Effective Repatriation
A case study of Volvo Construction Equipment in Eskilstuna

Master Thesis within Business Administration
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Jönköping September 2006
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Date: September 2006

Subject terms: Repatriation, Expatriation, International Assignments, Human resource management

Abstract

Background:
Going abroad for a number of years to live and work in a different country and culture is a major change for most people. To make this easier and minimize the risks of facing adjustment difficulties for these people going abroad, companies’ Human resource departments, in particular, have great responsibilities. It is also mainly their responsibility to ensure a smooth re-adjustment for employees returning to home country after a completed international assignment. Today many companies not only underestimate the problems related to an unsuccessful repatriation process, but also do not acknowledge the difficulties that the expatriates face upon return. Moreover, there is evidence showing that only a minority of companies invest substantial resources in the task of creating an Effective Repatriation process, even though researchers have confirmed repatriation to be more challenging than expatriation.

Purpose: The purpose of this thesis is to find out how companies can improve and facilitate the repatriation of their employees. This will be done by examining factors affecting how an expatriate perceives the repatriation process and by identifying the most critical actions in achieving an effective repatriation process.

Method: In order to fulfill the purpose of this thesis a qualitative method was chosen. A case study was conducted over Volvo Construction Equipment in Eskilstuna, based upon personal interviews with expatriates as well as representatives of the Volvo International Assignment Management (VIAM) and Human Resource department of Volvo Construction Equipment in Eskilstuna. Further, the case study included a preliminary study based on a question and answer format, answered by 20 expatriates at Volvo CE in Eskilstuna. With support from information gathered through the preliminary study, later 10 personal interviews were carried out with expatriates at Volvo CE.

Conclusion: The findings of this thesis propose 10 main factors, which influence how an expatriate perceives the repatriation process. These are; (1) the Purpose for why an expatriate is sent abroad, (2) the Picture of the repatriation process and responsibility areas communicated by the home company, (3) the perceived Communication and support, (4) the utilization of Mentorship, (5) Reverse culture shock issues, (6) Career issues, (7) Organizational issues, (8) Practical issues, (9) Family issues and finally, (10) the existence of an Evaluation.

Further, the result of this thesis suggest that there are four critical actions in achieving an effective repatriation process; preplanning, communicating and providing support, proactive repositioning process and finally, applying an evaluation.
Acknowledgements

We would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to all the individuals who have helped us during the writing of this master thesis.

First, we would like to thank our contact person Hanna Ekman at Volvo Construction Equipment in Eskilstuna for your help and insight during our research. We highly appreciate the time and effort You have devoted in order to help us with our research.

Moreover, we would like to thank all the respondents for their dedication and time spent on our thesis. Without Your insight it would have been impossible to develop our work.

Finally, we would also like to thank our tutor, Cinzia Dalzotto, for her suggestions and counsels throughout the development of this thesis. Your guidance has improved our work significantly.

Thank you and good luck in the future!

Jönköping 2006-10-15

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Table of Contents

1 Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1
  1.1 Problem discussion ............................................................................................... 1
  1.2 Purpose .................................................................................................................. 3
  1.3 Introducing information & Definitions .................................................................. 3
  1.4 Structure of the thesis .......................................................................................... 5

2 Methodology ................................................................................................................. 6
  2.1 Qualitative method ............................................................................................... 6
  2.2 Case study ............................................................................................................. 7
  2.3 Selection of Volvo CE and respondents from Volvo CE ...................................... 8
  2.4 Collection of data ................................................................................................. 9
    2.4.1 Question-and-answer format as a preliminary study .................................... 10
    2.4.2 Personal Interviews ..................................................................................... 11
      2.4.2.1 Structure of interviews ........................................................................ 12
  2.5 Analyzing data ...................................................................................................... 12
  2.6 Trustworthiness of the thesis .............................................................................. 13

3 Theoretical Framework ................................................................................................. 15
  3.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................... 15
  3.2 The problems with repatriation ........................................................................... 15
  3.3 Factors influencing the repatriation adjustment ................................................... 17
    3.3.1 Pre-return Repatriation Adjustment – sources of information about home country .......................................................... 17
    3.3.2 Post-return Repatriation Adjustment ............................................................ 18
  3.4 The purpose of international assignments ............................................................ 20
  3.5 Effective repatriation ............................................................................................ 21
    3.5.1 Prior to departure ....................................................................................... 22
    3.5.2 During their stay ....................................................................................... 23
    3.5.3 After they return ..................................................................................... 24
  3.6 Transaction costs .................................................................................................. 25
  3.7 Concluding section ............................................................................................... 25

4 A case study of the Repatriation process of Volvo CE in Eskilstuna ........................................... 27
  4.1 Summary of the preliminary study ....................................................................... 27
  4.2 Results from the empirical findings ..................................................................... 28
    4.2.1 The purpose of international assignments .................................................. 29
    4.2.2 Clear Repatriation and Responsibility areas ............................................. 29
    4.2.3 Communication and Support ................................................................... 32
    4.2.4 Mentorship .................................................................................................. 34
    4.2.5 Career issues ............................................................................................... 35
    4.2.6 Organizational change issues ...................................................................... 37
    4.2.7 Reverse cultural shock issues ..................................................................... 38
    4.2.8 Practical issues ............................................................................................ 38
    4.2.9 Family issues ............................................................................................... 39
    4.2.10 Evaluation issues ..................................................................................... 41

5 Analysis ........................................................................................................................ 42
5.1 Factors affecting the repatriation process ................................................................. 42
5.1.1 The purpose of international assignments .......................................................... 47
5.2 Effective repatriation .............................................................................................. 48

6 Discussion ................................................................................................................. 57

7 Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 62

8 Final remarks ............................................................................................................ 64
8.1 Criticism towards the study ................................................................................... 64
8.2 Suggestions to further studies ................................................................................ 65

References ..................................................................................................................... 66

Appendix 1 – Introduction mail .................................................................................... 69
Appendix 2 – Mail: Preliminary study ......................................................................... 71
Appendix 3 – Reminder mail 1 ..................................................................................... 73
Appendix 4 – Reminder mail 2 ..................................................................................... 75
Appendix 5 – Mail: Personal Interviews ....................................................................... 77
Appendix 6 – Preliminary study ................................................................................... 79
Appendix 7 – Interview guide ....................................................................................... 81

Figures

Figure 1-1 Structure of the thesis .................................................................................... 5

Figure 3-1 Illustration of Solomon’s (1995) theoretical suggestion about a circular process ........................................................................................................... 16

Figure 3-2 Basic Framework of Repatriation Adjustment (Black, Gregersen & Mendenhall, 1992a, p. 230) ...................................................................................................................... 17

Figure 3-3 A model of effective repatriation (Jassawalla, Connolly & Slojkowiski, 2004, p. 40) ................................................................................................................................. 22

Figure 4-1 Volvo’s process of an International Assignment (Information folder, Volvo Group, 2006-03-10) ............................................................................................................. 30
1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the reader to concepts of International assignments and the Repatriation process. Firstly some background information is given. Later a problem discussion is held, concluding into the purpose of the thesis. To avoid any misunderstandings some definitions are specified. Finally, in order to make it easier for the reader to follow, a structure of the thesis is illustrated in a model.

The current expansion in the internationalization of business organizations means that a rapidly increasing number of firms are moving from being purely domestic players to being cross-national players. Consequently, many companies today have parts of their organizational activity abroad. Due to this increased internationalisation, many companies believe that if they do not have employees with global skills, the organisations will lose their competitiveness. Therefore, companies need employees that are willing to work globally, since the most effective way to achieve international experience is by living and working within a foreign business arena (Webb, 1996). By having subsidiaries in foreign countries, companies can send their employees abroad to gain and share new knowledge across borders.

Companies have been reassigning employees abroad during a long time of period. However, since the business world has become more global, there has also been an increase in expatriation. This development represents a major challenge for Multinational companies (MNC) (O’Sullivan, 2002).

Going abroad for a number of years to live and work in a different culture is a major change for most people. Choosing to face the challenge to work abroad does not only have a great impact on the employee’s life but in some cases also affect possible spouse and children. To make it easier and minimize the risks of facing adjustment difficulties for these people going abroad, companies’ Human resource departments, in particular, have great responsibilities. Human resource managers are the ones that select the right candidates to send abroad. They also design packages that are sufficiently motivating to overcome barriers post by the reluctant spouse or partner and are responsible for organizing appropriate pre-assignment training. In addition to this, they also have the responsibility to ensure a smooth re-adjustment for employees returning to home country. However, there is evidence that only a minority of companies invest substantial resources in this last task (Paik, Seguad & Malinowski, 2002).

1.1 Problem discussion

While several researchers have examined the problems with choosing and training expatriates, few have studied the last part of international assignments – the repatriation process (Black, 1992; Solomon, 1995). Maybe this is also one of the reasons why, even though expatriation has been around quite some time, companies are still struggling with the repatriation part. The focus has only been on the expatriation part, whereas the repatriation part has not been seen as a problem, although in some cases it has created setbacks (Paik et al., 2002). The primary reason for the repatriation process not to be seen as an important issue might be because of the common opinion that – the expatriate is only coming home and that this should not cause any problems. However, studies have shown that repatriating is often more challenging than expatriating (Black & Gregersen, 1999; Paik et al., 2002). Research has also shown that there are several problems both practical as well as psychological that are related to the repatriation process (Paik et al., 2002).
The cost of failed international assignments is high, both financially for the organization and from an employee’s perspective (Webb, 1996). The cost of repatriation failure is threefold (Allen & Alvarez, 1998).

Allen and Alvarez (1998), state that the first area is “underutilization of key employees”. Many repatriates believe that when they return they will be given a promotion. This is of course not always possible. However, even though this is a relevant problem by itself, most often even larger problems can arise. According to research, dilemmas appear when the repatriates come home and realize that they have lost ground in their careers, and that other colleagues that stayed in the domestic organisation have been promoted.

In many cases, problems can also appear when the home organisation fails to identify the new knowledge the repatriate has acquired. Consequently, these employees are placed in lower positions in the organisation than they in fact are appropriate for. In order to improve this problem companies must carefully consider the international expertise and knowledge that the repatriates acquires and moreover identify their definite value (Allen & Alvarez, 1998).

The second area is the “loss of key employees” (Allen & Alvarez, 1998). If a repatriation process is not carried out in a proper way, the repatriate might feel so strongly about it that he/she quits and begin to work in another company. According to Black and Gregersen (1999), 25 per cent of repatriates leave their organisation within two years. If an organisation loses a repatriate, it will lose a big investment; since the cost of an international assignment is very high. Also, when repatriates return from their international assignment, they have gained great knowledge and experience, which will be lost if the employee resigns. However, research has shown that Scandinavian employees tend to be more loyal to their organisations than American employees. As a result, the “loss of key employees” does not seem to concern Scandinavian companies to the same extent (Paik et al., 2002).

Finally, the last area is the “inability to recruit employees into overseas positions”. According to Allen and Alvarez (1998), organisations that have poor repatriation processes will have employees that are unsatisfied with their overseas assignment. This will be communicated directly or indirectly to the rest of the employees, and can put off new personnel from going on international assignments. If the employees of an organisation hesitate to go on international assignments, this can contribute to decreased cross-cultural knowledge and understanding. To make sure that new employees will go on overseas assignments, the organisation must ensure that the repatriates are taken care of properly and that the employees recognize overseas assignments as an opportunity for their careers (Black and Gregersen, 1999).

As stated above, many different problems can occur within in connection to the repatriation process. Therefore, organisations must ensure that their employees will have a proper repatriation process. O’Sullivan (2002) define a successful repatriation transition outcome as,

“one in which, upon return, the repatriate: gains access to a job which recognizes any newly acquired international competences, experiences minimal cross-culture readjustment difficulties; and reports low turnover intentions” (O’Sullivan, 2002 p. 597).

Furthermore, according to several researchers, (Black & Gregersen, 1999; Feldman, 1991; Hurn, 1999) many expatriates are dissatisfied with the repatriation process. Researchers
have also examined the factors affecting the repatriation process (Black 1992; Jassawalla et al., 2004; Paik et al., 2002). However, regardless of earlier studies done within this field, there are not many suggestions or sufficient guidelines on how to handle repatriation in an effective way (Jassawalla et al., 2004). Consequently, the authors of this thesis believe that general guidelines and more proposals on how to successfully manage repatriation could be created to improve the process.

By examining the perceived experiences of several Swedish expatriates in a Swedish Multinational Company, the authors of this thesis believe to find valuable information. This information can improve the chances of finding the most appropriate actions, meeting the demands of expatriates, and by that create a smooth repatriation process. Consequently, following research questions will be answered:

-Which factors affect how an expatriate perceives the repatriation process?
-Which are the most critical actions for achieving an effective repatriation?

These two questions will first be answered and analyzed and later provide a base for a discussion about how and what practical solutions that companies could apply to meet the underlying needs of their expatriates in the creation of an effective repatriation process.

1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to find out how companies can improve and facilitate the repatriation of their employees. This will be done by examining factors affecting how an expatriate perceives the repatriation process and by identifying the most critical factors to achieve an effective repatriation process.

1.3 Introducing information & Definitions

The Volvo Group is one of the world's leading suppliers of transport solutions for commercial use. Volvo Group represents a set of companies that provide an international market with a great variety of products and services. It was founded in 1927 and has today more than 80 000 employees and production in 25 different countries spread all around the globe (http://www.volvo.com/group/sweden/sv-se/Volvo+Group/, 2006-03-15). Volvo AB consists of six separate subsidiaries which are: Volvo Trucks, Volvo Buses, Volvo Penta, Volvo Aero, Volvo Financial Services and finally Volvo Construction Equipment. When referring to the entire organisation, the authors of this thesis will use the term “Volvo Group”, throughout the work of this thesis.

The empirical material of this thesis is mainly gained from Volvo Construction Equipment in Eskilstuna. The company develops and produces construction equipment such as tractors, forklift trucks and dumpers. These machines are produced on four continents and distributed in more than 200 countries. Today, their products are leaders in many world markets (http://www.volvo.com/NR/nrldonlyres/326C1C56-8D70-4EBB-AEE8-FB926CC9612/0/VolvoCE_history.pdf, 2006-03-15).

When referring to Volvo Construction Equipment in Eskilstuna, the abbreviation “Volvo CE” will be used. As a clarification, instead of using Volvo CE, the term “Home Company” will also be used within this thesis. “Home company” stands for the company that the expatriate is contracted by. “Host Company” will instead be applied when referring to the organisation situated in current contracted country. Both these terms are well-established descriptions and are used within the Volvo Group.
Moreover, according to Barsoux, Evans and Pucik (2002) the term “Human resource management” refers to the activities carried out by the organisation, in order to improve the utilisation of human resources. When referring to the Human Resource Department of Volvo CE the authors of this thesis will be using the abbreviation “HRM department in Eskilstuna”. In addition, when referring to Volvo Groups central HRM department, concerning International assignments, the abbreviation “VIAM” (Volvo International Administration Management) will be used.

The term “Expatriation” defines the process of sending home company employees to a host company -in most cases to a foreign subsidiary, during a pre-defined period of time (Hill, 1994). Furthermore, those employees being sent to work in a foreign country are called “Expatriates”. “Repatriates” instead refers to those employees having been abroad and are in the process of returning (Herry & Noon, 2001). Herry and Noon (2001) further defines the word “Repatriation” as the process of returning to home country after being working in a foreign country over a defined period of time. When referring to the time period linked to the process of returning to home company, mainly the term “Repatriation process” will be used. Both “Expatriate” and “Repatriate” are frequently occurring terms in this thesis and are used as the same word, referring to the employee who has taken on an international contract. Beside these terms, the expression “International assignment” occurs within this thesis. By using the phrase international assignment, the authors of this thesis refer to the entire process including both expatriation and repatriation.

Through out the thesis the word “effective repatriation” is used. The authors of this thesis therefore found it important to define the meaning of the word. According to Cambridge Dictionary (2005) the term effective is “successful or achieving the results that you want”. The word effective has arisen through the word efficiency which is defined as “when someone or something uses time and energy well, without wasting”. When using these definitions together with the word repatriation one could understand what the authors of this thesis mean when referring to an effective repatriation. An effective repatriation is achieved when the repatriate is satisfied with the repatriation process due to a smooth readjustment to home country and company. Simply stated – effective repatriation is completed when all parties involved have achieved the results that they wanted and have perceived the repatriation process as successful. According to O’Sullivan (2002) a successful repatriation process can be defined as:

“one in which, upon return, the repatriate: gains access to a job which recognizes any newly acquired international competences, experiences minimal cross-culture readjustment difficulties; and reports low turnover intentions” (O’Sullivan, 2002 p. 597).

After shedding some light on the fundamental facts and definitions of this thesis, it is now time to take a closer look at the structure of the work, done with support from these facts. In the following section a comprehensive model of the work of this thesis is therefore presented.
1.4 Structure of the thesis

![Diagram of thesis structure]

**Purpose** - constitute a fundamental base of this work and has derived from the background and problem discussion presented in the current Chapter 1.

**Methodology** - was chosen dependent upon the purpose and will be thoroughly explained and justified within Chapter 2.

**Theoretical Framework** - is presented within Chapter 3 in order to provide the reader a base of knowledge in the subject in matter. Consisting of an initial introduction, theories illustrating the problems related to the repatriation process, as well as factors influencing the repatriation adjustment and an effective repatriation.

**Empirical Findings** - were gained through a case study conducted over Volvo Construction Equipment in Eskilstuna and is presented in Chapter 4. The structure of this chapter was based on the most significant factors identified with support from the theoretical framework.

**Analysis** - is based on theoretical findings as well as empirical evidences found with support from the case study. To bring sense and structure to Chapter 5, theoretical models previously presented will be used as a base.

**Discussion** - is presented in Chapter 6 and concerns which and what solutions companies possibly could apply to meet the underlying needs of their expatriates in the creation of an effective repatriation process.

**Conclusion** - is found in Chapter 7 and highlights the final points by answering the initial research questions, which strongly reflect the purpose of this thesis.

**Final Remarks** - presented in Chapter 8 bring up criticism of the study and provide suggestions on further studies interesting to conduct within this field of research.
2 Methodology

This chapter explains and gives arguments for the chosen research method. First the choice of research method is presented, followed by sections describing the applied methods. Data was collected at Volvo Construction Equipment in Eskilstuna, through a question-and-answer format and personal interviews with 10 expatriates. The chapter concludes with a discussion about how the analysis of the data was made and the trustworthiness of the thesis.

2.1 Qualitative method

Method could be described as the tool that enables researchers to perform and achieve the supposed goal of a research. There are principally two possible methodological approaches to choose between, the quantitative and the qualitative method. The choice of methodological approach is strongly dependent upon the information investigated, the problem, the purpose and finally the current research questions of the research (Holme & Solvang, 1997). The choice of method for this thesis was a qualitative method.

According to McDaniels and Gates (2005) quantitative methods are based on statistical information and are often used to point out relationships between different variables. While quantitative methods are formalised, highly structured and characterised by a high level of control, qualitative methods are instead only to some extent formalised and therefore brings more flexibility (Holme & Solvang, 1997). Holme and Solvang (1997) further state that a qualitative method provides a deeper understanding about a specific subject in matter. A qualitative method is therefore also sufficient when investigating standpoints and values among respondents (McDaniels & Gates, 2005). Consequently, a qualitative approach was the natural choice of method for this research. To fulfil the purpose of this thesis a profound understanding about expatriates experiences and opinions was needed. The authors of this thesis believed that these experiences could best be found by using a qualitative method.

Qualitative methods are connected with words like exploration and discovery. When the researcher tries to make sense of a situation or a phenomena without pre-determined expectations one can state that an inductive approach is used (Patton, 2002). It is said that a qualitative research generally is seen as inductive. However, some researchers argue that during the different stages of the research process both an inductive and a deductive approach can be implied (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). According to Patton (2002), induction can be explained as a “research then a theory” approach, while deduction on the other hand is a “theory then a research” approach. Moreover, through an inductive analysis patterns and associations derived from observations are found. A deductive analysis instead tests hypotheses theoretically through a logically derived process. An inductive approach initiates with an investigation of open questions rather than testing theoretically derived hypothesis, which is done in a deductive approach.

The authors of this thesis did not follow a clear inductive or deductive approach. Instead a combination of these approaches was applied. The goal was to allow the respondents/expatriates speak openly about how they had experienced the repatriation process. The authors did not want to interfere or influence the respondents’ answers with existing theories. Nevertheless, since the theoretical study had been done before the empirical research the authors of this thesis cannot claim that the research was done without any influence of the theories. Therefore, it can be stated that this is more a deductive than an inductive study.
According to Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000), there is a method called the abductive approach, were a combination of the deductive and inductive methods are applied. The authors of this thesis conclude that the abductive approach is the best method to explain the conducted research. This could be stated since the study was done with some kind of knowledge base, however with an open mind.

### 2.2 Case study

The idea of a case study is to focus on individual instances rather than a wide spectrum (Denscombe, 1998). Eriksson and Wiedersheim-Paul (2006) argue that a case study is useful in order to receive deeper knowledge of a narrow and particular problem. The authors of this thesis believed that by doing research on only one case rather than trying to cover a large number of cases would provide more insight and understanding of the subject in matter. What a case study can do that other methods cannot is to examine things in detail. In case studies the focus lies on relationships and the processes that lead to the outcomes. The advantages with using a case study approach is that it generate the opportunity to not only find out what the outcomes are, but also why certain outcomes might take place (Denscombe, 1998).

The underlying reason for the choice of doing a case study was because of the complexity of investigating a repatriation process. To be able to fulfil the purpose of finding out how companies can improve their repatriation process, the authors of this thesis needed to gain a deep insight on expatriate’s experiences. How the respondents felt about their experiences related to the repatriation process was highly individual and was depending upon personal characteristics as well as current circumstances. Consequently, examining the repatriation process was a complex procedure; why case study was an appropriate method to use. A case study is also more favourable when dealing with relationships and social processes, which is another motivation for the chosen method.

Yin (2003a) state that there are as a minimum six types of different case studies. First, case study can be based on single- (focus on one event) or multiple- (focus on two or more events) case studies. Secondly, whether single or multiple, the case study can further be exploratory, descriptive or explanatory.

An exploratory case study aims to define the questions and hypothesis of a later research or at determining the feasibility of the desired research procedures. On the other hand, a descriptive case study aims to present a complete description of a phenomenon within its context. An explanatory case study instead presents data bearing cause-effect relationships - explaining how events happened (Yin, 2003a).

As mentioned above, our aim was to examine which factors influence the repatriation process and how companies can improve and facilitate this process. To achieve this, profound knowledge of the repatriation process was needed. The authors of this thesis believed that by looking at one single company the likelihood of receiving a greater insight of the problem, related to the repatriation process, was increased. Accordingly, the single case approach has been used in this thesis, based on Volvo Construction Equipment.

To come up with a guideline or possible suggestions on how companies can facilitate the repatriation process, one must first examine the existing repatriation process from the companies’ perspective and thereafter analyse the situation. This has to be done in order to realize and identify the actual problem caused by the situation that the repatriation brings. The authors believe that both describing and evaluating a cause-effect relationship was
required to fulfil the purpose of this thesis. That is also why the explanatory single case study was the most appropriate method to apply in this research. To enable this “Explanatory single case study” a company which could provide the study with valuable information was needed. The selection of such an appropriate empirical base of information will further be described in the following chapter.

2.3 Selection of Volvo CE and respondents from Volvo CE

Volvo Construction Equipment in Eskilstuna was chosen as the empirical base for this thesis. Volvo Group is a company that has great awareness of the importance of an international assignment and therefore also has a great interest in improving the process of repatriation. In return this enabled the authors of this thesis to obtain good access and consequently also the information needed in order to fulfil the purpose. In addition, Volvo CE is a Multinational company that sends out a large number of expatriates representing different departments every year. This further allowed gaining information from a great number of expatriates with different personalities, experiences and opinions. Consequently, the authors of this thesis concluded that Volvo Construction Equipment would be an excellent choice of company.

There are two principal ways to make a selection of respondents, the probability selection and the non-probability selection (Holme and Solvang, 1997). The probability selection is built upon a conscious decision; meanwhile the non-probability selection instead could be explained by a random selection. Since the authors of this thesis needed to get in contact with people that had experienced an international assignment and wanted to share their opinions and feelings concerning the subject in matter, a probability selection appeared as the most efficient method.

Furthermore, Holme and Solvang, (1997) state that selection of respondents ought to be done with support from well-defined criteria’s where the focus should be the knowledge and the experience of the supposed respondents. In this thesis, criteria’s were created with the background of previous theoretical research. These criteria’s for the choice of respondents were:

(1) An international assignment contract outside the Scandinavian countries,
(2) A minimum of two years long international assignment contract, and
(3) An arrival to home company not longer than three years ago.

The first criteria were stated since an international assignment with a greater geographical distance could result in a more challenging repatriation. The second criteria were created due to the fact that a longer stay can lead to higher cultural influence and change on an expatriate. Finally, the aim of the third criteria was mainly to ensure that the information gained by the respondents were up to date. These criteria’s were then given to Hanna Ekman, a representative from the HRM department in Volvo CE in Eskilstuna. She provided the authors of this thesis with a list of all expatriates who fulfilled these criteria’s, which resulted in 25 expatriates in total.

Before the question-and-answer format was dispatched, a mail was sent to all 25 possible respondents were the authors introduced themselves and the study that was going to take place (see Appendix 1). In this mail the respondents were asked if they wanted to take part in the study by first filling out a question-and-answer format and later perhaps participate in a personal interview. Hanna Ekman sent out this mail to the 25 potential respondents.
That the mail was sent out by her and not from the authors of the thesis was to show the potential respondents that the HRM department was backing up the study. This way the authors of the study thought that the potential respondents would understand the seriousness of the research and therefore hopefully participate. The mail was successful and out of the 25 potential respondents, 22 replied that they wanted to participate in the study. Holme and Solvang (1997) argue that it is not an easy task to determine how many respondents that should be observed within a qualitative study. The authors of this thesis experienced the actual number as relatively unimportant rather found it significant that each respondent added something new to the findings. Since the question-and-answer format was done to create a base of knowledge and understanding of the expatriates’ situation, the authors of this thesis agreed that it should be sent out to all 22 expatriates that had agreed to take part in the study. Another mail was sent, this time by the authors of the study. In this mail (see Appendix 2) the authors showed their appreciation to the respondents for agreeing to go through with the study. Also a link to the question-and-answer format and instructions concerning it were given. The respondents were told that they had to reply within two weeks. After one week an additional mail was sent only to remind the respondents that had not yet filled out the question-and-answer format. Finally, after two weeks, and two “reminder mails” (see Appendix 3-4) out of the 22 expatriates 20 responds were received.

After analysing the information gathered from the format, another mail (see Appendix 5) was sent to the respondents. This mail was concerned with information regarding the personal interviews that where going to take place. This mail was however only sent to 15 of the respondents that. Depending on what the respondents had answered in the format, it could be seen that some of them were more eager to share their experiences. After analysing the answers given from the format 15 respondents were selected. The authors of this thesis also found it important to interview expatriates that were both negative and positive towards the repatriation process. Consequently, this was also taken under consideration when choosing the 15 respondents. After sending the mail to the 15 potential respondents for personal interviews, 10 were set. The number of personal interviews was a result of accessibility, availability of resources such as time and economy. The final number of 10 interviews later appeared to give enough data to create an interesting analysis.

2.4 Collection of data

A major strength of case study data collection is the opportunity to use different sources of evidence. Studies of events within the case study could be both combined with interviews with people involved and with formal documents. All appropriate sources of information could be used to examine the subject in matter (Denscombe, 1998). Primary data is considered as data that is specifically collected for the aim of this relevant study, while secondary data instead is information gathered for other purposes at other times. The choice of how to collect data should primarily be dependent upon what best suits the purpose of the research (Eriksson & Wiedersheim-Paul, 2006).

Since the aim of this thesis is to examine the repatriation process in order to come up with suggestions on how companies could improve their repatriation process, a deep knowledge was needed about their process. Therefore, both primary and secondary data has been used in this thesis. Primary data was obtained through a brief question format and personal interviews. Secondary data was instead collected by using previous research, as well as revising accessible documents within the chosen organisation.
Moreover, data was collected from multiple sources of evidence. This was done by collecting, both secondary and primary data from VIAM in Gothenburg and HRM department in Eskilstuna. Mainly, primary data have been collected through personal interviews with expatriates at Volvo CE. Beside personal interviews also a question-and-answer format was first conducted among the expatriates. Further information regarding this question-and-answer format will be discussed in the following section.

2.4.1 Question-and-answer format as a preliminary study

According to Yin (2003b) one favourable type of interview to use in an explanatory case study is the more structured survey or question-and-answer format. Further Yin (2003a) argues that the question-and-answer format may be perceived as a database from which a more interesting and convincing case study can be composed. Holme and Solvang (1997) mean that a question-and-answer format can work as a preliminary study for a qualitative study. Moreover, Holme and Solvang (1997) state that the question-and-answer format should be used in order to create further knowledge about a specific problem area.

The authors of this thesis were convinced that a preliminary study was needed in order to investigate and confirm that a problem existed. Consequently, a brief question-and-answer format was conducted. This was done with support from background information from several discussions with Hanna Ekman, a representative from the HRM department in Volvo CE in Eskilstuna, and one personal interview with Inga-Lena Wernersson - manager at VIAM.

The question-and-answer format consisted of approximately 30 different types of questions, both fixed statements as well as a large number of open-ended questions. The questions represented three different types of information; (1) Background questions, containing information such as host country, length of stay, current position and information about family circumstances. (2) Expatriation questions, obtaining information regarding the circumstances before leaving home company. (3) Repatriation questions, giving a brief impression of the perceived repatriation process within home company (see Appendix 6 – Preliminary study).

Background data was primarily considered important, in order to facilitate a more individually based personal interview. Expatriation data was prioritised since it, regarding to previous studies, indirectly can have an impact on the perceived impression of the repatriation process. Repatriation data was collected in order to receive an initial understanding about the general impressions of the repatriation process, and by this, further later enable deeper personal interviews. According to Burns and Bush (2005) a computer-administered question format is fast, cost efficient, able to capture data in real time and less threatening for some respondents. This is mainly also why a computer-administered question-and-answer format was conducted.

Furthermore, in relation to Burn and Bush (2005) the authors of this thesis tried to compose questions which were unloaded, focused and crystal clear, brief as possible and not double-barrelled. Well-structured questions were considered primarily important to the authors of this thesis. This, since the thought was to achieve short and consistent questions in order to avoid misinterpretations and irritation among the respondents. Also, the order of the questions plays a significant matter in a question-and-answer format. Burn and Bush (2005) mean that attention should be given to placing the questions in a logical sequence to ease the respondent participation. Also, in the beginning of the question-and-answer format a few short warm up questions were used. This was done since, warm up questions
was mentioned as another important aspect that could enhance the respondents’ interest and demonstrate the ease of responding to the research (Burns & Bush, 2005).

The question-and-answer format, conducted in English, was sent by email to 22 respondents. Out of them 20 responds were received. These 20 responds were later used as the base of information, needed in order to gain deeper knowledge about problem areas and also to create individually based personal interviews. In the following section more detailed information regarding personal interviews will be presented.

2.4.2 Personal Interviews

Many qualitative studies are conducted through personal interviews, where a small number of objects are chosen to be examined (Patton, 2002). The researchers Eriksson and Wiedersheim-Paul (2006) also argue that interviews are one possible alternative when gathering primary data for a qualitative study. Moreover, in relation to Holme and Solvang (1997) who state that personal interviews are characterised by closeness to the source of information, the personal interviews were considered being an effective method in this thesis.

This qualitative research is mainly based on empirical material collected from personal interviews. After screening and analyzing the question-and-answer format, the authors of this thesis could state that problem related to repatriation existed in Volvo CE. Furthermore, the format also showed indications of factors causing the problems related to the repatriation process. The information gained through the question-and-answer format was later used a base for the personal interviews.

A personal interviews’ major strength is that interviews are similar to an everyday conversation, which result in respondents feeling comfortable and therefore freer to express their opinion (Holme and Solvang, 1997). Also McDaniel and Gates (2005) argue that personal interviews can create an informal atmosphere, which can enable deeper interviews since the respondent feel less concerned talking about more personal topics. Furthermore, according to Eriksson and Wiedersheim-Paul (2006) personal interviews have significant advantages through its unlimited numbers of resulting questions. This will bring better possibility for the researcher, trying to motivate the respondents to further explain their answers. In addition, an unlimited number of questions can also help the researcher to more easily drive a discussion back into focus (Eriksson & Wiedersheim-Paul, 2006). Because of these strengths and possibilities, the authors of this thesis were determined to also base the thesis on personal interviews. Ten personal interviewees were conducted. These ten respondents were mainly chosen after screening results of the preliminary study. By this, the authors strive to get access to a broad number of personalities and also emphasised the importance of choosing expatriates represented from different positions. In addition, as restrained by lack of time among possible respondents, the final number of personal interviews was considered as positive.

To improve a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere among respondents, the interviews took place at closed conference room at Volvo CE in Eskilstuna. According to Taylor and Bogdan (1984), it is important that the interviews are made in a place where the respondents feel relaxed. The researchers also argue that people usually feel comfortable in their offices. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes to one hour. The length of the interviews were mainly dependent the participants limitation of time. However, the authors of this thesis believe that it was enough time to ask and talk about everything that was of concern. The structured of the interviews will be presented in the following section.


2.4.2.1 Structure of interviews

According to Eriksson and Wiedersheim-Paul (2006), there are principally two different ways of structures to use when conducting an interview. These are: the structured method and the unstructured method. In a structured method the researcher bases the interview upon a questionnaire with identical questions for each and every respondent. The unstructured method is instead more like an open discussion without support from a questionnaire. A combination of the unstructured and the structured method is called the semi-structured interview, here an interview guide is applied (Jacobsen, 1993). The interview guide work as support for the researcher when aiming to create a discussion regarding a broader area of a particular subject in matter. Moreover, the greatest opportunity with the semi-structured interview is that the respondent become less limited and therefore provides a deeper discussion (Patton, 2002). Since the authors of the thesis wanted to achieve a broad discussion resulting in deeper knowledge, a semi-structured model of interview was applied. Also, since the semi-structured model of interview, not only enable a deep discussion, but also brings the possibility of greater knowledge connected to cause-effect-relationships, the semi-structured model of interview was considered as the most appropriate choice.

Furthermore, our choice of structure of interview was based upon an interview guideline providing both specific as well as open-ended questions (see Appendix 7). Moreover, when making an interview the interviewer should strive to let the respondent steer the discussion in his/her own direction. In order to do so, the researcher should instead of asking detailed and precise questions use an interview guide (Holme & Solvang, 1997).

Information regarding how results of personal interviews as well as how the preliminary study were analysed will further be highlighted in the following section.

2.5 Analyzing data

According to Holme and Solvang (1997) there are no specific ways or restrictions on how to interpret and draw conclusions out of empirical material. Nevertheless, it is essential to categorise and structure the empirical findings in order to facilitate a good base for future research (Lundahl & Skärvad, 1999).

When a qualitative study is performed it is followed by an extensive work up. This work up aims to analyse and create an overall picture of the study. Yin (2003b), state that analysis could be done with support from three general strategies; Relying on theoretical propositions – meaning that researchers should analyse the empirical data with a theoretical base, Thinking about rival explanations – meaning that a researcher should consider possible critics when analysing empirical data, and also Developing a case description – meaning that researchers should have plan when analysing empirical findings.

In order to conduct the preliminary study the authors of this thesis relied on theoretical propositions and conclusions. Thereafter, the results from the preliminary study was investigated and compared to theoretical framework in order to address consistent patterns. Through these patterns an initial structure of the empirical material was found and created. This empirical structure was later used as the base for capturing arguments and structuring the analysis of theoretical framework compared to the empirical findings.

Moreover, already from the beginning, the authors of this research developed a preliminary case description. This was initially created in order to facilitate communication, schedule meetings and to meet the needs of the commissioner Hanna Ekman at the HRM
department of Volvo CE in Eskilstuna. Later this preliminary case description also turned out to play a significant role in the process of planning implementing and analysing the empirical work. Finally, when composing the conclusions the authors tried, in relation to what Yin (2003b) stated, also to be aware and ahead of time of potential direct rival explanations of the research. In the following section, aspects related to trustworthiness of the thesis will be brought up to discussion.

2.6 Trustworthiness of the thesis

The work with trying to ensure trustworthiness of a research should continue throughout the whole process of conducting a study (Eriksson & Wiedersheim-Paul, 2006). According to methodological theories trustworthiness is often said to depend on the two variables; reliability and validity. High reliability means that the next researcher with the exact same prerequisites, following the identical procedures as described, should receive the same findings and conclusions as the previous researcher. Validity instead is created when the research is done correctly; meaning that what is actually aimed to be investigated is examined (Lundahl & Skärvad, 1999). In a qualitative study the validity is superior to the reliability. The focus of a qualitative study should be to achieve as relevant and reliable information as possible, rather than trying to achieve the same result from time to time (Holme & Solvang, 1997). Accordingly, this statement has also worked as a general guideline throughout the entire working process of this thesis.

In line with Yin (2003b), suggesting that the researcher should use multiple sources of data to ensure high trustworthiness of the research, the authors of this thesis were convinced to collect primary data from the different sources. These different sources of evidence were represented through, Headquarter department VIAM, the HRM department of Volvo CE and finally also the expatriates themselves. In addition, secondary data was also obtained. This was done primarily through screening earlier research and theories but also from analysing available documents used within the Volvo Group.

Furthermore, many critics state that a qualitative method is more vulnerable than the quantitative method. One major reason for this is that the interviews rarely are controlled and data collection methods often differ from one respondent to another (Lundahl & Skärvad, 1999). To ensure the highest possible trustworthiness of the personal interviews made, each interview were to some extent controlled by specifically custom made plans on what the interview should focus on. These plans were in beforehand made with support from the interview guide and the answers received from the question-and-answer format. This way, the authors of the thesis, also could ensure that the answers and information received from the question-and-answer format was interpreted correctly.

A qualitative study is to great extent depending upon the opinions, values and interpretations of a researcher (Holme & Solvang, 1997). Therefore, when asking questions to respondents the researchers of this thesis strive to use an unloaded language. This was done in order to avoid that answers of the respondents were influenced by the opinions and values of the researchers. Moreover, factors such as previous experiences and knowledge of the researcher can also influence the trustworthiness of a personal interview (Lundahl & Skärvad, 1999). This since, values, attitudes and earlier impressions can influence the researcher to unconsciously draw conclusions or interpretations (Holme & Solvang, 1997). To avoid this, the authors of this thesis both participated in the personal interviews. By both taking participation in the interviews one of the authors could ask the questions, while the other one took notes and prepared following up questions. This way the dialogue went on very fluently.
Moreover, after each personal interview was made, a discussion regarding the outcome of the interview was held between the authors. This was primarily done in order to discover if the interpretations of the questions were similar, and if not, what the authors may have misunderstood or misinterpreted. To further avoid misunderstandings it is crucial to give respondents the possibility to, in beforehand, prepare for the personal interview (Eriksson & Wiedersheim-Paul, 2006). The authors of this thesis believe that the preliminary study conducted did enable a good possibility for the respondents to prepare before the personal interviews were made. The researchers of this thesis also clearly informed the respondents about their anonymity in beforehand. The anonymity was considered as important to ensure that the respondent could express their opinions and feelings without any concern for what others might think.

In order to create a relaxed and comfortable situation for the respondents, during the interviews the authors of the thesis chose to speak Swedish. To facilitate the process of later translating the Swedish language into English, a tape recorder was used. With this technical equipment the authors of this thesis could also assure that no information was lost. However, Taylor and Bogdan (1984) argue that one should not record the interview if it makes the respondents feel uncomfortable. Therefore, before each interview the respondents were asked if they allowed the interview to be recorded. However, none of the respondents minded us taping the interviews. Later the interviews were transcribed into Swedish and translated into English. In order to keep the initial responds and avoid false interpretations, the translation process was done with care. The authors of this thesis were aware of the risks involved in a translation process, but felt that their awareness and good knowledge in the English language helped minimizing the risks. The translation consequently also made it possible to use reliable quotations. Furthermore, the tape recorder was important since it gave the possibility to focus more on the dialogue and details such as body language during the interviews. By this, the authors of this thesis could further avoid the risk of making incorrectly misinterpretations.
3 Theoretical Framework

This chapter aims to give the reader a theoretical base within the subject of matter. First the literature state of the art is presented, followed by the problems related to the repatriation process. Later theories and research regarding factors influencing the repatriation adjustment and effective repatriation is clarified and argued.

3.1 Introduction

Earlier studies done in the subject of repatriation were often descriptive and narrow (Tung, 1981; Tung 1988). Their main focus was twofold: What organisations should do in order to achieve an effective repatriation and why organisations need to view repatriation as an important issue. These studies are more or less only concentrated on how the company should adapt towards individual goals in order to prevent underutilization of knowledge, loss of invested money or dissatisfied personnel. However, during the past few years, the research on repatriation processes has been changed considerably. Now the focus lies on describing how and why, repatriates have problems with adjusting to new job assignments (Feldman & Tompson, 1999). Nevertheless, recent studies done by Allen and Alvarez (1998) and Paik et al., (2002) have gone back to investigating updated numbers such as the amount to employees leaving the organisation and the costs of international assignments; just like the earlier trends. In addition, these recent studies have also developed a new focus, which is not only concentrated on what the organisation can do to create an smooth repatriation, but also what the actual repatriate can do in order to create an effective repatriation (Paik et al., 2002).

Regardless of earlier studies, there are not many suggestions or sufficient guidelines on how to handle repatriation in an effective way (Jassawalla et al., 2004). The aim of this thesis is to contribute with research within this theoretical gap. This is done by first examining earlier theories and research regarding the problems with repatriation, and thereafter study research concerning factors influencing the process and leading to an effective repatriation process.

3.2 The problems with repatriation

Solomon (1995) argues that an effective international assignment program consist of a circular process, which begins with (1) the selection of candidates, (2) pursued by cross-culture preparation, (3) global career management, (4) completion of the international business objectives and finally ends with (5) repatriation. However, even though the importance of the repatriation stage is recognized here, it is generally ignored. This is the underlying reason why expatriates perceive repatriation as a problem within many organizations. Accordingly, organizations must view all five of these different phases to have an effective international assignment (Solomon, 1995) (see figure 3.1 below).
Figure 3-1 Illustration of Solomon’s (1995) theoretical suggestion about a circular process

According to Paik et al. (2002), repatriation involves a period of great changes for the expatriate, both professionally and personally. All factors connected with the repatriation influence the expatriates, their families and the home company. Companies need to be aware of these changes and the challenges that they bring (Paik et al., 2002).

Expatriates have to adjust to new cultures and work environments all through the international assignment. Consequently, the expatriates generally tend to change their mental maps and behaviour routines on how to act both personally and professionally during the time abroad. Simultaneously, the home company might also go through adjusts such as corporate changes or shifts in strategies and policies. This implies the fact that when expatriates are returning home, they have changed, the home company has changed, and the people and the home society have changed (Stroh, Gregersen & Black, 2000). Nevertheless, expatriates do not expect returning home to be difficult. On the contrary, many believe that it should not be problematic at all, since they are “only returning home”. The expatriates are thought to return to a known environment and are therefore assumed to pick up the threads of their old life and readjust quickly without any difficulties. According to Harzing and Van Ruysseveldt (1995) it is not only the organization that fails to recognize the potential shock of returning home; the expatriates themselves often also underestimate the difficulties of returning home. The reason for this is because the expatriates do not reflect on the possibility that they themselves have changed, and that the home country and company also might have changed during their time overseas. In addition, many times the expatriate return home to an organization that appears to have forgotten who they are. The company does not know what the expatriate have accomplished during their time abroad and consequently does not know how to use their new knowledge properly (Paik et al., 2002).

Moreover, many expatriates are away from their home company and country for 3-5 years. During this period abroad, they are “out of sight” and are not kept up-to-date with the changes back home (Black, 1991). Black’s study (1991) shows that it is generally more difficult for expatriates to re-adjust to home country and company than adjusting to life abroad. One of the major explanations for this is because most expatriates sent on international assignments have never lived in their host country before. Consequently, they
do not have much personal experience and therefore their expectations are based on stereotypes. This makes their anticipations more open and flexible. In opposition, all expatriates have lived in the country their have re-entered and therefore have personal experiences. These personal experiences create expectations on how things should be on return (Paik et al., 2002). Feldman (1991) therefore argues that more attention should be given to the repatriation phase. This should be done since during the repatriation many expatriates feel anxiety and left behind, creating high repatriation turnover (Feldman, 1991).

3.3 Factors influencing the repatriation adjustment

Arrival and adjustment to home country include several complicated aspects. In general there are three problematic lines that expatriates and their families have to encounter: (1) finding work, (2) communicating with home country co-workers and friends, and (3) the general culture of the home country (Black, Gregersen & Mendenhall, 1992a). To illustrate and further examine these factors affecting repatriation adjustment Black et al. (1992a) created a model called “Basic framework of Repatriation Adjustment” (see figure 3.2 below). The model is divided into two parts; Pre return Adjustment –which include factors that influence repatriation adjustment before expatriates return home and Post return Adjustment –which consist of factors that affect adjustment after they return home.

Figure 3-2 Basic Framework of Repatriation Adjustment (Black, Gregersen & Mendenhall, 1992a, p. 230).

3.3.1 Pre-return Repatriation Adjustment –sources of information about home country

There are important sources of information about change in the home country and company that can influence the repatriation adjustment of expatriates returning home. Just
as expatriates make adjustments before leaving on an international assignment, they also make adjustments before returning home from their time abroad. These adjustments prior to repatriation are mainly psychological in nature. This implies that expatriates, before they have actually returned home, begin to make changes in their mental maps of what work and living will be like in their home country. Since the expatriate and the home country might have changed during the years abroad, it is generally helpful with some changes in their mental maps. There are a variety of possible sources of precise information about home country that can help change expatriates’ and their families’ mental maps of the home country before their return (Black et al., 1992a). These sources will further be examined below.

**Communication**

In multinational and global firms, job- or task required interaction and information exchange is especially relevant since there is generally a high need of coordination between the home company and the foreign operation. This requirement of coordination may cause a reasonable level of relevant information to be passed on to the expatriate (Black et al., 1992a). However, while most information conceded is focused on changes in the home company, little of this information is related to the changes outside of the work in the home country. Consequently, information obtained through job required interaction might smooth the progress of the expatriates’ adjustment to work, but will probably have less impact on general environmental adjustments to the home country (Black et al., 1992b).

**Mentor**

Moreover, an organizational mentor or sponsor is another source of work-related information. According to Black et al. (1992a), a formal or informal mentor can provide the expatriate with information about structural changes, job opportunities, and overall job and organizational-related knowledge. This information might not help the expatriate to adjust to the general culture; however, it might help them to successfully adjust to work and communicating with home company people upon return (Black et al., 1992b).

**Visit to home country**

Another important source of information about the home country and company is regular home visits during the international assignment. By making visits to the home country frequently the expatriate and his/her family have the opportunity to acquire information about work related changes, social changes, and general home country changes (Black et al., 1992a). Nevertheless, visits also allow colleagues and friends to notice changes in the expatriate (Black & Gregersen, 1999).

**Pre-return training/orientation**

Finally, pre-return training and orientation given by the home company is another source of information. Many scholars have proved the effectiveness of training before leaving on international assignments (Black et al., 1992b). According to Black et al. (1992b), the same principals can be applied to the repatriation process. The researchers argue that when expatriates re-enter their home country it might feel quite foreign and therefore pre-return training can be useful.

**3.3.2 Post-return Repatriation Adjustment**

When the expatriate has returned to home country, there are some factors that can ease or hinder their adjustment to work, to interaction, and to the culture in general. Accordingly,
these factors are grouped into (a) Individual-, (b) Job, (c) Organizational and (d) Non-work categories as could be seen in the figure 3.2 above (Black et al., 1992a).

**Individual variables**

Individual factors important and relevant to both an effective cross-cultural adjustment and the repatriation adjustment process are self-oriented factors, which is connected to how strong self-image the expatriate has; relational-oriented factors, which stands for the willingness to communicate with home nationals; perceptual-oriented factors, which describes the ability to understand invisible cultural maps and rules. These three factors are expected to facilitate the cross-cultural adjustments during the international assignment and also to have a positive impact on the repatriation adjustment (Black et al., 1992a). However, expatriates that have successfully adjusted to their host country might face greater challenges in readjusting to their home country on return. Consequently, the more expatriates acquire the rules and maps of the host culture, the more difficult it is to go back to their old maps and rules relevant to the home country. This especially concerns expatriates that have been on assignments for extended periods or completed assignments in cultures very diverse from their home country (Black & Gregersen, 1999).

**Job variables**

Another significant issue in the adjustment process of repatriation is connected to job factors. According to Black et al. (1992a) research, clear job description and high role clarity is relevant in repatriation adjustment to home company. The researchers also found out that generally expatriates take their global assignment with the hope of promotion after a successful international assignment. However, this is not usually equivalent to the reality of repatriation. In fact, international assignments can be seen more like a punishment in terms of an expatriates’ carrier, since many expatriates returning home are demoted to lower-level positions than they had held overseas (O’Sullivan, 2002). This is very surprising since expatriates often gain unique country knowledge and international management skills during their international assignment. Essentially, one of the purposes of international assignments is to gain such knowledge and skills. However, after the expatriates return home these skills are used inconsistently (Feldman, 1991).

**Organizational variables**

Furthermore, the home company’s overall approach to the repatriation process can have an important impact on the adjustment of expatriates that have returned home. Studies show that expatriates feel that their companies have communicated a very vague picture of the repatriation process (Black et al, 1992b; Feldman, 1991; Paik et al., 2002). Black et al. (1992a) argues that additionally to clarifying the repatriation process, firms also need to pay special attention to financial compensation packages when expatriates have returned to home country. Moreover, training and orientation after an international assignment can improve repatriation adjustment.

**Non-working variables**

Finally, non-work factors such as shift in social status and changes in housing conditions have been associated with the repatriation adjustment of expatriates. Many expatriates experience an increase of social status during their international assignment. However, when they return home some expatriates experience that they lose social status since they no longer are “special”. Next to the shift in social status, changes in housing conditions can have a significant influence in the repatriation adjustment for the expatriate and his/her
family (Black et al., 1992a). Before leaving for the overseas assignment some expatriates sell their house/apartment or terminate their rental agreement. Consequently, upon return some expatriates might not have a home to come back to. Not knowing what to return to can in some cases create anxiety, which can have a negative effect on the repatriation process (Feldman, 1991).

Another area that might be seen as a problematic is the integration of the family (spouse and children). If the family fails to adjust back to the new situation, the repatriation can be affected negatively. For example, it is quite usual that the spouse gave up his or her employment to follow the expatriate on the international assignment. Therefore, on return to home country the spouse might have problems finding a new post. Family problems can make the repatriate feel uncomfortable and insecure, which could make the repatriation process function less smoothly. It is therefore important that the organization tries to help both the repatriate and his/her family with unforeseen problems that can occur during the repatriation process (Feldman, 1991).

According to the model suggested by Black et al. (1992a) above presented factors are considered crucial in the influence of the repatriation adjustment. However, the authors of this thesis believe that one additional underlying factor affecting the repatriation process needs to be mentioned – The purpose of international assignments.

3.4 The purpose of international assignments

Later on in this thesis it will be illustrated that the purpose of the international assignments may play a significant role in the adjustment of the repatriation process and its effectiveness. Therefore the authors of this thesis chose to include following research.

From an organisational perspective

The increased globalisation has opened up many doors and business opportunities. However, as the world is becoming more global everyday, companies need to pursue global knowledge and maintain a global perspective in order to remain competitive. One of the most important factors when managing business abroad is to effectively transfer company’s critical competences on an international basis.

According to Baruch et al. (2002), the objectives for international assignments are threefold: The first reason for sending employees overseas is to transfer knowledge. For example, when specific business needs are required since the destination lacks these exclusive skills, employees are sent to these destinations. Career development, is the second reason why employees are sent on international assignments. This gives promising managers the opportunity to go abroad in order to obtain experience in self-sufficiency and management autonomy. The third and final reason for sending employees on overseas assignments is in the purpose of gaining control over operations abroad. This is generally done by senior managers, which are sent to keep the subsidiaries in line with the home organizational directions (Baruch et al., 2002).

However, it is important to mention that the purpose of sending employees on international assignments can differ between organisations and expatriates (Paik et al., 2002).
From the employee perspective

The primary motive for employees accepting an overseas assignment is the expectation of own personal growth and international experience. A common belief, among employees is also that an international assignment will enhance one's future career. Further, drives to accept an overseas assignment is the potential of higher compensation, which is generally given to the employee during the time abroad. Finally, the desire for a cross-cultural adventure can also be seen as a factor for accepting an international assignment (Paik et al., 2002).

Up till this point the theories and research suggested have concerned the factors influencing and creating problems connected to the repatriation process. The following step is to examine what theories and research suggests needs to be done in order to facilitate these problems and enable an effective repatriation.

3.5 Effective repatriation

The challenges that take place on the return of an expatriate are today well documented (Allen & Alvarez, 1998; Black et al., 1992a; Bonache, Brewster & Suutari, 2001; Harvey & Fung, 2000). According to Poe (2000) and Solomon (2001), a list of action items associated with effective repatriation can be derived from these writings. Useful action steps that can be found from these writings are for instance: (1) training managers before they leave, (2) supporting them while they are abroad, and (3) acculturating them upon their return. Despite knowing these central actions, many firms fail to implement them or still have problem with their repatriation processes. Moreover, not all recommended actions are equally effective or advisable on every expatriate and situation. However, some actions are more important than others. Researchers state that firms that manage repatriation processes effectively have often planned beforehand much of what will occur after the managers’ return. Preplanning is also crucial since foreign assignments are characterized by high level of uncertainty and anxiety for expatriates before and during their time abroad and by frustrations upon their return (Jassawalla, et al., 2004). If the planning of the repatriation is not done properly, the outcome could be limited job opportunities for the expatriate. Many times there are no available jobs at the time of the return of the expatriate. Therefore it can be difficult to find a suitable post for the expatriates, even if the company values them. This is often the result of companies having a too short planning horizon, which in addition is a cause of the expatriates being “out of mind”. The organization does not have the expatriate in mind and therefore their return is often not planned until very close to their actual arrival (Allen & Alvarez, 1998).

Jassawalla et al. (2004) have made a model of effective repatriation. The model (figure 3.3 below) identifies action steps taken prior to departure, during the assignment and upon the return, which appear to determine the organizational and individual outcomes.
Prior to departure
* Task clarity
* Career counselling
* Formal policies and guidelines for repatriation

During their stay
* Perception of support while on assignment
* Nature and frequency of communication

After they return
* Quality of interaction with Sponsors
* Perception of support upon return

Outcomes
For the firm: Improved retention, Return on investment in human capital.
For the employee: Lower Uncertainty and anxiety, greater Satisfaction, greater feeling of Belonging.

Figure 3-3 A model of effective repatriation (Jassawalla, Connolly & Slojkowiski, 2004, p. 40).

3.5.1 Prior to departure

Three factors that can improve the outcome of a repatriation process in prior to departure are: task clarity, career counselling and formal policies and guidelines for repatriation. Expatriates who are satisfied with their repatriation process report high levels of clarity about their task assignment. With other word, they are clear about what is expected of them and when their performance will be evaluated (Klaff, 2002). Task clarity seems to be essential because: (1) it increases the expatriates’ focus on task and lessens his/her anxiety while overseas, (2) it creates a sense of accomplishment when the international assignment is competed, and (3) it reduces the expatriates anxiety upon his/her return and therefore eases the transition into the home company. Moreover, since unclear task expectations can lead to negative repatriation experiences, it is important to ensure a high level of task clarity. This can be done by: (a) communicating performance expectations, which include milestones and deadlines, and (b) explaining performance consideration criteria. These actions emerge as the primary steps in an effective repatriation process (Jassawalla et al., 2004).

According to Bonache et al. (2001), there is a clear link between good career counselling and positive repatriation. Receiving a formal career counselling where questions such as (1) how the expatriates’ international assignment fit with the goals of the firm, (2) how the expatriates’ contribution to the foreign assignment makes a difference for the firm, (3) how the skills and the knowledge acquired from the international assignment will be translated into career enhancements on the return and (4) the kind of positions the expatriate will be offered in the home company depending on their performance overseas, are all discussed in beforehand. Quality career counselling seems to be essential for a big picture understanding for the expatriate. As an outcome, expatriates are able to recognize why they were sent on an international assignment and define the benefits for the firm and themselves. Jassawalla et al.’s (2004) study showed that the high level of anxiety associated
with the lack of clarity about the future within the firm, created poor performance overseas and also poor repatriation upon return. Consequently, the researchers argue that an effective repatriation process appears to require high-quality career counselling, which includes explicit clarification of (1) the purpose of sending the employee overseas, (2) the benefits of the overseas assignment to the organization and the employee, and (3) the expatriate’s career options upon return (Jassawalla et al., 2004).

Another factor that appears to be strongly connected with the effectiveness of the repatriation process is the presence and quality of policy guidelines for foreign assignments (Linehan & Scullion, 2002). Consequently, researchers argue that firms need to develop formal policies that govern the pre-visits, visits and post-visits expectations of expatriates. Here “pre-visit” refers to a visit before the definite move, “visit” occurs during the international assignment, while “post-visit” refers to a visit in direct linkage to the repatriation process (Jassawalla et al., 2004).

3.5.2 During their stay

During the overseas assignment expatriates can feel that they have lost connection with the home company and therefore consider themselves as isolated. Problems can arise from these thoughts. Actions taken to reduce the feeling of isolation and enhance the sense of connection appear to contribute to effective repatriation. Two steps that can be taken by organizations during expatriates’ time abroad are: perception of support while on assignment and nature and frequency of communication.

Jassawalla et al.’s (2004) study showed that many expatriates that reported that they had been through an effective repatriation process felt supported by their home company while on their international assignment. However, the presence of support from home company did not enhance satisfaction, but their absence significantly increased dissatisfaction and resentment. For instance, when expatriates are left to fend for themselves in for example finding accommodation etc. the level of resentment appears to be high. The attitude of inadequate support during the stay not only heightens their anxiety and diffuses their focus on tasks, but it is also take to mean as a clear signal of the poor repatriation yet to come. Often in these cases expatriates return dissatisfied. Consequently, it is important that firms manage their expatriates’ perceptions of support by taking actions that suggest their concern for the wellbeing of the expatriate and his/her family (Jassawalla et al., 2004).

Research also suggests that communication between expatriates and the home company is important (Bonache et al., 2001). It is the frequency of the communication, not only with one person in the firm but with the home company as a whole, that is most essential for the expatriate. According to Klaff (2002), frequent visits to home company and country can contribute to the feeling of connectedness among expatriates. Likewise, the maintenance of social networks in the home company is also viewed as highly beneficial (Linehan & Scullion, 2002). It has been indicated that frequent communication reduces the feelings of isolation, but also: (a) improves the motivation and moral of the expatriate, (b) ensures expatriate that he/she is still a part of the organization, and (c) keeps the expatriates updated to any change in the organization, which leads to trust. Consequently, expatriates who have less communication with their home company run a higher risk of feeling isolated and purposelessness. The feeling of being out of touch seems to interfere with expatriates’ motivation, increase resentment and raise anxiety about returning to the home company (Allen & Alvarez., 1998; Jassawalla et al., 2004).
3.5.3 After they return

Employees that have been abroad for a couple of years often return to an organization that has undergone significant changes in structure, information and assessment systems, and formal and informal processes. Some of these changes also give way for new rules and power structures (Forster, 2000). Social issues can be a source of anxiety for expatriates returning home. However, these problems are nothing compared to the issues related to receiving credits for the foreign assignment, utilization of their newly acquired skills, and having a choice of assignment upon their return (Jassawalla et al., 2004). For example, research has showed that approximately 25 per cent of expatriates, in the US, leave their firms within a couple of years. Their underlying reason for doing so is related to the poor use of the new knowledge and skills the expatriates have acquired overseas. On the other hand, expatriates that have stayed despite poor planning and preparations for the international assignment generally have been satisfied with the way home company considered their gained knowledge during the repositioning (Paik et al., 2002). O’Sullivan (2002) agrees that this is one of the key elements to achieve a successful repatriation. The researcher argues that the expatriate must gain access to a position that recognizes the newly required competencies and enables the expatriate to achieve a career that is comparable to colleagues not taking on an international assignment. In addition, Feldman (1991) states that the new position must in one way or another be similar to the foreign assignment in order to gain efficiency.

Two major factors that seems to make a difference when returning is the quality of interaction with supporters and the perception of organizational support. According to Jassawalla et al.'s (2004) study, expatriates that were satisfied with the repatriation process often identified a sponsor as an important contributor to their good experience. A sponsor is defined as:

“a person who has more formal authority […] who has a personal stake in the success of the foreign assignment, and who is vested in the career growth of the returning expatriate” (Jassawalla et al., 2004, p. 43).

Moreover, literature regarding repatriation also stresses the importance of a mentor during an international assignment (Klaff, 2002). However, according to literature mentor and a sponsor is not the same. A mentor is a person who provides the expatriate with information and answers to practical questions, but is not necessary vested personally and emotionally in the success of the returning expatriate and is not responsible for the success of the assignment and the returning expatriate (Linehan & Scullion, 2002). A sponsor serves as a confidante and supporter. They look for opportunities within the firm that expatriates can use upon their return; they keep the expatriate updated of key decision-makers in the home company, and make sure that the returning employee’s skills are used by the firm. Sponsors play a significant role in problem solving during the expatriates time abroad and particularly upon their return. Consequently, by assigning each expatriate a sponsor the repatriation process could become much smoother (Jassawalla et al., 2004).

Employees that take on international assignments often feel highly valuable during their assignments. This creates an effective response. The expatriates tend to enjoy greater autonomy and are in the centre of the attention (Paik et al., 2002). However, when they return they miss the autonomy, attention, lifestyle and monetary benefits that come with the international assignment. Upon return, the expatriate face difficulties adjusting to a new work environment with new players (Feldman, 1991). Thus, the expatriate’s perception of the support they receive upon return appears to be a complex concept. It indicates a mixture of issues related to: (1) receiving credits and recognition for the foreign
assignment, (2) selecting a new assignment in the home company, (3) using their new perspectives in the new position, (4) adjusting to the positive or negative diversities in job related autonomy and responsibilities of the new position compared to the foreign assignment, and (5) utilization of the repatriation programs, if any, assigned to reorient the expatriate to the organization and home country (Jassawalla et al., 2004). Consequently, researchers propose that firms should provide support to expatriates upon their return. This can be done in terms of repositioning them on posts that indicates that the company values them as much as they were valued overseas (Jassawalla et al., 2004).

To sum up, there are many different actions companies can take in the accomplishment of an effective repatriation. An effective repatriation is achieved when the repatriate is satisfied with their repatriations process (Jassawalla et al., 2004). When the repatriate is satisfied it will most likely lead to reduction of issues arising from an unsuccessful repatriation such as “underutilization of key employees”, “loss of key employees” and “inability to recruit employees into overseas positions”. These issues can in many cases lead to indirect and unexpected costs. For companies to become more efficient and avoid these costs it is central that they realize the importance of an effective repatriation (Allen & Alvarez, 1998).

In the next section the theory about transaction cost will be presented. Later on in this thesis it will be clear why the theory is brought up and important to mention.

3.6 Transaction costs

The Transaction cost reasoning is a well known theory developed by the economist Ronald Coase. However, the theory became most widely known through Oliver Williamson's Transaction Cost Economics. The basic idea of the theory could be explained in several ways. For example, most people, when buying or selling a stock must pay a commission to their broker; that commission is a transaction cost of doing the stock deal. Or consider buying a banana from a store; to purchase the banana, your costs will be not only the price of the banana itself, but also the energy and effort it requires to find out which of the various banana products you prefer, where to get them and at what price, the cost of traveling from your house to the store and back, the time waiting in line, and the effort of the paying itself; the costs above and beyond the cost of the banana are the transaction costs.

Today, transaction cost economics is used to explain several different behaviors. Often this involves considering as "transactions" not only the obvious cases of buying and selling, but also day-to-day emotional interactions, informal gift exchanges, etc. According to Williamson (1979), the determinants of transaction costs are frequency, specificity, uncertainty, limited rationality, and opportunistic behavior.

3.7 Concluding section

From the theoretical framework one can see that researchers view international assignments as consisting of a circular process, where the repatriation process is included (Solomon, 1995). Still today many companies fail to acknowledge the repatriation process as a part of the international assignment, and also do not recognize the problems related to it (Paik et al., 2002). Nevertheless, many researchers state that repatriating is a challenge, involving a period of great changes for the expatriate both professionally and personally (Black et al., 1992a, Paik et al., 2002; Jassawalla et al., 2004).

According to Black et al. (1992a), there are several factors affecting repatriation adjustment. These are illustrated in a model consisting of two parts. The first, Pre return Adjustment
—refers to different sources of information affecting how the expatriate develops expectations upon return. The second, Post return Adjustment –examines factors affecting the perception of the repatriation process, such as Individual Variables, Job Variables, Organizational Variables and Nonworking Variables. Additionally, another possible factor influencing the repatriation adjustment could be the purpose for why an employee is being sent abroad.

Furthermore, based on the factors affecting how an expatriate perceive the repatriation process, a model of effective repatriation has also been examined. The model suggests factors such as communication, mentorship and career counseling as important variables in an effective repatriation. These factors are divided into three periods: prior to departure, during the assignment and after they return. Jassawalla et al. (2004) suggest that these actions can affect both organizational and individual outcomes of the repatriation.

These theoretical findings have been used as a base when conducting the case study presented in the next chapter, and will also later set the guidelines for the analysis of the thesis.
4  A case study of the Repatriation process of Volvo CE in Eskilstuna

In this chapter the empirical findings will be presented. First the most important results from the preliminary study are given, followed by the findings of the personal interviews. The empirical findings are structured after the ten most significant factors identified during the working process of this study.

In the following chapter different factors influencing and affecting an expatriate’s perception of the repatriation process will be presented. The empirical findings consist of data gathered from 20 conducted question-and-answer format, as well as 10 personal interviews with expatriates at Volvo CE in Eskilstuna. Also, data gained from one personal interview with Inga-Lena Wernersson – manager at VIAM is used. Furthermore, secondary data such as facts in information folders and web pages have in some cases also been utilized to create an overall picture of International assignments of Volvo CE and Volvo Group.

First a brief summary of the most important information gained from the preliminary study will follow (see Appendix 6 - Preliminary study). Later the results from the 10 interviews will be told.

4.1  Summary of the preliminary study

Among the 20 respondents participating in the preliminary study both positive and negative opinions about the repatriation process at Volvo CE appeared. The experiences told and the opinions expressed are not solely consisting of repatriates with managerial positions. It is instead representatives from different levels and professions in the organization of Volvo Construction Equipment in Eskilstuna. Both sexes are represented from different divisions and working positions within the organization, in this preliminary study. However, the majority of the respondents are men. 70 percent or 14 expatriate, traveled together with their spouse or together with both their spouse and children. From the answers given in the preliminary study it can be analyzed that the repatriates that traveled alone seemed to have a more positive view upon the repatriation process. Out of these fourteen respondents, five agreed with the statement suggesting that they were satisfied with the way home company cared for their family in relation to the repatriation process. On the other hand, not one of the respondents stated to strongly agree with this statement. Instead a slightly larger proportion of the respondents, corresponding six people, strongly disagreed with the statement suggesting that Volvo CE cared for their family in relation to the repatriation process.

The opinions regarding the communication with home company during the time abroad was diverse. Just as there were respondents who had experienced the overall communication as being positive, there were also respondents expressing the direct opposite. However, in the question on whether or not the frequency of the communication had increased during the last six months of their time abroad one side had a clear majority. This is stated since 80 percent of the respondents declared that they did not notice any significance difference in the frequency of the communication.

Moreover, the preliminary study also revealed that just over half of the respondents had a mentor during their international assignment. However, most of these respondents implied that the contact with their mentor was rather unimportant during their time abroad as well as during their repatriation process. In the face of these findings, one fourth of the
participating 20 respondents, that did not have a mentor, claimed that they would have wanted a mentor and also missed one during their international assignment. On the other hand, the same proportion also stated that they neither had a mentor nor missed one during their time abroad.

Furthermore, the majority of the respondents stated that they had found their new positions on their own on return. Approximately five persons instead mentioned that Volvo CE had offered them a new position before their arrival. In addition, four repatriates out of 20, stated to strongly agree with the statement suggesting that Volvo CE took their gained knowledge into account when repositioning them at return. The same proportion of the respondents instead chose the opposite alternative and declared to strongly disagree with this statement - creating two strong opposite sides in the question of whether or not Volvo CE took the expatriates gained knowledge into account when repositioning them. In connection to this question it is interesting to point out that a great proportion of the respondents, twelve out of twenty people, still agreed or strongly agreed to being satisfied with their new position at home company. However, also worth mentioning is that still three out of 20 of the respondents stated to be dissatisfied with the new position at home company. Overall, respondents participating in this preliminary study also expressed the actual return to office as a somewhat positive experience. Just over a half of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement proposing that they felt welcome and appreciated when returning to home company.

As many as 80 percent of the respondents, accordingly 16 people, expressed that they did not know or were uncertain if Volvo CE or VIAM had any kind of evaluation process for employees returning after an international assignment. Only two of the respondents, participating in the preliminary study, stated that they did encounter some kind of evaluation process after returning to home company.

A clear majority of the 20 participating respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement suggesting that the overall impression of the expatriation process was satisfying. At the same time, only six out of twenty participating agreed that the overall impression of the repatriation process was satisfying. Noticeable is that nobody of these respondents stated to strongly agree with this statement. On the other hand, four respondents stated that they in fact strongly disagreed with the statement suggesting that the repatriation process was satisfying. Nevertheless, the majority of the respondents, disregard of what they had stated in the other questions, were satisfied with the overall international assignment. Ultimately, the preliminary study still showed that out of all participating respondents close to 90 percent, interestingly replied that the repatriation process at Volvo CE could be improved.

4.2 Results from the empirical findings

In these following sections the results from the personal interviews will mainly be told. This empirical part is structured after the ten most significant factors identified during the working process of this study. In some cases the empirical findings of secondary data and the preliminary study will also be presented. When empirical findings from different sources are used it can create a risk for confusion. The authors of this thesis therefore found it important to divide the empirical findings from each other. Consequently, when referring to the material gained through the preliminary study it will be clearly mentioned. Also, when referring to an expatriate from the preliminary study the word “respondent” has been used. Instead, when referring to empirical findings gained from personal interviews the word “interviewee” is used.
In the next section the underlying reasons for why the respondents in this thesis were sent abroad will be clarified. Also the employees’ motives for accepting international assignments will be presented.

4.2.1 The purpose of international assignments

From the Volvo Group’s perspective

During a personal interview with Inga-Lena Wernersson at Volvo International Assignment Management (VIAM), it was mentioned that the purpose of contracting international assignments primarily was threefold. Firstly expatriates can be sent out to exchange their knowledge and skills. Secondly, some expatriates are also sent overseas in the direct aim of shortening the distance between foreign markets and home company. The final reason for contracting employees on international assignment could be to share and spread the “Volvo spirit” to local companies within the Volvo Group. Moreover, Wernersson mentioned that sending employees abroad, in the purpose of carrier development is not seen as one of the primarily reasons. However, she was aware that expatriates do generally develop new skills and gain new knowledge during their international assignment (I. Wernersson, personal communication, 2006-03-15).

The preliminary study confirmed that the purposes mentioned by Wernersson were the underlying reasons for the international assignments. When examining why the respondents were sent, the most common motive was to exchange their knowledge and skills to other countries. Some were also contracted abroad in the aim of shortening the distance between the countries. Only a few of the respondents were sent with the main purpose of spreading the “Volvo spirit”.

From the perspective of employee

From the preliminary study it can be seen that most of the employees accepting an international assignment did it in the purpose of growing professionally and/or personally. The respondents also mention that the overseas assignment was viewed as a chance to experience something new, such as working in a new country and culture, or gaining a new insight in the organization. This is also one of the underlying reasons for why the assignment seemed appealing for some of the respondents. Below follows a few statements on how some of our respondents expressed their primarily motivation for accepting an international assignment.

“The opportunity to widen my horizon at Volvo.”

“Long desired dream plus new career challenge in addition to have a personal possibility to experience a different culture and climate.”

“I felt that I could really make a difference and be a good help and make a good input for the company. I like to work in different countries and with different cultures.”

4.2.2 Clear Repatriation and Responsibility areas

From the perspective of the Volvo Group

The parties engaged in the process of an international assignment are the expatriates and their families, the Human Resource department (HR) / Line management and Volvo International Assignment Management (VIAM), which is a central department, administering all international assignments at Volvo Group within Sweden. According to
an information folder internally distributed by Volvo CE, the roles and responsibilities of
HR/Line management and VIAM are described as below.

“Human resource department and Line management are responsible for co-operating with the
assignee/expatriate on career of planning before, during and after the International Assignment. HR and
Line management are also responsible for general HR issues and for many practicalities of an international
assignment.” (Information folder, Volvo Group, 2006-03-10).

“VIAM acts on the behalf of the Volvo Group and is responsible for conducting and tracking the process
of international assignments, as well as acting as a policy owners for International Assignment Policies and
Procedures.” (Information folder, Volvo Group, 2006-03-10).

According to the same information folder concerning International assignment, the process
of an International Assignment is described with support from the picture below (see
figure 4.1). The process of an International assignment consists of three major parts. These
are: (1) Departure, (2) Assignment, and (3) Repatriation.

Figure 4-1 Volvo’s process of an International Assignment (Information folder, Volvo Group, 2006-
03-10).

The process of an International Assignment within Volvo Group is further divided into
six specific stages: Job offer, Pre-visit, Departure, Arrival, Assignment and the Repatriation
or sometimes “moving on” to another international assignment. During these stages,
involved parties are actively working with separated issues parallel with each other. The
information folder, present different activities and responsibilities related to the specific
repatriation process, as follows;

Expatriates responsibility is to:

“Prepare for return to home country or move to new assignment; Prepare all necessary administrative and
tax formalities for departure; Contact mentor.”

VIAM’s responsibility is to:

“Inform expatriate about moving process; Initiate move with Volvo Logistics; Arrange tax-counseling
session for expatriate.”

HRM and line managers’ responsibility is to:
"Support arrangements for repatriation or next move; Discuss assignment outcome and career planning issues well in advance of assignment conclusion."

During the personal interview Wernersson stated that VIAM usually contact current HRM department in order to initiate a moving process for the expatriate. Also, this contact is aimed to trigger a more intensified communication between the expatriate and the HRM department of the home company (I. Wernersson, personal communication, 2006-03-15).

From the perspective of expatriate

Results from personal interviews indicate that a majority of expatriates in the beginning perceived the administration of international assignment as professional. A great proportion of interviewees also indicate that this positive impression gradually changed as time went by, in many cases as a result of poor communication.

"You received a lot of help and everything was managed really professionally during the time of expatriation but when you moved out and during the period of repatriation there was almost nothing."

Information regarding the repatriation process given to the expatriates was perceived as low among many interviewees. In fact, many interviewees believed that Volvo CE did not have a current repatriation process. The ones implying that a repatriation process existed still felt that the process could be improved. Following expression clearly illustrates this:

"Because there is no repatriation process at all at Volvo CE today, any kind of process will be an improvement."

A small share of the expatriates interviewed still stated that the HRM department in Eskilstuna took their full responsibility in relation to the time during the international assignment and the repatriation. Furthermore, results from personal interviews prove that the responsibility areas in relation to the repatriation process are perceived indistinctly.

"[…] responsibility -I do not really know what their intentions are, how they thought this should be coped with, but I believe that someone should at least feel that they are in charge!"

The responsibility problems can also effectively be illustrated by this following quotation:

"Due to the enormous size of Volvo, it is very easy to hide and not take 100 percent full responsibility"

Furthermore, almost all interviewees stated that they themselves had a large responsibility in relation to the repatriation process. Additionally, many interviewees state that they missed some kind of specified restrictions on what the individual responsibility concerned. One of the respondents stated this really clear by saying:

"As long as I know what my responsibilities are and if they are clearly stated in beforehand it is alright with me. I can do everything on my own, just as long as I know about it."

Moreover, the role of HRM department, during the repatriation process, was sometimes stated to be unclear. As a result of this some of the interviewees stressed that information regarding the obligations of HRM department in Eskilstuna was needed. Further some expatriates suggested that these obligations preferably should be established within the VIAM department.

"VIAM should or need to establish a repatriation process which gives clear guidance to home company on how and when to do what […] common within Volvo."
Even though Volvo Group has clear guidelines on the different roles of the parties involved, the statements above imply the contrary.

Furthermore, the preliminary study clearly showed that the majority of the respondents believed that an improvement in the repatriation process could be done within Volvo CE. The respondents had met similar but also different problems during their repatriation process. Consequently, several improvement areas were mentioned and discussed during the personal interviews.

One of the problems areas that was commonly mentioned and emphasized among respondents was communication issue. In the following section this will be more closely examined.

### 4.2.3 Communication and Support

From the preliminary study it can be seen that respondents have experienced the communication between home company and themselves very differently. Some respondents have stated that they had good communication with home company, while others disagreed and instead felt that they did not have a good communication at all with home company. Moreover, several respondents have expressed that the communication was neither good nor bad. Through the personal interviews it was later shown that the expatriates that had experienced communication as being good, had generally positions abroad where they had direct linkage with the home company. Because of these positions the expatriates where kept up to date on what was happening at home company and therefore perceived the communication as positive and more frequent. Consequently, the personal interviews confirmed that these expatriates also had fewer difficulties in adjusting to work at home company after return. However, the interviewees that did not have positions abroad where they had frequent conversations with home company, as a result of their position, generally experienced the communication as less good. In fact some of these interviewees expressed that they did not have any communication at all with home company. Therefore some of them also perceived themselves as being more or less “forgotten” during the time abroad. One expatriate expressed it very clearly when he said:

“[…] definitely, I felt out of sight sometimes.”

The lack of support and communication was stated as a factor creating dissatisfaction among a number of expatriates from the personal interviews. Those expatriates that were dissatisfied also argued that more communication with their HRM department was needed. On the other hand, a frequent communication was not required during the time abroad. However, after departure to host country and before arrival to home country most interviewees agreed that more communication and support would have been appreciated. Further, these interviewees stated to believe that this communication could have made a big difference on how they experienced the repatriation process.

“A mail or a phone call would have been enough, just to indicate that they cared.”

In addition, some interviewees mentioned that before the departure, VIAM department and the HRM department in Eskilstuna had given them the impression that they would keep in touch and have frequent communication with them; however, as soon as they had left everything changed. Two interviewees illustrate this by saying:

“Everything sounded alright when we were in Sweden, but as soon as we came to country X everything went very quiet.”
“I had very good contact with the HR department in my host company concerning the job in country X but hardly any contact with HR people in Sweden. Everything was very important for HR before we left but as soon as I left Sweden everybody forgot us.”

According to Wernersson at VIAM, there should be an increase in the communication with home company, specifically with the HRM personnel, six months before the repatriation of the expatriates. This should be done in order to prepare the expatriate for his/her arrival. There are also several practical issues, such as the moving process, that need to be planned in before hand; therefore it is said that communication with expatriates should become more frequent upon their return (I. Wernersson, personal communication, 2006-03-15).

However, from the preliminary study, it is shown that a strong majority of the respondents did not experience any significant difference in the frequency of communication with home company during the last six months of their stay. Some respondents hardly had any contact at all with the home company on return. As an example of this, one respondent wrote:

“I was not even contacted when I got close to the time to move back to Sweden. I had to deal with everything concerning moving my furniture and belongings myself.”

Another interviewee later stated that if expatriates wanted to have any kind of contact with home company during the time abroad, they had to take the initiative themselves;

“I called and said to HR - is there anyone who knows that I am going to be moving home within a week. “

Lack of communication has very often led to disappointment, irritation and a down fall in loyalty toward home company, among the respondents; resulting in a somewhat negative expectation of returning home. On the other hand, the ones that experienced a good communication with home company had a more positive perception of the repatriation process.

Furthermore, the role of HRM department was many times discussed during the interviews as well as the preliminary study. Some interviewees stated that they tried to establish communication and get help from HRM department, but many times were directed to information on the webpage instead. Many interviewees further stated that more direct support would be of significant matter in order to improve the current repatriation process. Primary this was highlighted in relation to issues such as moving procedures, the occurrence of unexpected problems and other practical issues.

Also, a few interviewees stated that they experienced communication between home company HRM department and the host company as helpful and valuable. This communication was perceived as needed to achieve a smooth and a more thought trough repositioning process. As a result of good communication between the different parties, the interviewees felt a sense of control and therefore expressed that they were more comfortable with the entire repositioning situation.

Furthermore, most respondents from the personal interviews felt that the communication with family and friends was kept better compared with home company. Even though inevitably, because of the geographical- and time distance, it decreased as time passed by. Keeping in contact with family and friends was described as one way efficient way to keep updated during the time abroad. Another efficient way to keep an expatriate updated could be the use of a mentor as a source of information. In the following section the mentorship will further be discussed.
4.2.4 Mentorship

To improve the lack of communication, some respondents suggested a solution with support from a better mentorship. Following quotation frames this wish very well.

“A real mentor could make a difference.”

The preliminary study shows that just over half of the respondents did have a mentor during their international assignment. Nevertheless, nobody from the preliminary study described the mentor as being of significant matter during the time abroad. However, three respondents from the preliminary study expressed that the mentor was significant or very significant in the process of repatriation. Despite that a majority of the expatriates having a mentor described this relationship as unsuccessful, the expatriates who did not have a mentor seemed to miss it. During the personal interviews these expatriates that did not have a mentor and also missed one, explained that they believed that having a mentor could have made a significant difference in some occasions. One occasion that was brought up was the repositioning period. In addition, a few of the interviewees that had experienced the mentor as significant, among other things, felt that the mentor had been of great support concerning the repositioning process.

However, a clear majority of the interviewees having a mentor described the communication between their mentors and themselves as unsuccessful. Further, the communication between expatriates and the mentors was generally said to be on the initiative of the expatriate.

“I had very little communication with him actually. I believe I was the one who took the initiative. I do not think that I would have expected more communication. In my case, the mentor was more or less a formality.”

“A mentor that really cares would have been good. In my case I had to call my mentor to ask. I never got any suggestions or questions of what I wanted to do when I got back.”

A few of the interviewees also mentioned that the HRM department should follow up the mentors work to make sure that it is efficient or not. Or else it is almost useless since it only a formality.

The personal interviews also showed that there was a great difference in the amount of information received about mentors and their functions. Also, the information regarding the supposed aim of having a mentor was perceived as weak. Following are two quotations regarding this issue:

“I need information regarding the role of a mentor. Also I think that mentors need to get information from HR on what to do and also how to do it.”

“He did not receive any information regarding what to do as a mentor […] I don’t think he got any more information than the paper be signed, but as soon as he signed it, he also seemed to forget about it.”

Generally, a line manager from the home company was represented as the mentor. This choice was in many of the cases done as a result of an underlying thought of career interests.

Furthermore, the empirical findings from the personal interviews showed that some expatriates perceived it difficult to maintain relationship with mentors due to the high frequency of change in positions and organizational structure. This was seen as a result of the extensive length of an international assignment.
Regardless of how the expatriates at Volvo CE had experienced the mentorship, the company has clear guidelines on the role and responsibilities a mentor should have. A mentor has duties such as, staying in contact with the expatriate during his/her international assignment, keeping them updated about changes within the home company and helping the expatriate with his/her repositioning. These obligations have been specified in the guidelines provided by VIAM (Information folder, Volvo Group, 2003-03-10).

It has been shown that career issues are areas that the mentor should help and support the expatriate in. The following section career issues will be discussed.

### 4.2.5 Career issues

From the preliminary study it can be seen that the majority of respondents have found their repositioning post on their own. However, a few respondents have instead been suggested positions on their return. The results indicate that these generally were expatriates with managerial or high positions. Nevertheless, the Volvo Group has a policy that guarantees returning expatriates a position equal to the previous position at home company. Many of the respondents, from the personal interviews, expressed that this policy was not enough in decreasing the anxiety of finding a position when coming home. Moreover, a majority of the interviewed respondents felt that they had developed international contacts and also gained new knowledge and skills during their overseas assignment. Consequently, they generally wanted new positions at a higher level than the ones guaranteed by Volvo CE. One interviewee explained this issue by saying:

"Since that would be like taking 10 steps back, I choose to get another employment myself."

Another respondent expressed it as following when she wrote:

"I don't think it's a good idea to go back to the old job. You have changed during your time as an expatriate and you want to have some use of that. If you go back, it's like it never happened and that is a shame. It's an important time of your personal life and the company have spent a lot of money on you that will be useless if they don't take advantage of all the new things you have learned during your stay abroad."

Furthermore, several interviewees stated that they were disappointed and dissatisfied with the repositioning process. Firstly, they had little help finding new positions on return. In many cases they had to go through a regular job search process, if they wanted a position higher or different than one equal to the position before the departure. This is how one interviewee perceived it:

"Upon return nothing happened. I felt forgotten and not prioritized at all. I had to do everything on my own. I was very lucky that there was a job opening for me."

The second reason for dissatisfaction among interviewees was because of the feeling that the company did not acknowledge their new skills or take their gained knowledge into account when repositioning them. This created a great deal of irritation and frustration for a couple of these interviewees. One of them described his experience about the repositioning as below:

"[...]upon return I had the poor experience of learning that no one had any interest in capturing or promoting the gained experience abroad."

Moreover, some interviewees mentioned that they were disappointed with the communication with the HR personnel, regarding the repositioning. Some interviewees
also meant that they had problems establishing contact with them during the time abroad as well as during the period close to arrival. These expatriates felt that the HR personnel did not acknowledge their repositioning neither as problematic nor as their responsibility to help them. However, stories told during personal interviews reveal that some of the expatriates have had large difficulties in finding a new position. A few had such big problems with the process, ending with the result of a repositioning only a couple of days before arrival. In many cases the “not knowing” created anxiety, disappointment and frustration upon return.

“Not until people were standing here, or a couple of weeks earlier, has one acknowledged and realized that; -oops, he is going to be back soon!”

The ones that were happy with their repositions had generally been offered a new position by the HRM department in Eskilstuna months before arrival or used their own networks when trying to find new positions. The respondents that used their own networks were perceived as very proactive and took the entire responsibility on their own shoulders.

Furthermore, one expatriate also stressed out the importance of making a post-visit to home company a couple of months before arrival. This interviewee meant that by visiting the home company one could investigate different repositioning possibilities and make managers aware of ones return. This interviewee had on his own initiative arranged a visit to Volvo CE in Eskilstuna in connection to his repositioning process. An action taken that facilitated his repositioning process significantly, and which most likely also had a positive impact on his experiences connected to the adjustment and repatriation. A few interviewees also expressed that visits to home country could facilitate the repatriation process since they naturally became more up to date both within the organizational changes as well as the environmental changes. Volvo CE’s expatriates are guaranteed one visit to home country each year (I. Wernersson, personal communication, 2006-03-15). This is a general policy within the Volvo Group that has seemed to be very appreciated among the interviewees.

Even though some interviewees were positive about their repositioning process, not all found it to be an easy task. This is how one interviewee expressed it:

“The company needs to have a better contact with the expatriates when they are on their way back home. It is very hard to be active finding a job when you still are abroad and when it is a new position no one thinks about you if you are not there, so someone else need to take responsibility.”

The majority of interviewees feel that they have grown personally and gained a great amount of new knowledge and skills. Despite this, only a few of them explicitly stated that they at their current position make use of these knowledge, contacts and skills.

Furthermore, many interviewees mentioned that the HRM department of Volvo CE had to become more active during the process of reposition. This was primarily considered as important to ensure that new knowledge was utilized and taken into consideration. These two following quotations emphasize this very well.

“Volvo should be more active to see if the person who comes back can be repositioned to a position that will benefit Volvo, if the person should be interested. If the person is not active and uses his/hers contacts in Sweden, it will not benefit Volvo or the person.”

“It had felt better if the company had been more interested in the knowledge I had gained when repositioning me.”
Also a few interviewees also stressed that the reposition preferably should be solved early. This was suggested in order to increase the chance of finding an appropriate position and also to decrease the amount of anxiety during the repatriation process. One interviewee also suggested a personal development career plan as a possible tool:

“A personal development plan for the repatriation could be one idea. It is understandable that it is difficult to have a position available at the time of repatriation but just knowing that there is a plan to find a suitable position would be very nice.”

In addition, some interviewees expressed that an overall long-term plan was preferred to reduce the risk of sudden and unexpected problems such as housing issues, affecting the repatriation process. A more long-term plan could in particular facilitate the repositioning process according to some interviewees:

“There should be a more long term plan, not like sending employees and then hoping that they do not return. That is in fact close to how it feels, which is very awkward.”

In connection to repositioning problems, organizational change issues can be bought up. Following section covers the empirical findings concerning this issue.

### 4.2.6 Organizational change issues

“"The company I left wasn't the same as the one I returned to.""

From the preliminary study it can be seen that the majority of respondents returned to a new position or department after arrival to home country. Consequently, there has been a changeover regarding organizational variables for many respondents. A few interviewees did not experience this as an issue at all, while others had greater difficulties handling these transformations. The changeovers that generally created some problems were connected to organizational- and structural changes.

“The department did change during the period we were away. This affected me since I now had three bosses.”

Moreover, new work procedures and computer systems were also mentioned as factors creating a changeover. This is how one respondent expressed it:

“[…] it took a while before I found my place and present position”

Some interviewees expressed that the first period back at home company was a bit tough since everyone expected one to know all the changes and new ways of working.

“When I came back, one of the major problem was that everyone expected me to know everything. He already knows everything he is just turning back they thought.”

In some cases this also created a slight sense of stress and anxiety.

A few interviewees also perceived a change in the overall way of working in Sweden compared to the other country.

“In general it was less pulse in daily work than I recalled.”

These changes were not acknowledged as problems but still had an affect on the interviewees. Instead the interviewees saw this as an outcome of the personal and professional transformations that they had been through because of the overseas
experience. This could also be connected to the following section—the reverse cultural shock.

4.2.7 Reverse cultural shock issues

After being away for a couple of years, most interviewees agreed that they had gone through some kind of personal change. As an example, one of the interviewees expressed that he appreciated and valued different things from what he used to do, before leaving on an international contract.

“Living in another country, surrounded by a new culture affects the individual on different levels.”

Most of the interviewees felt some kind of reversed cultural shock after returning to home country. However, they did not have any problems in relation to this. Nevertheless, a few interviewees had greater problems with the process of acclimatization to home country. These interviewees generally had been away for a longer period and to countries very different from home. This is how one interviewee, just recently returned, stated it:

“After totally 13 years abroad it is a totally new way of living at home. It is a different society and I am not yet used to it. I feel like an alien in my own country.”

The interviewees being away in countries with very different cultures or societies than home, generally also had experienced a harder time after return. They had also noticed a change in their values and way of living. A few interviewees mentioned that they were shocked by the way they felt after arrival to home country. This is how one respondent puts it:

"Reverse cultural shock—I did know I was going to have one, but not so heavy."

Opposite to the reverse cultural shock issues, several interviewees and respondents experienced practical problems connected to the Swedish social system. These practical variables will further be examined in the section below.

4.2.8 Practical issues

What some respondents did not know on return, but experienced, was that after a person have been away from Sweden for some year he/she automatically is deregistered from different records. The outcome of this was for example practical problems such as inability to buy on credit because of the absence of registered income in Sweden and problems with registration and finding a new doctor or health centre. These issues often came as a surprise to many of the interviewed and created disorder and irritation during the first period after arrival. Two interviewees expressed it as following:

“It was hard to get in touch with a doctor and know what you have to do to be part of the social community.”

“Get a loan in the bank, to sign for a contract at Telia, cable TV, broadband, to rent an apartment or to buy or sign any kind of a contract etc, all these things cannot be done until you have been one year in Sweden as all companies take credit information about you.”

These practical have in some cases brought consequences as mentioned above. Therefore some of the interviewees also stressed out the importance of support from HRM department within these areas.

“You didn’t get any help when you moved back home, you were supposed to know everything.”
Nevertheless, the financial housing support given by Volvo CE provided many expatriates the possibility to keep their old home during the time abroad. This was during personal interviews considered as being one of the most significant aspects facilitating the process of repatriation.

On the other hand, there were still a few expatriates stating that they indeed had problems with the housing conditions. This is how one respondent from the preliminary study put it:

“We could not find a house moving back to Sweden for instance and had to move twice due to that. All of this was paid out of my own pocket”

From the preliminary study it could be seen that these respondents often were the ones that were most frustrated and dissatisfied with the repatriation process. Another issue sometimes creating frustration was the moving procedure from host country. The results show that interviewees perceived this procedure very differently. However, the ones that had experienced problems related with the moving generally were also dissatisfied with the repatriation process.

“I was not even contacted when I get close to the time to move back to Sweden. I had to deal with everything concerning moving my furniture and belongings myself. Also the HR people in Sweden were not consistent from family to family on what we were able to bring home. I had to pay for some of the moving charges myself. I know that other families brought home much more then I did.”

Some expatriates suggested that HRM department should provide a checklist, highlighting some of these possible problems that can occur in connection to the repatriation process.

“Maybe some kind of checklist, what problems you can face and how they can be resolved upon return.”

In addition, also a few interviewees mentioned that they would have appreciated a locally adapted checklist, which consequently meets the national laws and regulations of the current host country. This checklist was generally needed upon return and move from the host country to home country. The checklist should include issues such as moving issues, car issues, taxes, etc.

Another factor linked with practical issues is family matters. Going on an international assignment together with ones family has often been experienced as more challenging than going alone. These problems will be discussed below.

### 4.2.9 Family issues

The results of the preliminary study showed that a majority of expatriates left home country together with their families. All interviewees agreed that moving abroad with the family did result in a great challenge. Despite this, the experience of bringing the family to a new country was primarily described as something positive. On the other hand, some problems were mentioned in relation to the process of returning to home country. Especially the procedure with finding a new work for the spouse was described as a problem of significant size and matter.

“I think it should be clearly stated, for those going abroad, that this will not only affect your situation, but also have large impact on your spouses working situation and the circumstances of your children. As an expatriate, it is pretty difficult to realize what this is all about, when you are leaving and coming back to Sweden feels so far away at the time you are leaving.”
From the personal interviewees as well as the preliminary study it could be seen that the adoption and acclimatization of the expatriates was not experienced as a major problem when coming home. Despite this, some interviewees mentioned problems related to their children entering the Swedish education system. This in many cases caused an emotional involvement which lead to an indirect affect on the readjustment of the expatriate. This is how one respondent expressed it:

“The biggest adaptation was for the children 9 and 12 years that had never been in a Swedish school before.”

Some interviewees further stated that the adaptation of the family was considered as being a greater problem than their own experienced adaptation.

“You have cut off pieces from your previous life during your time abroad. We were abroad for about four years. It happens a lot during such long period. Of course this also affected my family [...]”

In addition, those interviewees returning to home country together with a spouse, which they met and married during the time abroad, experienced a higher number of practical issues concerning family matters. One of these respondents in the preliminary study illustrated these problems by writing:

“To come back to Sweden with the family is not easy as the rules and organizational changes in the Swedish system. I started with my wife who has never lived in Sweden and we came back with two kids born in country X. Registration at tax department and to get resident permit was complicated. This is something that someone from Volvo can help you with before coming back as you can prepare most of it in advance.”

Furthermore, only a few interviewees did explicitly confirm that the return to Sweden resulted in a lack of social status. Some agreed that the return has often led to an economical changeover. However, the interviewees all agreed that they generally were aware of the social change upon return.

Moreover, before leaving on an international assignment many interviewees stated that their family also had to undergo a process at Volvo CE. In many cases this process was perceived as something strongly positive and contained anything from medical examination, cultural and language training to personal interviews with members of the family. As a result of this, many expatriates also stated that they had expected some kind of repatriation process where the family should have participated. An interviewee describes this very well by saying:

“Before we left, the entire family participated, it was very good, we received a positive opinion about the process, but when returning home nobody seemed to care.”

Another expatriate in relation to this said:

“Considering the process that my family went through before leaving - yes, I think it is a reasonable requirement to receive some kind of contact when returning home.”

Moreover, the empirical findings collected from the personal interviews also show that some expatriates saw this problem in connection to the responsibility of VIAM department.

“During the entire period, there was nobody asking me how it was going for the family. Not one single time!”
“No one from VIAM has so far contacted me or my family to get the experience from our time abroad. Experience that can be shared with employees about to take up a foreign assignment.”

As can be seen from the quotation above, some of the interviewees mentioned that some kind of evaluation where families were interviewed after arrival was missed. In the next section factors concerning evaluations will be discussed.

4.2.10 Evaluation issues

During the personal interview done with Wernersson it was found that Volvo Group aimed to send a brief evaluation survey consisting of short overall questions. Results from the preliminary study however displayed that only two out of twenty respondents participated in some kind of evaluation process after returning to home company. This evaluation was provided by VIAM and just as Wernersson mentioned, consisted of a brief survey covering the overall impression of the experience as a whole. Interestingly, from the preliminary study it was shown that the majorities of the respondents were not sure or did not know if Volvo Group or Volvo CE had any kind of evaluation process after returning home. However, later a majority of the interviewees expressed that they did expect some kind of evaluation after their completed international assignment. Also many interviewees were skeptic against the non-existent of the evaluation process. Mainly, since they believed that this could be one of the most efficient ways to improve both their own future work and the international assignment procedure as a whole for other expatriates to come. A majority of interviewees also stated that they missed an occasion where they would have the possibility to share both positive and negative experiences.

“There are many things to battle with […] I wished for a possibility to give some feedback and also a moment to set to zero.”

A few interviewees did also mention that the evaluation would have been of importance for their spouse and family.

“No evaluation. It was a lot of talk about that, but it never happened. I know that my wife have mentioned it a lot of times, maybe cause she felt that she wanted to share her feelings. “

In addition, some interviewees state that they, beside an evaluation covering the overall impression of the international assignment, also miss some kind of evaluation directly linked to the professional position. Here work related issues and achievements made during the time abroad could have been evaluated and discussed.

Many expatriates from the interviews suggested that the HRM department of Volvo CE should initiate an evaluation process. These interviewees also highlighted that the evaluation did not necessarily needed to be grand and extended. The general conclusion was that a small and informal meeting would fill the purpose of a fine evaluation.

“Something small and less magnificent, here in Eskilstuna […] an occasion where you can meet employees and carry out some kind of debriefing.”

To sum up, different factors influencing and affecting the experienced international assignment and repatriation process of the expatriates in this thesis has been mentioned and discussed above. In the following section analysis of this empirical material as well as theoretical framework will be presented.
5 Analysis

In this chapter theories from the Theoretical framework will be discussed and analyzed against the empirical findings of this study. First factors affecting the repatriation process is examined. Later the actions contributing to an effective repatriation process are explored and considered.

5.1 Factors affecting the repatriation process

Black et al. (1992a) argue that arrival and adjustment to home country include several complicated aspects. These are framed in three problematic lines, (1) finding work, (2) communicating with home country co-workers and friends, and (3) adjusting to the general culture of the home country. To illustrate and further examine these factors affecting repatriation adjustment Black et al. (1992a) divided them into two periods; Pre return Adjustment and Post return Adjustment (see figure 3.2). The empirical findings of this thesis verify that the three general problematic lines could be found. The case study of Volvo CE also confirms the fact that different factors, taking place before and after return, affects the expatriates’ perception of a repatriation process. Where these problematic lines could be found in the empirical findings of this thesis will be illustrated and analysed in the following sections.

Pre-return Adjustment

The model suggested by Black et al. (1992a) (see figure 3.2) implies that expatriates experiences of being on an international assignment result in changes of their mental maps. These changes could be identified among the respondents interviewed in this thesis. As an example, several interviewees expressed that they had changed in one way or another during their time abroad. Consequently, a change in their mental map had taken place.

Moreover, Black et al. (1992a) also suggest that different aspects and sources of information, such as information regarding home company, task required communication, visit to home company, pre-return training and Sponsor/Mentorship, could affect the expectations of the expatriate coming home. In connection to the pre-return period, the empirical findings of this thesis also suggested that different sources of information and communication can affected the expectations of the expatriate. In other words, “Black’s” different aspects of information have influenced the expectations of expatriates returning home. This could be seen since many of the expatriates that experienced communication as more frequent also generally had more positive expectations upon return. On the other hand, the expatriates that experienced a lack of communication, in general, perceived the repatriation process and the expectations linked to it, as more negative. In addition, the expatriates that had positions abroad in direct linkage with home company also perceived the communication as better. This was because they were kept up to date on what was happening at home company. However, expatriates that did not have positions abroad where they had regular communication with home company generally experienced the communication as less good. These respondents felt that they did not have any communication at all with home company and therefore perceived themselves as “forgotten”. According to Black et al.’s theory (1992a), an expatriate that has had a position abroad in direct linkage with home company will probably be informed and kept up to date. Consequently, information obtained through job-required interaction might smooth the progress of the expatriates’ adjustment to work back home (Black et al., 1992b). This was also partly shown among the expatriates that had a job abroad in direct linkage with
the home company, since many of these respondents experienced fewer difficulties in adjusting to work at home company after returning.

Moreover, Black et al. (1992a) state that a mentor or sponsor is another source of work-related information affecting the expatriates’ expectations upon return. According to the researchers, a formal or informal mentor can provide the expatriate with information about structural changes, job opportunities, and overall job and organizational-related knowledge (Black et al., 1992b). The empirical findings of this thesis showed that the use of a mentor as a source of work related information was low. This is stated since some of the respondents having a mentor described the relationship with the mentor as unsuccessful. Nevertheless, a few expatriates still expressed that their mentors played a significant role in the process of spreading information and adjusting to work.

Black et al. (1992a) argues that another important source of information about the home country and company is regular home visits during the international assignment. By making visits to the home country frequently the expatriate and his/her family have the opportunity to acquire information about work related changes, social changes, and general home country changes (Black & Gregersen, 1999). A few of the expatriates in this study also confirmed that visits to home country could facilitate the repatriation process. This was considered important since they became more up to date both within the organisational changes as well as the environmental changes of their home country. Consequently, visits to home can affect the expectations an expatriate has before returning, since it will make him/her more up to date.

Finally, the last source of information during the pre-return period is according to Black et al. (1992a), the pre-return training and orientation. The researchers argue that when expatriates re-enter their home country it might feel quite different from their expectations and therefore pre-return training can be useful. Volvo CE does not have any pre-return training or orientation for their expatriates upon return. Having this said, the authors of this thesis cannot confirm if this is an important source of information. However, a few respondents, particularly those being abroad for a longer period, expressed that pre-return training would have been appreciated.

To sum up, the authors of this thesis believe that Black’s different sources of information do affect the expectations that the expatriate has upon return. All variables mentioned are not equally important. Thus, together they play a significant role in what expectations the expatriate has when returning home. If the expatriate has experienced frequent communication, due to usage of different sources of information, he/she would most likely receive a more up to date picture. In return, through communication, the problems of (1) finding work, (2) communicating with co-workers and friends, and (3) adjusting to the home country culture, can be reduced. As a conclusion, sources of information can lead to an updated picture of home company and country, which can result in a smoother adjustment upon arrival. To continue, a smoother adjustment can most likely also play a role in the expatriates’ perception of the repatriation process.

**Post-return Adjustment**

According to Black et al. (1992a) the Post-return Adjustment is dependent upon four different factors; Individual variables, Job Variables, Organisational Variables and Non-work Variables. These four variables can either ease or hinder the adjustment to work, interaction and to the culture in general. In fact, all these four different variables were also
found to affect the Repatriation adjustment of the expatriates within the empirical findings of this thesis. The authors of this thesis will now explain how.

Black et al.’s (1992a) model states that Individual variables important and relevant to both an effective cross-cultural adjustment and the repatriation adjustment process are self-oriented factors, relational-oriented factors, and perceptual-oriented factors. These three factors are expected to facilitate the cross-cultural adjustments during the international assignment and also to have a positive impact on the repatriation adjustment. Since the majority of expatriates interviewed did not experience problems related to the cross-cultural adjustment, the authors of this thesis suggests that one possible explanation for this might be that the interviewees had personalities fulfilling these three factors. According to research, the more expatriates acquire the rules and maps of the host culture, the more difficult it is to go back to their old maps and rules relevant to the home country. This especially concerns expatriates that have been on assignments for extended periods or completed assignments in cultures very diverse from their home country (Black & Gregersen, 1999). This can be confirmed by the fact that the few interviewees who actually had greater problems with the process of acclimatization to home country, generally had been away for a longer period and to countries very different from home.

Another significant issue in the adjustment process of repatriation is connected to Job variables. According to Black et al.’s (1992a) research, clear job description and high role clarity is relevant in repatriation adjustment to home company. The researchers also found that generally expatriates took their global assignment with the hope of promotion after a successful international assignment. However, this is not usually equivalent to the reality of repatriation (Black et al., 1992b). This has also been confirmed by the empirical findings in this thesis. A majority of the interviewed respondents felt that they had developed new skills, international contacts and gained new knowledge during their overseas assignment. Consequently, they generally wanted new positions at a higher level than the ones guaranteed by Volvo CE. Also researchers imply that international assignments, in some cases, can be seen like a punishment in terms of an expatriates’ carrier since many expatriates returning home are demoted to lower-level positions than they had held overseas (O’Sullivan, 2002). In this particular case study expatriates interviewed were guaranteed a position equal to the one they had before departure. However, many of the respondents strived for a reposition related to a career development. Consequently, they often wanted positions at a higher level than before their international assignment. Thus, since Volvo CE guaranteed a position equal to the one before departure, they more or less had to find a position on their own. This could be exemplified by the quotation below:

"Since that would be like taking 10 steps back I choose to get another employment myself."

Furthermore, several of the respondents from the personal interviews stated that they were disappointed and dissatisfied with the repositioning process. Firstly, they had only some help finding new positions on return. In addition, many interviewees experienced that Volvo CE did not acknowledge their new skills or take their gained knowledge into account when repositioning them. This created a great deal of irritation and frustration. The authors of this thesis therefore propose that there is a clear connection between Job variables and the expatriate’s adjustment to home country and perception of the repatriation process.

Organisational variables, such as the home company’s overall approach to the repatriation process can have an important impact on the adjustment of expatriates that have returned. Studies show that many expatriates feel that their companies have communicated a very
vague picture of the repatriation process (Paik et al., 2002; Black et al., 1992a; Feldman, 1991). This fact can also be seen in the empirical findings, mainly since several interviewees express that a repatriation process was missed. Additionally, this could also be related to Solomon’s (1995), statement suggesting that an effective international assignment process consists of a circular process. Further, the author of this thesis suggest that the picture illustrating Volvo Groups process of an international assignment expresses a somewhat similar view to the circular model suggested by Solomon (1995). Solomon (1995) argue that the international assignment consist of five different phases; selection of candidates, cross-cultural preparation, global career management, completion of the international assignment and finally the repatriation process. These different stages can be compared and also considered as equal to the six stages; Job offer, Pre-visit, Departure, Arrival, Assignment and the Repatriation, suggested by the Volvo Group and Volvo CE. Solomon (1995) further state that many organisations fail to take all different stages into consideration and consequently are unsuccessful in creating an effective international assignment. By examining the perceived experiences among expatriates, empirical findings show that a majority of current expatriates did not describe the repatriation process as being effective. Despite the fact that information and illustrations distributed within Volvo CE did include a phase of repatriation, a majority of the interviewees still did not consider the repatriation process as represented within the different stages of an international assignment. This is proved, since many expatriates explicitly stated that there was no repatriation process experienced within Volvo CE. The authors of this thesis further propose that this also could be closely connected to the aspects of clear responsibility areas. Results from personal interviews indicated that a majority of expatriates in the beginning perceived the administration of international assignment as professional. Additionally, some expatriates interviewed stated that the HRM department in Eskilstuna took their full responsibility in relation to the time during the international assignment and the repatriation. On the other hand, personal interviews also showed that the responsibility areas in relation to the repatriation process sometimes were perceived as being indistinct. Many interviewees stated that they missed some kind of specified restrictions on what the individual responsibility concerned. One of the respondents stated this really clear by saying:

“As long as I know what my responsibilities are and if they are clearly stated in beforehand it is alright with me. I can do everything on my own, just as long as I know about it.”

The authors of this thesis find this quotation to be very illustrative of the problems that could appear in relation to unclear responsibility areas. Considering the fact that Volvo Group has a clear guideline regarding responsibility areas, in connection to international assignments, the results of this study indicate that Volvo CE has failed to communicate a clear and consistent picture of responsibility areas. The empirical findings further showed that some interviewees were willing to take their responsibilities. Nevertheless it seemed like nobody had grasped what his or her own responsibility included. Consequently, the authors of this thesis suggest that such a situation can enhance the risks of misunderstanding and disappointments among expatriates. The author of this thesis therefore believe that a vague picture of the responsibility areas might have the same results as communicating a vague picture of the repatriation process, suggested by the researcher Solomon (2002). As a conclusion, the findings of this study propose that Organisational variables indeed can ease or hinder the adjustment of expatriates when returning home and therefore also affect how the repatriation process later is being perceived.

Black et al. (1992a) state that Non-working variables such as shift in social status and changes in housing conditions are associated with the repatriation process. This thesis
empirical part confirms that social status only to some extent was perceived as an issue influencing the repatriation process. The housing conditions were also experienced as less of a problem much due to the fact that many interviewees were given the economical possibility to keep their homes during their time abroad. This was greatly appreciated among the expatriates. On the other hand, those expatriates leaving Sweden without keeping their homes clearly saw the housing conditions as more problematic. The interviewee who mentions that he had to move twice due to problems with finding a house up on return could be seen as a good example, illustrating expatriates having housing problems.

Other non-working variables, not emphasized by Black et al. (1992a) or other researchers, but that were found of importance in the empirical findings of this thesis are practical issues connected to the Swedish social system. Practical problems such as inability to buy on credit because of the absence of registered income in Sweden and problems with registration and finding a new doctor or health centre often created disorder and irritation among the repatriates during the first period after arrival. The authors of this thesis believe that the absence of these issues in other theoretical material could be explained by the fact that most research in the field of repatriation is done in America. Since the Swedish social system differs from the US, the problems related to practical issues might also be different or not equally important in these countries. Consequently, the authors of this thesis argue that practical issues therefore might be seen as another factor possibly affecting the Swedish expatriates’ perception of the repatriation process.

Moreover, Feldman (1991) emphasizes the integration of the family (spouse and children) as a factor related to non-working variables. The researcher states that if the family fails to adjust back to the new situation, the repatriation can be affected negatively. As an example, Feldman (1991) mean that it might occur that the spouse have problems finding a new post on return. A few interviewees also mentioned this specific problem in relation to the process of returning to home country.

“[…] this will not only affect your situation, but also have large impact on your spouses working situation and the circumstances of your children.”

Family problems can make the repatriate feel uncomfortable and insecure, which could have a negative impact on the repatriation process (Feldman, 1991). Since it was shown from the preliminary study that a great proportion of the respondents travelled together with their families, the factors related to family and spouse naturally becomes a significant aspect identified in this particular case study. Meanwhile, adoption and acclimatisation was not experienced as a major problem when coming home, some interviewees instead mentioned problems related to their children entering Swedish school of system. This in some cases caused emotional involvements, which in return lead to an indirect affect on the readjustment of the expatriate. In addition, many interviewees further perceived the adaptation of the family as a greater problem than their own experienced adaptation. Furthermore, the empirical findings of this thesis also suggest that the size and matter of the problems related to family aspects are highly individual and sometimes even dependent upon circumstances that have been changed during the time abroad. As an illustration of this, the interviewee that arrived to home country together with a foreign wife and newborn baby could be mentioned. He of course had greater problems upon return than other families. To sum up, it is clear that Non-working variables also can affect the expatriates’ adjustment to home country and accordingly the perceived repatriation process. With this said, the authors believe that if the expatriate has had problems in adjusting to home country and company, he/she would most likely experience the
repatriation process negatively. On the other hand, if the expatriate has had no problems in adjusting on return, the chances of perceiving a positive picture of the repatriation process is increased. Therefore, the result of this study propose that factors affecting the expectations and the adjustment of expatriates are important matters that organisations have to be aware of, when striving towards an effective repatriation.

In the following section “the purpose of an international assignment” is discussed. This is suggested by the authors of this thesis to be another factor that has an affect on the expatriate’s perception of the repatriation process; however not mentioned in Black et al.’s (1992a) model.

5.1.1 The purpose of international assignments

From a theoretical perspective it is clear that the organisation- and the expatriate’s purpose of taking on an international assignment may differ. Baruch et al. (2002) mean that the objectives for organisations initiating international assignments are threefold and could briefly be explained by words such as “knowledge transfer”, “career development” and “gaining control over operations abroad”. Looking upon the main purposes for why Volvo CE is contracting employees for international assignments, similarities could be found to those suggested by Brauch et al. (2002). The most common motive for employees being sent was to exchange their knowledge and skills to other countries. However, Wernersson mentioned that sending employees abroad, in the purpose of carrier development is not seen as one of the primarily reasons within Volvo Group. Nevertheless, Wernersson was aware that expatriates generally do develop new skills and gain new knowledge during their international assignment (I. Wernersson, personal communication, 2006-03-15). In the preliminary study the respondents were asked about what they thought were Volvo CE’s underlying purpose for sending them abroad. The answers stated by the respondents showed to be equivalent to the purposes also mentioned by Wernersson.

Paik et al. (2002) state that the primary motive for employees accepting an overseas assignment is the expectation of ones own personal growth and international experience. The researchers further claim that a common belief, among employees, is that an international assignment will enhance ones future career. Other drives mentioned are the potential of higher compensation and also a cross-cultural adventure (Paik et al., 2002). These motives could be confirmed from the answers given in the preliminary study. The respondents mentioned that the overseas assignment was viewed as a chance to experience something new, such as working in a new country and culture, or gaining a new insight in the organization. However, professional growth was mentioned as one of the most important and most frequently mentioned motives. Having this said, the authors of this thesis suggests that when the expatriate's purpose of accepting an international assignment is due to carrier enhancement, meanwhile the organizational motive is another, indeed an incitement for problems could be created. This, in return also could affect the perception of the repatriation process. The authors of this thesis therefore believe that one possible explanation why a few of the interviewees felt disappointed with their carrier development upon return is due to difference between individual and organisational purposes. For that reason the authors of this thesis also suggest that the purpose of an international assignment in some cases might affect the perception of an expatriate coming home.
5.2 Effective repatriation

The preliminary study clearly showed that the majority of the respondents believed that an improvement in the repatriation process could be done. The respondents had met similar but also different problems areas during their repatriation process that they felt could be improved.

By looking at different theoretical writings useful action steps toward an effective repatriation process could be found. These are: (1) training expatriates before they leave, (2) supporting them while they are abroad, and (3) acculturating them upon their return (Poe, 2000; Solomon, 2001). The perceptions and expressions made by the respondents as well as interviewees verify that these three action steps could be identified. In the following analyze it will be illustrated how.

Not surprisingly, all recommended actions are not equally effective or advisable on every expatriate and situation. Some actions are considered more important than others. Researchers state that one of the most important actions taken by firms that manage repatriation processes effectively has often shown to be preplanning (Jassawalla et al., 2004). Jassawalla et al. (2004) argue that preplanning is specifically crucial since foreign assignments are characterized by high level of uncertainty and anxiety for expatriates before and during their time abroad and by frustrations upon their return. During the personal interview made with Wernersson, at VIAM, it was stated that the frequency of communication with home company, specifically with the HR personnel, intends to increase during the last six months of the stay. According to Wernersson, this should be done in order to prepare the expatriate for his/her arrival, which particularly includes practical issues such as the moving process. With this information, the authors of this thesis assume that the Volvo Group and Volvo CE strive towards a preplanning approach. Nevertheless, this preplanning seemed to be more focused on practical issues rather than factors connected to well-being and carrier issues. This is stated since a few of the interviewees explicitly mentioned that they still had great difficulties with finding new positions only weeks before their return. According to Allen and Alvarez (1998) when the planning of the repatriation is not done properly, the outcome could be limited job opportunities for the repatriate. Assuming that Allen and Alvarez’s (1998) statement is correct, this would mean that Volvo Group and Volvo CE does not have a 100 percent working preplanning approach. In addition, when companies have too short planning horizons it will not only result in lack of available jobs for the repatriates but it will also make the repatriate feel “out of mind”. The organization does not have the expatriate in mind and therefore their return is often not planned until very close to their actual arrival (Allen & Alvarez, 1998). A few of the interviewees also experienced such a downfall.

“Not until people were standing here, or a couple of weeks earlier, has one acknowledged and realized that; -oops, he is going to be back soon!”

Opposite to the statement made by Wernersson, the preliminary study showed that a strong majority of the respondents did not experience any significant difference in the frequency of the communication with home company during the last six months of their stay. Some respondents hardly had any contact at all with the home company on return. One respondent said:

“I was not even contacted when I get close to the time to move back to Sweden. I had to deal with everything concerning moving my furniture and belongings myself.”
Another respondent said that if they wanted to have any kind of contact with home company, they had to take the initiative themselves;

“I called and said to HR -is there anyone who knows that I am going to be moving home within a week. “

Once again, these statements could be seen as proof that Volvo Group’s and Volvo CE’s preplanning approach is not flawless. The results from this study further indicate that the lack of preplanning many times caused irritation and frustration among the respondents. Hence, the author of this thesis believe that one of the primer critical success factors for an effective repatriation, like as Jassawalla et al. (2004) argue, is the aspect of preplanning.

Jassawalla et al. (2004) who emphases the importance of preplanning have also made a model of effective repatriation (figure 3.3). The model identifies key action steps taken prior to departure, during the assignment and upon the return, which appear to determine the organizational and individual outcomes. This will be analyzed in the following sections.

**Prior to departure**

Jassawalla et al. (2004), argue that task clarity, career counselling and formal policies and guidelines are three factors that can improve the outcome of a repatriation process in prior to departure. Task clarity occurs when the expatriate is clear about what is expected of him/her and know that his/her performance will be evaluated, resulting in a more effective repatriation experience (Klaff, 2002; Jassawalla et al., 2004). As previously mentioned above, the expatriates were asked in the preliminary study if they knew Volvo CE’s motives for sending them abroad. A great majority of the respondents seemed to have an explanation for them being contracted abroad. The authors of this thesis can therefore assume that the expatriates had some kind of idea on what was expected of them before leaving. However, it was not clear to what extent Volvo CE had communicated this task clarity.

Regarding the expatriates knowledge of an upcoming evaluation, it can be seen from the empirical finding that the part of creating task clarity has not been fully completed. This is stated since the majority of the respondents from the preliminary study were not sure or did not know if Volvo Group or Volvo CE had any kind of evaluation process after returning home. A result which gives a clear indication that the information given regarding an upcoming evaluation was missing or inefficient already prior to departure. Nevertheless, Wernersson mentioned that Volvo Group intends to distribute a comprehensive evaluation to their expatriates. However, it was found that only two of the respondents from the preliminary study stated that they had participated in one. This information strongly implies that Volvo Group and Volvo CE’s evaluation approach is inefficient; not only because many did not know that there existed an evaluation, but also due to the fact that all expatriates had not participated in one. Subsequently, this information brings us to a point where the authors of this thesis argue that Volvo Group and Volvo CE firstly need to improve their evaluation process in itself, before they can start making improvements in providing information about an upcoming evaluation. Moreover, several expatriates stated that they miss some kind of evaluation directly linked together with the professional position. Consequently, none of the 20 respondents have evaluated or discussed work related issues and achievements made during the time abroad with neither Volvo Group nor Volvo CE. As already stated Klaff (2002) argue that it is of great importance that the expatriate in beforehand knows about an evaluation to achieve task clarity. Assuming that this statement is true, the authors of this thesis suggest that the criteria for an effective task clarity and repatriation are not fulfilled due to Volvo CE’s lack of evaluation.
According to Jassawalla et al. (2004), task clarity is declared to be important since: (1) it increases the expatriates’ focus on task and lessens his/her anxiety while overseas, (2) it creates a sense of accomplishment when the international assignment is competed, and (3) it reduces the expatriates anxiety upon his/her return and therefore eases the transition into the home company. A few of the interviewees mentioned that some kind of evaluation would have helped in order to feel that they have accomplished their assignment. This is also inline with Jassawalla et al.’s (2004) second suggestion, that task clarity can create a sense of accomplishment. However, regarding the other two suggestions connected to reduction of anxiety, there is not enough information provided in the empirical findings to confirm this. Nevertheless, the authors of this thesis believe that Jassawalla et al.’s arguments and suggestions make sense and therefore again underline the importance of creating task clarity in order to improve the particular repatriation process investigated.

Jassawalla et al. (2004) propose that quality career counselling is essential for creating a big picture understanding for the expatriate. As an outcome, the expatriates are supposed to be able to recognize why they were sent on an international assignment and through that be able to define the benefits for the firm and themselves. In contrast to this theoretical suggestion, the results from the preliminary study showed that the respondents in general knew the supposed purpose for their international assignment, without having a career-counselling plan. In addition, Suutari and Brewster (2001), state that there is a clear link between good career counselling and positive repatriation. The empirical findings of this study strongly indicate that Volvo CE did not apply any career counselling prior to departure. This is stated since the empirical findings truly imply that several of the interviewees missed some kind of counselling related to professional development. In fact, some of the interviewees also mentioned that they were both surprised as well as disappointed that no one did acknowledge or showed an interest for their work done abroad. This also resulted in some expatriates feeling dissatisfied with their repatriation process. As a result, the authors of this thesis agree with Jassawalla et al.’s (2004) proposal of a career counselling to create an effective repatriation process.

To improve the repatriation process it was also suggested by some interviewees that the reposition preferably should be solved earlier. They believed that such an action could increase the chance of finding an appropriate position and also to decrease the amount of anxiety during the repatriation process. One interviewee even explicitly suggested a personal development career plan as a possible tool for improvement.

“Solve the reposition early [...] A personal development plan for the repatriation could be one idea. It is understandable that it is difficult to have a position available at the time of repatriation but just knowing that there is a plan to find a suitable position would be very nice.”

The authors of this thesis believe that this “personal development career plan” possibly can be equivalent to Suutari and Brewster’s (2001) “career counselling plan”. With this said, the authors of this thesis agree with Suutari and Brewster’s (2001) statement suggesting that there is a clear link between good career counselling and positive repatriation. As a result, it is suggested that a career counselling plan possibly would make the repatriation process of Volvo CE become more efficient. Furthermore, Jassawalla et al.’s (2004) study illustrated that an effective repatriation process appears to require high-quality career counselling, which includes explicit clarification of (1) the purpose of sending the employee overseas, (2) the benefits of the overseas assignment to the organization and the employee, and (3) the expatriate’s career options upon return. Also, Suutari and Brewster (2001) highlight similar ideas of what should be included and discussed in a career counselling. Even though the empirical findings did not provide enough information to confirm theoretical
statements concerning what a career counselling must include, the suggestions given by Jassawalla et al. (2004) were all indirectly brought up one way or another. Also most importantly, the results from the preliminary study indicated that there is a clear need for some kind of counselling.

Linehan and Scullion, 2002 identifies another factor appearing to be strongly connected with the effectiveness of the repatriation process, namely the presence and quality of policy guidelines for foreign assignments. Thus, some researchers argue that firms need to develop formal policies that manage the pre-visits, visits and post-visits expectations of expatriates (Jassawalla et al., 2004). In Volvo CE’s international assignments process, it can be seen that a pre-visit is included. Furthermore, the expatriates are also guaranteed one visit per year to home country during their time abroad as a general policy. However, in connection to return there is no post-visit included. The expatriate can of course decide to visit home country during the last period of the stay, although this could not be considered as a “post-visit”. This is stated since there is no policy offering a visit in direct linkage to the repatriation process. From the personal interviewees it was also found that the pre-visit as well as the visits to home country during the stay was greatly appreciated among the expatriates. In addition, a few expatriates expressed that visits to home country could in some cases facilitate the repatriation process since one naturally would become more up to date both with the organisational changes as well as the environmental changes. The importance of having a policy regarding the post-visits was also stressed out during the personal interviews. One interviewee meant that by visiting the home company one could investigate different repositioning possibilities and make the home company aware of his/her return. It showed to be successful in his case, since it to great extent facilitated his repositioning. In connection to this, he also mentioned that this action most likely had a positive impact on his experiences connected to repatriation. Consequently, the authors of this thesis agree with earlier research proposing that pre-visits, visits and especially post-visits might be essential factors in an effective repatriation process.

During their stay

According to Jassawalla et al. (2004) some expatriates consider themselves as isolated since they feel that they have lost connection with the home company during their time abroad. Problems can arise from these thoughts. However, the researchers suggest two actions that organizations can take to reduce these feelings. These are: perception of support while on assignment and nature and frequency of communication. The researchers mean that these actions enhance a sense of connection, which appears to contribute to an effective repatriation (Jassawalla et al., 2004). Some of the interviewees expressed thoughts implying feelings of isolation.

“[…] definitely, I felt out of sight sometimes.”

Likewise Jassawalla et al.’s (2004) study, the empirical finding of this thesis indicate that an effective repatriation has a clear link to the expatriates perceived support from the home company as well as the frequency of communication, while being on their international assignment. This is believed since several opinions from the personal interviews showed that the lack of support was an underlying factor for creating feelings of isolation and dissatisfaction. Those interviewees feeling dissatisfied argued that more communication with their home company’s HRM department was needed. A frequent communication was not needed during the time abroad. However, after departure to host country and before arrival to home country most respondents agreed that more communication and support would have been appreciated. The authors of this thesis believe that these two periods
possibly might be especially important since expatriates can be more vulnerable during periods of change. Consequently, expatriates will most likely also require more concern as well as help with practical issues, during this time of period.

In line with Jassawalla et al.’s (2004) statement suggesting that inadequate support during the stay does not only increase the expatriates anxiety but also gives a signal of a poor repatriation yet to come, the interviewees declared that communication and support could have made a big difference on how they experienced the repatriation process. Moreover, direct support was identified as a crucial feature creating an effective repatriation process, among the interviewees participating in this study.

“More direct help instead of having been directed to web pages etc”

As a comment to the quotation above, the authors of this thesis claim that a web page can be of great help for many expatriates. However, during some periods of the stay expatriates need more direct and personal help. In those cases, being directed to web pages can create frustration, which in return can generate lack of trust towards the HRM department in home company. Trust is a significant factor in any good relation. Therefore the authors of this thesis believe that if the expatriate feels a lack of trust towards the HRM department, there will be difficulties creating a working relationship and a sustainable cooperation.

Also, some interviewees argued that VIAM department and the HRM department in Eskilstuna had given them the impression that they would keep in touch and have frequent communication with them, even after departure to host country. However, several interviewees stated that everything changed as soon as they had left Sweden. Moreover, during personal interviews some expatriates described that their family had to undergo a minor process at VIAM and Volvo CE, before leaving home country. In many cases this process was perceived as something strongly positive. In relation to this process, the authors of this thesis believe that perception of support most likely was created. However, a few of the interviewees meant that this support decreased during the international assignment.

“Before we left, the entire family participated, it was very good, we received a positive opinion about the process, but when returning home nobody seemed to care.”

Accordingly, these mismatched expectations seemed to create a poor start for future communication, which also with great likelihood resulted in many interviewees expressing frustration. Thus, the authors of this thesis believe that communicating an “incorrect” picture might lead to dissatisfaction. This could also be linked to the proposal of Jassawalla et al. (2004), which stresses the importance of firms controlling their expatriate’s perception of support. The researchers further suggest that organizations can do this by taking actions that show concern for the wellbeing of the expatriate and his/her family (Jassawalla et al., 2004). The authors of this thesis agree with this statement since the empirical findings showed that a few of the interviewees meant that they were disappointed with the HRM department for not showing their families and themselves enough concern.

“During the entire period, there was nobody asking me how it was going for the family. Not one single time!”

This lack of showing concern created a negative perception of support, which in return might have effected the impression of the repatriation process.
Theories suggest that frequent communication reduces feelings of isolation, improves the motivation and moral of the expatriate, ensures the expatriate that he/she is still a part of the organisation and keeps the expatriate updated to any change in the organisation (Allen & Alvarez, 1998; Jassawalla et al., 2004). From the empirical study it can be seen that such a statement can be confirmed. This since the empirical material strongly indicates that lack of communication has led to disappointment, irritation and a downfall in loyalty toward home company. In addition, those expatriates that had positions abroad, in direct contact with home company had a more frequent communication and therefore felt more updated. In result, this gave them a stronger sense of being a part of the home company and therefore possibly reduced feelings of isolation. Also, the empirical findings indicate that these expatriates later viewed more positively upon the repatriation process. Furthermore, Suutari and Brewster (2001) claim that a frequent communication with the home company preferably should be held with several sources. Additionally, Linehan and Scullion (2002) argue that the maintenance of social networks within the home company is highly beneficial during an international assignment. In connection to these theoretical suggestions, the authors of this thesis argue that social networks within the home company can be considered as important since it enables a higher frequency of the communication. Therefore, a critical factor to enable a frequent communication resulting in a more effective repatriation is suggested to be the social network.

Another possible factor improving the process of creating an effective repatriation could be the communication held between the HRM departments in home company and host company. This is stated since the empirical material indicates that such a communication can assist an upcoming repositioning process. Consequently, those expatriates who stated that they experienced repositioning process as positive argued that communication between HRM departments in home company and host company had been successful. This particular communication, held between the two HRM departments during their stay, was considered as helpful in connection to the repositioning process of these expatriates. As a result of successful communication held between the two parties, some expatriates stated that they gained a sense of control and therefore felt more comfortable with the upcoming repositioning situation. The issues regarding repositioning process will further be discussed in the following section, “Upon the return”.

After they return

Theoretical contributions suggest that employees that have been abroad for a couple of years often return to an organisation that has undergone significant process of changes in structure, information and assessment systems and formal and informal structures. These changes are consequently suggested to evolve into new rules and power structures (Forster, 2000). The preliminary study showed that the majority of respondents returned to a new position or department within Volvo CE after arrival to home country. Thus, there was a changeover regarding organizational variables for many respondents. While a few interviewees did not experience this as an issue at all, others instead had greater difficulties handling these transformations. A few interviewees clearly argued that Volvo CE was not completely the same organization as they once left. This was due to changes in information systems as well as new working procedures, but most importantly caused by the fact that they received a totally new position. With this said, the authors of this thesis agree with Forster’s (2000) statement regarding changes in organisation during the expatriates time abroad. Yet, the authors cannot fully confirm if the experienced changes in the organisation were primarily due to time or because of the expatriates’ new positions. Nevertheless, any trigger of change is a factor that may result in anxiety and challenges for
the repatriate. It is therefore noteworthy to stress that there might be “invisible” changes which cannot be recognized by the employees within the home company, but still matters for an expatriates returning back. Some interviewees expressed this by saying that the first period back at home company was a bit tough since everyone expected one to know all the changes and new ways of working.

In connection to change, many of the interviewees stressed their own individual and professional change as a result of the time being abroad. O’Sullivan (2002) argues that one of the key elements to achieve a successful repatriation is to acknowledge the new knowledge and skills that the expatriates have acquired overseas. As stated earlier in the analyses some respondents from both the preliminary study as well as the personal interviews stated that Volvo CE did not fully take their new knowledge into account when repositioning them. This has showed to cause dissatisfaction among these repatriates. Feldman (1991) further argue that the new position in one way or another must be similar to the international assignment, in order to gain efficiency. The authors of this thesis believe that such an action is only possible to fulfil if the company evaluates the expatriates experiences and knowledge gained during the international assignment. By this said the authors of this thesis once more want to highlight the importance of an existing evaluation.

According to Jassawalla et al. (2004) there are two major factors that seem to make difference within the period upon return. These are: quality of interaction with supporters and the perception of organisational support on return. A sponsor and a mentor are two types of supporters that are stressed as being important contributors to a successful repatriation process. The empirical findings of this thesis show that while some of the respondents have had mentors, none had a sponsor. Moreover, the ones that had a mentor experienced it differently. A few thought that it was of great help, whereas others did not describe the mentor as very supportive. The reason for the respondents’ different opinions is most likely due to the fact that the expatriates did not have a clear picture of the responsibility areas of the mentor. Regardless of how the expatriates at Volvo CE had experienced the mentorship, the company has clear guidelines on the role and responsibilities a mentor should have. A mentor has duties such as, staying in contact with the expatriate during his/her international assignment, keeping them updated about changes within the home company and helping the expatriate with his/her repositioning. The same obligations have in fact also been specified in the guidelines provided by VIAM (Information folder, Volvo Group, 2003-03-10). Moreover, these obligations are in line with the definition of the role of a mentor suggested by Linehan and Scullion (2002), proposing that a mentor is a person who provides the expatriate with information and answers to practical questions, without necessarily being vested personally and emotionally in the success of the repatriate or the international assignment.

From the preliminary study it was also found that the ones that did not have a mentor during their time abroad, still seemed to miss one. The authors of this thesis therefore believe that some of the expatriates within Volvo CE wished to have some kind of supporter. As an outcome of this, the authors further propose that a person who has obligations and clear responsibilities in connection to the success of the repatriate and the international assignment is needed within Volvo CE. A person, who has these responsibilities, could, according to Jassawalla et al. (2004), be identified as a “sponsor”. In addition, a sponsor should serve as a confidant and supporter. They look for opportunities that the expatriates can use upon their return; they keep the expatriate updated of key decision-makers and ensure that the firm will use the returning employees’ skills. Hence,
the authors of this thesis believe that Jassawalla et al.’s (2004) statement, saying that a sponsor can smoothen a repatriation process, is likely true.

In addition, many interviewees mentioned that their mentors changed positions during their time abroad. Due to this they naturally lost contact with them. The authors of this thesis believe that this would possibly not have happened in the case of a sponsor. This is stated since the sponsor is contracted and therefore has obligations, which also most likely will lead to a replacement, if necessary. To sum up, the authors believe that Volvo CE has two choices in the process of creating an effective repatriation; they can either improve their already existing mentorship program or apply sponsors, working directly as supporters for the expatriates.

Generally employees that take on international assignments feel highly valuable during their assignments since they are in the centre of attention. However, often when they return they miss the autonomy, attention, lifestyle and monetary benefits that the international assignment brings (Paik et al., 2002). Some of the respondents from the personal interviews mentioned that they had felt some kind of change in their lifestyle after returning. Among other things, a few brought up a change occurring when the spouse had to go back to employment after not been working during the entire time abroad. The monetary changes after returning home was also discussed. However, this was not claimed to be a problem of significant size since they generally were aware of this change in before hand. Even though a few interviewees declared that they had greater benefits and higher social status abroad, none of them recognized the change as being a setback on return.

Furthermore, Feldman (1991) state that the expatriate face difficulties adjusting to a new work environment upon return. A few respondents also felt a change in the overall way of working in Sweden compared to the other country. For example, one interviewee felt that there was less pulse in the daily work than he recalled. However, these changes were not acknowledged as problems but still had an affect on the interviewees. Instead the interviewees in many cases saw this change as a result of personal and professional transformations, which they had been through because of the international experience.

The researchers Jassawalla et al. (2004) argue that the expatriate’s perception of organisational support on return is a complex concept, nevertheless still an important one that needs to be provided. Further, the five issues creating the complexity is proposed as; (1) receiving credits and recognition for the foreign assignment, (2) selecting a new position in the home company, (3) using their new perspectives in the new position, (4) adjusting to the positive or negative diversities in job related autonomy and responsibilities of the new position compared to the foreign assignment, and (5) utilization of the repatriation programs, if any, assigned to reorient the expatriate to the organization and home country (Jassawalla et al., 2004). The empirical findings of this thesis show that Volvo CE in some cases has failed in creating a perception of support among their expatriates. In particular, the lack of the first issue created a negative perception of the support received upon return. This is stated since findings from the personal interviews strongly indicate that Volvo CE has not given all of their expatriates enough recognition for their foreign assignments. Moreover, a few of the respondents from the preliminary study stated to strongly disagree with the statement suggesting that Volvo CE took their gained knowledge into account when repositioning them. Consequently, the new knowledge that these expatriates had received was in some cases perceived as unutilized. Finally, the empirical findings of this thesis indicate that the fifth issue concerning the utilization of the repatriation program is not fulfilled.
“Because there is no repatriation process at all at Volvo CE today, any kind of process will be an improvement.”

As illustrated from the quotation above, some of the interviewees even claimed that there was no repatriation process, even though this is stated to be included in the process of the international assignment. With this said, the findings of the empirical material hint that repositioning expatriates on positions that indicate that the company values them, possibly could be identified as one of the most critical actions to achieve an effective repatriation.

To sum up, there are many different actions companies can take in the accomplishment of an effective repatriation. An effective repatriation is achieved when the repatriate is satisfied with their repatriations process (Jassawalla et al., 2004). According to Allen and Alvarez (1998), when the repatriate is satisfied it will most likely lead to reduction of company costs arising from an unsuccessful repatriation such as “underutilization of key employees”, “loss of key employees” and “inability to recruit employees into overseas positions”. These issues can in many cases lead to indirect and unexpected costs. Considering the transaction cost theory proposed by the researchers such as Williamson (1979) and Coase (1973), the authors of this thesis can see some resembling to the costs connected to an unsuccessful repatriation. These costs can too be seen as transaction costs. This is stated since they are cost that are not directly connected to the repatriation process of the company. Nevertheless, they are costs arisen from an unsuccessful repatriation process. To compare it to the example about buying a banana in the theoretical chapter; the costs of a repatriation process will not only be the obvious ones but also indirect costs connected to “underutilization of key employees”, “loss of key employees” and “inability to recruit employees into overseas positions”. These issues can bring indirect costs, such as the energy, effort, time and money it requires to find a new employee if the repatriate leaves the home company because he/she is unsatisfied; the costs of loosing that specific knowledge or skill that the repatriate leaving has, the cost of educating new personal; the costs of repairing a bad reputation about international assignment; the costs of having unmotivated personnel; and the costs of motivating these employees again. As a conclusion, all costs above and beyond the known costs of a repatriation process can be seen as transaction costs. The authors of this thesis believe that these transaction costs most likely could be reduced if the organization has an effective repatriation process. An international assignment by it self already costs a large amount of money. In addition to this an unsuccessful repatriation process might lead to high transaction costs. Considering this fact, the authors of this thesis find it surprisingly that many companies do not find it crucial to strive towards an effective repatriation process.

Up till this point the authors of this thesis have discussed and analysed factors affecting the repatriation process and critical actions in achieving an effective repatriation process. These theoretical findings as well as empirical evidences have created a base of knowledge that enables the authors to now suggest the most important action steps identified. These will be discussed in the following chapter.
6 Discussion

In this chapter a discussion is held about how and with which “tools” companies might be able to meet the underlying needs of their expatriates, in the creation of an effective repatriation process.

Theories as well as empirical findings of this thesis indicate that the repatriation process could be described as a complex subject. How one expatriate perceives and experiences a repatriation process is highly individual. Consequently, expatriates encounter different problems during their returning process. As a result, many solutions and recommendations could be appropriate to undertake. Thus, it is close to impossible and almost irrelevant to bring up all problems and solutions in this thesis. The authors will instead discuss critical action steps that companies can take to improve their repatriation. The discussion presented is based on impressions gained through conducting this case study over Volvo CE in Eskilstuna. The authors of this thesis are aware of the fact that suggestions are not equivalent for all companies in general. However, the authors believe that these implications might be used as a source of information and inspiration for other companies in their work of creating an effective repatriation process.

Preplanning

Before contracting an employee and sending them abroad there has to be a plan. By having a plan unexpected problems might be avoided or at least minimized. Preplanning is important, not solely from the perspective of the employee but also from the perspective of the organization which of course has invested a lot of money in sending the expatriate abroad.

The authors suggest that a pre-plan should be conducted before the expatriate is sent abroad. This is considered important since it might increase the expatriate’s sense of individual control and safety, when knowing that there is a long-term plan. Further, the authors of this thesis propose that a pre-plan should contain a personal meeting between the employee, the line manager and HRM department of the company. Here the purpose of the international assignment could be discussed and well-defined motives for both parties involved could be set. This should be done before the final contract is signed. During this meeting the parties should develop a career plan where specific and realistic career objectives and goals are discussed. If the employee considers the international assignment as being a logical step in his/her career, then the person should also together with the company discuss what would happen when the assignment is accomplished.

After the contract later has been signed and both parties have agreed about financial issues, another personal meeting should be held together with HRM department. The authors of this thesis propose that such a meeting should be held at the home company. Moreover, the meeting is suggested in order to conduct a formal and written plan containing basic information such as status, destination and position abroad. Also, the expectations that the employee has career-wise, already discussed during the previous sit-down, can be included in this formal plan. In addition, these facts are suggested to be written in an “individual pre-plan”, administered by HRM department in Eskilstuna. The authors believe that an “individual pre-plan” could decrease the anxiety that the expatriate might feel. Instead the individual pre-plan possibly could create a stronger sense of belonging and support. Not only could this individual pre-plan be of great importance for the expatriate going abroad, but it might also later provide the HRM department with valuable information in relation to the process of repositioning.
Additionally, the authors of this thesis believe that it might be of importance to preliminary schedule the final return date as well as the date for a post-visit to home country. This way, the company is more likely to know when to provide the expatriate with certain information about what needs to be administered before the return to home country etc. Also, having this plan the risk of HRM department being unprepared when the time is close to return might decrease.

Furthermore, several expatriates from the personal interviews also mentioned that they had met unexpected practical problems after arrival to home country. Due to new positions and acclimatization issues expatriates might have a lot to think about directly after arrival. Having these “smaller” practical issues during this time can likely create frustration and irritation. Not being able to buy items on credit or sign contracts that require a previous record of income are only two of these practical issues mentioned. The authors therefore suggest that HRM department should send all expatriates a document that is needed in order to update the income-information register. The results from the empirical findings indicate that it would be appropriate to send this document approximately a few months in beforehand. The authors of this thesis believe that with such a simple preplanning action step, the home company might both hinder these unnecessary problems and also show that little extra support which some of the respondents in this case study sometimes have seemed to miss during the period of repatriation.

**Communicating and providing support**

The analysis of this thesis showed that communication and support was perceived as one of the major factors affecting the perception of expatriates. Those expatriates having a positive opinion about their experience, among other things, referred to more frequent communication and a stronger sense of support. Therefore the authors of this thesis believe that an improvement of the support and communication might lead to a more effective repatriation process.

Firstly it is important to mention that communication is a shared responsibility. Therefore, efforts should be made from all parts involved. However, the authors of this thesis still believe that the responsibility connected to communication primarily should lie in the hands of the company contracting the expatriate. Communication will conceivably be more efficient when everyone involved understands the benefits of it. It is believable that more frequent communication could make the expatriate feel more up to date and aware about changes made within the organization. The authors of this thesis also propose that a higher frequency of communication with HRM department most likely can emerge into the expatriate feeling a stronger sense of support.

Telephone calls, more direct help and mentors are three general actions that might lead to a sense of higher communication and support. Results from the empirical findings suggest that communication and support primary is required during periods of change. With this said, the authors suggest HRM departments to have a common policy ensuring that the expatriate is contacted at arrival to host country and upon return to home country. In this particular case, Volvo Group already has a policy, which state that the frequency of communication should increase during the last six months of the stay. The authors agree that this policy is helpful since it in many ways can reduce the risk of expatriates feeling left alone with all the responsibility of coming home. By increasing the frequency of communication during the last period of the stay the expatriate most likely will be more psychologically prepared of the fact of returning home. Hence, the expatriate starts to make changes in his/her mental map, which in result can create correct expectations upon
return. Additionally, during the years abroad some respondents also stated that they felt “out of sight”. A simple act to eliminate the risk of this occurring could be to send personal greetings in connection to different celebrations, such as Christmas. This way the expatriate may feel that he/she still is a part of the home company. The interviewees also discussed the importance of receiving direct help instead of being directed to web pages and other documentation. The authors of the thesis believe that Volvo CE should be aware of this situation and strive towards providing more direct help to expatriates. This way the expatriates possibly will feel more supported.

Furthermore, it is theoretically suggested that a mentor can improve the communication and perception of support. That a mentor could work as a communication channel between the home company and the expatriate is already well known at VIAM. Mentor’s have duties such as staying in contact with the expatriate during his/her international assignment, keeping them updated about changes within the home company and helping the expatriate with his/her repositioning. These obligations have also already been specified in the guidelines provided by VIAM. Thus, the empirical findings of this thesis still have showed that the use of a mentor, in many cases, has been unsuccessful. Therefore the authors believe and propose that the mentorship within Volvo CE and VIAM can be improved. The authors believe that one underlying reason for problems related to the mentorship could be that the organization has failed to communicate the role and the importance of a mentor among their expatriates and the mentors. To create awareness about these duties the authors suggest that VIAM could provide a training seminar. Here guidelines on how a mentor should manage his/her role could be discussed and set together with the expatriate and the mentor. Moreover, the organization could encourage the expatriate to choose a mentor that has international experiences. This is suggested since a mentor with international experience probably knows what the expatriate goes through and therefore can be more supportive than a mentor without international experience. In addition, the authors believe that another factor improving the mentorship might be giving a small compensation to mentors. It is rational that compensation can make the mentor more motivated and willing to fulfill his/her duties.

Another factor creating problems connected to the mentorship is the length of the international assignment. When expatriates are abroad for a couple of years organizational changes can occur. This might result in mentors quitting or changing divisions within the organization. Volvo CE and VIAM need to be aware of this and therefore have policy suggesting that when a mentor leaves, he/she should be replaced. The authors of this thesis suggest that the same solution for other companies with similar problem could be appropriate. Another alternative for improving the mentorship within Volvo CE would be to instead implement a sponsor. Researchers suggest that a sponsor is an employee working fulltime with the responsibilities involving all expatriates being on an international assignment as well returning home.

**Proactive repositioning**

Finding a suitable position upon return has shown to be one of the major problems among the expatriates in this research. To enable an effective repatriation process, Volvo CE needs to dramatically improve their repositioning approach. The expatriate needs to feel that knowledge and skills that he/she has gained during the process are appreciated and valued within the organization. Since the respondents of this study were represented by employees with different personalities and positions, the results of this thesis strongly indicate that the feeling of appreciation is a general phenomenon amongst expatriates. With this said the authors state that companies in general should assure that expatriates are
appreciated. One way to achieve this could be to have an evaluation connected to the expatriates’ career development. Through such an action the company can show that they acknowledge the expatriate’s professional development. Furthermore, the authors of this thesis suggest that during this evaluation, preferably held by HRM department, the “individual pre-plan”, previously suggested, can be used as a base for discussing repositioning possibilities. This is suggested since it might facilitate the work of finding a new position that covers the expatriate’s new knowledge and skills.

Also, the authors believe that it is important that companies plan the repositioning well ahead. This is stated since the empirical results as well as theoretical suggestions indicate that working proactively with repositioning issues could decrease the expatriates sense of anxiety and instead increase a feeling of control. The authors of this thesis therefore suggest that a “career development evaluation” could be an appropriate action step to apply. Furthermore, the authors suggest that this “career development evaluation” could be held in connection to a post-visit several months before moving back home. A post-visit could also be seen as an opportunity for the expatriate to take his/her own responsibility in connection to repositioning. During this post-visit the expatriate is expected to actively search for possible opportunities and vacancies. This could for example be done by contacting and visiting different divisions and departments. In addition, the post-visit might not only be provided in the aim of helping the expatriate to find a new position upon return, but could also be an opportunity to make him/her feel more updated about changes within the home company and home country.

Moreover, results of this study indicate that a proactive repositioning possibly will be created if the organization is more flexible concerning the termination date of the contract. If the expatriate finds a suitable position a few months before arrival the company should give the person the opportunity to finish the international assignment before the contract has stipulated. The authors believe that such a policy could only be sustainable if both HRM department in home and host company communicate and cooperate with each other. Therefore communication between HRM departments is strongly recommended. Further, the authors believe that such communication could be important since HRM departments through this contact can receive valuable information regarding working performance of the expatriates.

**Applying an evaluation**

The empirical findings of this thesis showed that the great majority of the respondents were not evaluated after their return. Theories suggest that evaluation is one of the main critical actions for an effective repatriation. The purpose of an evaluation should be to improve the repatriation process, as well as creating a sense of accomplishment for the expatriates and their families. Since Volvo CE today does not have an evaluation they will not know if their expatriates are satisfied or dissatisfied with their international assignment. Neither will they know what needs to be improved in order to make progresses in creating an effective repatriation. The authors of this thesis therefore suggest a brief personal meeting a few weeks after the arrival. This meeting could preferably be held between personnel from the HRM department and the expatriate. Here they could discuss the overall impression of the international assignment. Also, questions such as: how the communication and support was perceived, how the communication could be improved, how the relationship with the mentor was perceived, what the most difficult practical issues encountered were etc, could be discussed. Furthermore, the authors are convinced that the presence and participation of the spouse could be valuable during this evaluation. Theories have suggested that the impact of families is large in connection to the success of an
international assignment. In addition, gathering new insights from someone outside the organization is often considered as a valuable resource. The spouse’s perspective could therefore be considered as important.

The authors of this thesis have up till this point analyzed and discussed the findings of this thesis. In the next chapter the final and the most important conclusions will be presented.
7 Conclusion

This chapter presents the final conclusions of this study and is based on the initial research questions which arose through the purpose of this thesis; “Which factors affect how an expatriate perceives the repatriation process” and “Which are the most critical actions for achieving an effective repatriation”.

The perception of repatriation is highly individual. Therefore, several factors of how an expatriate perceives the repatriation process can be identified. However, there are a few factors that have been more general and recognised within this thesis. These are; (1) the Purpose for why an expatriate is sent abroad, (2) the Picture of the repatriation process and responsibility areas communicated by the home company, (3) the perceived Communication and support, (4) the utilization of Mentorship, (5) Reverse culture shock issues, (6) Career issues, (7) Organizational issues, (8) Practical issues, (9) Family issues and finally, (10) the existence of an Evaluation. These factors have all, to different degrees, shown to affect the expatriates’ perception of the repatriation process. While some of these factors might affect the expectations of the expatriates before coming home and indirectly the adjustment process, others directly affect the adjustment process of an expatriate after arrival. In return, the results of this thesis propose that expectations and the process of adjustment have a significant impact on how the repatriation process is perceived.

A majority of the factors identified above have previously been acknowledged by researchers. Nevertheless, this study has shown that there are still factors which researchers have been given less consideration. For instance, this study suggest that the purpose of why the expatriate is sent abroad and practical issues, which an expatriate faces upon return, can be factors of significant matter affecting how an expatriate perceives the repatriation process.

Furthermore, the authors of this thesis have also argued the importance of having an effective repatriation process by indicating that transaction costs might arise from unsuccessful repatriation processes. The authors believe that these indirect costs can be avoided if organizations strive towards having an effective repatriation process. Through identifying the ten factors above, the authors of this thesis can see that there are many variables affecting the outcome of a repatriation process. By analysing theories and empirical findings, the authors have identified four critical actions that could to be taken in order to achieve an effective repatriation. Firstly, this research suggests that preplanning could be seen as a base for creating an effective repatriation. Through preplanning possible problems could be foreseen and hindered. The authors further believe that a pre-plan should be conducted already before leaving home company and cover all stages within the entire international assignment.

Another critical action is communicating and providing support to the expatriates and their families upon return and after arrival. The findings of this thesis indicate that by doing this, one can avoid expatriates feeling “out of sight” and instead increase the amount of trust between the parties involved. In addition, if communication and support is provided during the time abroad, the expatriate might have less difficulty with adjusting to home country and company. Further, a proactive repositioning process is suggested to be another action that can lead to an effective repatriation process. This is stated since the empirical findings show that there is a clear link between a successful repositioning and a positive repatriation process. Also, a proactive repositioning process will most likely enhance the chances of taking the expatriates gained knowledge into account when finding
him/her a new position. Finally, applying an evaluation can be considered as a critical action taken in order to achieve an effective repatriation process. The authors of this thesis believe that this is important, in terms of both improving the current repatriation process as well as creating a sense of accomplishment for the expatriate that has been abroad.
8 Final remarks

This chapter aims to bring answers to possible doubts and criticism towards this study. Also, the goal is to provide the reader with a few new research ideas. These suggestions could be used as a source of inspiration by other researchers interested in the subject in matter.

8.1 Criticism towards the study

Critics typically state that single case studies offer a poor basis for generalising (Yin, 2003b). Consequently, choosing respondents from one single company and using the case study method can be considered as weaknesses with this thesis. The authors of this thesis are aware of this. On one hand a multiple case study might be better or more dependable when generalising. On the other hand, a multiple case study might not be the best method to use when time is limited but the researchers still want to exam something in depth (Yin, 2003b). Since the authors of this thesis wanted to do an extended study of the subject but did not have much time, the choice of doing a single case study was considered as the most appropriate alternative. Even though the conclusions of this study might not be fully applicable on all companies or useful in making consistent generalisations, the authors still mean that this thesis is contributing with valuable information and knowledge to the research field of Repatriation. This is stated since a huge part of this thesis consisted of examining factors affecting how an expatriate perceives the repatriation process and identifying the most critical factors to achieve an effective repatriation process. In the process of answering these questions, theories and other empirical research have been tested and discussed against empirical findings of this study. In line with this, Yin (2003) propose that critics against case studies are not current when considering the fundamental aim of the method, which is to test existing theory within a particular area, in order to confirm or replicate it. Discussing and analyzing already existing theories can lead to progress within the area of research and can therefore be considered as significant (Richie & Lewis, 2003). As a conclusion, this thesis can be seen as a contribution to the research field in matter.

Furthermore, the repatriation process of an expatriate is perceived highly individual and therefore it is of great importance to look at different peoples’ values and attitudes. Volvo CE is a large multinational company consisting of expatriates with diverse background and personalities. Choosing expatriates represented from Volvo CE have given this thesis a valuable access to information received from a broad group of expatriates. Moreover, the authors also argue that it is more important to get true access to the respondents matching the actual requirements, instead of having poor and shallow contact with respondents from diverse organizations. Since this thesis was done on a mission given by Volvo CE the company showed great interest and gave access to internal information. Also, most respondents and interviewees were very willing and engaged in taking part in the work of this thesis. Due to this the authors of this thesis were able to create a strong relationship together with the respondents, resulting in a true access that was very valuable and reliable.

Another aspect that might be questioned within this thesis is the choice of literature. To bring sense and structure to the thesis, the theoretical framework has been based on the two research questions; Which factors affect how an expatriate perceives the repatriation process? and Which are the most critical actions for achieving an effective repatriation? With these questions in mind, the authors later chose theories and research handling these specific areas. The result of this was that two main theories were applied and more thoroughly explored.
In addition, in some cases the theories used might seem to be out of date, which could be considered as a weakness. However, the authors believe that regardless of when the research was done, it can still be current today. Having this said, despite that some of the theories chosen might appear as outmoded the analysis of this thesis has shown that these theories and research actually are relevant even today.

Along the working process of this thesis several interesting topics and questions arose. Some of these areas will be briefly discussed in the following section.

8.2 Suggestions to further studies

Depending on various social systems, expatriates from different countries encounter diverse practical issues. For instance, the social system within Sweden differs greatly from the American. Knowing this, the authors assume that this might be one of the reasons for why practical issues are not thoroughly considered in existing researches. Consequently, since most research within the field of repatriation is based on American expatriates, the authors of this thesis believe that further studies reflecting Swedish social systems and accordingly Swedish practical issues is needed. This is also stated since practical issues in this study have shown to be significant. Such information would contribute with valuable knowledge regarding how Swedish companies can improve and achieve an effective repatriation process.

Further, it would also be interesting to look upon international assignments and the repatriation process from a broader and more international perspective. For instance, how has the globalization affected the management of international assignments? What impact might this change have on the individual expatriate that is sent abroad? Also, how has the globalization affected the number of employees sent abroad? Are companies today more or less eager to send employees out on international assignments?

In addition, in order to make improvements of any kind, it is highly important to make a continuously evaluate and follow up the current efficiency of the repatriation process. To enable such work, quantifiable measurements of the efficiency is needed. As a result of this the authors further argue that a research could be conducted in the aim of identifying applicable and quantifiable measurements of the international assignment as well as the repatriation process.

Another important area, related not only to the field of international assignments and repatriation, but also to the more general field of Human Resource Management, is the issue of using an efficient career planning. Through the empirical findings of this thesis it was many times proved that the lack of career planning created frustration and irritation among expatriates. Therefore, the authors of this thesis believe that companies such as Volvo CE need to gain more knowledge about how to successfully conduct career planning. Knowing this, the authors of this thesis suggest that future research should be done, forming a possible career planning tool. Also, research should be done in order to examine how an individual career plan can be applied in order to combine individual objectives with corporate motives and values.
References


Internet sources

(http://www.volvo.com/group/sweden/sv-se/Volvo+Group/, 2006-03-15)
(http://www.volvo.com/NR/rdonlyres/326C1C56-8D70-4EBB-AEE8-FB9262CC9612/0/VolvoCE_history.pdf, 2006-03-15)

Internal sources

Appendix 1 – Introduction mail

Hej,


Din erfarenhet om tiden efter ditt avslutade utlandsuppadrag är av stor vikt för oss. Tidigare forskning visar att många efter hemkomst, både på ett privat och professionellt plan, möter en vardag de i många fall kanske inte räknat med.

Det är viktigt för företaget att dina nyvunna kunskaper efter utlandsuppadrag verkliguppmärksammas och tas till vara. Tycker du att din kunskap omsatts på bästa sätt? Finns det något Volvo CE kunde ha gjort bättre i fråga om din hemkomst?


Vi är högst tacksam för ditt svar och hoppas få återkomma med vår enkät i vecka 13. Tack på förhand!

Med vänliga hälsningar,

Jennie Andersson & Shabnam Heidaripour

(ie02anje@ihh.hj.se) (ie02hgsh@ihh.hj.se)
Hi,

We are two girls that are about to finish the fourth year at Jönköping International Business School. Commissioned by Hanna Ekman and the HRM department of Volvo CE, a master degree thesis will now be conducted regarding international assignments and its process of follow-up. The aim of the thesis is to map out improvement areas and by that develop the current repatriation process at Volvo CE.

Your experience related to the time after the completed international assignment is of great importance to us. Previous research propose that many expatriates after arrival to home country, both professionally and privately, meet a weekday that they have not really expected.

It is important for the company that the knowledge gained after a completed international assignment is acknowledge and transferred into reality. Would you consider your knowledge as transmitted the best way possible? Is there anything that Volvo CE could have done better in connection to your arrival to home country?

The review is divided into two parts. The first part consists of a survey that is expected to take up till 10-15 minutes. You will without difficulty be able to fill in the survey through your computer. The responses will only be analyzed by us as external investigator. The second part of the study will instead be built upon supplementary personal interviews.

We highly appreciate your reply and hope to that we are welcome to return with our survey to you week 13.

Thanks in advance!

Yours sincerely,

Jennie Andersson & Shabnam Heidariour
Appendix 2 – Mail: Preliminary study

Hej,

För en tid sedan fick du en förfrågan angående deltagande i en undersökning rörande befintlig repatriationsprocess på Volvo Construction Equipment. Vi är tacksamma för att du valt att medverka.


Sammanställning av enkätunderlig beräknas ta en månads tid och därefter kommer du eventuellt att via mail bli kontaktad för en kortare personlig intervju eller gruppdiskussion.

Innan du klickar dig vidare via länken, uppgör dina svar och sänder enkäten till oss genom att trycka "submit" vill vi klargöra ett fåtal enklare begrepp.

Expatriation: Syftar till perioden innan avresa.

Repatriation: Syftar till perioden efter hemkomst.

International Assignment: Syftar till utlandsuppdraget i sin helhet, inklusive både expatriation och repatriation.

Det är dessutom viktigt för oss att påpeka att vi verkar som utomstående utredare i undersökningen. Trots att du i enkäten tillfrågas att uppgö ditt namn, är du alltså helt anonym gentemot Volvo CE.

Klicka på följande länk för att genomföra enkäten:


Om du har några frågor eller funderingar är du välkommen att ringa eller maila oss;

Jennie Andersson: 0739-837131 ie02anje@ihh.hj.se
Shabnam Heidaripour: 0737-713747 ie02hgsh@ihh.hj.se

Stort tack för din medverkan!

Med Vänliga Hälsningar,

Shabnam Heidaripour & Jennie Andersson
Hi,

You have previously received a query regarding participation in our survey regarding the current repatriation process at Volvo Construction Equipment. We highly appreciate that you choose to participate.

Below there is a web link to the survey that is expected to take 10-15 minutes for you to complete. The survey will function as a preliminary study that will be used as a base of information for future personal interviews and is consisting of short statements as well as open ended questions.

The compilation of the results from the survey are expected to be ready within a month, thereafter you will possibly be contacted through email for a brief personal interview or group discussion.

Before you put yourself forward through the link, give your responses and send the results to us by clicking on the “submit” we would like to clarify a few fundamental concepts.

Expatriation: Refers to the period before departure.

Repatriation: Refers to the period before and after arrival to home country.

International assignment: Refers to the entire assignment, including both expatriation and repatriation.

Additionally it is important stress out that we act as external investigators for this research. Despite that you will be asked about your name you will remain anonymous towards Volvo CE.

Click on the following link to carry out the preliminary study.


If you have any further questions or thoughts you are most welcome to contact us through telephone or email;

Jennie Andersson: 0739-837131 ie02anje@ihh.hj.se

Shabnam Heidaripour: 0737-713747 ie02hgs@ihh.hj.se

Thank you for your participation!

Yours sincerely,

Shabnam Heidaripour & Jennie Andersson
Appendix 3 – Reminder mail 1

Hej,


Sammanställning av enkätunderlag beräknas ta en månads tid och därefter kommer du eventuellt att via mail bli kontaktad för en kortare personlig intervju eller gruppdiskussion.

Innan du klickar dig vidare via länken, uppgör dina svar och sänder enkäten till oss genom att trycka "submit" vill vi klargöra ett fåtal enklare begrepp.

Expatriation: Syftar till perioden innan avresa.

Repatriation: Syftar till perioden efter hemkomst.

International Assignment: Syftar till utlandsuppdraget i sin helhet, inklusive både expatriation och repatriation.

Det är dessutom viktigt för oss att påpeka att vi verkar som utomstående utredare i undersökningen. Trots att du i enkäten tillfrågas att uppge ditt namn, är du alltså helt anonym gentemot Volvo CE.

Klicka på följande länk för att genomföra enkäten:


Om du har några frågor eller funderingar är du välkommen att ringa eller maila oss;

Jennie Andersson: 0739-837131 ie02anje@ihh.hj.se
Shabnam Heidaripour: 0737-713747 ie02hgsh@ihh.hj.se

Stort tack för din medverkan!

Med Vänliga Hålsningar,

Jennie Andersson & Shabnam Heidaripour,
Internationella Handelshögskolan i Jönköping

English version
Hi,

We have acknowledged that you have not yet carried out the preliminary study regarding current repatriation process at Volvo Construction Equipment. We are thankful that you have chosen to participate and therefore hope that you before the end of this week will complete this survey.

Below there is a web link to the survey that is expected to take 10-15 minutes for you to complete. The survey will function as a preliminary study that will be used as a base of information for future personal interviews and is consisting of short statements as well as open ended questions.

The compilation of the results from the survey are expected to be ready within a month, thereafter you will possibly be contacted through email for a brief personal interview or group discussion.

Before you put yourself forward through the link, give your responses and send the results to us by clicking on the “submit” we would like to clarify a few fundamental concepts.

Expatriation: Refers to the period before departure.

Repatriation: Refers to the period before and after arrival to home country.

International assignment: Refers to the entire assignment, including both expatriation and repatriation.

Additionally it is important stress out that we act as external investigators for this research. Despite that you will be asked about your name you will remain anonymous towards Volvo CE.

Click on the following link to carry out the preliminary study.


If you have any further questions or thoughts you are most welcome to contact us through telephone or email;

Jennie Andersson: 0739-837131 ie02anje@ihh.hj.se
Shabnam Heidaripour: 0737-713747 ie02hgsh@ihh.hj.se

Thanks for your participation!

Yours sincerely,

Shabnam Heidaripour & Jennie Andersson
Hej,

Denna vecka slutför vi enkätundersökningen rörande repatriationsprocess på Volvo Construction Equipment. Ditt deltagande är av stor betydelse för undersökningens utfall och vi ber därför vänligt att du så snart som möjligt slutför enkäten.


Sammanställning av enkätunderlag beräknas ta en månads tid och därefter kommer du eventuellt att via mail bli kontaktad för en kortare personlig intervju eller gruppdiskussion.

Innan du klickar dig vidare via länken, uppgär dina svar och sänder enkäten till oss genom att trycka "submit" vill vi klargöra ett fåtal enklare begrepp.

Expatriation: Syftar till perioden innan avresa.

Repatriation: Syftar till perioden efter hemkomst.

International Assignment: Syftar till utlandsuppdraget i sin helhet, inklusive både expatriation och repatriation.

Det är dessutom viktigt för oss att påpeka att vi verkar som utomstående utredare i undersökningen. Trots att du i enkäten tillfrågas att uppgöra ditt namn, är du alltså helt anonym gentemot Volvo CE.

Klicka på följande länk för att genomföra enkäten:


Om du har några frågor eller funderingar är du välkommen att ringa eller maila oss;

Jennie Andersson: 0739-837131 ie02anje@ihh.hj.se
Shabnam Heidaripour: 0737-713747 ie02hgsh@ihh.hj.se

Stort tack för din medverkan!

Med Vänliga Hälsningar,
Jennie Andersson & Shabnam Heidaripour,
Internationella Handelshögskolan i Jönköping
Hi,

During this week the preliminary study regarding the repatriation process at Volvo Construction Equipment will be brought to a conclusion. Your participation is considered to be of great importance to us and therefore we now ask you to as soon as possible complete the survey.

Below there is a web link to the survey that is expected to take 10-15 minutes for you to complete. The survey will function as a preliminary study that will be used as a base of information for future personal interviews and is consisting of short statements as well as open ended questions.

The compilation of the results from the survey are expected to be ready within a month, thereafter you will possibly be contacted through email for a brief personal interview or group discussion.

Before you put yourself forward through the link, give your responses and send the results to us by clicking on the “submit” we would like to clarify a few fundamental concepts.

Expatriation: Refers to the period before departure.

Repatriation: Refers to the period before and after arrival to home country.

International assignment: Refers to the entire assignment, including both expatriation and repatriation.

Additionally it is important stress out that we act as external investigators for this research. Despite that you will be asked about your name you will remain anonymous towards Volvo CE.

Click on the following link to carry out the preliminary study.


If you have any further questions or thoughts you are most welcome to contact us through telephone or email;

Jennie Andersson: 0739-837131 ie02anje@ihh.hj.se
Shabnam Heidaripour: 0737-713747 ie02hgsh@ihh.hj.se

Thank you for your participation!

Yours sincerely,

Shabnam Heidaripour & Jennie Andersson
Appendix 5 – Mail: Personal Interviews

Hej,

Stort tack för att du har medverkat i enkätundersökningen rörande repatriationsprocess på Volvo Construction Equipment. Resultaten av underlaget är just nu under granskning och vi hoppas kunna följa upp enkätmaterialet med personlig intervju med dig.


Torsdag 20 April
8.00 - 9.00
9.00 - 10.00
10.00 - 11.00
11.00 - 12.00
Lunch
13.00 – 14.00
14.00 – 15.00
15.00 – 16.00
16.00 – 17.00

Fredag 21 April
8.00 - 9.00
9.00 - 10.00
10.00 - 11.00
11.00 - 12.00

Vänligen, uppge i detta mail ditt namn och den dag och tid som passar dig bäst. Därefter, vidarebefordra detta mail till avsändare. Om ingen av dessa tider skulle passa dig är det bra om du hör av dig. Alternativt kan vi då istället komma överens om annan tid eller möjligern en telefonintervju.

Som sagt, vi är ytterst tacksamma om du skulle vilja ställa upp på denna personliga intervju. Vi hoppas här kunna närmare diskutera dina synpunkter på repatriationsprocessen.

Vid eventuella frågor, kontakta gärna oss gärna via mail eller telefon.

Tack på förhand,
Med vänliga hälsningar,

Shabnam Heidaripour & Jennie Andersson
Hello,

Thank you for your participation in our survey regarding the repatriation process at Volvo Construction Equipment. Your result from the question-and-answer format is currently under examination and we hope to later be able to follow-up your material through a personal interview together with you.

We further hope that we together can find a suitable time for a meeting. Therefore, below a proposition of possible dates are presented. The interviews are expected to require approximately thirty minutes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Torsdag 20 April</th>
<th>Fredag 21 April</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.00 - 9.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.00 - 10.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.00 - 11.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.00 - 12.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.00 – 14.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.00 – 15.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.00 – 16.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.00 – 17.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kindly, clearly state what time and date that you find most appropriate. Thereafter, forward this mail to current remitter. If none of these occasions are suitable for you, it would be preferable if you let us know so that we instead can arrange another time or conduct a telephone interview.

As stated above, we greatly appreciate if you would like to participate in this personal interview. During this meeting we hope to more in detail be able to discuss your viewpoints on the current repatriation process.

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact us through email or telephone.

Thanks in advance,

Best regards,

Shabnam Heidaripour & Jennie Andersson
## Appendix 6 – Preliminary study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name?</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which is your current position at Volvo CE?</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What was your position before international assignment?</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What country did you expatriate to?</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With whom did you expatriate?</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alone</td>
<td>30.00%  (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With spouse</td>
<td>30.00%  (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With spouse and family</td>
<td>40.00%  (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How long was your international assignment?</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For what reason did you return to home country?</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed contract</td>
<td>61.90%  (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reason</td>
<td>38.10%  (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When did you return to Sweden?</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What was your primary motivation when accepting the international assignment?</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you believe was Volvo’s primary goal when sending you on an international assignment?</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What kind of preparations did you have before your departure? (E.g., cultural training program, past experience etc.)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How was the communication between home company and you during the time you were abroad?</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very good</td>
<td>25.00%  (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>15.00%  (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>35.00%  (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less good</td>
<td>30.00%  (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not good</td>
<td>10.00%  (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How was your communication with home company more frequent during the last six months of your time abroad?</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More frequent communication</td>
<td>15.00%  (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last frequent</td>
<td>5.00%   (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very significant difference</td>
<td>80.00%  (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you know if Volvo CE or VAWI have any kind of evaluation processes for employees returning home?</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>20.00%  (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>50.00%  (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>30.00%  (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you participate in any kind of evaluation process after returning home?</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>15.00%  (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>85.00%  (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did you receive your reposition at home company? (E.g., home company help me, I found it on my own etc.)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you have a mentor during your time abroad?</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>87.89%  (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>12.11%  (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If no, did you miss it?</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>50.00%  (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>50.00%  (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If yes, how important was the contact during your time abroad?</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very significant</td>
<td>0.00%   (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>0.00%   (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither</td>
<td>14.89%  (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient</td>
<td>21.81%  (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insignificant</td>
<td>27.27%  (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If yes, how important was the mentor for you during your repatriation process?</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very significant</td>
<td>15.18%  (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>9.09%   (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither</td>
<td>18.18%  (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient</td>
<td>18.18%  (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insignificant</td>
<td>36.16%  (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am satisfied with the way home company cared for my spouse/family in relation to the repatriation process</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly</td>
<td>0.00%   (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>26.32%  (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither</td>
<td>26.02%  (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>15.79%  (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>35.56%  (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was satisfied with my new position at home company.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly</td>
<td>20.02%  (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>35.56%  (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither</td>
<td>16.67%  (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>16.67%  (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>0.00%   (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Strongly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt welcome and appreciated after returning home.</td>
<td>35.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am satisfied with the overall communication with home company during my time abroad.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am satisfied with the overall expatriation process.</td>
<td>15.79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am satisfied with the overall repatriation process.</td>
<td>15.79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am satisfied with the overall international assignment.</td>
<td>31.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think the current repatriation process can be improved?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>89.47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If yes, how do you think the current repatriation process can be improved?</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 7 – Interview guide

Interview guide - Overall questions

Career issues

- Utility of your knowledge and contacts?
- Reposition process?
- Do you consider your time abroad as valuable for your career development?
- What was the greatest outcome of your international assignment?
- How do you think that your international contacts could have been utilised?
- Do you use your international contacts or the network created during your stay, in your current position?
- To what extent was your contacts and knowledge used?
- Do you think that Volvo CE lose a valuable resource through your current position?

Communication

- How did it help you/ not help?
- Forgotten? (Out of sight?)
- Who did you have the most frequent communication with?
- Who should have the outmost responsibility to keep you updated?
- Did you have problems with establishing contact with home company?
- How good was your communication with family and friends? Do you think that these relations affected your repatriation?
- Is more communication needed during the international assignment?

Reversed Culture shock

- Changes regarding values, attitudes and organisational structure?
- Did you expect it to be somewhat problematic returning home?
- Did you feel somewhat depressed after returning home?
- Career development among colleagues?
- Do you think that you’ve changed during your international experience?
Status - Economical factors

Mentor & Sponsor
  - Did you miss it? Could the information regarding this be improved?
  - Could you see yourself as a future mentor?

Family & Practicalities (such as house, school)
  - Did your family have any problem to readjust?
  - What could Volvo CE done better in relation to your family and repatriation?

Proactive behaviour on your own
  - What did your do to facilitate the repatriation and adjustment?
  - What did you do in order to facilitate the adjustment in relation to your family?

Mentor
  - How did you find your mentor, who was it?
  - Can you give one practical example of how the mentor helped you?
  - How can the contact with your mentor be improved?

Responsibilities
  - What is your own responsibility in relation to repatriation?
  - What is HR and line management responsibility?

Evaluation and follow up
  - Do you think that an evaluation is missing within Volvo CE today?
  - What should be included within the evaluation?
  - Any kind of following up within your department?