

KYMENLAAKSON AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU

University of Applied Sciences

Master's Degree Programme in International Business Management

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USING EXPERIENCES EARNED IN A FOREIGN ASSIGNMENT –
CASE L4 PROJECT, STORA ENSO

Master's Thesis 2009

ABSTRACT

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Master's Thesis

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Expatriation, sending employees for an international assignment, has become more popular in Finland within the last twenty years. The phenomenon has been studied much, however there is a lack of studies that focuses on repatriation, returning to the home country, and how companies benefit from the experiences of the expatriates after repatriation.

This study focused on repatriation and whether a case organisation had the ability to gain from experiences earned in a foreign assignment. The target group was Finnish expatriates from L4 Project of Stora Enso who were in an international assignment in Belgium in 2002 and 2003. Repatriation has happened about five years before this study. Interviews of the project members and their superiors took place in spring 2008.

It was admitted by the members and superiors interviewed that valuable experience was earned during the assignment. Organisation had used these experiences in 76% of the cases and they had added value to the organisation. Earned knowledge had been transferred within the organisation and it had enhanced Stora Enso as a learning organisation. International assignments of the cases were not part of individual career planning which is in the employees' interest.

As a result of the study there are proposals for improving international assignment policy, new organisation of project experts and taking project experts as a part of company's management audit process. Findings of the study are planned to be used in the future projects and when people are sent for an international assignment. At the end repatriation and expatriation are rethought and the phenomenon has been developed further by criticising use of expatriates and their repatriation to the same location. New term, globatriation, relocation for career development after an international assignment, is introduced.

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1 INTRODUCTION AND SETTLING THE TOPIC

1.1 Background

Expatriation has become more popular – almost as a trend – in Finland within the last twenty years. Using international assignments has been seen as the most powerful strategy for developing globally competent leaders by some scholars. (Kohonen 2007, 10)

Although many enterprises have researched expatriation, the nature of the development and learning during international assignments is not fully understood. It is known that the company will receive return on the investment mostly after repatriation when using experiences expatriates earn during their assignments. (Kohonen 2007)

Today it is not enough that companies succeed in expatriation but also repatriation should be completed successfully. It seems that companies are focusing on the success of the expatriation but the repatriation is forgotten. It has been pointed out that after an international assignment one needs more challenges in the home country.

Expatriation has been also studied in Stora Enso but none of the studies have focused on repatriation. One of the recent studies from the group Freimanis, Lanter, Pereira, Veith and Viitikko (2007), “How to develop and mobilise experts for investment projects?” found that repatriation from Stora Enso projects is unclear and undefined or at least handled in different ways. In the company there is no standardised approach in place covering re-integration of project experts.

Researches of expatriation are mostly focusing on individuals. There is a lack of studies on repatriation as well as the phenomenon from organisation perspective. This study focuses on repatriation from organisation’s point of view and the organisation’s ability to gain from experiences earned in a foreign assignment in a case company Stora Enso.

I, the author of the study, have also been in an international assignment and experienced repatriation. As well as facing its problems, it was interesting to focus

more deeply on the phenomenon. The fact that the company was also interested in finding solutions to the problem areas helped to produce a meaningful case study.

1.2 Stora Enso and Projects

Stora Enso is a global paper, packaging and forest products company producing newsprint and book paper, magazine paper, fine paper, consumer board, industrial packaging and wood products. The Group has 32 000 employees and 85 production facilities in more than 35 countries worldwide, and is a publicly traded company listed in Helsinki and Stockholm. The company's customers include publishers, printing houses and paper merchants, as well as the packaging, joinery and construction industries. (Stora Enso's Annual Report 2008, 2)

The company's annual production capacity is 12.7 million tonnes of paper and board, 1.5 billion square metres of corrugated packaging and 6.9 million cubic metres of sawn wood products, including 3.2 million cubic metres of value-added products. Company's sales in 2008 were EUR 11.0 billion, with an operating profit excluding non-recurring items and fair valuations of EUR 388.4 million. (Stora Enso's Annual Report 2008, 2)



Figure 1. Organisation Chart of Stora Enso

Stora Enso's organisation structure includes Business Area (BA) organisations, Business Unit (BU) organisations and Group Function organisations. Stora Enso's global Business Areas (BA) are Fine Paper, Packaging, Publication Paper and Wood

Products. Business Unit (BU) is normally one mill which can include more than one Business Areas (BA). Group Functions coordinate and instruct BAs and BUs. Investments organisation is an example of the Group Functions.

Stora Enso has a procedure (Group Investment Process) for planning and implementing investments, which is coordinated through the Investment Committee and the Investment Working Group. Investments organisation is responsible for Group Investment Process as well as Investment Committee and the Investment Working Group. Group Human Resources organisation is responsible for International Assignment Process which is used in expatriation.

L4 Project, the paper machine 4 project at Langerbrugge in Belgium, was Stora Enso's largest single investment project ever, at a total cost of EUR 470 million. It was part of the Group's Asset Restructuring Programme to enhance competitiveness in publication paper and to meet increasing demand for high quality paper. When paper machine 4 was started up on 31 May 2003, it was the world's biggest newsprint machine. It utilises only recycled paper as raw material, and residuals are burnt as fuel, which is in line with Stora Enso's commitment to sustainable development. (Stora Enso's Annual Report 2003)

Large investment projects, such as L4 Project, take place approximately once in five years in Stora Enso but 5-10 smaller projects are ongoing continuously. Own organisations are created for the projects and depending on the size and the phase of the project the organisation includes full time and/or part time members. Before an international assignment a person might have been working for the project organisation from a couple of months to several years.

The number of Finnish expatriates, mostly for director/manager positions abroad, is approximately 20 to 30. Large investment project increases the amount, for example in L4 Project case it was doubled. The normal length of the international assignment is less than 5 years and in the large investment project it is normally 1 to 2 years.

1.3 Settling the Topic

Stora Enso is using expatriation in the implementation of the investment projects. Investment projects, small and large, are planned and implemented worldwide all the time. The company is not only investing in equipment but also in human resources.

The topic is interesting and current. Human resource matters after the projects are under discussion every now and then. Individuals feel that their experience is not appreciated after returning to the home country and it effects their satisfaction towards the company.

Since repatriation has not been studied earlier and a usage of the experiences is only based on feelings, it is important that this topic will be researched and documented.

L4 project expatriates at Langerbrugge, Belgium in 2002 and 2003 were chosen to be the target group because the project was one of the largest projects in Stora Enso. Most of the members left from and returned to the same organisation, even from/to the same position, in the home country. Repatriation has been a while ago so the change/benefit is visible, therefore the timing of the study is perfect.

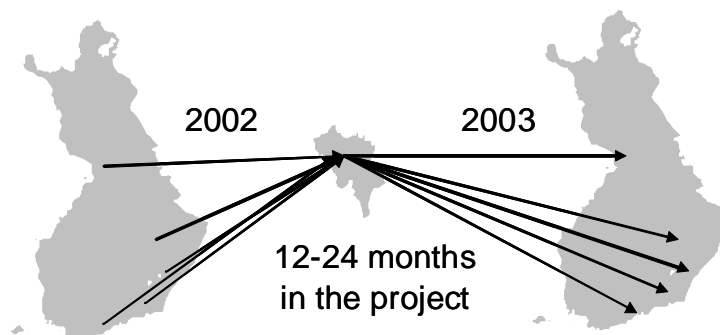


Figure 2. Most of the Finnish Expatriates Left and Returned from/to the Same Organisation

This study was planned and implemented in close cooperation with both the manager responsible for investments and the manager responsible for international assignments. Their common objective was to improve the procedure and their comments were valuable in the study process.

This study focuses on repatriation and using the experiences earned during the assignment of the case project. The objective of this study was to find out whether the case organisation has the ability to gain from experiences earned in a foreign assignment. The organisation itself was especially under study, the ability of the organisation to learn from the experience of its employees as well as the ability to offer job challenges that respond to the experiences of the employee.

If an organisation had the ability to gain from experiences then the interest was whether it had given added value to an organisation and analysing if there was anything that could have been done even better. If not, the reasons why were to be researched. Another objective was to find out if the organisation had not had time or knowledge to focus on such issues and the target of this examination is to help them.

As a result of the study ideas/propositions for improving International Assignment Policy of the company and practicalities for use of project experts are presented.

The theory behind the phenomenon is presented next in this study and it is linked with Stora Enso's policies and procedures. The methodology and the implementation of the study are analysed after that and the case itself is in focus in Chapter 5. During the process the development idea is constructed ending in a rethinking repatriation and expatriation which can be used in the future projects.

2 INTERNATIONAL ASSIGNMENTS

2.1 Expatriation

Expatriation means that companies send their employees for an international assignment for one to five years. The phenomenon is seen important for career development and companies train managers by sending them abroad to learn. Expatriation can also add the competitiveness of the organisation. Literature on international careers sees the international assignments as unique “once-in-a-lifetime” experience which should be taken if offered. (Suutari 2003)

The literature has found three main basic guidelines for using expatriation. They are specific business needs, development and to control overseas operations. (Suutari 2003, Baruch, Steele & Quantrill 2002)

A traditional reason for using expatriation is specific business needs, for example, using skills and/or experience that is lacking in the unit where the expatriate is sent to. Project work can be seen as a typical specific business need. Project experts are needed where the projects are located and normally there are not such experts available. (Suutari 2003, Baruch, Steele & Quantrill 2002)

Development by expatriation means that promising managers are sent abroad to learn and to transfer knowledge and organisational practices across units. Recently individual development and developing global leaders have had a more important role in expatriation. Development can be also a reason for using expatriation in investment projects. (Suutari 2003, Baruch, Steele & Quantrill 2002)

One reason for using expatriation is to control international operations and to coordinate and to integrate operations worldwide. In the investment projects expatriation can ensure that the control of the projects stays in the hands of a small group and guidelines are known and followed. (Suutari 2003, Baruch, Steele & Quantrill 2002)

First researches concentrated on expatriation, selection of the expatriates, their cross-cultural adjustment, pre-departure training and development of the process. Today the final phase of the cycle, repatriation, is in focus. An important related theme is the

connection between international assignments and career considerations after the assignment. (Suutari 2003)

2.2 Repatriation

Repatriation can be seen as the final link to the completion of the international assignment but it is probably the most ignored phase of the assignment. The literature knows the problems of the repatriation and many scholars have found that repatriation has been given even less attention than that devoted to the expatriation. (Baruch et al. 2002)

Expatriates often return back to an organisation that appears to have forgotten who they are, does not know what they have accomplished during the past few years, and does not know how to use their international knowledge appropriately (Solomon 1995). It is obvious that organisations cannot know how to use the gained experience if they do not understand how expatriates develop during their international assignment. Identifying suitable tasks and creating interesting career tracks for individuals after repatriation are also seen difficult. (Baruch et al. 2002)

Naturally organisations focus more on people who decide to repatriate permanently back to the home country after the assignment and give less attention to people who decide to commit themselves to international tasks for a longer term. Organisations can feel that project experts are not repatriating permanently but seeking new project opportunities all the time. (Baruch et al 2002)

2.2.1 Repatriation Problems

There is not a clear common view about reasons for repatriation difficulties among human resources managers and expatriates but current expatriation literature has identified three main areas associated with repatriation difficulties: work environment reintegration, socio-cultural environment reintegration and family reintegration. (Yongsun et al. 2002, Paik, Segaud & Malinowski 2002, Suutari & Välimaa 2002)

The reasons for difficulty in reintegrating into the company work environment are based on communication with the company during the assignment. According to Paik,

Segaud and Malinowski (2002, 647) a human resources manager and an expatriate do not share the opinion about communications and its responsibilities. Human resources managers believe that communication should exist but they are not supposed to take full responsibility of it when expatriates felt that they have already challenging responsibilities and the responsibility of communication would be too much for them. Without communication with the home office at some critical points, the expatriate could become forgotten and reintegration back to the home office can be difficult. (Paik, Segaud & Malinowski 2002, 640)

Human resources managers see reintegration into the corporate culture more important while expatriates think that reintegration into the home country culture (socio-cultural environment reintegration) is more difficult. Often the company places more efforts to bring the expatriate back into the corporate culture when in fact the expatriate is facing problems outside the corporate environment. Expatriate has been integrated or assimilated to the norms and values of the host country and got used to their status, which is often higher in the host country. All expatriate benefits will be lost upon repatriation and it can cause frustration. (Paik, Segaud & Malinowski 2002, 641)

Companies provide assistance to family needs during readjustment to the home culture for helping family integration. Expatriates feel that these issues are internal to the family and do not belong to the company. Companies should remember that they do not place too much emphasis where it may not be needed. Expatriates agree that the interest of family and friends in their experiences helps making their reintegration easier. (Paik, Segaud & Malinowski 2002, 642)

As described earlier there are different reasons for sending an expatriate for an assignment from the organisation point of view, reasons like specific business needs (meet project targets), development (knowledge transfer) and to control international operations (control of the project procedure) but the expatriate accepts the assignment for career advancement, compensation and adventure. (Paik, Segaud & Malinowski 2002, 647)

Thus, there is a clear difference in motivations and expectations. Repatriates tend to focus more on the appreciation of individual career development and multicultural

experiences than on application of a newly acquired knowledge or skills during their assignments that organisation values. (Paik, Segaud & Malinowski 2002, 647)

To improve repatriation, both the company and expatriates have to understand and share a common view in conflicting motivations and expectations. The balance between personal and organisational goals should be achieved. Organisation should increase understanding why expatriates want to assume the international assignment as well as provide support for smoother transition into the home country. The organisation should make more effort to keep in touch with the expatriates during their assignment and inform them about the changes in the home unit. Although the organisation may provide assistance to the family needs during repatriation, they should be careful with the internal family issues. (Paik, Segaud & Malinowski 2002, 647)

It is possible to improve the repatriation process by focusing on the correct issues. When both, the company and the repatriate, are satisfied with the repatriation it will increase the probability that the repatriate will stay in the company and developing the needs today and tomorrow will happen in the common understanding. Benefiting from the investment is then possible. (Suutari & Välimaa 2002)

2.2.2 Recommendations for Successful Repatriation

Successful repatriation is a sum of many elements. It includes functions prior the assignment, during the assignment, immediately preceding repatriation and after repatriation. (Van Ruysseveldt 2003)

Prior to the assignment the organisation should guarantee or make an agreement of outlining the type of position expatriates will be placed in upon repatriation. Mutual agreement about the successful repatriation should exist between the expatriate and the company. (Van Ruysseveldt 2003, 339, Paik, Segaud & Malinowski 2002, 648)

During the assignment the expatriate should have continuous communication with the home unit and mentoring programs should exist. The expatriate should be updated what happens in the home unit and for example phone conversation once in a while would be enough. (Van Ruysseveldt 2003, 339)

Immediately preceding repatriation, the organisation should arrange career management activities, like providing help in the career planning of the repatriate and if possible organise multiple career planning sessions to discuss the expatriate's concerns regarding repatriation, for example career objectives, performance. One important matter immediately preceding repatriation is pre-departure briefings on the details on the repatriation process. The organisation should ensure that all the elements of the repatriation process are transparent. (Van Ruysseveldt 2003, 340)

After repatriation the organisation should provide repatriation training seminars for the emotional response and lifestyle changes following repatriation. Providing financial counselling and financial/tax assistance, reorientation program about the changes in the company and some downtime upon repatriation ensures successful repatriation. The most important after the repatriation activity by the organisation is visible signs that the company values international experience. (Van Ruysseveldt 2003, 341)

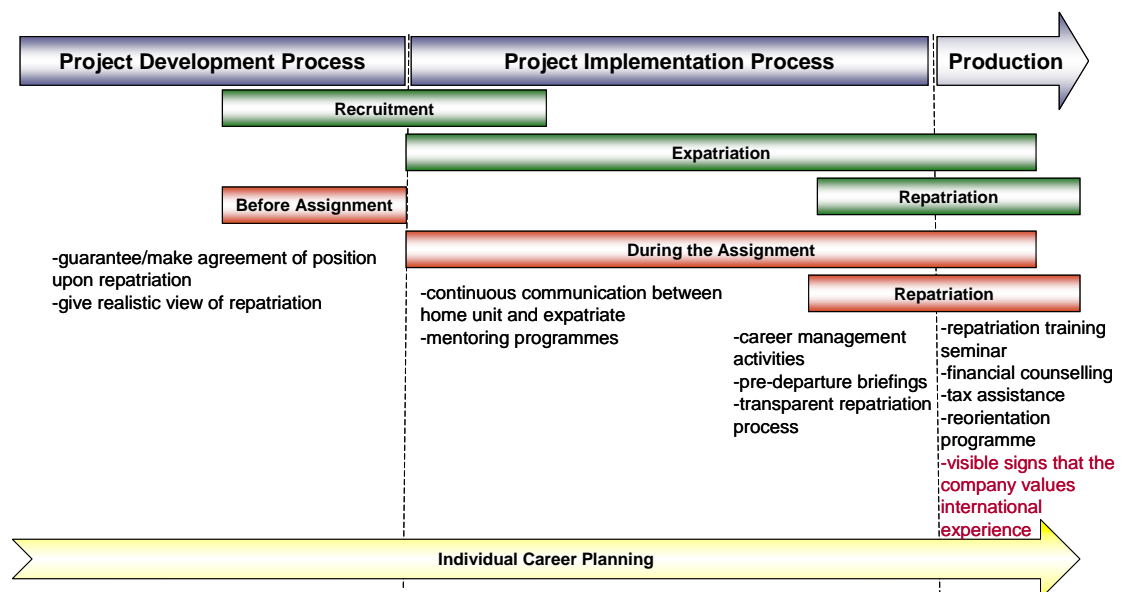


Figure 3. Actions in Successful Repatriation Modified According to Van Ruysseveldt (2003)

2.3 Individual Career Planning

Since companies are restructuring, re-engineering and outsourcing today, the lifetime employment and security belongs to the past. Employees need to be self-directing and flexible, constantly learning and upgrading their skills, and ready to change employers

whenever the change would land them at a better position with another organisation in order to develop and sustain their own careers. (Van Ruysseveldt 2003, 344)

The literature sees international experience as a competitive asset as international assignees and other high demand professional are having more and more boundaryless careers. A boundaryless career assumes that individuals will move from one company to another for better opportunities in their own professional development. (Van Ruysseveldt 2003, 344)

Michael Dickmann and Hilary Harris (2005) studied how an international assignment impacts on the career capital of individuals in one global organisation by using knowing how, knowing whom and knowing why framework (figure 4).

Career capital area	Key individual career capital activities	Key organizational career and HR management activities
Know How Tacit and explicit knowledge, skills and abilities	General Know How seen as basis Nature: mostly informal development IAs give general business understanding and raise self-confidence Methods: on-the-job learning; correct work behaviors, international assignments	Know How activities most important Nature: formal competency framework, training has important role IAs expose assignees to broader management issues Methods: career Path Tool, On-the-job learning, IA
Know Why Identity, values and interests	Know Why gaining in importance with tenure Nature: informal, emerging, experience-based factors shape knowing why IAs challenge own beliefs, create more awareness and encourage self-reflection Methods: perceived orgl. culture and reputation, opportunities and challenges	Know Why activities substantial Nature: formal career system, feedback and coaching important IAs create a global mindset and a local awareness in expatriates Methods: career conversations and coaching
Know Whom Intra-firm, inter-firm, professional and social relations	Know Whom activities most important Nature: proactive, own benefits for current job and future career paramount IAs need differential approaches to parent, local and global networking from expatriates Methods: internal and external networking; assigned mentors/self-found sponsors	Know Whom activities least managed Nature: hierarchical superior as initiator IAs give expatriates increased opportunities to build their networks Methods: internal networking activities, HR 'owners' during early career

Figure 4. Key Individual and Organizational Career Capital Activities by Dickmann and Harris (2005, 406)

The difference of career capital between individuals and organisation can be seen from the findings of Dickmann and Harris (2005). When an organisation sees “know how” as the most important, it is seen as a basis for individuals. Although “know whom” is the most important to individuals, it is the least managed by the organisation. Most expatriate interviewees realized that their social capital had suffered as a result of working abroad. According to the study “know why” had an influence on the values and interests of individual and influenced their career

development. There is a link between a career and an international assignment, but how could the organisation manage the careers better. (Dickmann & Harris 2005, 406)

It is researched that there are specific challenges for both organisations and employees on human resource management (HRM) in the project-oriented companies due to specific characteristics, particularly the temporary nature of the work process and dynamic nature of the work environment. (Huemann et al. 2007)

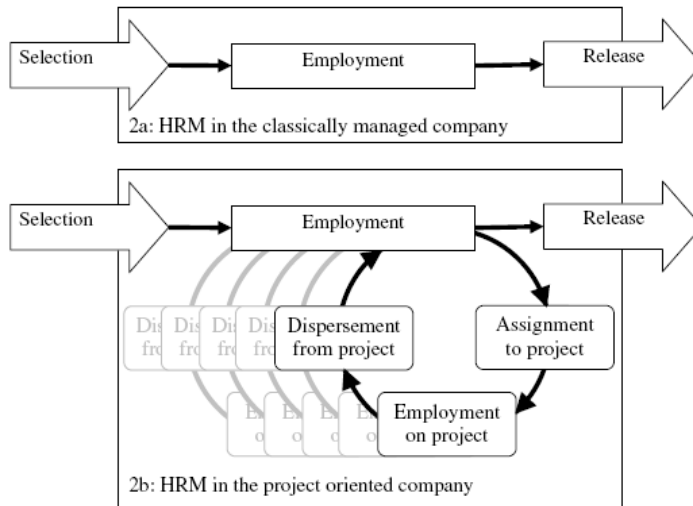


Figure 5. HRM in the Project-Oriented Company versus HRM in the Classically Managed Company by Huemann et al. (2007, 319)

A simple model of HRM processes (figure 5) shows the difference between a traditional company and a project-oriented company. During an employment in a project-oriented company an individual works in many projects. (Huemann et al. 2007, 318)

According to the study of Huemann et al. (2007, 321) in the dispersement from the project the organisation needs to decide whether the employee will be:

- immediately assigned to a new project
- assigned to a project where their skills will be better used starting sometime in the future
- held in abeyance because there is no project for them to be assigned to

If there is not another project to join they can do many things:

- sit on the bench

- go through training or other personal development
- go to the project management office to do technical and process development

The organisation has a key role in the dispersment of the project. Leaving of valued personnel should be avoided, training/social activities should be arranged and network of potential peripheral workers should be kept. HRM in project-oriented companies must take the perspective of the individual employee as well as the organisation. It is vitally important to ensure employees' well-being and ethical treatment of workers in the project-oriented company. (Huemann et al 2007, 321)

Individuals are normally responsible for their career planning but companies can support them by having programmes and helping with planning its employees' careers. Projects create challenges in HRM and special characteristics of project oriented organisation must be taken into account.

2.4 International Assignments in Stora Enso

Group Human Resources control International Assignments in Stora Enso. They are responsible for International Assignment Policy and its processes. Business Unit (BU) organisations are sending units when an expatriate is sent for an assignment but Group Human Resources assist BU organisations with practical matters. An organisation where an expatriate is sent to is a host organisation.

2.4.1 International Assignment Policy and Process

Stora Enso's International Assignment policy (2004) together with its processes was updated in 2004 so the policy valid today was not in use in the case project, L4 Project. However the earlier policy was quite similar to this one.

The policy is created in the cost point of view, it defines compensation and allowances. Career planning support and repatriation is also included in the policy. According to the policy international assignees have a great opportunity to shape their own career development. In the updated policy the company has introduced more structured support by appointing a dedicated Home Company Manager for International Assignees to support career development and job placement activities.

The Home Company Manager's responsibility is normally limited to 3 to 5 years. There was not the Home Company Manager in the earlier policy so in the L4 Project it was not in use. If the international assignment lasts from three to five years the Host Organisation becomes primarily responsible for the expatriate, unless otherwise agreed. Again, a dedicated Career Support Manager will be appointed. Human Resources organisation reviews the process annually to identify the break point in the career support responsibility. Changes in the assignment duration or in the Business Unit organisation can cause changes in responsibilities. (Stora Enso International Assignment Policy 2004)

Expatriation and repatriation processes cannot be seen separately. Expatriation is the initiation and repatriation is the culmination of the same process. In reality most activities that ensure high retention after repatriation are done during rather than after the assignment. (Van Ruysseveldt 2003, 350)

In Stora Enso the expatriation and repatriation process is called International Assignment (IAS) process and it has four phases:

1. Planning and Approval
2. Pre-Assignment
3. On Assignment
4. End of Assignment

In the Planning and Approval phase repatriation or career development are not mentioned. According to the policy the planning of an international assignment will start with an evaluation of the business need and cost implication, not in the individual development needs.

Before an international assignment, in the Pre-Assignment phase, an assignment briefing will be arranged where communication for the assignment terms and conditions will be discussed and international assignment process will be explained. The assignee will be informed of internal and external resources which can be utilised for tax consultation, relocation and removal assistance, culture and language training. The policy lists all actions that are paid by the company before leaving for an assignment.

In On Assignment phase, shortly after the arrival in the host country a welcome briefing will be arranged. Country, culture and language training started prior the assignment may be continued in the host country. Tax arrival briefing and tax return preparation and, if needed, the extension of permits and certificates will be provided. Assignee's execution of duties and progress on assignment is evaluated and their salary together with the pensionable salary is reviewed by the host company.

The closure of the host country payroll and tax will be done at the End of Assignment phase. The company will arrange a tax departure briefing. Assignment related social security, insurance and pension arrangements will be terminated. Reasonable repatriation costs will be paid by the company. The assignees are encouraged to give feedback on the assignment and the repatriation formalities.

2.4.2 International Assignments and Investments

Expatriation is used in the Project Implementation Process in Stora Enso (figure 6). Before implementation there have been many different phases in the process. The project has been studied carefully (Project Development Process; conceptual phase, pre-feasibility study and feasibility study), different opinions have been taken into account and support of the project for the company strategy is closely analysed. Studies and analyses cannot be done without certain experience so it is natural that participants and knowledge of the earlier projects are used in the planning phases of the projects.

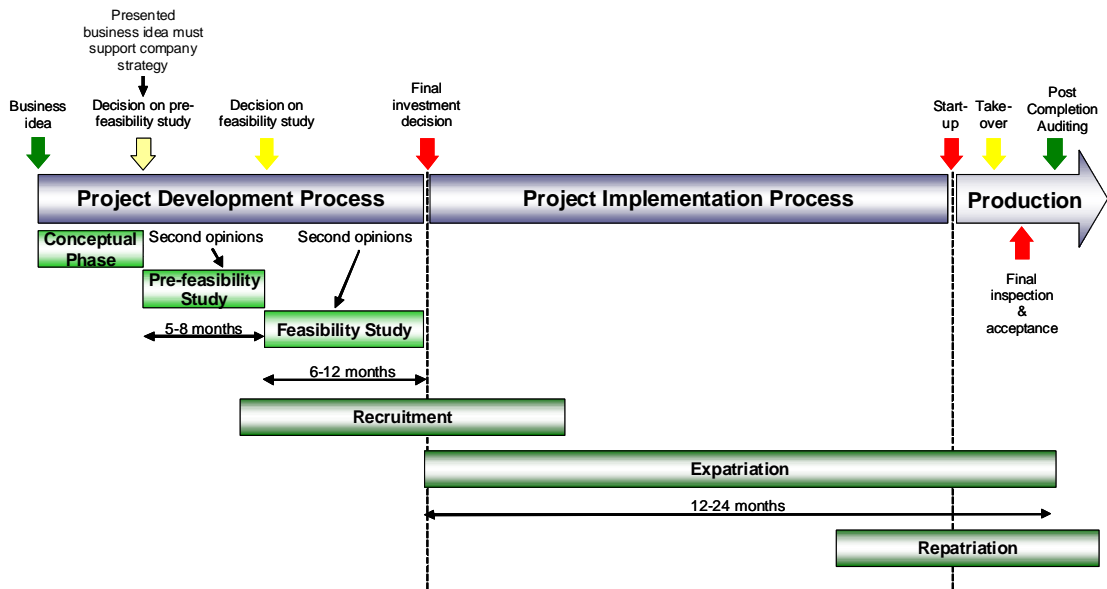


Figure 6. Project Implementation Process modified from Implementation Guidelines of Stora Enso

Normally pre-feasibility and feasibility phases are executed without using expatriation. If the location of the work is transferred to the other country, some persons are sent for an assignment after the final investment decision. Expatriation is handled in cooperation with the project organisation, the Human Resources organisation (Group Function) and the Business Unit (BU) organisation. Projects are implemented according to the policy and there are different actions in the different phases (figure 7).

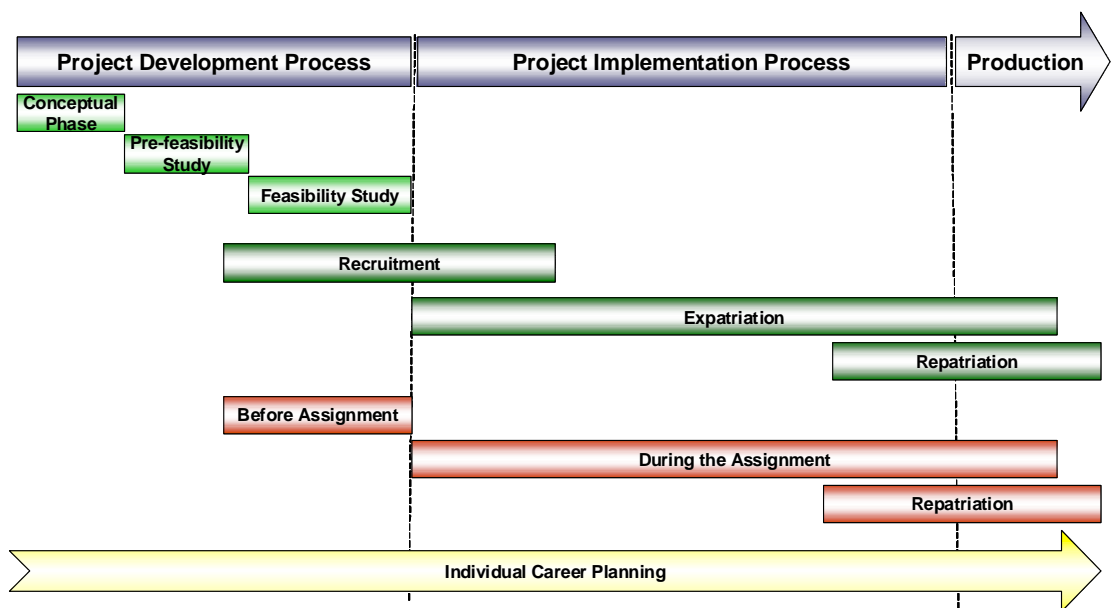


Figure 7. Actions in the Project Implementation Process Modified from Implementation Guidelines of Stora Enso

Before the Assignment (in IAS process Planning and Approval and Pre-Assignment phases), in the feasibility study, the use of expatriates, local personnel and consultants is studied as well as the recruitment is planned. Project organisation is responsible for planning and recruiting.

Recruitment before the final investment decision is problematic because situation can change, for example a schedule can change or a project can be postponed or even terminated. Uncertainty requires flexibility from the expatriates and often there is not much time for making decisions. Persons are recruited from Business Unit organisations and flexibility is also required from them. Repatriation is not in focus before the assignment but the success of the project is the main concern.

Length and time of expatriation in the investment project differs among expatriates. Recruitment is done partly in the feasibility study phase, partly in the implementation phase. The expatriate needs to negotiate repatriation issues with BU and expatriation issues with Project organisation. A vision is created based on discussions.

During the Assignment (in IAS process On Assignment phase) the project organisation coordinates expatriation. The experiences of BU organisations are used when needed but Project Organisation has the main responsibility of the assignment. Often the assignment can be prolonged and again flexibility, both from expatriates and from their home organisations, is required. During the assignment the project organisation focuses on the success of the project. Responsibility of communication between a home organisation and an expatriate during the assignment is not clearly defined in the policy.

Repatriation (in IAS process End of Assignment phase) is completed together with the project organisation and Business Unit (BU) organisation. BU organisation has the main responsibility of repatriation (offering job opportunity) but practical matters such as arranging moving and ending the contract in the host country will be done by the project organisation. Also, the repatriate has many responsibilities, for example ending all personal contracts (bank account, insurances etc) and arranging personal matters in the home country. When a family of the expatriate is also living in the host country, the expatriate has more responsibilities.

Individual career planning should follow throughout the process. Developing during the assignment should support individual career of the expatriate and it would be ideal that the assignment could be a part of individual career planning of the expatriate. The expatriate is responsible for the career planning.

3 EXPERIENCE IN THE LEARNING ORGANISATION

To be able to analyse expatriates' gained experiences in a foreign assignment we should first define experience. Data is explicit knowledge which can be easily transferred in written format. Data becomes information when it has some value and knowledge is certain type of information. Different knowledge becomes experience when time goes by, in other words, when knowledge is integrated in person's life story. Thus experiences turn out to be important building blocks of personal and professional identity as well as a source of true understanding and competence. Organisations are interested in the experience, which is valued in general. People are recruited for experience more often than for intelligence or education (Davenport, 2000, 2).

Organisations should keep the experience and focus on not losing the people with valued experience. People in organisations have always sought, used, and valued knowledge, at least implicitly. Studies have shown that managers get two-thirds of their information and knowledge from face-to-face meetings or phone conversations. Only one-third comes from documents. A company has invested in human resources and gained experiences in the organisation. It is not easy to have knowledge in the right place at the right time but that should be organisations target. (Davenport 2000, 12)

In the organisation there are knowledge buyers, sellers and brokers. All of us are sometimes buyers but not necessary sellers or brokers. Brokers are people who make connections between buyers and sellers. (Davenport 2000, 28)

There are different kinds of payments in the knowledge market. One of the most used payment type is reciprocity, when I give you something, you give me something back. Also reputation is quite close to reciprocity. Sharing the knowledge gives the seller certain reputation and it can be good for self-respect. Some people sell the knowledge only for altruism. They are just so nice and want to help others and they do not ask anything in return. Trust is present in the knowledge market. It must be visible and ubiquitous. Trustworthiness must start at the top. (Davenport 2000, 32)

The experience is gained when time goes by. In the projects one can earn special, explicit knowledge that cannot be easily transferred. That experience can only be earned by working in the projects. Project experts are aware how knowledge markets work. It is normal that project expert sells certain knowledge as well as buy some knowledge. Often they also act as brokers. Reciprocity is normal payment type for project experts. Especially transferring certain special knowledge gives an expert certain repute. Best project experts have good repute and self-respect. Altruism is rarely a payment type for project experts. Persons with project experience are valuable to the organisation and often they are well aware of it.

3.1 Managing Organisational Learning

An organisation is actually a group of individuals. Organisation's ability to learn is based on individual's ability to gain and share knowledge. In order to benefit from experience as much as possible, the organisation should focus on individuals, their motivation, well-being and try to fulfil their expectations. Some knowledge is easy to transfer, even without motivation or even if the individuals have left the company but some knowledge follows the individual. A person with certain special knowledge may be motivated to transfer it to others but experience can be so special that it is almost impossible to transfer or it may take time. (Argyris 1999)

Without knowledge, an organisation could not organise itself. An organisation should create possibilities to knowledge sharing, for example coffee breaks. New knowledge is created when people share information with each other. All healthy organisations generate and use knowledge. Organisations absorb information and turn it into knowledge. Interaction with the environment is important. Knowledge should be transferred easily to become a learning organisation. Organisation should understand the forces that drive the knowledge so that it can be easily moved and utilised more effectively (Davenport, 2000, 88).

The purpose of knowledge management activities on the whole is to supply the right knowledge to the right people at the right time. Two assumptions that illustrate the problem of learning within organisations can be found. Many of today's knowledge management activities within organisations are too influenced by the information systems function which is characterised by sequential thinking and rationality.

Knowledge management activities should have a greater focus on the individual and his or her cognitive abilities (i.e. the interplay between his or her thoughts and feelings) which are prerequisites for learning to take place. (Olsson Neve 2006, 3)

According to Olsson Neve (2006, 109) knowledge growth should be supported by organisations in both an incremental way and by promoting paradigm shifts between individuals. Employees' awareness of their knowledge improves learning within organisation and learning is associated with both individuals' cognitions (thoughts) and affections (feelings).

Project experience contains special knowledge which is not so easy to transfer and repatriates represent a unique vehicle for knowledge transfer and organisational learning. Each project is different but somehow similar. Experience is sometimes difficult to define and actually the most valuable experience is often gained without noticing over a long period of time. Project experts have wide international network which is important in the knowledge transfer. Within the project experts knowledge is transferred and organisational learning is realised both between project experts and between members of different units and project experts.

Organisations should remember that knowledge and especially experience is the strength of the company. It should not be forgotten that motivation and awareness of the knowledge influences individual capability and willingness to share knowledge within the organisation and create organisational learning. Problems in an international assignment may affect knowledge transfer negatively even if the person stays in the company after repatriation. (Argyris 1999)

If individuals feel that their experiences are not valuable, they seek opportunities from other organisations where their expectations are fulfilled. Motivation and reasons for motivation can differ between individuals but feelings cannot be ignored. Motivated people gain and share knowledge effectively in the learning organisation.

3.2 Knowledge Creation

One well known model in the knowledge management is a model of knowledge conversion from Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995). It is a simple, tacit driven approach to

knowledge management, which focuses on knowledge transformations between tacit and explicit knowledge.

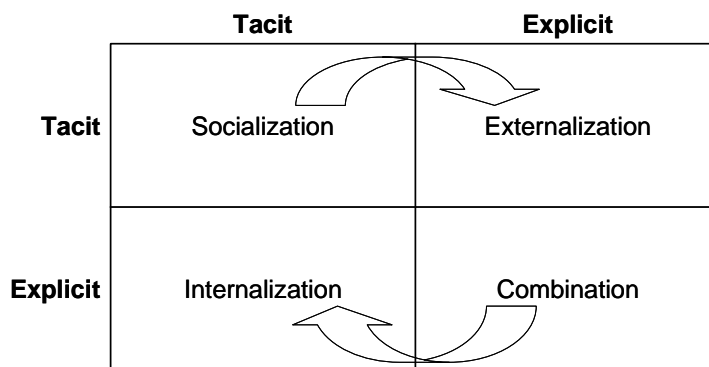


Figure 8. Model of Knowledge Conversion from Nonaka and Takeuchi

Knowledge creation is a continuous process of dynamic interactions between tacit and explicit knowledge. The four modes (socialization, externalization, combination and internalization) of knowledge conversion interact in the spiral of knowledge creation. (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995)

Socialization (tacit-to-tacit) is a process of sharing experiences and thereby creating tacit knowledge. It happens in face-to-face situations when tacit knowledge is shared among people through modelling and mentoring, conversation, workplace culture, shared experiences etc. It is natural, typically social interactions. Externalization (tacit-to-explicit) is a process of articulating tacit knowledge into explicit concepts, a tacit knowledge is transferred to a visible form, to an explicit knowledge, which is easier to share throughout the organisation. Combination (explicit-to-explicit) is a process of systemizing concepts into a knowledge system, creating new (explicit) form to the (explicit) knowledge. Internalization (explicit-to-tacit) is a process of transferring explicit knowledge again to a tacit knowledge. (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995, 62)

Project experts transfer knowledge by all four modes, however socialization and externalization are mostly used. Socialization is typical and important in knowledge sharing but unfortunately often knowledge is shared among people who just happen to be in the right place at the right time. Among project experts knowledge is often transferred by phone conversation. Externalization happens normally by someone's

request. This study is typical example of externalization, tacit knowledge is transferred to visible form and shared throughout the organisation.

Nonaka and Takeuchi focus on sharing common knowledge and creating new knowledge, which gives an organisation competitive advantage. Nancy M. Dixon (2000) has researched different types of knowledge transfer; serial transfer, near transfer, far transfer, strategic transfer and expert transfer. She focuses more on transferring existing knowledge and does not pay so much attention to creating new knowledge.

Serial transfer is used when the knowledge (tacit or explicit), which a team has gained from doing its task in one setting, is transferred to the next time that same team does the task in a different setting. Explicit knowledge is transferred by near transfer when a team has gained the knowledge from doing a frequent and repeated task and it is reused by other teams doing very similar work. Far transfer happens when tacit knowledge, which a team has gained from doing a nonroutine task, is made available to other teams doing similar work in another part of the organisation. The collective knowledge of the organisation, which is needed to accomplish a strategic task that occurs infrequently but is critical to the whole organisation, can be transferred by strategic transfer. Expert transfer is used when a team facing a technical question beyond the scope of its own knowledge, seeks the expertise of others in the organisation. (Dixon 2000)

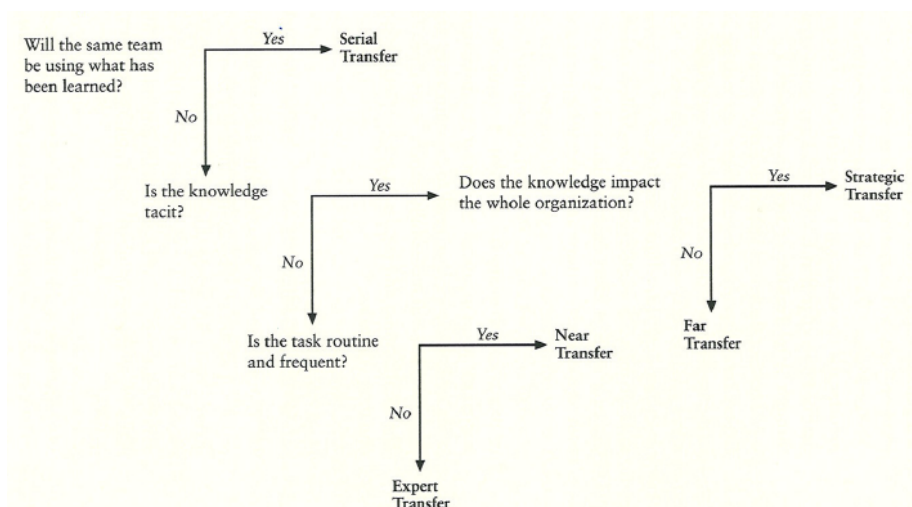


Figure 9. Decision Tree for Selecting Type of Transfer (Dixon, 2000)

Most of the knowledge expatriates earn during an international assignment is not used by the same team, it is tacit and does not have an impact on the whole organisation. According to Dixon (2000) the type of transfer in such cases is far transfer.

Far transfer is always unique, there is not just one way to make this kind of transfer happen. This kind of transfer is largely situation dependent and due to that less easy to replicate. Exchange in far transfer is reciprocal, all in the team learn something new. Far transfer is critical to organisations and losing of key persons with special tacit knowledge means that far transfer cannot happen. (Dixon 2000, 89)

Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) focus on organisational knowledge creation whereas Dixon (2000) focuses on understanding how companies transfer knowledge. In general both models can be useful in organisations. Knowledge is often transferred by socialization and externalization (Nonaka & Takeuchi 1995) and by far transfer (Dixon 2000). It is not easy to define how expatriates and project experts transfer knowledge, however they are well aware about their knowledge and how it can be used. All above described transfer methods are used.

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Case Study

Case study is more a research approach or a research strategy than a method. As this study focuses on the limited group (L4 Project members), this is an intensive single-case study. This is an exceptional and unique group from which we want to learn more about. Learning happens by interviews, members themselves as well as people from their organisation. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008)

With the case study, the case is an object of interest in its own right and the researcher aims to provide an in-depth elucidation of it. In this study L4 Project group is the object of interest. Almost any kind of research can be constructed as a case study but when the distinction is drawn the case study is distinguished as a special research design. In the case study, the researcher is usually concerned to elucidate the unique features of the case. (Bryman & Bell 2007, 62)

The main aim in a case study is to understand and explore the case from the inside and develop understanding from the perspectives of the people involved in the case. In this study the most of the interviewees were known by the researcher and pre-understanding was quite high. However, in a case study the key interest is in the case itself, not in the pre-given theoretical propositions. Theoretical propositions and pre-understanding of the case may have influenced the interpretation. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 119)

4.1.1 Implementation

This study was implemented in three stages; Planning Stage, Implementing Stage and Analysing Stage. Examination was based on interviews, not only of the project members but also of the people from member's organisation (Supervisors, Managers, Directors). At the beginning of the study a more specific frame was created together with a study plan (Appendix 1). They were approved by the company and the supervisor from the university before starting the implementation. The plan and the schedule were modified during the study and it was followed by the supervisors from the company and the university.

According to Stenbacka (2001) qualitative research has good validity when it generates understanding of a social phenomenon, the informant is part of the problem area and he/she is given the opportunity to speak freely according to his/her own knowledge structure. The method of non-forcing interviews with strategically well-chosen informants should be used. Expatriation including repatriation can be considered to be a social phenomenon and informants of this study were part of the problem area and they had an opportunity to speak freely. This study has good validity.

In qualitative research reliability has no relevance. In many cases qualitative research cannot be repeated with the same result and usually it is not even needed.

Yin (2003) makes a difference between analytical generalisation and statistical generalisation. Analytical generalisation is relevant in qualitative research. It is possible to lift empirical material as a result of the study to a general level when informants relevant to the study are chosen strategically not by a statistically drawn sample. In this study the results can be generalised also to other expatriate groups.

It is important that the case study researchers do not think a case study as a sample of one and they do not delude themselves. It is possible to identify typical cases that can be used to represent a certain class of objects. (Bryman & Bell 2007, 64)

Stenbacka (2001) recommends researchers to be most careful and systematic in the presentation of the study. A systematic approach was focused within this study. However, all scientific work is based on certain assumptions, explicit or implicit, that guide the investigation process. The study process was systematic, although the researcher had to think critically about what she was doing and why during the process, confronting and often challenging her assumptions.

4.1.2 Thesis Management

The research literature emphasises the planning of the process and following the plans. In this study preliminary plans were made in the early phases and they were modified during the process. The research process was consistent, supervisors from

the company and the university were used for guidance and following the plans. The schedule was modified when needed.

One of the challenges was objectivity. As the researcher was a member of the target group the knowledge and pre-understanding of the case was easily not objective. However, it also helped in the process because interviewees were familiar and researcher does not need to use time to research the background of the case.

4.2 Conduct of the Study

This study was planned carefully at the beginning of the process. The perspective of this study was framed and ideas how to get close to the topic in this case were written down (Appendix 2).

The scope was framed, the target group limited and the schedule was created. Studying the topic by the literature, research papers, and previous studies both in general and from Stora Enso was important. Different theory options were analysed.

The L4 Project organisation included 83 members and 71 commissioning and start-up supports from seven European, Asian and American countries. In the project organisation 35 were expatriates (29 from Finland), four local personnel and 44 were consultants. Expatriation was not used in commissioning and start-up supports' assignments which lasted two to six months and they were excluded from the study. The target group of the study included only L4 project members from Finland (Members), their superiors were interviewed for the organisation point of view.

The people for the interviews were selected from the target group. Questions for the interviews (Appendix 3, Appendix 4) were issued based on the analysis what was needed to be known in order to continue the study. Email questions for the people who have left Stora Enso after L4 Project were also issued (Appendix 5). Interviews were also scheduled in the planning stage.

The interviews of the study took place in spring 2008. In all 14 members were interviewed, 12 face to face and two by phone. From members who had left the company after the assignment, three email answers were received. From organisation

representatives there were four face to face interviews and one phone interview. Interviews were analysed, verified and the development idea was created in the analysing stage. Result and findings are analysed in the next Chapter.

5 CASE L4 PROJECT

5.1 Introduction

The theory behind expatriation and repatriation, this study and its objectives, methodology and implementation have now been described and this Chapter will focus on the case.

Expatriation was used in the case project, L4 Project. The project was planned and implemented according to Stora Enso's policies and strategies. After pre-feasibility and feasibility studies the project was supported and the final investment decision was made in autumn 2001.

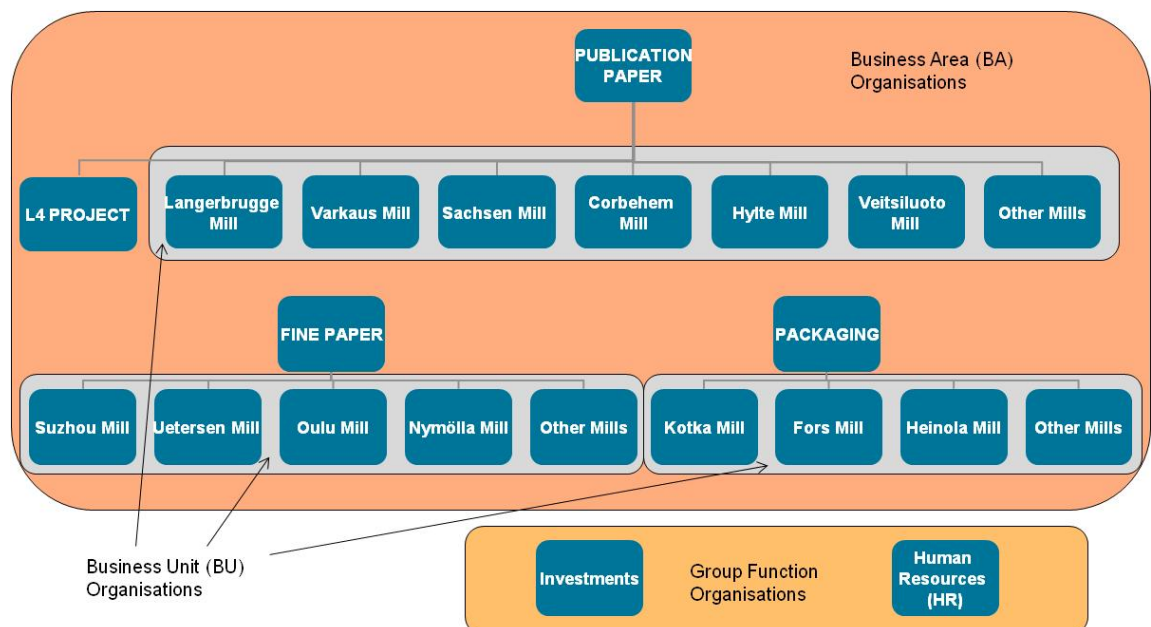


Figure 10. Example of Organisations

Stora Enso's organisation structure is based on Business Areas as can be seen in Figure 10. In the figure organisations are examples so it does not include all Business Areas or all Business Units or all Group Functions of the company. As can be seen L4 Project organisation belonged in Business Area Publication Papers but not in Langerbrugge's Business Unit.

In this study L4 project expatriates/repatriates are called *Members*. Member's home unit, sending unit is Business Unit (BU) Organisation from where Member was sent

for an assignment. *Organisation* refers to BU Organisation. *Organisation Representative* is a superior interviewed from Member's Organisation. L4 Project Organisation is a host organisation where Member was sent to. Project refers to L4 Project Organisation. Group Functions include for example Investments organisation and Human Resources Organisation.

L4 project was implemented in 2002 and 2003. The project organisation included 53% consultants, 42% expatriates and 5% local personnel. Of the expatriates 83% was from Finland, 8% from China, 6% from Sweden and 3% from USA.

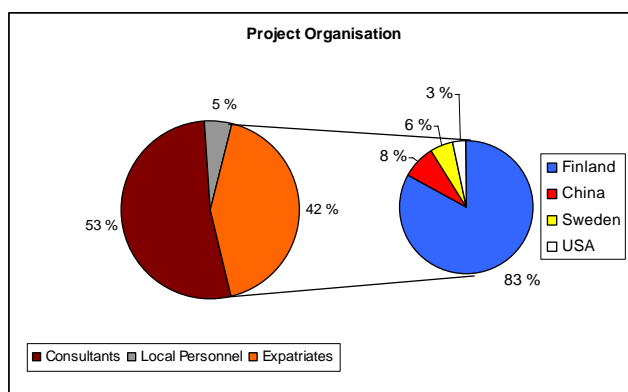


Figure 11. Project Organisation Included 42% Expatriates from which 83% were from Finland

In the L4 Project Organisation there were persons with both long project experience as well as newcomers. All positions were open in Stora Enso's internal job market (IJM). Each Member had his/her reasons for joining the project but gaining experiences and developing themselves were on everyone's mind.

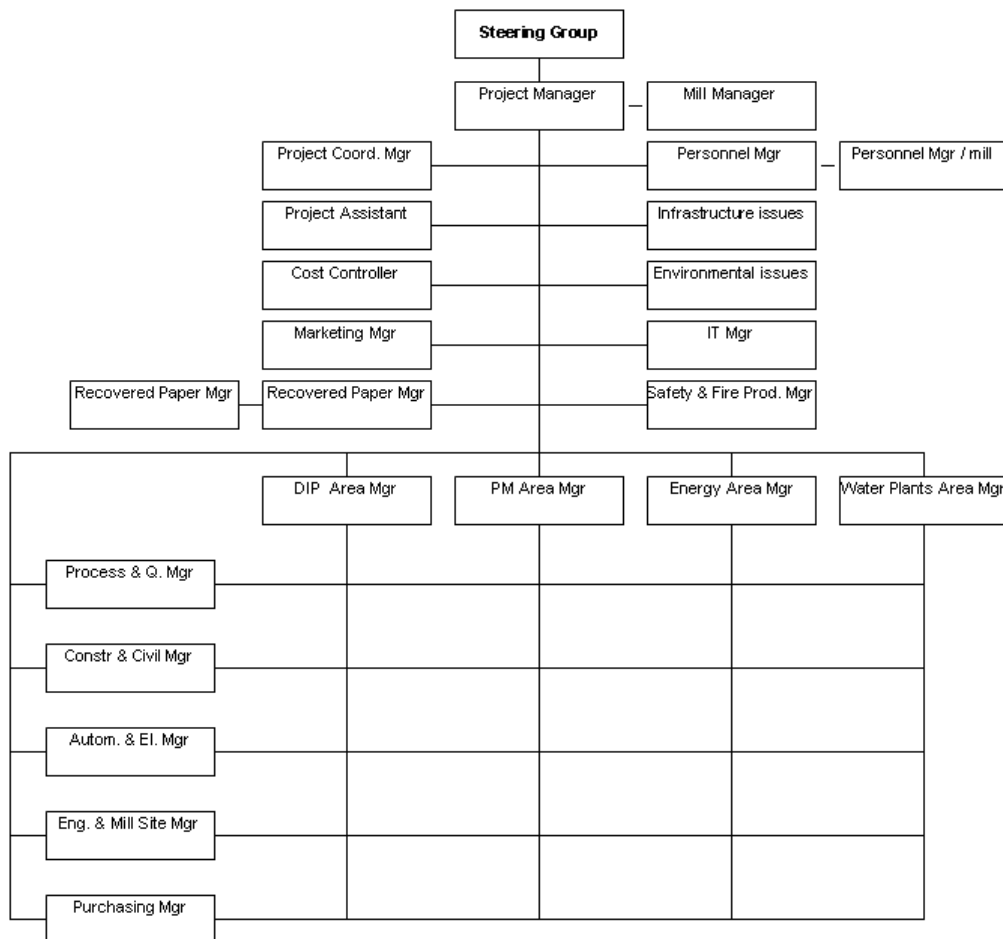


Figure 12. L4 Project Matrix Organisation

Figure 12. describes the L4 Project Organisation with Area Managers and Discipline Managers. In addition to these positions there were Project Engineers, Project Supervisors, Assistants and Commissioning and start-up supports in the organisation. Based on the Stora Enso principles a project organisation works independently and reports to Steering Group that normally consist of members from Business Area involved and persons from Group Functions.

5.1.1 General

The target group of the study included 29 Finnish expatriates (Members), of which 14 were interviewed for the individual point of view. Their superiors (Organisation Representatives), 5 persons, were interviewed for the organisation point of view. Results of the interviews were analysed by actions before, during, after the assignment and now, about five years after repatriation both from the individual and from the organisation point of view.

Focus is on earned experiences and use of them. Before the international assignment Members had certain knowledge, during the assignment they earned more knowledge as well as in the repatriation. Different knowledge becomes experience when time goes by. Repatriation has happened about five years before interviews and earned knowledge has become experience.

L4 Project has been documented by for example pre-feasibility and feasibility studies, different project instructions and “Learnings from L4 Project”. The latter one was written by the Members at the end of the project, just before repatriation. This, mostly technical, information has been used in the projects after L4 Project.

This case will be analysed for the organisation perspective and how the experiences earned in the assignment have been used. Such knowledge has not been documented in the company earlier.

For analysing the results of the study Members were divided to two sub-groups. First group (a) included Project Manager, Area Managers, Discipline Managers and Project Engineers, the other group (b) included Project Supervisors and Other Members. Group (a) had more responsibilities in the project than group (b). It must not to be forgotten that all Members had responsible duties and level of responsibility might differ within the group. It is also possible that a Member had more responsible duties in the project, than in the BU Organisation.

5.2 Experiences Earned from the Individual Point of View

An international assignment from the individual point of view is that a project needs the best possible persons to work hard and long days during certain period, in this case during the project. If needed, the organisation wheedles employees to join the project, the vision of the project and the life after that is described to be wonderful and full of opportunities. In reality project work is hard work, it requires moving abroad and handling culture shocks both in the host country and in the host organisation. After working hard the person is repatriated and problems are faced again, for example a reverse culture shock. It seems to be pure luck whether the repatriation is successful or not. Each individual needs to cope with all problems, stress at work and in personal life. It is possible that in the home organisation nobody understands what a person had

gone through and the earned experience is not valued. It might be that taking special assignments after repatriation, where the gained experience could be used, causes jealousy in the organisation. It is easier to refuse from the offers. Each individual copes with the situation in their unique way.

In the following different phases of the process are analysed from the individuals' point of view.

5.2.1 Before Assignment

Each Member had his/her reasons and expectations before the assignment. Almost everyone (93%) had a project work background and 86% of the Members were asked to join the L4 Project by another Member. Even if they were asked they wanted a change and self development.

None of the Members were interviewed by the Organisation before the assignment. Everyone had a job interview by the Project but not an interview where an individual career was planned or common targets for the assignment would have been set.

It is obvious that none of the assignments of the Members were based on the career planning or strategy by the company, even though development discussions take place annually. It is possible that some Members had talked about international assignments in their development discussions but this assignment was not a result of the individual career planning in any case.

Before an assignment, the Members expected to gain international experience in a large investment project as well as knowledge about newest technology and procedures of the industry. They felt that experience was received as expected.

Vision created before the assignment about experiences and work opportunities after the repatriation was not realistic in 80% of the Members who had unsuccessful repatriation.

5.2.2 During Assignment

All, 100% of Members said that the project was a good experience and knowledge and experience were earned. It was emphasised that the Project itself was handled well and coordinated with the experience. Naturally there were minor matters that were pointed out but in general everyone said that the Project went well.

Project implementation (life cycle, administration, responsibilities), team work skills, and importance of human resource issues were mentioned to be valuable experience. Especially project experience in total was valuable and recognising the fact that all projects, large and small, are basically the same. Knowledge and experience were transferred from the Members with long project background to newcomers during the assignment and networks for knowledge transfer were created.

Communication between Organisation and expatriates differed among the Members. It happened due to Member's initiative mostly just before repatriation when future position needed to be agreed.

All Members had positive memories about the assignment. Family experience, especially children's experiences, was mentioned to be invaluable. In the spare time all expatriates travelled a lot. Experiences outside of the work were mentioned to be of more value than they expected.

5.2.3 Repatriation

There were two types of interviewees, some Members had no complains about the repatriation and some had many. There were Members who did not have any complains about their own repatriation but they commented about problems of others. It was known that repatriation was not handled well in every case and examples of the unsuccessful repatriation were known. The responsibility of the individual in the repatriation was emphasised.

Unsuccessful repatriation had been under discussion so much that it was expected that successful repatriations did not exist in the L4 Project. Actually 41% of the Members said that their repatriation was handled well enough. Even if it was handled well, there

were comments about matters that could have been better (such as practices with moving loads etc).

There were more successful repatriations at the lower level of the organisation, 30% of the Members of group (a) (Project Director, Area Managers, Discipline Managers and Project Engineers) had a successful repatriation but among group (b) (Project Supervisors and Other members) the result was 57%.

Members pointed out the discussions prior to the assignment about career development. L4 Project representatives emphasised that an international assignment is a unique opportunity and career development is guaranteed after that. Finding a position after an assignment was said not to be a problem. Van Ruysseveldt (2003) emphasised that if the skills and competencies of repatriates are not needed then the repatriates should be given a realistic expectation prior to accepting the global assignment. Within the Members the given expectations were not realistic.

Some similarities could be seen among the Members who had a successful repatriation. Most of them (86%) had the position or department of repatriation agreed before leaving for an assignment. Good contacts in the Organisation or in other units helped in the repatriation as well as previous experiences. Members who were not repatriating for the first time had a more realistic view about the repatriation and knew how it could be helped.

In 53% of the cases one single person was important in successful repatriation. That person was a Member him/herself or another Member or a person from BU Organisation.

Luck had a significant role in the repatriation. In some regions there was new project starting and therefore 29% of the Members found a new position immediately. Others found new positions either as agreed or due to luck. Totally 43% of the Members with the successful repatriation said that luck had a role in their repatriation. Most of the Members with the unsuccessful repatriation felt that they had bad luck in the repatriation.

As in the successful repatriation also in the unsuccessful repatriation similarities can be seen. In some cases responsibilities were not clear. If the sending and the returning unit were not clear, it was a region with many units or only a country, it correlated with the unsuccessful repatriation. This kind of situation was in the 80% of the unsuccessful repatriation and mostly it was said that nobody took responsibility of their repatriation and/or new position.

Negotiations about the repatriation did not start early enough. It was commented by 90% of the Members with the unsuccessful repatriation that negotiations about the next position started less than one month prior to the repatriation and few Members did not know their position when repatriated. In the latter situations Members knew their Organisation, so after the repatriation they came to their working place everyday but had nothing to do. An unclear future creates stress and a stressed person might feel that the repatriation is not successful even if the most of the things were handled well.

Clear negotiations about the position after repatriation did not exist. Normally only one position was offered by Organisation. If this position was agreed before an assignment the Members accepted the situation (successful repatriation) but if the expectations were higher, it was a clear disappointment.

5.2.4 About Five Years after Repatriation

Most of the project Members (76%) said that they had used their experience after repatriation. All of them had used their expertise as a member or as a consultant in other projects after the assignment. A conclusion is that knowledge has been transferred within the company.

Professional networking was mentioned to be valuable, not only to the Members but also to the company. Knowledge transfer is easier among familiar persons than with the strangers. By networking also awareness of the projects and newest technologies and procedures are spread in the company.

Successful repatriation seemed to have a correlation with the feelings Members have today. Members who had a successful repatriation were satisfied with today's situation and Members who had an unsuccessful repatriation were not satisfied with

the circumstances today. Some Members were still bothered about small matters in the repatriation, even it had happened many years ago. People among this group had a strong feeling that Organisation thinks that the project experts are not important between the projects. It was commented that the feeling when working in the projects is just the opposite.

Responsibility of the own career was understood among the Members but company's support in the career development was also expected. Members who left the company after the assignment said that the main reason for leaving was that Stora Enso did not offer them any interesting job opportunities, which they received from somewhere else.

5.3 Experiences Earned from the Organisation Point of View

It was not easy to find correct Organisation Representatives for the interviews because people had retired, changed the company/organisation or were abroad on an assignment. Members' situation before L4 Project was not known by 50% of the superiors interviewed so they could not comment the whole process. Discussion was then on a general level.

Organisations find project experts effective and unique persons who easily cause problems to a stable organisation. They are normally also valuable to the organisation. In general personnel are encouraged to develop themselves, so organisations do not prevent anyone from joining domestic or international projects. Even if they want to keep a valuable person in their organisation, company's interests are in favour of the projects. From the organisation point of view projects take the best possible persons and changes that occur due to that, needs to be accepted. Persons are in the international assignment as long as the project needs them and possible changes of the repatriation time are only informed to the organisation. Organisation is responsible to nominate the position to the repatriate, which is sometimes easy, sometimes difficult. Personal relationships or differences in the past may affect but the situation is accepted in the organisations. The organisation wants to take care of its personnel and problem handling is seen as a part of the job.

Organisations do not want to separate project experts from its other personnel. They want to see their resources as one entity, not as special groups. A person who is most of the time present can be more valuable to the Organisation than an experienced project expert who is most of the time working for a project somewhere else. It was commented that all experience is used when possible in the Organisation.

When the Organisation needs a certain kind of experience they try to find it first in their own Business Unit, then in their Business Area or somewhere nearby. Within the company there are networks and people contact each other when they need certain knowledge. Organisations use its experiences as effectively as possible and fill in gaps one way or another.

Organisations would value if special experts, such as project experts, worked mainly for the Group (human resource responsibility) and their experiences could be used when needed. Nowadays when needed experience is not found nearby, it is bought from consultants. Group persons could be used instead of consultants. They could be the same project experts as they use today but they would not cause any human resource problems in the Organisation.

In the following the different phases are analysed from the organisation point of view.

5.3.1 Before Assignment

Organisations value experience, also project experience. Employees are encouraged to upgrade their skills for example in an international assignment. It was mentioned that the Organisation do not prevent employees for taking new challenges even if it may cause problems to them.

When an Organisation Representative was familiar with the Member's situation before the assignment, it was commented that project needs are in the priority. L4 Project recruited the needed personnel even if some of them could have been useful in their current Organisation.

Experiences are valued and used, the Organisations do not systematically collect knowledge concerning the experiences. None of the Organisations had a leaving

interview before assignment or a returning interview after repatriation. The only interviews that took place in addition to the annual development discussions were job interviews. Since such knowledge is not systematically collected it is only in persons' minds and will be lost within the people. Since sending an employee for an international assignment is not part of a career planning it can be discussed whether each expatriate is a real talent for the company.

5.3.2 During the Assignment

It is well understood in the Organisation that a person earns experience in each project and all that experience is not used after the project. Knowledge of earned experiences differs between Organisation Representatives due to their background. If the Organisation Representative has been in an international assignment, the topic is naturally more familiar.

From the Organisation point of view knowledge is also used during the project. When the same persons work in a project after a project, procedures are known and followed and as a result a company saves time and money.

Organisation Representatives were not systematically in contact with the Members during the assignment. If there was communication it was due to the Member's initiative. The Organisation was only interested in the duration of the assignment and if the time of repatriation was changed. They were responsible for nominating the Member to a position when repatriating and they needed to know when it will happen.

5.3.3 Repatriation

According to Stora Enso's International Assignment policy, repatriation is handled when all assignment related procedures (payroll, tax, social security, insurance, pension) have been closed/terminated, assignee has moved back to a home country (or an equivalent destination) and costs are paid. However, it was noticed by the Organisation Representatives that systematic repatriation procedure is missing.

Based on this study the Organisation Representatives were satisfied when all Members had found a position after the assignment. They had no interest whether the

position was the best possible or not. Project experts are usually exceptions in the Business Unit Organisation because they normally work mainly for the projects. In the Organisation they work only between the projects.

It was admitted that repatriation is not easy and in the L4 Project it was not handled well in every case. For example Organisation Representatives were quite helpless with the situation that a Member, who might have been abroad for several years, was going to return into their Organisation and they did not have any open position.

Organisations did not receive any assistance from Group Human Resources when handling the repatriation. It was not even needed. Managers emphasised that they are responsible for handling their Organisation and Group Functions may only confuse the situation. Project informed about repatriates who needed positions but if there was not suitable position available, the Organisation had a problem.

Organisation Representatives emphasised that offering positions is not so simple. Organising substitutes for short-term positions is challenging, especially replacing a high position for 2 to 3 years because of an international assignment was seen problematic. Normally in that time the substitute has just learned the duties. Even if Organisation values high professionals and wanted to offer a position for all Members, they could not guarantee career development.

In some cases it was pure luck that a correct position was available for the Member. If all positions were filled, nothing could have been offered. In L4 Project case some positions were created due to the fact that Members were seen as potential talents and the company did not want to lose them.

It is possible that there was a suitable position available for the Member in some other than their own BU Organisation but a position and a Member did not meet. Projects and maybe also project personnel are well known within Business Area of the project, but in the other Business Areas the situation is not so well known.

In this case there were not any repatriation training seminars or financial counselling and financial/tax assistance in repatriation. Payrolls were terminated in the L4 Project

and Members returned back to a Finnish payroll. There was not any reorientation program or organised downtime upon repatriation.

5.3.4 About Five Years after Repatriation

The Organisation Representatives said that the experiences earned in the assignment were used after the repatriation. The experience of Members has been used in a project within their Organisation or in another organisation. They also emphasised that when the expertise was needed, the Organisation encouraged the Member to transfer knowledge. Using earned experiences gives added value to the Organisation and sharing the knowledge with others makes company a learning organisation.

The Organisation is aware of the knowledge of its personnel in general. In large organisations it is possible that all experience is not used but Organisation Representatives did not see that as a major problem. The management needs to focus on the personnel as a whole, not necessary as each individual. Today there is not time for that.

Even if it was commented that in a large enterprise it is impossible to have an individual career planning for every employee, the company could focus on special talents and their career planning.

It was admitted that projects and extra arrangements cause problems to the Organisation. Organisation Representatives agreed that in all cases using the experience might not happen right away but in a long term they try to benefit from all of them. It was mentioned that project experts do not have the patience to wait. They want everything to happen right now and to have the best possible solution to themselves, not to the company. According to Organisation Representatives the best employees will always have a job, if not in this company then in some other company.

Organisation Representatives agreed that the company has to have project experts of their own, experience can be bought outside but not everything. It was also commented that only own employees can really keep company's side in the negotiations. Buying the knowledge should be considered case by case. In total, it is

cheaper if the company can use their own personnel as consultants and this should be encouraged.

Organisation Representatives wanted a bigger role from the Group for project experts. They did not need assistance with organising their own BU but Group could be responsible for the knowledge transfer and coordinating project experiences. The Organisation saw repatriating Members as a problem if there was not any open position available. They suggested that the company should have a pool, department where the repatriates could work between the projects. From the pool Business Units could recruit persons for short-term assistance (as a substitute or as a consultant) or for a long-term position.

It was also commented that in an ideal situation a project expert works in the Business Unit organisation between the projects. That would guarantee more effective knowledge transfer and usage of the earned experiences but it would require luck and perhaps some special arrangements in the organisation.

To avoid a leave of high professionals, the company should focus on offering job opportunities not only for expatriates but for all employees. Job rotation should be encouraged more. It is impossible to create individual career planning only for certain specialists, because position changes are quite often so called snow ball effect. When there is an open position somewhere that is filled internally, it opens another position and so one. If such job rotation does not exist, career development within the company is not possible. Projects can be seen as job rotation opportunities but as projects are temporary, they do not create permanent job rotation.

There have been individual career programs for the future talents in Stora Enso. In one programme all members had a “god father” from another organisation to guide and supervise in the career development. This programme needed years of commitment from the god fathers and it is not in use anymore.

5.4 Conclusion

Organisation and Members had some similar comments about expatriation and repatriation as well as using experiences but also some differences were found. Figure 13. describes comparison between individual and organisation point of views.

	Individual Point of View	Organisation Point of View
Before Assignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -93% of Members had project background -83% of Members were asked to join by another Member -experience expected to be gained -vision created not realistic -no interview before -no connection with career planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -project needs are in priority -projects create HR problems -organisations do not prevent individuals to take new challenges and develop themselves -no interviews before
During Assignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -experience has been earned -knowledge has been transferred -communication with organisation was based on individual's initiative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -understanding that experience has been earned -no systematic communication with Members
Repatriation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Members had no complains or many complains -own responsibility was emphasised -41% of repatriation was handled well -luck had a significant role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -systematic procedure missing -all Members found position → 100% of repatriation was handled well -no assistance from Group HR → not needed -easier when expatriate is at lower level of organisation
Now – About 5 Years after Repatriation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -76% of Members have used experiences in organisation -knowledge has been transferred -created networks are valuable -visible signs that organisation values international experience missing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -experiences have been used → given added value to organisation -organisation is learning organisation

Figure 13. Individual Point of View vs. Organisation Point of View

Most of the Members (93%) had project background. When special knowledge was needed in L4 Project 83% of the Members were asked to join the project by another Member. Project needs are in priority. Even if projects create HR problems in the Organisation employees are not prevented taking new challenges and developing themselves. International assignments are not part of career planning and Organisations do not interview expatriates before the assignment.

Project expatriates should realistically discuss expatriation with project organisation and repatriation with BU Organisation before an assignment. Vision of the future is created based on these discussions.

All interviewees, Members and Organisation Representatives, agreed that valuable experience was earned during the assignment. Some knowledge can be transferred to the others in written format, however during such assignment the experience that cannot be easily transferred is always earned. Knowledge was also transferred during the assignment.

Business Units and Business Areas should take care of its employees, also when they are on an international assignment. Communication between expatriates and organisations should be more systematic during the assignment.

A systematic Procedure is missing in repatriation. In Organisation point of view 100% of repatriation was handled well because all the Members found a position when in individual point of view only 41% of repatriation was handled well. Both Members and Organisations gained valuable knowledge about repatriation in this case.

The Organisation had used the experience earned in the assignment of 76% of the Members. According to the Organisation Representatives, all Organisations that used experiences also benefit from them. According to the results, Organisations have the ability to gain from experiences, if they want.

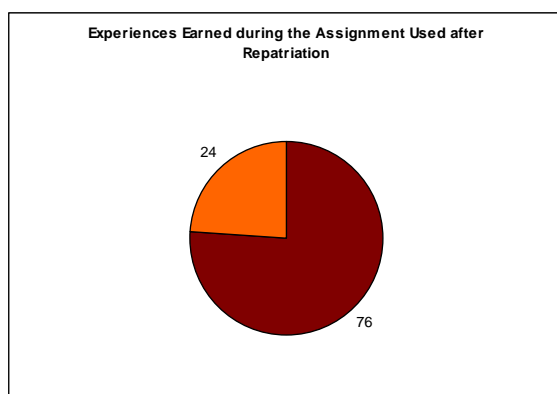


Figure 14. Organisation Had Used the Experience Earned During the Assignment of 76% of the Members

Organisations can learn from earned experiences if they know how the expatriates developed during the assignment. They cannot offer job challenges that respond to the experience if they are not aware of them. In large investment projects there are different experts working and different experiences are gained, the complex is not easy to handle.

Most Members were missing visible signs that the company values international experience. It was commented that signs were almost vice versa, repatriation problems and high expectations of the career development of the repatriates were not appreciated in the organisation.

Increasing awareness of the projects and its personnel would also increase the possibility that a repatriate and an open position will meet. Cooperation between Business Areas needs to be increased and mobilising the project experts encouraged. It may be hard because some of the projects are required to remain totally or partly confidential. At least when a large investment project is implemented, the awareness should be increased.

After repatriation there could have been a seminar or some kind of a meeting in which all Members from different Organisations could have gathered and shared their experiences of expatriation and repatriation. That meeting would have been also a perfect occasion for knowledge transfer between Members and Organisations. Investments organisation could organise that meeting in the future.

Reorganising repatriation needs a change in the way of thinking, both the expatriates and the organisations. Understanding and sharing a common view in conflicting motivations and expectations improve repatriation. That can only happen by increasing communication between the organisation and expatriates. Expatriates should be ready to lose their current position before an international assignment and the company must be honest that they cannot guarantee a certain position to the repatriate. Experience earned in an international assignment should be used for the company's future needs, where it is needed.

Project experts, project-oriented persons are exceptions in Organisation because they work mainly for projects. A global company can offer more opportunities to project-

oriented persons than normal project-oriented company. Alternatives for new opportunities after one project (dispersement of the project) could be:

- immediately assigned to a new project
- assigned to a project starting sometime in the future
- training or other personal development
- act as consultant to the mill(s)
- take substitute or permanent position from the mill
- abeyance

All others than the last one, sitting on the bench, are good options and these can be taken into account in the individual career planning.

Group HR should play a key role in coordinating project talents. It is not easy since in the projects there are experts of different areas and it is not easy to define the knowledge of those people. One person might have knowledge needed for many different positions and finding the best possible position for everyone is hard. Project experts can be ambitious and creative and would need impulses regularly. Organisations might feel that other people are more stable choice for open position than a project expert. Some Members admitted that they got bored in the Business Unit Organisation because in the projects there happens something all the time while the Business Unit Organisations are stable.

If there is an attitude against international assignments in the organisation, it makes learning from the experiences harder. This attitude can be on any level of the organisation. If the earned experiences are ignored when the expatriate returns from the assignment, the motivation for knowledge transfer may decrease.

Possibility to take an international assignment part of an individual career management should be researched. Finding and focusing on the real talents of the company should be in focus. Nowadays in the International Assignment Process repatriation is mentioned only from a cost point of view. The procedure is not connected to a career development as it could be and the responsibilities of repatriation are unclear.

Persons who have been on an international assignment would be perfect managers/directors because they have special experience of knowledge transfer which can be useful in a high position. The Organisation should be aware of its knowledge and its effective use to become a learning organisation.

6 SUMMARY AND EVALUATION OF THE STUDY PROCESS

Expatriation, sending employees for an international assignment, is used for specific business needs, development and to control overseas operations. The final link of expatriation is repatriation, when expatriates return to the home country. The company benefits from the earned experiences mostly after the repatriation.

The case company, Stora Enso, uses expatriation in investment projects. This study examined the case company's ability to gain from experiences earned in a foreign assignment. The case, L4 Project was implemented in 2002 and 2003 so repatriation was a while ago so the benefit is visible.

Both individuals and organisations value earned experiences, also project experiences. This is important because all knowledge/experience cannot be bought from the market. It was found that experience was earned during the international assignment and they were used in the company after repatriation. The use of the experience earned in an international assignment is in good level; 76% of interviewed Members had used the earned experience after repatriation.

A new international assignment procedure should be more systematic and repatriation should not be forgotten. A workable procedure needs a new group culture and a change of employees' attitude. Responsibilities, such as communication between an organisation and an expatriate during an assignment, should be clearer. Assignment should be discussed realistically with expatriates before the assignment and the company should not promise too much.

A pool, an organisation at the Group level, could help with the problems that international assignments cause to the Organisation. The pool would include project experts that work mainly for projects but in between also for Business Unit organisation. They could be used for substitutes in different positions or instead of consultants. That may bring savings to the company.

It can be seen that project experts create a project-oriented organisation with special characteristics and HR issues in the company. If it is not recognised the special characteristics are not taken into consideration. Whether the company wants to focus

on small number of experts and create a visible organisation around these persons should be studied. However, this could help the company to focus on the correct issues.

In Stora Enso there is a management audit four times a year with Business Unit Manager, Business Unit Human Resource Manager, Business Area Manager and Business Area Human Resource Manager. One part of the audit is to find potential talents from the company and job opportunities to them. Group HR coordinates the situation of the company. Project talents should be added as one part of management audit. Nowadays they can be forgotten and only minor part of the company knows about them. A person could be added to the list when leaving for the international assignment with estimation of repatriation time and he/she could stay there as long as repatriated. That would increase the awareness of the ongoing projects and its personnel from other Business Areas and the situation of the future repatriates. Figure 15. summarises all three proposals.

Proposal	Why
More systematic international assignment procedure (including repatriation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -focus also on repatriation -clear responsibilities -discussion realistically before assignment -change in corporate culture and employees' attitude
Pool in group level – own organisation for project talents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -HR responsibility to group → helps mill organisations -project-oriented special needs taken into account → sign that organisation values experience -coordination of different options in repatriation → savings, increasing motivation
Project talents part of management audit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -project talents not forgotten -increase of awareness of project talents -job opportunities and employees connected

Figure 15. Summary of Proposals

Knowledge transfer within the company does happen but it could be more effective. A seminar or a meeting after repatriation should be arranged for improving repatriation and knowledge transfer. Focusing on how expatriates develop during their assignment increases the use of earned experiences. The case company is a learning organisation but it could work more effectively.

If there were more persons with international assignment experience in the high position of the organisation, experiences would be more effectively used due to better understanding. An international assignment could be mandatory for director positions.

Findings of the study apply also to other talents than project experts, who are sent for an international assignment. It should be a must that any expatriate earns valuable experience during an assignment which is used after. Communication between organisation and expatriate should exist in all cases as well as knowledge about expatriates and their repatriation plans in any assignment should be increased in the organisation. Expatriates/repatriates of any kind could join the same seminar for sharing and transferring of the earned knowledge.

I, the author of the study, have also earned new knowledge during the process. This knowledge can be partly used in my new position in the company. However, the most important target for contribution of the company is to transfer earned knowledge for future use.

Useful knowledge in this process is to understand the research procedure and its demands. I made clear plans at the beginning of the study which were modified as needed. A clear plan helped the process. I had close contact with both the supervisor from the company and the supervisor from the university. With a clear plan it was easier to discuss the study and its progress.

In the beginning it was hard to get close to the topic. I read lot of theory and none of them where exactly what I needed. It was clear that expatriation and repatriation was part of the theory but not in a way that suited my needs. Drawing a picture helped to understand what I needed to know. In the beginning I should have studied deeper knowledge creation and focused more on the facts I needed to know by interviews. Some of the interviews were very fruitful in general but not necessarily for this study. I learned a lot about practices in different Business Areas and Business Units, not to forget the fact that all of them have different ways of working. Interviews with Members went well and it was easy to discuss with familiar persons. However sometimes I had a feeling that I knew too much. It is possible that taking these matters into account when planning interviews the result of the study would have been partly different. However I think that in general the study was well managed.

Since repatriation and knowledge transfer have been documented the results will be used in the company, at least when sending project experts for an international assignment. I have created a summary presentation of the study and distributed it in the company. Especially in Business Area Packaging the topic is current since new projects are foreseen. HR Managers are encouraged to rethink expatriation and repatriation also when other specialists are sent for international assignments. This study is part of a learning process of the company and it will be interesting to see how Stora Enso acts as a learning organisation.

In this Chapter the study and its elements were summarised and evaluated. Contribution of the study is also defined. In the next Chapter results of the study has been modified further and it adds content for the study. Discussions develop the results.

7 DISCUSSION – RETHINKING REPATRIATION/EXPATRIATION

Companies are investing in human resources, for example by sending employees for an international assignment. Expatriates earn experience during the assignment and the company should benefit from them after repatriation.

Based on this case and current literature rethinking repatriation and even expatriation should occur. Are the companies using expatriation only because it is a trend? Is the real meaning behind the phenomenon thought? Are companies actually benefiting from its investments? Should companies commit employees only for a certain period for its needs to avoid repatriation problems?

Expatriation is used for specific business needs, development and to control international operations. These are good reasons but is the case company using expatriation too much in the large investment projects and creating too many problems for the organisations in repatriation?

In the case the Project organisation included 53% consultants, 42% expatriates and only 5% local personnel. Of the expatriates 83% were from Finland, 8% from China, 6% from Sweden and 3% from USA. The Chinese expatriates were sent to the assignment to learn. The plan for these expatriates was that they could be used for similar projects in China in the future. Using their experiences after repatriation could be a topic for further research and development.

Organisation of large investment projects and using expatriates should be considered carefully in the future. In this case, there were only 5% local personnel in the organisation and many Finnish expatriates. Based on discussions with expatriates, the ideal project organisation would include 50% local personnel, 25% consultants and 25% expatriates from different countries as can be seen in the Figure 16.

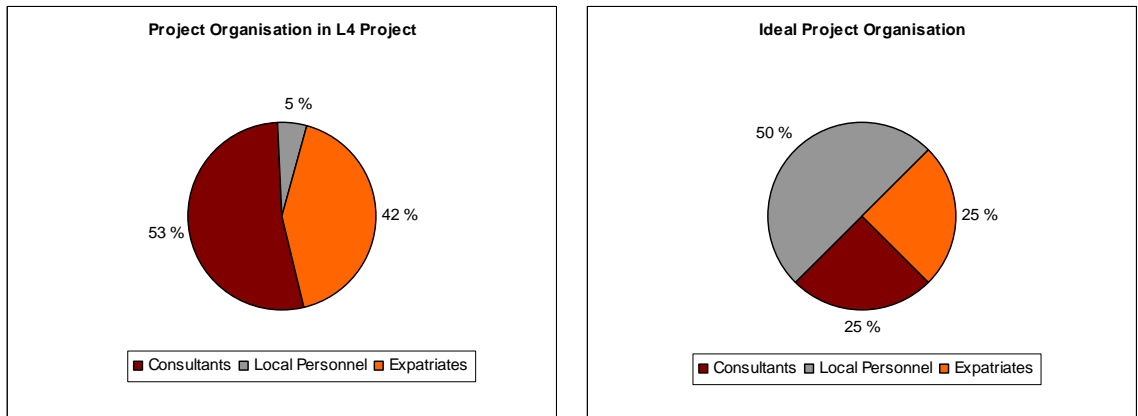


Figure 16. Use of Expatriation Should be Reconsidered

By recognising that there is a project oriented organisation in the company, the idea of repatriation to the same position or organisation can be easily forgotten. The company and the expatriate could agree on a career development before an assignment. Repatriation would then happen to a location where a suitable position is available. When an expatriate will be sent for an assignment, the current position would be given up. When accepting an international assignment a person will accept an international career and unsure future at the same time. Instead of repatriation the term *globatriation* could be used. The term would mean relocation for career development after an international assignment. Figure 17. describes future repatriation, globatriation.

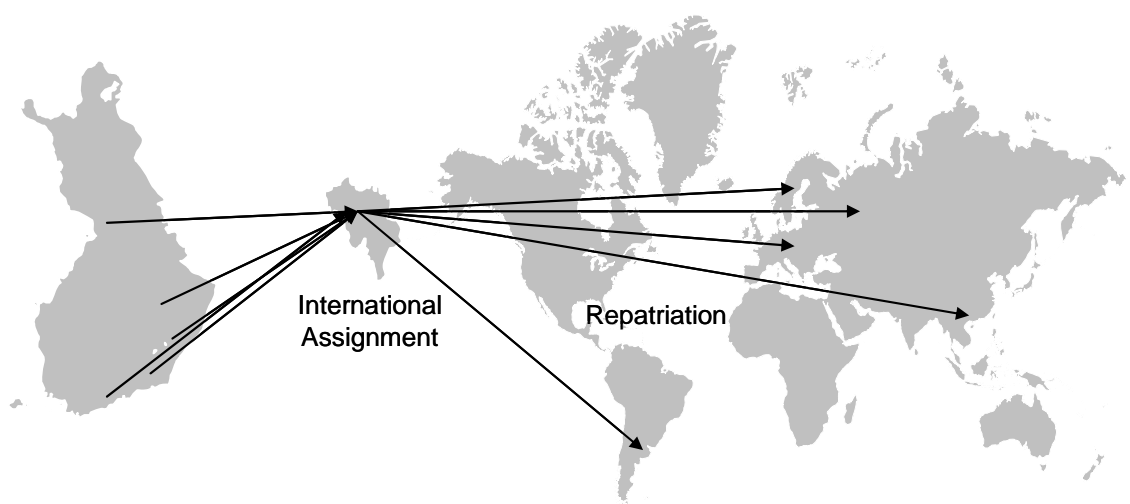


Figure 17. Globatriation – Relocation after International Assignment for Career Development to Anywhere in the World

The purposes of using expatriation and how much it is used should be considered carefully. If the number of expatriates will be lower in the future it helps the company to focus on them. Only real talents would be sent for an assignment and it would be easier to offer job opportunities that respond to the experiences of the repatriates. Experiences would be used more effectively.

The organisation is a group of individuals who gain and share knowledge within the organisation. For achieving benefit from international assignments and experiences earned during the assignment, the company must give a realistic vision about the assignment and repatriation, succeed in repatriation and focus all the time on the individuals' motivation, well-being and try to fulfil their expectations. That might need changes in using expatriation and reorganising responsibilities and the idea of repatriation.

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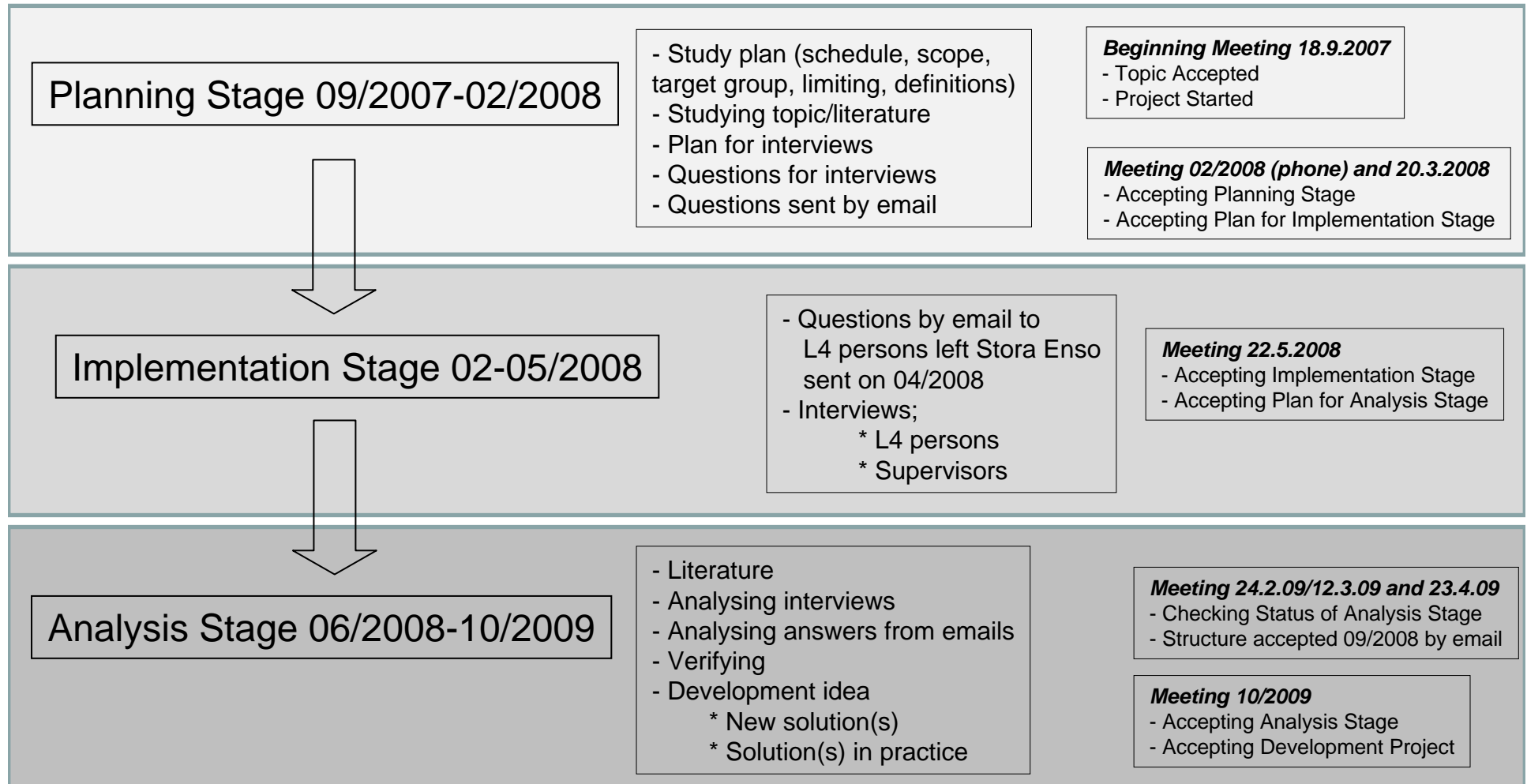
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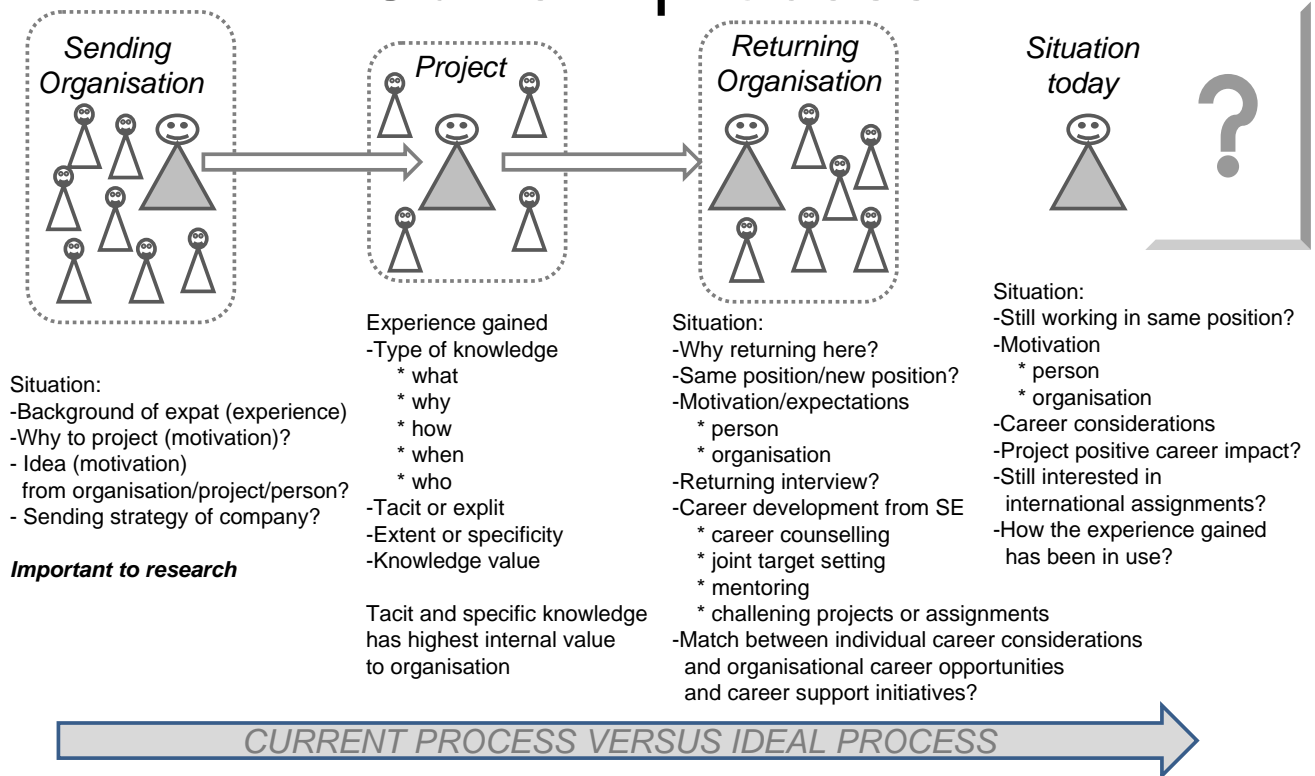
Schedule and Checking Points

Development Project/Tanja Lipsanen 10/2009

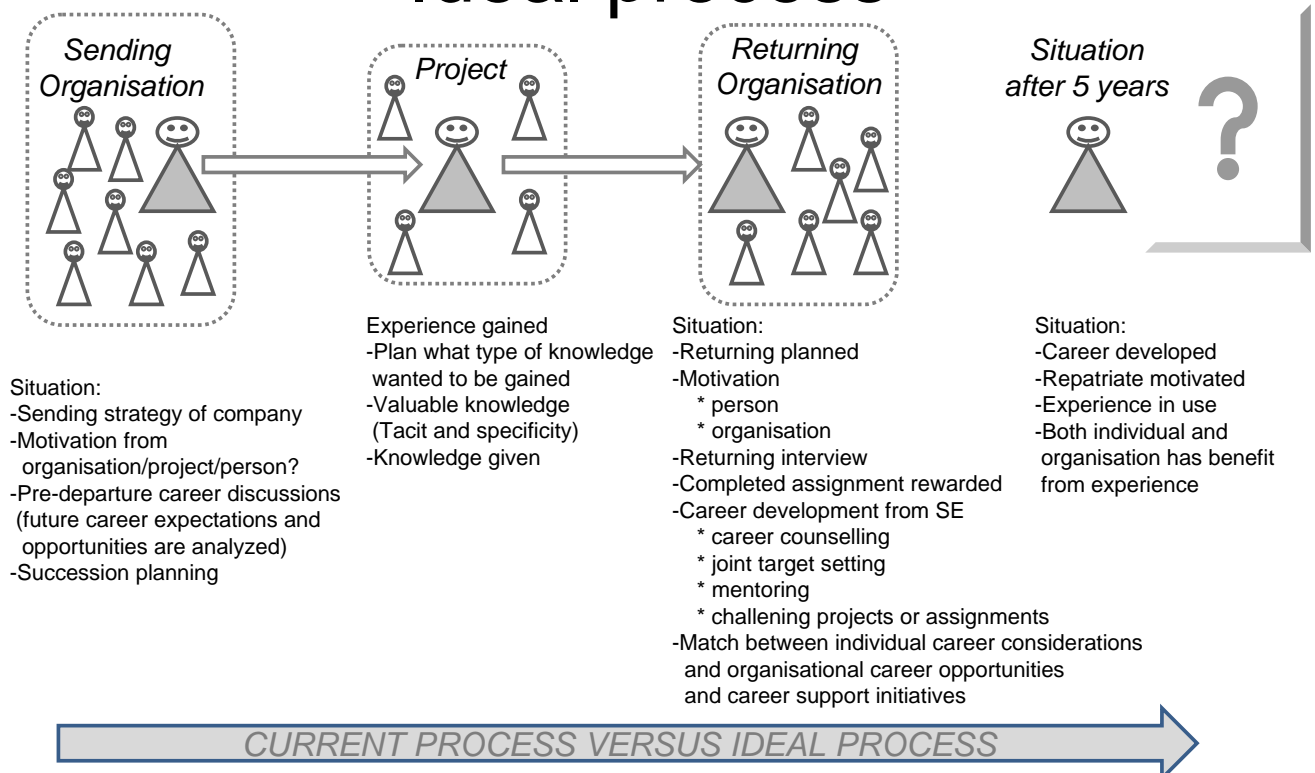


PROBLEM: BENEFITING FROM EXPERIENCE?

Current process



Ideal process



11.3.2008

QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEWS CONCERNING REPATRIATION/CAREER IN STORA ENSO AFTER L4 PROJECT – PROJECT MEMBERS

1. Position and employer before L4 project? Supervisor?
2. Position and employer after L4 project? Supervisor?
3. Positions and employers between repatriation and now?
4. Why did you join the L4 project?
5. Did you have (career plan) interview before joining the project by sending company?
6. How was the project? Did you receive experience you waited?
7. What experience you gained was valuable to you? To Stora Enso?
8. Have you used experience gained from the project in your position(s) after?
9. What kind of experience gained from L4 project was not used after?
10. How was repatriation handled?
11. Did you have returning interview after L4 project?
12. What kind of plans/career expectations you have for the future?
13. Have you had career development in Stora Enso? Do you feel that someone is taking care of your career planning?
14. Do you have ideas how repatriation and career planning/development should be handled so that both Stora Enso and individual will benefit?
15. Would you join the project in Stora Enso again? Why?
16. Have you thought leaving Stora Enso?
17. Other comments

11.3.2008

QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEWS CONCERNING REPATRIATION/CAREER IN STORA ENSO AFTER L4 PROJECT – SUPERVISORS

People from Your organisation were in international assignment in L4 Project, Belgium on 2002-2004.

1. Did you have interview with the expats before they join the project? Any other from the organisation?
2. How have you used the results?
3. Did you have returning interview with the expats after the project?
4. How have you used the results?
5. Did you receive assistance from HR department with the repatriation?
6. Do you have career opportunities that match with employees' career expectations? Do you know their expectations?
7. Have you used those persons' experience gained in L4 Project? How?
8. Do you know what kind of experience gained in L4 Project was not used after and why?
9. Do you have individual career planning? How is it organised?
10. Do you have career planning or counseling for the employees?
11. Do you have ideas how repatriation and career planning/development should be handled so that both Stora Enso and individual will benefit?
12. Other comments?

11.3.2008

QUESTIONS FOR PEOPLE WHO LEFT STORA ENSO AFTER L4 PROJECT

1. What was Your position and employer before L4 project?

2. Who was Your supervisor?

3. What was Your position and employer after L4 project?

4. Who was Your supervisor?

5. Did you have other positions in Stora Enso after L4 project and before leaving the company?

6. Why did you join L4 project?

7. Did you have (career plan) interview before joining the project by sending company?

Yes

No

Other comments

8. How was the project? Did you receive experience you expected?

11.3.2008

9. What experience you gained was valuable

a) to you?

b) to Stora Enso?

10. Have you used experience gained from the project in your position(s) after?

a) In Stora Enso

b) In other company

11. What kind of experience gained from L4 project was not used after in Stora Enso?

12. If your experience gained from L4 project was not used after; was it a reason that you left Stora Enso?

Yes

Yes, partly

No

Other comments

13. How was repatriation handled?

11.3.2008

14. Did you have returning interview after the project?

15. Did you have interview when you left Stora Enso?

Yes

No

Other comments

16. What kind of plans/career expectations you have for the future?

17. Did you have career development in Stora Enso? Do you feel that someone was taking care of your career planning in Stora Enso?

18. What should have been done differently in repatriation in Your case?
