

# Expatriate Assignments and Career Outcomes: Career development of Portuguese Repatriates

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## Abstract

This paper aims to study the expatriation, specifically the career management of Portuguese repatriates. The purpose of this research is to examine how the expatriate assignments may influence the professional career development upon return.

This research was carried out using the quantitative methodology. The data collection was done through the application of a questionnaire to 75 repatriates belonging to organizations located in Portugal.

The data collected in this study show that repatriates enhance the expatriation experience, regardless of a career progression or not, because they acquire and develop new skills, achieve a richer and more extensive functional content and assume positions with more responsibility and autonomy. The fact that repatriates plan the international assignment as part of a development career process confirms the theoretical perspectives of the new psychological contract, protean career, boundaryless career and intelligent careers.

The results show that the completion of international assignments doesn't have a direct impact on the repatriates' career development.

These findings will be discussed in detail and implications and suggestions for future research will be proposed as well.

**Keywords:** Expatriates assignments; repatriates; career outcomes; career development; international human resource management.

## **Introduction**

The globalization of economies and the business internationalization put major challenges to the Human Resources Managers (HRM) of multinationals, being the management of the expatriates and their careers a core concern, mainly due to the high repatriates' turnover (Bonache et al., 2010; Cerdin & Pargneux, 2014; Greenhaus & Callanan, 1994).

Carrying out international assignments (IA) is extremely important to organizations because, mostly, are done with developmental and strategic goals (Brookfield GRS, 2013; 2014; 2015; Kraimer et al., 2009). On the other hand, it is also important for expatriates who complete those IA, namely, when motivated by career progression expectations and the development of new skills (Finuras, 2003; Martins, 2013). As such, the career management of these professionals is especially relevant to the international human resources management (IHRM), which should encourage a balance of interests to promote the mutual benefit either of organizations or expatriates, developing talents and global careers (Cerdin & Brewster, 2014; Farndale et al., 2014; Suutari et al., 2012).

Furthermore, much has been written about the value of expatriation as a potential development source with positive career effect (Baruch et al., 2016; Dickmann et al., 2016). However, are not known, until now, studies that address specifically the career management issues of the Portuguese repatriates.

The main goal of this paper is to study the relationship between expatriate assignments and repatriates career development after return to the home company.

The emphasis is to show how expatriation assignment can be good or not for intra-organizational career. In line with this, our contribution is explain how career development influences the repatriates willingness to stay or not in the home company upon return. Furthermore, we come also showing how organizational factors play a role in desire to remain in the home company upon return and company support practices can reduce turnover.

The paper will have the following structure: In section 1 we present some literature about the expatriation concept and their relationship with repatriates' career development. In section 2 we present the methodology. In section 3 we present the results which are discussed in section 4. Finally, in section 5, we present the conclusions, limitations and implications of the paper and will also make some suggestions for future research.

## **Expatriate Concept and their relationship with repatriates' career development**

An expatriate has been traditionally defined as an employee sent on assignment by their employer to another country, usually on a temporary basis, to fulfill specific organizational

objectives (Baruch et al., 2016; Dowling & Welch, 2004; Richardson & Mallon, 2005), much studied in the literature and normally classified by their employers as ‘international assignees’ (Dickmann et al., 2016; Tornikoski et al., 2014). On the other hand, repatriate is commonly defined as individuals who return from their expatriate assignment to their home company upon completion of their IA (Lazarova, 2015).

The expatriation processes and associated career issues have been studied by several authors, mainly in the international context (e.g., Benson & Pattie, 2008; Cerdin & Pargneux, 2014; Feldman & Thomas, 1992; Ren et al., 2013; Selmer, 1999; Stahl et al., 2002; Suutari & Brewster, 2003). The findings of this research shows that expatriation is viewed by expatriates as an opportunity for career progression during and after the expatriation process, once they acquire new skills and knowledge that will enable them to grow personally and professionally. However, their expectations are not always matched, in many cases, and because of that they leave the organizations that had sent them abroad (Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2001; Nguyen et al., 2014; Stroh, 1995). The results of the study carried out by Baruch, Steele and Quantrill (2002), show that 50% of the repatriates leave the organization within two years after the return, mainly due to the poor organizational practices in what concerns career management. In the last three years, the annual expatriate’s turnover rate ranged from 8% to 10% (Brookfield GRS, 2013; 2014; 2015). Among the expatriates who leave the organization, between 20% and 22% dropped out during the IA, and 25% to 31%, left the organization in the first year after the return from the IA. One to two years after the return from the IA, the turnover rate ranges between 23% and 26%. Two years after the return from the IA, the rate rises from 24% to 29%.

According to recent data from Brookfield Global Relocation Services (Brookfield GRS, 2014; 2015), when you consider the relationship between expatriates career management and the increase of the IA Return On Investment (ROI), the design of career paths that allow the use of the new skills after the return was reported by 33% and 34% of respondents, in 2014 and 2015, respectively, as the most important initiative. Furthermore, and as referred by Baruch, Altman and Tung (2016), the impact of career consequences associated with global mobility have received little research attention. As was recently underlined by Dickmann and colleagues (2016), the question remains, however, to know what types of circumstances and in which contexts would expatriation help advance career, in terms of career capital impact of their international work upon repatriation.

As part of expatriation process, the management and career development is particularly important after the completion of IA, at the repatriation period, given that repatriates become

more committed to the development of their careers after an international experience, as pointed out Lazarova and Caligiuri (2001). However, many studies show that, very often, the desired career development doesn't happen due to the lack of organizational support (Black et al., 1999; Riusala & Suutari, 2000; Stahl et al., 2002; Suutari & Brewster, 2003). The career advancement expectations from the expatriate, even before the IA, mostly, does not match with the vision of the organization, and this divergence is pointed out as one of the main failure reasons of expatriation, namely, leading to the repatriates' turnover.

Selmer (1999) points out that when expatriates realize that their career prospects are not coincident with those of the organization, they become dissatisfied and their focus goes to looking for other employment alternatives outside of the expatriation organization. More recent research (Heijden et al., 2009; McCaughey & Bruning, 2005) concluded that when the expatriates perceive that they don't have organizational support in what concerns career management, they show intention to leave the organization or, inversely, when there's perceived organizational support at the repatriation, including through designing career plans considering the repatriates experience, the intention to stay in the organization increases (Lazarova & Cerdin, 2007).

According to Yan, Zhu and May (2002), from the repatriate point of view, the repatriation success is achieved through the long term career development and new opportunities, such as a promotion in the organization or the assignment of new tasks that are more challenging. On the other hand, from the organization point of view, the repatriation success is the use of the new knowledge and skills acquired during the IA, either in the current position or in others that repatriates will perform in the future, or even transferring them to other employees of the organization (Yan et al., 2002).

Currently, many multinationals companies, as part of its talent and global career management policies, have defined international experience as a requirement for the employees be promoted to specific functional levels within the organization (Zhou, 2015) but also to test their skills for future top management positions (Cerdin & Brewster, 2014).

Traditionally, the turnover of repatriates after the return from an IA is seen negatively by the organization. However, recent literature (e.g., Bonache et al., 2010; Birur & Muthiah, 2013) suggests that from the repatriate point of view this could be seen as positive, mainly regarding career development. This perspective may be related to the concept of boundaryless career, in which the completion of an IA is enhanced by repatriates because of the opportunity to acquire new skills and to promote their personal and career development, even if it doesn't mean a progression on the expatriation and repatriation company (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996;

Tung, 1998). Stahl, Miller and Tung (2002) found that expatriates who participated in their study were not concerned about career progression within the organization, because they considered international experience as positive for their personal and professional development, and as such, they believed that with that experience they would achieve a career advancement, even if it was in another organization. This leads us to suggest the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Completing IA is directly related to a vertical career progression of the repatriates;

Hypothesis 2 – The repatriates who have had a vertical career progression upon return from IA remain on the organization that sent them abroad;

Hypothesis 3 – The repatriates without a vertical career progression upon return from IA are on active job search.

## **Methodology**

For this research was adopted the quantitative methodology, because it appears to be the most appropriate to test and verify hypotheses, once it involves a) a specific phenomenon to be studied; b) a structured way to measure this phenomenon numerically; and c) a mathematical analysis (this is, statistical) to this phenomenon (Freixo, 2012; Neves, 2014). Taking into account the characteristics of the study, the time and the resources available for research, we choose a kind of study non experimental and descriptive-correlational. We classify it as having a descriptive-correlational approach, because we intend to describe the universe of a given population and establish relationships between variables. What characterizes a descriptive-correlational study is that the researcher tries to explore and determine the existence of relationships between variables, in order to describe these relationships and find factors concerned to the population or the phenomenon under study (Fortin, 1999).

The target population of this study is composed by repatriates, which means, persons who completed an IA and returned to their home country. The definition of repatriates as the population on this study is due to the fact that they have experienced all the expatriation phases, prior to departure, during the assignment abroad and upon return. Once this study focuses on organizational expatriation, are covered in the target population employees of organizations located in Portugal, both portuguese international organizations and multinationals subsidiaries.

The sample is composed by repatriates with the following characteristics: (1) have completed an IA with 6 months of duration minimum; (2) have returned from IA in the last 4 years. This period of time was settled to avoid memory biases about the international experience; and (3) professionals with an employment relation, or not, with the organization that sent them abroad.

Given the special features required for the sample elements and since we do not know the number of repatriates existing in Portugal, the sampling technique used was non-probabilistic or non-random (Barañano, 2004; Freixo, 2012; Marôco, 2014). Within this type of sample, which is done based on prior information about the target population and that involves value judgments from those who make the selection, we used two types of sampling: (1) convenience sampling, by requesting for participation in the study to people who are contacts of the researchers; and (2) “snowball” sampling, by requesting to the first participants in the study to indicate other people who they know and who match with the requirements of the sample (Barañano, 2004; Marôco, 2014). Were adopted these two types of sampling because the sample elements are not easily accessible and the attributes required are difficult to find on one single person.

The questionnaire was built and applied to the participants, including (1) questions with qualitative and quantitative answers (Hill & Hill, 2008); (2) open, closed and semi-open questions (Barañano, 2004; Freixo, 2012; Hill & Hill, 2008); and (3) questions with a four and five point Likert-type rating scale to measure satisfaction and attitude of respondents regarding the issues under study (Freixo, 2012).

The questionnaire begins explaining the scope of their implementation, the purpose, the recipients, ethical issues and the researcher contacts. After the introduction, the questions are structured and divided into three parts. The first part presents a set of questions about the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants, with the unique and exclusive purpose of support in the analysis and interpretation of the results. The second part intends to gather information about expatriation experience(s) of participants, which is important to validate the requirements of the sample elements and also for the analysis and interpretation of the results. The third, and last part, presents a set of questions aiming to characterize the expatriation experience(s) of the participants relating that with the management and development of their professional careers. The repatriates who have completed more than one IA are asked to answer the questions of the questionnaire taking into account their last IA.

In order to minimize the risk of missing answers, all questions were defined as mandatory, except those that might be not applicable to all respondents (for example,

training/expertise area in case the respondent have higher education, the current organization business area, among others).

The questionnaire disclosure and request for the participants cooperation was done by: (1) sending the collaboration request to all connections of the researcher on LinkedIn, where some of them, in turn, disseminated to their contacts, for example co-workers who were in the same conditions and they could also participate in the study; (2) direct contact with people who were known by the researchers and who met the requirements to participate in the study; (3) request some recruitment and selection consultancies to disseminate the request to the candidates who met the requirements.

It's important to outline that on this research the ethical issues, inherent in the used scientific methodology, were respected (Freixo, 2012), including the right to privacy, anonymity and confidentiality of the participants. Each respondent was identified with a number assigned according to the order of the answers arrival.

Totally, were received 75 valid responses, between August and October 2015.

The repatriates' mean age was 39 years. Regarding the gender distribution, the majority is male repatriates (84%, n=63). The sample includes repatriates in a range of organizational positions, including managers (66.7%, n=50), and no managers (33.3%, n=25). The majority of the repatriates held a higher graduation, i.e., undergraduate, MBA, Master or PhD (89.3%, n=67), with 40 of them employed by their company for six or less years (58%).

The analyze and treatment of the data collected through the questionnaires was made using the software IBM® SPSS Statistics, statistical analysis software, version 21.0.0.0 for Windows system, designed for social sciences.

To retain or reject hypotheses, the following levels of statistical significance were used: (1)  $p > 0.05$  (higher than 0.05), there is no relationship between the variables, which means that more than 5% of the time the result obtained in the applied test will be due to chance;  $p < .05$  (less than 0.05), there is a relationship between the variables, which means that in less than 5% of the time the result is due to chance.

## **Findings**

### ***Impact of expatriation on the repatriate career development upon return***

Most of participants consider that there were many aspects that have had impact positively on their career development (Table 1). The development of intercultural skills was

pointed out by all respondents (100%), followed by the development of professional and management skills (98.7%), demonstration of professional and management skills (94.6%), new career opportunities among other potential employers (94.6%) and finally progression within the organization (54.6%).

Must be highlighted that the progression within the organization was the point with the most discordant respondents (45.3%) about its impact on career development.

**Table 1** – Impact of expatriation on the career development

	Totally Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Totally Agree		Total	Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Progression within the organization	6	8,0	28	37,3	31	41,3	10	13,3	<b>75</b>	<b>100</b>
New career opportunities among other potential employers	0	0,0	4	5,3	49	65,3	22	29,3	<b>75</b>	<b>100</b>
Demonstration of professional and management skills	0	0,0	4	5,3	52	69,3	19	25,3	<b>75</b>	<b>100</b>
Development of professional and management skills	0	0,0	1	1,3	48	64,0	26	34,7	<b>75</b>	<b>100</b>
Development of intercultural skills	0	0,0	0	0,0	34	45,3	41	54,7	<b>75</b>	<b>100</b>

### ***Career Advancement***

When the respondents were asked about the situation of their career after returning from the IA, 37% of respondents consider to have been a promotion, 32.9% say they have kept the same function, 24.7% consider to have been a lateral career moving within organization and 5.5% consider to have been a demotion.

Concerning the reasons why respondents consider to have had a career promotion after return from the last IA, 54.2% indicated that they have an higher position in the organizational structure, 29.2% reported that they have an higher degree of responsibility and commitment at the current position, 12.5% mentioned that currently have higher autonomy, expertise, networking and professional maturity and 4.2% indicated that they have started a

project of self-employment upon return from IA.

About the reasons why respondents consider to have been demoted after returning from their last IA, 75% report that the current position is in a lower hierarchy level than the position they had during the IA and 25% refer that there was a reduction of responsibilities and functional content after IA.

In what concerns the reasons why respondents believe that they had an lateral career moving within the organization after return from the last IA, 35.3% report that they have the same position but in another location, department or organization, 23.5% indicate that they have the same position but with higher recognition, autonomy and responsibility, 23.5% mention that they have a similar position but with a different job title and 11.8% report that they have a similar position although requiring an higher expertise degree.

With regard to the perception about the inexistence of career advancement after return, the majority of respondents refer that they don't feel like their careers are stagnant after completing the last IA (66.7%, n=50). However, 33.3% of respondents (n = 25) claims to have been victim of career stagnation after return from their last IA.

The reasons pointed out by the majority of respondents who believe that the career is not stagnant were (1) the international experience provides or provided new opportunities, including in other organizations (41%), (2) the completion of an IA allowed enrichment professional experience, including on an international level (20.5%), (3) the expatriation experience promoted opportunities to left the organization for a new challenge or project (10.3%) and (4) the expatriates progression expectations absence, that's why they don't see their careers as stagnant (10.3%). On the other hand, among the 25 respondents who consider that the career is stagnant since the return of the last IA, most respondents indicated the following reasons for that: (1) the labor market does not offer the desired opportunities (31.8%), (2) have the same or similar position they had before the IA (27.3%), (3) there is no chance for career progression in the current organization (13.6%) and (4) due to financial reasons and crisis in the business sector (9.1%).

The 75 respondents were also asked about the impact of IA in several aspects related to career development. The majority (84%, n=63) of respondents believe that the impact was positive. Noteworthy is the impact on career development in terms of (1) to contribute decisively to the improvement of professional, management and intercultural skills, which are critical to career progression (94.7%), (2) to provide to the repatriated an enrichment of the current position (85.4%), (3) to increase the employability in the labor market (81.3%) and (4) to contribute to increase the job proposals to leave the organization (52%).

The results also show a less positive aspect, which is that the completion of an IA contributes to the majority of respondents feel that they are over qualified for the current position (53.3% of concordant answers).

It's also highlighted, about the IA impact, that the aspect that got more disagreement among the 75 respondents was the increase of the current salary conditions (30.7% of discordant responses).

Several reasons were pointed out by respondents for perceiving in a positive way the impact of an IA on their careers. 61.5% (n=24) refers to the contribution to the cultural enrichment and professional experience, 35.9% (n=14) indicates that international experience is highly enhanced, both personally and for the job market, and 2.6% (n=1) mentioned networking as a positive result for his career after the last IA.

To study the career development of the participants, we compared also the hierarchy level of their position during the IA and after return. The majority (66.7%, n=50) of respondents had a leadership position during the IA and, upon return, 58.9% (n=43) continue performing a leadership position. However, there's a decrease of management and leadership positions in return between 7.8% of respondents.

### ***Turnover Intention***

The 75 respondents were asked about the turnover intention at two different times, after the IA and in the near future. The results show that the turnover intention is lower after the return (50.7%, n=38), but it increases when they are asked about the likelihood of seeking a new job in the near future (64%, n=48).

### ***The career advancement and the repatriate's turnover***

The correlation between the repatriate's career progression and their permanency on the expatriation organization upon return from IA was statistically tested through the Chi-Square test. However, the result does not show statistical significance that allow us to confirm this relationship ( $p = .466$ ;  $\chi^2 = 2,5$ ). The results show that repatriates who continue working at the organization that sent them abroad, only 38% (n=17) were promoted, while the majority (62%, n=28) was not promoted.

Same way, we tested the correlation between the vertical career progression of repatriates and their current employment situation, which means, if they are or not on active job search. The results of the statistic test, Chi-Square, indicate that there is no statistically

significant correlation between the two variables, both after the IA ( $p = .110$ ;  $\chi^2 = 6,0$ ) and in the near future ( $p = .635$ ;  $\chi^2 = 1,7$ ).

Most respondents who had no desire to leave the organization after the IA, did not have a vertical career progression (54%,  $n=20$ ). On the other hand, those who had desired to leave the organization, the majority also did not have a vertical career progression (72%,  $n=26$ ).

### ***Expatriation perceived as a career development strategy***

When the participants were asked if the IA was planned as part of career development process, 65.3% of respondents ( $n=49$ ) confirmed that the IA was planned and 34.7% ( $n=26$ ) reported that was not planned.

They were also asked if the organization that sent them abroad had the same concern in planning the IA as part of a career development process, and only 38.7% ( $n=29$ ) stated that the organization had this concern. It appears, therefore, according to the perception of expatriates, a major concern of themselves in the planning of the IA as a career development strategy, compared to organizations that send them abroad.

Among the reasons why the repatriates planned the IA, the results show that (1) they are seeking for professional and personal enrichment (67,5%), (2) they desire to have an IA and/or to have an international career (25,6%) and (3) lack of opportunities at Portugal. On the other hand, the reasons why the respondents of this study did not plan the IA as part of a career development strategy were: (1) the IA was not done under the goal of a career progression (70.8% ), (2) the IA was held only for financial reasons and lack of opportunities in Portugal (16.7%) and (3) the IA was held to fulfil business needs (12.5%).

The respondents consider the organization planned the IA because (1) has shown concern about the expatriate needs and career (45.5%), (2) searched for the right profile for the IA completion and goals achievement (31.8%), (3) the IA success was an expectation (13.6%) and (4) the organization had an international development plan (9.1%). On the other hand, among the reasons why the organization did not have planned the IA, respondents point out that (1) the organization doesn't have strategic career plans and was not concerned about the personal interests of expatriates (52.5 %) and (2) the career progression was not a pre-set goal for the IA (47.5%).

## **Discussion**

### ***Relationship between IA and career advancement***

In line with the main objective of this study, the first theoretical hypothesis proposed that the completion of IA is directly related to the career progression of repatriates. More specifically, predicted that, after the completion of an IA, repatriates have a vertical career progression associated with this experience.

Statistical analysis of the results showed that there is a significant correlation between the completion of an IA, regardless of its goals and type of IA, and repatriates vertical career progression. The literature suggests that one of the major organizational reasons for the organizations to relocate is based on the objective of promoting the career development (Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2001; Finuras, 2003; Martins, 2013) and that this kind of IA has been increasing on the last years (Brookfield GRS, 2013; 2014; 2015). However, the results of this study indicate that only a minority of expatriates complete IA with this purpose (15%, n=11).

Although the relationship between the completion of IA and the repatriates vertical career progression is not confirmed, the respondents demonstrate that they enhance the expatriation experience and the majority (66.6%, n=50) considers that their career is not stagnant after the IA. All respondents said that expatriation had a positive impact on their careers, whether it have improved or not their hierarchical position in the current organization. This result reinforces the findings of other studies (e.g., Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Stahl et al., 2002; Tung, 1998) which show that repatriates consider the completion of an IA as positive for their careers, not being concerned with progression within the organization, since they believe that they will have career advancement, although this may occur in another organization. This is in line with the proposed by the authors Bastid and Bravo (2013), who claim that nowadays individuals enhance new success criteria in their careers, such as skills development and perceived internal and external employability, which goes beyond the vertical progression in the hierarchy of an organization. Also the concept of subjective/ internal career proposed by Schein (1996) is connected to this perspective of the repatriates surveyed, saying that career is related to the values, aspirations and expectations of individuals and not only with progression within an organization. We may also associate this perspective to what Kanter (1989) calls professional career, in which individuals consider that there is a progression when they are assigned with more demanding and challenging work, with access to new knowledge and opportunity to apply it.

The majority of the repatriates participants on this study planned the completion of an IA as part of a career development process, which confirms the theoretical perspectives of the

new psychological contract (Torrington et al., 2002), the protean career (Hall, 1996; 2004), the boundaryless career (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996) and intelligent careers (Arthur et al., 1995). It is the individual who manages his own career based on their personal priorities and not on the priorities of the organization they work for. Thus, the results of our study provide support to argument by showing that respondents assessed their career capital growth as significantly higher on individual–organizational interactions after repatriation (Dickmann et al., 2016).

Nevertheless, the first hypothesis could not be confirmed on this sample, as the results show that the completion of an IA is not correlated with vertical career development of repatriates after the return, because only 37% (n=27) of respondents refer they have been promoted. Among these, only 54.2% (n=13) consider that they were promoted because they are on a higher level of the organizational hierarchy. Given these results, we can say that the current economic and financial situation at Portugal and at the portuguese companies, which had inevitably a negative impact from the austerity policies, may contribute to this lack of opportunities for employees promotion. Even the careers stagnancy at the public sector in the recent years may be, in some way, a negative influence to the private sector. It must be pointed out that in this study we only have one repatriated from the public sector and he mentioned this fact, however, it's not significant in this sample.

Another reason that may be the cause for these results is that organizations have more flat hierarchies with fewer hierarchical levels, promoting the mobility of employees by assigning new challenges to keep them motivated and promote its development within the organization (Alis et al., 2014). In this study, some of the respondents who claim to have been promoted indicate the highest degree of responsibility, commitment, autonomy and knowledge as a reason for promotion.

### ***Relationship between career progression and permanency on the expatriation organization***

The turnover of repatriates has been studied by several authors (e.g., Black et.al., 1999; Martins, 2013; Ren et al., 2013; Stroh, 1995; Suutari & Brewster, 2003) due to the need of considering all the expatriation process from a strategic perspective, since the turnover of this professionals represents a serious loss to the organizations that invested on their professional advancement.

The majority (60%; n=45) of the participants on this study still working on the expatriation organization. However, the remaining 40% (n=30) left the organization that sent them abroad, and most of these (88.9%, n=24) left the organization during the first year after

return from the IA. As referred by Baruch, Altman and Tung (2016), these repatriates can be seen as “Boundaryless careerists”, that is, people who enhance the learning and experience that they derive while living and working abroad even though their efforts may not necessarily be recognized by the organizations that sponsored them in the first place. To continue their pursuit of international learning and experience, they are willing to switch employers and/or make lateral career moves across organizations and countries.

An high rate of respondents (62%, n=28), despite not having had an internal progression within the organization upon return from the IA continues working there. This result can be explained by the fact that the objectives of the IA completed by the majority of respondents do not fit in the development and career progression, as also claim (48%, n=36) that the organization did not create career expectations prior to departure, during the assignment abroad and upon return. Another factor that may also have contributed to this result is the length of the IA completed by respondents, of which 42.7% (n=32) were short-term assignments (Dickmann & Baruch, 2011), which means, IA with less than one year, carried out for a specific purpose and without career advancement prospects.

Furthermore, we may refer again the economic and financial crisis in Portugal that inevitably contributes to the reduction of opportunities in the labour market for these professionals, although most of the repatriates in this study state that the IA they completed had a positive impact on their careers development in terms of (1) new career opportunities among potential employers (94.6%, n=71), (2) increase the employability in the labor market (81.3% n=61) and (3) increase the number of job proposals to leave the organization (52%, n=39).

### ***Relationship between career progression and turnover intention***

This hypothesis is not confirmed, because, are mainly the respondents who did not have a vertical career progression after the IA (54%, n=20) who doesn't want to left the organization of repatriation. About turnover intention in the near future, are mainly the respondents who had a vertical career promotion (63%, n = 17) who express the desire of leaving the organization of repatriation.

Contradicting the literature (e.g. Black et. Al., 1999; Martins, 2013; Ren et al., 2013; Stroh, 1995; Suutari & Brewster, 2003; Suutari et al., 2012), this study specifically, does not confirm the turnover intention or the active job search of the repatriates who did not progress in their careers in the expatriation organizations. It is possible that some of these repatriates may be on top of internal career. Moreover, most respondents completed the IA assuming a

management position (66.7%, n=50) and, upon return, also the majority remained in a leading role (58.9%, n=43). It is also possible, as underline Baruch, Altman and Tung (2016), that even though expatriates from the US, Germany and Korea may not be satisfied with their respective companies' expatriation and repatriation, they nevertheless valued the IA and felt that it contributed positively to their general well-being.

On the other hand, it's possible that the participants of this study enhance the employment security more than the willingness to try or take the risk of new work experiences. It is possible that the fear of risk, identified by Hofstede (1991) as a cultural characteristic of Portuguese society, may emerge at some of our repatriates surveyed, although more recent sociological studies point to a decrease in uncertainty avoidance in our younger population (Rego & Cunha, 2009).

Another reason that may explain why the repatriates surveyed in this study aren't in active job search, lies in their statement that the IA they completed had a positive impact on the development of their careers (94.6%, n=71) and on the development of professional and management skills (98.7%, n=74). Reinforcing this idea, 85.4% say that the completion of the IA contributed to the enrichment of the current position.

According to several literature (Black et al., 1999; Martins, 2013; Ren et al., 2013; Stroh, 1995; Suutari & Brewster, 2003), one of the main reasons why repatriates left the expatriation organizations upon return from IA is that they can't apply the new acquired skills, however this was not confirmed in this sample.

## **Conclusions, limitations and future lines for research**

### ***Contributes***

Although there are several studies about the expatriation in Portugal, are unknown, so far, studies with repatriates exploring the relationship between the completion of IA and career development. This research aims to contribute, therefore, to fulfil this scarcity, making a new contribution to the literature on IHRM, particularly about career management of Portuguese repatriates.

However, being this study descriptive-correlational and having a relatively small sample, the results can't be generalized to the entire repatriates population.

This research allowed us to know the perception of repatriates about the role of IA on the career development after the return and if the impact on the career progression was positive. It contributed also with new perspectives and information about the turnover reasons

of portuguese repatriates, which can be a powerful tool for HR professionals from organizations that expatriate employees.

The findings in our sample allow us the following conclusions (1) the completion of IA is not directly related to vertical career progression of repatriates upon return; (2) notwithstanding, the repatriates consider that the completion of IA had a positive impact on their careers, regardless of the improvement, or not, on their hierarchical position in the organization, which show us the enhancement of new criteria for the career success, according to the subjective/internal career concept (Schein, 1996) and; (3) the lack of vertical career progression upon return from IA is not directly related to the turnover or the turnover intention of repatriates, which can be explained by the enrichment of the current position and the development of new skills due to the experience of expatriation. This study contributes to confirm Dickmann and colleagues (2016) argument that a dynamic notion of career capital acquisition and use is needed. This suggests that repatriates build on their different forms of career capital to benefits themselves and their organizations.

### ***Limitations and future lines for research***

The first difficulty we found in this study was to find out participants to answer the questionnaire online. This difficulty is originated by the strict requirements and characteristics that the participants needed to have to be part of the sample, as well as the inaccessibility of such professionals. Such constraints prevented that the number of the sample elements was higher.

We have to say that the answers to the questionnaire depend largely on the willingness, honesty and ability of respondents, so this may also be a limitation of this study.

This study may be a reference for future research about this subject in Portugal, on which further research is needed. Future studies may broaden the scope of research involving, beside the repatriates, HR professionals from Portuguese organizations that sent employees abroad. Thus, the individual's perspective of expatriation will be complemented by the organizational perspective in what concerns the repatriates career management. Namely, we may understand if organizations effectively plan and carry out the IA as a career development strategy of its employees or, on the contrary, repatriation is seen as an organizational problem in the career systems of organizations for repatriates.

Most studies of expatriation focus on business firms sending people abroad. Is little the research which include other sectors, for instance, non-profit organizations, the military, NGOs, peacekeeping missions and the diplomatic service as well as missionaries. Future

research should include more diverse sectors and to make comparisons in term of career outcomes.

As far as the methodology is concerned, it would be also interesting to complement the quantitative methodology with the qualitative methodology, allowing the approach of the research goals in a more comprehensively manner and understand, more in depth, other factors related to this subject.

### **Conclusion**

Was expected that IA had a real impact on the portuguese repatriates career progression, but this was not confirmed. However, the empirical research developed using a quantitative methodology allowed us to conclude that, regardless of the existence of career progression within the organization, repatriates consider expatriation as positive, which confirms what is reported in the literature.

In conclusion, it's not confirmed a vertical career progression of repatriates. Nevertheless, they see the completion of IA as having a positive impact on the development of their careers in what concerns the position enrichment and the development of new skills, which may be a discouraging factor to seek for a new job after the return from an IA.

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