed to the top positions in the subsidiaries, regardless of his/her nationality
- 4) What is the percentage of employees in your company that go abroad for an international assignment?
 - Under 3%
 - 3% - 6%
 - 6% - 9%

- More than 9%
- 5) What is the average length of the international experiences of your expatriates?
- Less than 6 months
 - 6 months – 1 year
 - 1 year – 2 years
 - More than 2 years

Expatriation process:

- 6) Below you will find statements regarding the first steps of an international assignment. Please read each statement carefully and select the level of agreement with the statement. (where 1 means strongly disagree and 5 strongly agree).
- Candidates are selected through a formal process with stated criteria
 - For each expatriate is given an efficient pre-assignment training
 - There is an agreement before the leaving, including all policies agreed for the reentry
 - Every expatriate's spouse/family receives the adequate training to go abroad
 - Each expatriate is fully informed about what to do during the international assignment
 - The expatriates well know what kind of benefits and right they gain due to the international assignment
- 7) Below you will find statements regarding the working period in the host-country. Please read each statement carefully and select the level of agreement with the statement. (where 1 means strongly disagree and 5 strongly agree).
- Our expatriates generally experience culture shock problems and challenges related with the adjustment in the host-country
 - We provide supports to make the expatriates' adjustment easier during the period abroad
 - We steadily keep the communication with the expatriates
 - We guarantee the expatriates' expectations (such as job position, housing conditions and tax and legal services)

- We ensure that expatriate's spouse/family does not encounter adjustment during the sojourn abroad
- None of our expatriates decided to stop early their international assignment

Repatriation process:

8) When do you make the repatriation agreement (wherein all the policies and the employee's expectations are stipulated)?

- At the beginning of the international assignment, after having selected the candidates
- During the international assignment
- When the reentry process starts
- We don't implement a repatriation agreement

9) When do you usually begin the repatriation process and provide supports and briefings for the reentry?

- 6 months before the assignment ends
- 3 months before the assignment ends
- Few weeks before the assignment ends
- Few days before the assignment ends
- Immediately at the end

10) Below you will find statements regarding the four steps of the repatriation process. Please read each statement carefully and select the level of agreement with the statement. (where 1 means strongly disagree and 5 strongly agree).

- We use to prepare our expatriates for the new position by developing the plan for the future and giving them the right information before the travel
- We render the needful helps to the repatriates for the travel to the home country
- We guarantee the necessary arrangements for our repatriates and their family, in order to facilitate the period of transition upon the return
- We ensure to figure out the challenges that may occur upon the reentry, in order to guarantee a better readjustment in the home environment

11) Below you will find statements regarding the factors that may affect negatively or positively the reentry process for the repatriates. Please read each statement carefully and select the level of agreement with the statement, basing on your experiences. (where 1 means strongly disagree and 5 strongly agree).

- Young individuals experienced a higher level of distress upon the return compared to their older colleagues
- Female repatriates generally encountered more challenges upon the reentry than their male colleagues
- Your repatriates with their spouse/family experienced less distress than their single colleagues
- A repatriates with previous international experience faces less difficulties
- A long period of assignment affected negatively your repatriates
- A huge culture distance influenced negatively the reentry of your repatriates
- The maintenance of contacts with host-country individuals sometimes hindered the reentry
- The contact with home-country individuals and organization facilitated the reentry process
- A good housing condition generally helps the repatriates to readjust better in the home environment

12) What is the percentage of your repatriates that had faced challenges about the readjustment in the home environment (reverse culture shock, housing conditions, family reasons, working position covered)?

- Less than 25%
- 25% - 50%
- 50% - 75%
- More than 75%

13) Below you will find statements regarding the support practices helpful for the reentry process. Please read each statement carefully and select the level of efficiency about the following procedures. (where 1 means extremely poor and 5 very efficient).

- The pre-departure briefing about what to expect during the repatriation process
- A mentoring program during the whole assignment
- The reentry training and coaching
- A continue communication tool with the expatriates before leaving the host country
- The use of a repatriate directory network
- Visible signs that you appreciate the international experience
- An agreement outlining the type of position the repatriates will be placed upon the repatriation
- Reorientation program regarding the possible changes occurred in the company
- Support structures for facilitating the family reintegration upon the return

14) Below you will find statements regarding the benefits achieved both for the repatriates and the organization due to the international assignment. Please read each statement carefully and select the level of achievement of the following outputs. (where 1 means not achieved and 5 entirely achieved).

- Job loyalty and commitment
- Performance efficiency improvement
- Attract future expatriates
- Ensure the sharing of the transfer knowledge
- Retain and develop the newly skills
- Develop global managers for competitive advantages
- Return on investment

15) Below you will find statements regarding the repatriates' expectations ensured by HR managers. Please read each statement carefully and select the level of agreement with the statement. (where 1 means strongly disagree and 5 strongly agree).

- We manage to ensure a smooth readjustment in the organization for the repatriates
- The new repatriate's job position matches the policies agreed

- We extremely value and exploit the newly knowledge and expertise gained by repatriates
- We always take in high consideration who return at home after an international assignment
- The repatriates feel satisfied about the repatriation program applied
- The repatriate's spouse/family did not encounter readjustment challenges

16) What is approximately the percentage of resignation rate by the repatriates?

- None leaves our company upon the reentry
- Less than 20%
- 20% - 40%
- 40% - 60%
- 60% - 80%
- More than 80%

Acknowledgements

At the end of this dissertation, my thoughts are with all people that made it possible.

First of all, I would like to thank Professor Roberto Dandi, who gave me the possibility of developing my last dissertation. This opportunity has brought to me many useful resources for my knowledge and my future career.

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In the end, an infinite gratitude and love to my mom and dad. Despite we experienced bad times the last year, they have had the strength to encourage and help me in all what I did. They made all the sacrifices possible in order to give me the best possible life and the best education achievable. I will be so grateful to my family for what they did to me forever.

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Managing the repatriation: challenges and opportunities

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Introduction

Through the last half-century, we have witnessed an impressive globalization process among countries and companies. Firms have had more possibilities to enlarge their business over their own borders, exploiting new international strategies and modes of entry in new markets in order to beat and overcome their competitors.

Mostly in the last decades, this phenomenon has shown an exponential increase due to the removal of some entry barriers by the major part of the countries in the world. So, it had been possible for many MNCs to make mergers & acquisitions, joint ventures with other companies or establish new subsidiaries in foreign countries.

However, without a direct and an immediate connection between the head-quarter and the subsidiaries, the whole organizations would face a problem of communication and transfer of knowledge, without considering an effective control about the performances of the plants in the foreign markets. Moreover, many firms believe to lose their competitive advantages against rivals by hiring local people to cover important positions in the subsidiaries without global and efficient skills and without knowing the company's culture. To fix those problems, MNCs have some solutions, one of those is the "*international assignment*". With this term we refer to the period of work (that can be few months or many years) experienced by an employee, called expatriate, sent by the company to cover managerial position in the foreign subsidiary, usually in exchange of better work conditions, major responsibility or career improvement. Thanks to the study by Edström and Galbraith (1977), there have been found three main reasons about the international assignment. The first one is fill positions, which refers to the transfer of technical and managerial knowledge. The second reason is a management development; the expatriate managers obtain an international experience that it will be helpful for them to get future managerial skills. The last motive concerns a collective goal that is organization development, which consists in a socialization of both expatriate and local managers into the corporate culture and the creation of a verbal information network that provides links between subsidiaries and head-quarter¹. Any international assignment implies several procedures and organizational process that a company has to do to achieve an effective expatriation.

It is usually required a proactive process of planning and training, which has to be attended by the employee in question, prior the departure in the foreign country and let

¹ Harzing A.W. & Reiche S., 2009, "*International assignment*", International Human Resource Management.

him/her, potentially accompanied by the relative spouse or family, to adapt with the best manner in the new context. The whole process of adaptation and adjustment does not stop when the employee starts to work in the subsidiary, but it keeps working to help the managers to overcome any kind of problems that may occur, which can affect negatively their performance during their permanence in foreign plant.

The *repatriation* is the final step of an international assignment. When the pre-determined period of job is accomplished by the worker, the enterprise prepares all the procedures and steps that will help the expatriates to come back in their home country, making some readjustments that are straightforward to make a match again with the employees and the company's culture and organization, without incurring in the risk of losing their talents.

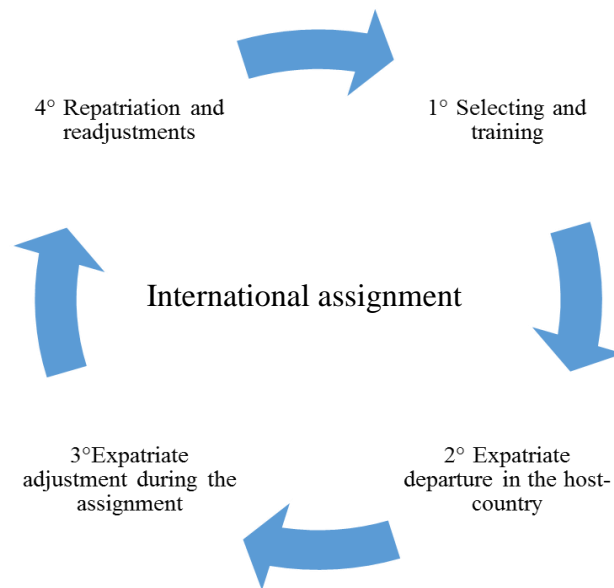
Purpose of study

The main purpose of this dissertation is to study and understand in the clearest way all the repatriation phenomenon (from the pre-departure step to the readjustment in the head-quarter and the loyalty issue), summarized all the past researches, highlighting what are the common issues in the articles and in what they diverge. In the end, they will be studied how is structured the repatriation process of a real company (Company Alpha) and they will be analyzed through two surveys (one for repatriates and the other for HR managers), in order to collect empirical results, which they will be useful to implement a benchmarking analysis to assess possibly convergences or divergences with the theoretical assumptions regarding the reentry process found in the past articles.

Extant literatures

Dealing with the term repatriation, we always refer to a process that belongs to a large and complicated organizational management, which is the final part of the international assignment. Corporates sometimes may incur in the terrible mistake to consider the expatriation and the repatriation as two independent and separated operations, but it is completely wrong. The expatriation is at the beginning of the international assignment, while with the repatriation the whole process ends up (obviously, there are other phases between these two steps, which must to be conducted in order to accomplish an effective international assignment program). With the term "*Repatriation*" we generally refer to all the operations (among these reentry practices and readjustments in the home country) involved in rendering the assistances necessary to the expatriates (possibly with his/her family) when they return to the home country, after having accomplished their missions in the host country.

Figure 1: International assignment cycle's framework



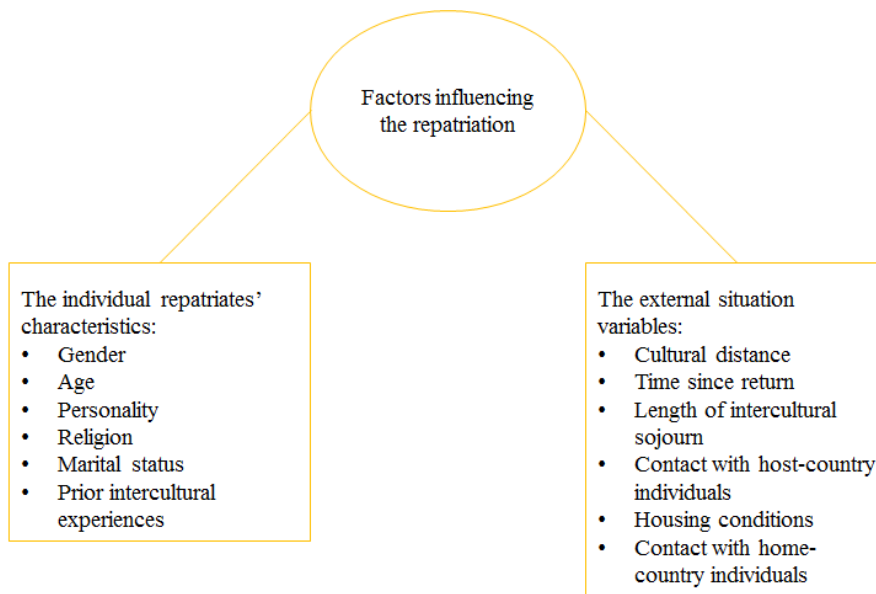
Sometimes, the international assignment program does not end with the reentry in the home organization, but another international assignment may be committed immediately to the assignee. In the repatriation process, the repatriate should follow the four steps of the repatriation process: *preparation* for the reentry process and for the new job to cover; *physical relocation* that consists with the travel to the home country, by removing the personal effects and breaking ties with host-country colleagues; *transition* that it is set for a temporary accommodation (where it is needed), with the relative arrangements; *readjustment* by that the organization deals with the challenges experienced by the repatriate during the reentry process and tries to overcome these difficulties in order to facilitate the reinsert inside the company.

Factors affecting the reentry process

However, MNCs sometime do not fulfill efficient repatriation programs, which is due not only to a negligence of this step of the international assignment but also for the several and different aspects that may affect the repatriates when returning home. Then, it is clear that a firm can't adopt a universal standard strategy to solve those conflicts, so it is forced to take in consideration all the factors that may influence the reentry of the assignees and, after that, imply the correct practices and readjustments. Those features can be divided in two main categories²:

² Szkudlarek B., 2009, "*Reentry—A review of the literature*", International Journal of Intercultural Relations.

Figure 2: Factors affecting the reentry process



As example, regarding *the repatriates' individual characteristics* some scholars noticed that female repatriates tend to experience a higher level of distress upon the return, while young individuals are more inclined to feel a reverse cultural shock due to their higher culture identity change, which facilitates the integration in the host-country. Assignees with prior intercultural experiences well know how the repatriation process works, so they may experience an easy readjustment, and married repatriates may receive the spouse's support, since they might experience the same challenges, which can contribute to a better reentry process.

Instead, regarding *external variables* it has been assessed from some authors that a huge cultural distance may influence negatively the reentry process if the repatriate accepted and acquired the new values and norms. The same pattern is followed by the length of the experience, since the repatriate may feel more integrated with the foreign environment than the home-country. The contact with home-country individuals may facilitate the reentry process because the repatriate is updated about eventual changes occurred in the organization, while the contact with host-country individuals may hinder the repatriation process because the repatriate may feel still tied with the foreign country. In the end, a good housing condition can make easy the transition if the repatriate needs temporary arrangements.

Support practices employed by the organizations

These challenges force the organization to develop an effective repatriation program, with the necessary support practices, if it does not want to see its investment to be wasted. The repatriation process should be addressed by the company that provides support practices,

managing all the repatriates' expectations already prior to departure until the readjustment in the home environment. However, it is not a rare case that these individuals are left alone in those steps. This neglect leads to a two inevitable consequences.

First of all, due to the repatriation mismanagement the firms may encounter a high risk to lose its valuable talents carrying with themselves all skills and knowledge gained abroad, obtaining a competitive advantage by leveraging them. Secondly, in the last years we have witnessed the "*self-initiated repatriation*", by which repatriates return to the home country on their own behalf and without any company supports.

Therefore, an international company willing to overcome these problems and accomplish an effective repatriation process should apply the needful support practices, which are summarized in the table in the next page:

Figure 3: List of support practices employed by the organizations

• Pre-departure briefing about the repatriation process	• The support structures for the repatriates' families
• The mentoring program	• The agreement outlining the type of new working position to cover
• The reentry training and coaching	• Reorientation program about changes occurred in the organization
• The ongoing communication with the home organization	
• Visible signs of appreciation	
• The use of a repatriate directory network	

According with the existing literatures, the most used practice for the repatriation strategy is *the reentry training and coaching*. As well as the company provides a training to the employees before the departure, the same procedure must be applied starting some months before the return, if it wants to obtain a successful repatriation. *The mentor* is a sort of advisor and confidant, and its core role is to maintain an efficient contact between the assignees and the home organization. At the reentry, the mentor, with the supervision of the HR manager, seeks the best job opportunities suitable for the new repatriates' expertise.³

The communication is a crucial mean in the repatriation strategy, as well as during the whole period of assignment. Here, for communication we do not mean only between the two parties (i.e. the repatriates and the company), but also with other repatriates. To let it all be possible, there should be established a *repatriate directory network* among former expatriates in order to facilitate and encouraging the interactions and gather useful information about the assignment.

³ Chew J. & Debowski S., (2008), "*Developing an Effective Repatriation Strategy for MNC: A Model and Tools for International Human Resource Management*", Journal of Comparative International Management.

Benefits of an effective repatriation

The achievement of a successful international assignment, with an effective repatriation program, can bring notable advantages both for the organization and the individual.

At the end of the assignment, the repatriate can fulfill professionally and personally outcomes. Talking about the professional benefits, the career advancement represents the main reason for undertaking an international assignment. Consequently, with the certain provision of a higher rewarded position in the organization, the repatriate will feel more valued by its company and the repatriate's self-image will tend to increase. This recognition may result in a better commitment and feeling of trust to the company by the former expatriate, who will be more likely to remain within the corporate.

In the end, all of that may determine a better performance, assisted by the experiences and skills acquired abroad, which can lead to a higher satisfaction for the position covered. The final outcomes reported by the repatriates are a greater respect for different norms and values and becoming more culturally sensitive⁴.

In turn, these profitable outcomes automatically produce benefits for the whole organization. A satisfied repatriate about the entire repatriation program and that he/she managed to achieve the results described before, he/she will be more inclined to increase the won job loyalty and commitment, which leads automatically to an improvement on the performance efficiencies. Moreover, the company may exploit the newly acquired knowledge and expertise and share them among the other employees that, together the development of the future global leaders, may increase the own competitive advantages. In the end, an efficient management of the repatriates may attract and encourage other employees to undertake the international assignment program, which in turn the organization can exploit it more times.

Repatriates' loyalty

Another benefit arising from an efficient repatriation management is the retention of the repatriates. However, the higher is the neglect on the reentry process, the higher could be the resignation rate. In the recent studies, it has been noticed a direct relationship between the repatriates' turnover rate and the level of distress and challenges experienced during the reentry phase. In support of this theory, there are data collected through surveys by the scholars, which they are anything but encouraging. A survey conducted by Lee and

⁴ Caligiuri P. & Lazarova M, (2001), "*Strategic Repatriation Policies to Enhance Global Leadership Development*", Journal of World Business.

Liu (2007) pointed out that the 25% of repatriates decided to leave their parent companies within one year upon the reentry due to the high level of distress experienced⁵. The real concern related to the individual leaving is the flow of the key resources and core competencies with them allowing the other competitors to gain those competitive advantages without a broad investment of time and money, wherein their skills seem to be more demanded and appreciated. In the end, all of those factors have a negative impact for the future international assignment projects. The organization will slowly lose the ability to recruit its employees to join an overseas assignment program because they perceive it as a negative working career, even if the truth is merely the opposite.

It has been demonstrated that an ongoing communication system among the expatriates and the organization shortens the level of the repatriates' turnover rate. In particular, it was discovered that the repatriates' perception to the support practices influences mostly the turnover's rate, rather the support practices themselves⁶. This study indicates that repatriates' resignation intention strongly depends on the level of appreciation and visibility given by the company for the global experience and the quality of the offered career planning sessions. We have to consider that the implementation of a reentry support practice is an objective fact, whereas the perceptions of the usefulness and quality of that practices are absolutely subjective. Therefore, while in the former the identification of the challenges affecting the repatriations' turnover rate is easier (here we have to assess the implementation or not of some specific support practices), in the latter the distress experienced upon the return is located in the repatriate's mind and perception, which represents a sort of barrier for the repatriation adjustment in the organization.

Repatriation process of Company Alpha

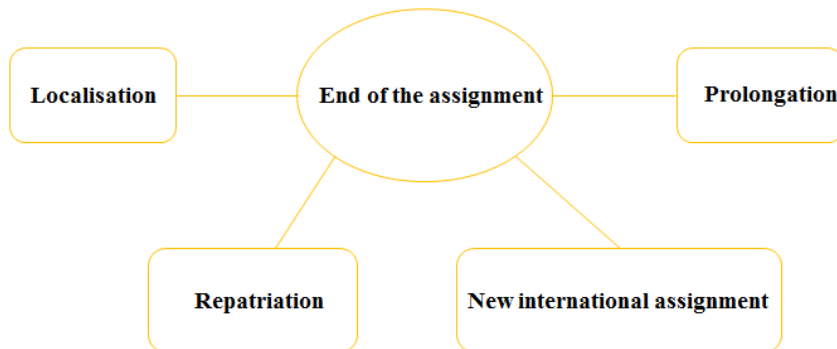
Company Alpha is the leading multinational steel manufacturing corporation, and as a global business operating in more than 60 countries (mostly in Europe), needs to leverage the international mobility program and transfer its best skills and talents in order to have the right people in the right place at the right time, and to facilitate the development of its staff. It includes all the policies and information about the international mobility program in the documented agreement at the beginning of the assignment. Therefore, the assignee is immediately well informed regarding also to the repatriation process.

⁵ Lee H.W. & Liu C.H., (2007), "*An examination of factors affecting repatriates' turnover intentions*", International Journal of Manpower.

⁶ Caligiuri P. & Lazarova M, (2001), "*Retaining repatriates: The role of organizational support practices*", Journal of World Business.

Company Alpha always provides a home country return guarantee, in order to protect their repatriates during the reentry process. This is applicable either when the assignment ends due to the personal reasons, or at the end of the assignment. There could be happen four cases at the end of the assignment:

Figure 4: Possible ways at the end of the assignment



In the case the assignment is *prolonged*, the home-country HR shall decide on the extension of the home country return guarantee. If the assignee chooses to be *localized* in the host-country, his/her remuneration shall be adjusted to the host-country remuneration levels and all assignment benefits end. While, by undertaking a *new international assignment*, the assignee receives all terms and conditions related to the new project by the corporate international assignment team as if the expatriate was about to leave for the first time. In the end, for *the repatriation* the company assists the returner in all the steps of this process, where necessaries, and pays all approved costs in order to guarantee the best readjustment in the home environment.

However, for each case the decision shall be taken no later than six months prior to the end date of the assignment and communicated to the assignee, home HR and corporate international assignment team.

Repatriation challenges

Nevertheless, Company Alpha too may encounter reentry challenges. In the case of short-term assignment, the employee stays abroad maximum for twelve months, without be accompanied by his family or spouse/partner. Therefore, it is easy to assume that the repatriation process for the organization is easier and less expensive, because it has not to care about their readjustment in the home environment and then it requires less investment. Moreover, from a culture identity change point of view, even if the assignee is likely to well integrate himself in the host culture, he/she would have few time to adapt on the foreign culture in totally, which involves a lower level of distress experienced upon the return due to the reverse culture shock.

Instead, in the case of long-term assignment most of the times the assignee is accompanied by the relative family, which leads to the organization higher costs to assist both the assignee and the family. Consequently, this concern is encountered by the organization also in the repatriation phase, and it has to guarantee the adequate assistances to all of them.

In addition, if an incumbent shows a high level of adaptation with new cultures and values, his/her culture identity may change during the international assignment, accepting the new values and feeling himself/herself more integrated with the new environment. At the time of reentry, he/she may refuse the old values owned about his home culture and he would experience a reverse culture shock.

When an incumbent is selected for an international assignment, after his leaving in the foreign country he does not leave only the home environment, but also his work position that remains vacant. So, Company Alpha has to overcome the job position that has been left vacant during the international experience by replacing the incumbent, and it usually does it by exploiting the organic system having a disposition.

In the reentry phase, if it had not been possible to guarantee the path agreed at the beginning of the assignment, the corporate international assignment team has to find an alternative solution for the repatriate that should be at least equated to that covered previously.

To overcome this problem, Company Alpha has always managed to find a new working position or a project that were suitable for the new skills and responsibilities acquired by the assignee due to the international mobility, showing to the repatriate and to the other employees how the international assignment was well perceived by the organization. Meanwhile, it is not forced to downgrade the employee who replaced the old job position covered by the assignee before going abroad. In the case of short-term assignment, the replacement appears easier for Company Alpha, wherein it would be possible to overcome the relative job functions left be vacant due to the international assignment for few months, and managed by the organization team in Company Alpha, which let us to assume that it may prefer the short-term assignments.

Surveys results and assessments

The purpose of this study was to investigate in detail the repatriation process and the factors influencing the repatriates. This analysis comprises of two surveys: survey for HR managers collecting 8 responses, the other one a survey for repatriates collecting 24 responses. Both the two surveys are structured in the same way: *General information*,

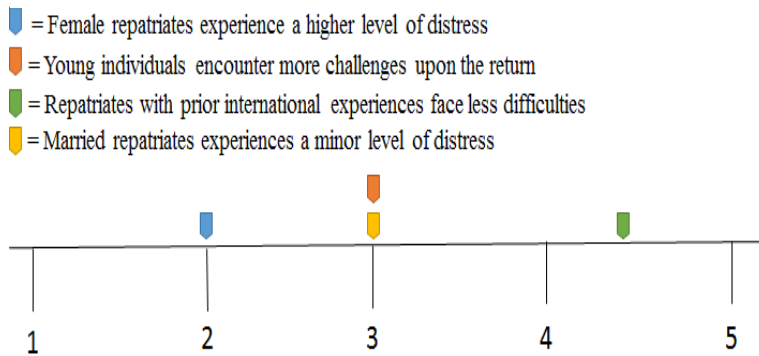
Expatriation process and *Repatriation process*. The results gathered were compared to the theoretical assumptions stated at the beginning of the dissertation, in order to assess if they are in line or if there are some divergences among them. Moreover, it had been possible to understand which support practices resulted to be more useful and which were not, and what kind of outcomes they achieved at the end of the assignment.

Factors that influence the reentry process

In the survey for HR managers, we asked to the interviewees to say their opinions on the features influencing the repatriation basing on their experiences, in a Likert form phase, where 1=totally disagree and 5=totally agree.

All features characterizing the reentry process are labeled, and each label is reported in this line according the weighted average computed.

Figure 5: Repatriates' individual characteristics

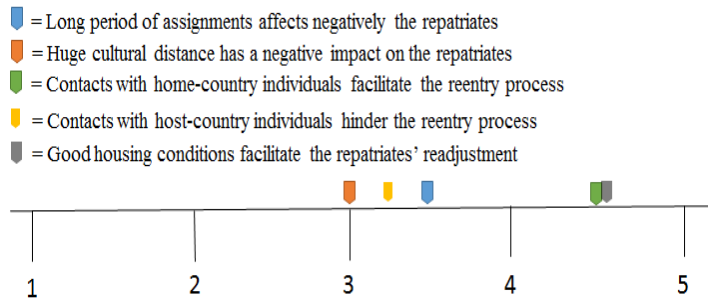


- ▣ =Female repatriates experience a higher level of distress
- ▣ =Young individuals encounter more challenges upon the return
- ▣ =Repatriates with prior international experiences face less difficulties
- ▣ =Married repatriates experiences a minor level of distress

Looking at the blue label (2) in the first line, we immediately see a confutation since the interviewees disagree with the theory assumption which confirms the women are more inclined to

experience a higher level of anxiety and distress upon the return. This supposition may stem from the fact that some years ago the MNCs tend to discriminate women in favor of men, because they were considered unfit for this project. But now, companies select the right candidate for the international assignment project, regardless the gender. Instead, by looking at the green label (4,42), we notice a convergence with the theory assumption by which states repatriates with prior international experiences are more inclined to readjust their selves better in the home country in the reentry process. The other two labels (red and yellow=3) gave us an unbiased result, by which the marital status and the age of the repatriate can impact on the repatriation phase. In both cases, it was reached a balanced result by positive and negative values, which in short asserts further researches are needed since we can't notice a convergence or divergence with these two suppositions.

Figure 6: External situation variables

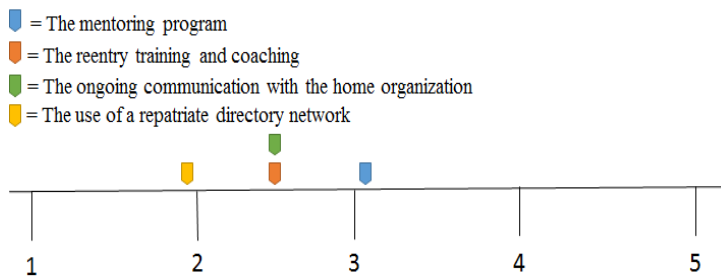


Regarding external situation variables, the same result was gained by the red label (3) and the yellow label (3,25). Interesting to observe that the red one is not in line with the assumption by which a huge cultural distance can influence negatively the reentry process. This outcome may stem from the fact that this feature is too related with the personal traits of the repatriates, and therefore it is uneasy to compute. The blue label (3,5) highlights that the interviewees quite agree with the theory by which a long period of assignment can influence negatively the reentry process. The assignee has more time to feel integrated in the host-country, which can lead to a reverse culture shock upon the return in the home-country. The last two factors (green= 4,5 and grey= 4,57) tells us that the interviewees totally agree that an ongoing communication and a good housing condition facilitate the reentry process, therefore we notice the convergences with the assumptions made by the other authors. After all, an ongoing communication represents one of the main support practices to let the best readjustment process for the repatriates.

Support practices employed perceived by repatriates

In both surveys, we analyzed the support practices employed by the organizations and how the interviewees perceived the efficiency of these tools. Even here, we studied these issues by exploiting the Likert form, where 1=totally inefficient and 5=totally efficient.

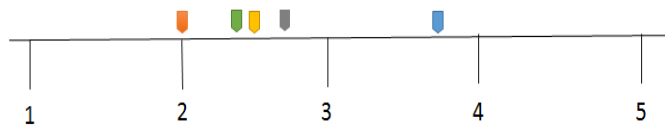
Figure 7: support practices perceived by repatriates



Substantially, we witness a negative assessment about the support practices perceived by the repatriates interviewed. A divergence with the theory stems from the evaluation about *the reentry training and coaching* (2,5). In fact, we knew that it represented the most useful and utilized practice for facilitating the readjustment. Instead, we notice that our interviewees confute this theory since they might perceive their training useless. *The use of a repatriate directory network* has been resulted the least efficient practices employed (1,92). The cause may stem from the fact that this type of support practice still remains quite unknown both from the two parties. Interesting to observe the unbiased

results gained by *the mentoring program* (3,16) and *the ongoing communication* (3,1). The theories state that are the most efficient and used practices together the reentry training and coaching, but here we verify controversy results against the theories assumed.

- = Visible signs of appreciation about the international assignment
- = Support practices for the repatriates' families
- = Reorientation program concerning changes occurred in the company
- = Agreement outlining the new type of working position to cover
- = Pre-departure briefing about the repatriation process



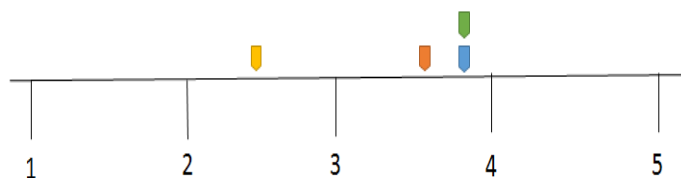
As a confirmation about what said at the beginning, the only practice perceived useful regards *the visible signs of appreciation about the international assignment* (3,72). Even *the support practices*

for their families (2) and *the reorientation program* (2,42) were perceived useless by the interviewees. *The agreement outlining the type of new working position* resulted inefficient (2,5), which is due from the fact that is complicated for an organization to ensure immediately a new working position at the end of the assignment, which does not give support to the repatriates and confutes the theory assumed about this practice.

Support practices employed perceived by HR managers

Figure 8: Support practices perceived by HR managers

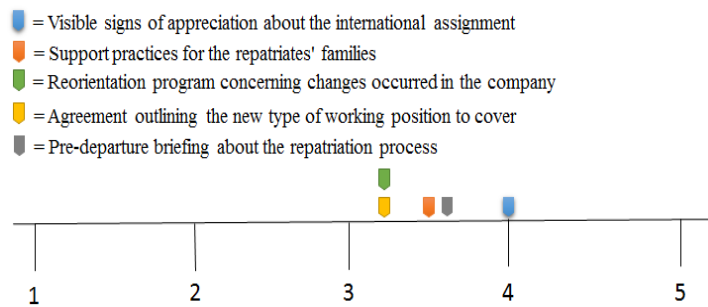
- = The mentoring program
- = The reentry training and coaching
- = The ongoing communication with the home organization
- = The use of a repatriate directory network



In this case, we notice a different outcome. In fact, most of the practices here were valued efficient by the HR managers interviewed. We find that both *the ongoing communication* (3,87) and *the mentoring program* (3,87) were considered efficient and vitals for the repatriates' assistances, which

are in line with theory assumptions. *The pre-departure briefing* has been resulted a quite efficient practice (3,62) in order to inform their repatriates what to expect during the reentry phase, and the same for the reentry training and coaching (3,62), which have confirmed what found by the other scholars. However, again we get the same results concerning the least efficient and used practice and the most efficient and utilized practice. *The repatriate directory network* represents the least efficient and used practice (2,5), which may support our theory whereby this support practice still remains unknown by many companies to facilitate the reentry process. Instead, *the visible signs of appreciation* have resulted to be the most efficient support practices (4), like in the

repatriate survey. Even the *support practices for the repatriates' families* were considered quite useful (3,5) for a better readjustment, as a demonstration that these organizations do not neglect this particular case. In the end, we can notice unbiased results both for *the reorientation program* (3,25) and for *the agreement outlining the type of new working position* (3,25). In the latter case the reason may stem from the fact that at the beginning



the organization does not know which kind of position the repatriate can cover at the end of the assignment, therefore it should not be used as a support practice. The former may

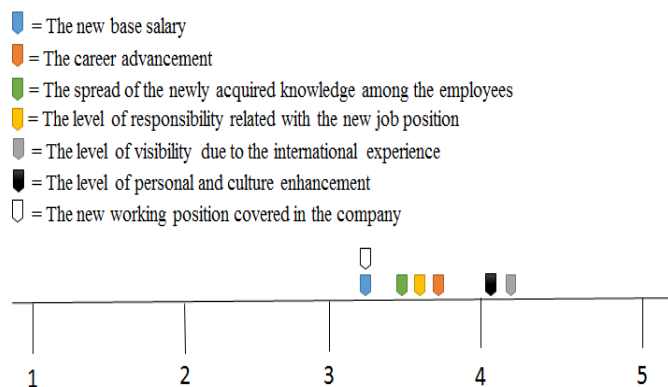
achieve this result due to the ongoing communication during the whole assignment, which let the repatriate already informed about eventual changes occurred in the organization.

Outcomes achieved through the international assignment

In both surveys, we analyzed the outcomes achievable both from the repatriates and the organizations. Even here, we studied these issues by exploiting the Likert form, where 1= not achieved and 5= entirely achieved efficient.

Opportunities for the repatriate

Figure 9: Outcomes achieved by repatriates



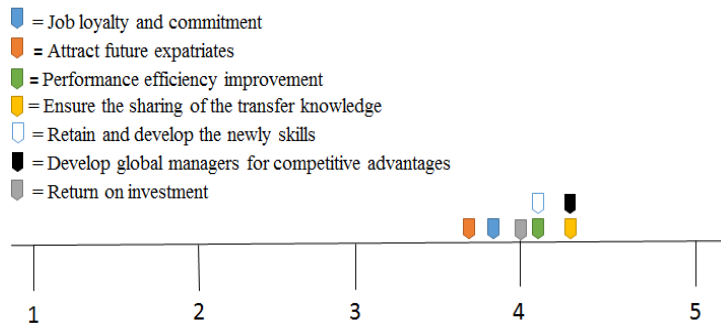
Most of them quite achieved a *career improvement* (3,75) after their reentry. Simultaneously, we notice a direct correlation with the quite achievement of *the level of responsibility related with their new job position* (3,6). Even *the spread of the newly acquired*

knowledge was quite achieved (3,5). *The level of visibility* has represented one of the most achievable outcome by the interviewees, with a weighted average of (4,2), which is in line with the only positive value obtained in the support practices analysis. The only unbiased values were registered in *the level of the new compensation received* and *the new working position covered in the company*. However, in the latter we have already explained that a career improvement does not mandatorily coincide with a new working position, but with a new project that requires the new responsibilities and expertise acquired by the repatriate. While the former reached an unbiased value because the

organizations provide a salary increase for whom joins the program in order to encourage the international assignment project, which remains unchanged during the assignment and does not undergo reductions upon the return. Therefore, many repatriates may not see an effective change in their salaries after the reentry. Even if the repatriation processes were not so well managed, as cleared by the results on the perceptions about the support practices employed, it figured out that most of the benefits were quite achieved by the repatriates.

Opportunities for the organization

Figure 10: Outcomes achieved by the organization



As saw previously, the HR managers asserted that the support practices applied were, in average, quite useful for the reentry process of their repatriates. What have been figured out from the

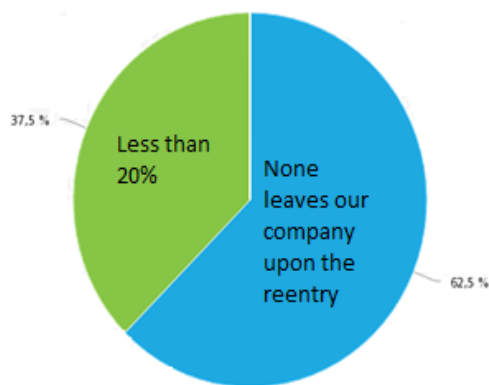
outcomes achieved supports the theories stated in the second chapter. Indeed, all the weighted averages of the possible outcomes to achieve exceed the value **3,75**. Noteworthy is that the most achievable outcomes concern *the sharing of the newly acquired knowledge and expertise among the employees (4,37)* and *the development of future global managers (4,37)*, by which these organizations can rise their competitive advantages against rivals. Moreover, these organizations managed to get a higher *job loyal commitment (3,87)* by their repatriates due to an efficient management of the repatriation process, which lead to an *improvement on the performance efficiencies (4,12)*. All these benefits had the positive impact to encourage other employees to join the international assignment program, which in turn gave more possibilities to these companies to exploit this kind of project. As a matter of fact, these organizations quite achieved to attract employees in order to join this kind of project (**3,75**), although this outcome has obtained the lowest weighted average compared to the other benefits.

Therefore, we may agree with the theories whereby an efficient management of the repatriation process can lead to achieve determined outcomes profitable for the whole organization with major probabilities.

Repatriates' loyalty

At the end of the analysis, we analyzed the resignation rate in both surveys. What we found out could be a starting point for further researches.

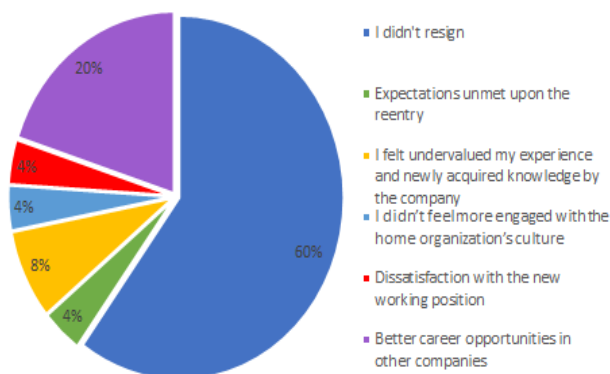
Figure 11: Resignation rate in HR survey



Immediately, we verify that the **62,5%** of interviewees asserted that their repatriates did not leave the organization after the reentry, while the **37,5%** stated that less than **20%** of the total repatriates decided to resign. If we have in mind the support practices analysis, we can have a convergence with the theory assumption, since efficient support practices

and positive perceptions about that influence positively the resignation rate. As a matter of fact, almost all the support practices were considered efficient for the reentry readjustment, obtaining a direct correlation with the figure above.

Figure 12: Resignation rate in repatriate survey



A similar result was obtained also in the repatriate survey, where **60%** of respondents did not resign upon the return and the remaining **40%** left their companies due several reasons. In this case we find a divergence with the theories. In fact, most of the

interviewees considered and perceived the support practices applied useless for their readjustment in the home organizations. According to the theory assumptions, we should have gained a higher resignation rate. The reason of this divergence could stem from the fact that we should consider the macroeconomic factors a country or more country are facing. Nowadays, we are dealing with a huge economic downturn, which have a strong negative influence on the employment rate. Even if a repatriate is not satisfied about the support practices employed, he/she will be less inclined to leave the company without the certainty to get another job with better career opportunities. In fact, the main reason that pushed the interviewees to resign is exactly the having reached better career opportunities in other companies (**20%**). In the end, we have to consider that most of the repatriates managed to achieve the final positive outcomes. It is quite unreasonable to think that a repatriate decides to leave his/her organization after having got a career improvement. Therefore, we may assume that the turnover rate of the repatriates is strictly related to the outcomes achieved at the end of the assignment.

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