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Expatriate Retention: A Challenging Goal for Global Corporations

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Abstract

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MBA, Bethel University, 2009

BS, Middle Tennessee State University, 1996

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Towers Watson Media stated that multinational organizations will grow by 45% in 2014 increasing expatriate assignments; however, global organizations lose billions of dollars yearly financing expatriate assignments due to unsuccessful retention efforts during the repatriation process. Fifty percent of expatriates consider leaving the organization within the first year of returning to their home country. The aim of this single descriptive case study was to explore the retention strategies organizational leaders need to retain expatriates employees during repatriation. Two managers from the compensation benefits department of a multinational organization in Tennessee participated in the study. Career self-management theory framed the study. Data collection consisted of semistructured interviews and a focus group interview, and member checking supported the validity and creditability of the findings. The 3 themes that emerged as key to strategies for expatriate employee retention were having career development opportunities, having a point leader, and implementing a program policy. The findings of this study may affect social change by encouraging expatriates to remain employed with the organization where they are valued, continue to develop career paths, and encourage other employees to accept foreign assignments for development. The data from this study may contribute to the prosperity of expatriates, their families, communities, and the local economy.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Expatriate assignments are important to global corporations; however, retention rates do not reflect their use as a vital asset (Reiche, Kraimer, & Harzing, 2011). Retention of expatriates is low during the repatriation process leading to organizational issues (Reiche et al., 2011). Low retention rates can cause companies to lose billions of dollars each year (Bashir, 2012). Corporate leaders need to implement retention strategies for expatriates that should start when the assignment commences (Cooper & Rice, 2012).

As a result of effective leadership and addressing the low retention rates of expatriates before the assignment begins, the organization may gain a higher commitment from the expatriate thus increasing retention (Gupta, 2013; Reiche et al., 2011). Addressing the main concerns of expatriates such as options, job satisfaction, and opportunities will ease the repatriation process (Ren, Bolino, Shaffer, & Kraimer, 2013). Organizational leaders who are proactive in their approach to the repatriation process will benefit from the expatriates' knowledge upon return and recruitment of future expatriates (Stahl, Chua, Caligiuri, Cerdin, & Taniguchi, 2009). The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to explore the strategies organizational leaders should implement to retain expatriates during the repatriation process.

Background of the Problem

Business expansion for multinational corporations (MNCs) is an important part of operations and many MNCs plan on increasing their expatriate presence by 45% in 2014 (Towers Watson Media, 2012). Expatriates are key assets in the growth process and provide vital information to organizations promoting long-term development (Reiche et al., 2011). Retention of expatriates during repatriation is essential to the organization's growth and profitability (Reiche et al., 2011). Repatriation has a high risk of turnover, which can lead to several issues for an organization, namely retention of the expatriate (Reiche et al., 2011).

Retention is important for business opportunities in current and new markets, and companies that experience low rates of retention may see losses in revenues (Nery-Kjerfve & McLean, 2012). The planning process for the expatriate's reentry should start well in advance of the return (Skimutis & Verschuur, 2011). Many MNCs are not as proactive during repatriation and do not have effective programs or polices in place to help retain expatriates (Nery-Kjerfve & McLean, 2012). Retention of the expatriate should start with a discussion of options before the assignment begins and continue while on assignment, until return (Cooper & Rice, 2012; Cox, Khan, & Armani, 2012). Issues during the repatriation process can leave an expatriate wondering if the assignment was beneficial to their career development and lower their commitment to the organization (Nery-Kjerfve & McLean, 2012).

Problem Statement

U. S. companies lose $2 billion a year due to unsuccessful retention of returning expatriates (Bashir, 2012). Repatriation is a difficult task for an organization's leadership; and up to 50% of first year returning expatriates leave for better opportunities (Nery-Kjerfve & McLean, 2012). The general business problem was the loss of experienced expatriates, which can impact an organization. The specific business problem was that organizational leaders lack the strategies needed to retain expatriates as they transition back to the home organization.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative single descriptive case study was to explore the strategies that organizational leaders need to retain expatriates as they transition back to the home organization. The repatriation process is challenging for expatriates as they return home and may hinder retention (Biemann & Braakmann, 2013). Two organizational leaders who manage expatriates from the global compensation department of a large global service company located in Tennessee participated in semistructured interviews and a focus group session to share their individual perspectives and experiences in successfully retaining expatriates after their assignment is completed. Likewise, two managers, who manage or managed three or more expatriates each participated in interviews to share their experiences and strategies. This topic may contribute to social change by allowing organizations to have a better understanding of their employees' needs and will have a direct impact on revenues through high retention rates of expatriates.

Nature of the Study

The objective of this study was to explore the strategies that organizational leaders need to retain expatriates as they transition back to the home organization. The method used was qualitative and the inquiry of design was a single descriptive case study. Qualitative method is unstructured and the researcher is provided with a better understanding of the lived human experiences of participants (Javalgi et al., 2011). This is unlike a quantitative method which is beneficial to understanding relationships among variables (dependent and independent) or mixed method, a combination of qualitative and quantitative, either concurrently or sequentially, and both lengthy and costly (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013).

By use of single case study the researcher can conduct exploratory or explanatory research and ask how or what questions to understand the characteristics of real-life events (Yin, 2014). A single case study of one global company was better suited for this study of retention of expatriates for data saturation and time purposes versus phenomenology which would be problematic in reaching saturation needed, ethnography that explores cultural groups, content analysis which studies communications, or grounded theory, exploring new theories to explain the phenomenon (Freeman & Lindsay, 2012; Lawrence & Tar, 2013; Reiche et al., 2011; Sangasubana, 2011). The development of themes or patterns in the case study may provide information to organizational leaders to address retention barriers.

Research Question

In this research study I endeavored to explore the principal research question and subsequent research question. The principal research question was What strategies do organizational leaders need to retain expatriates as they transition back to the home organization? The subsequent research question was What motivates expatriates to stay with an organization after the assignment is completed? The subsequent question along with interviews aided me to provide depth to the principal question.

Interview Questions

To research the topic of expatriate retention and the strategies organizational leaders should implement during the repatriation process at reentry the following questions were addressed with participants.

1. How many expatriates do you manage who are on assignment, or have managed?
2. In your experience what is the retention rate of expatriates who return from completed assignments?
3. How long are the expatriate assignments (6 months, 1 year, 3 years, or longer)?
4. What procedures are in place to help expatriates and their families reenter the home country after assignment completion?
5. How did you help expatriates who remained with the company?
6. What have expatriates done when they were offered new assignments?
7. How would a foreign assignment align with career development of expatriates within your company?
8. What other information would you like to provide that we have not addressed already?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework guiding this study explored the central research question to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon using career self-management theory introduced by Lent and Brown (2013) which is a linkage of social cognitive career theory (SCCT). Lent and Brown's (2013) aim was to use career self-management theory to explain how individuals direct their own career development and create career opportunities. SCCT, introduced by Lent, Brown, and Hackett in 1994, focused on career development and human resource management (HRM) practices (Howe-Walsh, 2013), and is based on three prior developed theories introduced by Albert Bandura from the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s: social learning theory, self-efficacy theory, and social cognitive theory (Armstrong & Vogel, 2009; Lent & Brown, 2013).

Theorists using SCCT and career self-management theory reflect on the navigational process an individual considers to advance their career through international assignments and the behaviors enacted that aid the occupational process (Howe-Walsh, 2013; Lent & Brown, 2013). The main difference is that career self-management theory was designed to pay more attention to career processes and behaviors individuals use to achieve their career goals (Lent & Brown, 2013). A link of social cognitive career theory, specifically, career self-management theory is explored in this study to glean career and retention strategies organizational leaders can implement to retain expatriate employees.

Definition of Terms

There are many terms related to the phenomenon under study. The following are key terms and definitions that are unique and specific to the research topic. The terms are clear with insight to realize the objects of the research.

Expatriate: An expatriate is an individual who works for a local global organization and accepts a foreign assignment in a host country which may last one year or be as long as three to 5 years (Altman & Baruch, 2012).

Home country: The home country is the company the expatriate works for in their native country of origin; the parent company (Chang & Smale, 2013).

Host country: The host country is the company operating abroad in a foreign country where the expatriate accepts the assignment (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010).

Knowledge agents: A knowledge agent is one who is an expatriate who returns to the home country and provides the company with vital knowledge learned while on foreign assignment that may be beneficial to the competitiveness of the organization. (Reiche et al., 2011).

Multinational Corporations (MNCs): These types of corporations are subsidiaries of the parent company that operate in foreign countries (Chang & Smale, 2013).

Open-coding: Open-coding describes the segments of text from the participant's interviews that reflect different ideas as they are transcribed and placed into codes or themes for future use in this study (DiSantis et al., 2013).

Repatriation: The term describes the process of reentry to the home country organization the expatriate must complete (Altman & Baruch, 2012).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

In this study, I communicated to the reader certain facts regarding this study such as any assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. Assumptions in research are beliefs or notions believed to be true by the research and guide this study. Limitations are problems or weaknesses that affect a study. Delimitations of a study are factors the researcher will not consider in this study, which will be conveyed to the reader.

Assumptions

Assumptions within research are beliefs upon which research is proposed (a foundation), guides the research, and are factors taken for granted by the researcher when viewed as the truth without definite proof (Abrams, 2010; Cunliffe, 2011; Wahyuni, 2012). An assumption made by this researcher was that the repatriation process is highly regarded within organizations, and as such, leaders would be anticipating the repatriates return having plans in place to utilize their new skills in an advanced position. Another assumption made by this researcher was that organizational leaders automatically assume there will be adjustment difficulties for expatriates, and their families, as they return to the home organization, and therefore would have policies and procedures in place to help them adjust to their new work environment and lifestyle.

Limitations

Limitations within research are problems or weaknesses the researcher identifies that can affect the internal validity and are uncontrollable (Ellis & Levy, 2009). As the researcher, I found that though the data was saturated that the smaller sample size may not reflect the transferable view of retention and the repatriation process of the industry. Another limitation considered was that participants of this study managed expatriates and the assignment from a leadership view point, which may not reflect the specific retention needs of the individual repatriate.

Delimitations

In research delimitations allow the researcher to define the boundaries of the research by conveying to the reader what will not be considered, thereby maintaining a manageable discussion of factors addressed in this study for the reader (Ellis & Levy, 2009). Delimitations are important to address for the reader and impact the validity of this study (Ellis & Levy, 2009). An identified delimitation of this study by the researcher was that participation in this study was delimited to interviews of leaders who manage expatriate assignments and retention; expatriates were not interviewed limiting the generalizability to other perspectives. In addition, a second delimitation noted by this researcher is that this study examined retention of the returning expatriate to the home organization after completion of the assignment; generalizability of retention while the expatriate lived in the host country was not warranted.

Significance of this Study

This study provided a better understanding of the repatriation process and the strategies needed by organizational leaders to retain expatriates. This study may help improve the practice of business regarding the main obstacles faced during repatriation by expatriates and how organizations can be proactive in their efforts to retain vital staff. Organizational leaders can use this study to glean where they can make changes in their processes and implement policies that reflect they value their expatriates.

Contribution to Business Practice

Companies in the United States are estimated to lose $2 billion a year due to ineffective retention of expatriate employees returning from assignments (Bashir, 2012). The purpose of this study was to explore the essential strategies that organizational leaders should implement to retain returning expatriates, and aid in the reduction of billions of dollars lost during the repatriation process.

The significance of this study was twofold and will positively impact multinational organizations through retention of expatriates and maintaining competitiveness in the global arena. This study added to the extant research and further bridges the gap in the literature between organizational processes and the specific issues expatriates face as they navigate repatriation.

Implications for Social Change

Organizational sustainability is important to global competitiveness (Boulouta & Pitelis, 2014; Marin, Rubio, & de Maya, 2012; Nazir, Shah, & Zaman, 2014). Sustainability is typically viewed as environment concerns and challenges an organization must address, however sustainability also encompasses the human aspect and human rights within the organization and in areas of operation (Kanji & Chopra, 2010). This study has the potential to impact positive social change by addressing the challenges faced by returning expatriates and their families, and promoting positive repatriation and retention.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

Multinational corporations often operate in foreign countries through the use of expatriate employees who accept short and long-term assignments abroad; use of expatriates is expected to grow by 65% within the next decade (Cox, Khan, & Armani, 2013; Harvey & Moeller, 2009). Expatriates play a valuable role in the success of organizations as they share their newly acquired knowledge during repatriation (Cave, 2014). The globalization of business has created exponential growth of MNCs and is not expected to show signs of slowing down as of 2013 (Cox et al., 2013). As MNCs (65%)

expand their global presence and send more expatriates on foreign assignments, organizations may see repatriation as an increasing problematic issue according to information presented by many researchers (Cave, 2014; Cox et al., 2013; Harvey & Moeller, 2009; Kraimer, Shaffer, Harrison, & Ren, 2012; Ren et al., 2013; Rozkwitalska, 2012).

I completed a literature search relating to the topic of expatriate retention after the assignment is completed. My goal in this research was to address the strategies leaders need to retain expatriates and the motivations behind the expatriates' decision to stay with an organization. The literature review foundation was based on databases from Walden Library, Proquest, EBSCO, PsyARTICLES, SAGE Premiere, ABI/INFORM Complete, and Ulrich's Periodicals of peer-reviewed articles within the date range of 1980-2014. Articles older than 2009 were used to provide the history of repatriation retention studied with the primary review being of those more recent articles from 2009-2014. I used specific search terms to identify resources relating to the topic: *expatriates, repatriates, repatriation, readjustment, reentry, HR practices and repatriation, organizational policies* and *repatriate retention*. The foundation was further expanded on using the conceptual information identified and reoccurring themes.

In this search, I gleaned knowledge from the literature review regarding three underlining themes as to why expatriates choose to stay or leave an organization after completion of an assignment: human resource (HR) practices, reverse culture shock and readjustment, and job satisfaction which incorporates job embeddedness, organizational career support and expectations, and general supports (training, mentoring and social networks). Each of the three themes will be discussed and a synthesis of the literature will be provided to garner the drivers of repatriation.

Repatriation

Expatriates have filled key positions while on assignments for MNCs as they look to increase the organizations' presence globally (Cooper & Rice, 2012). Towers Watson Media (2012) cited the transfer of knowledge during and after the assignment ends as the second impetus of the expatriate assignment according to 65% of MNCs. MNCs depend on this knowledge transfer to enhance their operations in foreign countries and stay competitive (Reiche et al., 2011). Expatriates are considered to be the *knowledge agents* for MNCs and their retention during repatriation should be a priority for the organization and their growth (Reiche et al., 2011).

Global organizations are finding it difficult to keep highly qualified expatriates after their reentry to the home organization, resulting in lost revenue, loss of time and opportunities, and, in some instances, damaging vital business relationships in the host country (Bashir, 2012). Understanding the reasons expatriates choose to leave their current organization is important to global multinationals due to expected growth in assignments of 45% in upcoming years (Towers Watson Media, August, 2012). Expatriate attrition is high and can lead to a lack of transfer of knowledge for the organization and underdevelopment of career opportunities for the expatriate (Lazarova, 2015).

Assignments are a necessary step for management positions; however, the return process is often mismanaged (Insch, McIntyre & Napier, 2008). International assignments are a key mechanism for expatriates to develop their competencies, skills and careers as they reenter to the home organization (Reiche et al., 2011). Expatriates are leery of foreign assignment acceptance due to the issues upon reentry; therefore, a better understanding of the organization's intentions before the assignment starts can help mitigate uneasiness (Cooper & Rice, 2012).

Harvey and Moeller (2009) stated that the concept of repatriation was conceived in the early 1980s and has been studied by numerous researchers. Repatriation is the process by which an expatriate working for a multinational corporation in a host country returns to their home country organization after the completion of a company initiated assignment; re-acclimatizing (Cox et al., 2013; Haslberger & Brewster, 2009; Lazarova, 2015; Reiche et al., 2012). The expatriate and MNC both experience more challenges during repatriation than the initial assignment, and if not managed properly reentry may lead to low retention rates (Cho, Hutchings, & Marchant, 2013; Cox et al., 2013). Dissatisfied expatriates often leave the organization for better opportunities where they can utilize their new competencies and skills, and advance their careers as *knowledge agents* (Reiche et al., 2011).

The repatriation process has typically been a more stressful event for expatriates, and poses several issues for organizations such as adjustment issues, low retention rates, financial losses, low motivation and job performance, and possible loss in global competitiveness (Jassawalla & Sashittal, 2009; Nery-Kjerfve & McLean, 2012; Ren et al., 2013; Sanchez Vidal, Sanz Valle, & Aragon, 2008, 2010). Kalkarni, Lengnick-Hall, and Valk (2010) suggested repatriation is a time of uncertainty for the expatriate, problematic, and continues to be a serious challenge for MNCs in today's global arena (Kraimer et al., 2012; Skimutis & Verschuur, 2011). Hurn (2014) also noted that repatriation is difficult and due in part to the changes the expatriate has experienced, and changes in the home organization.

Repatriation is the main cause of low retention of expatriates due to the lack of HRM polices, reverse culture shock, low job embeddedness, unrealized expectations and career development, the lack of supports, and feeling under-valued by the organization (Cave, 2014; Kraimer, Shaffer, & Bolino, 2009; Nery-Kjerfve & McLean, 2012; O'Sullivan, 2013; Shen & Hall, 2009; Valk, van der Velde, van Engen, & Szkudlarek, 2013). The failed repatriation process for expatriates sends a message that companies do not value expatriate efforts and could discourage potential future assignees (Herman & Tetrick, 2009). As companies continue to grow globally, repatriation will be as important, if not more, to the company and expatriate, therefore it needs to be a more strategic part of the organizational human resource plan (Fischlmayr & Kollinger, 2010; Gupta, 2013; Kulkarni et al., 2010).

Career Self-Management Theory

Research of retention issues faced by MNCs leadership can be explored through the theoretical lens of career self-management theory which was introduced by Lent and Brown (2013). Career self-management theory is a linkage of social cognitive career theory (SCCT) developed by Lent, Brown and Hackett in 1994 which was linked from previous theories of self-efficacy and social cognitive theory by Albert Bandura in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s (Armstrong & Vogel, 2009; Lent & Brown, 2013). SCCT stated career development is shaped by environmental factors, both objective and perceived (Howe-Walsh, 2013; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2000). Bandura's vision, which explains how career interests are developed (Tharenou, 2003), was conceived to build linkages among existing approaches to career development that also complemented each other (Lent & Brown, 2013). As part of the navigational process the individual perceives the barriers and opportunities, and support from the organization (environment), their family, and social interactions which may shape career interests (Hirschi & Freund, 2014; Tharenou, 2003).

Career self-management theorists explore the processes of career behaviors such as career advancement, career exploration, and job seeking (Lent & Brown, 2013). Important to career self-management theory are self-efficacy, adaptive career behaviors, positive emotions, and perceived social career supports which aid in the process of self-directed career management (Hirschi & Freund, 2014, Lent & Brown, 2013). Career self-management theorists focus on how individuals navigate career decisions and loss, enact behaviors that evolve careers, and use newly gained skills for job exploration in specific fields (Lent & Brown, 2013).

As part of career self-management theory, self-efficacy is the belief in one's capabilities, positive emotions, energize goal-directed activities, and social career supports which are motivators facilitating engagement and career management (Hirschi & Freund, 2014; Wright, Perrone-McGovern, Boo, & White, 2014). Self-efficacy is vital in shaping career development and choices (Armstrong & Vogel, 2009). Understanding all the variables that aid in career management, such as supports and barriers which have a huge impact on self-efficacy, will help individuals make informed career choices and decisions (Wright et al., 2014).

Adaptive career behaviors are integral to career self-management theory and are behaviors employed to advance individual's career goals; such as accepting foreign assignments to enhance skills for career development and promotions (Lent & Brown, 2013). Adaptive behaviors are considered by some researchers *as career competencies* or *process skills* which will benefit individuals in making career choices (Lent & Brown, 2013). Adaptive behaviors are a viable, but modest way to promote career goals (Lent & Brown, 2013), however coupled with self-efficacy they both foster development and career advancement.

Repatriation and Retention

The concept of repatriation and retention is relatively new to research literature within the past 20-30 years as evidenced by theories to explain relative issues introduced by Bandura beginning in the 1970s (Lent & Brown, 2013;Wright et al., 2014). There have been various theories introduced by researchers to explain the reasons some expatriates leave their organization after repatriation: career self-management theory, uncertainty reduction theory and commitment theory, social exchange theory, repatriation adjustment model, self-efficacy theory, theory of distributive justice, and three-component model to mention a few (Bandura & Adams, 1977; Black, Gregersen, & Mendenhall, 1992; Goodwin & Preiss, 2010; Howe-Walsh, 2013; Reiche, 2012; Xu & Bassham, 2010). Career self-management theory is used by researchers to more effectively understand specifics of career processes and behaviors individuals will employ to advance career goals (Lent & Brown, 2013). In contrast, two more predominant theories in the research literature, self-efficacy theory and repatriation adjustment model, have been used to glean an understanding of retention as well, however these do not focus the processes and behaviors individuals and organizations (Sanchez Vidal et al., 2010; Wright et al., 2014).

Self-efficacy theory. Self-efficacy theory, and variations, has been used by researchers since introduced by Albert Bandura in the 1970s and has a long standing role in career advancement looking at confidence in one's ability to advance careers (Wright et al., 2014). Self-efficacy theory according to Bandura and Adams (1977) stems from four sources: performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and states of physiological arousal, with the main one being performance. The greater the accomplishments perceived by an individual, the greater the personal self-efficacy thus perceived career development (Bandura & Adams, 1977). Wright et al. (2014) posited the greater the social supports, the greater the self-efficacy. Researchers of self-efficacy theory suggested that one's beliefs in their abilities and capabilities to successfully perform a behavior are factors in career development (Betz, 2004).

Repatriation adjustment model. Repatriation adjustment model is relatively new and researchers look to various adjustment issues, pre-return phase and post-return phase, as the reason for low retention rates (Sanchez Vidal et al., 2010). The researchers presented three dimensions of this model for both phases: work adjustment, interaction adjustment, and general adjustment which coincides with the original model of repatriation adjustment (Sanchez Vidal et al., 2010). The more frequently used model of repatriation adjustment was implemented by Black et al in the early 1990s (Black et al., 1992). Their analysis was that the repatriation process was just as difficult to adjust to as the initial assignment (Black et al., 1992). The framework for their repatriation adjustment model was based on four variables: individual (attitudes, values, and needs), job (tasks), organizational (organization and policies), and non-work (family and general environment) which can either help or hinder retention (Black et al., 1992). This model looks at adjustment in four areas and the barrier to adjustment, however does not specifically address the processes necessary to retain expatriates (Black et al., 1992).

Social exchange theory. Social exchange theory was introduced in the 1960s by Peter Blau and is based on a cost-benefit analysis and a comparison with alternative relationships in regard to human relationships (Fu, Bolander, & Jones, 2009; Reiche, 2012). The premise behind the theory is that if an individual perceives the benefit of a relationship to outweigh the cost, the individual will be satisfied and remain in a current position (Reiche, 2012). If the expatriate is content with the assignment and relationships developed, though readjustment has not gone well, they will be more committed to stay with the company after the assignment is completed and take on a new assignment, and form new relationships that will benefit the organization. This theory promotes the benefits of building relationships, however does not directly address the retention issues of expatriates, policies, and processes HR should implement for repatriation.

Uncertainty reduction theory. Uncertainty reduction theory (URT) was introduced in the 1970s by Berger and Calbrese and was one of the foundations of the repatriation model as suggested by Black and Gregersen in the 1990s (Howe-Walsh, 2013). Researchers using URT look at reducing uncertainty through human communication, for the expatriate the reduction of uncertainty would come via training and communication before the assignment commences, and with the host company (Howe-Walsh, 2013). Repatriation is challenging in a different way than the initial assignment and would require an approach that focuses on organizational interventions helping the expatriate re-adjust (Howe-Walsh, 2013). Communication and training are still key components, but would not address specifically the strategies leaders need to retain expatriates.

Compare and contrast. Researchers have shown that self-efficacy theory, repatriation adjustment model, social exchange theory, and URT play important roles in the general repatriation process (Bandura & Adams, 1977; Betz, 2004; Black et al., 1992; Howe-Walsh, 2013; Reiche, 2012; Wright et al., 2014). Understanding the key role self-efficacy plays in career advancement and barriers to retention due to maladjustment are important; however what they do not address are the specific process leaders should initiate to retain expatriates during repatriation (Bandura & Adams, 1977; Wright et al., 2014). Researchers of social exchange theory address the benefits of relationships and commitment, but do not suggest strategies to retain expatriates (Reiche, 2012). URT researchers discuss the uncertainty of the expatriate process, but not specific strategic goals that will help organizational leaders retain expatriates during repatriation (Howe-Walsh, 2013).

Career self-management theory posited by researchers explains the strategies leaders should implement to retain expatriates by focusing career planning; goal-setting and job-finding for returning expatriates (Lent & Brown, 2013). In addressing strategies through theory development, common themes emerged in the extant literature as to why some expatriates stay or leave their organization; human resource practices, reverse culture shock and readjustment, and job satisfaction.

Human Resource Practices

Repatriation is more difficult for expatriates to adjust to than the assignment, and is a critical phase not to be ignored (Cox et al., 2013; Haslberger & Brewster, 2009; Howe-Walsh, 2013; Sanchez Vidal et al., 2008, 2010; Wu, Zhuang, & Hung, 2014). Repatriates are often disappointed and frustrated with their home organization upon reentry due to numerous challenges (Feintzeig, 2013; Valk, et al., 2013). Human resource (HR) departments do not have available staff who specialize in assisting the expatriate with new positions, career development and reverse culture shock upon reentry (Nery-Kjerfve & McLean, 2012).

Often repatriates leave their organization upon return, or have at least thought about leaving (Brewster, Bonache, Cerdin, & Suutari, 2014). An estimated 44% of expatriates leave their organization within 2 years of returning to their home base (Cox et al., 2013; Kraimer, et al., 2009). Jassawalla and Sashittal (2009) suggested low to mid retention rates of repatriates with an estimated 20-50% leaving the organization within a year after the assignment was completed.

Cave (2014) and Nguyen, Felfe, & Fooken (2014) posited 25% of expatriates will leave their organization after one year. Ren et al. (2013) also listed a low retention rate of 28% for expatriates who leave after one year. Fifty percent of repatriates will leave their organization within 1-3 years of returning home (Kim & McLean, 2012).

The apparent dissatisfaction of the companies' efforts upon return lowers the rate of commitment and repatriates retention (Cave, Chung, & Choi, 2013). Many MNCs have not addressed the issues repatriates are challenged with as effectively as they address and prepare them for the initial assignment (Gupta, 2013). The highest point of dissatisfaction with the reentry process for expatriates is their organizations' policy regarding repatriation (Haslberger & Brewster, 2009). Many repatriates report that their organization does not have written repatriation policies, they are disorganized, and not prepared to handle repatriation (Olds & Howe-Walsh, 2014).

There is sufficient evidence showing the importance of human resource (HR) practices during repatriation and the retention of expatriates (Kulkarni et al., 2010). Oonk (2013) considered reintegration programs as being successful strategies of employers who wish to retain repatriates. Some researchers have identified that only 14% of MNCs have formal strategies to help with retention, while others reported that 26-29% of MNCs implement practices (Cho et al., 2013; O'Sullivan, 2013).

The impact on repatriation and retention can be both positive and negative depending on how well the HR practices are implemented (Kulkarni et al., 2010). Managing the expatriate process through to repatriation is complex and organizations should feel obligated to provide procedures that help in the process (Brewster et al., 2014). Hurn (2014) posited that HR departments should mange the repatriation process better and start long before the assignment ends. Fischlmayr and Kollinger (2010) acknowledged in their research that a long-term HR strategic plan will reduce future concerns, and help the expatriate use their international experience when they return to the home organization. Effective management of the repatriation process is key for successful assignments and retention, and should include organizational training, career advancement, and assistance with readjustment challenges (Cho et al., 2013; Gupta, 2013; Herman & Tetrick, 2009).

Failure of the assignment can be due to the management process of HR practices or lack thereof, and not valuing the expatriates' work abroad (Lazarova, 2015). Organizational mismanagement of the expatriate-repatriate process may cause damage to the organization and decreased retention rates (Kim & McLean, 2012; Santoso & Loosemore, 2013; Tinder, 2007). Nazir et al (2014) also agreed that repatriation is important, and mismanaged, and the preparation process of repatriation should being before allocating the assignment; MNCs do not handle the repatriation process properly (Santoso & Loosemore, 2013).

According to Cox et al., (2013) the timing of HR practices and training prior to return, having a domestic mentor during the assignment, implementing a fluent communication system, career management after the return, and prior knowledge of the repatriate compensation packet are all key factors in successful retention. HR practices are highly important and organizations should consider the length of time of the assignment and include additional supports to aid the repatriate and their family in adjusting to the home country (Howe-Walsh, 2013).

Unfortunately, what most repatriates experience is disconnect with HR and their needs, and that most organizations have more ad hoc or reactive reentry programs which are not effective (Jassawalla & Sashittal, 2009; Olds & Howe-Walsh, 2014; Starr, 2009). Nazir, Hussain, and Zaman (2014) agreed that most organizations do not effectively or adequately handle the repatriation process. Often expatriates have a negative few of their assignment and, consider it a *career disaster* with little advancement upon return (Collings, Doherty, Luethy, & Osborn, 2011).

Conversely, McEvoy and Buller (2013) found that some expatriates' perceptions of the HR process was positive and the repatriation process was managed well. McEvoy and Buller (2013) noted that for some MNCs the attrition rate was 35% after the first year and 26% after year two. Altman and Baruch (2012) noted a different opinion and though repatriation was chaotic the repatriate took on more of a *self-initiated* role. Repatriates were dissatisfied with their organizations' approach to reentry, however they have a positive perception of the assignment abroad and how it will affect their career (Forstenlechner, 2010). There are contrasting outlooks regarding the repatriation process and the effectiveness of HR practices, not all expatriates have bad experiences (McEvoy & Buller, 2013).

Organizations that are newer to global operations often fail to understand the repatriation process because they are learning to establish policies and procedures as they mature leaving them vulnerable to low retention and loss of talent (Nery-Kjerfve & McLean, 2012; Sanchez Vidal et al., 2008). Organizational policies and procedures should reflect both the company and the repatriates' needs; however this is not the case, and, instead, resources are placed in areas of non-concern toward repatriation, and not devoted to the repatriation process through programs and policies (Nery-Kjerfve &

McLean, 2012; Skimutis & Verschuur, 2011). Often many companies are not aware of the challenges repatriates face as they, and their families, transition back to the home country and fail to implement transitional assistance (Nery-Kjerfve & McLean, 2012; Sanchez Vidal et al., 2008).

Bailey and Dragoni (2013) provided alternate information in their study that shows companies do acknowledge the importance of an overseas assignments and have HR polices in place to help mitigate the challenges of repatriation. HR policies and procedures would also eliminate any unclear expectations between the repatriate and the organization, and should be discussed prior to reentry (Cox et al., 2013). Though researchers differ on their opinions of HR practices and how they affect the expatriate's adjustment upon return, it is clear from the literature, the importance of having clear guidelines and expectations is helpful for global organizations (Cooper & Rice, 2012).

Organizational policies and procedures are necessary tools for high retention rates and successful assignments (Cox et al., 2013; Pattie, White, & Tansky, 2010). A repatriates' misunderstanding of the process and failure of the organization to implement clear policies and procedures will lead to problematic reentry adjustment and culture shock (Nery-Kjerfve & McLean, 2012). Organizations that have positive retention results due to good practices and procedures are thus ensuring their continued success in retaining expatriates, and global competitiveness (Jassawalla & Sashittal, 2009; Pattie et al., 2010).

Reverse Culture Shock and Readjustment

Many expatriates experience reverse culture shock upon reentry and difficulty readjusting to work and life after returning to the home organization and country (Cox et al., 2013; Oonk, 2013; Skimutis & Verschuur, 2011). Coping with their new environment and numerous changes is part of the readjustment process for repatriates, however it is the least understood and poorly managed by organizations (Gupta, 2013). Adjustment is multifaceted and leads to uncertainty and disorientation when returning home, which may lead to maladjustment or reverse culture shock for several repatriates (Kelly & Morley, 2011).

Tharenou and Caulfield (2010) listed shock as one of the key factors affecting repatriation. Collings et al. (2011) noted that reverse culture shock is a *real issue* and should be eased by the organization before the process of repatriation beings. Hurn (2014) suggested that the experiences abroad create changes in the expatriate and that reverse culture shock is likely upon return. It is important for expatriates to realize the changes they have gone through and the profound affect it has on them in order to deal with reverse culture shock (Hurn, 2014). Reverse culture shock is an unexpected challenge of repatriation that most companies do not foresee (Andors, 2010). Reverse culture shock is one of the main factors that impedes the readjustment process, and it can take up to a year or a year and a half for some to readjust (Cox et al., 2013; Nery-Kjerfve & McLean (2011). Santoso and Loosemore (2013) posited that culture shock upon return home is more difficult than when the assignment commences. Kulkarni et al. (2010) viewed repatriation culture shock as severe, if not more so than when an expatriate assignment is initiated.

Reverse culture shock hinders the readjustment process for many repatriates

(Kelly & Morley, 2011). When readjustment is not a smooth process the expatriate may leave the organization causing the loss of valuable employees, their newly acquired skills and knowledge gained during the assignment, and creating financial burdens for the company (Cox et al., 2013; Haslberger & Brewster, 2009). Reverse culture shock can cause maladjustment for the repatriates, and even affect their families' adjustment (Kim & McLean, 2012). Problems adjusting also affected the expatriate's job satisfaction and their retention, thus leaving the organization for better opportunities (Nery-Kjerfve & McLean 2011).

Repatriates find that as they have changed personally and professionally during the assignment, the home organization has gone through changes as well (Gupta, 2013). Identity changes for both the expatriate and the organization can be detrimental to the assignment and repatriation process (Star, 2009). Changes may often leave the repatriate feeling as though they do not fit in (Nery-Kjerfve & McLean, 2011; Oonk, 2013). When working on a foreign assignment for long periods of time the expatriates' reference points or contexts are dissimilar from the home organization upon return causing adjustment issues (Kulkarni et al., 2010). Identity issues associated with specific roles for repatriates may cause stressful situations and stifle the reentry process causing reduced retention (Kraimer et al., 2012).

Fundamental changes experienced by the expatriate may cause identity issues leaving them to feel as though their new surroundings do not reflect their newly gained skills (Kraimer et al., 2012). Change also triggers a *sense-making* process required of the repatriates due to the changes they have undergone and changes in the organization

(Kelly & Morley, 2011). Sense-making is the process by which repatriates re-learn or learn new identities and ways to cope when upon reentry (Kelly & Morley, 2011). Repatriates may need to reconstruct *mental maps* to glean an understanding of their new surroundings in the home organization (Kelly & Morley, 2011). Mental maps are an expatriate's personal knowledge of how the organization operates before the assignment and after it ends (Kelly & Morley, 2011).

In a study by Starr (2009) regarding discourse change and expectations, Starr noted otherwise that the *lack* of change within the organization was difficult for the returning expatriate because of their newly acquired skills and personal growth while working abroad. Acclimatization is affected when both the organization and the expatriate have had changes take place during the assignment (Sanchez Vidal et al., 2010). Nery-Kjerfve and McLean (2011) acknowledged that *mental maps* and *behavioral routines* are altered living abroad which may encumber adjustment. Expatriate and organizational changes (or lack of) have an effect on the reentry process and can blur expectations (Sanchez Vidal et al., 2010).

There are additional issues that affect the adjustment process thus hindering retention. The differences in expectations of the expatriate and the organization can cause readjustment issues and lead to reverse culture shock; limited freedom and loss of independence play a role in both (Oonk, 2013). Also affecting adjustment is the loss of social networks while being on foreign assignment and having to reestablish new ones upon return, which can take several months (Nery-Kjerfve & McLean (2011). Maladjustment is perpetuated by changes in income expected, status, and lifestyle as expatriates return to the home organization as well (Haslberger & Brewster, 2009). The researchers also suggest that psychological contracts may lessen the negative affects of readjustment (Haslberger & Brewster 2009).

Other likely readjustment issues faced by repatriates may be job clarity, autonomy, and discretion (Kulkarni et al., 2010). A differing opinion regarding adjustment is that interventions should reflect specific needs of the repatriate (tailored), if adjustment was difficult during the assignment (Howe-Walsh, 2013). Many companies do not anticipate the impact reverse culture shock may have on returning expatriates and the adjustment issues that could surface (Kulkarni et al., 2010).

Repatriates face many challenges and an organizations' focus should be just as important regarding the reentry process as the initial assignment (Bailey & Dragoni, 2013; Kulkarni et al., 2010). The focus should include practices to help mitigate the uncertainty of the readjustment period while easing reverse culture shock, and addressing the multitude of adjustment demands (Gupta, 2013; Haslberger & Brewster, 2009). Expatriates' satisfaction in the repatriate process promotes a positive job attitude and stability in retention (Reiche et al., 2011).

Job Satisfaction

Organizational commitment focusing on the repatriate process may help increase retention through greater job satisfaction which leads to increased job embeddedness, which helps retain staff, and a clear understanding of career expectations and necessary supports (Reiche et al., 2011). Expatriates who are dissatisfied with the repatriation process in regard to career advancement exhibit higher turnover rates (Ren et al., 2013).

Shen and Hall (2009) added that as organizations place more attention on the repatriation process the employee-company tie will strengthen. When expatriates are not satisfied with organizational commitment they will look for better opportunities outside their current organization (Forstenlechner, 2010; Hemmasi, Downes, & Varner, 2010).

Job embeddedness is viewed by researchers as the *totality of forces* that influence individuals to stay with their organization (Reiche et al., 2011). Job embeddedness is a contributing factor which may affect retention either positively or negatively with expatriate-organization fit (Reiche et al., 2011). Reiche et al., (2011) contend that job embeddedness has varying levels of satisfaction for repatriates which plays a role in retention: benefits sacrificed upon leaving, perceived career prospects, and firm-specific learning. Higher job embeddedness is maximized when returning expatriates are able to use their newly acquired skills and secure career promotions (Reiche, et al., 2009; Shen & Hall, 2009).

Conversely expatriates' ongoing experiences while on assignment create changes in social networks, personal identity, and competencies and skills, which may lower job embeddedness (Shen & Hall, 2009). Weak job embeddedness may also cause host country retention issues with the expatriate having a higher intent to return home and not finish the assignment (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010). Low job embeddedness is a bi-product of dissatisfaction upon return and apparent when repatriates look to other MNCs for better opportunities to utilize their new skills and advance their careers (Shen & Hall, 2009). The impact job embeddedness has on the repatriates' retention rate is apparent and vital to organizational growth and competitiveness (Shen & Hall, 2009).

Sluggish career opportunities are determining factors in retention and embeddedness (Cave et al., 2013). When career advancement is overlooked or not taken seriously it may negatively affect the expatriates' career satisfaction and retention (Cole & Nesbeth, 2014; Ren et al., 2013). The lack of suitable jobs upon return was addressed by researchers, and the negative affect it had on retention was a challenge for MNCs (Suutari, Tornikoski, & Makela, 2012). Career growth can be seen as a predictor of job embeddedness, both positively and negatively, and career planning may contribute to high retention (Collings et al., 2011; Shen & Hall, 2009). Additionally, researchers continue to show that organizations pay very little attention to career development which can have a negative impact on retention of expatriates (van der Heijden, van Engen, Paauwe, 2009). On the contrary, some studies conducted by researchers do not agree that career advancement has a negative impact on retention (Ren et al., 2013). Suutari et al. (2012) added that though the repatriation process may be handled properly and be a positive experience, the expatriate may still plan on leaving the organization for better career opportunities.

Often expatriates feel underappreciated and underestimated during repatriation, and placed in positions where their skills are not utilized (Collings et al., 2011). Collings et al. (2011) and Gupta (2013) refer the to time period upon repatriation for some as the holding pattern where no specific position or role is defined. Expatriates who see themselves as being overqualified in a position may look for career opportunities with other organizations (Collings et al., 2011). On the contrary, Birur and Muthiah (2013) noted from their study of returning expatriates that they were satisfied with their new positions and felt valued by the company.

It is also important to implement career counseling and frame a psychological contract during the offer stage of the assignment to provide direction for the expatriate during repatriation (Collings, et al., 2011). Beneficial supports such as psychological contracts provide the necessary exchange of terms between an expatriate and home organization and map out career plans upon return (Ren et al., 2013). Psychological contracts will likely increase the repatriates' commitment to the organization and lower retention issues by stating the expectations of returning repatriates and the organization (Olds & Howe-Walsh, 2014). When psychological contracts are breached between both parties the effect on retention is greater due to negative attitudes (Ren et al., 2013). Minimal career opportunities or advancements may be good predictors of low job embeddedness, but other factors such as the lack of organizational supports will impact it as well (Shen & Hall, 2009). McNulty (2014) suggested there is an overwhelming problem between companies and expatriates, and supports and value.

Organizational career supports and expectations. Organizational career supports (OCS) and expectations are an important part of job satisfaction and may promote retention if the organization and expatriates' goals are clear (van der Heijden et al., 2009). Even the perception of such supports may increase an expatriates' willingness to stay with an organization upon reentry (van der Heijden et al., 2009). Organizational supports indicate the value placed on assignments and the expatriate (Cole & Nesbeth, 2014). Repatriation is the most stressful and challenging part of the assignment and extended supports are vital to success (Cole & Nesbeth, 2014; Collings et al., 2011; Ren et al., 2013). The implementation of organizational supports increases retention rates of the repatriate and the success of the overall assignment (Collings et al., 2011). Many expatriates expect the organization will treat and value them as higher qualified employees after the assignment, but the realty is quite different, and many find they are in the same position before leaving, or alternate positions where they feel demoted (Ren et al., 2013).

OCS signals to the repatriate that their assignment is valued and allows them to develop their human capital, and readjust to their new surroundings (Kelly & Morley, 2011; Kraimer et al., 2009). OCS focuses on coping strategies, career path planning, networking activities, coaching, establishing mentors, and managing expectations (Kelly & Morley, 2011; Stahl et al., 2009). Supports should be tailored to the individual expatriate need upon return and not standardized (Collings et al., 2011; Kelly & Morley, 2011). Well-designed supports show expatriates they are valued and increase retention efforts (Kraimer et al., 2009; Stahl et al., 2009). Having a direct link to the home organization while on assignment will increase the dynamism of adjustment and assimilate back to the home culture (Kelly & Morley, 2011).

Kraimer et al. (2009) noted that organizations do not adequately recognize or value the expatriate’s assignment, new skills, knowledge, or sacrifice. It was documented by Stahl et al., (2009) that expatriates surveyed did not believe their foreign assignment was valued by their organization. Cole and Nesbeth (2014) noted in their study that 37% of expatriates indicated organizational supports were either lacking or non-existent when they returned from assignment. It is evidenced through research that OCS are necessary to retain expatriates, and organizations should do a better job evaluating and implementing supports specific to repatriates that aid in retention (Stahl et al., 2009; van der Heijden et al., 2009).

Career planning. Career planning, an important identified support, may alleviate unclear expectations and is a supportive practice for expatriate return (Pattie et al., 2010; Shen & Hall, 2009). Having an understanding before the assignment commences regarding career advancement upon return will help facilitate a smoother repatriation process (Cooper & Rice, 2012). A primary organizational focus should be the repatriates' career path development to decrease any negative effects of the return (Harvey & Moeller, 2009).

Expatriates are less likely to contemplate other opportunities with different firms if work-related expectations are addressed during repatriation (Nery-Kjerfve & McLean, 2012). Researchers' have shown that when expectations are not met, or at least talked about before the assignment commences, there is a direct negative impact on retention (Olds & Howe-Walsh, 2014). Expatriates who feel valued by their organization and receive career support during the assignment and after they return are less likely to leave the organization (Collings et al., 2011).

In some studies researchers found that when repatriates' careers advanced upon return their retention rate increased (Hemmasi et al., 2010). Some studies conducted by researchers have shown the positive benefits of foreign assignments and that repatriates have been satisfied with career paths upon return putting their new skills to use (Cho et al., 2013). Cho et al. (2013) also noted that 33% of repatriates felt their foreign assignment provided the opportunity for advancement. Forstenlechner (2010) provided similar information stating repatriates had a positive view of their assignment and experiences. Cho et al. (2013) also suggested that having a career management program in place before the repatriate assignment ends is an effective tool, and positively relates to satisfaction and retention.

Another benefit of being proactive regarding repatriate career management is the recruitment of future expatriates (Hemmasi et al., 2010). It was noted by researchers that positive career management during repatriation had a bearing on whether or not new employees and repatriates would accept future foreign assignments (Stahl et al., 2009). A valid point that most researchers made is that an increase in satisfaction after the assignment ends is paramount to reducing low retention of expatriates (Cave et al., 2013).

Often what is seen in the repatriation process is the lack of career advancement and unclear goals (O'Sullivan, 2013). Several researchers found that the international assignment had a negative impact on repatriate career advancement and a lack of post-return jobs (O'Sullivan, 2013; Shen & Hall, 2009). Many expatriates' returning dissatisfaction stemmed from being placed in lateral positions were their new skills are not appreciated and advancement passed them by while being *out of sight*, *out of mind* (being absent from home organization for promotions) on foreign assignment (Harvey & Moeller, 2009; Jassawalla & Sashittal, 2009). Wu et al. (2014) postulated that 75% of the expatriate managers experienced the *out of sight, out of mind issue* and their careers derailed.

According to Harvey and Moeller (2009) and Pattie et al. (2010), many expatriates' careers are put on hold or restricted upon return and felt as though they were in a *holding pattern* to advancement. Researchers noted in several studies that repatriates are worried they were at a career disadvantage when returning to the home organization (Kim & McLean, 2012). Underemployment is the predicament that many repatriates experienced, being over qualified for the job assigned to them after reentry (Kraimer et al., 2009). Underemployment or substandard positions reportedly lead to stronger intent to quit the organization for many repatriates (Cave, 2014; Kraimer et al., 2009). Kraimer et al. (2009) also presented information regarding foreign assignments and that repatriates did not view the assignment as a stepping-stone to career advancement, they stated in reality it lessened opportunities.

Clearly when organizations and expatriates are in sync regarding the expectations of career advancement, retention may be positively affected (Cox et al., 2013; Gupta, 2013). When there are unclear expectations from both parties, career paths may be distorted and unattainable, and result in negative feelings (Olds & Howe-Walsh, 2014). Role clarity is an important aspect of repatriation and organizations should address this early in the assignment (Gupta, 2013). Often it was noted by researchers that expatriates have positive career expectations as they start and end an assignment (Collings et al., 2011). The organization and expatriate have very different views of what was expected upon return (Collings et al., 2011). Researchers have found that having clearly defined career paths and expectations after the assignment ends will promote synergy between the employee and company (Collings et al., 2011). Added supports are an asset that can help make the career development process easier to navigate as well (Collings et al., 2011;

Cox et al., 2013; Gupta, 2013).

General supports. General supports such as training programs, mentoring and social networks play an important role in maintaining repatriate job satisfaction (Cho et al., 2014; Sanchez Vidal et al., 2010; Shen & Hall, 2009). Supports from the organization are viewed by the expatriate as a commitment to them and the assignment, and can have a positive impact on retention (Liu & Ipe, 2010). Types of supports may vary depending on the organization and the expatriate, but the main point is that supports are important to successful retention (Cho et al., 2014; Sanchez Vidal et al., 2010; Shen & Hall, 2009). Researchers have suggested that when organizations provide supports, the repatriate feels they are valued and their overseas assignment is important (Reiche, 2012).

Training. Training is an important support and pre-return training shows organizational commitment and understanding of the obstacles faced by repatriates during reentry (Cox et al., 2013; Gupta, 2013; Pattie et al., 2010). Hurn (2014) suggested that HR departments should implement support through training programs that update the expatriate on living conditions and the business environment in the home country. Training prior to return has been noted by researchers to influence the expatriates' perception of the organization and whether or not they will relocate (Cho et al., 2014).

Repatriates who experience pre-return training have a better understanding of the changes in the organization, job expectations, career development, and responsibilities (Black et al., 1992; Pattie et al., 2010). Not all researchers agree that pre-return training is beneficial to the repatriate or organization, and retention efforts, and had no real impact on satisfaction (Cox et al., 2013; Gupta, 2013). In a study conducted by Sanchez Vidal et al. (2010) it was noted that for some repatriates pre-return training was not an important part of the repatriation process.

Mentors. Mentors are also an important support and valuable tool for expatriates to utilize during and after the assignment is complete (Birur & Muthiah, 2013; Stahl et al., 2009). Mentors can assist organizations in the readjustment process by training expatriates and counseling them upon return (Hurn, 2014). Organizations that encourage the development of mentors or reentry sponsors are being proactive with retention efforts, adjustment and job satisfaction (Cox et al., 2013; Pattie et al., 2010; Wu et al., 2014). Some researchers have found that mentors have a positive influence of the expatriates' views of the organization upon reentry (Cho et al., 2014). Mentors may help in career advancement of the repatriate and lessen the feelings of disconnect to the home and host organizations (Andors, 2010; Jassawalla & Sashittal, 2009; Kraimer et al., 2012).

It is important to have a connection with someone in the home organization that keeps the expatriate abreast of the changes and helps to re-integrate them upon return (Cooper & Rice, 2012). Often repatriates feel as though they are considered *out of sight, out of mind,* and the availability of a mentor may ease the uncertainties they are faced with when returning (Gupta, 2013). Gupta (2013) noted that only 26% of MNCs provided mentors for their repatriates. Sanchez Vidal et al. (2010) concluded from their study that mentors and frequent lines of communication were positively related to the repatriation. The lack of suitable mentors can have a negative impact on job satisfaction and retention (O'Sullivan, 2013).

Alternatively some researchers have noted that mentors do not aid in retention efforts nor do they help with adjustment and satisfaction (Cox et al., 2013). Jassawalla and Sashittal (2009) noted that some participants in their study did not feel the use of mentors helped them during or after the assignment in regard to job satisfaction and advancement. Gupta (2013) also noted that in a study by Stroh, mentors or mentor programs did not make a noticeable contribution to repatriation process, but did notify the organization of the imminent expatriate return.

Social networks. Social networks comprising family and friends and contacts at the home organization encourage retention of repatriates and are important supports (Valk et al., 2013). When there were no or limited support options from the organization, repatriates often depended on their social networks to help with important issues (Valk et al., 2013). Open communication with co-workers at the home organization via emails, conference calls and the occasional visit home provided additional support in the repatriation process and retention (Andors, 2010). Intent to stay with an organization hinges on multiple organizational processes that ease the challenges of repatriation as shown by recent research (Andors, 2010; Cho et al., 2014; Gupta, 2013; Valk et al., 2013.

Transition and Summary

In section 1 I introduced the topic of repatriation and retention strategies organizational leaders need to retain repatriates. The main focus was to present information regarding retention issues upon repatriation of the expatriate, discussing the crucial three themes; human resource practices, reverse culture shock and readjustment issue, and job satisfaction. I started the section by expressing the general and specific problems, background information, and then presented a summary of the literature review. The literature review was comprised of studies and resources mainly within the last 5 years to provide the most up to date information regarding the topic. In section 2 I explained the methodology of this study.

I presented in section 2 the purpose of this study, identify the role of the researcher and address the participants. I will also present a thorough justification of the research method and design that best explores the topic of retention and organizational strategies for repatriation. The population and sampling procedure is addressed, and the ethical process necessary to maintain validity and reliability. This section also included a discussion of the data collection instrument and technique used, and organization technique along with data analysis. Reliability and validity of the information is addressed along with the section transition and summary.

In section 3 I presented the findings of this study and how the findings may be applied to a professional practice. Implication for social change is addressed, and recommendations for action. Further research is suggested and I reflected on the topic and then lead to a conclusion of the findings in a summary of the information.

Section 2: The Project

The purpose of the project was to explore strategies that organizational leaders should implement to retain expatriates after the assignment is completed. The project consisted of the following elements: the purpose statement, provided an understanding of the role of the researcher, a description of the participants selected, stated the research method and design, and provided a rationale for the chosen population and sampling method. Also included in the project is a discussion of the importance ethical research, the data collection instrument (which included the researcher as the primary instrument), a discussion of how the data was collected and organized, and the analysis technique of coding themes. A final discussion is provided regarding reliability (dependability) and validity of qualitative studies.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative single descriptive case study was to explore the strategies that organizational leaders need to retain expatriates as they transition back to the home organization. The repatriation process is challenging for expatriates as they return home and may hinder retention (Biemann & Braakmann, 2013). Two organizational leaders who manage expatriates from the global compensation department of a large global service company located in Tennessee participated in semistructured interviews and a focus group session to share their individual perspectives and experiences in successfully retaining expatriates after their assignment is completed. Likewise, the same two chosen managers, who manage three or more expatriates each, participated in interviews to share their experiences and strategies. This topic may contribute to social change by allowing organizations to have a better understanding of their employees' needs and will have a direct impact on revenues through high retention rates of expatriates.

Role of the Researcher

In the role of the researcher I viewed the information from an interpretivism and constructivism perspective in that social factors and personal perceptions of backgrounds (histories) construct individual realities (Wahyuni, 2012). The constructivism perspective is in-line with qualitative interviewing allowing the researcher to interact with participants and have a meaningful dialogue (Wahyuni, 2012). A review of the literature regarding the topic allowed me to glean a deeper understanding of repatriation retention and collect data for this study that reflected the principal research question and subsequent question. I did not have any direct relationship with the participants. I contacted a co-worker who had a family member that worked for the organization and obtained access to leadership who manage expatriates, assignments, and retention by way of emails to ask for their participation.

In the data collection process I was the primary instrument of collection by way of obtaining information from the semistructured one-on-one interviews, and collecting data from a focus group meeting of participants. Interviews are the more common way of collecting data for qualitative research (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). Semistructured one-on-one interviews allow the researcher to collect data into themes and the participant has more freedom to elaborate openly regarding the topic (Wahyuni, 2012). A focus group added to the richness of the information by providing additional spontaneous responses through collaborated efforts of group participants (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013).

I initiated an interview protocol which depicted the interview steps and questions (semistructured one-on-one and a focus group), and followed the guidelines of the Belmont Report. A statement of ethical principles that researchers should follow when conducting research is listed in the Belmont Report (Belmont Report, 1979). To follow these guidelines, I ensured I met the requirements and had an understanding of the following three ethical principles (1) knowing the boundaries between practice and research and the meaning of each, (2) knowing and adhering to the basic ethical principles; respect for persons, beneficence, and justice, and (3) applications of the general principles; informed consent, risk/benefit assessment, subject selection (Belmont Report, 1979).

To mitigate researcher bias affecting this study, I took notes, recorded and reviewed data collected with the participants and during the focus group to safeguard any mistakes that took place in interpretation of the information as I understood, and had the participants review the translation and interpretation of the data for any inaccurate information; all participants were fluent in English (Wahyuni, 2012). The interviews were conducted after obtaining clearance from Walden IRB and after a signed consent letter from each participant was acquired. This ensured ethical issues were addressed and all parties to this study were aware of the topic, the questions being studied, and were willing to participate in the research study.

Participants

The focus of this case study was on leaders who manage expatriates as they transition back to the home organization. The strategies I used to gain access to these participants were through purposive sampling using the snowball technique. Purposive sampling allows the researcher to pick specific organizations and participants for this study who were more knowledgeable in the area being studied (Antony, Noronha, Williams, Mathias, & Thomas, 2014; Teklay, Abera, & Giday, 2013; Wahyuni, 2012). Snowball technique refers to the type of referral system in which one has multiple contacts who assist the researcher in locating participants for this study (Pattison, Robins, Snijders, & Wang, 2013; Wahyuni, 2012).

I contacted a co-worker in person and by email who had a family member who worked for the company and gained access via email to the vice president. The vice president provided a contact to two compensation managers who manage or managed expatriate within the U. S. The managers were all males and between the ages of 40-65 years old, and had worked for the company at least 10 years. In order to maintain ethical protocol, I explained the reason for this study and obtained the signatures of all participants on a consent form (see Appendix A) before conducting the interview. To ensure the well-being of all participants and conceal their identity, I did not share their names or the name of the organization within this study nor on any forms related to this study. I will maintain the interview information confidentially for 5 years, and will then destroy all research information and materials by way of electronically shredding all notes.

Research Method and Design

The research method and design most appropriate for the principle question and subsequent question under investigation was qualitative and single case study, seeing as both relay to the reader an understanding of this study through descriptive transcription and aid in affirming theory (Suddaby, Bruton, Si, 2014). The research method and design chosen for this study was qualitative method and single descriptive case study design. Researchers have chosen qualitative method to explore and explain expatriates' intentions to remain or leave their organization (Altman & Baruch, 2012; Cho et al., 2013; Cunliffe, 2011; Hodges, 2011; Santoso & Loosemore, 2014; Star, 2009; Suutari et al., 2012). Several studies conducted by researchers demonstrate a trend in the literature regarding expatriates and the use of qualitative research (Cho et al., 2013; Cole & Nesbeth, 2014; Cox et al., 2013). The current literature continues to build on the topic of expatriates, repatriates and repatriation using qualitative method and descriptive case study design to better explain common themes between strategies and retention of expatriates after they return from assignments (Altman & Baruch, 2012; Bailey & Dragoni, 2013; Kulkarni et al., 2010; Starr & Currie, 2009).

Method

Qualitative research method is proven to be beneficial when gathering and analyzing data from an international business perspective and understanding the essences (Barnham, 2010; Cho et al., 2013). Researchers have also found that the uniqueness of qualitative research provides them with the ability to look at the how, who, and why of the situation, test theories, learn more about the content phenomenon up close, and be able to have rich descriptive explanations (Cho et al., 2013). In their research, Valk et al. (2013) conducted a qualitative study regarding the challenges expatriates face upon return, noting issues with HR practices, lack of career opportunities, and lack of supports.

Quantitative and mixed methods were not considered for this research study. Quantitative which is beneficial to understanding relationships among variables (dependent and independent) and mixed method, a combination of qualitative and quantitative, either concurrently or sequentially, and both lengthy and costly (Venkatesh et al., 2013). Quantitative does not allow for the rich description associated with human experiences and perspectives, and considers validity and reliability of the measured data more important (Venkatesh et al., 2013).

Research Design

Case study design provides more flexibility in research than other forms of qualitative designs (Hyett, Kenny, Dickson-Swift, 2014). A case study allows the researcher to investigate a real-life phenomenon by developing a richer meaning compared to other designs, and warrants the situation, groups, individuals, and activity to be studied (Cronin, 2014; Wahyuni, 2012). Researchers choose to use case study when they wish to obtain information regarding the phenomenon in their context (Beverland & Lindgreen, 2010; Radley & Chamberlain, 2012). Case studies are used by researchers to investigate and analyze specific case or cases by capturing the complexity of the topic (Hyett et al., 2014).

There are various forms of qualitative research which were not considered for this research study due to their uses; phenomenological, ethnography, grounded theory, and content analysis. Phenomenological design is used to examine human experiences (Reiter, Steward, & Bruce, 2011), while ethnography is to explore predictable patterns in lived human experiences of cultural groups as the researcher participates and observes them in a naturalistic day to day setting (Sangasubana, 2011). Grounded theory may be used to research new or discovered theories, or information unknown or unstated to explain the phenomenon (Lawrence & Tar, 2013; Reiter et al., 2011). Content analysis is used by researchers to explore human communication through the systematic interpretation of textual, visual, or audible matter such as newspapers, television, websites, or books (Borkowski, Welsh, & Wentzel, 2012), and uses open-coding by inductive or deductive processes (DiSantis et al., 2013; Elo, Kaariainen, Kanste, Polkki, Utrianinen, & Kyngas, 2014).

A critical part of qualitative case studies is to ensure that the data is saturated, which means no new information (themes or categories) are obtained during the interviews and focus groups (Hodges, 2011; Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013; Fusch & Ness, 2015). If new data or information does occur then the data is not saturated and additional questions should be asked of the participants (Hodges, 2011; Marshall et al., 2013). During the interview and focus group process I asked additional questions when a new theme emerged until the data was saturated.

Population and Sampling

The population chosen for this study provided the necessary information to understand the phenomenon under examination due to direct contact with expatriates. The small sample size aided in saturating the data, as did non-random purposeful sampling. Participants were interviewed individually at a neutral location allowing for a collaboration of the data collected. The focus group meeting was held at a neutral location allowing for privacy and collaboration.

Population size is important in qualitative research, and at the same time challenging when deciding on the number of participants and who to choose (Draper & Swift, 2011). For a single descriptive case study the population size is small, can be one participant, or up to double figures (Draper & Swift, 2011; Dworkin, 2012; Ritchie et al., 2013). Participants who share like events or have salience regarding the topic matter will be chosen to provide rich information (Ritchie et al., 2013). The population for this single descriptive case design was chosen from managers who have had like experiences in regard to expatriates, the repatriation process, and retention. The sample included three managers of expatriates who work for the same global industrial manufacturing organization. The managers oversee the expatriate from assignment commencement through the repatriation process providing in-depth understanding and meaning as discussed by Dworkin (2012) and Ritchie et al. (2013).

Sampling is an important part of the qualitative research design (Robinson, 2014). In qualitative research, sampling is well-recognized, strengthens validity and reliability, and aided the researcher in meeting the objects of this study (Uprichard, 2013). There are different forms of sampling to be considered for research such as non-random, random, purposeful, intensity, maximum variation, homogenous, and others; the researcher will choose the one best suited for the particular study (Suri, 2011). The use of non-random purposeful sampling was used to ensure access to key members of the organization who may lend rich information to this study (Anderson, 2010; Suri, 2011). The population for this case study was comprised of two managers, and was viewed through an idiographic lens due to the limited number of participants allowing for intensive analysis as discussed by Robinson (2014).

To saturate the data, I chose a small sample size to develop an understanding of the phenomenon (Hodges, 2011). The data is saturated when no new information arises from data collected through semistructured, one-on-one interviews and the focus group meeting, and when key points and themes continually emerge lending to data replication (Hodges, 2011; Marshall et al., 2013). Review of individual interview notes and interview notes from the focus group, taped recordings, and NVivo software aided in data saturation by cross-examining the data and making connections, and ensuring no new key issues were revealed as posited by Anderson (2010).

Ethical Research

In consideration of high ethical standards and the IRB (06-12-15-0376619) policies regarding human rights and welfare, I explained to all participants the nature of this study and detail the entire process as noted by Abbott and Grady (2011). Following the Belmont Report's guidelines, I took extra precautions to ensure that all vulnerable populations are protected as advanced by Hernandez, Nguyen, Casanova, Suarez-Orozco, and Saetermoe (2013). I considered any issues that might arise with the data collection process and provided participants with information regarding this study for their review, I emailed them a consent form to participate, explained that participation is voluntary and they could decline to participate at any time without penalty, and their identity and the organizations' name within this study was confidential as discussed by Abbott and Grady (2011), and Swauger (2011).

The consent form (see Appendix A) included specific details of this study, participation of the population sample, how data was collected, risks and benefits of this study, and included that all information was held in confidence. The participants of this study were not provided any incentives to participate and did so of their own free will, and were given contact information for any questions they may have at a later date. Participants could withdraw from this study at any time without penalty by contacting the researcher via email or calling, or stating during the interview or focus group that they do not wish to participate. Participants read the consent form to ensure there were no issues with understanding the information, knowing that they had an opportunity to ask questions and address concerns, knew their role in my study, and were asked to sign the consent form.

I referenced storage of the data collection process on the consent form and in this study. Each participant was provided a confidential name to maintain confidentiality. The data I collected is stored for 5 years on a password protected electronic file until disposal. After 5 years, I will destroy the protected electronic file by deleting all the information related to this study from the file.

Data Collection

In a qualitative study, I am the data collection instrument (Turner & Norwood, 2013). I collected data from the participants of this study for analysis using semistructured one-on-one interviews and a focus group. Methodological triangulation of the data helped to convey the validity and reliability of the information collected, thereby minimizing subjectivity (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012; Jonsen & Jehn, 2009; Street & Ward, 2010). The process for interviewing was explained to participants as well as noting any consents which need signatures were documented.

Instruments

As a qualitative researcher, I found myself in the role of the primary data collection instrument for this study, and interpreter of the participants' voices and worldview meanings (Turner & Norwood, 2013). In addition to the primary data collection instrument, two other forms of collection associated with case study were used, semistructured one-on-one interviews and a focus group, which aided in methodological triangulation from multiple data sources as suggested by Wahyuni (2012) and Yin (2014). Researchers use within methodological triangulation to study a phenomenon by combining data collection procedures, thereby confirming findings, increasing rigor, and enhances the validity and reliability of this study (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012; Denzin, 2012; Jonsen & Jehn, 2009; Oleinik, 2011). I used NVivo, a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) to further organize the data into themes or categories as demonstrated by Smith and Firth (2011).

To enhance reliability and validity of the data collection process I had the participants review the transcribed data to ensure their views are reflected correctly in this study. Member checking also adds credibility to this study when participants agree with the information transcribed from individual interviews and focus groups (Carlson, 2010; Harper & Cole, 2012). Member checking allows participants to review the transcribed notes and provide feedback to the researcher for any inconsistencies, questionable assumptions, and affords the researcher an opportunity to re-analyze data collected (Anderson, 2010; Carlson, 2010; Harper & Cole, 2012).

All participants were asked to sign a consent form before the data collection process commences (Appendix A). A list of the questions was located on the consent form and shown in Appendix B. The protocol for the interview and focus group processes was outlined for the participants on the consent form and listed in Appendix C.

Data Collection Technique

I used semistructured one-on-one interviews and a focus group to collect information regarding the phenomenon. Interviewing is one of the more common ways to collect information for a case study (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). Using a focus group interview further enhanced this study due to the purposive nature and interviewing individuals who were focused on a specific topic, and it created a naturalistic setting allowing for spontaneity (Dilshad & Latif, 2013; Ritchie et al., 2013). Focus groups also allow the participants to feel safe and are more open to communicating information (Coenen, Stamm, Stucki, & Cieza, 2012).

Employing semistructured one-on-one interviews lends certain advantages to a qualitative study (Adams, 2010). Using semistructured one-on-one interviews are useful when the topic is not widely known about and can provide in depth information (Adams, 2010). These types of interviews are more structured than the focus group, with the researcher having control keeping the participant on task and setting agendas (Adams, 2010). Another advantage of the semistructured one-on-one interview is that researchers can ask new questions when they find additional themes have been presented (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

There are disadvantages of the semistructured one-on-one interview, one being created by the researcher when one does not listen well and interjects their own views (Adams, 2010). Another issue with this type of interview process is that participants may feel uneasy being questioned one-on-one and having long periods of silence with very little information collected (Adams, 2010). A third disadvantage occurs when the researcher loses control of the interview process and allows the participant to change the direction of the interview and the conversation either become negative in tone or takes on a new focus (Adams, 2010).

Focus groups provide several distinct advantages for the qualitative research process (Ritchie et al., 2013). First, focus groups allow for synergy between the participants and increased output of information that comes from the comfort of like-kind individuals in the group (Coenen et al., 2012; Ritchie et al., 2013). Focus groups also allow the researcher to gather more information than they would have in the individual interview as spontaneity arise, and may do so in a shorter timeframe (Coenen et al., 2012; Ritchie et al., 2013). A third advantage of the focus group is that individuals in groups interact with one another more openly which generates more interactive data (Coenen et al., 2012; Dilshad & Latif, 2013).

Conversely, there are disadvantages posed when employing focus groups. The interaction within the group often leaves the researcher as an observer and not in control of the conversation and questions (Ritchie et al., 2013). Focus groups may lack the richness and depth that individual interviews provide to the researcher and study (Ritchie et al., 2013). Also it may be hard to conduct a focus group due to participants not being able to meet at the same time or in the same place (Ritchie et al., 2013).

To curtail the issues created by the disadvantages of semistructured one-on-one interviews and focus groups it is beneficial to use member checking after the transcription of data collected (Anderson, 2010). Member checking helps the researcher know if there are discrepancies or inconsistencies in the transcribed data, the participants review the information for correctness ensuring the meaning of the information is presented accurately (Carlson, 2010; Harper & Cole, 2012). If the participants disagreed with the information on the transcript and new information was given, I made a note on the transcript of the information and also wrote it in the transcript, and stated that there were no new revisions completed. Member checking is an avenue for creating credibility, validity and reliability in this study (Anderson, 2010; Carlson, 2010; Harper & Cole, 2012). It also encourages the researcher to re-examine the data for any newly occurring themes that may have been missed (Anderson, 2010).

Data Organization Technique

Organizing and analyzing data is an important part of qualitative research where data captured from interviews and focus groups is categorized into themes and codes (Smith & Firth, 2011). I began the data organization process by using journal notes, written file folders and taped audio recordings of both the semistructured interviews and the focus group as considered by Covell, Sidani, and Ritchie (2012) and Smith and Firth (2011) and White, Oelke, and Friesen (2012). I categorized the information collected using word processing and spreadsheet software, NVivo, to aid in organizing patterns in the data. The participants were represented by a numeric number for their individual interview process and focus group participation to maintain confidentiality. Participants were listed as participant #1, and participant #2, and the focus group will be listed as focus group #1.

I transcribed the data into themes using a data software package which allowed an in-depth analysis of links between the two. Key themes were color coded for importance. I will store the data for 5 years on a password protected electronic file until disposal. After 5 years the protected electronic file is destroyed by deleting all the information related to this study from the file.

Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis can be a very complex process due to the massive amount of data that may be collected during the qualitative process (de Casterle, Gastmans, Bryon, & Denier, 2012). After the collection of data from the interviews and focus group, I color coded the information representing the most common themes gleaned from the data. I analyzed the data a second time to ensure no new themes were overlooked and that all information was transcribed correctly.

I used methodological triangulation from two different sources (individual semistructured interviews and a focus group), as suggested by Yin (2014) to corroborate facts. I entered the data into NVivo (CAQDAS) to aid in organization and development of themes as presented by Anderson (2010) and Smith and Firth (2011). I analyzed key themes in the data collection process based on the conceptual framework central question regarding the phenomenon and interview questions listed in Appendix B. After analysis of the key themes surmised from NVivo, I mapped how these correlated to the themes found in the literature, and ascertained any new, more recently published articles to show the reoccurrence of the themes, if any are present.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are two vital components of the research study. Due to the descriptive exploratory nature of qualitative case studies researchers often study the results closely to ensure the study is rigorous and meets the requirements for reliability and validity (Amerson, 2011). Researchers can assess reliability and validity using member checking and methodological triangulation (Hernandez et al., 2013; Hodges, 2011). Validity can also be assessed for correctness by asking participants to verify the interpreted data (Hodges, 2011).

Dependability

Qualitative case studies are often scrutinized by researchers for their reliability or dependability, as they seem weak and lack rigor (Amerson, 2011). Dependability within a case study is ensuring this study can be repeated by other researchers using the same case and following the same operational steps thus arriving at the same conclusions (Ali & Yusof, 2011; Yin, 2014). Uniformity and consistency are key components of dependability when coding data and can be used to strengthen this study, and addressing transferability (Oleinik, 2011).

Dependability and creditability can be assessed by incorporating member checking to verify the correctness of the interpretation of the transcribed data and review of the transcripts (Hodges, 2011). I described in this study all steps of the data collection process providing accountability, and allowing other researchers to replicate this study. I asked all participants to verify that the information transcribed is what each one intended the meaning to be during the interview and focus group meetings to aid in confirmability.

Validity

Validity in qualitative research has been examined by numerous researchers and with varying opinions as demonstrated by Ali and Yusof (2011). There are four types of validity to be considered: construct, internal, external and reliability or dependability (recently addressed), however internal validity is not conducive to those case studies that are descriptive and exploratory in nature, therefore it will not be addressed (Yin, 2014). Validity in most qualitative studies is addressed as credibility or trustworthiness of the interpretation of the data (Hodges, 2011). To maintain validity within this study I asked each participant to review the interpreted data for correctness and review transcripts for truthfulness through member checking, and report on the findings (Hodges, 2011). By establishing dependability and validity of the information, I established that the information has transferability to other contexts regarding repatriation as discussed by Yin (2014).

I incorporated methodological triangulation by way of interviews and a focus group to aid in interpretive validity (Hernandez et al., 2013). Triangulation is a way to saturate the data so that no new key themes or information are conveyed by the participants (Hodges, 2011). Construct validity is established by triangulation and member checking (Amerson, 2011). Transferability of the results is demonstrated through replication although in qualitative research transferability is left up the reader to decide (Ali & Yusof, 2011; Amerson, 2011).

Transition and Summary

In Section 1, I began by introducing the concept of repatriation and addressed the retention strategies organizational leaders need to have higher retention rates of repatriates. I focused on the retention issues of returning expatriates and had a discussion of the three most critical themes: human resource practices, reverse culture shock and readjustment issues, and job satisfaction. I presented the general and specific problems, background information pertaining to repatriation, and presented and discussed the current literature regarding the subject matter. I used studies and resources from mainly the past five years to provide a comprehensive explanation of the repatriation process and issues faced by expatriates.

In Section 2, I began with a discussion of the crucial elements of the project first by restating the purpose statement and then describing each part of the section. I described my role as the researcher and being the main research instrument, and detailed the participants for this study. I addressed the research method and design, as I provided a description of qualitative method and a single case study design. I introduced the population to this study and the type of sampling method that would be most representative, purposive sampling. Ethical issues were addressed and a discussion of the consent form was conveyed to the reader. Data collection was a large portion of this section and I addressed the following areas: collection instrument, collection technique, organizational techniques, and analysis. Finally in Section 2, I addressed reliability and validity through dependability, creditability, transferability and confirmability. I reviewed external validity of this study through replication and generalization. I reviewed validity or credibility in regard to construct validity and triangulation of data sources.

In Section 3 I begin with a review of the purpose of this study and a brief summary of the findings. I restate the central research questions with each theme being presented and discussed. I present a summary of the findings and a statement as to whether this study confirmed, disconfirmed, or extended the knowledge of this study with a comparison to the peer reviewed literature studies, or with newly researched studies. Also in Section 3 I review the conceptual framework and how the findings tie into the process, and either ties or disputes the findings to the existing literature on effective business practice. I present a detailed discussion regarding the findings with respect to the professional practice of business, and why and how they are relevant to improve practices. Lastly, in Section 3 I address implications for social change, recommendations for action and further research was surmised along with a reflection and conclusion of the section.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Section 3 began with a brief introduction of the study which addressed the purpose of the study, the research question, and brief summary of the findings. Section 3 further included the presentation of the findings, application to professional practice, implication for social change, recommendations for action and for further research, reflections, and a conclusion.

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative single descriptive case study was to explore the strategies that organizational leaders need to retain expatriates as they transition back to the home organization. The repatriation process is challenging for expatriates as they return home and may hinder retention (Biemann & Braakmann, 2013). The study was directed by the overarching question and sub question: What strategies do organizational leaders need to retain expatriates as they transition back to the home organization? and What motivates expatriates to stay with an organization after the assignment is completed?

I conducted semistructured interviews with one senior manager and one retired senior manager of a large global service company in Tennessee. I also conducted a focus group interview with the two senior managers. Both managers managed the compensation benefits program for expatriates. I qualified each participant based on their years managing expatriates, high retention rates, and the repatriation process. One manager managed the expatriate process for 11 years and one has managed for 10 years. The participants manage, or managed expatriates from the beginning of the assignment, during the host country position, and the repatriation process. The average number of expatriates they manage on assignment was 250. The average length of the assignment was 3-5 years, but can go up to 10 years depending on the type of assignment. Expatriates are typically placed on assignments lasting 3-5 years (Baruch, Dickmann, Altman, & Bournois, 2013). Agreeing that the typical assignment lasts three years, Moller (2015) also added that the cost to U. S. organizations is in the millions.

The individual interviews and focus group interview were conducted in an environment that was comfortable and allowed each participant to respond openly to eight interview questions (see Appendix B) and five focus group questions. I asked questions during the individual interviews and focus group interview that allowed managers to reflect on their experiences working with expatriates, and to indicate the strategies used to retain expatriates during repatriation. I found that the combined results from the interviews and focus group interview corroborate the facts as suggested by Yin (2014) through methodological triangulation. Researchers use methodological triangulation of data collected as a way to confirm, or disconfirm, the findings of studies (Yin, 2014).

Once I transcribed the data from the two individual interviews and the focus group interview, I imported the data into NVivo 11 qualitative analysis software for coding. I analyzed the data collected, coded the information into categories, and identified five core emergent themes. I analyzed the five core emergent themes further and found that two of the themes could be considered sub-themes instead of main themes. I listed the two similar themes as sub-themes under the core theme of career development. In review of the emergent themes, I noted the strategies that the managers stated helped organizational retention efforts that answered the main research question and sub question.

Using the main research question and sub question as a basis for the study along with the data analysis of individual interviews and focus group interview responses, I identified five core themes, which I grouped into three main themes and two sub-themes. The main themes included (a) career development with two sub-themes of the assignment is viewed as important by the organization and is a positive career move, (b) point leader, and (c) program policy. The vital strategies noted by the managers were (a) having an equitable position upon return, (b) identifying a leader who will be responsible for the expatriates' success, and (c) incorporating a policy that places leadership responsible for deciding on a position before the return. From the data analyzed I surmised that expatriate attrition rates in general were low, according to the managers' experiences.

Presentation of the Findings

The main research question and sub-question guiding the study was as follows: What strategies do organizational leaders need to retain expatriates as they transition back to the home organization? and What motivates expatriates to stay with an organization after the assignment is completed? I facilitated methodological triangulation by using semistructured individual interviews and a focus group interview. The data was saturated once no new information or themes emerged, and repetition of the information became apparent.

By using semistructured individual interviews I was able to gain a better understanding of the participants' relevant experiences and strategies used in expatriate retention, and clarified details through member checking, ensuring the meaning of the responses was captured correctly. I included a focus group interview of the two participants to add richness to the information collected, and to facilitate methodological triangulation. I loaded data from the transcribed notes of the semistructured individual interviews and focus group interview into NVivo 11 software to assist in categorizing themes, references, and sources. In NVivo I used classical content analysis to count and code themes into three main themes and two sub-themes. I surmised three main themes: career development, point leader, and program policy.

The first theme that emerged revolved around career development which led to two sub-themes: assignment viewed as important by the organization and is a positive career move. Having a point leader was the second theme to emerge from the data collection. The third emergent theme was the implementation of a program policy and the importance.

The conceptual framework for this research project was career self-management theory. I found that many of the responses by the participants supported career self-management theory. Career self-management theory applies to individuals who navigate their own careers through choices and behaviors to obtain goals (Lent & Brown, 2013). Individuals make career decisions and choices based on their career goals and how those choices will help promote them to leadership positions (Howe-Walsh, 2013; Lent & Brown, 2013).

Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

The first question established the participants' demographics, how long they had managed expatriates and how many. The demographic questions indicated that P1 managed the expatriate process for 11 years and P2 managed expatriates for 10 years. Both participants noted they managed 250-300 expatriates. The average assignment length was three years; however some assignments were 5 years.

Emergent Theme One: Career Development

The first theme to emerge from the data collection was career development and two related sub-themes: assignment is viewed as important by the organization and is a positive career move (see Table 1). There was literature to support the findings along with conflicting research regarding the emergent theme. The participant responses showed the importance of career development as a retention strategy for expatriates. Career development is the process by which one directs their own career path by making choices to gain more knowledge and skills to advance in a given career (P1 & P2, personal communication, 10-16-15, focus group communication 10-16-15). The responses of P1 and P2 align with Baruch et al., (2013) in that career development is a key factor in accepting an assignment for expatriates and the knowledge they gain while abroad.

I gleaned that assignments were deemed beneficial to the career advancement of expatriates. Responses from the focus group interview concurred that expatriates are the knowledge agents for the organization and provide good insight regarding overseas operations. Agreeing to a foreign assignment, as suggested by Abdullah and Jin (2015), allows expatriates to develop future leadership skills. The knowledge they transfer back to the organization promotes global competitiveness (P1 & P2, personal communication, 10-16-15).

The importance of career development is shown in Table 1 as I have listed the emergent main theme of career development and sub-themes; assignment is viewed important by organization and is a positive career move. The high frequency of occurrence in P1 and P2's responses indicated the importance of career development. Expatriates gain a holistic experience during the assignment which allows them to increase their skills, and development (Collings, 2014). Having a career development plan was supported by the literature and responses of the participants, and supports retention efforts of expatriates.

Table 1

Nodes Related to Theme 1 – Career Development

References	Sources	
Theme 1: Assignment is viewed important by organization	2	2
Theme 1: Is a positive career move	3	4
Total	5	6

Agreeing to a foreign assignment can be positive for career development (P1, personal communication, 10-16-15). During the focus group interview both participants stated that expatriates who agree to foreign assignments, and complete them successfully, have been promoted to various upper level positions within organizations (focus group communication, 10-16-15). The responses of the participants are in agreement with

Barakat and Moussa (2014) in that foreign assignments influence expatriate learning and development of skills creating expertise, organizational learning, and competitive advantage.

P2 also noted that if an expatriate has an unsuccessful assignment they will not be asked to complete other assignments abroad and typically stay in lateral positions in the home country upon return (personal communications, 10-16-15). P2's response was that in his experience he has noticed very few unsuccessful assignments where goals were not obtained.

In their experiences, P1 and P2 responded there has been several expatriates return from successful assignments who were promoted to new roles (executive positions, CEO, COO) during their tenure in an organization. P1 and P2 also noted in their responses the high retention rates of 85-95% are due to the emphasis placed on career development. High retention rates were also noted by both participants during the focus group meeting, which are directly accredited to leadership strategies (focus group communication, 10-16-15).

Member checking captured the meaning of participants' information regarding experiences with expatriate career development and promotions. Member checking with participants also confirmed the high rates of retention accredited to leadership strategies and valuing the expatriates (P1, personal communications, 10-21-16, & P2, personal communications 10-28-15). During member checking both participants agreed that completing an overseas assignment is imperative to personal growth in a global company, and advancement (focus group communication, 10-15-16; personal communications, 10-16-15).

The findings of the project promote career development through foreign assignments however there are contrasting views in the literature. An opposing view by Sarkiunaite and Rocke (2015), and Moller (2015) conveyed that assignments are risky and not an opportunity for expatriates. Sarkiunaite and Rocke (2015) stated there are several losses for the expatriate when they agree to an assignment: current status in the company, lack of career prospects and promotions, minimal career development and financial difficulties. Multinational companies do a poor job helping the expatriate with career planning and reentry transitioning (Kang & Shen, 2013).

Career self-management theorists look at how career goals are achieved through career processes and behaviors initiated by individuals to reach personal goals (Lent & Brown, 2013). To identify and achieve career development and promotions, global careerists navigate their goals by accepting global assignments within their organization (Nasholm, 2012). Goal setting and implementation of processes toward career advancement on the part of the expatriate allows them to be in control of their future advancement. Navigating one's own career is in alignment with career self-management theory (Nasholm, 2012).

The two relating sub themes, that the assignment is viewed important by the organization and as a positive career move, further supported career self-management theory by confirming the importance of accepting global assignments to advance careers. Organizational leaders that value assignments through management alignment, and expatriate experiences, are more likely to promote expatriates to senior leadership positions thus validating personal navigational processes (Abdullah & Jin, 2015). Career self-management theory falls in line with expatriate behaviors to create a developmental journey (Howe-Walsh, 2013; Lent & Brown, 2013). Expatriates' view assignments as a way to sculpt their own career paths and enact behaviors, such as choosing foreign assignments to enhance their skill sets and promotion opportunities (Guo, Porschitz, & Alves, 2013).

Assignment viewed as important by an organization. Organizational leadership strategy of valuing the assignment was essential for retention expatriates. Organizational leaders that have a positive view of the expatriate assignment and value the experience promote higher expatriate retention rates according to P1 and P2's responses. P1 and P2 stated that when an organization places a high emphasis on the importance of foreign assignments the expatriate is able to advance their career in significantly higher positions (personal communications, 10-16-15).

Both participants agreed during the focus group interview that when organizational leadership places increased value on the assignment and uses the knowledge gleaned by the expatriate, global competitiveness is increased (focus group communication, 10-16-15; personal communications, 10-16-15). Participant 2 noted that though there will always be some career risk in a foreign assignment, organizational global growth will necessitate the use of expatriates on several levels, and leveraging that knowledge at home will continue to be beneficial to the company (personal communication, 10-16-15). Expatriates then have the opportunity to move into new positions due to their newly acquired knowledge and experiences (P1, personal communications 10-16-15).

The findings of this study are consistent with other research regarding retention of expatriates. Management alignment is an important part of the expatriate process and success (Abdullah & Jin, 2015). Many company executives embrace the expatriate process recognizing skills and helping to facilitate career advancement (McNulty, 2014). Managing global talent and competitive advantage is central to organizational competitiveness (Pinto, Cabral-Cardoso, & Werther Jr., 2012). Organizational leadership’s value of the assignment is in alignment with career self-management theory in that expatriates will be more likely to accept assignments if they know the organization deems them important to development (Kelly & Morley, 2011). Expatriates facilitate career development based on the value they feel an organization places on skill development, as it relates to advancement which then coincides with career self-management theory (Abdullah & Jin, 2015; Kelly & Morley, 2011).

Positive career move. According to a response from P1, a global assignment is truly a positive career move and the expatriate is valued within the organization (P1, personal communication, 10-16-15). P1 noted that expatriates with certain expertise can take other assignments which facilitate more opportunities for career development in the company (personal communications, 10-16-15). Expatriates who have had successful assignments have the opportunity to take on new assignments to continue building skills (P2, personal communications, 10-16-15). P1 and P2’s responses concurred during the focus group interview that former expatriates have been promoted to senior level and vice president level positions due to the skills they gained while on assignment (focus group communication, 10-15-16). During member checking with each participant, they confirmed that I had captured the meaning of the information regarding assignments as positive career moves for expatriates correctly.

The existing body of knowledge regarding expatriate assignments supported the findings of this study. International assignments are positive for both the expatriate and the organization (Baruch et al., 2013). Expatriates who wish to advance their careers need to know that a foreign assignment matters to their advancement (Nazir, Hussain, & Zaman, 2014). A wealth of information can be gained by expatriates while on assignment which is instrumental in career development; however some organizations seldom utilize these skills (Barakat & Moussa, 2014).

My analysis of current literature also provided a differing opinion of how assignments affect careers. A contrasting view that was suggested by Santosh and Muthiah (2012) is that if the repatriation process is not managed properly other employees will refrain from taking assignments abroad. Foreign assignments are beneficial in career development; however, if the repatriation process is not handled properly, other staff will hesitate to accept assignments (Nazir, Hussain, & Zaman, 2014). There is no guarantee that expatriate assignments will enhance careers; this is a view held by some researchers (Abdullah & Jin, 2015). It can be stated that, as expatriates navigate their own careers and make the choice to accept a foreign assignment to develop their skills for advancement, they are modeling how career self-management theory works through self-initiation and being in control of one's opportunities (Lent & Brown, 2013).

Career self-management theory related to the main research question and sub question by demonstrating that development of one's career is an important motivator to expatriates, and that organizational leadership places high value on foreign assignments and advancement. Leadership promote expatriates who have had overseas experience and they have a high regard for expatriate commitment (P1 & P2, personal communication, 10-16-15). Expatriates who can sculpt their careers and have a positive self-directed career development plan are more likely to stay with the organization (Guo, Porschitz, & Alves, 2013), thereby reducing attrition rates.

Emergent Theme Two: Point Leader

The second theme identified having a point leader assigned to the expatriate before the assignment began (see Table 2). The responses of P1 and P2 from the individual interviews supported the importance of the point leader. Both P1 and P2 stated that having a leader person or point leader for an expatriate identified before the assignment commenced was extremely beneficial to retention (P1 & P2, personal communications, 10-16-15). The point leader is an individual, a senior manager, or vice president within a particular discipline where the expatriate is working who monitors their development and identifies a new position for expatriates before they return to the home office (P1 & P2, personal communications, 10-16-15 & focus group communication, 10-16-15).

The point leader contributed greatly to retention efforts through career enhancement for expatriates (P1 & P2, personal communication, 10-16-15 & focus group communication, 10-16-15). Arranging a position for the expatriate before they return was noted by Shieh and Pei (2014) an aid in reducing adjustment issues and increasing retention. P1 and P2 agreed in their responses during the focus group interview that leadership responsibility, starting with top management, made a tremendous difference in retention of expatriates and placing them in equitable positions after returning. The importance of the point leader was validated by the individual interview responses of P1 and P2, and how a point leader eased the repatriation process.

Having an equitable position to return to facilitates expatriate retention (Cave, 2014). Initiating a point leader demonstrates a strategy seen by leaders as highly effective in retention efforts and relates to the main research question of necessary retention strategies. The point leader works to establish an equitable position for the expatriate before they return which makes accepting an expatriate assignment more appealing (P1 & P2, personal communications, 10-16-15; focus group communications, 10-16-15). Having an equitable position established before returning is a crucial strategy necessary for retention and relates to the main research question of this study. A point leader eases the readjustment process for the expatriate allowing them to navigate career opportunities more confidently (Shieh & Pei, 2014), which aligns with career self-management theory through facilitating one's own career path.

By default, the point leader acts as a mentor; however, the leader has limited contact with the expatriate during the assignment (P2, personal communications, 10-16-15). Primary contact takes place when the expatriate returns (P2, personal communications, 10-16-15). Participant 2 responded that there is no mentor program in effect; however, many organizations do have individuals who mentor expatriates during the entire expatriate process (personal communications, 10-16-15). A mentor can help reduce vagueness and increase expatriate performance and, therefore, ameliorates high retention rates (Abdullah & Jin, 2015). During the focus group interview, both participants agreed that it is the expatriates' responsibility to stay in contact with and informed about the home country while on assignment, which relates to career self-management theory and personal development (focus group communications, 10-16-15). Increasing retention rates by implementing a mentor program or mentorship would be considered a valuable tool according to Cave (2014).

Member checking with each participant confirmed the findings and that the meaning of the information was captured regarding the importance of the point leader for the expatriate and for the organization (P1, personal communications, 10-21-15; P2, personal communications, 10-28-15). The importance of the point leader was noted in the responses of P1 and P2 which is depicted in Table 2. Table 2 reflects the data regarding the point leader and the high frequency of occurrence (see Table 2).

Table 2

Point Leader

References		Sources
Leadership responsibility	8	3

Having a point leader is necessary to a successful repatriation process and is in line with the main research question regarding retention strategies. Aligning with career self-management theory, expatriates can guide their careers increasing their opportunities for promotions (P1 & P2, personal communications, 10-16-15; focus group communication, 10-16-15). Expatriates are expected to initiate and maintain contact with the point leader, who acts as a mentor, to ensure they remain up to date on all current information and processes happening with the home organization (P2, personal communication, 10-16-15).

Initiating conversations with home managers and maintaining contact throughout the assignment demonstrates self-discipline toward navigating one's own career, aligning with career self-management theory and the current literature (Lent & Brown, 2013). Assigning a point leader to an expatriate before the assignment commences aligns with the main research question and the strategies needed for retention, and is in alignment with career self-management theory of creating ones' own career opportunities (Lent & Brown, 2013; Shieh & Pei, 2014).

Emergent Theme Three: Program policy

One of the best strategies for retention was implementing a program policy as shown below (see Table 3). P1 and P2 both stressed the importance of having a good departmental program policy for expatriate career advancement in their responses (P1 & P2, personal communications, 10-16-15; focus group communication, 10-16-15). The program policy formalized job placements and allowed the top leaders and expatriates to maintain a good line of communication (P1, personal communication, 10-16-15; focus group communications, 10-16-15). Having a good line of communication relates to the main research question and strategies necessary for retention. Accepting an assignment can be daunting for the expatriate and knowing the lines of communication are open eases the process and decision, which is in alignment with career self-management theory. Participant 2 stated that the program policy was implemented within the compensation department to help expatriates upon return, and there was no formal human resource (HR) policy in effect in the organization (personal communications, 10-16-15). The decision to implement a program policy to eliminate any confusion regarding the assignment relates to the main research question of essential retention strategies needed by leaders.

The program policy was implemented in the late 1990s to early 2000s with the goal to ensure expatriates had an equitable placement upon return (P1 & P2, personal communications, 10-16-15; focus group communications, 10-16-15). The policy enabled leaders of different departments or disciplines, HR, legal, finance, information technology (IT) and operations, the ability to search within their disciplines for appropriate positions for the expatriate before reentry (focus group communications, 10-15-16). Participant 1stated that before the program policy was implemented expatriate retention was not as high as it is now in 2015 (personal communications, 10-16-15). During member checking I confirmed that the meaning of the information was captured; participant 1 reiterated that before the implementation of the program policy, retention rates were low. Table 3 reflects the data collected and shows that a program policy is an important strategy for expatriate retention.

Table 3

Program Policy

References		Sources
Implemented a program policy	3	2

Participant 2 agreed that retention was lower before the policy implementation, and that expatriates leveraged their new knowledge for better opportunities with other companies (personal communication, 10-16-15). P2 responded that the cost of sending and expatriate on assignment was high and it gave the individual an expensive resume to take to other organizations (P2, personal communication, 10-16-15). The program policy made a difference in how assignments were viewed by the expatriate and how to better value efforts abroad (P1 & P2, personal communications, 10-16-15; focus group communications, 10-16-15).Viewing assignments in a favorable manner relates to career self-management theory and how an expatriate directs their on career development.

Expatriates are expected to review the program policy before the assignment begins to curtail any misunderstanding of what is required, and ask questions to understand what is expected (P2, personal communication, 10-16-15). Understanding expectations and being willing to accept an assignment suggested that expatriates have the ability and are expected to guide their own development and promotional opportunities (P1 & P2, personal communications, 10-16-15; focus group communication, 10-16-15). Promoting one’s own development through program policies and accepting assignments reflects the fundamentals of career self-management theory (Lent & Brown, 2013).

Though P1 and P2 responded that the program policy was a departmental addition, some researchers have concluded that having a formal HR policy in effect will aid in repatriation retention and management of global talent (Collings, 2014). Having a *thought-out* program would be beneficial for retention efforts (Sarkiunaite & Rocke, 2015). McPhail, Fisher, Harvey, and Moeller (2012) suggested that most companies do not provide the necessary HRM support to their global employees.

The program policy reflects on the main research question and the strategic actions taken by upper management to create high retention of expatriates, placing them in positions where their new skills will be used effectively. This too coincides with the sub question of the motivators for expatriates and knowing that upper management and the organization value them and their assignments. Placing high value on assignments and having an equitable position upon repatriation facilitates good retention efforts (P1 & P2, personal communication, 10-16-15). Once expatriates review the program policy, and feel comfortable accepting the assignment, they are directing their on careers and development, which is the basis of career self-management theory (Lent & Brown, 2013).

Serendipitous Results

Additional information that emerged, but was not considered as a main theme, was the use of a mentor, understanding tax issues, and future financial considerations for organizations. Though having a mentor was not a finding relevant to the study, mentors can positively affect retention efforts of expatriates and should be a consideration of organizational leaders (Cave, 2014; Cox et al., 2013) Mentors enhance the repatriation process and add value (Abdullah & Jin, 2015). Mentors also help increase retention rates through communication with expatriates while on assignment and upon return (Cave, 2014). Creating retention of expatriates through mentors aligns with career self-management theory in that expatriates are more likely to accept an assignment if they continue to have a solid communication line to the home organization (Cave, 2014). Implementing a mentor program is a positive strategy for global organizations and increases the acceptance of assignments by other individuals, thereby enhancing high retention (Abdullah & Jin, 2015).

Tax consideration was briefly addressed by both participants when asked if they had any new information to add to the study, though it was not a main emerging theme (P1 & P2, focus group communications, 10-16-15). Determining which country the expatriate pays taxes to and how much can become an issue if not handled properly (P2, personal communications, 10-16-15; Nazir, Hussain, & Zaman, 2014). During member checking participant 2 mentioned briefly that tax issues can arise for expatriates due to the differences between the home and host country through government legislation (personal communications, 10-16-15). Most expatriates are not versed in the tax codes of the host country, or how they should account for income once returning home; therefore, it would behoove an organization to provide them tax information (P2, personal communications, 10-16-15). Organizations that help expatriates have a better understanding of the tax differences and how they should set up their tax accounts aligns with the main research question as a strategy for retention (P2, personal communication, 10-28-15). Understanding the tax laws of the home and host country, and which country one pays their taxes in, aligns with career self-management theory allowing expatriates to navigate careers through making informed choices (Howe-Walsh, 2013; Lent & Brown, 2013).

Another interesting point expressed by Participant 2 during member checking was that the future of expatriate assignments will continue to evolve as organizations look for less expensive ways to conduct global business (personal, communication, 10-28-15). As expatriates navigate their own futures and how they acquire new skills, they may be more freely willing to move abroad, therefore, demanding less compensation be provided (P2, personal communications, 10-28-15). Having the ability to take control of their careers and how they build skill sets, future expatriates may demand less from organizations to accept assignments which falls in line with career self-management theory (P2, personal communications, 10-16-15). Participant 2 mentioned that global companies may find it more feasible to localize and train host country nationals, sending expatriates on short-term assignments to train (personal communications, 10-16-15). Some researchers have suggested that short-term assignments may have advantages that aid in retention of expatriates (Moller, 2015).

Summary

Overall, the research findings were in line with the purpose and significance of the study and related to career self-management theory. The main themes emerged as presented in Tables 1, 2, and 3, and played a vital role in exploring the research phenomenon while also addressing the main research question and sub question. This study has contributed to the understanding of the strategies needed by organizational leaders to retain expatriates during repatriation. Organizational leaders need to implement retention strategies for expatriates starting when the assignment commences (Cooper & Rice, 2012). According to Abdullah and Jin (2015) not only is it important to develop good strategies for retention, it is more important to implement good global strategies through HRM. Having few or ineffective strategies in place to retain expatriates during repatriation jeopardizes global competitiveness, profitability, and sustainability (Cave, 2014).

Applications to Professional Practice

Repatriation retention is a topic of concern for global organizations due to expatriates leaving the company for better opportunities (Chung & Choi, 2013). The results of this study provided meaningful information regarding the strategies necessary for expatriate retention during repatriation. The retention efforts of expatriates during the repatriation process is a perplexing issue for organizational leaders, and one of mismanagement by companies (Cho, Hutchings, & Marchant, 2014; Jassawalla & Sashittal, 2009). The findings of the study are relative to career self-management theory because expatriates navigate their own career development by accepting assignments to build new skills which they transfer back to the organization (Lent & Brown, 2013; Howe-Walsh, 2013). Organizational leaders may be able to identify the strategies that positively affect expatriates during repatriation, and change ineffective strategies to retain vital employees.

Organizational leadership may implement strategies that create high retention rates, meeting the career development needs of expatriates which increases profitability and sustainability of the company (Cho, Hutchings, & Marchant, 2014). Organizational leaders who have an effective retention strategy in place can lessen organizational costs of the assignment, and increase profitability and sustainability for the organization because the organization retains valuable knowledge and experience (Cave, 2014). The implementation of effective retention strategies also helps the organization remain competitive in a global market by retaining key expatriates who will transfer the knowledge they have gained from the assignment back to the home office (Barakat & Moussa, 2014). Another effective retention strategy is valuing the assignment and the efforts of the expatriate, which allows them to have more confidence in their career choices creating high retention (Abdullah & Jin, 2015). Knowing that organizations reward successful expatriate assignments by providing an equitable position upon return is an effective retention strategy (Cho et al., 2013; Gupta, 2013). Having retention strategies in place before the assignment commences eases the process of repatriation and can result in retaining knowledgeable employees (Nazir et al., 2014).

Applicable strategies identified within the second and third main themes that organizational leaders can implement toward retention are the importance of having a point leader and a program policy. The point leader is one who is responsible for establishing a position for the expatriate and is an effective strategy to retain expatriates due to having a senior manager involved in their development who is able to identify an equitable position upon the return (Cave, 2014) The point leader is instrumental in building good relations with the departments and expatriates to retain valuable employees who are considered to be important knowledge agents for foreign assignments who bring information back to the company to help maintain competitiveness (Santosh & Muthiah, 2012). The point leader works in the same discipline as the expatriate which is another effective retention strategy that allows the expatriate to advance in their given field without having to find another equitable position within the organization, or with another company (Shieh & Pei, 2014). The point leader is similar to a mentor who enhances the lines of communication between the organizations and expatriates (Hurn, 2014). Mentors are an effective repatriation retention strategy for organizations (Kang & Shen, 2013; Sarkiunaite & Rocke, 2015).

The program policy was another unique retention strategy similar to having HR policies in effect (McPhail, et al., 2012; Nazir, et al., 2014). The program policy is an effective retention strategy for repatriation because the expatriate reviews the policy before the assignment commences providing an understanding of the assignment, expectations, and that a point person will be assigned to them (Cox et al., 2013; Pattie, White, & Tansky, 2010). One aspect of the program policy is that expatriates have an understanding of the assignment in advance and know that a point person will be assigned to them to assist in establishing an equitable position upon return. Having program and formal policies as a retention strategy may strengthen the tie between organizations and repatriates whether the policies are implemented by organizational departments or HR departments (Nazir, et al., 2014). It is important for organizational leaders to have effective HR policies, or a program policy as a retention strategy during the repatriation process (Kulkarni, et al., 2010; Nazir, et al., 2014).

Implications for Social Change

Repatriation is a difficult process for both the expatriate and the organization and, if handled poorly, may inhibit expatriate retention as well as organizational sustainability and profitability (Kang & Shen, 2013; Shieh & Pei, 2014). If organizational leaders value expatriate efforts and assignments they may facilitate higher expatriate retention rates, and increase organizational global presence, sustainability and profitability by retaining knowledge and skills of employees returning to the home office (Abdullah & Jin, 2015). Organizational leaders who implement these strategies may also affect social change by influencing expatriates to remain employed with the company, building value through knowledge transfer, creating a sustainable workforce, and creating career development and satisfaction for employees. In turn, it may contribute to the prosperity of expatriates, their families, communities, and the local economy.

Effective retention strategies may have a positive effect on the level of commitment of the expatriate and other employees, who may consider accepting another assignment which can strengthen organizational competitiveness, and create organizational sustainably in the global marketplace. Organizational leaders who implement these retention strategies may contribute to the development of expatriate careers and skill sets, which may have positive impact on society. Researchers could utilize the findings of the study to glean the retention strategies needed by organizational leaders to retain expatriates during repatriation.

Recommendations for Action

Organizational leaders may consider evaluating their current retention protocol with the strategies listed from the three main themes, which were career development, employing a point person, and putting in place a program policy to retain expatriates during repatriation. Retention efforts are important to retain knowledge and skills to enhance organizational profitability, sustainability, and competitiveness; therefore, leaders need to identify the most effective strategies to implement within their organizations to retain expatriates (Cave, 2014). As leaders evaluate their current protocol against the three main themes from the findings, they may consider incorporating these strategies and discarding any strategies that are ineffectual for retention efforts.

Leadership may consider reviewing their strategies on a three year basis; the average length of assignments being three years in duration. Senior managers may want to consider the financial cost associated with the expatriate assignment and how they may implement retention strategies that benefit the individual, and are cost effective for the company. Organizational leaders should also consider how retention strategies align with company goals of retaining knowledgeable and skilled employees and then implement strategies that are beneficial to the expatriate and organization.

The findings from this study are important to organizational leaders who are interested in applying effective retention strategies to the repatriation process. The implementation of effective retention strategies may allow leaders to retain expatriates and understand the importance of developing knowledgeable and skilled employees to create organizational sustainability. Company stakeholders and the board of directors may be interested in the effective expatriate retention strategies that I explored in this study. I will disseminate the results of the study through scholarly journals, business journals, and psychology journals. Furthermore, I may provide the results of the study through conferences and training venues to organizational leaders who are interested in expatriate retention strategies.

Recommendations for Further Research

The findings of this study warrant additional exploration by organizational leaders of retention strategies for expatriates that are vital to global competitiveness, sustainability, and profitability through their skills and knowledge (Abdullah & Jin, 2015). Further exploration is warranted to study the impact of retention from the view of more than two participants to gain a more transferable view of the expatriate retention strategies necessary for organizations. Further exploration is necessary from the view point of the expatriate and their needs to enhance their retention and to glean strategies they feel are valuable to the repatriation process.

I would suggest conducting a study of expatriates to identify the strategies they deem as important in retention efforts. Additionally I suggest conducting a study that incorporates expatriates from differing disciplines such as international universities and teaching organizations to consider their view of retention strategies versus those of the business sector. Furthermore, I would suggest a study that focuses on the financial losses to the organization when retention strategies are not considered important during repatriation, and how financial loss affects organizational sustainability and profitability.

Reflections

Researching expatriate retention strategies was an exciting and daunting process, and allowed me to have a better understanding of the expatriate experience. I took on this DBA endeavor after being inspired to work and teach abroad. I wanted to learn more about the experiences and issues expatriates faced in preparation of my own future career choices to gain knowledge and holistic skills. I have felt overwhelmed at times with the entire process, but I never lost sight of the goal and how a seminal degree in business would positively affect my career.

From the study I found that organizations should implement retention strategies based on the needs of the expatriate and how expatriates facilitate their careers. I also gleaned from the findings that I had a preconceived notion that all organizations valued the expatriate and assignment due to the financial cost associated. The findings of this study exposed me to new strategies that organizational leaders need to retain expatriates, particularly having a point leader to help with career development and having a departmental program policy. I found that expatriate assignments are not always as exciting and successful, and I am reconsidering my thoughts on the length of time I would like to stay on an assignment if the opportunity arises. The findings of the study provided me with new knowledge that I can share with organizational leaders in the future.

Summary and Study Conclusions

Successful repatriation is important to the organization and the expatriate (Santosh & Muthiah, 2012). The repatriation process is often mishandled by the organization causing attrition of experienced employees who are the knowledge agents for the company (Santosh & Muthiah, 2012). Organizational leaders need effective retention strategies to retain expatriates after they return from the assignment (Sheih & Pei, 2014). The specific business problem is that organizational leaders lack the strategies needed to retain expatriates as they transition back to the home organization. The purpose of this qualitative single descriptive case study was to explore the strategies that organizational leaders need to retain expatriates as they transition back to the home organization and to answer the following research question and sub questions: What strategies do organizational leaders need to retain expatriates as they transition back to the home organization?, and What motivates expatriates to stay with an organization after the assignment is completed? Two senior managers that managed the expatriate process participated in semistrucutred interviews and a focus group interview.

Three main themes emerged from the data including (a) career development and two sub-themes of the assignment are valued by the organization, and a positive career move, (b) having a point leader, and (c) program policy. The findings indicated that leaders need strategies such as valuing the expatriate assignment, ensuring there are promotional opportunities by employing a point leader, and that a program policy is necessary for expatriate retention. The findings also indicated that organizational leadership should understand effective retention strategies and address any ineffective strategies and barriers that may prevent the success of expatriate retention strategies.

In conclusion, the relevant findings of the study are that retention strategies are necessary for the retention of expatriates. Organizational leaders should implement the most effective strategies. Understanding the barriers to retention will allow leaders to focus on strategies that are effective and ones that expatriates deem important. Implementing effective strategies are a vital to organizational sustainability, profitability, and building global competitiveness.

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Appendix A: Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research study of repatriation retention strategies. The researcher is inviting those who manage expatriates and the repatriation process for retention. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Lydia Nicks, who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to glean an understanding of the leadership strategies necessary to retain expatriates after they return to the home organization from a foreign assignment.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

Participate in a semistructured interview of questions. The interview process will take a minimum of thirty minutes, but no longer than an hour. Participate in a focus group meeting which will last thirty minutes to an hour at maximum. The interview and focus group will be audio recorded. Participants will be asked to verify a summary of the interview and focus group responses to ensure that the meaning of their answers has been captured.

Here are some sample questions:

1. How many expatriates do you manage who are on assignment, or have managed?

2. In your experience what is the retention rate of expatriates who return from completed assignments?
3. How long are the expatriate assignments (6 months, 1 year, 3 years, or longer)?
4. What procedures are in place to help expatriates and their families reenter the home country after assignment completion?
5. How did you help expatriates who remained with the company?
6. What have expatriates done when they were offered new assignments?
7. How would a foreign assignment align with career development of expatriates within your company?
8. What other information would you like to provide that we have not addressed already?

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one at the company will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as becoming stressed, fatigued, confused, or uncomfortable. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing.

The benefit of this study will aid organizational leaders in understanding the repatriation process for those expatriates who return to the home organization after the assignment has completed and what the repatriate requires to make a seamless transition toward retention.

Payment:

No form of payment is provided for the participants of this study. You will receive a copy of the study findings when completed.

Privacy:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure by using a locked storage file container where all written and audio recordings, and NVivo information is maintained. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via email, Lydia.nicks@live.com. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is **IRB -06-12-15-0376619** and it expires on **6-11-2016**.

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By replying to this email with the words, “I consent”, I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. How many expatriates do you manage who are on assignment, or have managed?
2. In your experience what is the retention rate of expatriates who return from completed assignments?
3. How long are the expatriate assignments (6 months, 1 year, 3 years, or longer)?
4. What procedures are in to help expatriates and their families reenter the home country after assignment completion?
5. How did you help expatriates who remained with the company?
6. What have expatriates done when they were offered new assignments?
7. How would a foreign assignment align with career development of expatriates within your company?
8. What other information would you like to provide that we have not addressed already?

Appendix C: Interview and Focus Group Protocol

Interview topic: Exploring the strategies needed by organizational leaders to retain expatriates after they return from their overseas assignment.

A. The individual and focus group interviews will begin with general salutations, an introduction of myself by stating my name and that I am a Walden University doctoral graduate student studying retention of expatriates.

B. I will thank the each participant for their time and willingness to be interview, and their general participation in the study, and state that the interview will take approximately 60-90 minutes.

C. I will ask each participant to read the consent form to glean an understanding of their participation in the study, and state that they may ask questions after reading the form, before signing the consent. If there are questions, those will be answered, and if not, I will ask for their signature on the consent form.

D. I will explain to them that their participation is voluntary and that they can stop the interview or focus group session at any time without recourse. I will explain to them that their identity will be held anonymous and I will state to them that each participant will have a code to protect their name and identity: participant #1 and participant #2.

E. I will provide each participant in the interview and focus group with a copy of the consent form they signed.

F. I will state to each participant of the interview and focus group that I will take notes via written documentation and will also record the interview and focus group sessions to aid in note taking and checking.

G. I will provide each participant with a copy of the interview questions, which are listed in Appendix B, to help them stay focused during the interview process.

H. Before the actual interview process starts, I will state to the participants that I am ready to start the interview process by stating, “I will now turn on the tape recorder and will begin to ask questions”.

I. I will restate the purpose of the study by stating “this case study is being conducted to explore the strategies needed by organizational leaders to retain expatriates after they complete an assignment abroad”, and will start asking the questions.

J. During the interview and focus group sessions I will listen attentively to the participant and monitor them for any discomfort during the session. I will also keep the participant focused on the question at hand, allowing for minimal added conversation regarding the study to glean any new material.

K. As the interview comes to an end, I will convey to the participants the steps in the process after the interview is completed. I will inform them that after I have transcribed the notes (written and recorded) from the interview I will have them available for participant review, to ensure I have captured their correct meaning for the study.

L. The final process of the interview will begin by asking the participants if they have any questions or comments, and if not, thanking them again for their time, willingness and participation in the study.