Factors Influencing

Repatriate Knowledge Management

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1) Abstract

Rising globalisation and competitive pressure require businesses to have an increased internationally skilled workforce and to make best use of all available resources. Repatriates are the obvious resources to help fulfil both needs, tough they are often the forgotten employees – both in business and in international management literature. There is a particular lack on linking repatriation, knowledge management and why some companies do a better job in using their repatriates' knowledge. Based on existing literature, eleven hypotheses on factors influencing repatriate knowledge management will be developed which might also help to mitigate the fluctuation risk of repatriates.

2) Keywords

Repatriate, Knowledge Transfer, Influencing Factors, Repatriation, Expatriate

3) Introduction & Research Question

In the last twenty years, globalisation has been on the rise leading to the basic requirement for businesses to have internationally skilled personnel. Competitive pressure has been rising simultaneously creating the need for companies to make the best possible use of all their available resources. According to the resource based view of the firm, resources need to be scarce, of value, hard to imitate and not substitutable in order to be able to deliver a sustained competitive advantage. While technology, efficiencies of scale and advantages of location start to become easier to copy or imitate, intangible resources and knowledge/skill of people gain in importance (Pfeffer 1995, 6). According to Haanes & Fjeldstad 2000 (52ff) knowledge can be of specific importance to creating a competitive advantage if not only passively available but actively put into actions within the organisation. This thought is also mirrored by Barney & Wright 1998 saying that resources need to be used to generate value (either by increasing sales or decreasing cost) in order to be strategic resources.

A resource which can potentially possess these characteristics are repatriates and their international experience and knowledge, which could for example be used for managing foreign operations, acquiring new business abroad or increasing international skill of home employees. Repatriates shall in the following be defined as managers returning from an expatriate assignment abroad. Expatriates in this context are employees who for a limited period of time work for a foreign subsidiary, affiliate or joint venture and thereby move their centre of life to the foreign country. In order to set a boundary – so called career expatriates or transpatriates – will not be considered for the rest of this paper.

Repatriates have up to now often been the forgotten employees for many companies. A study done by Cartus 2007 showed that only 24% of companies interviewed had a repatriation program including career planning and 80% of companies answered in the Cartus 2004 study, that their repatriation policy could be improved. Considering the high fluctuation rates of repatriates (Black, Morrison & Gregersen 1999 talks about 25% and Hsieh, Lavoie & Samek 1999 about 15%-25% with peaks up to 70%), repatriation can clearly be seen as the Achilles' heel of international human resource management (Stahl & Cerdin 2004, 896). This problem does not only hold true for businesses, but is also reflected in research. While there is extensive literature on

selection, preparation and in-country adjustment of expatriates, their return and the linked problems have seen a lot less attention; available literature on repatriates focuses mainly on the adaption, expectations and reintegration on their return and to a lesser extent on career management and return on investment. The specific area of combining repatriate management with knowledge management is even more under researched. However, especially this area could be key to finding a solution to high repatriate fluctuation and dissatisfaction with the return process. Seeing repatriates as a resource and putting attention to their knowledge could help to mitigate the fluctuation risk while at the same time utilizing an important resource to the company. On top it could provide an opportunity to avoid a risk to the pipeline of new expatriates when they start to hesitate if they should take a foreign posting in view of the risk of harming their future career upon their return (Andreason & Kinneer 2004), as well as to avoid a risk of loosing valuable information to a competitor when repatriates change to a place where they feel their experience is higher valued (Oddou, Osland & Blankeney 2009, 183).

This leads therefore to an important question – why do some companies make better use of their repatriates than others and what factors could organisations influence in order to improve their repatriate knowledge management. This is summarized in the following research question:
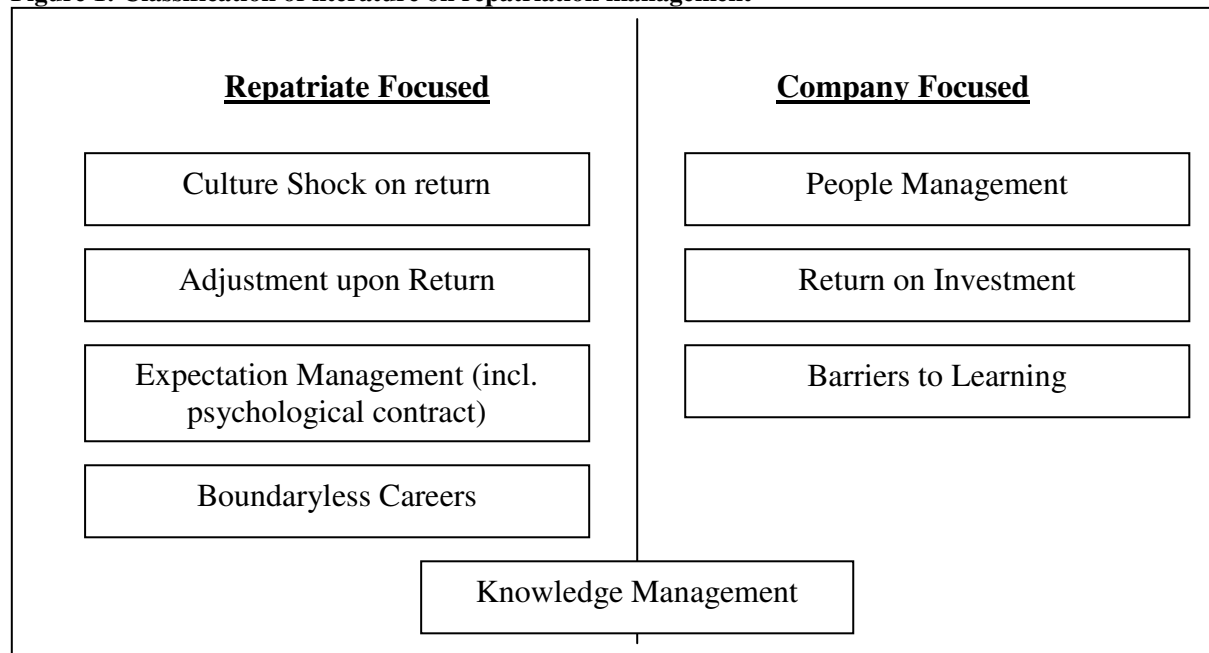
What factors influence the knowledge management of returned expatriates?

The remainder of the paper shall be dedicated to drawing a picture of the state of literature on the two areas included in this research question – repatriate management and factors influencing knowledge transfer, as well as developing a model of eleven hypotheses on potential influencing factors. The paper will conclude with a brief outlook on the empirical testing planned to validate the model.

4) Repatriation Management

Repatriation has over the past played a less important role in expatriate literature than for example the subject of preparation or in-country adjustment. However, also repatriation can be found in literature for more than 35 years. First papers were written by Murray 1973 and Howard 1974 and dealt with the culture shock upon the return home of an expatriate. A first empirical work was done by Clague & Krupp 1978 who focused on describing issues and giving possible solutions for companies. Since then literature has evolved, however those two first streams of research are still prominent. The below table attempts to categorize the research into repatriation into different streams of thinking:

Figure 1: Classification of literature on repatriation management

Repatriate Focused	Company Focused
Culture Shock on return	People Management
Adjustment upon Return	Return on Investment
Expectation Management (incl. psychological contract)	Barriers to Learning
Boundaryless Careers	
Knowledge Management	

Within the area of **culture shock theories**, the most famous piece of research is the extension of the culture shock u-curve to the w-curve as proposed by Gullahorn & Gullahorn 1962. Some other authors (like Hirsch 2003 or Fritz 1984) have expanded on the model by describing three (in the two models slightly different) phases of the return adjustment process. Many other papers have been contributing to describing the effects of the culture shock often also based on interviews with repatriates (for example Black & Gregersen 1991, Tung 1988 or Adler 1997). Culture shock theories have laid the foundation for all future research into repatriation. However, this is also where its limitations showed as they focused only on describing a phenomenon. This

led to the evolution of repatriate adaptation theories as the logical next step; investigating what influences the magnitude of the culture shock on return.

Base assumption of **repatriate adaption theories** is that a good return experience will lead to a higher degree of loyalty upon the return and less unwanted fluctuation. Most well known work in this area is provided by Black & Gregersen 1991 and Black, Gregersen & Mendenhall 1992, where they created a model distinguishing between three areas of adjustment (work, interaction with home nationals and general), as well as two types of adjustment (anticipatory adjustment and in-country adjustment). The model is completed by adding two adaption mechanisms used by repatriates called the behavioural control – the ability to adapt one's own behaviour to the environment, as well as the predictive control – the ability to predict the behaviour of one's environment (Black, Gregersen & Mendenhall 1992, 742). Black et al's model has been empirically tested by themselves, but also by a couple of studies thereafter with partly different results (e.g. Gregersen & Stroh 1997 or Hammer, Hart & Rogan 1998). For the study of Gregersen & Stroh 1997 the key factor for the differences seemed to be the different cultural environment. Key critic to the model of Black et al is its complexity, which makes it difficult to draw action points from it and makes empirical testing difficult. A simpler, but less well known model is proposed by Jassawalla, Connolly & Slkjkowski 2004. They propose a three phase model seeing influencing factors throughout the whole process of expatriation (prior to departure, during the stay and upon the return).

The next development stage of repatriate research can be described as **repatriate expectation theories**. Based on the adaption upon the return, these theories focus on one specific influencing factor – repatriate expectations and their fulfilment. Best known papers in this area come from J. Stewart Black, Hal B. Gregersen and Linda K. Stroh. The theoretical foundation for this research is found in the equity theory by Adams 1963, which is used to explain the repatriates will react to the way the feel they are being treated by the company (Stroh 1995, 446). The newest addition to the repatriate expectations theories have shifted to be based on the idea of the psychological contract as described by Rousseau 1989. While based on the equity theory repatriates would be creating their expectations based on the comparison to other repatriates, repatriates will with psychological contract thinking have a

conception of expected actions by the company and by the repatriate. If expectations are not met, then this does not lead just to dissatisfaction but to a breach of trust, which can only be repaired with great difficulty (Robinson & Rousseau 1994, 247). This idea is described by Lazarova & Caligiuri 2001 who explain the expatriate's feeling upon their return as wanting something back for the sacrifices done during the assignment abroad. An empirical study in this area was performed by Chi & Chen 2007 based on 141 Taiwanese repatriates showing a positive correlation of the fulfilment of the psychological contract and a greater commitment to the home organisation upon the repatriate's return. Key benefit of the repatriate expectation theories is the possible explanation for higher than usual fluctuation rates of repatriates, as well as an explanation for the repatriate's feelings upon his/her return. The major drawback is a difficulty to turn the explanations into concrete actions.

Beside the now described three main streams of research, there are various other contributions looking at repatriation from different angles like **Expatriate Return on Investment** (e.g. in McNutty & Tharenou 2006, Johnson 2005 or Tinder 2007), specific problems of **female repatriates** (Linehan & Scullion 2002) or the direction of **repatriation and career management**, where the concept of boundaryless careers adds an interesting perspective to the discussion around repatriate fluctuation (Stahl & Cerdin 2004, Arthur & Rousseau 1996).

The combination of **repatriates and knowledge management** has had very little research so far. The fact that repatriates acquire knowledge while being abroad can be found in many papers dealing with repatriation, but the description of the knowledge acquired is often only descriptive (e.g. in Adler 1997, 247 or Kühlmann 1995, 190). The first model developed describing repatriate knowledge comes from Berthoin Antal 2000. Another slightly different proposal is the knowledge diamond as presented by Fink, Meierewert & Rohr 2005. Both models clearly show the extensive knowledge repatriates acquire abroad and the strategic resource repatriates therefore could be for an organisation. Papers on knowledge transfer are however even more scarce than the ones describing the knowledge itself. Only one conceptual model has been presented so far by Lazarova & Tarique 2005, but no empirical validation has yet been published. While there is some work on knowledge transfer in multinational organisation and by expatriates during their time abroad

(Bendt 2000, Bonache & Brewster 2001, Minbaeva & Michailova 2004), there is hardly any mentioning of factors influencing knowledge transfer upon the return. The only exception are the above work of Lazarova, the contributions of Berthoin Antal 2001/ Berthoin Antal & Böhling 1998 on expatriates and organizational learning and the very recently published article of Oddou, Osland & Blankeney 2009, being the first article looking specifically at factors influencing repatriate knowledge transfer.

Finally, the last piece in order to complete the picture on literature available on repatriate management is the contributions within the area of **people management** giving companies advice on how they can improve their repatriate management. This is the area with the highest quantity of publications. Some better known contributions are by Tung 1988, Frazee 1997 Adler 1997 or Allen & Alvarez 1998.

The above brief review of literature available on repatriate management shows a clear need to further expand on the area of repatriate knowledge management – especially in view of the impact this could have on repatriate retention and the ability of a company to make the best use of their internationally skilled resources. The existing research is however an important basis for being able to make the best possible use of repatriates.

This is the area, where my thesis is hoping to fit in – transfer of knowledge upon repatriation. The second part of this paper shall therefore attempt to present a literature review on knowledge transfer and factors that can influence it.

5) Knowledge Transfer process

In order to be able to understand what factors influence the knowledge transfer, it is important to look at the process of knowledge transfer itself. Szulanski 1996 describes it as a four step process starting with a need to transfer knowledge followed by the transfer itself, the first application up to routine application of the knowledge. Szulanski's model is especially important, as it does not see knowledge transfer as a one way process. He insists that the need to transfer needs to be coming from the receiving location and that the transfer does not stop at the transfer, but can only be seen as completed once the knowledge is actively and routinely

applied. The limits to Szulanki's model are the lack of looking at different types of knowledge to be transferred, as well as the lack of looking at the environment in which the knowledge is transferred.

The probably best known and highest referred to model comes from Nonaka & Takeuchi 1997. Nonaka/Takeuchi's main contribution is the fact, that they show different methods of transferring knowledge for tacit and explicit knowledge. Concretely, they talk about four types of knowledge transfer – socialization for the transfer of tacit to tacit knowledge like in an apprentice-trainer relationship, externalization for the transfer of tacit to explicit knowledge in order to make tacit knowledge codified, combination as the creation of new knowledge of different explicit knowledge and finally internalisation for the transfer of explicit knowledge to tacit knowledge like the learning experience in a training or by reading a manual. But also the context of knowledge is addressed by Nonaka/Takeuchi's model by introducing the four Bas – the needed context for each of the four transfer types (Nonaka, Toyama & Byosière 2001, 500). According to Nonaka/Takeuchi, the combination of the four transfer types leads to a spiral of knowledge creation.

Another very context focused contribution is the system theory based model of Inkpen & Dinur 1998. Central element to this view on the knowledge transfer is the concept of knowledge spectrum, which describes the totality of the knowledge an organization could make use of, the concept of knowledge state – the knowledge an organization is currently using and the concept of knowledge pockets - a specific piece of knowledge. Both areas are surrounded by an environment, which Inkpen/Dinur describe by five contextual dimensions (culture, strategy, decision making structure and processes, environment and technology). For transfer of knowledge to be possible, the knowledge pocket to be transferred needs to be part of the knowledge state of the sender, but also the knowledge spectrum of the receiver. If this overlapping of the knowledge spectrum is not given, then the knowledge pocket is not connectable to the existing pool of knowledge of the receiver. The concept of overlapping culture can also be found by Ghoshal & Bartlett 1988, who showed that normative integration (shared values, strategies and goals) between headquarter and its affiliates can help the knowledge transfer.

A fourth very different way of looking at knowledge transfer is the social viable system model by Yolles 2007 – a metamodel which can be applied to various contexts. Key element are two processes - autopoieses, the process which allows noumenal activities to manifest themselves in events and autogenesis which steers the process of autopoieses – and three domains – the existential domain, which comprises culture, paradigms and worldviews, the noumenal domain, which comprises interpretation mechanisms like systems of thought and images, as well as the phenomenal domain, which comprises local actions like structure and behaviours. The model can also be used to describe pathological symptoms of a system (Yolles 2007, 39ff). Fink & Holden 2008 used this approach to describe the collective culture shock caused by expatriates on an affiliate. An expatriate can change the phenomenal domain, as well as bring in a break of the autogenesis and autopoieses process, to which the local systems reacts with a shock. A similar effect could occur when a repatriate comes back to headquarters and tries to bring new cultural views into the receiving location. In both cases, the knowledge transfer is blocked until there is an adaption of either the system or the expatriate to the new environment.

6) Influencing factors on the knowledge transfer

Reviewing the four knowledge transfer models presented above, there are different areas in which knowledge transfer can be influenced –the sender, the receiver, the knowledge itself and the environment of the knowledge transfer.

In the following, potential influencing factors for three out of these four areas will be sketched to build up a model of influencing factors that shall be tested for its relevance on influencing repatriate knowledge transfer:

Influencing Factors on the Sender
In order to be able to share knowledge, it is first and foremost needed, that the person holding the knowledge is prepared to pass it on to a receiver. This can be potentially distorted if the sender is afraid of loosing power by passing on knowledge (Szulanski 1996, 31). According to Osterloh 2003 it is important to have an intrinsic motivation of the sender to pass on the knowledge to guarantee the best possible knowledge transfer. Von Krogh 2000 adds to it, that the sender should possess an

active empathy to know what knowledge is needed from a receiver in order to assure an effective knowledge transfer process, where resources are not wasted on knowledge that is not beneficial for the receiver. In the context of repatriates, Adler 1997 has created a framework that can describe the attitude of the repatriate as the sender of knowledge. Adler thereby speaks of different attitudes towards integration – a re-socialized returnee, who negates the knowledge he has learned abroad and tries to completely fit back in to the headquarter organisation, an alienated returnee, who was completely immerged into the host culture and now cannot find back into the home culture and finally a proactive returnee, who takes the best of both cultures and aims at combining them. These three base attitudes could also be interpreted as attitudes towards knowledge transfer upon return, leading to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Repatriate Knowledge Management depends on the attitude of the repatriate towards reintegration.

Another important influencing factor is the ability of the sender to transfer knowledge. This can on the one hand be communicative and social abilities to interact with the receiver (Bendt 2000, 53) and on the other hand the ability to influence the receiver. The ability to shape one's surroundings can be influenced by the reputation and the seniority that a sender has within an organisation (Szulanski 1996, 31), as knowledge is also valued based on who it comes from (Davenport & Prusak 1998, 100). This is clearly also relevant for the transfer of knowledge by repatriates and therefore the second hypothesis is as follows:

Hypothesis 2: Repatriate Knowledge Management depends on the position of the repatriate upon his return.

Another factor that can influence the position of a repatriate in the company is the strategic importance that the international business and especially the host country of the repatriate have for the overall business performance. Looking at Adler´s 1997 (7ff) stages of internationalization, we can clearly see different needs for repatriate knowledge transfer depending on the position of the organisation in those phases. Within the domestic phase, when the company is mainly focused on the home market, the interest into knowledge about foreign cultures and operations will be rather limited, as it is expected that the foreign business partners will adapt to the rules of the domestic company (Berthoin Antal & Böhling 1998, 230). In the multi-

domestic phase, the foreign operations gain in importance and so will the knowledge of the repatriate. Stroh, Gregersen & Black 1998 (116) speak of pioneer expats, which seems to well fit into this stage of early development of foreign operations. For organisations in a multinational phase, repatriates will again be of lesser importance as internationalization is already well on its way and the focus is more put on standardizing across the different foreign subsidiaries. In the final degree of internationalization, the global phase, companies are looking to combine their standardization with differentiation on a local level. The knowledge coming from the different operations will gain in importance again and with it the knowledge of the repatriates. Considering that expatriation will not be a one-way stream anymore, but that there will likely also be inpatriates (employees from subsidiaries into the headquarters) and transpatriates (employees moving from one subsidiary to the next), the intercultural management capabilities will gain value. Based on the above thoughts, the third and fourth hypotheses are the following:

Hypothesis 3: Repatriate Knowledge Management depends on the strategic importance of the host country to the company.

Hypothesis 4: Repatriate Knowledge Management depends on the degree of internationalisation of the company.

Influencing Factors on the Receiver

The same as there is a need of a disposition to share knowledge by the sender, there also is a need for the receiver to be poised to accept new knowledge. A factor that can disturb the transfer on the receiving end is an ethnocentric attitude of the receiving organisation, which looks at any knowledge or process generated outside of the headquarters with suspicion (Szulanski 1996, 31/Macharzina, Oesterle & Brodel 2001, 647). But also on the receiving end, the threat of loosing ones power can be a prohibiting factor, when new knowledge challenges existing ways of doing things and thereby existing positions (Probst, Raub & Romhardt 1998, 115). But even if the receiver is prepared to accept new knowledge, there also needs to be a connectivity of the knowledge to the existing spectrum of knowledge (Szulanski 1996, 31). If a repatriate was to bring ideas that are solely relevant to foreign business into a complete domestic department, this could well lead to the process of knowledge

transfer stopping with the transfer and the knowledge never being implemented. The fifth hypothesis focusing on the receiver shall be:

Hypothesis 5: Repatriate Knowledge Management depends on the attitude of colleagues on the reintegration of the repatriate.

Influencing Factors on the environment of the knowledge transfer

As shown by the knowledge transfer models presented above, the environment in which the knowledge transfer takes place can be of fundamental importance.

In the specific context of repatriates, the first factor that creates an environment for the knowledge transfer is the career management that the repatriate has experienced alongside his assignment. A positive correlation between fluctuation rate and career planning for expatriates was shown by Stroh 1995. Also Forster 1994 cited restructuring and other major changes in the headquarter (which can lead to difficulties in assignment planning) as factors that negatively influence the return process. On the opposite, having a good career planning, that starts already with selection, continues with clear communication during the assignment abroad and finishes with a good career planning for the return including early involvement of the expatriate, can lead to creating realistic expectations in the repatriate and therefore a smoother return (Solomon 1995, 30). Assuming that a positive return experience enabled by good career management can create a positive environment for the repatriate to share his knowledge, the sixth hypothesis is the following:

Hypothesis 6: Repatriate Knowledge Management depends of the quality of career management during and post the expatriate assignment.

Knowledge transfer requires a common language between the sender and the receiver, as the knowledge needs to be understood by both parties (Grant & Baden-Fuller 1999, 123). The jargon used by an organisation can change over the period of a foreign assignment creating a barrier for a repatriate upon his return to pass on knowledge if he cannot put it anymore into the words, phrases and abbreviations used by the home organisation. While the repatriate will pick up the jargon again, it creates a further initial barrier to the transfer. One way that can overcome this and help to strengthen the position of the repatriate upon his return by reducing the out of

sigh-out of mind syndrome is regular visits to the home organisation (Hurn 1999, 227). The seventh hypothesis is therefore:

Hypothesis 7: Repatriate Knowledge Management depends on the degree of contact of the expatriate to the headquarters during his assignment.

A third factor within the area of career management which can be of influence to the knowledge transfer of repatriates is the initial reason of sending expatriates abroad. Using Mayrhofer's 2001 classification of foreign assignments, there seems to be a clear sign that not all of them will lead to the same knowledge transfer upon the return of an expatriate. Expatriates sent abroad to control a subsidiary or solve a specific problem will not be seen as bringing back knowledge other than if they are sent out to solve a similar problem again. Expatriates sent abroad because they are not wanted anymore in the headquarters will also not be seen as bringing back valuable knowledge upon their return. If a foreign assignment is however also seen as a means of development of top talent, the likelihood of the repatriate and his knowledge being positively received is increased. This would be the case for either trainee or early career development assignments or expatriates who are sent to top management positions abroad to prepare them for even more responsibility upon their return. The eighth hypothesis is for that reason as follows:

Hypothesis 8: Repatriate Knowledge Management depends on the initial reason for sending the expatriate abroad.

According to Nonaka, Toyama & Byosière 2001 (508) the first step for an organisation to make use of knowledge is an intention of its management to do so. Íf all members of an organisation are convinced of the benefit of sharing knowledge and the transfer of knowledge is rewarded, then the knowledge transfer will be positively influenced (Holden 2001, 11). In contrast, a company who wants to keep the status quo and is sceptical towards new knowledge can negatively influence the transfer of knowledge (Kamoche 1997). Such a culture would hinder the knowledge transfer of repatriates and the ninth hypothesis shall hence be:

Hypothesis 9: Repatriate Knowledge Management depends on the learning culture of the company.

Building on the last point, it is important not to only have a general learning culture, but also a culture that values the experience of repatriates. Stroh 1995 for example

has shown a positive correlation between the ability of a company to keep repatriates and the cultural values of a company that see foreign assignments as an important step in a career. Also Poe 2000 stressed the importance for receiving repatriates positively and placing value on their experience. This can minimize the risk that repatriates will look for different places that put a higher value on their experience. Berthoin Antal 2001 calls out the need for a top management strategy with regards to the expectations on knowledge transfer and repatriate reintegration. The tenth hypothesis is thus:

Hypothesis 10: Repatriate Knowledge Management depends on the degree of support from top management for active knowledge management upon the repatriate's return.

The last factor which shall be presented here influencing the environment of repatriate knowledge transfer is the organizational support structure provided by the company upon the return. Assuming that stress and conflict on the return can negatively influence the reintegration and acceptance within the home organisation, this can also negatively influence the transfer of repatriate knowledge (Harvey & Novicevic 2006, 330). Options for the company to facilitate the return can be to create contact with other repatriates or providing a mentoring system to help repatriates deal with the initial problems of the return (Mead 2005, 410). The last hypothesis is therefore:

Hypothesis 11: Repatriate Knowledge Management depends on the organisation support structure upon repatriation.

The above formulated eleven hypotheses are summarized in the chart below:

Figure 2: Factors influencing Repatriate Knowledge Transfer
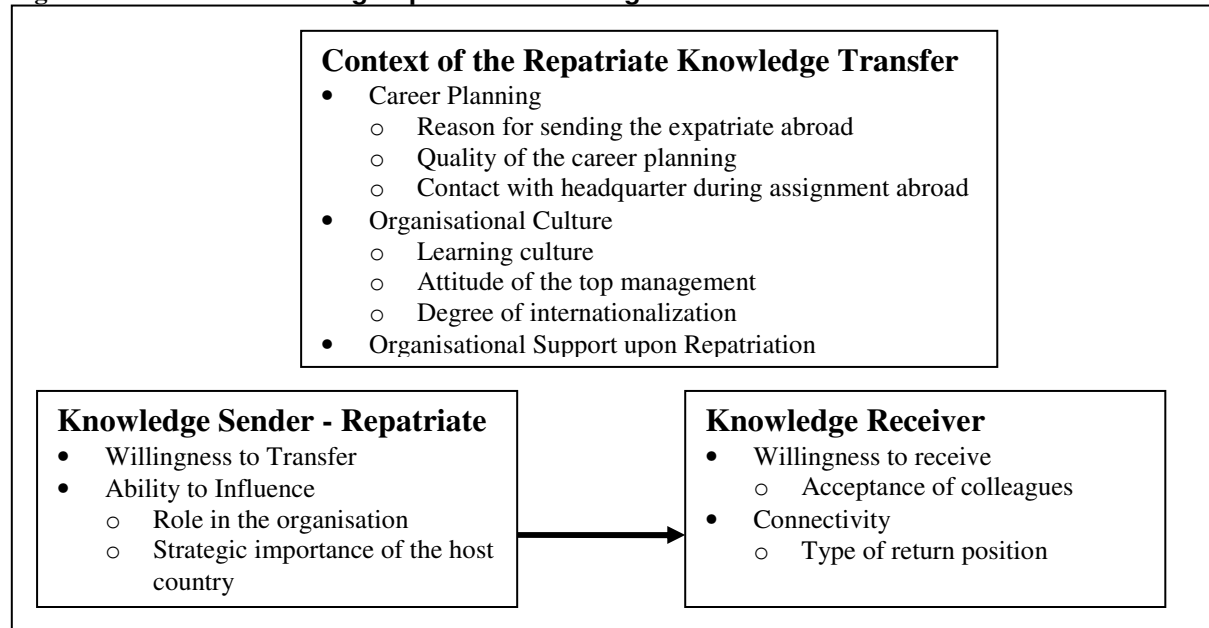
Comparing the above model with the only other two models available so far, we see some similarities but also some new points being brought into the picture. The above presented model is strongly influenced by the thought that a good adaption back into the home organisation will also facilitate the knowledge transfer process. The model of Oddou, Osland & Blankeney 2009 has a stronger background of the factors influencing a positive environment in a work-group and thus the knowledge transfer of the repatriate. The model of Lazarova & Tarique 2005 by contrast includes a special focus on the transfer tools and the type of knowledge to be transferred, which is not reflected in either of the other two models. In summary, all three models agree that it is an important need to understand the influencing factors but all three models put a slightly different focus on potential influencing factors. The similarities and differences of the three models are summarized in the table below:

Figure 3: Comparison of three models on factors influencing repatriate knowledge transfer

	Above Model	Oddou, Osland & Blankeney 2009	Lazarova & Tarique 2005
Attitude towards reintegration	X		X
Position upon Return	X	X	
Strategic Importance of Host Country	X	X	
Degree of Internationalization	X		
Attitude of colleagues	X	X	X
Quality of career management	X	X	X
Degree of contact during time abroad	X		
Reason for expatriate assignment	X		
Learning Orientation	X	X	
Top Management Support for e-integration	X		
Organisational support for the return process	X		X
Expertise of Repatriate		X	
Ability to develop social networks		X	
Commitment to work unit/organisation		X	
Management Style of Unit Leader		X	
Trust		X	
Intensity of Transfer Tool			X
Type of Knowledge			X

7) Outlook

Having created a framework of potential influencing factors, the empirical study of the above model to come will aim to add to the current state of knowledge on repatriate knowledge transfer in two specific areas:

1. Adding an empirical quantitative study.

As Oddou, Osland & Blankeney 2009 point out when assessing the landscape of literature available on repatriate knowledge transfer, there is no empirical studies available yet testing potential influencing factors.

2. Adding a first perspective on public sector repatriates

The study is also aiming to include public and near public sector organisations into the study. While literature is extensive when looking at career expatriates in the public sector like diplomats there is hardly any data available on organisations, where repatriation is a rather new phenomenon (e.g. like national banks, employer's associations or non foreign ministries).

The study will be based on a quantitative survey with Austrian and German repatriates in both private companies and public sector organisations. In order to take

into account the somewhat different settings, a slightly modified questionnaire will be used for the public sector. The study will be carried out via a web-based questionnaire. Results of the survey will then first be analysed by doing statistical description of the results and the participants, followed by testing the relevance of the created hypotheses via multivariate regression analysis as well as factor analysis in order to extract the most relevant influencing factors which will then be used in order to update the proposed draft model before attempting to identify potential hierarchies within the different aspects influencing repatriate knowledge management.

While the study will be a step forward to understanding the repatriate dynamics, there is still ample opportunity for further research in this area. Besides doing similar studies in a different cultural background, there is for example also potential to further drive research into knowledge management in the context of boundaryless careers as well as into the context of transpatriates.

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