FH MÜNSTER
University of Applied Sciences

Reasons and Risks of High Repatriate Turnover and How HR Can Mitigate Them

Abschlussarbeit
im Studiengang
Bachelor European Business Programme

vorgelegt von:	Annika Wolf
Matrikelnummer:	1019821
Erstprüfer:	Prof. Dr. Thomas Jansen
Zweitprüfer:	Prof. Dr. Sonja Öhlschlegel-Haubrock
Abgabedatum:	02.02.2022

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List of Abbreviations

GLOBE	Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness
HCN	Host Country National
HR	Human Resources
MNE	Multinational Enterprise
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PCN	Parent Country National
POS	Perceived Organizational Support
TCN	Third Country National

1. Introduction

1.1. Problem Statement

"[A] developed pool of global leaders is indispensable for operating successfully outside of the domestic market "(Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001, p. 389). A means for establishing global expertise in a company are international assignments. However, a survey carried out by Deloitte came to the result that 35% of returnees from international assignments leave their parent organization during the first year upon returning (Deloitte, 2008, p. 22). This is problematic as the high turnover rate imposes a challenge to the competitiveness of multinational enterprises (MNEs) (Scullion & Collings, 2006, p.49). It leads not only to loss of expertise (Oddou et al, 2013, p. 257) but also to high financial costs as companies invest heavily into their international assignments (Scullion & Collings, 2006, p. 49). Yet, successful repatriation is a topic which has only now started to gain more attention, and it is thus of interest to carry out further research on the reasons for high repatriate turnover and how it can be mitigated.

1.2. Purpose and Methodology

The purpose of this thesis is to explain more in detail how expatriates' retention in their parent company can be ensured as they are of high value for MNEs. The topics covered can be summarized by answering three main research questions:

- Why does high repatriate turnover pose a risk to MNEs?
- What are the main factors causing repatriation difficulties and repatriate turnover, and which ones are the most significant for Finnish and German repatriates?
- What are effective measures that can be taken by HR to overcome the risk of high repatriate turnover?

After explaining the most important terms regarding expatriation, the following chapters elaborate on the importance of retaining expatriates in the MNE. In order to investigate the reasons for high turnover rates among repatriates, literature is reviewed which focuses on the two factors 'employee commitment' and 'repatriate adjustment'. Both have an influence on repatriate turnover.

The identified reasons function as a base for suggesting how Human Resource departments can theoretically mitigate the risk of repatriates leaving the company. Repatriate turnover is further examined using Germany and Finland and the differences between their cultural backgrounds as examples. The methodological part of the thesis explains the concept of expert interviews and qualitative content analysis. The following chapter then shows own interview results. The discussion compares the results to the theoretical findings, showing that the interviews underline many findings of the literature. Yet, some aspects could also be added to the results of the literature review. It becomes clear that career management is of high importance as well as skill utilization, next to other minor influences. The interviews also revealed the importance of the fit of visions and values of the repatriate to the MNE's. Hence, the suggested measures also put a large focus on those aspects.

Traditionally, a lot of research concerning expatriates focuses on the expatriation itself. Even if it is slowly receiving more attention, former research often considers the repatriation process after international assignments as less important than, for instance, the selection and preparation process of expatriates (Linehan in Scullion & Collings, 2006, p. 196). Today, there is a rather small number of books, yet a growing number of journals and papers on the topic. A lot of the research has been carried out in the context of specific countries like the US and is thus rather limited (Lee & Liu, 2007, p. 123). For the theoretical background of the thesis information was mostly acquired from journal articles by authors such as Lazarova and Caligiuri (2001), Lazarova & Cerdin (2007) as well as Black et al. (1992). Books were used mostly for the methodical part of the thesis, citing authors like Mayring (2002, 2010, 2014), Flick (2007) and Misoch (2019).

1.3. Definition of Terms

Expatriates

Looking at the relevant literature, there are several different definitions regarding the term 'expatriate'. Some define the term rather broadly as "employees who come from a different country than where they are working"

(Parboteeah & Cullen, 2018, p. 434). Such definitions also include students moving and working abroad as well as people moving abroad permanently.

In the following, a focus will be put on *business expatriates* and thus the following definition will be used for the term expatriate: “a manager or technical specialist, usually from the [multinational corporation’s] home-country base, who is assigned temporarily to fill a specific role or complete a specific project in an overseas subsidiary, usually over a predetermined period” (McNulty & Inkson, 2013, p. 8).

Repatriation

Repatriation can be defined as the “reintegration of [expatriates] into their original home operation following an expatriate assignment” (Scullion & Collings, 2006, p. 49).

Employee Turnover (Voluntary)

Employee turnover can be broadly defined as the “rate at which employees leave the firm” (Dessler, 2013, p. 348). It can be further divided into voluntary and involuntary turnover (Dessler, 2013, p. 348). In the course of this thesis, a focus will be put on *voluntary turnover*. Thus, the following definition will be applied: “Employee turnover is the voluntary cessation of membership of an organization by an employee of that organization” (Morrell et al., 2001, p. 220). Turnover of expatriates upon repatriation is a measure used for measuring the usefulness of expatriate programs (Scullion & Collings, 2006, p. 49).

2. Repatriate Turnover: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction to the Literature Review

In the following, literature will be analyzed for investigating its answers to the research questions. The first chapters give a short overview of different types of expatriates, as well as motives of expatriate assignments. They are only shortly outlined at this point. Afterwards, for addressing the first research question, the next chapters investigate risks of high repatriate turnover. For identifying the reasons of high repatriate turnover, different models are then compared. Based on a model established by Black et al., the following chapters analyze the possible reasons for repatriate turnover in detail. Using survey results, the subsequent part shows the reasons that seem to be the most relevant. Having identified risks and reasons, measures for the mitigation of turnover are collected and structured.

2.2. Expatriation and Repatriation in General

2.2.1. Types of Expatriates

Business expatriates, as defined above, can be further divided into categories. Today, the main distinction is made between *parent country nationals* (PCNs) which are expatriate employees who come from the parent firm’s home country and *third country nationals* (TCNs) which are from neither the home country where the corporate headquarters are located nor the host country where they are employed. Another term linked to expatriates are *host country nationals* (HCNs). They are usually not eligible for expatriation, yet MNEs can choose to send them from the country of the subsidiary to the headquarters of the business for a limited period of time (McNulty & Inkson, 2013, pp. 12-13). In the thesis, the term ‘repatriate’ is not only linked to parent country nationals but all kinds of expatriates.

2.2.2. Motives for Sending Expatriates Abroad

The three primary motives for utilizing international transfers defined by Edström and Galbraith (1977) are

- *Filling positions*: Expatriates are often required when there is a lack of availability of managerial or technical knowledge in the respective host country.
- *Providing management development opportunities*: International assignments give the expatriate as well as the company the opportunity of developing international management expertise that can also be used after the assignment.
- *Supporting organizational development:* Expatriation can be used as a means of controlling activities abroad as well as achieving integration with the respective subsidiary by sharing values (Edström & Galbraith, 1977, p. 253).

Successful repatriation of expatriates thus contributes mostly to achieving the second motive mentioned above. “While skill gap filling may have its payback during an IA, much of the benefits of a developmental assignment will accrue to the organization after return” (Dickmann et al., 2008, p. 187).

The differentiation by Edström and Galbraith has been expanded over time (Scullion & Collings, 2006, pp. 40-45). For instance, Pucik additionally differentiates between demand-driven and learning-driven motives. Assignments for filling positions and control reasons are usually demand-driven and assignments for individual and organization development are learning-driven (Pucik in Pucik et al., 1992, as cited in Scullion and Collings, 2006, p. 41). This differentiation is pictured below.

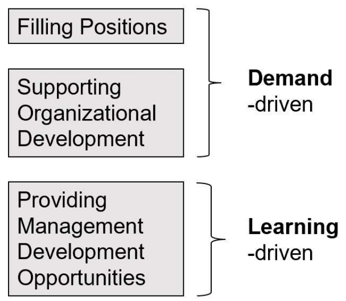

Figure 1. Expatriation Motives

Source: based on Pucik in Pucik et al., 1992, as cited in Scullion and Collings, 2006, p. 41

2.3. Risks of High Repatriate Turnover

2.3.1. High Costs of Expatriates

As mentioned above, companies usually invest a large sum of money into sending their employees abroad on international assignments. They do not only have costs in connection with relocating the assignee and their family, but expatriates also often receive a premium when agreeing to take on the assignment (Scullion & Collings, 2006, p. 49).

Early research has pointed out that expatriates cost employers on average two to five times more than home-county counterparts, meaning that they invest heavily into them. Thus, they are among the most expensive of the human resources and it is necessary to retain them in the organization after the assignment (Dickmann et al., 2004, pp. 16-17).

2.3.2. Competitive Risk

Another major risk of repatriate turnover is that the MNE loses the competitive advantage it has gained due to having sent their employees abroad. “Repatriates […] gain valuable strategic knowledge that could make the company as a whole more competitive. Their tacit knowledge and behavioral skills are hard - often impossible - to develop without immersion experiences in other cultures” (Oddou et al, 2013, p. 257). Expatriates experience perspective shifts which help them understand and manage a more diverse workforce and they establish new networks which can be valuable for MNEs. Additionally, they acquire a global mindset which is important as e.g. joint ventures frequently tend to fail because of cross-cultural differences and interpersonal conflict. Lastly, they develop new competencies which can be personal attributes and skills such as more self-confidence (Oddou et al., 2013, pp. 258-260). When an internationally proficient employee leaves the MNE that can often lead to advantages for direct competitors as repatriates tend to find jobs with competitors and thus provide them with valuable skills without the competitor having to invest into it (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001, p. 390).

2.3.3. Influence on Domestic Employees

The Santa Fe Relocation Services point out that the willingness to accept an international assignment is still a key barrier for organizations to fulfill their global mobility objectives. Therefore, the negative influence on domestic employees by repatriate turnover could be a major additional risk (Santa Fe, 2019, p. 78). As a result of high repatriate turnover, it is signaled to other employees that foreign assignments can have a negative impact on career advancement. Hence, the possibility of finding new candidates for expatriation is reduced (Brewster & Scullion, 1997, as cited in Dickmann et al., 2008, p. 177).

2.4. Reasons for Repatriate Turnover

2.4.1. Introduction of Framework

Contrarily to the scarce literature on repatriation, the research literature on employee turnover is extensive. However, traditional turnover theories can hardly be applied to the context of repatriate turnover as those are established merely for domestic employees and are often applied inside the organization (Allen & Vardaman, 2017, p. 163). Examples for traditional theories are Porter and Steer’s met expectations model or March and

Simon's organizational equilibrium. The latter is an example for a model that focuses solely on the domestic context (Hom et al., 2020, pp. 72-75).

A matrix which was established by Black et al. (1992) will be used in this thesis for investigating the reasons for repatriate turnover instead of the traditional theories. The model revolves around the concepts of repatriate adjustment and organizational commitment and shows how they influence turnover behavior.

Repatriation Adjustment / **Organizational Commitment**	High	Low
High	**Functional Retention** *High performance* *High intent to stay*	**Dysfunctional Turnover** High performance Low intent to stay
Low	**Dysfunctional Retention** *Low performance* *High intent to stay*	**Functional Turnover** *Low performance* *Low intent to stay*

Figure 2. Turnover Matrix by Black et al.

Source: Black et al., 1992, p. 754

Organizational commitment gained importance throughout the last centuries as a predictor of turnover as it proved to be a better predictor than e.g. job satisfaction which many earlier theories were based on (Porter et al., 1974, as cited in Hom et al., 2020, p. 150). As *repatriate adjustment* is exclusive for the international context, Black's model cannot be applied to the domestic but only to the expatriate context. Thus, the matrix is suitable for the research questions defined in the introduction. According to Black et al., repatriation adjustment as well as organizational commitment are the main influences on retention or, respectively, turnover (Black et al., 1999, p. 238).[1] This is also confirmed by more recent studies (Lee & Liu, 2005, p. 130; Allen & Vardaman, 2017, p. 166).

Some researchers distinguish between the terms turnover intention and actual turnover. In the case of looking at them separately, researchers have

[1] In the matrix only the strongest influences are shown and thus the direct influence of adjustment on turnover is not directly visible, yet explained in their research (Black et al., 1992, pp. 753-754).

found intent to leave or stay as the strongest predictor of actual turnover (Hendrix et al., 1999, p. 627; Mowday et al., 1982, as cited in Lee & Liu, 2007, p. 124). Yet, some studies use the terms synonymously, just like Black et al. in the matrix. Both terms will be used in the course of the thesis, yet the main focus will be put on actual turnover.

Taking all of this into consideration, reasons for repatriate adjustment as well as commitment will both be analyzed in order to find out about the underlying and thus initial reasons for turnover.

2.4.2. Repatriate Adjustment

The following chapter gives a short overview of Black et al.'s model of repatriate adjustment for then identifying the reasons for repatriate adjustment and consequently retention or turnover. There are different areas that repatriates need to adjust to when returning home. Black et al. divide those into the following categories:

- *Adjustment to the job*
- *Adjustment to interacting* with home country nationals
- *Adjustment to the general nonwork environment* such as adjustment to food and transportation (Black et al., 1999, pp. 209-210).

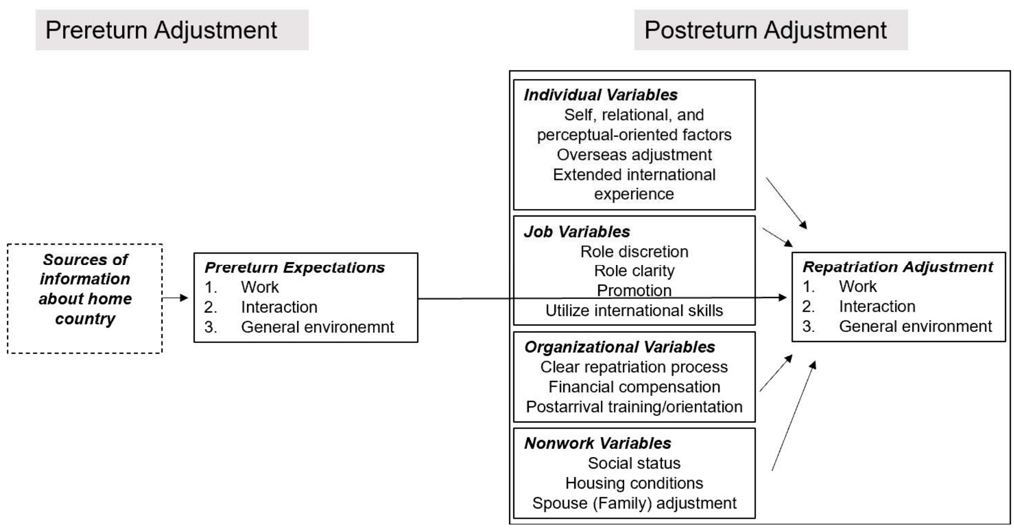

Figure 3. Repatriate Adjustment

Source: Black et al., 1999, p. 211, modified by author

The model pictured above shows that Black et al. introduce mainly five different categories of factors influencing the three areas of adjustment.

Those will be explained in the following in order to identify the reasons for eventual turnover.

If repatriates achieve prereturn adjustment and have appropriate *prereturn expectations*, it can facilitate postreturn adjustment. This can be influenced by different measures. For instance, “constant communication between the home office and the expatriates during the assignment is a critical element of successful repatriation” (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001, p. 395). It forms the repatriates’ expectations before returning and helps them prepare.

Looking at postreturn adjustment, Black et al. first suggest that *individual variables* are of importance. Self-, relational- as well as perceptual-oriented factors have a positive influence on repatriate adjustment. That means that repatriates believe in themselves, have a high ability to interact with new people and understand cultures (Black et al., 1999, pp. 117-118). Repatriate adjustment becomes considerably more difficult the longer the period of the stay abroad gets. Former research carried out by Harvey (1982, as cited in Dickmann et al., 2008, p. 179) also underlines this finding. Cultural differences have an influence on the expatriate’s adjustment to the host country a well (Dickmann et al., 2008, p. 179). The more they have adjusted to the foreign culture, the more difficult it gets to adjust to the home culture after returning (Black et al., 1999, pp. 214-215).

Next on, there are *job variables* influencing adjustment. Role clarity as well as role discretion play a big role at this point (Black et al., 1999, p. 211). Additionally, “[c]areer advancement has been proposed as a key factor in repatriate retention” (Allen & Vardaman, 2017, p. 165). As described before, expatriates gain extensive knowledge and skills during their stay abroad. Thus, many repatriates want to share and use that knowledge (Lazarova & Cerdin, 2004, p. 406). Research shows that turnover is also influenced by whether the assignment is developmental (learning-based) or functional (demand-based), whereas assignments that were functional more often lead to turnover intentions. This also suggests that development and advancement are important for repatriates to remain in the organization (Stahl et al., 2009, p. 102).

Organizational variables are essential as well. Issues can appear when the repatriation process is not clearly defined and leaves the employees with a lot of uncertainties (Black et al., 1999, p. 218). Additionally, lower financial compensation can have a negative influence on adjustment whereas repatriation training can facilitate the repatriation for expatriates and their families (Black et al., 1999, pp. 217-221).

In addition to that, *nonwork variables* must be considered. Similar to the financial shock, repatriates can experience a drop in social status after their return as they are not considered as foreigners and are not treated as e.g. a 'guest of honor' anymore (Black et al. 1999, p. 220). A financial and social shift can also be seen in poorer housing conditions, as repatriates and their families must find new housing quickly and often cannot obtain the same quality of housing they had before (Linehan in Scullion & Collings, 2006, p. 199). According to Black et al. (1999), the spouse's adjustment can have an impact on the expatriate's adjustment as well (Black et al., 1999, pp. 221-223). Yet, if accompanied by the whole family it can be assumed that it is not only the spouse that has to adjust as well but also the children, especially talking about a financial shift and a drop in social status. This aspect is added by the author of the thesis to the graphic above.

2.4.3. Organizational Commitment

The second component having an influence on turnover that was identified above, is organizational commitment. For also identifying influences on organizational commitment, this chapter reviews the three-component model by Meyer and Allen (1991) and, based on that, possible reasons for organizational commitment.

Even though it has received a lot of attention from researchers throughout the last centuries, there is no consensus on the definition of commitment (Meyer, 2016, p. 4). Yet, there are two factors which most of the applied definitions have in common: "commitment is a psychological state that a) characterizes the employee's relationship with the organization and b) has implications for the decision to continue membership in the organization" (Meyer & Allen, 1991, p. 67).

Bringing together different approaches from former research (Hom et al., 2020, p. 152), Allen and Meyer developed a multidimensional model which contains three different components of commitment and is thus also called the three-component model (TCM). A large body of evidence supports this construct, and it will thus mainly be used in this thesis in order to explain organizational commitment (Meyer, 2016, p. 31-33). They describe the three components as:

- *Affective commitment:* "employee's emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization" (Meyer & Allen, 1991, p. 67) - The employees want to stay in the organization.
- *Continuance commitment:* "an awareness of the costs associated with leaving the organization" (Meyer & Allen, 1991, p. 67) - The employees remain in the organization because they need to.
- *Normative commitment:* "a feeling of obligation to continue employment" (Meyer & Allen, 1991, p. 67) - The employees feel like they ought to stay in the organization.

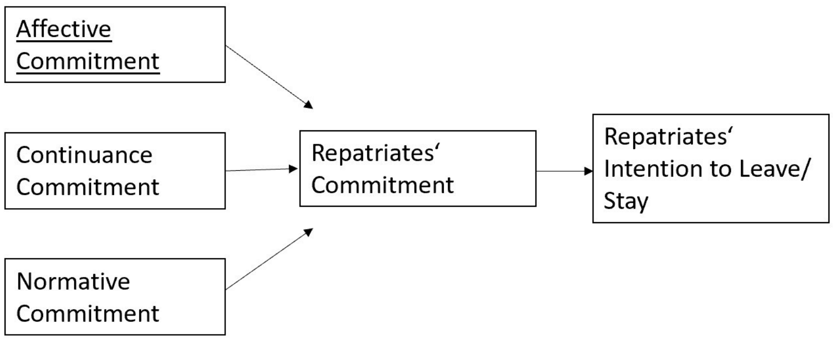

Figure 4. Influence of Commitment on Turnover

Source: Own visualization

The three components are not mutually exclusive as employees can also feel all kinds of commitment to varying degrees (Meyer & Allen, 1991, pp. 67-68), yet affective commitment is found to have the biggest impact on turnover intentions (Gellatly & Hedberg in Meyer, 2016, p. 197).

In the literature regarding organizational commitment most theories focus on the domestic context, yet there are also studies paying more attention specifically to repatriate retention (Santosh & Muthiah, 2016, p. 8). They mostly refer to the same or similar drivers of commitment and thus reasons for turnover behavior of employees. Most drivers of commitment are found to have the biggest impact on affective commitment, and thus they can also be expected to influence turnover (Meyer, 2016, pp. 293-295). The following graph gives an overview of the influences:

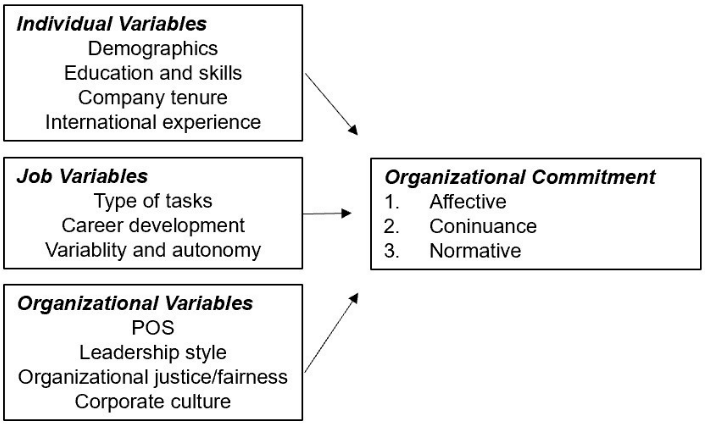

Figure 5. Organizational Commitment

Source: Own visualization

Some of the influences could already be seen in connection with adjustment, yet some are exclusive for commitment First, *individual variables* or, more specifically, personal characteristics and demographics can be considered when looking at the reasons for employee commitment. It can be said that commitment generally increases with age. There is also a negative correlation with the level of education and skills (Felfe, 2020, p. 157-158). Black et al. also describe a correlation between tenure in the parent company having a positive influence on commitment. Contrarily, more international experience and a higher number of international assignments can lead to disinvestment in their home country and company (Black et al., 1999, pp. 240-242).

Looking at *job variables*, especially the type of tasks as well as the qualification and career development opportunities have an influence on commitment. Whereas role ambiguity and role conflict have a negative impact on commitment, a challenging and variable job can have a positive effect. Autonomy also is connected to higher levels of commitment (Felfe, 2020, pp. 137-138). At this point, the importance of career advancement and development becomes clearly visible again. The remuneration, on the other hand, has a smaller influence on affective commitment and rather on continuance commitment. Consequently, it has a smaller influence on repatriate retention (Felfe, 2020, p. 140).

The biggest influence by an *organizational variable* on affective commitment is the perceived organizational support (POS), which is also often mentioned in literature about repatriation (Feldman & Thompson, 1993 as cited in Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001, pp. 390-391). “Considerable research indicates that the more employees feel supported by the organization, the more they feel emotionally attached to it” (Meyer, 2016, p. 334). Another organizational characteristic having an influence on commitment is the leadership style of the superiors. Transformational leadership is proven to lead to higher levels of especially affective commitment and normative commitment. The effect on continuance commitment is found to be rather low (Felfe, 2020, pp. 143-145). There are different reasons named in the literature for why transformational leadership influences commitment. For instance, Korek et al. show that transformational leadership results in a meaningful task for the employee and a positive working climate (Korek et al., 2010, as cited in Felfe, 2020, p. 147). Next on, organizational justice and fairness are found to have an influence on commitment as employees may feel more valued or obliged to act fair as well (Meyer, 2016, p. 355). According to Felfe (2020, pp. 162-166), cultural values can also have an influence on employee behavior and organizational commitment as well as corporate culture. This topic is investigated more in detail at a later point in the thesis. In connection to that, corporate climate plays a role as well. There are more drivers of commitment such as technical equipment in the organization and workplace security. Yet, as the correlations are rather low, those will not be reviewed at this point (Felfe, 2020, p. 155-156).

Concluding, it can be said that not all the literary sources identify the same reasons for turnover and there are many authors who only concentrate on one aspect at a time instead of comparing them. As different literature focuses on different possible reasons it is difficult to say at this point, which reason has the biggest influence on repatriate turnover. Using the matrix by Black et al. as an orientation, reasons for organizational commitment as well as repatriate adjustment were identified, as those are supposed to influence turnover behavior. Bringing together the models introduced above, one can deduct the following scheme for categorizing reasons for repatriate turnover to see why they influence turnover.

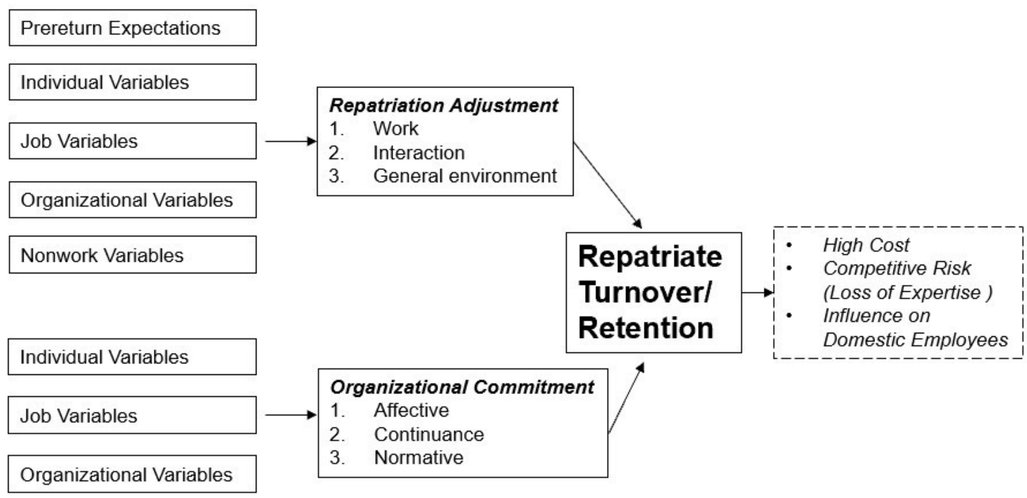

Figure 6. Integrated Model of Reasons for Repatriate Turnover

Source: Own visualization

2.4.4. Most Common Reasons for Repatriate Turnover Nowadays

The above-mentioned reasons based on the theoretical background are rather numerous and can hardly be compared regarding their importance. Hence, the following chapter uses more recent survey results in order to conduct which reasons for turnover are the most common nowadays. They are subsequently explained more in detail.

The following results of a KPMG survey from 2017 show the most common reasons for turnover which were named by employers:

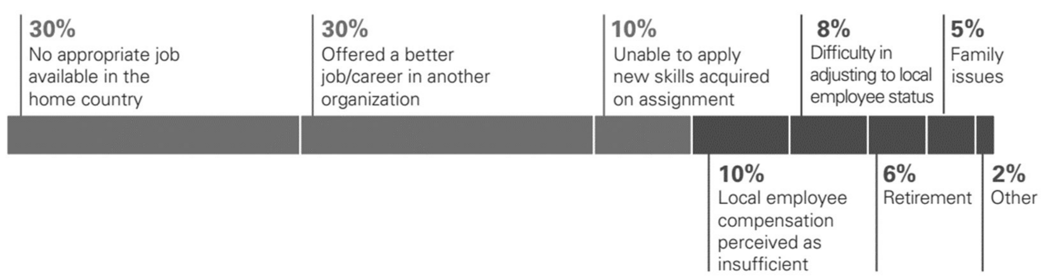

Figure 7. KPMG: Reasons for Repatriate Turnover

Source: KPMG, 2017, p. 79

Those are namely: the 'lack of an appropriate job', a 'better job in another organization', the 'inability to use the acquired skills', the 'local compensation', the 'difficulty in adjusting to the local employee status' as well as ‘family issues’. Retirement is also named as a frequent reason. Other surveys like the Brookfield Global Relocation Survey underline KPMG’s results. It also finds ‘unmet role expectations’, a ‘more marketable employee’ as well as ‘no opportunity to use the acquired experience’ as the main reasons for turnover (Brookfield, 2016, p. 65).

Explanations for those being the most common reasons could first be the little planning upon return which leads to the lack of an *appropriate job* where the repatriate cannot *use the acquired skills.* Roughly 82% of companies do not have a formal repatriation strategy linked to career management and retention (Brookfield, 2016, p. 59). Hence, “[m]any perceive their new jobs at home as lacking in autonomy, authority, and significance, compared with their global assignments” (Lazarova & Cerdin, 2007, p. 406). They sometimes even face downward mobility in their career (Adler, 2008, p. 288). On top of that, repatriates often experience high levels of uncertainty as repatriation discussions often take place shortly before the return (Brookfield, 2016, p. 60).

Being offered a *better position* in another company also appears to be one of the main reasons for turnover. This is a variable which has not explicitly been mentioned before, but which can be seen in most of the traditional turnover theories. For instance, March and Simon introduce the variable of ‘perceived ease of movement’ as a predictor of turnover (March & Simon, 1958, as cited in Hom et al., 2020, p. 73). If the employees have many alternatives of where they can work, the commitment is expected to be lower (Felfe, 2020, p. 158). The associated cost of leaving for expatriates is assumed to be rather low as they are usually highly skilled and can expect to find a new job quickly.

Adjusting to the *local compensation* as well as to the *local employee status* can be expected to be difficult because of “the low of special allowances and premiums and the effect of inflation on housing prices at home” (Linehan in Scullion & Collings, 2006, p. 199) which could lead to a financial shock. Whereas compensation was ascribed rather low importance in the last chapter because of the small influence on commitment, the survey results show that it seems to have higher importance in the repatriate context. Furthermore, "The demotion, loss of financial prerequisites, and absorption into corporate headquarters […] can easily increase the sense of lowered social status" (Black et al., 1999, p. 220). Eventually, as past behaviors cannot always be applied, repatriates can experience anxiety (Black et al., 1992, p. 751-752).

Problems that often appear in connection with the repatriates' *families* are that they are usually not up-to-date with the situation at home before they return. The spouse is typically forced to change careers, and children may have trouble fitting in at school. These problems can create stress for the whole family (Dickmann et al., 2008, p. 180). However, the study carried out by Brookfield Relocation Services revealed that only 16% of the responding companies consider greater family support (Brookfield, 2016, p. 66). Even though *retirement* is a frequently named reason, it will not be considered at this point as MNEs are expected to not have a considerable influence on it.

Concluding, using recent survey results, the most important variables in the model could be identified. Emphasis is often put on the importance of career planning as well as appropriate skill utilization. In connection to career planning, managing uncertainties is also of high value for repatriates. In the survey results, family issues as well as financial issues are found to play a big role as well. All those reasons can be positioned in the model created above. The career upon return is pictured as an example below.

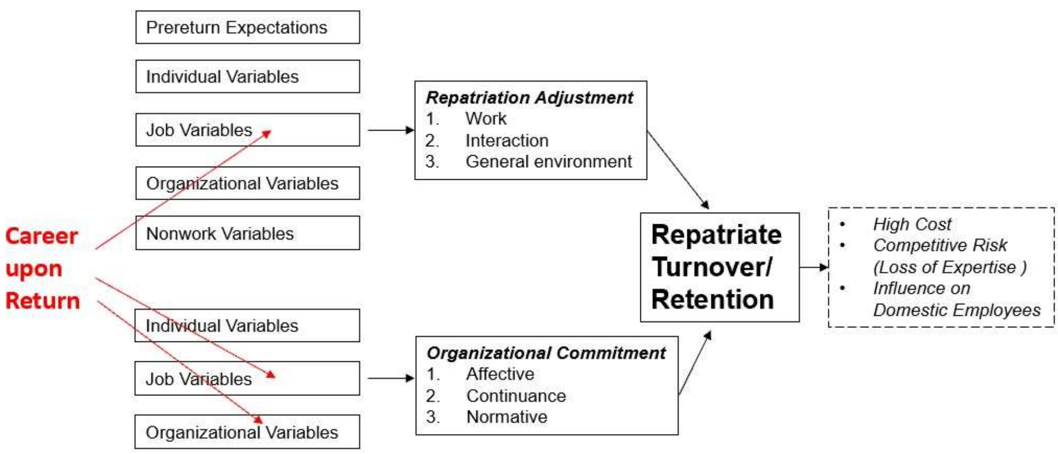

Figure 8. Career upon Return in the Turnover Model

Source: Own visualization

Even though the influence of the career upon return on organizational variables cannot be directly seen, it can be assumed that they have an impact on concepts like organizational fairness and POS. Repatriates could for instance perceive it as ‘fair’ to receive a promotion. Hence, an influence on organizational variables is also depicted in the graphic. Being offered a better position is the only reason which is not explicitly mentioned before in the theoretical background used for establishing the model. Yet it is closely connected to e.g. the level of education and skills. It is a variable which MNEs do not have a direct influence on. Thus, a focus will mainly be put on the other variables in the following chapter.

2.5. Turnover Mitigation Methods by HR

2.5.1. HR in an International Context

> “[International assignments are] typically finite, with clear objective, and raise […], in microcosm, all the classic issues and functions of ‘human resource management’. That is, the assignment must be planned, and the expatriate must be recruited, selected, prepared, trained, transported, housed, compensated, mentored, supported, performance-managed, and eventually repatriated”. (McNulty & Inkson, 2013, p. 9)

Hence, HR plays a major role in ensuring repatriation success. There are several measures that HR departments can take in order to mitigate the risk of losing their global staff (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001, p. 395). In the following, those will be structured using the phases of the assignment in which to take the measures. They do not only have to be taken after the assignment: “In reality, most activities that ensure high retention after repatriation happen during - rather than after - the expatriate assignment” (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001, p. 395).

2.5.2. Measures before the Expatriation

Even before they leave for the assignment, expectations of the expatriates should be managed. This can be achieved for instance through *briefings* by former expatriates which have returned to the home organization. It can help the expatriate deal with uncertainties (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001, pp. 395-396).

Regarding the career, it can be helpful to talk about the position they can expect upon returning even before the assignment. Guaranteeing the type of position, the expatriate will be working in after the assignment, can relieve a great deal of anxiety (Rugman & Hodgetts, 1995, p. 329). It is even suggested to offer a written guarantee or a *repatriation agreement* stating which type of position they will be placed in after the assignment. The effect of the assignment on the expatriate's career should be transparent from the beginning on. This could be connected to the company's competence profile showing which competencies the assignee should have and which ones they should acquire abroad (Deloitte, 2008, pp. 30-32). In connection to that, expatriation can also be *integrated in the HR development processes*. When the assignee knows how the expatriation is supposed to contribute to the MNE's success, he or she can work towards achieving those goals and prepare more specifically for the position after returning by e.g. building up specific networks abroad (Deloitte, 2008, p. 24). Those measures can be expected to facilitate repatriate adjustment since there are fewer uncertainties and prereturn expectations can be established.

It can also be considered to *shorten the assignment* in the first place since reintegration is supposed to be more difficult the longer the assignment lasts, as pointed out above. Yet, this also depends on the motive of the assignment and if there is a project that needs to be finished or if the expatriation is rather seen as a means to develop international expertise. Then, the management must weigh the disadvantages and advantages to decide if it is of advantage to shorten the assignment (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001, p. 396). Santa Fe Relocation Services show that the use of short-term assignments has overtaken the use of traditional long-term assignments and that the number of virtual work arrangements is expected to increase immensely (Santa Fe, 2021, p. 49). Supporting this development in an MNE could theoretically lead to lower turnover.

In the following graphic, the assumed influences of the measures on the different variables of the model regarding turnover reasons (figure 6) are depicted.

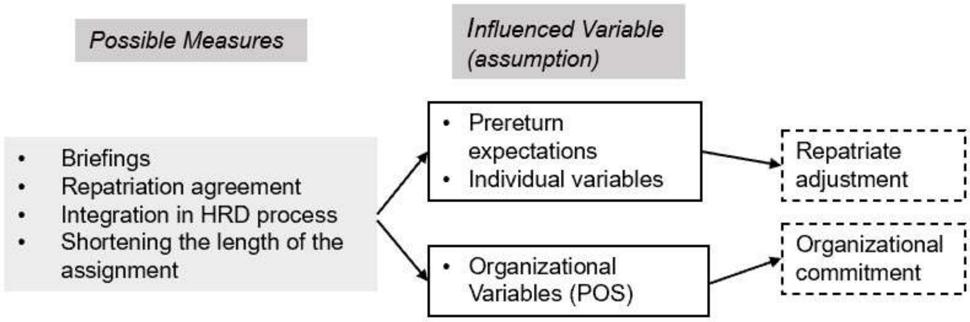

Figure 9. Measures before the Expatriation
Source: Own visualization

Looking at the model, it can be said that the measures named above are assumed to mostly have an influence on prereturn expectations and on individual variables affecting repatriate adjustment. They also influence organizational commitment as POS is expected to increase.

2.5.3. Measures during the Assignment

Related to the antecedent of *communication*, it is important that the expatriate is still integrated in the network of the home organization. This can help the expatriate build up appropriate prereturn expectations, as described above. This can be achieved through several different methods. First, the company can offer *frequent travels* to the home country. Furthermore, a *mentor* in the home organization can be established (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001, p. 395). This mentor or sponsor can e.g. be a senior executive assigned to the expatriate which informs about changes in the company and about significant choices that were made (Deloitte, 2008, p. 24).

> "Home country mentors who typically have more experience and a better understanding of the firm's global strategy are able to assess how best to utilize experience and knowledge gained from international assignments. They can facilitate repatriates' advocacy efforts and increase repatriates' visibility and exposure." (Wu et al., 2014, p. 179)

Thus, they can also help to find an appropriate position for the expatriate for after their return in which they can use their acquired skills (Rugman & Hodgetts, 1995, p. 329). There are also easy measures that can be established such as keeping them in the mailing list and sending them company *newsletters* (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001, p. 395).

Another suggested measure for keeping them in the network is *integrating them into projects* in the home office whenever they are scheduled to be home for a longer period of time (Rugman & Hodgetts, 1995, pp. 329-330) as this can also increase visibility in the home country's office. "By including home-country managers in debriefings and re-entry sessions, the organization increases the global sophistication of all its managers and significantly decreases organizational parochialism and xenophobia" (Adler, 2008, p. 297). Thus, having the expatriate stay in contact with the local office does not only help the expatriate himself but the local employees as well and thus the company as a whole.

As one of the issues mentioned are a financial shock as well as poorer housing conditions, it can also be considered to rent or maintain the expatriate's home during the assignment to *reduce the financial burden* (Rugman & Hodgetts, 1995, p. 329).

Before returning home, MNEs can also help the repatriate by providing repatriate *training* as well as *logistical support.* "This training can make individuals aware of the possible challenges they will face when returning to their home office and assuming a new role in the organization" (Pattie et al., 2010, p. 364). It can include structural, technological, legal and ethical changes and developments in the organization (Pattie et al., 2010, p. 364). Those measures can be connected to organizational as well as nonwork variables which make adjustment after returning easier.

In general, the post-return *career* should also be addressed again early before returning showing clear perspectives of what the expatriate can expect to avoid uncertainties and make adjustment easier (Suutari & Brewster, 2003, p. 1148). "Both [the assignee and the MNE] must identify job skills acquired or enhanced while abroad and systematically find ways to productively use them" (Adler, 2008, p. 296).

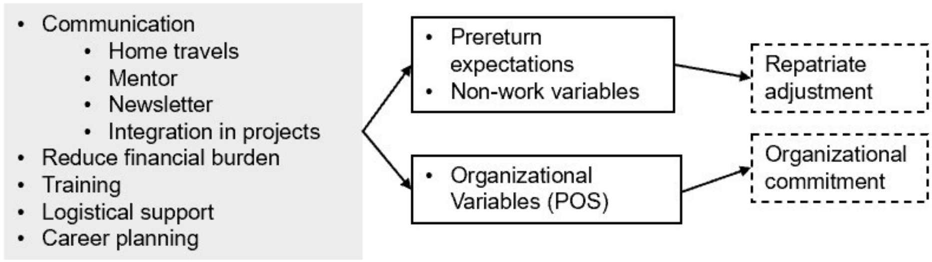

Figure 10. Measures during the Assignment
Source: Own visualization

Hence, the measures collected above are expected to have an influence on adjustment as prereturn expectations are established and also nonwork variables such as housing are taken into consideration. Looking at commitment, POS is affected again. Job variables are not included at this point yet, as the repatriate has not yet filled the new position and thus merely expectations about the job have been influenced.

2.5.4. Measures after the Assignment

According to studies carried out by Lazarova and Caligiuri (2001), it can be of advantage to allow the repatriates some *'down time'* after returning to their home country, meaning that they are given time to adjust and e.g. do not work their full hours during the first weeks. Another measure that can possibly be established are *reorientation programs* after the return to brief the repatriates on the changes in the organization (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001, p. 396).

"Organizations that treat expatriates and returnees as if they were 'out of sight and out of mind', on vacation, or so far behind that they could not possibly contribute usefully, diminish returnees' proactivity" (Adler, 2008, p. 295). Hence, the company-wide *recognition of value* of the international work is of importance and "enhances repatriates' credibility, and perceived expertise, competence and status" (Pattie, 2010, p. 363). It is a rather inexpensive measure for the company since it can be achieved e.g. through a home-coming reception or the like (Pattie, 2010, p. 363).

Finally, it is suggested in the literature that it can be of advantage to track *high-risk repatriates* that are likely to show less commitment to the parent company because of their age, their tenure in the parent company or their extended international experience (Black et al., 1999, pp. 251-252).

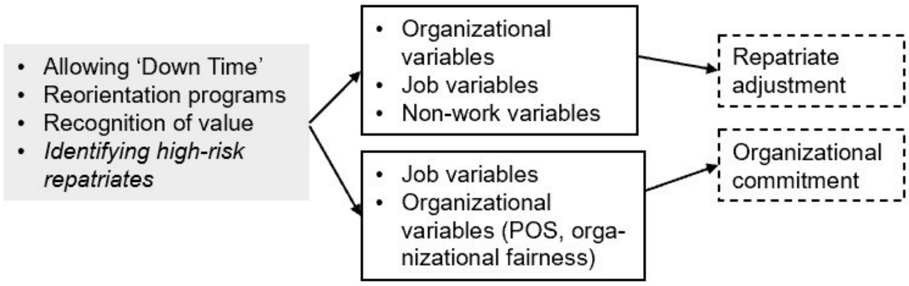

Figure 11. Measures after the Assignment
Source: Own visualization

As depicted in the graphic, all those measures cannot only be expected to lead to better adjustment through addressing organizational, job, as well as nonwork variables but also to increased POS, and thus higher commitment. Through the recognition of value, the concept of organizational fairness also gets addressed. By identifying high-risk repatriates, the variables are not directly influenced, yet individual variables like age can be used as an indicator for whether the repatriate can be considered 'high-risk'.

Summarizing the main findings, it is important to start planning the career upon returning early and subsequently throughout the stay. The goals of the assignment should be transparent from the beginning on. Additionally, communication can help in the form of briefings, newsletters, via a mentor or during home travels. Other support can include logistical support as well as training before and after returning regarding culture, changes in the home organization and the like. Finally, the value of the repatriates should be acknowledged by the home office and the repatriate should be reintegrated, being allowed to slowly get acquainted with the home country again. The measures can all be connected to the reasons for repatriate turnover and thus the model established in the last chapter.

3. Corporate Culture in Finland and Germany

3.1. Culture and Its Influence on Repatriate Retention

As shortly addressed before, the culture of the home country can also have an influence on turnover and, more specifically, on organizational commitment. As the focus in the following chapter will be put on two different countries, it is of interest to also pay attention to the cultural factor when investigating repatriate turnover. The Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) research program defines culture as "Shared motive, values, beliefs, identities, and interpretations of meanings of significant events that result from common experiences of members of collectives that are transmitted across generations" (GLOBE project, n.d.). The society's culture in a country is closely connected to the management and leadership practices, and thus having a look at national culture is useful even when the work focuses on business practices (Hofstede, 1997, p. 25).

Several studies focus on the effects of national culture on employee retention, as already introduced in chapter 2.4.3.. For instance, a study having investigated Japanese executives shows that sociocultural values such as collectivism have an influence on turnover as they impact social dynamics. They also show how certain types of commitment are of more importance for retention in collectivistic cultures (Allen & Vardaman, 2017, p. 167). Also underlining the hypothesis of national culture influencing employee withdrawal behavior, a study by Zimmerman et al. (2009) shows that "Western HR policies were ineffective in fostering retention among Chinese employees when compared to HR policies of Asian firms, further supporting the idea that collectivism should be considered in the turnover process" (Zimmerman et al., 2009, as cited in Allen & Vardaman, 2017, p. 168). Yet, national culture does not always have an influence on retention and there are also studies showing models which generalize well across different cultures (Allen & Vardaman, 2017, p. 169).

3.2. Countries to Be Investigated

In the following, a focus will be put on the repatriation processes in different organizations in Finland as well as in Germany. Finland and Germany are both countries in the European Union. Even though both countries are roughly the same size (The World Bank, 2021), Germany has a population of about 80 million people and Finland only of about 6 million (OECD, n.d. b). General company tenure is slightly higher in Germany than in Finland, meaning that employees leave their employers less frequently (OECD, n.d. a). Those two countries are chosen for this thesis because Finnish companies, and more specifically the company Nokia, are often used as a best practice example for repatriation (Verbeke & Lee, 2021, p. 252). Additionally, migration and especially emigration are currently a hot topic in Finland as many high-skilled workers are leaving the country for good (Korhonen, 2017). Germany, on the other hand, was selected because of the proximity to the author. A lot of former research focuses on US American enterprises (Suutari & Brewster, 2003, p. 1136) and thus there may be deviations from early research.

In order to compare culture and thus also management practices in Germany as well as Finland, mainly three sets of criteria and research methods will be investigated. Those are the criteria defined by Geert Hofstede (Hofstede Insights, n.d. b), the ones used in the GLOBE research project which was founded by Robert House (GLOBE project, n.d.) as well as the framework by Richard Lewis in his book ‘When Cultures Collide’ (2018). Hofstede and the GLOBE project both use categories for describing culture. The six dimensions used by Hofstede to describe culture are power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation as well as indulgence (Hofstede Insights, n.d. b). The dimensions GLOBE uses for categorizing the culture of different countries are performance orientation, assertiveness, future orientation, humane orientation, institutional collectivism, gender egalitarianism, power distance and uncertainty avoidance (GLOBE project, n.d.).

3.3. Comparison of Germany and Finland

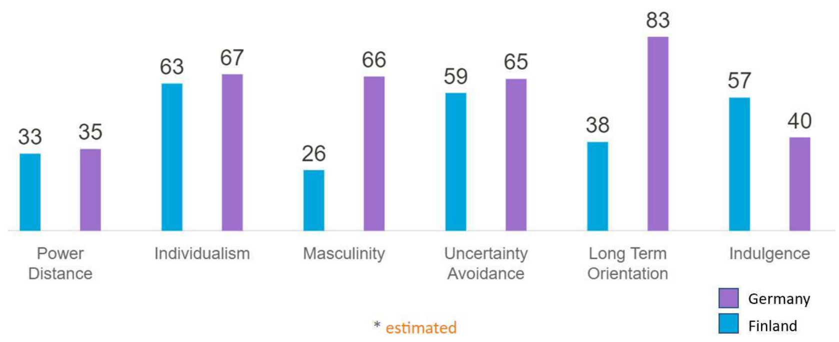

Figure 12. Hofstede: Results Germany[2]

Source: Hofstede Insights, n.d. a

According to the findings of Hofstede Insights, Germany and Finland score rather low in *power distance,* meaning that Germans like to use direct and participative communication and do not like control. Finns also strive for independence; hierarchies are only used for convenience. Power is usually decentralized, and superiors are accessible (Hofstede insights, n.d. a).

Germany and Finland both have rather high levels of *individualism,* which means that they tend to look only after themselves and their direct family (Hofstede insights, n.d. a).

"In the business context Masculinity versus Femininity is sometimes also related to as "tough versus tender" cultures" (Hofstede Insights, n.d. b). Germany is a lot more *masculine* than Finland. That means that performance is valued, people live in order to work, and status is often shown. Finland, on the other hand, is a rather feminine country meaning that managers strive for consensus and equality. They value solidarity and quality in the working lives (Hofstede insights, n.d. a).

Germany also scores high in *uncertainty avoidance* and *long-term orientation.* They have a strong propensity to save and invest and a perseverance in achieving results. In Finland uncertainty avoidance is fairly

[2] "The scale runs from 0 – 100, with 50 as a mid-level. The rule of thumb is that if a score is under 50 the culture scores relatively LOW on that scale and if any score is over 50 the culture scores HIGH on that scale. In the case of IDV – the LOW side (under 50) is considered "Collectivist" and above 50 considered "Individualist". However, when using the 6-D Model, it is important to keep in mind that culture only exists by comparison. "(Hofstede Insights, n.d. c)

high as well, yet regarding long-term orientation, the culture can also be described as normative. They have respect for traditions and focus on achieving quick results (Hofstede insights, n.d. a).

A low score in *indulgence* means that German culture is rather restrained. Germans control their desires regarding e.g. leisure time and feel that social norms restrain their actions. Finland, on the other hand, scores relatively high in indulgence, indicating that Finns have a willingness to “realise their impulses and desires with regard to enjoying life and having fun” (Hofstede Insights, n.d. a). They are rather optimistic and put a high importance on leisure time (Hofstede insights, n.d. a).

These results are to a large extent confirmed by the GLOBE project.[3] A difference that appears looking at GLOBE’s results is that institutional collectivism seems to be rather high in Finland, which cannot be seen looking at the high score in individualism in Hofstede’s model. This could be explained by the fact that GLOBE divides individualism or, respectively, collectivism into in-group collectivism and institutional collectivism whereas Hofstede’s category depicts both at the same time and is thus less specific. Another difference can be conducted looking at power distance in Germany, as the score is rather high in GLOBE’s model whereas it is fairly low in Hofstede’s model. This could be caused for instance by a difference in the research focus and indicators, yet a more in-depth analysis would go beyond the scope of this chapter. Otherwise, the scores underline the descriptions of Hofstede’s model (GLOBE project, 2004).

R. Lewis (2018, p. 185) adds that German bosses are rather private and there is generally not an open-door policy, which supports GLOBE’s findings showing that there is a rather high power distance. German companies are rather traditional, slow entities with many systems and hierarchical paths (Lewis, 2018, p. 185). Procedures often emerge from experience, on which there is a big emphasis. Thus, the status of a manager is also typically based on achievement, length of service, the ascribed wisdom of the person, the formal qualifications as well as the depth of education (Lewis,

[3] The scores are divided into cultural practices and cultural values and Germany is divided into East and West Germany (GLOBE project, 2004). At this point the author of the thesis puts a focus on cultural practices and includes East and West Germany in the analysis.

2018, p. 92). Germans strictly divide their private life and their working life (Lewis, 2018, p. 186).

Underlining the low power distance score, Lewis conducts that in Finnish companies there are only a few manuals, systems or hierarchical paths and bureaucracy is kept at a minimum. The corporate climate is rather informal, which facilitates the interchange of ideas. Finnish managers usually strike the right balance between authoritarian and consultative style, which supports the high score in femininity. Most of them make decisions without constant reference to headquarters. Finns generally need a lot of physical and mental space and they do not like wasting time. They do not speak a lot and are sincere. Finnish managers insist on good technology, factories and offices and thorough training for all employees (Lewis, 2018, pp. 311-316).

Summarizing the results, it is visible that the cultures are rather similar with some small difference when having a closer look at them. Finns seem to focus more on well-being and leisure time and less on status symbols and performance than Germans. They also feel less restrained by their social norms to do so. Germans, on the other hand, are more long-term oriented. They save and invest more and focus on achieving long-term results. Humane orientation and institutional collectivism are also higher in Finland. In German companies there is usually a bigger focus on hierarchies and top-down communication, whereas that is not the case in Finland. Additionally, German bosses tend to have a closed-door policy, whereas Finland prefers an open-door one.

3.4. Assumptions Regarding the Described Cultures' Influence on Retention

Looking at the literature review and comparing it to the findings about national culture, it is assumed that some features of the cultures can be of advantage for repatriate retention and others of disadvantage.

The way people of both cultures tend to address problems openly can be expected to facilitate the process of returning, yet the fact that private and working life is kept separate could lower commitment to the company.

Looking at Germany specifically, the Germans' tendency for uncertainty avoidance and long-term orientation is assumed to increase organizational commitment, as staying with a company can be considered a safe option. A big amount of bureaucracy as well as many systems and hierarchical paths as well as rather inaccessible superiors can potentially jeopardize direct communication in German companies. This can make the transfer of information more difficult, which might make adjustment harder.

In Finland, on the other hand, superiors are accessible, bureaucracy is generally kept at a minimum and the corporate climate is rather informal. Those points can all be considered to facilitate communication and information flows and thus the adjustment after returning. The supposedly higher institutional collectivism can also lead to higher organizational commitment, just like the high level of uncertainty avoidance.

4. Methodology

4.1. Qualitative Research

In the following, the methodology of the research carried out within the thesis is explained. This chapter gives a short overview of qualitative research in general. It will be used as a base for explaining the concept of expert interviews as well as qualitative content analysis which will be applied later on.

Empirical social research can be divided into two main categories: On the one hand, there is quantitative research and on the other, there is qualitative research. *Quantitative research* aims to make statistically evaluable and generalizable statements based on empirical data. It is obtained as representatively as possible. However, the aim of the research of the thesis is rather to gain deeper insight into the topic and analyze subjective experiences, opinions and motives with the aim of understanding them. In order to investigate further on the topic explained in the theoretical part of the thesis, *qualitative research* will thus be used. Characteristics of qualitative research are that it leads to a deeper understanding of a social phenomenon. Contrarily to the quantitative approach, this method is rather inductive and can generate new hypotheses. Qualitative research is rather flexible caused by the methods that are used which are rather open and thus usually leave room for unintended information (Misoch, 2019, pp. 1-3).

There are several suggestions regarding criteria for rating the quality of research, yet there is little consensus about them in the literature (Flick, 2007, p. 509). Some suggest that two of the traditional criteria of quantitative research, validity and reliability, can be modified in order to be applicable to qualitative research (Flick, 2007, p. 489). Others reject the criteria of quantitative methods completely and propose alternative criteria which will also be used in this thesis. Mayring (2002) suggests the following criteria for qualitative research:

- Process documentation: It must be documented in detail which methods were used for the research and how they were used.
- Argumentative interpretation validation: Interpretations must be justified by argumentation, as they are not clearly defined.
- Rule guidance: There need to be rules that have to be followed so that the methods are systematic.
- Proximity to the subject: The focus is put on everyday life of the subject in their natural environment and there is supposed to be a common interest with it.
- Communicative validation: In order to reach communicative validation, the researcher lets the subjects check the interpretation.
- Triangulation: Triangulation means that different theoretical backgrounds and research methods that are based on the same research question are taken into consideration in order to compare the results and combine the methods (Mayring, 2002, pp. 144-148).

4.2. Data Collection: Expert Interviews

4.2.1. Interview Method and Sample Group

A method that can mostly be regarded as a method of qualitative research are interviews. Interviews can generally be divided into three different types:

- Standardized interviews
- Semi-structured interviews
- Unstructured/narrative interviews

Here, a focus is put on the *semi-structured* interview. It is based on a basic guideline which is established beforehand. Yet, the interviewees do not have to choose from a set of possible answers but can answer freely (Misoch, 2019, pp. 13-14). A reason for using semi-structured interviews in this thesis is that comparability between the interviewees' given answers can be ensured rather than in unstructured interviews (Mayer, 2013, p. 37). Yet, they still get the opportunity of adding aspects which are not considered in the guideline and thus it is possible for the interviewer to discover additional aspects (Misoch, 2019, p. 66).

The interviews that are conducted cannot only be categorized as semi-structured interviews but also as expert interviews. There is no consensus on who can be considered an expert (Döringer, 2021, p. 265). They are mostly considered as "knowledgeable of a particular subject and are identified by virtue of their specific knowledge, their community position, or their status" (Kaiser, 2014, as cited in Döringer, 2021, p. 265). The expert is representing a larger group of people in his function as an expert. The aim is to limit the interview to the expertise that should be analyzed in the respective research (Meuser & Nagel in Garz & Kraimer, 1991, pp. 443-444).

Hence, for carrying out interviews, a sample group needs to be found. For finding experts as defined above, criteria should be determined in advance. Criteria can be based on the research question, theoretical preliminary considerations or former studies (Mayer, 2013, p. 39). In this case, criteria for the sample group were the following:

- The interviewees had to be employed either in Finland or in Germany.
- They had to be on an international assignment for at least one year for the assignment to fit into the category 'long-term assignment' or 'expatriate assignment'.
- The stay abroad should have happened in the past ten years for the information to still be up-to-date and useful for the thesis.

Interview partners were contacted over personal contacts of the author as well as via LinkedIn. Thus, the sampling method can be described as convenience sampling (Misoch, 2019, p. 207). After all, the author interviewed six former expatriates over the course of two weeks. Three of them are Finnish and three are German. Most of them were sent abroad for demand-driven assignments and only one was sent abroad for a learning-driven or, respectively, developmental assignment. They all went abroad throughout the last century for at least one year. A detailed overview of the participants is attached in Appendix C.

4.2.2. Interview Guideline

As explained above, an interview guideline must be established before carrying out expert interviews. As suggested by Misoch, the guideline starts with an introductory and informational phase, a warm-up, the main part, and the closing part (Misoch, 2015, p. 68). More specifically, the interview guideline used for the research of this thesis is structured in a way that it first investigates the general conditions of the international assignment as well as the overall experience the interviewee made. Afterwards, it refers to possible difficulties without giving the experts key words yet, in order to see what comes to their minds first. Afterwards, possible areas in which difficulties might have occurred are addressed. Those can be divided into the following categories:

- Career
- Perceived organizational support
- Communication

The category 'career' was chosen as it is the most named reason for turnover and influences not only commitment but also adjustment. Many aspects such as type of tasks and ability to use acquired skills are covered by learning more about the career as well. Additionally, by including questions about organizational support, useful support measures against turnover can be expected to be found. It is expected that valuable knowledge can be gained by putting emphasis on communication in specific, next to other support practices, as many measures for facilitating repatriate return revolve around communication.

The interviewer then asks the repatriates whether they have suggestions for improvement of the process. Additionally, more direct questions are integrated asking which measures helped them the most and, more directly, whether they ever considered leaving their organization after returning back home. The whole guideline in German as well as English is attached in the Appendix A. Additionally, the author developed a declaration of consent for the interviewees to sign as personal data is processed in the research (Appendix B).

To test whether the questions are understandable and can be clearly distinguished from one another, a pre-test is carried out before the actual expert interviews. An interview is conducted with a student who went abroad to China during her studies as many questions can be answered by her as well. The pre-test helps to get an overview of how long the time needed for the interviews. Additionally, some changes in the introductory part of the interviews are made for making the concept of the interviews more understandable after receiving feedback from the pre-test.

4.3. Data Analysis: Qualitative Content Analysis

The interviews were recorded using audio as well as video recording and transcribed subsequently. The transcripts can be found in Appendix D.1-6.. The analysis of the interviews is oriented on *the approach of qualitative content analysis* by Mayring**.** Other possible approaches would e.g. be the grounded theory (as described by e.g. Strauss & Corbin in Equit, 2015, p. 131), yet the qualitative content analysis seems to be the most fitting in this case as it allows the research to be based on a theoretical background (Mayring, 2010, p. 13). Other prerequisites are an established research question and that the research is not aiming to develop an entirely new theory (Mayring, 2014, p. 96*).* As in this case a theoretical background and a research question are established and the research aims to put the findings of the theoretical part into perspective to see how relevant they are in the expatriate context in Finland and Germany, qualitative content analysis appears to be appropriate.

There are several different approaches to the qualitative content analysis, with the theory by Phillip Mayring being an often mentioned one (Flick, 2007, p. 478). Other approaches have e.g. been formulated by Kuckartz (2014) or Gläser & Laudel (2010). The approach of this thesis will be based mostly on Mayring's model of 'structuring' the content: "The object of the analysis is to filter out particular aspects of the material, to give a cross-section through the material according to pre-determined ordering criteria, or to assess the material according to certain criteria“(Mayring, 2014, p. 64). The following graphic depicts the steps that should thus be applied:

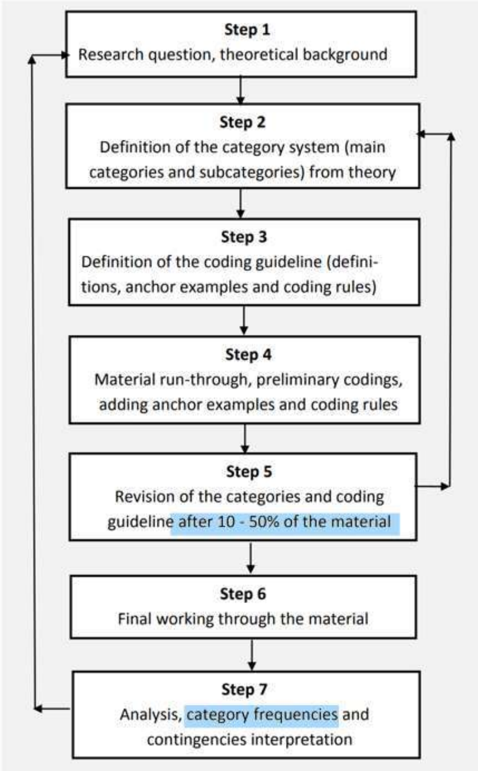

Figure 13. Model of Mayring's Qualitative Content Analysis (Summarizing)

Source: Mayring, 2014, p. 96

A difficulty with this approach appears when looking at the step of first analyzing only up to 50% of the content for establishing categories. As the number of interviews is rather small, a lot of content would potentially be lost when applying this approach. Thus, an idea by Gläser and Laudel (2010) as well as Kuckartz (2014) will be applied at this point in the process instead of sticking strictly to Mayring’s model. They suggest that it is more useful to adapt the categories simultaneously whilst analyzing the content. Then, the material is analyzed again using the new categories (Kuckartz, 2014, p. 77; Gläser & Laudel, 2010, pp. 201-203). Using their approach, all the content can be considered for establishing the categories. Additionally, category frequencies will not be assessed because of the small number of interviews. No meaningful information can be deducted from the category frequencies.

Thus, the process will be carried out as follows: First, the text gets *analyzed* to form *categories*. Afterwards, the text is *coded*, which means important parts of the text are categorized. The categories established before are *reevaluated* throughout the analysis (Gläser & Laudel, 2010, p. 198). Thus, there are inductive as well as deductive categories, which can both be mixed in the analysis. Deductive categories are the ones that are established beforehand, e.g. based on the theoretical background or on the research question. Inductive categories are the ones that are established while working on the text which was generated throughout the interviews (Kuckartz, 2014, p. 59). Afterwards, the author *analyzes* the different categories, and presents the *results* (Mayring, 2014, p. 96). The coding is carried out in order to help the author get an overview of the content. The results are presented using exemplary quotations. Those cannot be claimed to be representative because of the small number of interviews, yet can help to get a deeper insight into the topic.

5. Results

5.1. Established Categories

After transcribing the interviews, categories were established which are listed in the following and statements by the experts were coded. The categories that are marked with a '*' are inductive whereas the others are deductive.

- Overall expatriation experience
- Culture*
- Change of mindset*
- Career
- Unfulfilled expectations*
- Family issues
- Interest from colleagues*
- Interest from nonwork environment*
- High job mobility*
- Misfit of values*
- Turnover intentions
- Communication

- Support practices
- Suggestions for improvement
- Measures that are perceived unnecessary

If sticking strictly to Mayring's qualitative content analysis, a code book would have to be established, in which rules for encoding the content by using the established categories are described (Mayring, 2014, p. 102). In this case an excerpt from the code book could look like the following.

Code	Description	Anchor Example	Encoding Rules
Career	Any issue related to the job or the position of the repatriate	"so, I made a contract with HR that I will get a similar kind of position when I come back"	May be related to the career within and outside the sending company, during and after the stay
Interest from colleagues	Any issue related to the interest from colleagues about the international experience	"I noticed that people were not that interested at all."	Should be dis-tinguished from interest by non-work environment

Table 1.Exemplary Codes in Codebook

Source: based on Mayring, 2002, p. 122

Here, one inductive and one deductive category are presented using the name, a description, an example from the interviews, as well as rules for encoding. Because of the small number of interviews and the therefore low importance of quantifying statements, a code book is not of high importance for fulfilling the aims of the thesis. The coding is rather used for the author to get an overview of the results.

It is possible to use a computer-based approach for coding the interviews, yet as the number of interviews is small, the author uses a table for getting an overview of which topics are addressed by putting exemplary quotations into categories after color-coding them. For giving an example, the table regarding suggestions for improvement looked like the following:

Suggestions for improvement	Uh, yeah because some of our, uh, company systems they have changed. For example, we got new organization, new some IT tools and change management systems. So, I would have preferred to have a little bit orientation when I came back, but perhaps people here in Helsinki, they were thinking that it's still the same I think is that when they see that they don't have position available in my business unit, which is understandable, they should have gone through other HR's saying that I have this kind of expatriate, with this experience coming, he's a good guy. He's been working for us last six years, getting results. What kind of roles can you offer for him that he goes to another business unit?

Figure 14. Excerpt from the Interview Categorization

Source: Own visualization

5.2. Main Interview Results

The results of the interviews will be summarized in the following using exemplary quotations. This is done for showing if the individual cases are underlining the findings in the theoretical background or are even adding additional aspects. The results will be structured using the categories addressed in the last chapter. The statements by the interviewees will be marked using only the number of the interviews (1-6).

Looking at the *overall expatriation experience* it got clear that for the interviewed expatriates going abroad was rather easy (1-6). If they mentioned difficulties going abroad those were mostly about the company *culture* which often differed from the European one. For instance, especially the Finnish interviewees mentioned the very low hierarchies that are common in Finland.

> "I realized that actually work culture is so different than what we have here in the in our headquarters in Helsinki, so the work culture that was so different that I found it a little bit hard." (1)

Another difficulty that was mentioned was the mediation between the headquarter and the site abroad and not having a too Eurocentric point of view (3).

Returning home was rather easy for the German repatriates whereas the Finns that were interviewed perceived it as rather difficult. The main difficulty they named was the *change in their mindset* (1; 2; 6).

> "Yes, and actually that was harder. When I came back, I was changed and I got new ideas from living abroad. And the Finland has changed.

> But I was still living in the past. So country was changed, I was changed and some of my colleagues […] and it was a little bit difficult to adjust.” (1)

This change of mindset also made the move back into a smaller city after the assignment more difficult, as pointed out by interviewee 2. Overall, they were all rather satisfied with their assignments, and they would have all done it again (1-6).

Regarding the *career***,** the interviewed repatriates generally pursued different goals. Some of them were expecting to work in a better position after returning (2; 5), whereas others cared more about the experience of going abroad rather than a promotion (3; 4). Two of the interviewees were promoted after their return and for one of them the job opening was even the reason for coming back (1). Among them was the expatriate who was sent on a developmental assignment (5). On the other hand, it was also visible what happens when there is no appropriate position in place. After the return of one of the Finnish expatriates, the company did not have an appropriate position for him which made him leave the company.

> “He offered me a role that I saw from like after 30 seconds he started speaking I'm seeing through that he had nothing ready and he's now trying to, you know, scrape something together looking like a new role for you.” (2)

He also pointed out that if they had offered him a promotion, he might have stayed. Another repatriate also pointed out that he really would have struggled and would have felt anxious if there had not been a certain coincidence which led him to his position (4). All of the repatriates said that there was a clause in their expatriate contract about their position after returning. Yet, the formulation of that clause was very open in all cases, with no clear position set (1-3; 5-6). The developmental assignment was an exception: As the assignment was rather short, the repatriate got to keep his former position (4). He also stated it would be unfair towards the company to leave right after returning, especially since MNEs are investing a lot into expatriate assignments (4). Roughly half of them stated that they were able to use the soft and hard skills they had acquired throughout the stay abroad (4-6). Networks that had been built abroad were also mentioned as an advantage after returning (5).

A rather big issue also seemed to be *unfulfilled expectations* that the expatriates had before returning because of what was set in the contract or manual they received before going abroad. For instance, one German repatriate said:

> "Yes, I'll put it this way: I've read the concept. […] And it was all totally coherent, so I would have liked that it would have gone exactly like that." (4, translation by author)

Family issues did not seem to be a big topic for the interviewed repatriates. If they were accompanied by family their wives mostly did not work when they were abroad and then went back to working or studying when they were back in their home country (1; 2; 4; 6). For the children, the adjustment generally seemed to be a bit harder caused by e.g. differences in technological progress of the countries (4).

Interest from colleagues about the international experience also differed. Whereas the German repatriates generally reported that there has been a lot of questions and interest from colleagues (4; 5), a Finnish repatriate stated that they were rather jealous and did not want to hear about the experience (1). One repatriate from Germany also reports the same for his private life (4).

An additional point being mentioned was the *high job mobility* nowadays. Interviewee 2 mentioned that he was concerned about staying in the company because of what it would look like on his CV if he had only worked for one employer.

A final reason for turnover that was mentioned by the repatriates was the *misfit of values* with the company's.

> "[I]t was pretty much related to what the company was doing at the time and I did not share the views, the vision that the company was going." (6)

After all, the repatriates that stayed in their company also stated that they did not have *turnover intentions* after returning (1;3-5).

Looking at support from the MNE and, more specifically*, communication* throughout the assignments, the interviewed expatriates made very different experiences. Most of them were in contact with the office in the home country almost daily, either for reporting reasons or for business reasons (2; 3; 5; 6). Some of them had a superior that they were reporting to regularly (3, 5), but others basically had to decide themselves how much communication they wanted (1). There was also one case where the expatriate did not have any contact while being abroad for three years (4). One of the Finnish expatriates even worked from Finland for a couple of weeks during the time of his international assignment (2). They mostly agreed that they generally had a fairly good feeling on what was going on in the home country office. Some also stated that they did not feel like they would need a mentor as a contact person:

> "I had a pretty good feeling what happens in Finland all the time because I was in daily contact with the factory […]. I didn't have any like a single point of contact in a way, but obviously I knew everybody" (2)

Additionally, new ways of communicating such as videocalls were mentioned which facilitated communication while abroad (5). Even if they generally knew what was going on in the home office an issue regarding the career can also be connected to the topic of communication; Two of the former expatriates specifically complained about uncertainty about their position after return and the lack of communication from HR (2;4).

Concerning other *support practices***,** the experiences varied a lot as well: from receiving rather a lot of support (4) to HR making the whole assignment even harder (2). Most of the repatriates received mainly monetary support for flights and for moving furniture and the like (1-6). Additionally, administrative support seemed to be rather common, whereas sometimes it was outsourced to companies such as PwC (4). None of the interviewees received training or an update meeting upon their return. They reported it was rather "learning by doing" (4). Yet, most of them did not seem to mind that a lot and were rather satisfied with the support they received.

> "I think we didn't have any kind of coming back onboarding in that sense, maybe even not needed because we came back to home […]" (2)

After being asked for *suggestions for improvement*, the main points that were mentioned were a little bit of orientation after the return, including an introduction to e.g. new systems (4). Additionally, it was mentioned that HR should act more flexibly and pay attention to the individual case. Additionally, they should also search in other business units for suitable positions for the repatriate (2). One Finnish expatriate also states that it would be helpful that the people doing mobility management also went abroad at some point (2). Training on, for instance, cultural readjustment, on the other hand, was often *perceived unnecessary* by the repatriates (4).

Summarizing the results, reasons directly named for turnover were the move back into a smaller city, the missing position as well as values and visions of the employee that did not fit the company's anymore. Other factors imposing difficulties to the repatriates were unfulfilled expectations as well as uncertainties regarding the repatriation. Looking at support measures, regarding communication they made different experiences, yet the majority stated they had a fairly good feeling of what was going on in the home company even if they did not have a mentor. Additionally, they mostly received monetary and administrative as well as logistical support which they mostly perceived as sufficient. Cultural training was considered unnecessary. Some of the interviewed repatriates would have wished for more technical support after returning as well as HR paying more attention to the individual case as well as sticking to what they were stating beforehand. The interest from colleagues and the nonwork environment varied, whereas jealousy was often a problem. Nevertheless, the overall expatriation process was mostly perceived as easy. At this point it has to be considered again that those results are not representative and cannot be generalized.

6. Discussion

6.1. Introduction to the Discussion

Whereas the literature review allowed the author to get an overview of reasons for repatriate turnover and measures against it, the interviews gave an even deeper insight. Even though the number of interviews is rather small, many aspects that were mentioned in the literature are also visible in the interview results. However, some aspects seem to have a much higher importance according to the literature than to the interviewed repatriates. The following chapter compares the results of the interviews to the theoretical background and investigates possible reasons for the results in order to answer the research questions. First, a look will be taken at reasons for repatriate turnover that were stated in the literature as well as in the interviews. Afterwards, implications for HR will be compared and summarized. Additionally, limitations of the research will be discussed.

6.2. Comparison to the Literature: Turnover Reasons

For structuring the comparison of the interviews with the literary background, the model set up for reasons for turnover (Figure 6) is less suitable, as many of the reasons are interconnected and thus influence several variables included the model. The chapter therefore uses the categories defined in the content analysis (chapter 5.1.) as a reference. Categories related to measures by HR are not addressed at this point. Issues that were mentioned as important in the literature (chapter 2.4.4.), yet did not appear in the interviews, are addressed at the end, as well as cultural factors.

First, a look will be taken at the *change of mindset* connected to the move into a smaller city. This was specifically stated as a problem by the Finnish repatriates. Finland does not have a very dense population and it barely has cities (European Commission, 2021). Consequently, returning to Finland from an assignment abroad might be an even bigger change than returning to a German city. At this point, individual variables influencing adjustment are affected and the finding by Black et al. that readjustment gets harder the more the expatriates have adjusted to the host country is underlined (Black et al., 1999, pp. 214-215).

Looking at the *career* upon return, it is named as the main reason for turnover in both the interviews and the literature. Both showed that an assignment abroad can lead to a promotion. However, if the career after returning is perceived insufficient, that can potentially lead to difficulties. This can be explained by job variables being influenced which then leads to missing adjustment as well as missing commitment. The lack of commitment can theoretically also be explained by the concept of organizational fairness as the repatriate hat did not get promoted and thus left the company showed clearly that he felt treated unfairly by his company (Interviewee 2). Moreover, another repatriate that did get promoted said he would not leave the company as this would feel like unfair behavior (Interviewee 4). Thus, fairness increases commitment as stated in the theoretical part (Meyer, 2016, p. 355). Not only the position itself, but a lack of career planning can also lead to uncertainty which generally makes adjustment harder. One could see that not knowing about the position could lead to anxiousness. Prereturn expectations cannot be properly established which can theoretically also lead to less post-return adjustment. Having a lot of uncertainties might additionally lead to expatriates feeling like they are not supported enough. POS which is perceived insufficient can also lead to lower commitment. Thus, it can be seen that there are several factors influenced by career planning that can theoretically have an influence on turnover behavior.

In connection to the topic of careers, the type of job and tasks also has an influence on adjustment as well as commitment. It could be seen in the interviews that the job was often a reason for staying in the company: “OK, so you also plan to stay there for quite a long time? - Yeah, we have such an interesting job” (Interviewee 1). The interviews also show differences between learning-driven and demand-driven assignments. The number of interviews is too small for drawing conclusions about why expatriates that go on developmental assignments stay in the company more often. Yet, looking at the literature as well as the interviews it can be assumed that they get promoted more likely and their international experience is more valued in their company after returning. This underlines the finding that career improvement increases intent to stay in the organization. However, it also became visible that the international experience also has high intrinsic value, and some employees already feel rewarded by having the opportunity of going abroad and acquiring new skills and do not necessarily expect a promotion. That is a point the literature mentions less frequently. Yet overall, the career remains the most frequently mentioned reason for turning over after returning from an international assignment.

The interview partners also mentioned *unfulfilled expectations* as a reason for having difficulties returning to the home country. They can be found in the literary part as well, yet they are not assigned great importance. When MNEs do not stick to their contracts or manuals, prereturn expectations can be assumed to not be fulfilled. A lot of uncertainties can make adjustment harder, as pointed out in the literary part. Again, POS can be influenced as well as repatriates might feel less supported than they expected to in the first place.

In contrast to that, readjustment of the *families* played a smaller role in the exemplary interviews than in the literature. It only seemed to lead to minor stress, which can possibly also be connected to luck of the individual families.

Not being able to use the acquired skills was also named as a difficulty, yet it seemed to have lower importance than stated in the literature. Some of the interviewees report that they could not use their acquired skills even if they were promoted after the assignment. Hence, it can be assumed that being able to use the acquired skills is not only connected to the career as deducted in the literary part. Yet, a correlation could be seen between missing *interest from colleagues* and an inability to use acquired skills (Interviewee 1). Hence, the disinterest also has an influence on job variables and thus adjustment. Missing *interest from nonwork environment* also appeared as an issue in the interviews, which was not mentioned in the literature. Jealousy from nonwork environment influenced one repatriate and his family in their behavior (Interviewee 4). I can be assumed that this had a negative influence on nonwork variables and on adjustment to the general environment and interacting. Yet, this was only reported by one repatriate and can thus be assumed to not always be the case.

Additionally, a repatriate brought up the topic of today's trend of *high job mobility* which is barely mentioned in the literature. As pointed out in the results, one expatriate partly also left his company as he was afraid that staying there for too long would make it hard to find another job elsewhere. The OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) confirms that job tenure is decreasing also in Finland and Germany (OECD, 2019, p. 95). "[A] common prediction is that lifetime employment will gradually disappear. Instead, job mobility will increase [...]" (OECD, 2019, p. 94). It could on the one hand be caused by. e.g. more short-term hires but on the other hand by increased job hopping for better working conditions (OECD, 2019, p. 93).

Related to the latter, another additional point appearing through the interviews is the higher importance of *one's values.* One repatriate left his company as his values did not fit the company's. The literature discusses whether turnover is always necessarily influenced by the organization not doing enough or rather by the repatriates actively pursuing a new career that helps them achieve their subjective well-being (Lazarova & Cerdin, 2007, p. 407). The theoretical part of the thesis mostly focuses on the former, yet the interviews also revealed the importance of the second view. The second view can be related mainly to two concepts: First, the concept of the protean career can be addressed which revolves around being independent from traditional organizational arrangements as well as value-driven and self-directed (Hall & Doiron, 2018, p. 1). It can also be related to the theory about the boundaryless career. "Put simply, boundaryless career is the antonym of organizational careers that has dominated empirical research in recent times" (Arthur, 1994, p. 296). Nowadays, people usually expect to switch employers several times as pointed out before and generally become more self-reliant and self-managed. MNEs thus have less influence on the employees leaving the company. The repatriates are generally more marketable and thus have higher chances of finding a job which suits their subjective ideal career path (Lazarova & Cerdin, 2007, pp. 406-407). The interviews show that both perspectives should be considered when aiming to ensure repatriation success. Employment opportunities and career-related attitudes which are important in the proactive perspective

(Lazarova & Cerdin, 2007, p. 423) should thus be added as direct influences on repatriate turnover as they are only indirectly mentioned in the model (e.g. implied in individual variables such as skills and education).

Talking about issues that did not appear in the interviews, difficulties in adjusting to the *local employee status* could not directly be seen. Two repatriates describe that it was difficult for them to return as it felt like going backwards in life (Interviewee 1; 2). Yet, they did not report issues with having e.g. less autonomy or being treated differently. They also did not mention a financial burden or *insufficient compensation* which can be caused by the payments that the repatriates received when returning.

As the thesis studies Finnish as well as German repatriates, a closer look was also taken at *cultural* factors. Looking at the literature, it was assumed earlier (chapter 4.5.) that Finnish MNEs would be able to react more flexibly as a result of less bureaucracy and lower hierarchies. Yet that was disconfirmed by one of the Finnish interviewees stating that HR was very inflexible. Talking about corporate culture, the Finnish as well as German repatriates underlined the findings of the literature regarding their culture, yet there is no visible connection between the turnover behavior of repatriates and their corporate culture. There have been some difficulties in adjusting which can be connected to different cultures, such as adapting to Germany after having lived using China's technologies for a while. Yet, this was not really considered a culture shock (Interviewee 3). However, they pointed out differences in business culture. Those were partly also named as the most difficult thing about going abroad (Interviewee 1,4). Based on the interviews, cultural differences can thus be assumed to play a bigger role when going abroad than they do when returning. However, this does not always have to be the case.

Concluding, it can be said that the career upon return and, more specifically, a missing promotion and uncertainty about the position oppose challenges for repatriates. Additionally, a change of mindset, disinterest from colleagues as well as unfulfilled expectations also have an impact. They can be expected to influence concepts like POS and organizational fairness which are thus of importance as well. Those are points which are addressed in the literature, too. They can be put into the model of turnover reasons established in the earlier chapters which underline its applicability. Family as well as financial and cultural issues as well as difficulties in adjusting to the local employee status, on the other hand, generally played a small role compared to what the literature states. However, as the cases are rather individual, it can be assumed that those can still be issues for other repatriates. The following diagram shows the degree of confirmation of the literature by the interviews, ++ shows strong agreement, + agreement, -/-- would show contradiction. Especially job and organizational variables seem to be of importance, as well as proper prereturn expectations.

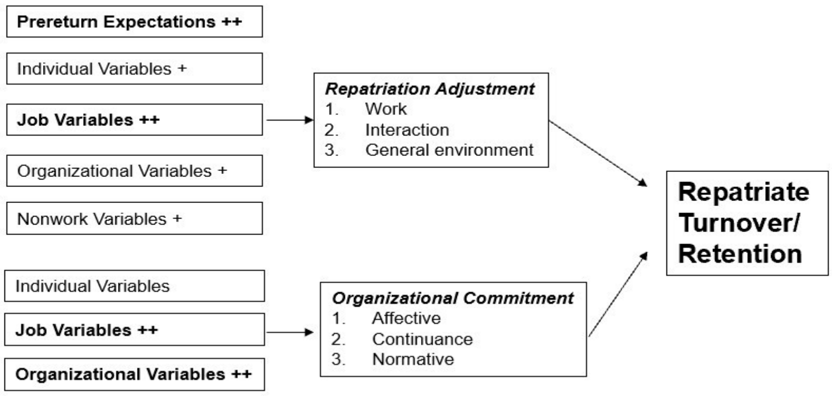

Figure 15. Variables Being Confirmed by the Interviews
Source: Own visualization

Yet, it should be added that the misfit of values and visions also influences turnover behavior. This stands in connection with the emerging view of turnover, with employees being more proactive rather than reactive. Career-related attitudes and employment opportunities appear to gain importance which might to lead to HR departments having less influence on the tenure of their workforce. The increasing job mobility underlines this theory.

6.3. Comparison to the Literature: Measures by HR

In the following, the suggested measures are, similarly to the literary part (chapter 2.5.), structured loosely based on the time at which they can be incorporated (before, during, after the assignment).

First, the literature identifies *shortening the assignment* as a measure positively impacting post-return adjustment which was also supported by the interviews. One of the interviewees which describes that his one-year stay abroad rather felt like a longer business trip. He did not struggle with moving furniture or even moving to a new flat (Interviewee 4). Yet, as already mentioned in the literary part, it depends on the motive of the assignment whether it is possible to shorten it. That might be the case rather in developmental assignments than in functional assignments, as no specific project must be completed. As pointed out in the literary part, alternative forms of assignments, such as short-term assignments, might thus facilitate returning.

MNEs should consider that high mobility of jobs and a higher importance of subjective values and visions are becoming more usual nowadays as pointed out in the last chapter. Especially for highly skilled employees like repatriates it is easy to switch employers. Thus, it might be of interest for HR to consider *alternative methods* of ensuring repatriation goals, such as knowledge transfer. An alternative could, for instance, be a bigger focus on inpatriates from subsidiaries or alternative forms of international assignments such as short-term assignments as mentioned above or virtual assignments. Otherwise, HR could also make use of the concept of boundaryless careers and actively recruit repatriates that have gone abroad for other companies (Lazarova & Cerdin, 2007, p. 425).

When focusing on long-term assignments, a focus should be put on *career management*. Regarding the career upon return, the interviews highlight what was stated in the literature. Career management is a process which should be addressed before as well as during and after the assignment. For mitigating uncertainties, it is important to inform the repatriate several months before the return about what position they can expect. Those measures also proved to be significant for the interviewed repatriates.

The literature states that *communication* during the assignment can help build up prereturn expectations not only in regard to the career but also to the general process of returning. Through the interviews there was no direct connection that could be drawn between turnover behavior and communication, yet it got visible that early and clear communication are important for the repatriates to not feel anxious about their return. The interviewed repatriates, against what was advised in the literature, do not necessarily want a mentor in their home organization for communication as long as they are connected to their colleagues at home for business reasons. Otherwise, having to report to a superior was also described to help them keep an overview over what they were doing abroad. *Modern technology* such as video-calling platforms also helped to facilitate communication which was not mentioned in the literature. Nowadays, it might thus be a little easier to stay informed than it was when the models in the theoretical part were established.

Not only the communication with the expatriate but also communication inside the MNE is of importance. The interviewed repatriates acknowledge that the search for an appropriate new position is difficult, yet suggest that communication is a key factor during the search. Especially in companies that are operating in different business units, the units should collaborate in order to find a suitable position for their international employees.

Requirements might vary depending on the repatriate and thus HR should be able to *react flexibly* throughout the assignment. This is in accordance with the literature saying that repatriates perceive support individually and put importance on different aspects (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001, p. 391). Additionally, they should stick with what is stated in the *expatriate contract* in order to not disappoint the repatriates' expectations. One additional suggestion was that HR executives working in global mobility should have *gone abroad* at some point in their lives in order to comprehend the challenges expatriates are facing.

Other measures that were most often mentioned as helpful by the repatriates themselves were *monetary support* for minimizing the financial burden, *administrative support* and *logistical support*, especially in regard to moving houses. Those were also points that were pointed out in the literature and which were perceived as helpful. A short hotel stay after returning was also rather common and according to the interviewees very useful. A common opinion in the interviews was that the repatriates did, in fact, not feel like they needed a lot of training returning to their country of origin. Technical support was more wished for than cultural support. The practice of outsourcing administrative support to companies like KPMG and PwC was addressed which could be taken advantage of by HR.

Methods acknowledging the repatriate's international experience must be considered carefully, as it might lead to jealousy amongst colleagues if they are praised too much. Instead, the management and colleagues should be included in e.g. debriefing sessions and *new skills acquired* should be identified.

Looking at the interviews, it became visible that it could be an effective measure by HR to identify *high-risk repatriates*. A variable for that could e.g. be how much their environment changed or their tenure in the company.

The aspects mentioned in the interviews are added to the graphic that was established using the literature in order to combine the measures for establishing a roadmap for HR. This is again not generalizable as a result of the small number of interviews yet could be used as an orientation for further research.

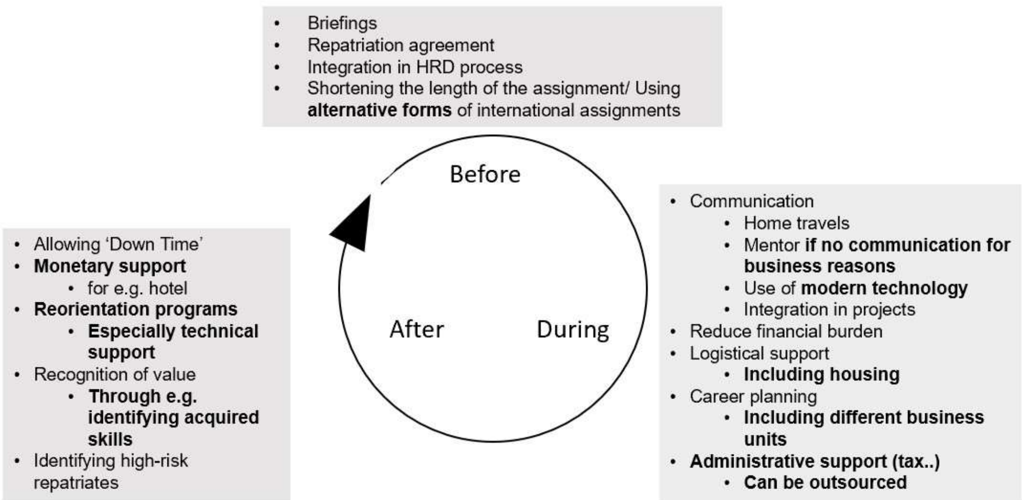

Figure 16. Measures against Repatriate Turnover Including Interview Results

Source: Own visualization, additions to literary part in bold

In the graphic, it can already be seen that many points given in the interviews underline and specify the measures given in the literature. Some new aspects could be added as well. Both, the interviews and the literature, especially underline the importance of career planning and early communication before the return. The importance of the length of the assignment also became clearer as it is connected to other factors such as the housing, which becomes less complicated with a shorter stay abroad. Administrative, logistical and financial support are also appreciated. Deviations that appeared were that especially cultural training seems to be less important to the interview partners than for instance an introduction to new IT-systems after returning and that a mentor is not always necessary as a means of communication during the assignment.

6.4. Limitations of Research

There are several limitations of the research which need to be addressed. The rather *small number of interviews* is one limitation as the results cannot be claimed to be representative, as already mentioned before. As there were only three representatives of the German or, respectively, the Finnish expatriates, it is very difficult to compare those groups. In addition to that, only male repatriates agreed to be interviewed and thus the female point of view is not represented. This supports the statement that convenience sampling often leads to a lower validity of the results (Misoch, 2019, p. 207).

All the repatriates are employed in different branches, and they mostly went to different countries during the assignment. Even though it is interesting to get an insight into different sectors, it would have been helpful to either have more participants or otherwise narrow down the research questions and focus on one nationality or maybe even on one company to get more comparable and representative results.

As the interviews were semi-structured interviews, they do not always include the *same questions*. The repatriates' opinions and experiences are very individual and thus the interviews had different foci. Hence, sometimes new questions were added when new topics were addressed. Thus, the way of carrying out the interviews was another reason for the low comparability of the interviews. Following a fixed structure of interview questions would have made it easier to compare the answers afterwards. Because certain topics were not always addressed to the same extent, there could only be assumptions made based on the theoretical background when it comes to e.g. cultural influence on repatriate turnover.

The research questions could still be answered using the literary background which was to a large extent underlined by the interview results.

If the guideline had involved even *more questions*, it is possible that there would have been even more results to be discovered. Yet, the author tried to keep the interviews rather short in order to make it easier to find participants. It is also possible that additional interviews with HR departments would have brought a new point of view and would have helped to find out which suggested measures are actually feasible.

Looking at *quality criteria* which were defined before, it can be said that most of the criteria could be fulfilled. As mentioned before, rule guidance was applied throughout the process of analyzing the data, yet the conduction of the interviews lacked a bit of rule guidance at some points because of the issues described above. Yet, the process is documented in detail. The author of the thesis underlines the interpretations with arguments and the proximity to the subject is rather high. Triangulation is also fulfilled as the findings were always compared to findings by other researchers that are mentioned in the literature review. Communicative validation is only partly applied as in some cases the interviewer asks for clarification and if she understood the interviewee's arguments right. In some cases, the transcripts were also sent to the repatriates after the interview for them to check them for correctness. The author should have done that in all cases instead of only when the interview partners asked for it.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that a lot of the results of the literature review were underlined by the results of the interviews. Some aspects could also be added due to the deeper insight that was gained through the interviews, yet those cannot be considered representative. The three research questions could be answered throughout the course of the thesis. Those were "Why does high repatriate turnover pose a risk to MNEs?", "What are the main factors causing repatriation difficulties and repatriate turnover, and which ones are the most significant for Finnish and German repatriates?" as well as "What are effective measures that can be taken by HR to overcome the risk of high repatriate turnover?".

First, it was deducted that the risks of high repatriate turnover are mainly the loss of an investment as MNEs usually invest a lot of money into sending their employees abroad. Additionally, there is a competitive risk coming along with high turnover of repatriates, as they often decide to work for competitors and use their acquired skills and knowledge there. Finally, high repatriate turnover can also signal to fellow employees that it is not useful for their career to go abroad. Thus, it might become harder to find suitable candidates for expatriation.

Answering the second research question, the main reasons for turnover which were found in the literature review as well as in the interview results were issues connected to the career of the repatriate after returning as well as a change of mindset and values and visions that do not fit the company's. Additionally, unfulfilled expectations and high uncertainties appear to be of importance as well as the more general concepts of perceived organizational support and organizational fairness. Those reasons can be explained using the concepts of repatriate adjustment as well as organizational commitment. A shift in financial and social status can, according to the literature also have a big influence, as well as difficulties with the spouse or the family. Yet, that was not supported by the interviews.

Measures by the HR department that seem to be effective in mitigating the risk of high repatriate turnover are consequently effective career management including career planning sessions. International experience should be valued, and the repatriates should be given the opportunity to use their acquired skills in their job after returning. This can be facilitated through effective communication. Additional support practices that are perceived helpful are logistical support, such as help with moving houses as well as financial and administrative support. It is pointed out that HR should pay attention to the individual case and stick to what is promised before going abroad. The interviewed repatriates perceived cultural reintegration as unnecessary, against what is stated in the literature review. Additionally, it should be considered that nowadays it becomes more common to search more actively for career improvement in different companies and thus switch employers more often. Thus, MNEs should also consider alternative methods of ensuring international expertise.

Regarding the comparison between Finnish and German repatriates, it can be said that the sample group was too small for identifying perceptions that were influenced by their cultural background. One visible difference was that the interviewed Finnish repatriates generally had more difficulties returning, which was caused by the change of mindset and values and a lack of career advancement. For instance, they had got used to living in bigger cities abroad. Looking at other support practices, it was visible that they received more or less the same or even more support than the German counterparts. Those cases are highly individual and hence the findings cannot be generalized for the respective countries. Therefore, the analysis of the differences in the management of repatriation processes is mostly based on the literary background. It is assumed that especially hierarchies and bureaucracy make the management of repatriates in Germany harder than in Finland, where superiors are accessible, and bureaucracy is kept at a minimum. Yet, this is not underlined by the interviews.

For further research it might be interesting to focus more on the cultural aspects of organizational commitment as well as repatriate adjustment. It would also be interesting to apply other models and constructs of turnover theory to the expatriate context, such as job embeddedness. Additionally, for further investigating the topic, it would be possible to conduct interviews with HR executives in order to elaborate more on the part about risks coming along with high turnover. Those interviews would also potentially show a wider spectrum of possible measures against repatriate turnover as well as limitations to the measures mentioned above.

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