



Exploring why Portuguese companies expatriate, and Portuguese expatriates accept international assignments

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Title

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Abstract

This study explores (1) the reasons that lead Portuguese companies to use expatriates and (2) the motivations that led the repatriates to accepting an international assignment. Semi-structured interviews were carried out on 44 individuals (14 responsible for organizational management of the expatriates and 30 repatriates), in seven international companies based in Portugal, and analysis of the thematic content was conducted for data processing.

Results suggest that the reasons that lead Portuguese companies to expatriating employees are connected to business needs and the control of international operations, while individual motivations are linked to personal and professional ambition, the will to serve the company and organizational pressure.

We concluded that Portuguese companies, like most European companies, seem to develop a strategy of International Human Resources Management (IHRM) according to an ethnocentric approach, characteristic to companies in early stages of internationalization. Similarly, the main motivations of Portuguese repatriates are identical to those of other expatriates, though the will to serve the company seems to be more valued by Portuguese repatriates than by expatriates from other countries.

Keywords: expatriates, individual motivations for accepting international assignments; organizational reasons for expatriating.

Introduction

The internationalization of business, the globalization of the economies and the free circulation of people and goods at a global scale have contributed to the increase in expatriation (Bonache *et al.*, 2010; Linehan & Scullion, 2002, Pate & Scullion, 2010; Sánchez *et al.*, 2007; Scullion & Brewster, 2001). An expatriate is an employee sent by a company to another company of the group, to work in another country for a defined period of time, which can last from six months to several years (Avril & Magnini, 2007; Aycan & Kanungo, 1997; Black *et al.*, 1991; Bossard & Peterson, 2005; Caligiuri, 2000; Lee & Liu, 2007; Sánchez *et al.*, 2007; Tung, 1988).

Despite the importance of this theme in literature, empirical studies (*e.g.* Baruch *et al.*, 2002; Caligiuri & Colakoglu, 2007; Hippler, 2009; Paik *et al.*, 2002; Welch *et al.*, 2009) focus mainly on companies based in the USA, the United Kingdom, Finland, Germany, Australia, and studies of a similar nature in companies based in Portugal are unknown. This research intends, therefore, to continue the studies already conducted in other countries. It is the aim of the research to identify the reasons for expatriation in Portuguese companies and individual motivations that lead the employees of these companies to accept the challenge of the international assignment. Despite the main focus of this research being on a specific geographic area (*i.e.* Portugal), it is expected that the data from this study will provide a basis for comparative analysis in an international context.

The article is structured in the following way. In the following section, the literature on the organizational reasons and individual motivations for expatriation is reviewed. Following, is the methodology used in the empirical research and the presentation of the main results. Finally, the results are discussed and some final considerations are made.

Literature Review

1. Organizational reasons for expatriation

Literature suggests different organizational reasons for international assignments, with resource to expatriates:

(a) *Initiate operations in foreign countries and transfer knowledge and competencies* (Bonache *et al.*, 2001; Minbaeva & Michailova, 2004; Sánchez, 2004; Stahl & Cerdin, 2004). This reason is linked to the need to send teams or employees to promote the transfer, control and dissemination of knowledge through all the business units of the multi-national providing them, also, with cross-cultural skills to facilitate communication and cooperation between headquarters and branch offices;

(b) *Transmission of the national image and representation of corporate home office* (Bonache *et al.*, 2001). This reason is linked to the multi-national in the initial phase of development that tends to assign national employees to positions of greater trust in branches in third countries. This decision aims to ensure the success and development of the home office's new businesses established in new international markets;

(c) *Control and coordination of global activities* (Bonache *et al.*, 2001; Harvey & Novicevic, 2001; Sánchez, 2004; Welch, 1994). This reason is directly linked to the interest in the global integration of the company's trans-national activities. Through the expatriates they seek to replicate the values and objectives of the home office in the culture of the branch where the international assignment is running.

(d) *Career development for executive positions* (Black & Gregersen, 1999; Bonache *et al.*, 2001; Harzing, 2001; Sánchez, 2004). This reason is used by companies that include in the career development plan of their executive managers an international assignment as an essential conditional;

(e) *Development of a global mentality in the organization* (Bonache *et al.*, 2001; Harzing, 2001; Sánchez, 2004). This reason is based on the fact that international companies intend to develop an integrated perspective of the organization, sharing new ideas, strategies and action between the different business units of the organization, regardless of their country of location.

(f) *Lack of local talent* (Baruch *et al.*, 2002; Harzing, 2001; Minbaeva & Michailova, 2004; Sánchez, 2004; Tung, 1998). This reason is explained by the need for companies to send employees equipped with distinctive technical, inter-personal and management competencies to branches in other countries lacking in local candidates qualified for the job post available. The expatriated employee's individual competencies can be improved without there having to be a great disparity in experience between the work performed before and during the international assignment.

In sum, literature (*e.g.* Bonache *et al.*, 2001; Hippler, 2009; Minbaeva & Michailova, 2004; Stahl & Cerdin, 2004; Wright *et al.*, 1996) suggests that this diversity of organizational reasons may require expatriates to transfer knowledge and experience between the branches (and between them and the home office), coordinating units globally interdependent and to carry out the local adaptations without affecting the parent and global company.

2. Expatriates' motivations for the expatriation

The question of why individuals accept an international assignment has been studied by many researchers (*e.g.* Bonache, 2002; Connelly *et al.*, 2007; Hippler, 2009; Hurn, 2007; Paik *et al.*, 2002; Stahl *et al.*, 2002; Webb & Wright, 1996; Yan *et al.*, (2002).

Among the aspects which most motivate the employee to accept an international assignment, are highlighted the improvements in the work position, salary and other financial benefits, professional and communicational development, greater autonomy, the variety of tasks, the acquisition of a global perspective of the company's operations, long-term career advancement, the search for *status*, the need to escape personal and family problems and a taste for adventure, unknown cultural challenges and contexts, a taste for disseminating or improving knowledge and competencies.

These individual motivations may be influenced by the social-demographic conditions, gender or marital status of the employee. For example, younger employees with lower salaries but higher career ambitions have a tendency to accept an international assignment more easily (Brett *et al.*, 1993). When these employees are married, the decision to accept is strongly influenced by the spouse's attitude to the international assignment (Stahl *et al.*, 2002; Suutari & Brewster, 2003) or, if they are women, the decision of expatriation is mainly the challenge of living and working abroad (Stahl & Cerdin, 2004; Suutari & Brewster, 2003).

On the other hand, literature underlines the fact that many candidates are compelled by the company to accept the international assignment (Cerdin & Pargneux, 2009; Selmer, 1999; Stahl *et al.*, 2002), fearing that refusal will have negative implications in the development of the individual career. However, Cerdin and Pargneux (2009) argue that the success of the international assignment is more likely only when the individual decision of an international assignment results (i) from individual motivation to go abroad (e.g., a taste for new professional and personal experiences) and/or (ii) when the decision to go is a free choice of the expatriate. Bolino and Feldman (2000) suggest that turnover is higher among the expatriates whose decision to leave was compulsive.

In sum, the intrinsic value associated to the international assignment (*e.g.* desire for career advancement, professional development opportunities, personal fulfillment, a taste for

exposure to different experiences) determines a more proactive attitude from the employee in seeking an international experience or an attitude of passive acceptance or active refusal, in case of being compelled to accept an international assignment (Baruch *et al.*, 2002; Hippler, 2009).

Table 1 summarizes the main individual motivations and organizational reasons for the decision of expatriation, found in the literature reviewed.

(Table 1 about here)

Methodology

A convenience sample was selected which includes seven international companies based in Portugal. To ensure anonymity identification codes were assigned to each company: CDA, CDS, ICA, IEE, IMC, SSA, SFA. In each company, repatriates who remain in the company after the international assignment (hereinafter called REPRET), repatriates who left the company after the international assignment (hereinafter called REPTUN), and organizational representatives (hereinafter called REPORG) were interviewed. The latter occupy positions connected to the management of expatriates/repatriates in the companies under study (*i.e.* directors, managers or human resources specialists).

Data collection took place between October 2009 and March 2010. Semi-direct interviews were made to organizational representatives (two per company) and repatriates (4 or 5 per company). In total, 44 interviews were made (14 to organizational representatives and 30 to repatriates, of whom 24 remain in the organization and six left after completing the

expatriation assignment). The organizational representatives were asked the reasons why they decided to send employees from home base to branches located in foreign countries. In turn, from these companies' repatriates we sought to understand the individual motivations to accept the international assignment. The scripts of both interviews are presented in Annex 1. Data were subjected to content analysis, with resource to the software program NVivo, version 8.

a) Characterization of the sample

Three companies integrate the industry field (IEE, ICA, IMC), two integrate the trade and distribution field (CDS, CDA), one integrates services (SFA) and the other integrates the telecommunications, information and communication technologies field (SSA). Four companies have less than 1000 employees (CDA, IMC, SFA, SSA) and the other three (CDS, IEE and ICA) have more than 1000 employees. Three companies have up to 20 expatriates (IMC, SFA, SAA), two companies have between 20 and 100 expatriates (CDS, CDA), and two companies have more than 100 expatriates (IEE, ICA). Three companies began expatriation/repatriation more than 10 years ago (CDA, IEE, SFA) and four companies began less than 10 years ago (CDS, ICA, IMC, SAA). The duration of the international assignments of the repatriates interviewed lasted between 8 and 125 months, the overall average being 35 months (CDS: 40 months; CDA: 47 months; IEE: 48 months; ICA: 16 months; IMC: 27 months; SFA: 51 months; SSA: 17 months).

In regard to the countries of destination of the international assignments, CDS sent expatriates to Brazil, Spain, and China. CDA has expatriates in South Africa, Botswana, Brazil, Cape Verde, Cuba, Spain, the USA, Morocco, Namibia, Kenya and Tanzania. IEE has expatriates in the USA, Latin America, Central Europe, and Maghreb region, Southern Africa Region, Spain and India. ICA has expatriates in Angola, Cape Verde, Romania, Morocco,

Oman and Brazil. The IMC has expatriates in Spain, Poland, Germany and the UK. SFA sent expatriates to Brazil and Macau. And finally, SAA sent expatriates to Spain, the USA, Brazil, Singapore, the Netherlands, the UK and France.

The majority of these companies have experience in repatriation of less than 6 years. Three companies studied have, at the time of data collection, retention of all their repatriates (IEE; IMC; SSA). The remaining four companies studied (CDA; CDS; ICA; SFA) have turnover among their repatriates, CDA being the one with the highest percentage of turnover (50%). All the companies referred to having concluded their international assignments, that is, they have no experience of an anticipated return of their expatriates or of abandonment during the international assignment.

Table 2 presents a summary of the profile of the companies participating in the study.

(Table 2 about here)

The repatriates interviewed carried out their international assignments in different expatriation destinations: Angola (10 repatriates); Germany (1 repatriate); Argentina (1 repatriate); Brazil (10 repatriates); China (1 repatriate); France (1 repatriate); Brazil/Holland (1 repatriate); Macau (1 repatriate); Malaysia/Singapore (1 repatriate); Poland (3 repatriates). The average duration of the international assignment was 35 months. 24 repatriates are male and 6 are female. The average age of the repatriates interviewed is 42 (minimum: 24; maximum: 66). In majority, the repatriates have a first degree (16 repatriates), 5 have a post-graduate degree (MBA, Masters); 3 have bachelor degrees, 5 completed grade 12 and 1 grade 9. As to marital status, 7 are single, 20 are married or are in a common-law relationship and 3 are divorced. At the time of the interview, 5 repatriates occupied technical jobs; 24 management positions (5 repatriates were line managers and intermediate level; 15 were

senior managers and 4 were top management) and, one of the repatriates was unemployed at the time of the interview.

There are repatriates who represent the first experiences in repatriation in the companies studied (5 repatriates: 3 repatriates in SFA, 1 repatriate in CDS, 1 repatriate in IMC), others were pioneers in the arrival to the country and branch but the company already had previous experience in repatriation to other destinations (9 repatriates: 2 repatriates in IEE, 1 repatriate in IMC, 4 repatriates in SSA, 2 repatriates in CDS). The other repatriates interviewed (16 repatriates) were the successors of earlier expatriate colleagues, that is, when they arrived to the countries and foreign branches, there were or had already been other Portuguese colleagues there. All the repatriates interviewed completed their expatriation assignment, that is, none returned before the period stipulated by the home company.

Table 3 presents the summary of the profile of the repatriates participating in the study.

(Table 3 about here)

Results

1. Organizational reasons for expatriation

Two main reasons why companies revert to expatriation were identified: i) control of international operations and; ii) business needs (synthesis on Table 4).

(Table 4 about here)

1.1. Control of international operations

The companies (CDS, IEE, IMC, ICA, SFA) refer that one of the main reasons for deciding to expatriate executives is connected to the need to control international operations while the subsidiaries do not become autonomous (n=8, this is referred to by both organizational representatives of CDS, IMC and SFA and, by one organizational representative from the companies ICA and IEE). Sending people of trust and with knowledge of the culture and business helps to improve the institutional representation of the home firm and subsidiary in the foreign country, facilitates the diffusion of the *Know-how* from the home firm to the subsidiaries. These arguments are explained in the following speeches:

... This need to be out is essential, since, things cannot be controlled from 4000 km away, so companies have to always have this mobility, someone has to be on the grounds ... contact with local authorities, the work was also important (REPRET 1, IMC)

... The aim was to create Know-how, to create a school. Interestingly, we have always had Portuguese expatriates to head SFA Brazil. Currently the director general of SFA in Brazil is also Portuguese, and went from here, but the rest of the team is local... it was a question of institutional representation which was very strong (REPORG 1, SFA)

... Usually, in the start-off structure are sent employees who are part of our structure here in Portugal (...) employees already with perfect knowledge of the organization, who are going to begin the work. And those kinds of people who are part of the permanent staff of the company, who we recognize the ability to, deep down, be a representative of the organization at these locations.... (REPORG 1, ICA)

Once subsidiaries are set up in other markets, some of these companies (CDS, IEE) defend the need to maintain national collaborators in top management positions, so that national cultural and business values can be replicated in these other foreign structures. This argument is clearly illustrated by the employees in charge of Human Resources in both companies and confirmed by a repatriate from IEE:

... the business needs to have people of trust there and people to ensure the corporate culture on location. Since the destination country may even have better staff than Portugal. (REPORG 1, CDS)

... typically, what IEE does is to place at the head of the business in a country and / or a region at least the CEO and as far as possible, the CFO of each company. This is for two essential reasons: one is that we want to control the business, and the best way to control it, even if not by the CEO is, most certainly, by the CFO and, the second issue, we want to take to all places where we set up, strongly respecting the local culture, adding value to local culture, hiring locals, teaching locals, training locals, we want, above all, to continue and take to the markets where we are, our values, our culture, our mission, our way of being, our business ethics, in short, everything that characterizes the culture of IEE in Portugal ... replicate in the target-markets selected (REPORG 1, IEE)

... One of the main objectives was, when we built a new factory, ... it was a bit of cloning what we have here, in procedures, in all processes, in all administrative issues, production issues, all that. (REPRET 3, IEE)

1.2. Business needs

On the other hand, the national market is showing signs of decline, so the companies studied feel the need to reorient their expansion strategies internationally so as not to lose business. The need for business growth through internationalization is another main reason, especially for the companies CDA, ICA, IEE, SSA (n=6, this is referred by both organizational representatives of the companies CDA and SSA and by one of the organizational representatives of the companies ICA and IEE), as illustrated in the following statements:

... what is at the start and the base is a principle of necessity. (REPORG 1, SSA)

... the national market is essential for us and continues to be our target market of reference, always a priority, but it is a maintenance market, not a growth market, we have nowhere to grow. Therefore, in the chart, if you look at a bar chart, the big difference is, in fact, made in the international market. (REPORG 1, IEE)

... there is really a strong wager at that level [the expatriation of highly competent staff, with great potential from CDA headquarters]. This is because the international area at the moment is about 70% of the Group's profitability and therefore no staff member is sent out there ... because at the moment the sustainability of the business and with a projection to 10 years, is out there ... that's where the business sustainment is (REPORG 2, CDA)

“... as a consequence of the market and the international juncture ... especially by the crisis situation being crossed here in Portugal in the construction industry ...” (REPORG 2, ICA)

2. Individual motivations for expatriation

Three main individual motivation reasons were identified due to which the repatriates decided to accept the international assignment: i) personal and professional ambition; ii) willingness to serve the company and; iii) organizational pressure (synthesis on Table 5).

(Table 5 about here)

2.1. Personal and professional ambition

The results of the testimonies of the repatriates suggest that individual motivations for expatriation are mainly associated with ambitions of a personal and / or professional nature (reason given by 17 repatriates). For these repatriates, expatriation represented, from a personal point of view, an opportunity to get to know a geographical reality unknown to date, being able to acquire new cultural competencies, feeling at the same time that a personal dream was fulfilled (10 repatriates). From a professional perspective, expatriation created professional development opportunities and organizational recognition of performance prior to the invitation for expatriation (7 repatriates). That is, the expatriation represented an opportunity to access more appealing professional challenges, with greater autonomy and responsibility in the job performed and better remuneration. Here are some examples:

... the fact that requests like this one also brought some recognition because it was a very, very big change in all terms. Of the position content. (...) It was a big change. It was also a challenge. It was something that attracted me as a challenge. (REPRET 2, CDA)

[it was] an ambition...first of wanting to know a new country. Other cultures...it is an attraction. (REPRET 3, ICA)

... widening the responsibility a little and widening the scope of work a little, I accepted. Weighing as well, obviously, the financial situation, all the economic advantages, the country ... Argentina, being a country with a culture close to the European culture, despite being a Latin American country, was a country that did not provoke a great shock, neither cultural nor in the day-to-day habits of the people. And that helped to make the decision. (REPRET 2, IEE)

2.2. Willingness to serve the company

The will to serve the company (referred by 8 repatriates) is another of the main individual motivations for deciding to accept an international assignment. This motivation is more evident in repatriates that have been with the company longer. Following are two examples:

... in my case I am a first instance employee at CDS, with almost 25 years of service to the corporation and, with the emotional link I have to the organization, so I cannot say no, it is almost a bit military. When there is a mission to accomplish and we need to fulfill it, we will be there at the forefront. That is what is underlying here. A bit emotional, a bit rational, but it is the willingness to serve. Because we believe in our company very much, in our directors, our shareholders, so we have to fulfill this mission. And that was what moved me. (REPRET 2, CDS)

... I came into this company at the age of 15. I have been here for 23 years. So I have a great link to this company. (REPRET 2, CDA)

2.3. Organizational pressure

Even though the majority of the repatriates considers that their expatriation was of free will (25 repatriates), 5 repatriates (about 17%) admit they were subjected to organizational pressure to accept the expatriation invitation. Organizational pressure seems to be the appanage of CDA, CDS and IEE. There are reasons to suppose that, in these companies, organizational pressure is associated to the fear of retaliation (e.g. the loss of work or internal career progression), leading the repatriates to feel compelled to accept the expatriation.

... At the time it was by great insistence of the company. It was not something I would have, well, by initiative, the will to do. Of course later I was willing because I had accepted but, initially, it was by great insistence of the company that that happened...I felt, in a certain way, pressured... (REPRET 1, IEE)

...No, I did not ask to have the international experience. So it was as a request, at the time by the President of the Group... That is, the desire that I go was great, the pressure was much, so I understood that if I said no, at some point my career would be jeopardized. (REPTUN 1, CDS)

Discussion

The results of this study allude to being before a group of companies that, in general, share the same organizational reasons for the use of expatriates. On the one hand, CDA, IEE, SSA and IMC face international assignments as additional reinforcement to the national market. That is, they assume the international assignments by the need to find alternatives to the increasingly decaying domestic market in the economic areas in which they operate. On

the other hand, evidences reveal that expatriation is assumed as a strategy to fulfill some of the main organizational objectives (e.g. business internationalization, improve the coordination and control level of the units/subsidiaries abroad, replicate aspects of the home base, develop and incorporate new organizational techniques and processes).

According to Havila *et al.* (2002) we can argue that most of these companies (taking advantage of a group of internal potentials to create opportunities) triggered a change process in the management of their business, able to react and adapt itself to new market conditions.

The organizational reasons for expatriation found in these companies are congruent with the majority of the literature reviewed (e.g. Bonache *et al.*, 2001; Sánchez, 2004). However, comparing the results found to those recently obtained by Tungli and Peiperl (2009), Portuguese companies tend to resemble companies in the United Kingdom and Japan more (*i.e.*, using expatriation to create a new operation) than the North American companies (*i.e.*, to fill competency gaps).

On the other hand, the personal and professional ambition of the majority of the repatriates interviewed seems to be close to the motivations of the 47 repatriates (20 Australian and 27 Finnish) studied by Welch *et al.* (2009). In common, the opportunity to live and work outside the home country emerges as the main reason for accepting the international assignment. It is possible that we are before a group of repatriates whose attraction for the unknown is the individual characteristic more in evidence, since the vast majority of the repatriates interviewed (26 repatriates, that is, 87%) confirms the connection between carrying out the expatriation assignment and the first visit to the destination country of that assignment.

These results meet with other previous results (Baruch *et al.*, 2002; Harvey & Moeller, 2009; Hippler, 2009; Paik *et al.*, 2002; Tarique & Caligiuri, 2004) and suggest that the expatriates are more interested in living an international adventure, getting to know a new

culture and anticipating organizational career development, while the organizational reasons to expatriate are more connected to the need to implement corporate objectives and the transfer of home base culture to the foreign branches.

Companies in the early stages of international development tend to draw more on expatriations of a technical or functional type (Caligiuri & Colakoglu, 2007), which can help to understand that, these companies having an average of 12 years of experience in international assignments, expatriations of a functional and technical type predominate over expatriations of a developmental and strategic type.

Additionally, regarding the management of expatriates in these companies seems to be in congruency with the opinion of Mayrhofer and Brewster (1996) and of Perlmutter (1969) that the majority of European companies organize and maintain an IHRM according to an ethnocentric approach. That is, the authority and the decision making are centered in the home base. This type of IHRM strategy is characteristic to companies in the early stages of internationalization, whose occupation of the core positions in the branches is attributed to home base expatriates. The expatriates have a leading role in the transferring of the culture and technical knowledge of the home base to the branches. The companies with an ethnocentric management of their HR tend to consider the home base expatriates better and more trustworthy than the native collaborators of the countries where the branches are located. The expatriates are deployed on temporary international assignments with the objective to perform the work defined by the home base and return (in the majority of the cases) to the position previously occupied. This evidence helps to understand why the development of competencies of the expatriates is not one of the organizational reasons referred to by these Portuguese companies.

Similarly to the conclusions of Scullion and Brewster (2001), the results of this research seem to demonstrate that, from an organizational perspective, the role of the

expatriate is linked to the need to preserve the interests of the organizations in international markets, which confirms the strategic importance of the expatriates in these Portuguese companies.

Conclusions, limitations and future lines for research

This research provides several contributions. Despite recent advances in the investigation of the expatriation management field, literature (*e.g.* Hippler, 2009; Tungli & Peiperl, 2009) suggests further research and specifically in yet unknown geographical contexts. Consequently, this study, by covering a new geographical context not yet explored, helps to bridge this *gap*. On the other hand, finding greater similarities to some countries (*e.g.* Japan, the United Kingdom) than to others (*e.g.* the USA) strengthens the argument of cultural influence in expatriation management. These evidences suggest the need to pay more attention to cultural differences to understand the specificities of the management of expatriates in each country.

On the other hand, the management strategy of the expatriates and the dimension of the company can help to explain some of the specificities in the organizational reasons found in the Portuguese companies compared to other countries. For example, the vaster opportunities for internal career development provided by North American companies can help to explain the identified career development of executive staff as one of the organizational reasons found in previous studies (*e.g.* Kraimer *et al.*, 2009) but not replicated in the organization of the companies involved in this research.

Nonetheless, many of the responding repatriates consider that one of the main reasons for accepting the expatriation is related to the wish to take on new professional challenges (*e.g.* more responsibility, autonomy, changes to the functional context). The results obtained

may contribute to Portuguese companies paying more attention to this individual motivation towards expatriation. The fact that we are before companies that select their best collaborators to represent the home base in the branches and countries abroad, suggests more clarity in the definition of the role to be played by their expatriates and guarantees of total organizational support during the international assignment.

The need for mutual consent in the decision to expatriate is another contribution that emerges from the results. Some repatriates felt compelled to accept the international assignment which can compromise the success of the expatriation and eventual dissatisfaction that, on return, can have a negative effect on the permanence of these talented collaborators in the repatriating company. On the other hand, the personal attraction to new cultures and countries suggests the expatriate has little affective connection to the home company and country. These results may have negative implications in the repatriate's personal wish to return to the home company, especially when returning to functions performed prior to the international assignment. That is, the same functions that motivated the search for new professional challenges. More valuing of the expatriation in the programs of organizational career development seems to be another of the contributions of this research to companies with expatriation practices.

The study has several limitations. Beside the reduced size of the sample, there is some unbalance among the interviewees in relation to gender, country of destination, type and duration of the expatriation assignments, functional and hierarchical levels prior to and during the expatriation assignment, preventing the analysis of some differences in terms of personal motivations to accept the expatriation assignment. For example, if the reasons to accept the expatriation assignment differ between men and women, between workers in different functional areas or between operators and management. This way, future research with this concern can help to clarify how these variables can influence the individual decision.

The relationship between the expatriation and the career development of the repatriate upon return has not been exploited, so future studies could analyze how the expatriation influences the internal career development of the repatriate and consequently his/her wish to remain with or leave the repatriation company.

Only repatriates were interviewed and not recent expatriates or expatriates about to begin the assignments. This fact may have created difficulties in the recollection of the real motivations at the time of the departure, and/or generated *post-hoc* reasoning that led the interviewees to cognitively reconfigure those motivations.

We hope that the present research encourages future theoretical and empirical studies on expatriation in order to advance research in this area.

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Appendices

Table 1. Synthesis of the individual motivations and organizational reasons, according to the literature reviewed

Individual motivations to accept the international assignments	Organizational reasons to expatriate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional and communicational development; • Financial benefits; • More autonomy and variety of tasks; • Acquisition of a global perspective of the company's operations; • Long-term career progression; • The search for <i>status</i>; • The need to get away from personal and family problems; • The taste for adventure, challenges and unknown cultural contexts; • The taste in disseminating or improving knowledge and competencies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transfer of knowledge and competencies between all the company's business units; • International representation of the company's home office; • Control and coordination of global activities; • Professional development of executive staff; • Development of a global mentality of the organization; • Lack of local talent.

Table 2. Profile of the companies participating in the study

Company	Activity area	Number of workers	Expatriated workers		Repatriated workers			
			Total	Year of the 1 st expatriation	Total retained	Total that left	Year of the 1 st repatriation	Average length of the IA
CDS	Trade and Distribution	35 000	50	2000	23	17	2004	40 months
CDA	Trade and Distribution	960	60	1991	3	3	1998	47 months
IEE	Industry	4500	150	1987	10	0	2007*	48 months
ICA	Industry	1800	250	2004	5	3	2007	16 months
IMC	Industry	932	4	2002	6	0	2005	27 months
SFA	Services	295	1	1996	4	1	1998	51 months
SSA	ICT	598	15	2007	8	0	2008	16,5 months

(*) The company only has a register of repatriations as of 2007, the time when it formalized its IHRM policies. Before this there is no register of repatriations in the HR department, as they were managed at each business unit level, though there were repatriations prior to 2000, as referred by both organizational representatives interviewed.

Table 3. Profile of the repatriates participating in the study

Case	Repatriate	Sex	Marital status	Age	Qualifications	Hierarchy (when interviewed)	Destination country	Duration/ (Year of return)
CDS	REPRET 1	M	Married	52	Grade 12	Director	China	36 months (2007)
	REPRET 2	M	Married	46	Grade 12	Director	Brazil	40 months (2002)
	REPRET 3	M	Married	41	1 st Degree	Director	Brazil	40 months (2003)
	REPTUN 1	M	Married	47	Bacharel	Administrator	Brazil	44 months (2004)
CDA	REPRET 1	M	Married	62	1 st Degree	Manager	Angola	24 months (1998)
	REPRET 2	M	Married	38	1 st Degree	Director	Angola	60 months (2008)
	REPRET 3	M	Divorced	54	Grade 12	Director	Angola	125 months (2008)
	REPTUN 1	F	Married	38	1 st Degree	Manager	Angola	8 months (2009)
	REPTUN 2	M	Single	31	MBA	Director	Angola	20 months (2006)
IEE	REPRET 1	M	Married	48	1 st Degree	Administrator	Brazil	30 months (2006)
	REPRET 2	M	Married	41	1 st Degree	Director	Argentina	27 months (2009)
	REPRET 3	M	Married	42	1 st Degree	Director	France	21 months (2001)
	REPRET 4	M	Married	38	1 st Degree	Manager	Brazil	114 months (2007)
ICA	REPRET 1	M	Married	45	1 st Degree	Administrator	Angola	21 months (2009)
	REPRET 2	M	Married	45	1 st Degree	Director	Angola	18 months (2007)
	REPRET 3	M	Single	24	Grade 12	Technician	Angola	15 months (2008)
	REPTUN 1	M	Married	38	1 st Degree	Unemployed	Angola	16 months (2007)
	REPTUN 2	M	Married	66	Bacharel	Director	Angola	12 months (2007)
IMC	REPRET 1	M	Married	55	Bacharel	Service Manager	Poland	36 months (2007)
	REPRET 2	M	Married	53	1 st Degree	Director	Poland	24 months (2004)
	REPRET 3	M	Single	27	Masters	Service Manager	Poland	22 months (2007)
	REPRET 4	M	Single	31	MBA	Director	Germany	27 months (2008)
								Continues

Continued								
Case	Repatriate	Sex	Marital Status	Age	Qualifications	Hierarchy (when interviewed)	Destination country	Duration/ (Year of return)
SFA	REPRET 1	F	Single	45	1 st Degree	Director	Brazil	40 months (2002)
	REPRET 2	F	Divorced	51	1 st Degree	Technician	Brazil	20 months (2000)
	REPRET 3	M	Divorced	53	MBA	Technician	Macau	22 months (1998)
	REPTUN 1	M	Married	39	MBA	Director General	Brazil	120 months (w/o return)
SSA	REPRET 1	F	Single	28	1 st Degree	Manager	Singapore/ Malaysia	13 months (2009)
	REPRET 2	M	Married	42	Grade 9	Manager	Brazil	18 months (2009)
	REPRET 3	F	Married	37	Grade 12	Technician	Brazil	11 months (2008)
	REPRET 4	F	Single	29	1 st Degree	Technician	Brazil/ Holland	24 months (2010)

Table 4. Individual motivations and organizational reasons, per company

	CDA	CDS	ICA	IEE	IMC	SFA	SSA	Total
Individual motivations								
1: Personal and professional ambition	2	1	3	2	2	3	4	17
2: Willingness to serve the company	1	1	2	1	2	1	0	8
3: Organizational pressure	2	2	0	1	0	0	0	5
Organizational reasons								
1 : Control of international operations	0	2	1	1	2	2	0	8
2 : Business needs	2	0	1	1	0	0	2	6

Table 5. Individual motivations and organizational reasons, per interviewee type

	REPORG-ALL	REPRET-ALL	REPTUN-ALL
Individual motivations			
1: Personal and professional ambition	0	14	3
2: Willingness to serve the company	0	7	1
3: Organizational pressure	0	4	1
Organizational reasons			
1 : Control of international operations	8	0	0
2 : Business needs	6	0	0

Annex 1:

a) Script of the interview to the Organizational Representative

- How long have you been carrying out international assignments?
- How many expatriates do you have?
- How long have you been carrying out repatriations?
- How many repatriates do you have? Of those, how many remain here? How many left after returning?
- Average duration of an international assignment?
- Country/ies of destination?
- Does the expatriate go alone or with company (who accompanies him/her)?
- What are the reasons for an international assignment?
- Was the international assignment fulfilled to the end?
- What function/activities/tasks are performed by your expatriates during the international assignment? (Are they identical, better or worse than those performed before going)?

b) Script of the interview to the Repatriate

- Duration of the international assignment?
- Country/ies of destination? (Did you know it on a personal or professional level)?
- Does the expatriate go alone or with company? (Who accompanied him/her)?
- Which individual motivations led to accepting an international assignment?
- Was the international assignment fulfilled to the end?
- What function/activities/tasks did you perform during that international assignment? (Were they identical, better or worse than those you already performed before going)?