



3 Repatriate social capital: An untapped resource at the individual and organizational levels

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores some of the individual and organizational benefits that can be derived from the social capital of assigned and self-initiated repatriates. After a review of the extant literature, a series of qualitative insights are drawn from 25 interviews with repatriates and HR experts. These findings suggest that repatriates' social capital may enhance career success and well-being at the individual level. At the organizational level, social capital may help streamline performance and knowledge transfers. The chapter concludes with some recommendations aimed at repatriates and multinational companies hoping to maximize social capital gains after repatriation.

INTRODUCTION

The social, cultural, and technological transformations brought forth by globalization have pushed multinational corporations (MNCs) to deal with growing levels of complexity and competition in the international arena. In this context, organizations have become increasingly reliant on expatriate employees, who work outside of their home countries at a firm's request (assigned expatriation), or due to other personal reasons (self-initiated expatriation) (Dickmann et al., 2018). Eventually, most expatriates decide to return to their home countries after their time abroad, a phenomenon that is most commonly known as repatriation. Despite the ubiquity of this final phase of the expatriation cycle, repatriates did not receive enough attention from scholars (Kraimer et al., 2016) up until fairly recently. As a result, research on the repatriation stage is still relatively scarce (Knocke & Schuster, 2017), and many questions remain unexplored in the literature. In particular, authors reviewing repatriation research to date noted how only a few studies have tried to connect different repatriation outcomes with specific and likely relevant antecedents, such as repatriates' social relationships (Chiang et al., 2020).

Following the recommendations of Chiang et al. (2020), the present study focuses on the impacts that repatriates' relationships have on different outcomes after they return from an international assignment (IA). Here, repatriates' social relationships are understood as forms of social capital; a sociological concept that encompasses an individual's social groups and connections, as well as the resources that can be accessed through them, and mobilized for different purposes (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Bourdieu, 1986; Lin, 2001; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). In this way, the chapter addresses the gap identified by Chiang and colleagues

(2020), while also extending their proposed scope, by considering all types of social relationships, and not just those belonging to the "work" sphere as originally proposed by the authors.

Prior studies have shown that social capital (SC) contributes to a range of positive repatriation outcomes (i.e., Oddou et al., 2013; Reiche, 2012). Moreover, given the boundary-spanning nature of their work, expatriate employees are particularly well-positioned to accumulate valuable forms of SC across national and organizational boundaries. Despite this, scholarly work on the SC of repatriates is still in its infancy; hence, the present research aims to explore several unknowns regarding the SC of repatriates, with key implications for repatriation management. For instance, what are the outcomes of repatriates' SC for organizations, as well as for individual careers? And what are their managerial implications?

This chapter is structured as follows. First, a review of the relevant literature concerning SC and repatriation issues is presented. Second, a summary of the repatriation outcomes that are connected to repatriates' SC is offered. Third, the methodological section introduces matters related to sampling and research design. In an effort to capture individual and organizational perspectives, the interviews involved both repatriates and HR experts. Next, the findings are described in two areas of focus: organizational, and then individual issues and outcomes. At last, a range of practical recommendations is proposed.

PERSPECTIVES ON REPATRIATION AND SC

This chapter considers two main kinds of internationally mobile professionals, assigned and self-initiated repatriates, who have usually gone on long-term assignments lasting 12 months or longer (Shaffer et al., 2012). Whereas assigned expatriates (AEs) are sent abroad by an organization, self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) choose to work in a foreign country on their own, due to self-directed career goals or other personal reasons (Richardson & Mallon, 2005). The purpose of the chapter is not to establish comparisons between both types, but rather, to capture a wide enough range of repatriation experiences. The reason for choosing to focus on these two categories of expatriates in lieu of other international career categories (i.e., Collings & Isichei, 2018), is driven by the clear differences and effects identified between AEs and SIEs (Chiang et al., 2018). To be clear, the distinction between AEs and SIEs mainly lies in whoever instigated the relocation (the organization or the individual) (Suutari & Brewster, 2000), and the additional organizational support that is typically available to AEs compared to SIEs (Guo et al., 2014). This conceptual clarity is expected to result in more rigorous findings.

In recent years, international career scholars have finally begun paying attention to the issue of repatriation. Even so, there is substantial evidence that

firms should improve their management of repatriation issues. As a result, many global firms continue to experience high repatriate turnover rates (Knocke & Schuster, 2017). By way of illustration, Marshall and colleagues (2010) found that most of the companies they surveyed (42) had implemented only two or fewer support practices for repatriates. They also reported that, while 60 percent of MNCs had offered some form of logistical assistance to repatriates, less than 70 percent had offered training and career support services during repatriation. This gap in repatriate assistance signals a major area of improvement.

In line with this reality, some studies have spoken of the "dark side" of international careers; the idea that international experiences may hamper the career success of individuals once they repatriate to their home countries (Arnaez et al., 2014; Inkson et al., 2012; Richardson & Zikic, 2007). However, the evidence in this regard is quite mixed, since positive career impacts have also been reported (for a review of these positive outcomes, please see Mello et al., 2022).

What's more, improper repatriation management also produces several undesirable consequences for organizations. From a knowledge or resource-based perspective, the repatriation process is a great chance for organizations to "harness newly acquired skills, perspectives, and knowledge essential to their competitive advantage" (Bonache et al., 2020). Nonetheless, it seems like this source of opportunities is not being properly leveraged by MNCs. In this sense, one of the most underutilized resources is the social capital of repatriates, more commonly conceptualized in the literature as one of the facets of "career capital" (see know whom career capital, i.e., Dickmann & Cerdin, 2018; Inkson & Arthur, 2001).

The social environment of repatriates is likely to have undergone some crucial transformations while they were abroad, such as trade-offs in personal and professional connections between the host and home countries (Mäkelä & Suutari, 2009). On top of the disruption of community ties caused by geographic relocations (Noe & Barber, 1993), expatriates may also suffer from reverse cultural shock (Howard, 1974), and find it challenging to adapt to a "home" that might look and feel vastly different to how they recalled it.

At an individual level, repatriates are faced with two related problems: first, losing rapport with their contacts at home may have lasting negative consequences for their career success, as well as the social support they may receive after IAs. Both issues could have a lasting impact on their well-being (Andresen, 2021; Mäkelä & Suutari, 2009; Seibert et al., 2001). Second, once they have returned, it can be equally difficult for expatriates to maintain the valuable international ties that they built abroad. A solid international network could eventually become useful in a range of future career scenarios (i.e., relocating abroad once

again, obtaining information about international opportunities, international collaboration, finding work meaningful, etc.). Thus, failing to maintain international connections could be an important loss for repatriates.

At the organizational level, overlooking the social resources that repatriates have access to, including their SC, poses several risks, such as not being able to cash out on the valuable knowledge transfers that expatriates continue to exercise after repatriating, and which are linked to their social networks (Reiche, 2012). In addition, repatriate turnover rates could increase. According to Shen and Hall (2009), the more changes in one's social network, identity development, and skills and competencies, the lower job embeddedness repatriates will have with their companies; and thus, the more likely it will be that a repatriate will move on to another organization.

On the positive side, studies have shown that IAs and repatriates' SC carry with them significant benefits, which enable positive and often long-lasting repatriation outcomes. In the following sections, an overview of these positive outcomes is provided, based on the available literature. Organizational outcomes are described first, including improved knowledge transfers (Reiche, 2012) and performance (Ben Hador, 2017). Second, the focus shifts to the individual-level outcomes, including benefits related to career success (Mäkelä & Suutari, 2009) and well-being (van Gorp et al., 2017).

Knowledge transfers after repatriation

When explicitly mentioned in the repatriation literature, SC has been mostly studied in relation to the perceived strategic importance of repatriates for knowledge transfers. There are many good examples of such developments (Antal, 2000; Amir et al., 2020; Barley et al., 2017; Burmeister et al., 2018; Harzing, 2001; Oddou et al., 2009, 2013; Reiche, 2012; Riusala & Suutari, 2004). Be that as it may, an unfortunate drawback in these SC-inspired investigations is that knowledge transfers have been mostly viewed as a desirable organizational objective, and not from the perspective of how they impact individual repatriation outcomes such as career success.

Organizational performance

In the general career context, it has been reported that SC at the personal, intra-organizational and external levels strengthens a range of performance components (Ben Hador, 2017). We know little else about how performance may improve thanks to SC in the specific context of repatriation, but one of the vehicles through which performance may improve is, once again, the process of repatriate knowledge transfers. Unfortunately, global firms do not usually invest in (or

know how to manage) repatriates' knowledge-sharing capabilities (Osland et al., 2020). As mentioned earlier, the social connections of repatriates can enhance knowledge transfers. In this regard, Arnett and Wittmann (2014) argued that organizations should increase socialization opportunities with partners to improve tacit knowledge exchanges, for instance, within cross-organizational teams (quoted in Wang et al., 2016).

At least, there is hope in the effectiveness of organizational improvements: it seems like organizational support before and after repatriation does result in better transfers of knowledge, repatriation adjustment, and performance (Furuya et al., 2009). This means that when done right, upgrading organizational policies is a highly impactful way of improving repatriate knowledge transfers, and thus, performance.

It must also be noted that the exploration and exploitation of individuals' external SC at the business unit level may also be a source of new business opportunities for organizations, which could indirectly impact performance at the company level. Still, for this to happen, organizations should encourage employees to develop and nurture their business relations with clients in a personal capacity (Josserand et al., 2017).

Individual career success

Although a significant subset of the repatriation literature has found that IAs are a risk factor for individual careers (Arnaez et al., 2014; Inkson et al., 2012; Richardson & Zikic, 2007), other authors have reached the opposite conclusion by adopting a more long-term perspective (Suutari et al., 2018). A recent systematic review of 55 articles found that, overall, studies had reported more positive than negative career impacts from IAs on repatriates' careers (Mello et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the authors emphasized the need to continue exploring career success issues in the different stages of the expatriation cycle.

Could looking at SC clarify how repatriates may achieve success (or not) after IAs? After all, SC approaches have been extensively used in general careers research (Spurk et al., 2018). However, in the context of international careers, not much is known about the influence of relationships and social networks on career success beyond a couple of theoretical proposals (Ramaswami et al., 2010; Shen & Hall, 2009) and empirical studies (Andresen, 2021; Mäkelä & Suutari, 2009).

What we do know is that maintaining strong connections in the home country is a key factor in achieving a suitable position after repatriation (Mäkelä & Suutari, 2009). Using Granovetter's (1973) influential distinction between strong and weak ties, Mäkelä and Suutari (2009) report that different network configurations typically associated with global careers (an internal network of weak ties, an internal network of strong ties, and an external network of strong

and weak ties) result in career benefits for repatriates (respectively, quick access to diverse information, advice, and help and support in personal and professional matters). However, they also note that these SC configurations carry some career and repatriation risks, as there may be unhelpful trade-offs between establishing social relationships abroad and weakening those in the home country. These findings imply that expatriates and their organizations must try to balance the risks and benefits that their international networks and IAs imply, by consciously nurturing connections to the home country. Additionally, Andresen (2021) recently confirmed that social networks were a crucial instrument that French and German self-initiated repatriates used to access job opportunities upon their return; in particular, she found a connection between available SC and the employability of repatriates.

Repatriate well-being

Authors such as van Gorp and colleagues (2017) have adopted a social support perspective to speak about repatriates' well-being and social connections. Although they use different terminology, their approach and their findings are also in line with the concept of SC. Their results suggest that if the support providers in the home country have had a previous international experience, they may be better equipped to assist repatriates. In other words: personal connections, especially those with formerly expatriated individuals, could be useful resources to improve repatriates' well-being.

Additionally, van Gorp et al. (2017) highlight the fundamental role of spouses in repatriates' well-being. In this sense, a remarkable finding was that when repatriates' partners experience repatriation difficulties, this distress might also cross over to the repatriates themselves. Indeed, the job-related arrangements of the spouse are one of the main challenges for repatriates (Riusala & Suutari, 2000). With the evidence currently available, we can only speculate that this would entail some repercussions for career satisfaction and career success, but more research would be welcome in this area.

METHODS

Design and data collection

This study followed a qualitative research design relying on 25 semi-structured, in-depth interviews, lasting between 40 and 60 minutes. The interviews took place virtually, over Zoom or Microsoft Teams (as preferred by the interviewees). Most interviews were conducted between June and July 2021, but additional interviews with HR spokespersons were carried out in December 2021. The great

majority of interviewees were members of two labor unions: The Finnish Business School Graduates, and Academic Engineers and Architects in Finland TEK. The participants had been part of a previous survey, in which they had agreed to participate in further qualitative interviews.

A total of 20 repatriates participated in the interviews. Purposive sampling was used to capture a wider set of career realities, and both assigned (13) and self-initiated expatriates (10) were interviewed. In terms of gender, 13 interviewees were men, and 9 were women. Their ages ranged from 32 to 70 years old, but most participants were in their 30s (8) and 40s (8).

In addition, 4 HR experts were interviewed — two of them were also repatriates themselves. When analyzing the repatriation issue from the organizational angle, it is also important to note that many repatriates were now working as managers after their repatriation, and they could thus also reflect on the overall organizational situation concerning global mobility, besides describing their own repatriation experiences.

An interview guide was followed to make sure that all relevant themes were addressed, but participants were given considerable freedom in determining the direction of the conversation. As a result, the content of the interviews was not always the same. In the interviews, several topics were discussed, including the individual and organizational implications of SC, its relevance for expatriation and repatriation, and potential actions to improve the management of relevant resources and challenges.

As the purpose of the research was to understand and reflect on the realities of participants, long and rich responses were preferable. Consequently, the questions that were presented to the participants were open-ended, so that each person could highlight and argue about the issues that appeared most relevant to them.

Data analysis

The method employed to analyze the data for this chapter was thematic analysis, based on the guide by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis is a flexible means of analyzing qualitative data that can accommodate a range of research materials and philosophical positionings. For this chapter, the choice of thematic analysis as a method to sort data into themes was also determined by its flexibility and suitability for the analysis of relatively large interview datasets (Nowell et al., 2017).

Once all the interviews had been transcribed word by word, a set of preliminary codes was established, based on insights from the literature review, theoretical frameworks, and the first reading of the whole dataset. The similarities and

relationships between codes were evaluated in subsequent readings of the transcripts. In this way, the process of applying the codes to parse the data combined abductive and inductive reasoning.

FINDINGS

Implications of SC for knowledge transfers

Many of the repatriates interviewed for this chapter explained that what mattered most to them in their work was receiving new challenges and being able to maintain some international aspects in their daily tasks. For those who were able to do the latter, the advantages were clear: being in an international environment also meant that their specific knowledge and their social capital may be welcome and perceived as an interesting resource. When the repatriates encountered a receptive environment, they could feel at ease in leveraging their international social capital, which then lubricated knowledge transfers across national or organizational boundaries. In other words, being in touch with international contacts was a source of timely and coveted knowledge, which the repatriates could then leverage for their own benefit and that of their organizations. This was true both for AEs and SIEs. Among other issues, repatriates would reach out to contacts to find out about corporate procedures and solutions quickly and accurately. Having established connections with experts abroad also continued to be an important resource to find out about novel ideas before anyone else and solving problems collaboratively.

I think it is beneficial to say 'Hey, I do have contacts over there'. If we do want to learn something from the US, like, 'How are they doing this now, and how is that impacting the firm over there?' Of course, it is of benefit. (AE, female, late 30s).

That's when you hear also some unpublished work and some work is still in progress. In the conferences, you basically learn about this work maybe a year later, when it's already finished (SIE, male, 38).

A case on the extreme positive spectrum was brought forward by an HR consultant, who highlighted the story of a self-initiated expatriate who, after being hired in Finland by a leading tech company, was tasked with teaching international business skills to the other employees, based on what he had learned during his IA, instead of his regular engineering tasks. This activity generated great value for the company. In addition, he wound up establishing new relationships with up-and-coming start-ups by providing them with similar sorts of advice.

Later on, this brought a new set of innovation and knowledge-related benefits for the tech firm:

"He connected with start-ups, and he was helping them. Through that, he got a lot of joy, because he was able to share his business knowledge, and so on. But at the same time, his company got lovely new ideas, and very good connections" (HR expert No. 1).

Unfortunately, a significant number of interviewees noted how it was mostly other individuals with international experience who were able to appraise their added knowledge and skills; and that otherwise, these tended to be disregarded or simply go unnoticed. In some cases, feeling as though their experiences were not useful or valued seemed to create a growing sense of career dissatisfaction. In such situations, their international social capital, and the knowledge that could be derived from it even after the IA, found no clear pathways to benefit their professional lives, let alone their employers. As evinced in the last excerpt, this is likely to affect not just repatriates' morale, but also, their performance, and their turnover intentions:

Even though all of these experiences have given me a lot of knowledge... Only those who also spent time abroad and really worked abroad appreciate it, but people who never worked abroad, they don't appreciate it that much. (SIE, female, 30s)

Professionally it's difficult because you feel that you have gained some experience, that you know something that... That could be useful for the business, and then you bump into an atmosphere where your experience is ignored, or belittled, or despised. And then I can tell you that the reason for my other quick departure from *Company A* after the assignment was partly due to this: a collision with the atmosphere, which was not particularly encouraging (AE, male, in his 60s).

Implications of SC for performance

According to the accounts of interviewees, the networks that they had built during their time abroad seemed to enable frequent knowledge transfers that could then result in improved performance, or greater ease in doing one's job. More precisely, it was raised that one of the benefits of SC was accessing intended information or support in a timely and uncomplicated manner, given how participants could identify from their networks who may be best positioned to answer their queries. In other situations, SC was equally useful to derive information-related benefits; for instance, one participant always reached out to contacts in

other countries and Finland decide if he was approaching prospective clients, and to be able to prepare appropriately when doing so.

Another important aspect that related to performance was the cross-cultural insights that the participants had acquired thanks to the IA and their social relationships, and which they continued to exploit as repatriates. This related to performance because the need to sustain international interactions did not end when the IA did. In many cases, the work of interviewees continued being highly internationally oriented after repatriating, as they often were team members or managers of cross-country teams. Furthermore, the need to maintain the connections to the home country was emphasized.

Having a strong network of people within the company, that helps to talk to the right persons and then be able to find out about work-related issues quicker, by knowing contacts in different locations and different roles [...] Yeah, it does help. Both things. The cultural understanding, because then you can relate to people and understand where they come from, what is motivating them and what is important from them. And then being able to reach out to the right person to get things solved. So yeah, I think both are beneficial in terms of performing in the role (SIE, male, 50s).

SC and repatriates' career success

This study sought to understand how repatriates' relationships and career success influence one another after IAs, given the relatively scarce coverage of these issues in the literature (Andresen, 2021; Mäkelä & Suutari, 2009). In this sense, the analysis of the interviews revealed that it is not uncommon for social capital to become a helpful entryway for repatriates to receive opportunities, or to take key career steps that will bring about positive returns in the future.

After a two-year assignment in the US and taking maternity leave, Heini (AE, 38 y/o) shared her new details with contacts in the US, letting them know that she was back to work in Finland. Regarding her network more specifically, she was surprised when a US colleague she had worked with on a project reached out to her: "Hey, you're back working! Are you looking for work? You know, I have something for you in the US". Although she is not planning to go to the US at this time, this clearly had an impact on Heini's subjective career perceptions. As she put it: "It's just good to know that if there was a will, there would be a way". Since she was back, she has received an overwhelming amount of offers, mostly from US-based headhunters, but also from Finland, where her specific knowledge of US regulations is sought after. In this sense, Heini also mentioned how her in-demand knowledge is enabled and updated through her international

contacts, whom she often calls or emails to obtain information about specific matters. Her initial salary had increased since the assignment, and a few months later, she was promoted.

Another repatriate, Kaarina (AE, 48 y/o), had a successful and diverse career in top management consulting companies after her assignment in Sweden. She went abroad with a smaller firm, and after repatriating, she was headhunted by a larger firm. Having worked with people from all over the world in Sweden, however, she wanted an even more global organization. She then found her way into one, and found out that although competitive, and global, the consulting sector is "a small world". When she changed companies, she found herself working with many well-known colleagues. In fact, Kaarina shared that she had not gone through formal application processes for any of these career moves. Instead, she relied on her networks.

Because of how I build networks, I just meet different people and I chit-chat with different people and I always tell them about what I'm doing, what I want to do in the future... You never know (AE, female, late 40s).

Like other interviewees', these cases evince how social capital may facilitate repatriates' career success upon their return. In particular, it seems that extended contacts, or bridging ties (Putnam, 2000), were the most useful in this regard, contributing to objective and subjective forms of career success, such as perceived employability within and outside of Finland.

SC and repatriates' well-being

An overwhelming majority of interviewees highlighted the indispensable role that their partners, friends and family played in providing direct emotional support during expatriation and the repatriation process. In this regard, there were no significant differences between AEs and SIEs. Thus, it was clear that close or bonding connections are effective sources of affective support for repatriates. Oftentimes, close contacts provided key career advice that extended well-beyond family or personal matters. In dual-career couples, which were common, partners often took turns in prioritizing each other's careers. In addition, spouses also often helped repatriates socialize, which was important for well-being.

In addition, there was the perception that organizations can make a difference in well-being, even when hiring a self-initiated expatriate who is coming back to Finland. To illustrate this point, I will share a short excerpt from an interview with a young SIE who was discussing her own positive experience when coming back to Finland and being supported by her company, in contrast to what

may happen to others, who may not be met with an appropriate degree of understanding:

"There are, for example, simply so many leaders that should not be in leadership positions, they have no clue in [...] leading people in a way that they should be led. They are more [so] leading things and processes [rather] than people.

[...] For people who are saying: "Hey, I am having a hard time adjusting and coming back". Hopefully, they have a good leader who says: "Ok...is there something I can do? Is there something we can do as a company? What can we do?" Not just to say: "Well come on, shut up and let us continue" (SIE, female, in her 30s).

PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

To summarize some of the research findings, repatriates' SC can be a driving force behind enhanced knowledge transfers and performance, which are of particular interest in the context of MNC operations. In addition, repatriates can leverage their bridging SC, or looser relationships, to maximize some aspects of their career success, and bonding SC, in the form of personal relationships (especially with partners) is a usual recourse to preserve well-being, and to receive helpful career advice.

Based on these results, this section offers some recommendations for organizations to improve their management of repatriation-related challenges. Indeed, the benefits that can be derived from SC should be interpreted as an incentive to consider SC as a valuable and versatile resource, that should be ideally included in repatriation support strategies for AEs, or the onboarding of SIEs who become new hires in a domestic organization once they return from a foreign location. Repatriation is a considerable challenge in most cases, and the availability of adequate organizational support can make a tangible difference, determining whether the overall repatriation outcomes will be mostly negative or positive (Kraimer et al., 2009). As Furuya and colleagues (2009) highlighted, receiving organizational support before and after repatriation is linked to improvements in readjustment, repatriate knowledge transfers, and performance.

A typical occurrence that AE repatriates recalled during the interviews was an excessive degree of uncertainty regarding their career progression and the job that would follow the IA. To avoid this, organizations could approach the assignment with an openly developmental approach, more transparently, and from the get-go. After all, managing repatriates at the departure, expatriation, and repatriation stages presents an unmissable opportunity to monitor the full life cycle of

social capital and skills acquisition. In this sense, a periodic review could be implemented to track the competencies and networks of expatriates *while* they are abroad; staying in touch with the expatriate in this way would help combat the "out of sight, out of mind phenomenon". In short, regardless of the objectives of each specific assignment, global mobility departments should reframe the experience as something that must develop the expatriates' skills, so that they will unquestionably match the long-term objectives of the home organization when the time to repatriate arrives.

Management of social capital after repatriation

In assessing the SC of both AEs and SIEs upon repatriation, a key obstacle has to do with identifying the potential resources that they may have access to, including the degree and scope of their international social capital. This has to do with the difficulty in measuring SC, which has long been a subject of debate in specialized circles (i.e., Hällsten et al., 2015; Villalonga-Olives & Kawachi, 2015). In expatriation research, it has also been noted that companies do not pay enough attention to the overall development of competencies and SC that takes place abroad (Shen & Kram, 2011).

To overcome the common problems that arise when attempting to measure SC quantitatively, a potential intervention would be to organize qualitative interviews involving the repatriates, supervisor(s), and HR or global mobility expert(s). During these sessions, the repatriates and the corporate representatives could reflect systematically on how the international experience developed the employee's competencies and their social networks. As an outcome, organizations would have a clearer impression of the added value of employees' social capital, as well as the kinds of growth that these professionals may have undergone.

At the minimum, and building upon the findings hitherto discussed, it would be advisable for the sessions to start from identifying the bridging and bonding relationships that have already contributed to the repatriate's career success, support, and knowledge transfers. Such a conversation could help firms estimate the extent of the resources available to their employees. As a follow-up to this discussion, the supervisors and global mobility experts should motivate repatriates to invest in their networks, given the crucial role that such career self-management activities seem to play in the global mobility context.

Repatriate and group coaching

An additional intervention could, to some extent, take inspiration from coaching approaches (Salomaa, 2021; Salomaa & Mäkelä, 2017), and cover their

current personal motivations, skills, and career plans to reach a conclusion that will feel meaningful to the participants. Aside from individual coaching, it could be particularly worthwhile to design group or family coaching events, which may also be more cost-effective. In this sense, one HR expert emphasized the importance of supporting spouses in the transitions related to repatriation. As a key bonding relationship for the expatriate, the experiences of family members have a strong impact on expatriates' well-being during repatriation adjustment:

I always encourage companies to take care of the two pieces of the puzzle. A lot of organizations are just concentrating their efforts on the expat, and the spouse is usually unattended [...] My observations show that there is a lot of pain, depression, and anxiety... (HR expert No. 2).

Time and time again, research participants lent support to van Gorp *et al.*'s (2017) argument that other former expatriates are uniquely positioned to offer them support or at least understand the challenges they face. Many interviewees were of the same impression, as previously mentioned in the discussion regarding knowledge transfers. Following this line of thought, it could be worthwhile to organize repatriate group discussions in which repatriates could share their career strategies and experiences with one another. Offering further credence to such an intervention, the existing literature does suggest that group coaching is a viable repatriation support strategy; in fact, it may be better than individual coaching when it comes to improving repatriates' fraternization and their interpersonal support (Szkudlarek & Sumpter, 2015). At the same time, the group sessions would allow firms to assist a greater number of returning individuals.

Offering new avenues for repatriates to meet other individuals who have gone through similar experiences could also be a helpful way for them to start restoring their domestic social capital, which may be needed after spending some time working abroad in a foreign location (Mäkelä & Suutari, 2009). Some interviewees were worried about how their professional network in Finland had become more limited while they were abroad. In this regard, getting in touch with other repatriates in these group discussions could be a first step in rebuilding their networks and sparking new relationships that may bring them future career opportunities later on.

CONCLUSION

This chapter sheds light on the importance of SC with regard to the repatriation of assigned and self-initiated expatriates, confirming the relevance of SC not only for individual career success but also for the organizations that employ them. It also shows how an SC-based perspective can inform our understanding

of repatriation challenges, as well as the career moves and social interactions that eventually pave the way to success.

This contribution differs from previous research in three ways. First, the implications of social capital are simultaneously considered at the micro (individual) and meso (organizational) levels of analysis. Second, both assigned and self-initiated expatriates are included. Third, the chapter is exclusively focused on repatriates, and it pays attention to both SIEs and AEs.

Two practical recommendations are drawn in the chapter based on the findings; namely, the use of qualitative interviews involving the repatriate, supervisor(s), and HR or global mobility expert(s) after the repatriation, and the application of individual or group coaching for repatriates, especially if it involves other peers or former expatriates.

Future research could extend this work by paying attention to complementary, behavioral perspectives, such as personality characteristics, which may somewhat contribute to certain networking behavior and preferences. In addition, future studies could adopt a more thorough longitudinal design to consider how SC develops progressively during the expatriation and repatriation stages. The available research has currently only looked at either one of these phases in isolation (Chiang *et al.*, 2020). In addition, more research is needed in other countries, as only repatriates from Finland were considered in the making of this book chapter.

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