

Exploring the experiences of expatriate executives in South African multinationals: the role of coaching

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ABSTRACT

Since the lifting of the international sanctions and relaxation of capital controls, South Africa has caught up with the rest of the world in terms of globalisation. This has resulted in a number of South African companies opening job opportunities in other markets. Previous research has highlighted the creation of job opportunities in other markets as an indication of the continuous need for expatriates in future.

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of executives taking international assignments in South African multinational corporations, and to examine how coaching can support the experience. This study looked at the experiences of expatriates in all three phases of expatriation, that is, (1) to explore the experiences of expatriate executives **prior** to taking international assignments in South African multinational corporations and understand how coaching can support that experience, (2) to explore the experiences of expatriate executives **during** the assignment in South African multinational corporations and understand how coaching can support that experience and lastly (3) to explore the **repatriation** experiences of executives in South African multinational corporations and understand how coaching can support that experience.

Qualitative research methodology was chosen to explore the expatriates' experiences and the world in which they live. Sixteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with respondents from three South African multinational corporates (MNCs) in telecommunications, oil and hospitality industries. Out of sixteen respondents, three were Human Resource (HR) managers whose responsibility it is to administer and manage global mobility in the three MNCs. Global mobility includes expatriates' management.

The results of this study have implied that South African MNCs are inconsistent in terms of the way they prepare their expatriates before departure, support expatriates during the international assignments and repatriation. As a result of that, expatriates have also revealed mixed experienced in all three phases of

the expatriation journey. For example, during pre-departure, some have experienced a pleasant preparation, such as look-see-visits, medical examinations and CEO on-boarding programmes, whereas others were never prepared (thrown in the deep-end). The misalignment between head office objectives and host country's objectives came out as the most frustrating experience by the majority of the respondents. In terms of the last phase of the repatriation cycle, the results of this study suggest that a repatriation strategy is ineffective or non-existent in South African MNCs. Expatriates come back and get absorbed by competition as a result of the lack of a repatriation strategy. The glue to the findings of this research implies that coaching does have a critical role to play in all three phases of expatriation, that is, during pre-departure, during the assignment and during repatriation.

The key message to South African MNCs is, if they want to use expatriates as their vehicle to succeed in global markets, they must involve former expatriates in crafting their realistic, practical expatriates' strategy which must be communicated and applied to all expatriates and host companies.

Key words: expatriate, host country, multinational corporate, repatriation, adjustment

DECLARATION

I, Bonga Mnengisa, declare that this research report is my own work except as indicated in the references and acknowledgements. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Management in Business Executive Coaching in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in this or any other university.

Bonga Mnengisa

Signed at Johannesburg

On the 28th day of February 2017

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my sons, Mpumelelo and Lumkile Mnengisa, that they find inspiration in education to craft their future.

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I would like to acknowledge my husband, Bonisile, and my two sons, Mpumelelo and Lumkile Mnengisa, for all the love, inspiration, support and sacrifices made during my two years of studying. I would not have made this without you, ndiyabulela Mazizi!

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of expatriate executives taking international assignments in South African multinational corporations (MNC) and to examine how coaching can support the experience.

1.2 Context of the study

Since the lifting of the international sanctions and relaxation of capital controls, South Africa has caught up with the rest of the world in terms of globalisation. This is according to Professor Nick Binedell in Makura (2012), Aykut and Goldstein (2007) and the Economist (2006). This has resulted in a number of South African companies opening job opportunities in other markets. According to Abdullah and Jin (2015), Okpara and Kabongo (2011), Vidal, Valle and Aragón (2007a), Scullion and Brewster (2002) and Selmer (2001b), these job opportunities in other markets are an indication that the use of expatriates will continue to grow in future. On the same note, Abdullah and Jin (2015), Takeuchi, Yun, and Tesluk, (2002) and Stroh and Caligiuri (1998) see the effective use of expatriates on international assignments as a critical success factor for companies. In support is Maritz (2012) in Kigo (2016), who has estimated 75% increase in the use of expatriate staff over the next three years in Africa. Furthermore, Maritz predicted the use of expatriates as a critical success factor to help establish and grow business across Africa. On the other hand, literature indicates that there is a high rate of expatriates' failure. Supporting that is Hogan and Goodson (1990, p. 50) who mention that:

“Overseas assignments are notorious for their high failure rate”.

According to Okpara and Kabongo (2011), multinational corporations are experiencing challenges in retaining expatriates in their foreign markets. On the other hand, an estimate of 20-40% of the expatriates return home before their assignment period expires (Mendenhall & Oddou, 1988; Mendenhall, Dunbar &

Oddou, 1987). At the same time, Naumann (1993) explains that expatriate failure occurs when managers quit or return home before completion of their overseas assignments. This could be as a result of a few factors, amongst others, such as lack of preparation before the assignment by the host country, failure to adjust to cultural differences, too great a workload, lack of support from host company and language barriers. Although Dhrampal, (2013); John, (2013); Tahir and Ismail, (2007); Caligiuri, Phillips, Lazarova, Tarique and Buirgi (2001), Black and Mendenhall (1990) agree that expatriates who return home prematurely are a challenge, Harzing (1995) argues that premature re-entry might be an insufficient way to measure expatriate failure. He further argues that the other measure for expatriate failure could be based on expatriates who finish their expatriation term, but fail to meet the required performance expectations. According to Harzing, those are more harmful to the organisation than expatriates who return home before time. There is therefore a need to explore the experiences of expatriate executives working for South African multinational corporations and to examine how coaching can support that experience. This study explores the expatriate executives' experiences before, during and after the assignment. It also captures both positive and negative experiences. This study contributes to the academic body of knowledge since those who have previously researched South African multinational corporations focused mainly on Sub-Saharan countries (Dhrampal 2013: John 2013). This research seeks to include expatriates working or who have worked for South African multinational corporations on other continents, such as the Middle East. It also includes non-South Africans who work or have worked for South African MNCs.

In addition to that, most researchers such as Okpara and Kabongo (2011), Osman-Gani and Rockstuhl (2009) and Caligiuri, et al. (2001), have concentrated on cross-cultural training (CCT) as the main and effective intervention for expatriates' adjustment and very little on coaching; therefore this research looks into the role that coaching plays to support the expatriates' experiences.

1.3 Problem statement

1.3.1 *Main problem*

To explore the experiences of executives taking international assignments in South African multinational corporations, and understand how coaching can support the experience.

1.3.2 *Sub-problems*

The first sub-problem is to explore the experiences of expatriate executives prior to taking international assignments in South African multinational corporations and understand how coaching can support that experience.

The second sub-problem is to explore the experiences of expatriate executives during the assignment in South African multinational corporations and understand how coaching can support that experience.

The third sub-problem is to explore the repatriation experiences of executives in South African multinational corporations and understand how coaching can support that experience.

1.4 Significance of the study

This study fills a gap in that it contributes to the academic body of knowledge since those who previously researched South African multinational corporations focused mainly on Sub-Saharan countries (Dhrampal, 2013; John 2013). Therefore, this study also includes the pre, during and repatriation experiences of executives working or who have worked for South African multinational corporations in other regions, such as the Middle East. The sample of this study also includes non-South Africans who work in these South African MNCs.

Abdullah and Jin (2015) stress the main concern of the expatriate assignments as being the assignee's skills and capability to handle new job roles and to adapt to the new culture. On the other hand, Shen (2005) claimed that

multinational enterprises pay little attention to international training and management development. It is therefore envisaged that this study will contribute by examining the potential role of coaching in international assignments. Although there is enough literature on cross-cultural training (CCT) as an intervention for expatriates' adjustment; Okpara and Kabongo (2011); Osman-Gani and Rockstuhl, (2009); Tahir and Ismail, (2007); Caligiuri, et al., (2001); Kealy and Protheroe, (1996); and Black and Mendenhall (1990)'s studies have found that only 30 per cent of managers who are sent on expatriate assignments receive cross-cultural training before their departure. The most popular reason for this low use of CCT is attributed to the fact that CCT is thought to be ineffective and top managers are unwilling to support it financially and otherwise (Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985; Tung, 1981; Baker & Ivancevich, 1971). Recent research has highlighted conflicting views about the effectiveness of CCT (Black & Mendenhall, 1990). Although Deshpande and Viswesvaran (1992) argue that previous studies examining the effectiveness of CCT have failed to quantify the effect of this kind of training, but only produced conflicting views. Waxin and Panaccio (2005) on the other hand, claim that CCT accelerates the expatriates' adjustment. It is on this premise that this study explores other potential alternative expatriates' development interventions, such as coaching.

Since most South African companies are continuing to penetrate the global market, this will help their Head Office HR Departments to consider coaching as part of the expatriate development strategies which will contribute towards leadership goal attainment, adjustment and self-efficacy.

In terms of methodology, most studies followed quantitative research methodology (Vidal, Valle, Aragón, & Brewster, 2007b; Caligiuri, et al., 2001; Gregersen & Stroh, 1997; Feldman & Tompson, 1993; Harvey, 1989). This study follows a qualitative method to explore the experiences of the expatriate executives. This is the most appropriate methodology for this study as, according to Creswell (2003), it seeks to collect insight into human behaviour and the causes that direct behaviour.

The findings are important for managers of companies considering taking international assignments. It helps in preparing them to know what to expect from the MNC's head office and host country. These findings also help the MNC's head offices with ideas to include in their international assignments policies, procedures and leadership development strategy. It is also beneficial to the host countries in terms of understanding how to work with foreign nationals and to determine the kind of support they should provide to the expatriates. Finally, the findings of this study are beneficial to professional coaches who wish to coach expatriates. It provides them with knowledge in terms of what expatriates expect from coaching and their experiences.

1.5 Delimitations of the study

This study focuses on executives working for three of the largest South African MNCs in the telecommunications, oil and hospitality sectors. Executives in this study refer to all levels of management up to the chief executive level in an organisation. The sample is drawn from executives who are currently holding international assignments and those who have been repatriated for not more than three years from the MNCs. The sample also includes three HR managers whose responsibility is to administer and manage expatriates (global mobility) in those three MNCs.

The geographical location of where this expatriate experience has been acquired is not limited to Africa. This study does not include expatriates on lower job levels. Furthermore, this study does not include executives who have been on short-term international assignments, such as three months only, or are self-employed by consulting for the specified three South African MNCs.

1.6 Definition of terms

This table defines terms which are used frequently in this report.

Table 1: Definition of terms

Adjustment
Black and Gregersen (1999) see adjustment as the degree of a person's psychological comfort with various aspects of a host country. Halim, Bakar and Mohamad, B. (2014, p.124) and Black's (1990, p.122) definitions are not far from Black and Gregersen's. They define expatriate adjustment as the following respectively: “The level at which an expatriate feels comfortable towards the new environment which consequently leads him/her to function effectively in that environment”. and “The degree of fit or psychological comfort and familiarity that individuals feel with a new environment”. On the other hand, Okpara and Kabongo (2011) define adjustment as a process where a manager leaves a familiar cultural environment and enters an unfamiliar one. In this study, Okpara and Kabongo's definition is adopted as this study views adjustment as a process and also that the expatriate executives leave their host countries' familiar cultural environment and join the unfamiliar host countries.
Coaching
According to Petersen and Hicks (1995, p.41), coaching is defined as a “process of equipping people with the tools, knowledge, and opportunities they need to develop themselves and become more effective”. In the same breath, Feldman (2001) views coaching as a means to facilitating learning and moving executives from excellent performance to peak performance. On the other hand, Rogers (2012, p.7) defines coaching as a partnership of equals whose aim is to achieve speedy, increased and sustainable effectiveness through focused learning in every aspect of the client's

life. Coaching raises self-awareness and identifies choices. This study adopts both Feldman's and Rogers' definitions as Feldman's definition aims for peak performance, and expatriates are expected to perform exceptionally from local employees. At the same time, it is critical that expatriates are self-aware of their thoughts and actions as they work in foreign countries.
Expatriate
Black and Mendenhall (1990) refer to expatriates as individuals being sent to live and work in a foreign country for a normal period of 2-3 years. Hill (2011, p. 683) defines an expatriate as "a citizen of one country working in another country". This study adopts Black and Mendenhall's definition as it focuses mainly on those executives who have been on international assignments for 2-3 years.
Mentoring
Wallace (2015, p.17) defines mentoring as an intervention whereby a senior and more experienced person provides guidance to a neophyte. On a similar note is Woo (2017, p. 2) who defines mentoring as a developmental relationship between a mentor and protégé who have different levels of expertise and skills. On the other hand, Sweeney in Clutterbuck (2004, p.13) describes mentoring as a partnership between two people built upon trust. Sweeney also sees mentorship as a process in which a mentor offers support and development opportunities to the mentee.
MNCs
It stands for Multinational Corporations. This term, according to Okpara and Kabongo (2011) refers to companies that operate globally. This study adopts Okpara and Kabongo's definition as is, however, with special reference to South Africa.

Triangulation

Triangulation is understood as the combination of at least two or more theoretical perspectives, methodological approaches, data sources, investigators, or data analysis methods. The intention behind using triangulation is to decrease, negate, or counterbalance the deficiency of a single strategy, thereby increasing the ability to interpret the findings (Thurmond, 2001, p. 253). In this study, triangulation is a combination of data sources.

1.7 Assumptions

This study assumes that the:

- Respondents conveyed their responses with honesty and integrity.
- The demographic profile of the respondents is appropriate and sufficient for this study.
- Experiences and views were only of those who are currently on international assignments or had been on assignment not more than three years ago and finally, of those responsible for administering and managing expatriates.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

As a number of South African companies are expanding their footprint to other countries, international assignments are increasing (Economist, 2006; Aykut & Goldstein, 2007). It has therefore become critical that the experiences of those holding positions in those markets are explored. Literature related to the experiences of expatriate executives is reviewed.

2.2 Background discussion

As much as there is an increase in international assignments for South African MNCs, research has shown that there is a high rate of expatriates' failure (Black & Mendenhall, 1990; Black, Mendenhall & Oddou, 1991). Hill (2005) and Naumann (1993) define expatriates' failure as the premature return of an expatriate to his/her home country. According to Okpara and Kabongo (2011), multinational corporations are experiencing challenges in retaining expatriates in their foreign markets. Recent research is however challenging this definition of expatriates' failure (Hung-Wen, 2007). Hung-Wen argues that this definition lacks empirical evidence and it is misleading (Simeon & Fujiu, 2000) as it suggests that for as long as the expatriate remains in the host country until the end of the assignment, then he/she is successful. Hung-Wen (2007) argues that other factors, such as not achieving performance objectives and repatriation difficulties must also be considered. In addition to that, Harzing (1995) argues that expatriates who stay on their assignment but fail to perform as expected could potentially be more damaging than those who return before time. A recent study reports 7% of incomplete international assignments due to family concerns (2012 Trends in Global Relocation) as compared to Black and Mendenhall (1989) and Mendenhall et al., (1987) who have estimated 10-40% of expatriates return home before time. Naumann (1992) and Black, et al. (1991) estimate direct cost of US\$55K-US\$150K and US\$100K per expatriate respectively. Recent research has shown a higher estimated cost of US\$300K-

US\$1 million per annum (Selmer, 2001a). This high failure rate of expatriates is supported by Vögel, van Vuuren and Millard (2008) in their study on South African expatriates, that the major issue in international human resource management is the failure of expatriates as a result of lack of support to training spouses. Tung (1981) links expatriates' failure to poor expatriates' selection. There are however no figures reported for South African MNCs. Abbott, Atkins, Grant and Stening (2006) link the high failure of expatriates to failure by the expatriate manager and/or their family to acculturate, and they believe acculturation is an on-going process of adjustment. At the same time, Jackson and Manderscheid (2015) identify cross-cultural adjustment as a key determinant of successful expatriates' adjustment. Furthermore, Abbott, et al. (2006) insinuate that CCT is the appropriate intervention for adjustment and it is normally only offered at the beginning of the assignment but is not appropriate for acculturation. They argue that CCT is costly and from which it is difficult to get results. There is therefore a need to investigate alternative interventions, such as coaching, to close this gap.

On the other hand, expatriates are under extreme pressure as the expectations are coming from both sides, corporate head office and the host company. This is supported by Collings, Scullion, and Morley (2007); Allen and Alvarez (1998); Tung (1998b); Hogan and Goodson (1990), Black and Gregersen (1992), Mendenhall and Oddou (1985) and Doz, Bartlett and Prahalad (1981) by pointing out that MNCs are making expatriation even more complex by posing conflicting expectations from headquarters management and subsidiary colleagues. This has made it critical to review literature on the experiences in all three stages of the expatriate's life, that is, before embarking on the international assignment, during the assignment and post the assignment which many researchers refer to as repatriation (Bossard & Peterson, 2005; Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2002; Gregersen & Stroh, 1997; Feldman & Tompson, 1993; Black, Gregersen, & Mendenhall, 1992; Harvey 1989). In each stage, the potential role of coaching is investigated.

2.3 Expatriates experiences during pre-departure

Moving to another country to stay for more than a year can be a challenge, and it can also affect the way, and when, the executive would be ready to adjust. Abbott, et.al. (2006) argue that sometimes organisations place their managers in high pressure positions without a rigorous check of their personal qualities and readiness for the expatriate experience.

Many researchers believe that there is a need for some kind of preparation before an executive takes on an international assignment if one is to see the success of a traditional expatriate assignment (Vögel, van Vuuren, Millard, 2008; Collings et al., 2007; Tahir & Ismail, 2007; Black, et.al.1992; Black & Porter, 1991; Black & Mendenhall, 1990).

2.3.1 Recruitment and selection of expatriates

Collings et al., (2007), and Black and Porter (1991) are in agreement that it all starts with recruitment. Black and Porter (1991), for instance, argue that some American executives responsible for international assignments assume that a good manager in America will be a good manager in Tokyo and ignore or end up not taking extensive recruitment process for expatriates seriously. Osman-Gani (2000) is also of the opinion that organisations should first put their executives through rigorous examination to assess their personal qualities and preparedness to take on international assignments. He mentions the availability of assessment batteries, such as the Intercultural Adjustment Potential Scale (ICAPS) and Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (MPQ). Tung (1981) links poor expatriate selection to expatriate failure. Pires, Stanton and Ostenfeld (2006) and Tung (1981) and Tung (1998a) suggest that when companies select candidates for expatriation, they overemphasise technical competence over other attributes, such as human relational skills. Tung (1998a) further recommends flexibility, resourcefulness, creativity and strong negotiation skills as critical attributes for expatriates as they are required to work in multiple environments. Bonache and Brewster (2001) on the other hand, have defended the focus on technical skills when selecting candidates. They argue that if the

expatriates' function is to transfer tacit and specific knowledge, it makes sense that capabilities be emphasised when selecting expatriates. After the study they have conducted with Americans in Taiwan culture, Huang, Chi, and Lawler (2005, p.1667) concluded that personality traits should be considered important criteria for the selection process. They used Goldberg's (1990) big five personality test and found that the expatriate will best fit with the local culture (adjust) when his or her personality test demonstrates strengths related to the culture's most relevant aspects, hence they advocate a personality test as part of the selection process. On the other hand, Caligiuri, et al. (2001) believe that the selection of expatriates should include the appraisal of the spouse's likelihood to succeed overseas since most reasons for expatriates' early return is the spouse's inability to adjust. Furthermore, regarding selection of expatriates, in the study conducted on the Japanese MNCs, Tung (1982) found that the Japanese MNCs employ significantly more parent country nationals in their overseas operations at the senior and middle management levels. At the same time, Tungli and Peiperl (2009) describe parent country nationals as those professionals who come from the country of origin of the MNC and are sent to operations in host countries. Third country nationals are then described as those professionals who are neither from the parent country nor the host country and are sent for assignments in foreign countries.

2.3.2 Cross-cultural Training (CCT)

Cross-cultural training is one training that has been cited by many researchers (Gupta, Dasari & Dasari, 2012; Okpara & Kabongo, 2011; Tahir & Ismail, 2007; Osman-Gani & Rockstuhl, 2005; Waxin & Panaccio, 2005; Kealey & Protheroe, 1996; Black & Mendenhall, 1990) as the training relevant for preparing executives for international assignments. According to Black and Mendenhall (1990), cross-cultural training enables the individual to learn both content and skills which will help in reducing misunderstanding and inappropriate behaviours during cross-cultural interactions. They also believe that cross-cultural training is effective in developing important cross-cultural skills, facilitating cross-cultural adjustment, and in enhancing job performance. The research conducted by Price Waterhouse in 1997-1998, according to Scullion and

Brewster (2002), shows that cultural awareness training is the most common form of pre-departure training for expatriates in Europe. They add by mentioning that some companies use other forms of preparation, such as shadowing, look-see visits other than cross-cultural training, and others extend the pre-departure training to spouse/partner and children. Furthermore, Waxin and Panaccio (2005) argue that the mere CCT is not sufficient; they propose that training must be in accordance with the hardness of the culture of the host country. In their research findings, Vögel, et al (2008) mention that South African MNCs do not provide the preparation, support and training required by their expatriates and their spouses and children. When talking about the importance of cross-cultural training, Black, et al. (1991) argue that CCT facilitates the formation of accurate expatriates' expectations. On the other hand, Dharampal (2013) believes that cross cultural training reduces uncertainty and adjustment. She is supported by Black and Mendenhall (1990) when they mention one of the objectives of CCT as being to create realistic expectations for the expatriate in terms of living and working in the host country. Recent research (Kassar, Rouhana, & Lythreatis, 2015) has confirmed that CCT reduces expatriate turnover and yields greater expatriate satisfaction and performance. On the other hand, Tung (1981) is of the opinion that although the choice of the training method is of utmost importance, it should however depend on the two determinant factors, that is, the degree of similarity between the culture of home and the host culture, and the degree of interpersonal interaction between the expatriate and host country national. Black et al., (1999) have a different opinion. They believe that the training should be looked into three dimensions, that is, cultural toughness, communication toughness and job toughness. They believe that the tougher the culture to adjust to, the more distant the culture, the more interaction will one need with host nationals and the tougher the new job. They believe that if that is the situation, then one would need rigorous expatriate training. Mondy and Noe (2005), in Abdullah and Jin (2015), stress that pre-departure training should include, amongst other things, familiarisation in language, culture, history, living conditions, local customs and peculiarities. Okpara and Kabongo (2011) agree with them through the study they conducted on 226 expatriates working in Nigeria, They suggested language as an example of an area that requires cross-cultural training since Nigeria has about 250 tribal languages.

According to Black and Mendenhall (1990)'s study, only some 30% of U.S. managers destined for international assignments receive cross-cultural training. They believe that this is mainly due to management not believing that the training is effective. Cerdin (1996), in Okpara and Kabongo (2011), also found that CCT has no significant influence on expatriate adjustment. There is therefore a need to investigate other development interventions, such as coaching.

2.3.3 Theoretical background to coaching

As coaching is one important aspect that is investigated in this study, it is critical that a brief theoretical background around this subject is discussed before reviewing literature on the potential role of coaching in each phase of expatriation.

According to Fazel (2013), the coaching discipline borrowed its existence, methods and approaches from various fields such as management, philosophy, social sciences and psychology. Fazel further purports that although the coaching trademark is an incorporation of various fields and methods, psychology seems to be the most influential contributor. This is affirmed by literature as Passmore (2010) and Grant (2007) explain that coaching originated in the 1960s with its roots being the humanistic traditions of psychology. Coaching emerged from sports (Passmore, 2010; Stelter, 2009) and counselling, clinical, organisational and health psychology have also been considered the basis of coaching (Grant, 2007). On the other hand, Stober (2006) highlights that in order to ensure the understanding of the roots and customs of coaching, the coaching community needs to highlight its practice with theories, such as humanistic psychology. At the same time, humanistic psychology, according to Williams (2012) came into being as a third force in the 1960s after psychodynamic theory and behaviourism and was initiated by Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow. Williams (2012) is of the view that the objective of the humanistic psychology was to promote the emphasis on personal growth and the importance of beingness and the lived experiences of human beings

hence the humanistic theory of self-actualisation, according to Stober (2006), is the foundation on which coaching abides.

For the purpose of this study, the Carl Rogers' person-centred theory is reviewed in detail as a framework for the potential role of coaching to support expatriates' experiences in this study.

According to Feist and Feist (1998), Carl Rogers' person-centred theory influenced coaching. This theory advocates the client as the source and director of change (Stober, 2006). This is also aligned to one of Rogers (2012)'s principles of coaching. Rogers' theory also emphasises the concept of being non-directive (Palmer & Whybrow, 2014; Feist & Feist, 1998), which means that the coach does not chart the path for the client, but facilitates the coaching process (Rogers, 2012; Joseph & Bryant-Jefferies, 2008; Bozarth & Brodley, 1991). Similarly, Bozarth and Brodley (1991), add that being non-directive indicates that the coach facilitates the process and unleashes the client's potential by embodying the Rogerian principles of unconditional positive regard, empathetic listening, rapport building and providing appropriate feedback. This also talks to the strengths-based approach to coaching as it recognises the client's strength (Kauffman, 2006). This discussion recognises Whitmore (2010)'s definition of coaching as a process of unlocking people's potential to maximise their own performance.

2.3.4 The role of coaching in pre-departure experience

When discussing the relevance of coaching to expatriates, Abbott, et al. (2006) mentioned that coaching is likely to be effective as it is a connected process that impacts on the individual's affective, behavioural and cognitive domains. This is in line with the humanistic approach to coaching as it advocates that coaching should address the client as a whole and unique being (Feist & Feist, 1998). Abbott, et al. (2006) believe that evidence-based coaching informed by cross-cultural research and experience, would be the most relevant one as it has the potential to improve the performance and personal satisfaction of the expatriate manager. By evidence-based coaching, Stober and Grant (2010) imply that the results of the coaching can be evaluated and rated for its

effectiveness. In agreement is Passmore and Law (2008). They consider that senior executives of global companies should raise awareness of cultural competence through coaching if they are to succeed in global business. At the same time, according to Carl Rogers' person-centred theory and Jenny Rogers's principle of coaching, the client is resourceful and can direct the change (Rogers, 2012; Stober, 2006; Feist & Feist, 1998). On the other hand, self-awareness, according to Goleman (2004), is a component of emotional intelligent (EQ) and EQ is one of the great qualities that make a leader. Goleman (2004) defines self-awareness as having a deep understanding of one's emotions, strengths, weaknesses and drives. Furthermore, Salovey and Mayer (1990, p.16) discuss that when people approach life tasks with emotional intelligence, they should be at an advantage for solving problems adaptively. This debate ties with person-centred theory that the client has an inherent tendency to self-actualise (Feist & Feist, 1998). It is however, not really clear what the role of coaching during this stage is, and therefore it is critical that this is investigated.

2.3.5 Research Question 1

What are the experiences of expatriate executives prior to taking positions in South African Multinational Corporations, and how can coaching support that experience?

2.4 Expatriates' experiences during the assignment

Once the expatriate is in the host country, reality kicks in. There are myriad experiences that they face. They face work related challenges as well as non-work related, such as language barriers and culture shock which Abbott, et.al (2006) refer to as "acculturation". At the same time, Dhrampal (2013) and Allen and Alvarez (1998) argue that Head Office does not always understand the circumstances and context under which expatriates work and has unrealistic expectations in terms of delivery. The pressure to produce immediately in an overseas assignment compounds the demands imposed on the

expatriate and that may negatively affect performance on the job (Black & Gregersen, 1992).

2.4.1 *Non-work related experiences during the assignment*

In the research conducted by Tahir and Ismail (2007) on expatriates in Malaysia, they found that some of the cultural issues experienced by the expatriates at the workplace were gender and dress code issues. The expatriates were expected to dress according to the Malaysian social norm, otherwise negative remarks were passed onto them. In terms of gender, Malaysia is a male-dominated society so it was not easy for female expatriates to adapt. They had pre-conceived ideas about western women. Tung (1998b) acknowledges that it is not easy for expatriates to adjust to a new environment. In the study she conducted with 409 expatriates on assignments to 51 countries around the world, she found that it took the majority of them six to twelve months to feel comfortable in a new cultural setting. Forster (2000) supports that by mentioning that culture has a highly pervasive influence on the behaviour of individuals. According to him, culture influences a person's perceptions, attitudes, motivations, values, learning experiences and personality. Furthermore, Hofstede and McCrae (2004, p.58) stress that "culture is (a) a collective, not individual, attribute; (b) not directly visible but manifested in behaviours; and (c) common to some but not all people". Furthermore, Halim, et al. (2014) advise that if expatriates are sensitive towards cultural differences and have the ability to be more open to cultural differences, they will be able to adjust to the new working environment. Thomas (1998), on the other hand, when talking about the expatriates' adjustment in a foreign country, maintains that married executives adjust better than non-married ones. However, Thomas (1998) contradicts himself by mentioning that the main reason for expatriate failure is the failure of the spouse to adjust. Okpara and Kabongo (2011) share the same sentiment, however, they also believe that prior international experience in a foreign country helps in adjustment. They maintain that it reduces difficulties, stress, and anxieties related to adjustment. Even though Thomas (1998) agrees with them, he adds by mentioning that prior experience should however be positive and must be of a similar knowledge. Prior

international experience was also cited by Suutari and Brewster (2001) in their study conducted on the Finnish expatriates. They found that seventeen per cent of their respondents were already on at least their third international assignment.

In conclusion, Black and Mendenhall (1990) and Kealey and Protheroe (1996) believe that success on a global assignment is greatly influenced by the expatriates' cross-cultural adjustment to the host country.

2.4.2 Work related experiences during the assignment

According to Thomas (1998), early termination of the expatriate's assignment is a reflection of either a failure of work performance (i.e. professional ineffectiveness), or a lack of personal satisfaction on behalf of the expatriate or family member(s); or both. In addition to that, Collings et al., (2007) claim that managing the performance of individual expatriates has been a challenge to MNCs, and they are supported by Mendenhall and Oddou (1988) who mention that the reason for that challenge is because of high conflicting expectations that are posed by both Head Office and the host company. They maintain that the expatriates have a need to meet both expectations. Hogan and Goodson (1990) argue that the challenge is that different expectations in an unfamiliar culture can make the expatriate manager's leadership and communication style obsolete, and this can affect performance. Collings et al., (2007) list some of the factors impacting the expatriate's performance as, technical knowledge, personal and family adjustment to foreign culture, environmental factors and political factors. Some of Dhrampal's (2013) respondents highlighted that the locals' "perception" of time, referring to "African time", was a challenge, and that South Africans were perceived as arrogant and displaying superior attitudes. This has an impact on different work ethics and sense of urgency. Furthermore, bribery and corruption in business dealings were also alluded to by Dhrampal (2013) and John (2013) in their studies conducted with South African expatriates in Sub-Saharan countries as a big challenge. Olatunbosun and Oluduro (2012) confirmed these findings by stressing that bribery and

corruption are so deeply rooted in many of the countries' systems in such a way that one can hardly do anything without conforming.

Feldman and Thomas (1992) feel that another challenge related to experiences of expatriates' performance is that they are evaluated on very different criteria from those used in the home country, and they believe that this creates a barrier to performance.

Although literature has revealed a strong high performance expectation from both home country and host country, some researchers have indicated there is a lack of or inadequate support by the home country (Dhrampal, 2013; Vidal, et al., 2007a; Bossard & Peterson, 2005). However, the question remains whether coaching could provide support for such experiences.

2.4.3 The role of coaching during expatriates' assignment

To support the expatriates' performance, Osman-Gani (2000) and Feldman and Bolino (1999) believe on-site mentoring will enhance the expatriates' experience of their international assignment. According to Woo (2017), the primary function of mentoring is associated with vocational support, psychosocial support and role modelling, whereas coaching is known for playing a role in enhancing an employee's work-related performance. In addition, Bozer, Sarros and Santora (2013) maintain that the effectiveness of coaching should translate into organisational change and sustainability. Coaching has been promoted as being effective in enhancing goal attainment (Grant, & Cavanagh, 2011) and viewed as a means to facilitate learning and to move executives from excellent performance to peak performance (Feldman & Lankau, 2005). Abbott, et al. (2006) also support coaching for expatriates. They are of a view that training programmes cannot deal with the affective domain of expatriate acculturation with the same immediacy and individual attention, but coaching can. They also believe that evidence-based coaching informed by cross-cultural research and experience would be the most relevant as it has potential to improve performance and personal satisfaction of the expatriate manager. At the same time, Passmore and Law (2008) maintain that senior executives of global companies should raise awareness of cultural competence through coaching if

they are to succeed in global business. They argue that international coaches should formulate a cross-cultural model as part of their coaching framework. Abbott, et al. (2006) add, by raising the fact that a coach with expatriate experience would add more value as he or she can also play a mentoring role to assist the expatriate in adjusting. They believe that coaching gives the expatriates the opportunity to explore their own values and motivations while going through the acculturation journey. According to Rogers' person-centred theory to coaching, the relationship between a coach and client plays an important role (Rogers, 2012; Stober, 2006). If the client does not feel understood and accepted, the chance of an effective coach-client relationship is minimal (Stober, 2006) and this is referred to as building rapport, empathetic listening, unconditional positive regard, congruence and appropriate feedback. Even though they support coaching, Abbott, et al. (2006, p.17), warn that coaching is "not a cure-all", which will ensure expatriates' success. They mentioned a few limitations, such as, some highly experienced and competent managers may not want to be coached, managers may be dependent on the coach, and they believe that this may inhibit acculturation and the timing of coaching may also not be right. This is supported by Rogers (2012) that although the client is a director of change, change cannot happen if the client is not ready. Therefore it is the role of the coach to create the thinking and safe environment through skilful questioning (Grant & O'Connor, 2010; Kline, 1999). That is, for example, when the expatriate is under most stress, they may not be able to receive coaching well.

The implications from the literature review are that each stage of expatriate experience is critical to the success of the international assignment, and therefore adequate support from both home and host countries is critical.

2.4.4 Research Question 2

What are the experiences of expatriate executives during the international assignment in South African Multinational Corporations, and how can coaching support that experience?

2.5 Repatriation experiences

Repatriation is the last stage of expatriation. This is the stage when the executive is returning to the home country (Kraimer, Shaffer & Bolino, 2009). Lazarova and Cerdin (2007) highlight repatriation turnover as a major source of concern for repatriates. On the other hand, Lazarova and Cerdin (2007) and Bonache and Brewster (2001) view repatriates as vehicles for knowledge transfer and organisational learning and view multinational firms as institutions for integrating knowledge. According to Harvey (1989), the repatriation of corporate executives into the domestic organisation and social environment has a sudden and profound impact on the individual as well as family members. He maintains that one of the reasons could be because the executive and the family members have missed out on many events and trends in the home country. Feldman and Thompson (1993) concur by mentioning that when executives were still expatriates, they experienced difficulty in adjusting to new cultures and customs, but for repatriates, it is difficult to adjust to companies and communities that have changed so dramatically during their absence. Although Harvey (1989)'s study is less recent, however his repatriation framework was found to be still relevant in this study. Harvey (1989) divides repatriates' experiences into four categories, that is, Organisational/Career Issues, Financial pressures, Family Problems and Executive Psychological stress. These categories are also in keeping with Black and Gregersen (1991)'s categorisation of repatriation challenges. Harvey's categorisation is used to review literature on repatriation in the table below:

Table 2: Experiences of repatriates

Organizational/Career Issues

According to Lazarova and Cerdin (2007), Bonache and Brewster (2001) and Harvey (1989), many organisations have difficulty in determining the position to be filled by a repatriate, and this causes the executive to feel less valued. In the study conducted with expatriate hotel managers in China, Feng and Pearson (1999) found that assigned expatriates were more worried about their future jobs than the directly employed

managers because it was not certain whether there would be jobs waiting when they go back home. Kraimer, et al. (2009) and Bossard and Peterson (2005) concur and claim that this causes frustration to the repatriates to an extent that many of them decide to leave the organisation because they feel less valued by their managers. In addition, Kraimer, et al. (2009) and Black, et al. (1992) maintain that few expatriates get promoted upon repatriation. Trends Report in Lazarova and Caligiuri (2002) and Black (1992), suggest that 12% of expatriate employees leave within a year of returning and 13% leave within the following year, or a total of 25% within two years after repatriation. These figures have subsequently changed according to the 2012 Trends in Global relocation report: 22% left while on assignment, 24% left within one year of return, 26% left within between one and two years of return and the largest percentage, 28%, left more than two years after the return from assignment. That shows an increase in each parameter since the previous survey.

Kraimer, et al. (2009, p.29) claim that “the more assignments an individual completes, the more opportunities the individual has to develop unique skills and abilities”. They also add that expatriates who accept multiple international assignments are likely to gain a broader range of skills. Therefore such experience is expected to be valued by MNCs.

Vidal, et.al (2007b) raised a concern that if expatriates leave their organisation within that short period after coming back, that implies a high cost to the company as the expatriate goes to the competition. Gregersen and Stroh (1997) believe that the roles of repatriates should be clarified.

Financial pressures

According to Harvey (1989), financial problems for the repatriated executive centre on the difference in foreign compensation levels and loss of overseas allowances. Harvey adds by saying that loss of that pay creates stress to the repatriated manager because his/her standard of living was typically adjusted while overseas. Black et al., (1992) and Gregersen and Stroh (1997) argue that most repatriates experience severe housing challenges upon repatriation. Other financial issues such as children’s education and

anticipated pension funds are also mentioned by Harvey (1989).

Family Problems

Harvey (1989) mentions that repatriation does not only affect the executive, but the children also have difficulties in re-integrating into schools and becoming accepted in social groups. The spouse may also have difficulty in restarting his/her own career. Gregersen and Stroh (1997) also agree that if repatriates have difficulty adjusting to interacting with home country nationals or to living in the home country after international assignments, then people would expect a “spill over” effect on the spouses’ level of adjustment.

Executive Psychological stress

Harvey (1989) maintains that if the organisation does not have a well-articulated repatriation programme, the executive may have to deal with the re-entry problems without organisational support. Black (1992) mentions some of the factors that frustrate the repatriate include being placed in non-challenging jobs, lack of promotion opportunities, loss of status and autonomy, lack of career planning and counselling. Vogel, et al. (2008) also support this in their findings that South African expatriates do not know their long-term career paths, and they were not assigned mentors when they were on assignment.

2.5.1 *The role of coaching during repatriation*

According to Vidal, et.al (2007a) and Tung (1998b), expatriates are very important assets for international organisations, and therefore their knowledge, experience and skills acquired during the international assignment are key to maintaining competitive advantage in the global arena. Some researchers came up with different ideas of supporting repatriation. Ideas such as shortening the length of the assignment (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2002), putting communication systems in place to keep the expatriate up-to-date (Vidal, et.al. 2007b) and using them to transfer knowledge from host country to home country (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2002). Meanwhile, Abbotts, et al (2006) believe that coaching

conversations themselves may help the client through the crisis. On the other hand, Joseph (2008) argues that coaching is not really about the alleviation of distress and dysfunction but it is about the facilitation of well-being and optimal functioning. At the same time, Carl Rogers' person-centred approach proposes that the right social environment must be created so that the client can feel understood, valued and accepted for who they are (Joseph, 2008; Stober, 2006). However, the level of motivation and readiness to learn has been highlighted by Bozer and Joo (2015) as critical before executive coaching is provided. There is very little literature on the role of coaching during repatriation. Further investigation needs to be carried out.

2.5.2 Research Question 3

What are the experiences of expatriate executives during repatriation after an international assignment in South African Multinational Corporations, and how does coaching support that experience?

2.6 Conclusion of Literature Review

The literature review mainly focused on exploring the experiences of executives taking international assignments in South African multinational corporations and how coaching could support those experiences. The perception is that expatriates experiences happen in three different stages of the international assignment. That is before the assignment, during and after. That is illustrated in the conceptual framework below:



Figure 1: Conceptual Framework (Self-developed: Bonga Mnengisa)

Expatriates are under extreme pressure as the expectations are coming from both sides, corporate head office and at the same time, they are expected to perform and meet targets at the host company (Collings et al., 2007; Allen & Alvarez, 1998; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1988). It is therefore critical that their experiences are explored before they embark on the assignment, during their assignment and when they return from the international assignment. This framework also suggests that coaching plays a role in all three stages of the journey of an expatriate. Literature has been reviewed for all stages. This framework also ties in with the three research questions in this study:

2.6.1 Research Questions:

What are the experiences of expatriate executives prior to taking positions in South African Multinational Corporations, and how can coaching support that experience?

What are the experiences of expatriate executives during the international assignment in South African Multinational Corporations, and how can coaching support that experience?

What are the experiences of expatriate executives after the international assignment in South African Multinational Corporations, and how can coaching support that experience?

CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

What are the experiences of expatriate executives after the international assignment in South African Multinational Corporations, and how can coaching support that experience?

3.1 Research methodology /paradigm

This study follows the interpretivist paradigm which Creswell (2013) refers to as Constructivism. This is an approach in qualitative research. According to Creswell (2003), Constructivists claim that individuals look to understand the world in which they live in and work, and create subjective meanings towards a particular phenomenon. He goes further (Creswell, 2013) by maintaining that the goal of the researcher therefore in this instance would be to rely as much as possible on the views of the participants in the situation being studied. This is also supported by Bluhm, Harman, Lee and Mitchell (2011, p.1870) when describing the purpose of qualitative research as being “critical for gaining an understanding both of what individuals experience and how they interpret their experiences”. Additionally, Elliott, Fischer, and Rennie (1999) advocate the aim of qualitative research as being to understand and represent the experiences and actions of people as they encounter, engage, and live through situations. Therefore, the researcher, in exploring the expatriates’ experiences in three different stages of their international assignment, relied on the opinions of people who are currently holding expatriate positions in MNCs and those who have previously been expatriates in those companies to understand their experiences better and to examine how coaching can support that experience. The researcher’s own background as a former expatriate has shaped the interpretation of the meaning that the sample would make out of their experiences by using open-ended questions. At the same time, Creswell (2003) describes one of the characteristics of a qualitative research as being finding out why people behave the way they do. This was discovered through interactions with the current expatriates, repatriates and HR Mobility managers who are responsible for administering and managing expatriates in the study.

The choice of this paradigm also made a difference in the body of knowledge, as most researchers, such as Okpara and Kabongo (2011); Gregersen and Stroh (1997); Feldman and Thompson (1993); Black (1992) and Harvey (1989) employed quantitative research methodology. This paradigm was therefore found as the most appropriate one to explore the experiences of expatriate executives taking positions in South African MNCs.

Table 3: Quantitative Style versus Qualitative Style: Neuman (1997) in Creswell (2003)

Quantitative style	Qualitative style
Measure objective facts	Construct social reality, cultural meaning
Focus on variables	Focus on interactive processes, events
Reliability is key	Authenticity is key
Value free	Values are present and explicit
Independent of context	Situationally constrained
Many cases, subjects	Few cases, subject
Statistical analysis	Thematic analysis
Researcher is detached	Researcher is involved

3.2 Research Design

Out of the five qualitative designs: narrative, grounded theory, ethnographies, case study and phenomenology, this study chose phenomenology as the most appropriate for this study as, according to Moustakas (1994), it enables the

researcher to describe what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon. In this study, the researcher was able to describe what the current expatriates, those who have been expatriates before and the HR Mobility managers have in common as they described their experiences in all three stages of the assignment. Moustakas (1994, p.15) adds by saying that phenomenological research is about “living the experiences”. Creswell (2013) is also in agreement by adding that the researcher would describe the individuals’ lived experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants. This design therefore perfectly supported the purpose of the research questions in this study as being to explore the experiences of expatriates in all three stages of expatriation and to derive a universal description of their experiences.

This research design was consistent with the research questions.

3.3 Population and sample

3.3.1 *Population*

The population of this study consisted of executives who are currently working or have worked for South African MNCs within the last three years. The population also included non-South Africans who work in these South African MNCs. Executives in this study referred to all levels of management.

3.3.2 *Sample and sampling method*

According to Devers and Frankel (2000), purposive sampling is often used in qualitative research. They maintain that purposive sampling is used to enhance the understanding of the selected individuals’ experience or to develop a concept. In this study, therefore, purposeful sampling is used. Sixteen people in total were interviewed. This is in accordance with Polkinghorne (1989)’s average number of interviews in qualitative research, which is 5-25 people. The sample included:

Table 4: Description of sample and purpose

Sample group	Purpose
Executives who are currently working for South African MNCs	To understand their pre-departure and during assignment experience
Executives who have worked for South African MNCs within the last three years.	To understand their pre-departure, during and post assignment (repatriation) experience
HR Mobility managers whose responsibility is to manage international assignments (expatriates) Participants 2, 15 and 16 in chapter 4 of this study are HR Mobility managers.	To add to the understanding of the expatriate executives' experience

Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, and Spiers (2008) argue that the sample must be appropriate and have the right knowledge about the subject. The above sample was appropriate for the study under discussion. See **Appendix C** for more details on the sample.

3.4 The research instrument

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather the experiences of the expatriate executives. The questions were open-ended questions to uncover more information about the participants' experiences. This decision was informed by guidelines on writing interview protocols by Jacob and Furgerson (2012). Two separate research instruments were developed. The first one was directed at the expatriate executives who are currently holding international assignments in the South African MNCs and those who were previously expatriates in those companies. The second research instrument was directed at the HR Mobility managers who are responsible for administering and managing international assignments in the three South African MNCs as

mentioned in the background. The purpose of this specific instrument was to gather information about the support both home and host companies provide to expatriates in all three stages of the international assignment. Each research instrument had three questions that sought to obtain the experiences of expatriate executives prior, during and post the international assignment. The last question in each research instrument allowed the participants to provide their own suggestions in areas where they felt a need for improvement. A discussion guide was used to gather critical demographic information about the participants, which helped the researcher in probing some of the questions.

The actual Research instruments and the discussion guide are in **Appendix A** of this report.

3.5 Procedure for data collection

Taking into consideration the purpose of this study, the research paradigm and research design chosen, semi-structured interviews were used to gather information on the experiences of executives as expatriates prior, during and post their international assignments in the South African MNCs. This is supported by Devers and Frankel (2000) who emphasise the importance of taking into consideration the purpose of the study when selecting an approach, research instrument or method for collecting data.

Longhurst (2003) defines semi-structured interviews as a verbal interchange where the interviewer attempts to elicit information from another person by asking questions. Open-ended questions as per the research instruments were asked to gain understanding of the expatriates' experiences.

According to Longhurst (2003), the advantages of semi-structured interviews are that they give the participants the opportunity to explore issues they feel are important, they are conversational and the tone is informal and that makes the participant feel comfortable during the interview process. Another advantage, according to Creswell (2013), is that the researcher has control over the line of questioning. In this study, the researcher had the advantage of probing for clarity or further information where it was necessary. One more advantage is

that the interviews took place in a natural setting (Creswell, 2013). In this study, the researcher had the opportunity to talk to the participants directly and could see how they behaved within a context.

Although the semi-structured interview is the most relevant for this study, Creswell (2013) mentions that some of the disadvantages of an interview is that the researcher's presence may bias the responses, and that not all people are articulate. The researcher built rapport with the participants by first verbally introducing herself and the research objective before embarking on critical questions.

Interviews were held at the participants' places of work and some in private conference rooms. This was to ensure that the participants were comfortable. The researcher used the interview guide to collect demographics of the participants and the interview script to gather the participants' experiences about the phenomenon. All interviews were tape recorded. Although Creswell (2013) recommends high quality tapes which will fit into the transcriber's machine, all voice recordings were sent to a professional for transcribing. The researcher also took notes during the course of the interview to record the conversations and non-verbal behaviour of the participants (field notes).

After the transcripts were developed, a master transcript file was developed. According to Creswell (2013), good qualitative data analysis relies on the ability to locate information collected and to keep it in context.

3.5.1 *Ethical Consideration*

To ensure that all was done ethically, request for access to the participants was first obtained from the authorities of the organisations. This is what Delvers and Frankel (2000) refer to as negotiating access from the "gate keepers". This is to maintain integrity and credibility of the research, according to them. This was done by sending a letter of request for permission to the Human Resource department which is responsible for managing expatriates. The purpose of the permission letter was to assure the organisation confidentiality and anonymity. Creswell (2013) also supports this idea of gaining permission from the

authorities by mentioning that qualitative research involves gaining permission to study the site. In this instance, the study only focused on the participants' experiences and not on the organisation.

The letter of consent was sent to the participants to obtain their acceptance to participate in the interview before the interview date was arranged by e-mail. The purpose of the letter was to assure confidentiality. This practice is supported by Longhurst (2003), by emphasising confidentiality and anonymity as the two important ethical issues.

The Consent Letter is on **Appendix B** of this report.

3.6 Data analysis and interpretation

According to Sofaer (2002) and Basit (2003), qualitative data analysis is the most challenging aspect of the research methods. As the researcher needed to make sense out of the respondents' shared meaning and experiences, thematic analysis was the most appropriate way to analyse data in this study. Braun, Clarke and Terry (2014, p.57) describe thematic analysis as a method for systematically identifying, organising, and offering insight into patterns of meaning across a set of data. They further advocate that thematic analysis allows a researcher to make sense out of collective shared experiences. Delvers and Frankenson (2000) point out that data can come in the form of field notes, audio and videotapes, and transcripts. It is on these premises that the researcher made use of transcripts, tape recordings and field notes to analyse data.

This study followed Braun, et.al (2014)'s five steps to thematic analysis as follows:

1. Familiarisation with data

At this step, Braun, et al (2014) advise that the researcher should read the raw data as many times as possible to familiarise themselves with the actual semantic meanings expressed and start noting potential points of interest. Creswell (2013, p.183) agrees by also emphasising that at this stage the

researcher must immerse themselves in the details to make sense of the whole database before breaking it into parts. He refers to this stage of data analysis as “reading and memoing”. According to Huberman and Miles (1994), this stage is about writing reflective passages in notes and drafting a summary sheet on field notes. In this research, the researcher spent some time in the familiarisation stage, taking notes.

2. Coding the data

Braun, et al (2014) define a code as a brief label or short phrase that captures a key analytical idea in the data and conveys this to a researcher. At the same time, Creswell (2013) describes coding as a process that involves aggregating of text or visual data into smaller categories of information. It involves looking for evidence from different databases used in the study and assigning a label to a code. The researcher looked for passages which were related with each code as an indicator of the participants’ interest and did not count the number of quotations that appeared in the database, just as Creswell (2013) suggested. Creswell believes that counting the number of codes is associated with quantitative research. Microsoft Excel was used to analyse data as recommended by Meyer and Avery (2009) as a qualitative data analysis tool.

3. Searching for themes

This means clustering of different codes together to create potential themes, (Braun, et al 2014; Creswell, 2013; Huberman & Miles, 1994). Creswell (2013) describes this process in a form of a metaphor of a family of themes with children or subthemes and grandchildren being segments of data. According to Hossain (2011), identifying themes is about describing what was found during interviews.

4. Reviewing themes

At this stage, Braun, et al. (2014) believe that the purpose of reviewing themes is to check if the participants’ themes are a good fit with the coded information, and they believe that one should do that by checking back to the coded data and making a story of each theme throughout. Creswell (2013) concurs by

mentioning that one might look at, for instance, individual experiences and the context of those experiences. For example in this study, the researcher looked at the expatriates' adjustment experience in foreign countries and the context related to that.

5. Defining and naming themes

According to Braun, et al. (2014), this stage involves developing of overall analysis through detailed analysis of data in each theme. Therefore, the researcher will come up with definitions of each theme here. For example, theme is "pre-departure experience", there is a definition for this stage. Creswell (2013) refers to this stage as interpretation of data.

6. Producing the report

The last stage of Braun, et al. (2014)'s thematic or content analysis is "producing a report". They believe that at this stage, the thematic or content analysis is saturated with writing. According to Creswell (2013), this is now about the packaging of data found in text, tabular or figure form. Huberman and Miles (1994), on the other hand, see this stage as about making contrasts and comparisons. In this report, the researcher is relating back to the research questions and putting together a scholarly document. Fictitious names of respondents and the MNCs they are working for have been used to ensure confidentiality. This report has been saved and back-up copies have also been made and stored in a safe place. The transcriber was also asked to keep the information confidential.

3.7 Limitations of the study

As part of the interview, only HR managers of the home country have been interviewed. This study did not include HR managers of the host countries. This is as a result of time constraints and lack of funds to include them. However information about support from host countries has been probed from the expatriates and the HR Mobility managers of the three MNCs.

While the respondents of this study are from the three South African MNCs, the majority of the respondents are from one MNC. Therefore their responses might have a significant influence on the results.

Although the proposal for this study was to interview 18 people, as a result of the proximity of the sample population of this study, only 16 participants were interviewed. Three out of 16 were HR Mobility managers who provided enhanced information on the experiences of the expatriates. Out of the three HR Mobility managers, one is currently an expatriate, one a repatriate and the third one has never been an expatriate before but has been managing expatriates for many years. This number however was still within best practice for a qualitative research as Polkinghorne (1989) suggests between 5-25 interviews.

3.8 Validity and reliability

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), the researcher is the key instrument in the research and has a high likelihood of being subjective and biased which can have an unpleasant impact on data validity and reliability of the study. In agreement is Noble and Smith (2015). They regard validity as truth value which recognises the existence of multiple realities and the possibilities of the bias of the researcher in qualitative research. Furthermore, Miles and Huberman (1994) argue that the subjectivity of the researcher can however be mitigated by strategies such as triangulation. On the same breath, triangulation is understood as the combination of at least two or more theoretical perspectives, methodological approaches, data sources, investigators, or data analysis methods (Thurmond, 2001). Thurmond (2001) advocates that the intention of using triangulation is to decrease, or negate the deficiency of a single strategy, thereby increasing the ability to interpret the findings. Furthermore, Burke (1997) describes data triangulation as the use of multiple data sources to understand a phenomenon. Burke also emphasises the fact that using multiple data sources for triangulation does not mean using different research methods, but refers to the use of different sources in a single method.

According to Noble and Smith (2015), reliability in qualitative research is about how sound the research is in relation to the application and the correctness of the research methods employed and the integrity of the final conclusions.

A combination of data sources has been used to triangulate in this study which is specified in the internal validity section.

3.8.1 *Internal validity*

Internal validity is described by Christensen and Carlile (2009) as the extent in which conclusions are drawn from data collected and reasonable alternative outcomes are ruled out in a manner that is unambiguous. Some of the criteria for determining internal validity include, peer examination, triangulation, member checking and interview technique (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, special attention was given to triangulation of data sources to deal with internal validity.

In the first place, the sample was drawn from three different South African MNCs, which are from telecommunications, oil and hospitality industries. Secondly, the sample was made up of current expatriates, repatriates and HR Mobility managers whose role is to administer and manager expatriates.

As a result, extensive conclusions were made out of data collected from these sources. This study was also peer-reviewed to uncover any assumptions.

Noble and Smith (2015) also recommend repeated checks of tape recorded interviews as part of the strategies for ensuring truth value. In this study, all interviews have been recorded and they have been checked repeatedly during analysis to check emerging themes. Transcripts have also been checked to ensure the themes written are true to participants' statements.

3.8.2 *External validity*

According to Burke (1997), external validity is relevant when researchers generalise beyond their studies. On the other hand, Lincoln and Guba (1985)

refer to external validity as transferability. Noble and Smith (2015) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) see transferability as the level of applicability of the same research in other settings or the ability of the researcher to generalise the findings to other populations. However Burke (1997) states the qualitative researcher can help the readers of the research report in terms of when to generalise. Furthermore, the qualitative researcher must ensure full documentation of important information such as, the size of the sample, how they were selected, data collection methods used and data analysis techniques used.

To ensure external validity, the research methods, sample and the process followed have been well documented in this research report.

3.8.3 Reliability

Although Golafshani (2003) argues that reliability is irrelevant in qualitative research, Noble and Smith (2015) refer to reliability as consistency, and they describe consistency as it relates to trustworthiness. Trustworthiness also acknowledges the research methods employed in the study and the researcher's decisions which are clear and transparent. At the same time, Creswell (2013) maintains that reliability can be enhanced by obtaining detailed field notes through using a good quality tape recorder.

In this study, field notes were taken during the semi-structured interviews and were used in the findings and discussion chapters to describe observed emotions of the participants. A specialist was sourced to transcribe all recorded interviews in this study to ensure that the statements are true to the participants' account.

Furthermore, the researcher's decisions were also made clear and transparent by detailing the research methods and design followed, population and sample employed, procedures for collecting and analysing data, limitations and delimitations, validity and reliability details in this final report.

3.9 Demographic profile of respondents

Table 5 outlines a short summary of the demographic profile of the respondents proposed compared to actual:

Table 5: Comparison between proposed demographic profile of respondents and the actual

No.	Sample group	Proposal	Explanation of actual sample make-up
1	Executives currently working for South African MNCs	10	12
2	Executives with repatriation experience within South African MNCs within the last 3 years	6	4 (including 2 reassigned
3	HR personnel administering and managing international assignments	2	3 (1= currently an expat 1= repatriate 1= never an expat before)

It was envisaged that a total of 18 participants would be interviewed, but an actual total of 16 was interviewed as a result of distance and time challenges. Most of the participants work outside South Africa, as a result it was a challenge to secure face-to-face interviews with them. See **Appendix D**.

Some of the respondents had dual roles in terms of the three sample groups as per Table 5 above. It was proposed that ten (10) people who are currently working for SA MNCs as expatriates would be interviewed, instead twelve (12) were interviewed. In sample group 2, it was proposed that six (6) people with repatriation experience would be interviewed, however the researcher managed to interview four (4) including two that have been re-assigned to other international assignments. In terms of HR Mobility managers managing expatriates, the proposal estimated 2, and the actual is 3 as a result of the opportunity to sample the third MNC. One (1) HR Mobility manager is also currently working as an expatriate and is included as part of Sample group 1. The 2nd HR Mobility manager has repatriated but was not included as part of the Sample group 2 as she repatriated more than three years ago and the 3rd HR Mobility manager has never been an expatriate before.

Refer to a detailed demographic of the actual respondents in **Appendix D**.

CHAPTER 4. PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines and briefly describes the results of the study. It begins with an overview of the demographics of the respondents interviewed in one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. Thereafter, a high level summary of the overall results as per the three research questions is presented. This summary of results is in a form of themes derived from the data focusing on the experiences of expatriate executives in South African Multinational Corporates. This chapter also gives a high level overview of the results pertaining to the possible role of coaching to support the experiences of the executive expatriates in South African MNCs.

4.2 Demographics Profile of Respondents

A total of sixteen (16) respondents of which three (3) HR Mobility managers were interviewed during the period of October 2015 and January 2016 across three different companies in three different industries, that is, the telecommunications, oil and hospitality industries. The aim of the interviews was to explore the respondents' experiences in South African MNCS and the role that coaching plays to support that experience. All three phases of the expatriate's life cycle, which are; (1) prior departure, (2) during the assignment and (3) post assignment were explored, based on the respondent's expatriation experience. Respondents were either currently on expatriation assignment during the time of study or had returned from the expatriation not longer than three years earlier at the time of study. To ensure triangulation, the three HR Mobility managers from the sample were also interviewed to enhance an understanding of the experiences of expatriates. The responses were derived from the interview transcripts which were analysed into 149 codes and 16 themes.

Respondents were asked to complete a participant's demographic form before the interview to ensure the researcher has a brief knowledge about the respondents. This helped the researcher in ensuring the right questions were pitched at the right level.

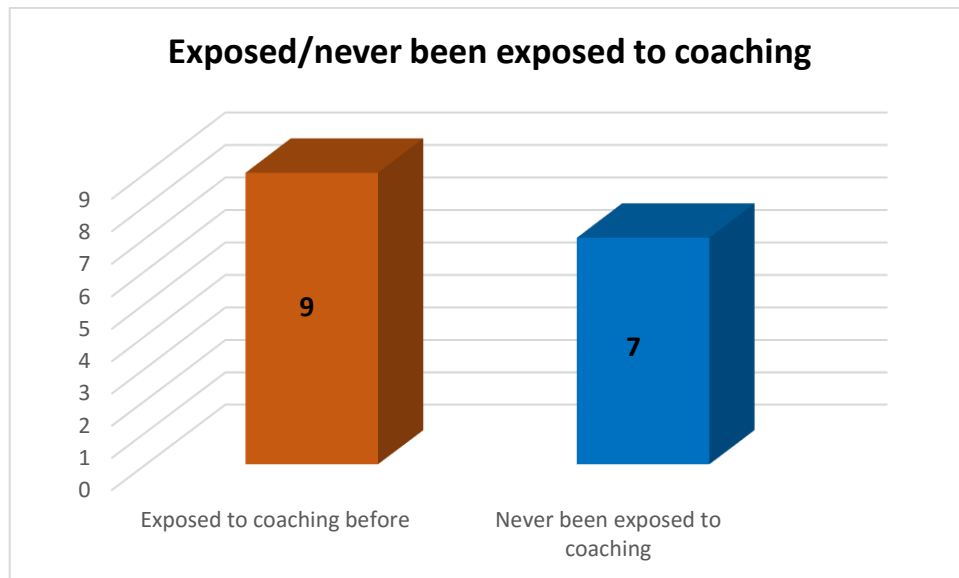


Figure 2: Respondents coaching demographics

As part of this study is to examine the role that coaching plays to support the experiences of coaching, the respondents were asked before the interview to indicate if they have been exposed to coaching before or not. The findings of that exercise are that nine (9) executives have been exposed to coaching before and (7) have never been exposed as shown in Figure 2. Despite the seven that have never been exposed to coaching, the overall view of the respondents was that coaching does have a role to play in supporting the expatriates' experiences. This data was also used as part of triangulation.

What was noticed about the demographics of the respondents is that the average age was 36, mainly in Senior Management and two in Executive roles. None were in CEO roles in their organisations, as displayed in Figure 3.

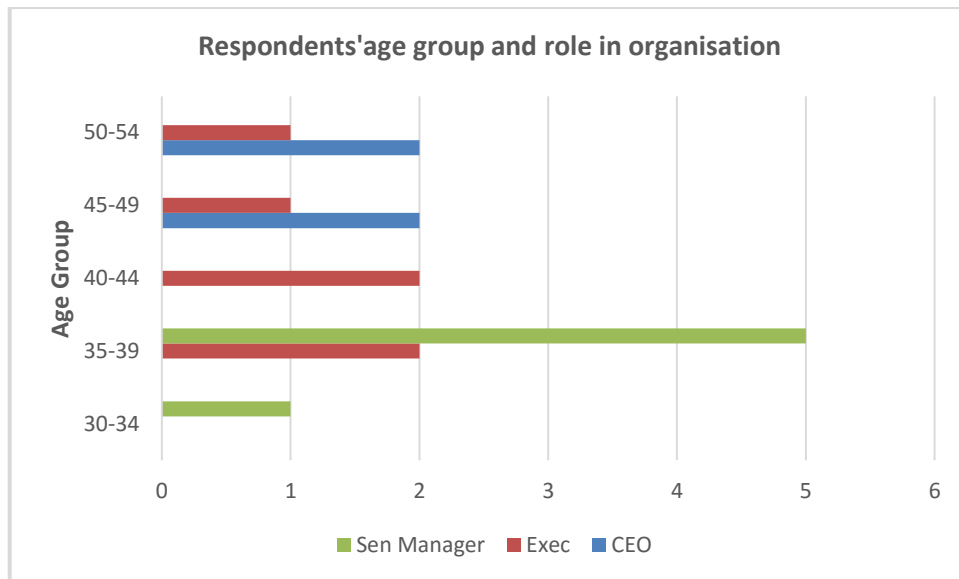


Figure 3: Respondents' age group and role in organisation

Most respondents are of South African nationality (including the three HR Mobility managers) with rich experience working in other countries. The respondents' current and previous experience in foreign countries gives this study rich data in terms of expatriates' experiences in South African MNCs. Figure 4 shows the spread of the countries in which the sample has worked: See **Appendix E** for a more enlarged diagram.

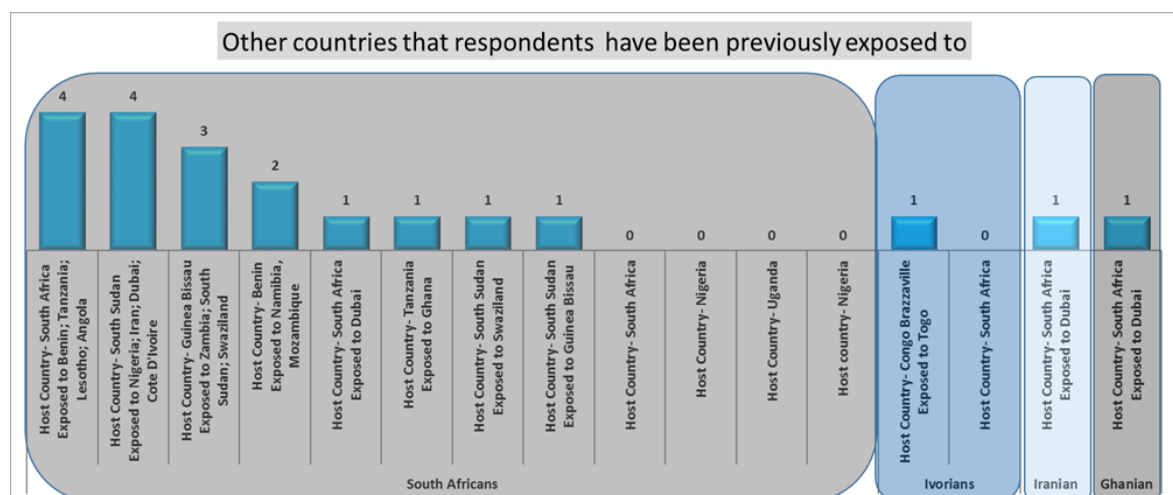


Figure 4: Nationality, current host country and previous experience

To ensure confidentiality, the respondents have been randomly allocated numbers, for example, Participant 1 or Participant 12. Respondents' verbatim responses have also been used to support the findings report.

4.3 Results pertaining to Research Questions

Thematic analysis was used to analyse data gathered from the interviews in response to the three research questions. The respondents were guided by overarching semi-structured interview questions related to each research question. The actual interview instrument is attached in **Appendix A**.

The themes and sub-themes below emerged per research question during the analysis of data:

Table 6: Themes emerged per research question

Research question 1: What are the experiences of expatriate executives <i>prior</i> to taking positions in South African Multinational Corporations, and how can coaching support that experience?"	
Theme	Sub-themes
Pre-departure experience	• Prior international assignments prepare expatriates • Pre-departure programmes
Support during pre-departure	• Support from the organisation • Support from family
Characteristics that prepare expatriates for international assignment	No sub-theme
Impact of pre-departure preparation	• Work-related impact • Emotional impact • Impact to family • Financial impact • Overall impact of pre-departure preparation
The role of coaching during pre-departure	• Coaching first time expatriates • Coaching for family remaining behind • Coaching on on-boarding/orientation

Research question 2: What are the experiences of expatriate executives <i>during</i> their international assignment in South African Multinational Corporations, and how can coaching support that experience?"		
Theme	Sub-theme	
Experiences of expatriates in host country	• Work environment • Work ethics • Experience of people and the country	
Balancing Head Office expectations with Host country expectations	• Lack of alignment between Head Office and Host country expectations • Head office must localise • Head office has a South African mentality • Continuous communication	
Challenges during international assignment	Adjustment (<i>incl. climate</i>)	Cultural differences
	Well-being	Business Ethics
	Acceptance by locals	Language
	Unrealistic expectations from Head Office	Transitioning
	Social life	Family
Support during international assignment	• Support from Head Office • Support from Host country • Support from Expatriates' Social Clubs • Support from High Commissioner • Support from Family • Self-reflection as coping mechanism	
Expatriates experience with external stakeholders	• Pleasant experience • Challenges dealing with external stakeholders • Foundation for maintaining stakeholder relations • MNCs contribution to host country economy	
The role of coaching during the assignment	• Previous experience of coaching • Perceived value of coaching • Recommended role of coaching during assignment • Possible focus area for coaching	

Research question 3: What are the experiences of expatriate executives <i>post</i> their international assignment in South African Multinational Corporations, and how can coaching support that experience?"	
Theme	Sub-theme
Repatriation strategy	• No repatriation planning • Lack of career plans for expatriates • MNCs lose great talent over competition • Communication on expatriates' contracts • Expatriates with great track record • Skills transfer
Challenges during repatriation	• Adjustment at work • Adjustment at home • Adjustment to culture
Support during repatriation process	• Support from Head Office HR • Support from local HR • Reflections on improvements
The role of coaching during repatriation	• Coaching on preparation for repatriation • Coaching on Financial aspects

The findings are presented according to themes per research question as outlined in table 6.

Definition of themes is included in this report as **Appendix C**.

4.4 Results pertaining to Research Question 1

4.4.1 Pre-departure preparation

At the beginning of the interview, the researcher asked the respondents an open question about how their organisations prepared them. This question was answered with mixed feelings. A few felt their organisations prepared them well.

Participant 3: *"Before the assignment Company X has quite an extensive expatriate policy and process, and before the assignment one had to go for*

medical testing and post that medical testing when the results were done you had a debrief"

Others had a bad experience:

Participant 4: *"If I want to be honest and I am obviously very straight forward, I don't hide what I believe, a one word description would be badly. Okay... I was appointed ... I signed the offer letter, we agreed to my employment ...then I requested some time, because I had just moved to a new location...but can you give me at least a month to just also settle and organise my family and everything. And that was the first problem. They said 'no'"*

On the other hand, there were those that felt that there was no preparation at all. Here are some of the responses:

Participant 6: *"I wasn't prepared, at all – except for brief discussions here and there to say that the place has nothing for me. That is all we read and understood, all of us... I wasn't prepared at all. I didn't even do any of the.... I didn't go and look and see, I didn't do a psychometric pre-assessment and briefing to say this is what goes on there and this is how to prepare you for it. Nothing."*

Participants 8 and Participants 12 added that the assignments were not clear in the first place. Here are their responses respectively:

"...because there were a lot of things that were not clear and I needed clarity on...Other than that, from a Group perspective, I didn't get any... there was nothing that was done to basically help with the transition."

"So it wasn't clear because we know Group is part in Dubai and part here...so it was quite scanty and for somebody who is leaving their country I don't think there was enough information to travel and frankly speaking when enough information was available, it was okay you are going next, you are going for three months, SA or Dubai, still not sure... So in my opinion it wasn't satisfactory."

Although expatriates had mixed feelings about their pre-departure experience, the HR Mobility managers from all three companies agree that they prepare their expatriates well. Here are their comments:

Participant 2: *“From my side, I also do the look see. First of all I will call you and just congratulate you and from there I will ask ‘what is it you know about Nigeria? That is the first thing I would do... But I will make sure I call the person, congratulate the person and you know, introduce Nigeria to the person subtly before the formal ones start.”*

Participant 15: *“It has changed somewhat over the last couple of months: from a general expat point of view there are obviously all the forms and you are given a start-up kit just for your basics, for your start-up information, policies are provided to them, they know exactly what they are walking into from that perspective...They also go through now what we call expatriate preparation training. It is online. We launched it in December.”*

Participant 16: *“There are different approaches that have been used, there is normally a pre appointment trip. Our model is very much to find suitable general managers who we trust and know the culture of our company and know the way we operate and give them an opportunity and persuade them.”*

Prior international assignments prepare expatriates

The interview data also revealed that expatriates who have had prior international assignments, either short term or long term, are better prepared than first timers. Some of them even felt that there was no need for their organisations to prepare them.

Participant 1: *“I think probably the preparation happened on my first assignment which was in Zambia. Before Zambia I was actually at Head Office and I was taking care of six African countries. So already I was exposed to travelling and spending some time, three months/two months/four months or even six months in a country. The other assignments I never even went for coaching because already I more or less had an experience and I knew what to expect”.*

Participant 3: *“Sure, I had done the training prior to Nigeria, and I had never did courses before for Iran or South Sudan or Dubai. I think my having been a seasoned professional I then just realised and knew very well; the more you become an expatriate, the more easy it is for you to be able to adapt – so less preparation.”*

Participant 13: *“I was prepared because I had a short term assignment before it wasn’t something that was really new for me, so with the first experience, compared to the first time, I think the second one was less stressful, because the first time I had to travel without my family so it wasn’t easy, I just gave birth.”*

Pre-departure programmes

The study revealed that the South African Multinational Corporates do offer various pre-departure programmes. The following programmes were attested by the respondents:

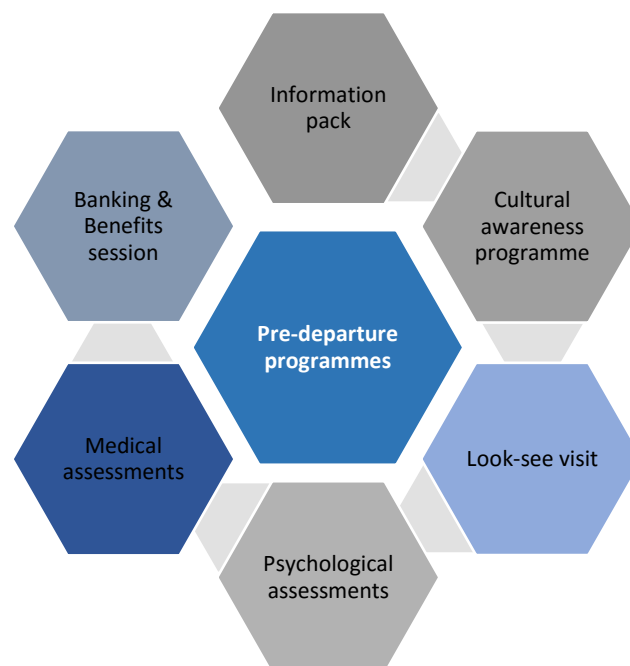


Figure 5: Pre-departure programme

Information Packs

Most respondents received information packs as part of pre-departure preparation and they found these useful.

Participant 9: *"I was very surprised by the way Company X was doing things. I received 12 forms when I accepted the offer of Company X ... and it was all about preparation of my assignment. This was related to insurance, health check, my banking situation. So before going to my position I had a lot of interaction so that I came very confident that Company X will take care of me."*

Participant 7: *"When I was about to go to Dubai physically I remember when I signed my contract I was given a whole pack of lots of files on Dubai by the HR team which was... it was interesting. There was lots of general knowledge in terms of orientation and socialising and adopting your new environment. I think more than 500 pages. It was about the regulations of the country, the legal system of the country, the public transport of the country, must do and mustn't do in the country because a lot of things might be legal or illegal and different from the country of your origin. ..Yes."*

Participant 11: *"They explained a little bit, they gave me a pack of the culture, the dos and don'ts, it was sort of a welcome pack because in their minds I have already accepted the job and it told me the language, the population. Yes, the country, the languages that are spoken and then they obviously give you a few words you can speak. But because it is predominantly English it was fine, you can get away speaking English with a lot of people. That was good, it gave you the details so you don't offend people"*

While some respondents found the information pack useful, others found it "tedious"

Participant 10: *"I think the documentation - that is the big thing for me. And at the time Ms L even said we need to look at it – and I said 'we are a "technology" company, why are you sending me pieces of paper? Surely I should be going onto a portal, you giving me access to a portal and I fill in some basic stuff..."*

Cultural Awareness Programme

A cultural awareness programme was experienced by most respondents before leaving their home countries and they found it useful.

Participant 1: *"I think the whole preparation is based on culture, what the culture is all about, the regulation, what the nuances are. There are those salient things that you don't actually get until you get to a place. The whole emphasis was them trying to tell us what kind of people, lives, cultures, dos and don'ts. How you greet people. That kind of a thing just for a softer landing which actually worked very well I must say...Actually two day full session."*

Participant 2: *"...and they will also take you through the pre-cultural programme...Maybe a month before I would say.....the second day of the programme they will call somebody from Nigeria, or somebody who had an experience in Nigeria, to come and share their experiences about Nigeria – just so the other social aspects that might help you."*

Participant 3: *"Then there is also the expatriate preparation that we had to do and this was a course that was two days, and it covered quite detailed information around the country of assignment..."*

In some instances, the family was also involved in cultural awareness programmes to assess readiness.

Participant 2: *"So there is a survey you will do. So I will do the survey and my husband, and any kids who are 18 years and above, so my son also had to do the survey – just to check in terms of your cultural readiness. It was the best programme; my son enjoyed it"*

Whilst the majority of respondents found the cultural awareness programme useful, Participant 1 did not think so. He found it misaligned to the actual experience in host country.

"The interesting thing is that most of the stuff that you get taught is not exactly what you encounter when you get to countries. For example... in fact it is amazing. Just a basic thing like don't actually use tap water to brush your teeth

or put your air-con on all the time so the mosquitoes don't actually come into your room. All those things you actually don't get taught...My first assignment I went and I was shocked... about 60% of it made sense. The other 40% I was learning it as I was flying."

Look-see-visit

Look-see visit appeared as a popular pre-departure programme amongst the MNCs sampled as one gets to see the actual country in which they will be working. The respondents who experienced the "look-see visits" cited schools and accommodation as the main valuable things that one gets out of the visit.

Participant 2: *"...you would be taken through the look-see-decide with your family, for you to see the schools here, and the kids have to go to schools. So that would be arranged."*

Participant 8: *"when I agreed to pursue the opportunity I was then invited to a look-see visit as well as an interview. Basically the look-see was to come to the country and look at the more personal elements of picking up the assignment which is living conditions, schools, lifestyle, food... the more softer elements of me making the migration. So I did that for a couple of days and then I went onto the interview"*

Participant 4: *"No, I had a look and see with my family, we came back and then two weeks later I had to go to work..."*

All three HR Mobility managers confirmed that their organisations offer look-see visits to their expatriates at the beginning of the assignment to help them make a decision. Below are some of their contributions:

Participant 16: *"Where the manager goes there, sometimes with his wife and they have a look and do a bit of a field trip and get a sense of whether it could work for them or not."*

Participant 8 mentioned that before she took the look-see visit she was uncertain and sceptical about the assignment but this is how she felt afterwards, *"Yes. I think... not better... more certain of what I can expect....only when I was*

here did I get my own perspective.” Similarly, respondents 9 and 10 found revelation in the look-see visit “...so I realised I could live in Congo Brazzaville even if it is slightly far from my own country. The look and see visit made me comfortable to go to this position”.

Participant 10: *“I was pleasantly surprised, because like Maputo can be a very filthy place, whereas (Benin) is very clean; ...it is very clean city and people are very conscious of that. So I was quite surprised in terms of what I thought I would be getting and what I actually got, because people have this perception of West Africa like it is like terrible. So I was from that perspective quite surprised.”*

Although most respondents found value in the look-see visit, Participant 5 found it useless, as she only went through it after she had signed the contract, *“the offer was already signed. Whether you like or don’t like it you have actually resigned from your current position and then you have taken the offer. So even the look and see does not serve the purpose.”*

Psychological assessments

Clear evidence emerged that not many expatriates complete psychological assessments which assess personality fit and ability to cope with stress before taking their international assignments. In some instances, this is as a result of the inconsistency from Head Office HR perspective. Participants 8, 11 and 13 are from the same organisation and they all have not been through psychological assessments. However Participants 3 and 15 are also from the same organisation and have been through psychological assessments. Participant 3, however, was not happy with the results. He believed that the psychologist was subjective and therefore, according to him, the assessment did not serve the purpose.

“I mean we know that these things are not legally defensible... it is very much subjective, and therefore I was quite surprised by some of the insights that he had... So for me it was not defined very much on where I am but rather on my ability to create relationships.”

Contrary to Participant 3 is Participant 14 who is from Company O. He found that psychological assessments were more valuable to his spouse than to him. *“When the time came for me to go and stay in Nigeria, we went through the process of seeing a psychologist...there is also another psychologist consultant that works for Company O that works with different coaches and 50% of them were Nigerians. So they will probably sit and tell you. I think it worked more positive for my wife because it was going to be her first time going to Nigeria. For me I was doing business already in Nigeria so I knew what I was getting myself into.*

Medical assessments

Evidence from both expatriates and HR Mobility managers show that generally expatriates do complete the basic medical examination. Quotes extracted from a few respondents.

Participant 6: *“No. Except the usual, I had to do Yellow Fever, and, and... but I didn’t do any comprehensive medical checks for going to Sudan.”*

Participant 9: *“...and there were one day when I woke up they asked me to go to a medical centre, to perform my check- up.”*

Banking and Benefits session

Although banking and benefits session seems to be one of the most important preparations that MNCs should offer to expatriates as it helps them with skills to manage their finances well, not all organisations sampled offer that programme. Only participant 2 mentioned her experience of this programme. She explained that the value of this programme is also that the spouse is involved and one gets to decide how much they would put offshore and how much remains in the home country.

“So they would prepare you, make meetings for you with somebody at the bank, the South African Revenue Services, you will have a meeting with somebody from Ernst & Young to understand your tax liabilities... So your partner comes along, so they do all that you know... So you will sit with a mobility consultant,

with your husband, or with your partner, and then they will take you through your package; they take you through your package with your partner!

4.4.2 Support during Pre-departure

The respondents shared their experience on the kind of support they received from both head office HR and host company HR. Those who received support declared that it was during the look-see visit and it was from the local HR.

Participant 9: *“they get me in touch with head of HR in the host country and when I went there for the look and see visit I went to see the schools and the medical centre that can support us”*. Many of the respondents did not think that the organisation cared about them. **Participant 11:** *“To be honest with you I got very little support from this side. No HR or local. Even to open up an account, or a greeting session”*. **Participant 8:** *“Even schools. You are literally on your own. You choose based on what you think.”* **Participant 13,** *“I think something that I was a bit surprised, compared to what I have seen it done in Operation – for instance I am not sure whether someone in HR knows where I live.”*

Participants 5 and 8 felt that there was no alignment between head office HR and host country HR in terms of preparation for expatriates respectively.

“There was miscommunication between Group as well as the operation. They don’t prep the host country to say she is arriving make sure this and that and that”.

“What I picked up is there is not really good integration between what the local HR to manage the look-see as well as the Group initiative. The two are not correlated. The Group side was doing their own thing whereas the local side... so I picked up there wasn’t alignment. ”

Support from family is one of the sub-themes that emerged during the interview. Participant 5 and 8 revealed it was easy for them to get support from their husbands as they are also travellers and one has experience working in foreign countries and the other wishes for this kind of opportunity in future for himself.

4.4.3 Characteristics that prepare expatriates for international assignment

Although most MNCs select expatriates based on their work performance and experience, most respondents were of a strong opinion that expatriation is not an easy task, one therefore needs to possess certain qualities to prepare for the assignment as displayed in Figure 6:

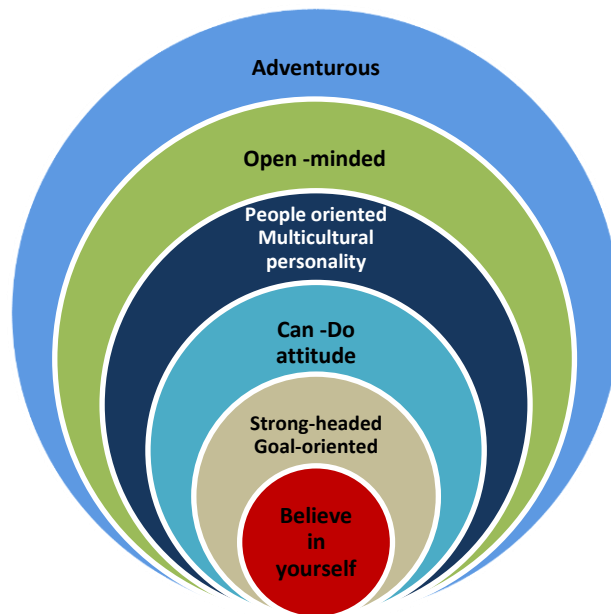


Figure 6: Characteristics that prepare expatriates for expatriation.

Participant 3 cited that it is as a result of his belief in himself that even today he is *“one the longest serving expats in one of the most difficult environments”*

As for Participants 1 and 2, being strong-headed and knowing what you want is the characteristic that prepared them, *“I am a very strong headed person so I always push and push and push for some things”* Whereas for Participants 1 and 4, having a “Can do” attitude is a great deal for being considered for these opportunities, *“My boss basically says I know you can do it, you just go. To be quite honest I am also like that.... I actually don’t look at an assignment with uncertainty in mind. An assignment is an assignment and I make it work my way. At the same time, Participant 4 revealed that he demonstrated a “can-do attitude” when he was on look-see visit and he found the operation in crisis. He*

had to step in to save the company and let his wife carry on with the look-see visit alone.

Participant 4 also is of the opinion that the starting point of an expatriate is for them *“to be someone who is very comfortable or enjoys interacting with people. That is the first thing...And I think if you send someone on an expatriation and they are not capable or have an inclination to interact with people, you might already be in danger of having a problem there”*

Lastly, some participants expressed open-mindedness and adventurous as good ingredients for an expatriate. Participant 10 even shared the advice that the first thing he does when going into a new country is to change his mind-set to referring to that host country as *“our country”*.

4.4.4 Impact of pre-departure preparation

Evidence from the interviews proved that pre-departure preparation does have an impact on expatriates in one way or another. Five sub-themes emerged out of this theme as outlined in Table 7:

Table 7: Impact of pre-departure preparation

Sub-theme	Impact	Supporting quotation
Work-related impact	Learn on the fly	Participant 1: “I was learning it as I was flying”. Participant 4: “I arrived in Benin, as I said...There hadn't been a CEO for five months. So there was no hand over, okay...was just dropped in and had to hit the road running”
	Information over-load	Participant 10: “I have had to try and catch up all of this information, it is a ton of information...you just get information overload and you are really trying to assimilate everything...So you are trying to do this ...between 11 and one in the morning literally”
	Difficult	Participant 13: “...it wasn't easy...and also for my previous employer because I was in the finance department there so for a CFO, if I want to use that word, I am a key employee; so you cannot release a key employee just 'like this'. You have to be prepared to take all the steps”
Emotional impact	Shock	Participant 1: “My first assignment I went and I was shocked. Participant 2: “So in general I was not really much shocked. The things that instantly shocked me was how other expatriates would behave”.
	Negatively surprised	Participant 10: “A negative surprise was on Company X offices, the offices look nothing like this. They are completely rundown”
Impact on family	School set-up	Participant 4: “It was a hectic issue, because that five months

		where I had just landed in a new place, my young daughter was with us, she had just started a new school, so I had to uproot her from school”.
	Uncertainty	Participant 12: “So it had some impact, because in our part of the world in Ghana, things work differently. For example ...so it was tough, and my family too – it was sudden; for my parents they were not sure whether I am still at Company X or whether I am leaving Company X”
Financial impact	Rented accommodation	Participant 12: “I also rented an apartment at the time and all that. And the luck I had with my rented apartment was that around the time I had two months to renew, so for me it was to say ‘do not renew’ because you are going to be away.”
Overall impact of pre-departure preparation	South Africans	Participant 3: “I think preparation for an assignment for a South African is probably 50% of the success.”

4.4.5 The role of coaching prior departure

When asked if they see coaching playing a role in expatriation, most respondents responded positively. Some believed that coaching did have a role to play during the first phase of the expatriate’ life cycle. They believed that first-time expatriates need coaching more.

Participant 7: *“I think it is a great idea, especially maybe in the beginning of their assignments, especially to familiarise them in the new culture they are moving into... a couple of the executives that we had ... coming from quite a culture... in cases that we had the European culture and they come here and the level of dissatisfaction is a lot, especially when they arrive.... I believe that can have a huge impact, positive influence on the whole organisation.”*

Participant 11: *“Especially if you are a first time expat there are a lot of things you don’t know. You don’t know too much about schooling, the benefits, how the benefits work, and offshore accounts.”*

Participant 11 added by stressing that coaching should also be extended to the family remaining at home to equip them with coping skills.” *the family takes quite a beating because if they are not there with you there must be some coaching on both sides so that people know how to deal with the separation, know how to deal and understand the time and leave spent together. Also the different support structures you need, if you are going to leave your family and go.”*

Participant 5, on the other hand, was of the opinion that coaching should be on on-boarding, *“there must be a proper coaching and a proper assistant on the on-boarding process which we lack. The coaching is just not there”*. Participant 7 concurs with her, however he suggests that coaching for orientation can be done telephonically, *“ My suggestion is a little bit before they go somewhere by way of maybe telephonic conversation or a couple of days orientation.”*

Although respondents believed that coaching does have a role to prepare expatriates prior to departure, some suggested that the coach must have expatriate experience.

4.5 Results pertaining to Research Question 2

This section of the report looks at findings related to research question 2 per theme.

4.5.1 Experiences of expatriates in host country

The respondents had a variety of experiences in their different host countries. The findings of their experiences are presented in three sub-themes as displayed in Figure 7:

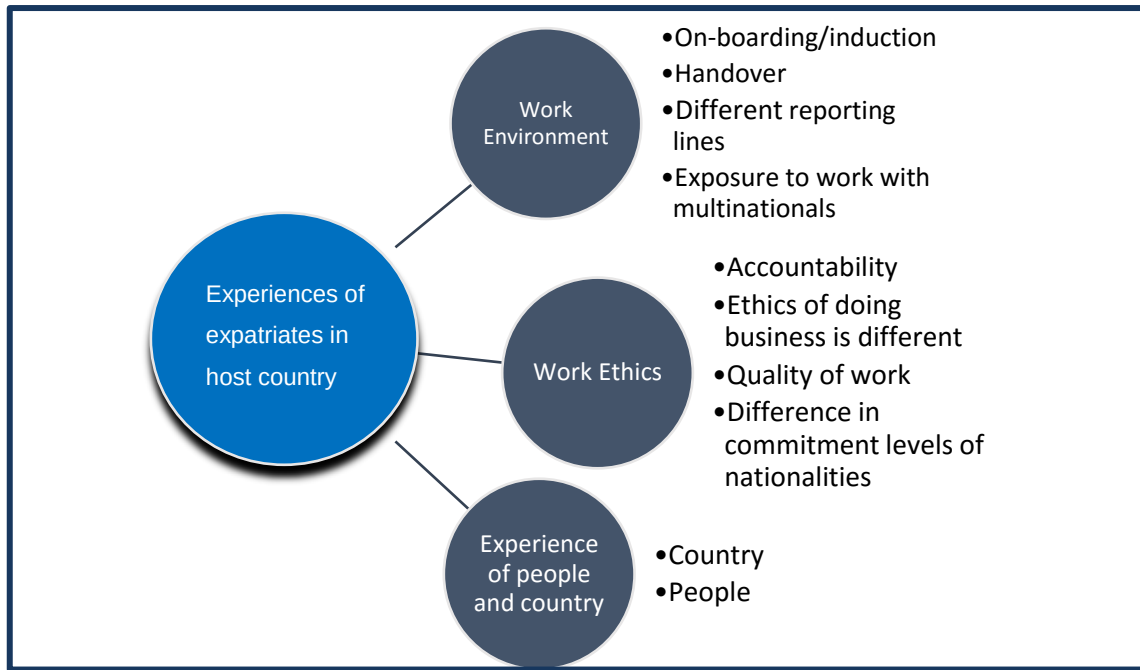


Figure 7: Sub-themes of experiences of expatriates in host country

The evidence gathered on expatriates' experiences in the host country is outlined in Table 4.3 in the form of verbal quotations from respondents.

Table 8: Sub-themes of experiences of expatriates in host country

Sub-theme	Impact	Supporting quotation
Work environment	On-boarding (<i>disappointed</i>)	Participant 1: "No. That is the one sad thing about Company X, and not only me, you can speak to others you actually don't get on-boarding. You are expected to perform miracles. You are given a job... in fact you are just being told you are the CEO of this operations go out and get it done. No-no. You actually get there and have to figure out what to do and every month you are exposed to a monthly review to tell them why things are not going the way they should." Participant 8: "From a Group perspective, I didn't get any... there was nothing that was done to basically help with the transition."
	On-boarding (<i>Pleasantly surprised</i>)	Participant 9: "I have been surprising well for something. I did this kind of position in the past, but when I joined Company X I realised that they planned something for us ... called an on-boarding pack....I think it is a good process". Participant 11: "...It is always very good in that they had set up a whole lot of inductions before I came there, for various heads of department or whatever, and they took me through". Participant 15: "And then ... from an executive perspective we have just recently put in the whole executive on-boarding. The on-boarding is also for the family as well"
	On-boarding (<i>Roles were not clear</i>)	Participant 12: "I don't remember if I went for induction... But for me it wasn't solid as to 'this is your clear cut responsibility'; we were a bit all over the place, doing a bit of everything". Participant 11: "...So if you are asking whether somebody sat down and made it clear – I am going to tell you no... but when you get to

		the operation, you need to be very clear about what your role is in the operation and sometimes I think operation and group need to tell you what is protocol.”
	Handover (undermined)	Participant 4: “No handover. So I don’t think that is ideal and I think maybe we are a bit lax about things like that. So if we can do it we do it, but if not, we are also comfortable to say ‘just get the person in’.” Participant 10: “I had a bit of a discussion with MK on the first day (the predecessor) for an hour on the phone - that was a little bit different. It might have been a bit better – but he had already left.”
	Reporting lines	Participant 12: “Coming here I would say the structures were there but I felt like ‘you are on your own’ at the beginning... and the way I know work environment from where I came from, the bosses will pass on information readily, and they will involve you more. But coming here was a bit of a shift...Ja, so the reporting lines also were not clear...”
	Growth and opportunity to work with multinationals	Participant 13: “So this is something also different and working with people from different companies, different countries, it is a good experience for me...also working with consultantexactly! And not only... because now for the operations, the processes, you are seen as a consultant, so when I was in the operations I was the one saying ‘I want this, I want that’. Now ...you are no more customer – you are the supplier.”
Sub-theme	Impact	Supporting quotation
Work ethics	Accountability	Participant 8: “Secondly, I think accountability is still a problem. When somebody takes responsibility end to end for something. I don’t think that is the case. If there is something they are required to do they will do it but there is no walking on fire to make sure it gets delivered because you are accountable. That still needs a bit of work... I feel people don’t feel they are part of the solution. It is more like a job.” Participant 1: “For example, in South Sudan when I arrived there was no concept of time and there was no concept of reporting... I do whatever I do, whenever it is time for me to tell you if you ask me I will tell you...” Participant 12: “So I would say in SA the work ethics is much more solid than in Ghana. Why I say that is because over here we are results-driven, which means we try to get there in time with less resources; whereas in Ghana time is not really a factor. People work either in their leisure or by whatever...in meetings in Ghana people are late, they don’t respect time, but here time is a very good thing”.
	Ethics of doing business	Participant 14: “When you do business in South Africa it is very Western in thinking in terms of I meet you now, we never met each other, we conduct an interview and you walk your way and I walk my way. That is a very Western way. In Nigeria you never get this. For an average Nigerian I have to know you or we have to meet two/three times, have dinner/lunch before I sit down and have this conversation with you... I am talking even the business, doing deals. It is a very Africa, East way of doing things. We talk about that is the way of doing business” Participant 2: “Another thing is the differences that in SA if you go to the Department of Labour things will be done; there is a process that needs to be followed. In Nigeria there is no process, so when you get there money talks. To be honest with you money talks... But in SA you can put in an application and not talk to anybody and things will be done. So it is more relationship in Nigeria – more than here.”
	Quality of work (Related to skills and	Participant 5: “Quality is okay. Performance is okay especially if you have a proper relationship as a supervisor to your group. It is more like getting the buy-in and then after that you can be able to

	performance)	manoeuvre the relationship and make them perform. I am talking specifically about my department in Bissau. The quality of the work is poor. Performance is poor. That is South Sudan....Performance and quality is low because they lack the skills.” Participant 14: “On average I would say it is relatively weak compared to South Africa. Even though you still get the commitment but quality of work is not the same as South Africa. Again, don’t use that as a blanket statement because you get Nigerians who are trained in London, who are trained in Canada who come back and this person is strong and well-travelled so their exposure as well helps”.
Sub-theme	Impact	Supporting quotation
Work ethics	Difference in commitment levels	Participant 2: “Nigerians are hard-working, they say their mind, and so a person will sit in a meeting and tell you ‘You know South Africans are a bit modest’. But again in Nigeria people are hard-working because there is no second job. In SA people are saying ‘Well I will apply, if it is not Company O, I can go somewhere else’. So there is not that level – in Nigeria if someone is sick that person will still come to work. But in SA if a mosquito bites my finger I will have sick leave! I will not come! ...in SA I would say people see work as I will say that they are doing the company a favour, but in Nigeria an employee sees it as the company is doing him a favour” Participant 14: “You find that Nigerians are much more committed. They are hard workers, they are committed. They can push work and they are pretty much focused...Nigerians are very confident. They have a confidence you see coming out. Very confident people” Participant 5: “Other departments in Guinea Bissau you would find that commitment is low, performance is low...Bissau is different. Commitment is lacking because there is that sense of entitlement”.
Experience of people and country	Country	Participant 2: “For me I enjoy the experience. Like there was everything positive about the experience because I also took it personal; I took it positive and said ‘I am here to learn’. I saw it as an opportunity of a life-time and it was ‘wow, I am finally here in the place where my husband was born’ and my kids will experience that.” Participant 7: “I was feeling... for a while I was overwhelmed. Also the driving side was different from my country so I was feeling overwhelmed because I couldn’t process all these differences. Slowly I was trying to learn little by little bit. I can say after six/seven months I was feeling quite relaxed.” Participant 11: “Ghana as a country, I mean I never had any issues. As a country it was easy to live in, it is predominantly English speaking so that made it easy. I had all of the luxuries that I have at home – I had movies, I had the mall, it is a little bit more expensive but it is fine...Obviously roads and things, traffic and that, which was a little bit of a hassle....”
Experience of people and country	People	Participant 5: “They look at somebody like me, tiny in my leggings and I am trying to go there. Automatically I am not a local. I look petite and all of that. They will harass me why am I going to that section? I look at the people and I am like what if I had dollars to want to go and build a school for you people here.” Participant 6: Their attitudes, their outlook to life, their skills levels, their level of aggression you find in every single person, their hatred for foreigners – every sort of thing – I mean the people aspect was for me the big surprise and there are just not enough words, or words, to describe it to you. And that I wasn’t prepared for. I don’t think anybody that hadn’t lived in the country could have prepared me for it” Participant 7: “Also in terms of your culture I think there was lots of differences in South Africa. For example in Iran the culture is very

		different and normally you can expect everything quite fast from people and if you are not collaborating you can go to them and speak out and get something done. I realised in South Africa I was lost initially because initially I tried to be friendly but then I felt certain things are not working. Then I tried to be a little bit formal but I realised certain requests were being ignored. Then without my just willingness but out of frustration I became a bit sensitive and overreacting and then I felt that okay I am getting worse results. I was lost.” Participant 10: “So I am loving it, it will be fun”
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4.5.2 *Balancing Head Office (HO) and Host country expectations*

How expatriates balance Head Office and Host country’s expectations appeared to be one of the most difficult questions the respondents had to answer. Some became emotional and the researcher could see the frustrations through their body language and tone of voice when answering the question. The responses are categorised in the following sub-themes:



Figure 8: Sub-themes on a balance between Head Office and Host Country’s expectations

These sub-themes are presented in the form of respondents’ quotation in Table 9:

Table 9: Responses related to balancing Head Office and Host country expectations

Sub-theme	Impact	Supporting quotation
No alignment between HO and Host country	Continuous struggle	Participant 1: "There is no alignment whatsoever...What we tend to do is that we actually don't have a policy that is grounded" Participant 2: "The only frustration again that I have as an HR manager is 1000 interventions that come from head office, and they don't talk to me. They will say 'oh we are celebrating women's day' for example you know? It's August, Women's Day, send it out to everybody, send us pictures. And I say 'it's not happening in Nigeria'." Participant 3: "That was always difficult because we had different shareholders with different expectations. And trying to balance that was quite interesting because (1) what you try to do is to ensure that you uphold the values and the mandate of the organisation that is sending you – so in this instance it was Group Head Office – and then you need to balance that with the expectations of the local shareholders on the ground" Participant 6: "No! Those two didn't talk to each other. (<i>shook head</i>) ...I cannot be talking leadership, talent and whatever and fancy things, when I am busy trying to teach someone how to use a toilet set (<i>becomes aggressive</i>) That is how bad and basic it is..." Participant 8: "That has been a continuous struggle and obviously people don't experience it very positively so there are some negative comments about that – you are not satisfied with what we do, etc. but... so people realise that there is a different benchmark." Participant 4: "I think at the end of the day it brings a lot of pressure to bear on an expatriate, especially in the role I was playing ... as the CEO, it becomes a very lonely place, because that is where the buck stops."
	HO puts too much pressure on expatriates	Participant 4: "... I will just describe it as pressure. Uninformed pressure. So you get bombarded with emails from all different people, every day, and sometimes asking you for the same thing, you know? ... there is no conversation about support, because group doesn't support, group just issues instructions." Participant 7: "In a couple of cases there were high expectations but maybe I was not trained for those things..." Participant 10: "Ja, it is difficult. It has been quite difficult, so like I just received an email from Head Office saying they want strategic priorities by Monday. Head Office has to think things through. I am here now, that document cannot be done by Monday, I only arrive back on Sunday night. I need to check if my team is ready, and say please can we have an extension."
HO has a SA mentality	HO does not understand what is going on in host country	Participant 1: "My view is Head Office don't actually feel or see what we see. They have these grand ideas and grand strategies that they want to roll out, but in most cases they don't fit to local content...South Africans will always view things as South Africans..." Participant 2: "I want to design a policy on maternity leave'. So what Head Office will do is they will send me the South African one and I will scrap it, change it and do everything else" Participant 5: "You can be there in Guinea Bissau but you forget and you sit now in that nice office and then you demand from HR. Have you engaged at that level to understand what the shortcomings are? Do you know there are even resources that

		are supporting you?" Participant 6: "Head Office is there and South Sudan is there, and there isn't in my view a concerted effort to try and bridge that gap in terms of understanding"
Head Office must localise	Localisation is inevitable	Participant 5: "Rwanda operation is not like a South Sudan operation. Nigeria operation is not like a South Sudan operation. A Nigeria operation and a Cameroon operation are too different. That alignment and proper support must be because people have that understanding, experience of being in both worlds." Participant 8: "...sometimes Head Office will come up with a name and when translated it means something derogatory so you can't use it. We have to get back to them and say, unfortunately you can't use it."
Continuous Communication is key	Ensure alignment	Participant 1: "One of the issues that is a hindrance to companies achieving their objectives is communication. In those markets you communicate and communicate and communicate. It would be a mistake for management to actually go out and expect that you will speak to people and they will get things done. In those markets you try and make sure that you get the best or the maximum out of an individual whether a driver or whatever" Participant 4: "But the glue, the fact that you have communicated and shared with them, has brought something different, and you speak their language – it helps you to just navigate those differences; they become small, they don't become mountains... So communication is a very important thing" Participant 8: "Very clearly my way of work I make sure that I communicate that continuously to everyone to say this is a Head Office priority but there is a Head Office mandate. In terms of hierarchy everyone knows that Head Office priorities supersede everything so I make sure I create visibility on that...Definitely it is a Head Office priority..."
Expatriation brings alignment	Buy-in from locals	Participant 3: "...If you lose them along the way they have the ability and easy access to things that can frustrate you, that can make life difficult for you. So while you are balancing a head office agenda you also need to make sure that you take the local operation and people along with you." Participant 8: "Then where required where we have to manage and push back on the local considerations then I will set up a teleconference and have that conversation with Head Office to make sure they understand where we are coming from". Participant 1: "...That is why I say lead by example. I will work with them throughout. If I say the meeting starts at 08h00, All the time, I am on time, I am there and I am prepared. If I say there is a deadline I meet the deadline before them..."

4.5.3 Challenges experienced during the assignment

All respondents interviewed have experienced some kind of challenge during the assignment or while supporting the expatriates. The type of challenges, however, vary. Some are dependent on the political or economic status of the host country, whilst others depend on the expatriate's experience. Figure 9 illustrates the sub-themes that came out of the transcripts.



Figure 9: Challenges experienced by expatriates during the assignment

Table 10: Sub-themes on challenges during the assignment

Challenge	Supporting quotation
Adjustment	Participant 4: "Oh probably a month or two..... If I look at the very first place I went to on assignment I would say it probably took me half a year to settle in, but" now it is very quick" Participant 8: "Probably like six months."
Cultural difference	Participant 12: "Okay, so the human part of it is also a big shift. In Ghana where I come from people are more friendly, even on the job, but ... I am sure you know about this, where in Africa or West Africa you shake hands and what; when you come here you... no shake hands, it is only maybe for the first time they meet you, you shake hands – and that is it." Participant 1: ".... In South Africa for example, we are individuals. I talk for myself and only myself. In the many countries that I have been we talk for ourselves. For example, in South Sudan there was also this thing that... for example, "Inshallah" God permitting. You now so you said to someone can you do this for me "Inshallah". You have to basically believe that God is basically going to allow it to happen... Each and every country has its own nuances that one has to understand and try and pick up the good things to actually get the job done." Participant 4: "You will get people smiling and talking to you and agreeing with you, but somehow you don't seem to be moving because the resistance is under here, it is hidden. There is a hidden resistance, so you must be adaptable"
Acceptance by	Participant 3: "It also very important, constantly reminded you that you are always a guest in the country"

locals	Participant 5: "People were not comfortable around me....Because of my role and where I am coming from" Participant 8: "...so people generally look at you suspiciously and you are immediately an outsider. As soon as you are an outsider it positions you as them and us..." Participant 1: "When I went to Swaziland the first thing is you are South African and that actually gets mentioned several times. Straight on your face. It gets shouted at your face all the time..." Participant 6: "...if I can relate it to the South African context of apartheid and blacks and whites situation, except there it is Arabs and blacks. So you immediately come out of a phase like that and suspicion, you are suspicious about anything! And it takes them quite a while to recognise that you are not an oppressive person from the north."
Business ethics	Participant 5: "South Sudan is different. External engagement is really non-existent because people want to be bribed before you talk to them. People want something in return" Participant 8: "Either you fall in line or if you don't fall in line people can really work against you and sabotage or try and put... there are a lot of... like non-transparent things that happen in the background... The locals want to direct certain things to happen with certain companies. It is very subtle but it is very rife, it is very bad here..."
Unrealistic expectations from Head Office	Participant 6: "So it was a very difficult set up because you had an operation to run, and you really didn't have any funding to do this, so it was quite stressful... and it was bad, so to try and get it, I think the things we got to do in that country were crazy things... without additional funding coming to you, you have an infrastructure, so how do you become creative... but you have put me here as management to run this operation, to do what, how, why am I here? Do you understand?"
Poor skills levels	Participant 11: "My team here is not as skilled as in Ghana, but that is typical of the Tanzania environment, they come from a socialist background so the skills levels are a little bit lower." Participant 6: "But the biggest, biggest problem was your skills levels. With such levels of illiteracy, I think it was about – if I remember well – just about 23% or so, of literacy." Participant 5: "Yes, back to the basics. Who is Company X? What are their core objectives? ...do they even understand our structure; do they understand who is giving us the money; where we are taking the money right now? Those simple little things. So that is where I am starting"
Transitioning	Participant 9: "This is a key challenge for us. Because when implementing such an organisation, we need to bring in new spirit, taking for example the EBU, it is a business oriented, and we can see outside the company if we have commercial sense... This is something we should explain to the people within the company so that they can accept this transformation." Participant 10: "I have a very different style to MK in some ways: so I am inheriting a very successful business but like every successful business it can change... he is very much a people's person, and hugely strong on that... which but it is not something that I would want to do 100% of my time. So he is very much people, people, people, and I am probably more towards the numbers delivery, innovation, thinking outside of the box is good.. it is not my core strength, I can do it... So it is different styles. So it is very difficult for them...Now I think they are battling a bit with me." Participant 7: "Yes. So last year I became local. Financially yes because surely there are some benefits when you are on expat assignment."
Language	Participant 1: "Once you speak their language it goes a long way. When you have those meeting with the stakeholders and you speak in

	their language it goes a very long way. By the way they don't expect you to be perfect in their language..." Participant 4: "I speak, write and read French absolutely fluently, I conduct meetings in French" Participant 14: "No. Nigeria is purely English. The only thing that I found is, it is the most tribalistic country ever, I have ever found. You are either Yoruba or Igbo and appointments are based on that..."
Social life	Participant 12: "So it has been hard, it has been hard since I arrived. Because in my country you know everybody, you know your neighbour, you can easily make friends – to a place where everybody is stand-off. The best you get is a hello, you know, there is nothing like how are you or that – so it has been hard" Participant 8: "I mean for me the one thing about being an expat you work very hard and socially... I mean I don't really have a life socially". Participant 7: "Okay there were lots of changes in my social life. When I went to Dubai I think it was easier because there were lots of other people at the Company X office similar to myself. We had lots of young people... They were from all different countries having a bachelor lifestyle in Dubai... So we were all understanding each other and we could feel each other's pain..." Participant 14: "The social life is there but I don't have family to go to so I stay until 21h00..." Participant 9: "This is an issue for an expatriate, having a social life in a hosting country! Because of your position first, you are representing a very high profile company, and you don't know with whom you are interacting, so because you should be careful, so that it is kind of some restriction on your social life." Participant 11: "If I went out it was by myself. I went to the movies by myself, and sometimes I would go out by myself for dinner..."
Family	Participant 2: "...the challenge I experienced was that I went to Nigeria in September. It is the school year, the school year in SA runs from Jan to December, so my son could only join after he finished in December" Participant 3: "In Nigeria – no. In Iran – yes, my family did, for a short while, because our boys had to go to school so there was no international schooling at a certain level... we weren't happy with the international quality of the school, it was really not anything compared to what we receive in SA... So we decided to return, so they have not been with me since" Participant 11: "So my daughter started off and the first exam she was getting like 60s and 70s, and she was not impressed, because she was like at the 70 or 80 level when she left here, but after the first semester she was getting 80s and 90s. So I was getting worried..." Participant 14: "No you have to be in the host country to get the benefits. It is a decision that you have to take." Participant 13: "...the time for the school: in my country they go to school from 8 to 12, they have two hours break and they resume at 2 until 5. But here they end at 1 so you have to find either to look for an after care, and you also have to fetch your kids on time."
Well-being	Participant 8: "The food is a struggle. I mean it has been a real struggle. Generally whenever I go home or somebody goes home I tend to buy a lot of volume stock to keep us going here, like South African products". Participant 5: "In Guinea Bissau we did not have proper infrastructure. We did not have proper shops or supermarkets. We... if we were to buy things we would buy from Lebanese stores and mostly the goods have expired... we get food from home. We fly with food"... we have one toilet for how many people? A hundred and something. They don't have a kitchen or a pause area..."

	Participant 12: “I am still struggling with the food. I am not saying the food here is bad... there is an African market somewhere, I get a few of the things and I try it. But generally food is scanty, small- so you know we like the spices, there is no spice...” Participant 5: “The weather is too hot. The weather is ridiculous in both countries. It is the same actually.... You just get this funny rash. You don’t really... you can’t tell but the place is dirty. So even like the soil or the sand you really... you stay away from a lot of things... water” Participant 1: “I have never had malaria. So it's observe, learn and do what is right...”
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4.5.4 HR Mobility Managers’ view on challenges facing expatriates

Although expatriates have expressed the challenges they face during expatriation, their HR Mobility Managers also had their views on the subject:

According to Participant 2, most expatriates have wrong perceptions about locals. They see themselves as better and more knowledgeable than locals

“What the expatriates would do ... you are going to a new country and you feel like “Mrs know it all”, there is no one in Nigeria, I am the only one! So by the time they get there a lot of expatriates might have a lot of shoulder pads, you know they carry themselves too high and then the locals will now look at you and say ‘who do you think you are? You will not tell me anything”

On the other hand, Participant 15’s experience of expatriates is that some expatriates struggle with adjustment as there are high performance expectations from both Head Office and the Host country and it is even more challenging for those who have left family behind.

“So if your family is not with you it is an adjustment. That first six months as an expat you are almost on a high; you are settling in, you are finding furniture if it is not already done for you, you are learning the politics and you are working. Because you are going in and you have to ramp up, you have to prove yourself because no. 1) you are a foreigner in somebody else’s country, somebody else wanted that job, so you have to come in and prove yourself. So you are ramping up...”

At the same time, Participant 16's experience is that the challenge their expatriates face is that they are required to be independent and perform many roles.

"...they need to be more independent and get involved with all sorts of things, they will take full responsibility for the HR function, the marketing function, the management function, the finance function, with their heads of department...so we require independent, high degree of independence, the general manager must be able to navigate those challenges"

4.5.5 Support during international assignment

Regarding support during the assignment, comments from respondents revealed that support came from different sources.

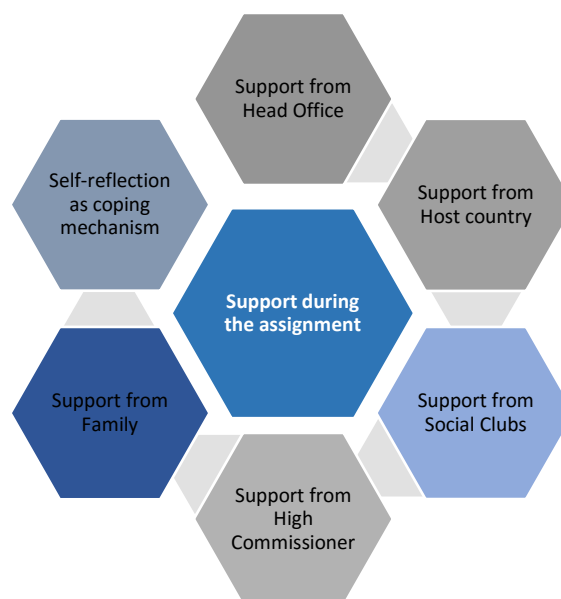


Figure 10: Sub-themes of support during the assignment

Table 11 outlines the quotes supporting the sub-themes of the kind of support the respondents received during their assignment. Some comments made were negative, others positive.

Table 11: Sub-themes on support during the assignment

Sub-theme	Supporting quotation
Support from Head Office	Participant 2: "The support is limited because head office does not understand my country. The support is there in terms of giving me the umbrella, but I design my own landscape" Participant 3: "Very little support. I guess because I was a seasoned professional and my own nature is such that I would do things. (<i>very confident-sits upright</i>) So very little support..." Participant 4: "To tell you the honest truth I wouldn't always, I wouldn't describe it as support, I will just describe it as pressure. Uninformed pressure" Participant 5: "There is no support. They don't support us. For me I normally say, before even supporting my department support the other functions" Participant 8: "...if there is any conversation between me and HR it is when I ask. Other than that there is nothing, nothing whatsoever. There is no engagement, nothing..." Participant 6: "For my role, I can say I had group support in the sense that I came from group, so I had contacts, I had relationships that I could call on to help me do stuff"
Support from Host country	Participant 4: "Fortunately when I arrived there it wasn't all bad and at least when I arrived in country the way I was received there by the HR department" Participant 9: "I think most of the support I am getting is in the local host company". Participant 2: "I get great support from the colleagues. I think the day I would say I am leaving Nigeria most of them will even petition and say "T" don't go!" Participant 11: "...so the first one to support the expats was ..., he even issued a statement to say when he left Ghana that the one thing he didn't do right was the expatriates' issues. .. Mr.R. was excellent in Ghana, he really took me in, he used to invite me for dinners, I would spend time with his family. It was like my family in Ghana...."
Support from social clubs	Participant 7: "...and then I was introduced to a platform called Inter-Nations. It is a great platform. It is designed for expats who are working out of their countries and it has got this community active in more than 120 countries including South Africa. You are both foreign with different backgrounds in another country... Meeting each other in our houses. Introducing, for example, different cuisines to each other... That was great" Participant 12: "...friends and colleagues around were also helping me in that manner. So just helping me to settle in. They were very, very, very supportive and receptive...I had to join a few clubs, like there is an expat group. So we meet sometimes, maybe every two weeks and we go somewhere, meet each other ... And then make new friends and colleagues... it is mainly for expatriates who are away from home and we come together,." Participant 13: "...sometimes I can say I had opportunity to go out because they have something they call a community of expats in SA. I have registered to this community and because I didn't have a maid at home I went there only once." Participant 14: "Yes. My group all basically sit in different countries. We have formal meetings and informal meetings. We always share experiences and move around. We get to move around and see how other people are explaining..."
Support from High Commissioner	Participant 1: "The first thing I do is I am looking for the Embassy, the UN Offices. Those I know one way or another the UN you will find those cosmopolitan and diverse sort of people and whatever. At some point there will be two/three/or four that you click with" Participant 8: "The one thing that also helps here, in the South African High Commission Office they are really doing some work. They are trying their best to make us comfortable."
Self-reflection	Participant 8: "The coping mechanisms are really self...I think it is just self-reflection"

4.5.6 HR Mobility Managers' view on support provided during the assignment

Although expatriates mentioned various support structures required during their stay in host countries, the HR Mobility managers mentioned minimal support required or provided during that period. Below are some of their comments:

Table 12: Sub-themes on HR mobility managers' support

Sub-theme	Supporting quotation
Support from Head Office	Participant 15: "Guys who have been in the same country for six years, they tend to not need the support. The expats who have been expats for a number of years don't need the support the same as any new person would" Participant 16: "...head office supports them on the issues, pension, insurances"
Support on expats performance	Participant 16: "So you can't just apply what you did here, so they need to understand that there are certain core operating processes and procedures that are non-negotiable... so we require independent, high degree of independence, the general manager must be able to navigate those challenges" Participant 15: "Ja, they have gone through their induction etc. And then we keep tabs on them as we go through their assignment... we don't always go to the individual, we often check with HR. I would like to, but we have over 100 expats and there are two of us... We try, I know we don't manage it and I know it is people's biggest gripe, at least one of their gripes, but we do not have the capacity"
Support from Host country	Participant 15: "That varies depending on the operation. For example in Nigeria, you know that team, they are so good, they will manage it and let us know when there is a problem... If the person is not managing we will then exit them, but we will do all the exit procedures with them"
Expats development	Participant 15: No. Expats, technically speaking – and it is something I have disagreed with for many years – expats are experts, which means that in terms of their development, they trained in that kind of thing, they should already have it, going into that job. They are there. It is an expectation, they are there to impart knowledge, skills, etc., in the organisation, for the two years, and then pull out... we don't manage their development, no- but we would like to, ... we don't have enough staff. So we work with the HR heads and the CEOs in country" Participant 16: "We provide the support locally, from South Africa, the training support and development if that is necessary...In fact we are, we are, ... you are trying to assert your culture and values, so you need to retain your identity, so they come down for conferences, they come down for regular meetings, they are not operating in isolation... But their needs might be slightly different ..." Expats development on technical skills: Participant 15: "Yes, to a degree it is: if you are hiring somebody who is going to a technical field and your business changes while that person is on assignment and they are required to go through specific training, yes..."

4.5.7 Expatriates experience with external stakeholders

Although the majority of respondents found it challenging to deal with external stakeholders in the host country, others found it a pleasant experience.

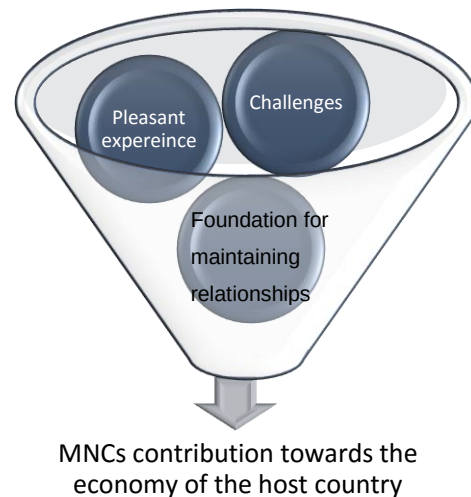


Figure 11: Expatriates' experience with external stakeholders

The general experience from the respondents with external stakeholders was positive. The majority seem to have been well received and coping well.

Participant 2: *"...they see me as an in-law, so they welcome me very well, I mean sometimes at the airport if I am with my colleagues, they will say 'ooh our wife is here!'...when you go for meetings, you go somewhere, don't go alone as a foreigner, and always take along a local employee..."*

Participant 5: *"It is a situation where when they hear you are from South Africa they already have confidence in you that you know and you are going to assist them"*

Speaking the local language was proven to be a strong advantage when dealing with external stakeholders during the interviews.

Participant 4: *"in my first meeting with the minister of communications, I walked into his office, I was introduced, we sat down, he had been told I am South African, and the first question that came out of his mouth, in English, he said to me 'but you know this is a French-speaking country, how are you going to cope?' And I responded in French, I said 'Honourable Minister, I speak French, we can carry on in French if you so wish'.*

He jumped off his seat and hugged me... if we can send people to a place who already speak the language, it will make that work, the journey a little bit different"

Participant 1: *"I mean I go into government meetings where they say to me, our English is not that great... I say no, no "Creole"... I battle with my "Creole" but we get somewhere. That actually eases the tension as well. You walk into a community and you start speaking their language and it opens the doors...I found when we literally go to those villages and talk to those communities in their local language...you get a long way to actually getting the buy in."*

Participant 5: *"There were challenges, especially the formal meetings. I would take one of my managers. One of my managers studied in Amsterdam and he is from Guinea Bissau and he was very fluent so I would take him with."*

Participant 10: *"Language makes it a little bit tougher, but they are pretty good"*.

A mixture of challenges the expatriates are experiencing when dealing with external stakeholders came out in this study.

Majority of the respondents expressed a need to earn the stakeholders' trust.

Participant 1: *"They must actually see that you are actually doing it because you feel it. Then you get that buy in and you get that support"*

Participant 8: *"That has taken time. It is only once people engage you that they realise. No I mean I think there is a higher expectation because they want you to prove your worth, what was the whole purpose of you being brought across, what is it that you are bringing that a local person couldn't deliver"*

Participant 12: *"So most of the time, after I deal with external people they ask me 'where are you originally from? 'You know? Because first they think okay we are dealing with somebody from local or whatever, then they are like 'no, no, this person, there is nothing local here, let me just find out'. You know? Before you realise oh okay, okay, okay. So it is always like that, even if I was in Ghana and there were external people, people want to first tap in and see what is here, and then they start to arrive. So it wasn't a problem."*

Participant 13: *"Now working with external stakeholders most of them are in the project; they are external... everything that you say they want to go and confirm with someone else."*

Although the respondents seemed to be doing or have done well in working with external stakeholders in host countries, they have shared certain attributes which they believe are the foundation for maintaining stakeholder relations in host countries.



Figure 12: The foundation for maintaining stakeholder relationships

4.5.8 The role of coaching during international assignment

When asked if they see coaching playing a role during this second phase of the expatriate' life cycle, most respondents responded positively. Some of them first shared their previous coaching experience even if it was outside the expatriation, and then made their contribution on how they see coaching playing a role.

Table 13: Perceived role of coaching during international assignment

Sub-theme	Supporting quotations
Previous coaching experience	Participant 2: "...Now that I am exposed to coaching, companies need to wake up and realise you know a lot of expatriates come back and they leave the company. Most of them. Participant 8: "Yes I have been... with Company X... a type of coaching, an executive coaching programme in my time in South Africa before I came here." Participant 9: "Actually I am getting coaching from the group. The Group has appointed a consulting firm that is following my on-boarding activities actually, so I am having some times some sessions with them you know... so we can improve the effectiveness of the team. That is a very good initiative. It is good, good. Good so far (<i>smiles</i>).... I get positive

	feedback of what you yourself want to implement, and that which is happening”. Participant 10: “We had the coaching sessions which were quite cool, I had never done that before in my life by the way – ever” Participant 14: “...you had to find a coach within Company O and a coach outside Company O and then we had to... the guys had to take you through in terms of what you must do and what you must get out of coaching. It was looking at both soft and hard skills. It was more soft skills, the emotional intelligence part of it. It was a little bit of a maturing of the hearts”. Participant 7: “I had four coaching sessions with WITS University when I was doing my MBA. It was part of the course mandatory and out of the class sessions, ... we would go together through what I am doing at work, my ambitions, what I intended to gain out of my MBA as values and also she gave me very good advice...I learnt a lot also at that time”
Perceived value of coaching programmes	Self-awareness and feedback Participant 7: “...I thought it was a waste of time ... they were very open to hear what I was saying, They were more listeners than being the talker and that was very impressive. ...The other side was responsive, receptive and then giving me their version without any bias or prejudice. ... I was quite shocked when I saw certain feedback which mostly they are blind-spots. Initially I was defensive and she was trying to encourage me to look at the positive ones... I think there were a couple of blind-spots that consciously I was not that aware of.” Builds networking skills Participant 14: “Networking, I was never good at it but through GIBS I managed to pick it up over. Countries like Nigeria business happens at night” Unlocks potential Participant 10: “...but the coaching helped in that it gave me a chance to express things where I am thinking ‘you must ease off a bit here’ or ‘maybe you shouldn’t...Humility in leadership is a very important thing and we discussed it in the coaching, So if you come across arrogant then no one will work with you”.
Recommended role of coaching	Participant 7: “...my personal view is it would be great if within the first year of their assignment they can have coaching sessions for themselves. They are still new in that context...but much more sessions during the first year of their assignment...Inside them they know that there might be a level of change needed because of change in the environment...Otherwise I feel that if they get to know certain elements of coaching, especially cultural points after a few years the impact for them wouldn’t be that much because by then they have adopted another way of dealing with that situation...” Participant 2: “You know because you are training me in SA, although the training is good, but have somebody on the other side whether a colleague mentor or coach, but have somebody on the other side who is contracted by us, somebody I can talk to about my day to day challenges...the first three months of an expatriate moving on the other side, I think that can help to settle in the family. So even when you are on the other side within that three months we can have one session with the family now in Nigeria, being run by a Nigerian”
Possible focus areas for coaching	Family: Participant 2: Yes. They both need that in the country that is run by the local person. Yes, somebody who would just deal with expatriates: how do they now adapt into Nigeria” Participant 1: “...during the coaching I think there must be emphasis as well being put into the other half and not only the executive that is going. I

	tend to see this coaching as more designed for the assignee and not for the family.” Socialisation: Participant 1: “...like expatriate clubs, there is socialisation...how do I take an executive housewife into those environments where she probably has to interact with other wives of expatriates that were in business. How does she get to that level of fitting? We never actually talked about that. The whole emphasis was how we learn the cultures.” Financial management: Participant 2: “I would make sure that they understand also the financial aspect of it. The financial aspect of it is a very big thing for expats...I speak to a lot of expatriates and the money part of it is the biggest contributor to be honest. . I was earning R20000 now I am going to earn R60000 – it is a big leap – and people don’t know how to manage it. So expats also need that...” Transitioning: Participant 2: “I would contract and have coaches in country that will be with expatriates the first three months, when they come in, the first three months, and then the last three months when they are leaving” On-going and predefined: Participant 11: I think it needs to be quite a predefined session, it needs to be on-going, for you to see the benefits. It needs time and on both occasions I don’t think I took enough time to be able to...” Career advancing: Participant 2: If there can be you know that thing of saying “coaching on the axis”, where they ask to send you outside, how do we now take your experience and infuse it in the organisation?
Recommended role of coaching	Participant 1: “Yes definitely. Definitely. You know the interesting thing also is it shouldn’t be psychology. Participant 4: “Very much so. I think especially in country, we could take what I said about having an experience peer to be a sounding board, almost like a coach Participant 4: “I definitely think there could be, especially because of the unique circumstance of being an outsider in the market Participant 11: “I have, when I was with Company X before I left for Ghana, so about 3 years before I left to go to Ghana I had a personal coach.... So I did have a coach...It was very good. looks better, (talks with interest and different tone) Look Company X paid I think for us to like meet and talk but then the whole coaching programme just fell away, ...I had a coach in WITS, we did about three or four sessions”
Recommended coach	Participant 2: “...everything should not be South African-centric; if you are sending somebody to Benin, have somebody in Benin who will coach that person....”

4.5.9 HR Mobility Managers' view on the role of coaching during assignment

Although one respondents' perception of coaching was to correct wrong doings, they all believe that executive coaching does have a role during the expatriates' assignment.

Participant 16: *"...I think there is an argument that could be made that they perhaps would have more areas of coaching that they would benefit from...But practically I don't think it's as easy as that ... There is plenty of head office support and lots of interventions that can happen to avoid things going wrong or going pear shaped. But the sort of executive coaching, I think if they were closer they might participate more."*

Others see coaching as more than expatriate preparation training.

Participant 15: *"If we look at the way we do our expat management, yes we send them in to impart knowledge, etc. I think the coaching plays a very real role in terms of individuals of different cultures. Yes they go on expat preparation training and they have all of that, but to have somebody that they can go to when they have these issues I think is a big thing. Managing somebody from Pakistan vs managing somebody from SA, dealing with those different dynamics, is very different. To have somebody who can coach you through that, almost be your sounding board... I think to have that would be very important"*.

The HR mobility Managers have different views about aspects where coaching can play a role. Some of their views differ from those of expatriates themselves:

Table 14: Perceived role of coaching by HR Mobility managers

Sub-theme	Supporting quotations
Leading in different cultures	Participant 15: "... you require leadership skills at say executive level pretty much the same as you require here but you are dealing with different cultures"
Handling political nuances in-country	Participant 15: ".....you also dealing with different politics – politics in Guinea Bissau in terms of dealing with government, that kind of thing...if you have been a GM in Nigeria or a GM in Cameroon and you go into Uganda as an executive, you have never had that experience. You don't know how to deal at that level. And I think often we throw the people to the wolves. That level of coaching I think would be appropriate"
Adjustment	Participant 2: "You know because you are training me in SA...but have somebody on the other side whether a colleague mentor or coach... somebody I can talk to about my day to day challenges.... the first three months of an expatriate moving on the other side, I think that can help to settle in the family...we can have one session with the family now in Nigeria, being run by a Nigerian"
Transitioning	Participant 15: "...Going below executive I wouldn't say so, but you are looking at somebody who is GM, you are looking at somebody who is in your succession pool; I think having somebody to coach them to the next level in terms of leadership skills, in terms of external-internal politics and learning to deal with government politics, etc." Participant 16: "I think it all depends on the evolution of the organisation because if you are affecting change management where you are really trying to deliberately drive a cultural shift and different performance expectation, then you would need to evaluate...I think it increases, bit of panel beating or coaching as you put it... Initially it's getting to grips with performing the job..."
Coach should be regional specific	Participant 2: "...everything should not be South African-centric; if you are sending somebody to Benin, have somebody in Benin who will coach that person..." Participant 15: "I would say more specific region. You can have a regional person. Yes. Nigeria is very different, so maybe there a Nigeria coach – specific – is one thing. But when someone is used to dealing with Francophone and that kind of thing, and the West Africa I think is fairly similar, they have slightly different nuances, but West to East is completely different. So I think having regional coaches would probably be a good thing"

Overall, most respondents see coaching playing a large role during the international assignment.

4.6 Results pertaining to Research Question 3

This section of the report looks at the findings related to research question 3 per theme. The interview data has revealed that repatriation is one of the weaknesses in two out of the three multinational corporates interviewed. A few themes came out of the interview data, and evidence shows that at the centre is the repatriation strategy

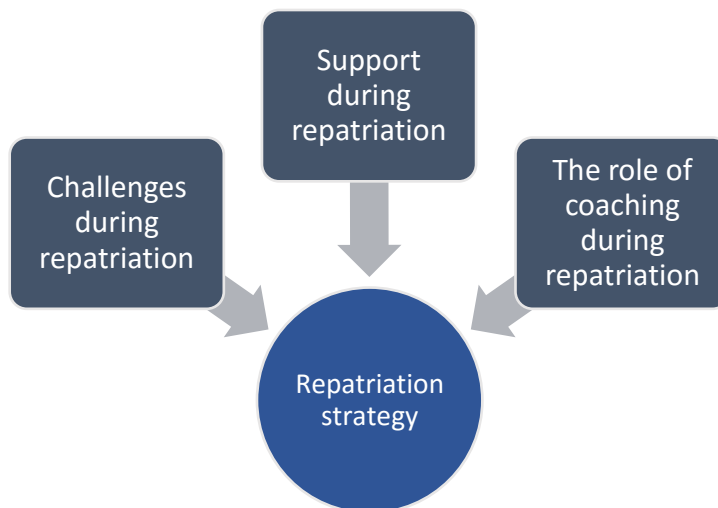


Figure 13: Themes emerged from expatriates experiences during repatriation

4.6.1 *Repatriation strategy*

Repatriation strategy emerged as the most critical and the starting point for repatriation experience. Respondents had different experiences of the strategy. Some felt there is no strategy that talks about repatriation in their experience, whereas others felt it is there, but not clear. The following sub-themes emerged out of this theme.

Table 15: Sub-themes on repatriation strategy

Sub-theme	Supporting quotation
No repatriation planning	Participant 1: “I have never been. ... what is an interesting one for me is I finished my term and I get allocated to another country before I even think about... it has happened for as long as I can remember. Right away. I never sort of come back. I don't even know what I am going to do when I come back ...because first of all there is no expatriation policy...” Participant 3: “The repatriation was a bit of a challenge, there was no preparation for repatriation...I chose to return, I had been there for seven years in Iran. For the other countries the contract had ended, so there wasn't really...” Participant 4: “No, my contract was about to expire but they had already notified me that it would be renewed and then I got a call about a group executive position and I went through a sort of interview type process and then I was selected” Participant 5: “No repatriation....No. My assignment in Guinea Bissau did not come to an end. It was coming to an end in four months before I left and then we had another guy who was supposed to start the function in South Sudan ... he asked me that we swap. We swapped” Participant 6: “This organisation ... would have kept me in South Sudan as long as I could take it, if it were up to them – if I didn't put my foot down and say ‘I am leaving’ I would still be there, and probably they would probably only take me out the day they hear I have had a breakdown. Because I had attempted a number of times to say ‘I am not coming back’ but then there was always a ‘please stay longer, please do another six months or whatever’. Until I decided that this is it, I am not going to stay any longer” Participant 11: “Ja. So I told them I am leaving because I wasn't prepared to stay another year, there was no way I was staying another year...So I gave them notice.”
No repatriation policy	Participant 1: “There is no expatriation policy. Maybe it is there but we don't know.... I don't think that we've planned this international business that well. It has actually happened by default. It is a sad thing...but we don't have a story to write about...At some point with this localisation you have to accept that there will be a time when all these people you have sent out have to come back. What do you do with them once they are back?”

	Participant 3: “No, in 2012 I went and then I relocated to Dubai for a short while and then I came to SA on a project, then I was still a Dubai employee and I travelled between the two, then I was at the group and took up the assignment at the group”. Participant 6: “I guess there was no preparation to say if I leave then what happens, who continues or takes over? I just had to be firm and say ‘I am not coming back...And to remind you that also in the previous December we actually had to evacuate from a full blown civil war or whatever you want to call it. And I still went back.”
Lack of career plans for expatriates	Participant 2: “... companies need to wake up and realise you know a lot of expatriates come back and they leave the company. Most of them...And I also experienced colleagues, when we speak as expatriates, all of them are saying ‘when I go back I am going there to give notice and I go’... but the company itself does not tap on that experience.” Participant 4: “I think one of the things is sometimes when you are outside as an expatriate for a while, the biggest complaint is you get forgotten. So when you come back sometimes you don’t even find a place to land. ...You might just be put in a corner because there is no job for you.” This statement is keeping with Allen and Alvarez (1998)’s belief that overseas assignments sometimes result in an "Out of Sight, Out of Mind" situation for expatriates. Participant 6: “Look... I was lucky that when I came back, or just before I came back there was shared services...they could not fill the roles, or the roles they needed to fill with equity candidates.... So I was asked if I was interested in this role. But I guess if there had been an equity candidate that was readily available there wouldn’t have been a discussion of what am I going to do when I come back, okay? Even though I had said probably 6 months ahead I am coming back.”
MNCs lose great talent over competitors	Participant 1: “One of the losses of many countries is repatriation. People like ourselves are gone for fifteen years. You come back and in eighteen months’ time you resign and go somewhere else. These are high calibre individuals and I think it is a loss. If the company had to calculate the loss... the investment that they’ve made into these people and what they’ve got out of them it is close to zero. That is a

	problem. Who benefits? It is the other company. That is the sad part”. Participant 11: “So I had already had an offer from Company D in May of that year and I was leaving in October. Company D couldn’t wait long. So I said ‘fine when I leave in October... I started on 1 November in Company D. But Mr.Z did try and get me a job during that time but MN wouldn’t budge”.
Communication on expatriates’ contract	Participant 1: “I don’t know. The communication is very, very bad. I think... for me to be quite honest this is one thing I feel very strongly about....I do not know.... The whole thing... to be quite honest I don’t think there is a plan. Maybe there is but they are not communicating it to us. You always have to ask them. By the way my contract with 2 years stint has expired in October last year and I was told to stay put...” Participant 4: “No, my contract was about to expire but they had already notified me that it would be renewed and then I got a call about a group executive position.” Participant 11: “Oh, you sign a contract for two years, so as an expat you never know whether somebody is going to renew or not. And Ghana made it even more difficult. So your contract would almost expire and you would be the one going to them and saying ‘you know my contract is expiring, is there going to be a renewal?” Participant 12: “You know? I mean the worst part is my contract was renewed this year July, my contract had expired. After a week I was still on post and I had to send an email to say ‘what is happening to my contract?’ (<i>raising eyebrows</i>)... How do I plan? Ja, because it is in the middle of the month, the salary will be the end of the month. So nothing was paid around that time, until after a week or so I started pushing a document and then at the end of the month ...”
Expats with great track-record get re-assigned many times	Participant 1: “I am one of those I actually come from an environment where my job speaks for itself. For the last fifteen years I have worked for Company X I have never spoken to anyone my job has spoken to them. Nobody has ever communicated with me...”

Skills transfer	Participant 4: “ I am doing it voluntarily with some people but I am not being used in a structured way” Participant 8: “No, no there is nothing. There is no structured programme like that” Participant 11: “So I started to build my team to support me and be able to support themselves.100%. I really did the skills transfer. Even now I don’t do things for my team, I teach them; I take the time and teach them. So the team were really getting prepped well, to the extent that when I left, I left ... acting with ..., as my successor I put down and he did it for six to eight months with no issues.” Participant 14: “For example, I have a finance manager who started as an accountant to a senior accountant and now is the finance manager, a local guy. So he grows. Everyone in Company O has a performance agreement as well as a personal development plan”
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Contrary to evidence given by expatriates on repatriation strategy, HR Mobility managers seem to think that they do have a working strategy in place.

Participant 15: *“We start six months in advance, so at 6 months we contact... Yes, before the expiry, we contact the operation and find out whether they are going to be extended or not. Sometimes it is three months...Anything executive level and above has to come here for approval...They have to put forward a request, they have to put forward a motivation as to why the person would be extended and the COE to sign off”.*

The HR Mobility Managers however do acknowledge poor communication on expatriates’ contracts.

Participant 15: *“In some of the operations we only know a month after the person’s supposed to have left, but it is still in country...”*

In terms of the skills transfer, both HR Mobility managers cited that they do have a working skills transfer process.

Participant 2: *“What I do is especially with expatriates when they come in, I have meetings with them. So we now say ‘you are here for a two year period, we don’t know how long it will renewed, but here are the people that you need to train’. So in as much*

as you tell them, most of them would not necessarily do it. So then we have quarterly sessions, even the quarterly sessions just with expatriates, to say what are the challenge, what can we do better'..."

Participant 15: *"That is the whole point, yes. It is tracked in country, because they have to put a successor in place, so it depends on how they manage their succession in place. They are required to find a successor and train that person up. And then they move out. It is not always possible"*

Career planning has also been experienced by the HR Mobility managers as lacking for expatriates. **Participant 2** views that as lack of future focus from the employer's point of view, *"We are not future focus... in terms of our manpower planning as companies, we don't think for the future, we just do things for now. And that is what I think"*. On the other hand, Participant 16 did not see that as a challenge in his organisation. **Participant 16**, *"...But to date ...every single one of our expat general managers has changed hotels as an expat. So they have been in more than one country. Which suggests there is life after the assignment..."*

4.6.2 Challenges during repatriation

At least half of the people who have repatriated before have experienced some kind of a challenge during repatriation. Figure 14 illustrates the sub-themes that came out of the transcripts and some of the supporting comments.

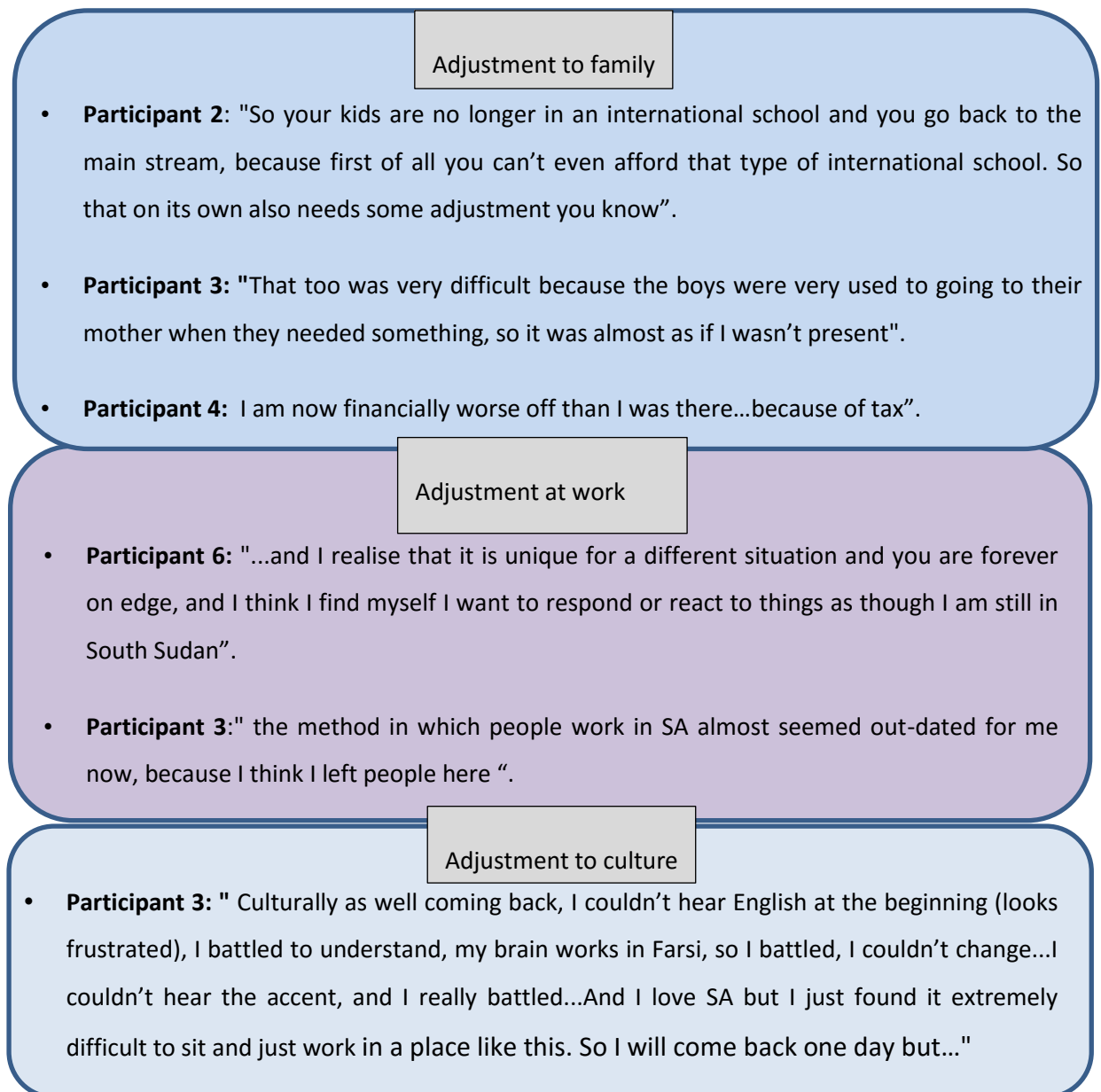


Figure 14: Challenges facing expatriates during repatriation

On the other hand, the HR Mobility Managers have experienced challenges whereby expatriates do not want to come back

Participant 16: “We normally tell them for not less than 24 months...our problem is when it start running into 4-5-6 years we are faced with a different challenge of possibly moving them around to other assignments, they don’t necessarily want to come back. So they don’t necessarily want to come back to South Africa...So far not many have returned to South Africa, they try to stay expat and then retire and the next generation go in, that is how it works”.

4.6.3 Support during repatriation

Data retrieved from the transcripts revealed mixed feeling about support received by respondents during repatriation.

Table 16: Sub-themes on support during repatriation

Sub-theme	Supporting quotation
Support from Head Office HR	Participant 3: “The group did put in certain things for me, they did say to me that I could have access to a psychologist if I needed it...I think there is very little one can do because it is an experience that you have to go through” Participant 11: “Group did absolutely nothing. Group didn’t even know I had resigned from Ghana, they didn’t even know I was leaving them. But the day I walked in to group to sign off on all my stuff, Boss Lady still thought I was coming back! No! Nothing! Nothing ... They did absolutely nothing.” Participant 6: “No, I made contact with ICAS to say ‘look this is what I have been through in the past 3.5 years and I realise that it is unique for a different situation and you are forever on edge, and I think I find myself I want to respond or react to things as though I am still in South Sudan.”
Support from local HR	Participant 11: “But you know what was good, was Mandy’s team, they are people who have a heart; ... a few people like Refiloe who was looking after expats.... So my claims, whatever I had Refiloe would take and process. So after my second year, Refiloe would make sure everything for me was sorted out. ... until the day I left – my container going, my money, everything – Refiloe sorted it out...”
Reflections on improvements	Participant 11: “But you know what, you learn, you learn things, it takes two people to waltz. So I am not completely innocent in all of this. There are things I could have done differently you know? For

	one I could have come back to the group. And in fact in hindsight, as much as I took Company D and I enjoyed it and I moved on..."
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*Actual names of participants have been changed for anonymity.

Contrary to expatriates experience on support from Head Office HR, is the Mobility HR Manager, Participant 15 feeling very strongly that her organisation does support repatriation by helping expats find jobs and with shipping of their luggage.

"No.1 so we have an updated CV on record, also so we can check with other operations if there is a need in their operation....So we market them across the group. And then we put them in contact with relocation agents"

"...and then we put them in contact with relocation agents, because we have to have two quotes that come out. ... They effectively ship the goods. No, they will assist in moving the person home...they will make sure on landing that everything goes through customs and everything is checked etc., and the stuff then gets delivered at home."

Participant 15 also shared her experience in terms of psychological support her organisation provides to expatriates on returning home although this service has not been recently used.

"We have an industrial psychologist. From a family perspective they can go through a repatriation session with them. We have not had that requirement for a while. What we have found is most of our guys are not comfortable with it"

Although expatriates expected support from both Head Office and local HR, **Participant 11** did some reflection and found that she could have also played her part to make her experience different:

"But you know what, you learn, you learn things, it takes two people to waltz. So I am not completely innocent in all of this. There are things I could have done differently you know? For one I could have come back to the group. And in fact in hindsight, as much as I took Company D and I enjoyed it and I moved on..."

4.6.4 The role of coaching during repatriation

This section of findings covers areas where respondents saw a possible role of coaching in repatriation.

Participants 2 and 11 felt very strongly about a possible role of coaching post expatriation.

Participant 2: *"Because some expatriates don't want to leave, and for the last three months when they are leaving, you know, something that will prepare them to leave the country....If there can be you know that thing of saying "coaching on the axis", where they ask to send you outside, how do we now take your experience and infuse it in the organisation?"*

Participant 2 also saw coaching playing a significant role in preparing the expatriate for possible loss of power and autonomy back home.

" ... But when you are on the other side you find that your scope widens, you interact with the SA High Commission, you interact at the highest level, but then when you come back here, you are now expected to downgrade....Because why would companies pay so much money for people? It costs a lot of money ... I would say if the companies can also notice that when people come back they should have a dedicated programme..."

Participant 4 on the other hand saw coaching playing a possible role in career planning during repatriation.

"Yes. I mean I have a coach now. I think one of the things is sometimes when you are outside as an expatriate for a while, the biggest complaint is you get forgotten. So when you come back sometimes you don't even find a place to land. You might just be put in a corner because there is no job for you. So it is useful to have a coach, especially from a job perspective, a career perspective. It is very important."

As repatriation has been proven to have a financial impact on expatriates, participant 2 believes that coaching during repatriation will also be beneficial if it focuses on the financial aspect of things.

"I would make sure that they understand also the financial aspect of it... I speak to a lot of expat wives, I speak to a lot of expatriates and the money part of it is the biggest

contributor to be honest. People don't want to accept sometimes or say it... You know for example, they put you in the highest of the highest places, where you are. But when you go back to your country you are just a John who was working with this company... So your kids are no longer in an international school and you go back to the main stream, because first of all you can't even afford that type of international school. So I think there should also be financial planning for expatriates – it's very important! ...there should be coaching for financial excellence."

4.7 Summary of the results

This chapter covered a presentation of the demographic profile of the respondents and an outline of the results in the form of core themes that came out during data analysis.

A total of sixteen (16) respondents participated in this study. They each shared their experiences answering to the three research questions in a semi-structured interview. The actual research instruments are included in this report in Appendix A. The respondents of this study are from three South African MNCs and they fall into three categories, that is, those who are currently working as expatriates in the MNCs, those with repatriation experience of not more than three years and those whose responsibilities are to administer and manage expatriates.

The results were presented per theme answering each research question. They covered the experiences of the respondents in all three phases of the expatriation lifecycle which is, the expatriates' experiences **prior** departure, **during** the expatriation and **post** expatriation.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to synthesise the findings in chapter 4 into higher-level implications and also to discuss the potential meaning related to the findings.

This chapter begins with some of the key findings regarding the demographic profile of the respondents. The profile helps in understanding the rationale behind opinions and perceptions provided by the respondents.

5.2 Demographic profile of respondents

Respondents of this study were sourced from three (3) organisations in three (3) different industries, that is, telecommunications, oil and hospitality for triangulation purposes. As this study is focusing on executive expatriates working or who have worked in South African MNCs, at least ten (10) of the respondents have taken assignments in more than one foreign country before. The countries experienced included, Angola, Benin, Congo Brazzaville, Cote D'Ivoire, Dubai, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Guinea Conakry, Iran, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Swaziland, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo and Uganda. Furthermore, all thirteen (13) respondents were parent country nationals (South Africa), that is, professionals who come from the country of origin of the MNC and are sent to operations in host country and three (3) were third country nationals from Cote D'Ivoire, Ghana and Iran. These are professionals who are neither from parent country nor host country and are sent for assignments in host countries (Tungli & Peiperl, 2009). This demographic of the respondents is in alignment with Tung (1982)'s findings in her study of the Japanese MNCs. She discovered that they employ significantly more parent country nationals in their overseas operations at the senior and middle management levels.

Eleven (11) out of sixteen (16) respondents, are still on international assignments, whereas four (4) have returned to the home country of which one (1) has recently been reassigned another international assignment by a different employer and the last one has never been an expatriate before but has been a manager of expatriates for many years. It is also important to note that three (3) out of eleven current expatriates have worked in more than four (4) countries before. This is in line with Suutari and Brewster (2001)'s study conducted on the Finnish expatriates. They found that seventeen (17) per cent of their respondents were already on at least their third international assignment.

The analysis also shows that the respondents have all been notably successful in their careers, with most being on at least senior management if not executive or CEO levels.

Whilst it was expected that all interviews would be conducted face-to-face, this was not possible with one of the respondents as she had to return to Uganda on the day of the interview. The interview was therefore conducted telephonically.

5.3 Discussion pertaining to Research Question 1

This section covers discussion of the research findings as it relates to research question 1, *What are the experiences of expatriate executives prior to taking positions in South African Multinational Corporations, and how can coaching support that experience?*

5.3.1 Pre-departure preparation

This section deals with all means of preparation that the respondents have experienced before they left their home countries. It also covers the views of the three (3) HR mobility managers whose role is to administer and manage expatriates.

It appears that there is inconsistency by South African MNCs in terms of pre-departure preparation. Essentially, all five executives from Company X have had a bad pre-departure experience. Some claim that there was absolutely no

preparation, whereas others complain of lack of clarity and uncertainty by Head Office. This situation left some of the executives dissatisfied and disappointed. This is a reflection of inconsistency by Company X in terms of pre-departure preparation. On the other hand, respondents from the other two organisations were satisfied with the pre-departure preparation they have received.

Although most respondents were generally unhappy with the pre-departure experience, the analysis revealed various types of pre-departure programmes that the respondents went through at different times, such as, information packs, cultural awareness programmes, psychological assessments, medical assessments, banking and benefits sessions and look-see-visits. This discovery is however in alignment with Scullion and Brewster (2002)'s findings in the Price Waterhouse Cooper report (1997-1998) that some MNCs in Europe do use other forms of pre-departure preparation such as shadowing, look-see visits other than just cross-cultural training. Some of these additional programmes were found effective by the respondents in this study whereas others were found ineffective. While one (1) respondent out of fifteen (15) has never had an opportunity to experience a look-see-visit, the look-see-visit, referred to as "*field experience*" by Tung (1982) is generally one of the most valued programmes by most respondents just as it was rated the most common by Hung-Wen (2007)'s respondents and second highest by female respondents in Selmer, Torbjorn and de Leon (1998). The respondents in this study felt that look-see-visits gave them a different perspective and helped them in making informed decisions. Black and Gregersen (1990) also relate the impact of pre-departure interventions to expatriates' commitment. Here is what some of the respondents had to say about the look-see-visit experience:

Participant 9: *"...so I realised I could live in Congo Brazzaville even if it is slightly far from my own country. The look and see visit made me comfortable to go to this position."*

Participant 8: *"Before I came I definitely had a very negative perspective and I thought I was doing it probably as a formality and also because my line manager really convinced me to do it. When I got back, for the first*

time I really considered this because I could see life and what would materialise if I moved across. So I think that really helped.”

While cultural awareness appeared to be popular in Company O, it was not the case in Company X and Company TS. This programme is referred to by most literature as cross-cultural training (Okpara & Kabongo, 2011; Osman-Gani & Rockstuhl, 2009; Tahir & Ismail, 2007; Caligiuri, et al., 2001; Waxin & Panaccio, 2005; Mendenhall & Stahl, 2000; Kealy & Protheroe, 1996; Black & Mendenhall, 1990).

The evidence from the results indicates that cross-cultural training was practiced in the past few years by Company X as attested by most old executive expatriates and the HR mobility manager. This revelation is somewhat contradictory to previous literature (Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985; Tung, 1981; Baker & Ivancevich, 1971) as it claims that most managers are unwilling to support CCT. The respondents from Company X in this study have also shared that the CCT was subsequently replaced with an online version which is deemed ineffective. Some respondents found CCT misaligned to the actual experience in the host country.

Participant 1: “...All those things you actually don’t get taught....My first assignment I went and I was shocked... about 60% of it made sense. The other 40% I was learning it as I was flying.”

This misalignment is in contrast to Selmer et al., (1998)’s and Black and Mendenhall (1990)’s statements on the aim of CCT as being that of increasing the applicability of new behaviours which are more appropriate to the host culture. At the same time, the amount of content that is not covered in the pre-departure training as mentioned by Participant 1 confirms Selmer et al., (1998)’s concern that pre-departure training is conducted apart from the realities of the host country.

Although there is a bucket of pre-departure programmes, not all respondents have had the opportunity to experience some of them. Respondent 6 in particular has never been exposed to any of the programmes except for basic

medical assessment which she believes she did not have a choice as she was going to a high risk country, South Sudan.

“I wasn’t prepared, at all. I wasn’t prepared at all. I didn’t even do any of the.... I didn’t go and look and see, I didn’t do a psychometric pre-assessment and briefing to say this is what goes on there and this is how to prepare you for it. Nothing.”

This once again implies some inconsistency in MNCs HR Practitioners terms of how expatriate executives are prepared.

What came as a surprise is the lack of gravitas put on psychological assessments by the MNCs. Clear evidence emerged that not many respondents have completed psychological assessments before departure. The psychological assessments, according to the respondents, are meant to assess personality fit and the expatriate’s ability or potential to cope with stress in a foreign country. Reasons behind a low intake are not specified in this study.

Koo Moon, Kwon Choi and Shik Jung (2012) and Okpara and Kabongo (2011) are of the opinion that the expatriates’ previous years of international experience contributes positively towards the ability to adapt to the current assignment. Koo Moon et.al, (2012) however believe that non-work previous international experience is more effective in building the expatriates cultural intelligence. Most respondents in this study who have taken expatriate roles, either short-term or long-term, in more than one foreign country before their actual long-term international assignment have echoed the same positive statements about previous international assignment. The results of this study have implied that prior international assignments do prepare expatriates for adjustment. Some of these respondents and their organisations felt no need for pre-departure preparation. These respondents believed that they were better prepared than first timers. This view is supported by Tung (1982) in her study in Japanese firms that CEOs with extensive overseas work experience need less preparation training. However, this notion is discouraged by Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer, and Luk (2005) and Mendenhall and Oddou (1985). They argue that this kind of thinking is only helpful for present adjustment and could

be one of the reasons for faulty international human resource practices and high expatriate failure rate. Although Participant 3 acknowledges that prior international experience prepares them, he however warned that, as every country is different and has its own nuances, expatriates need to therefore always go through preparation when undertaking an international assignment, no matter how many times they have completed an international assignment.

5.3.2 *Support during pre-departure*

Support during pre-departure preparation appears to be one of the interventions that carries weight and yet is taken lightly by SA MNCs. Many of the respondents were not convinced that they were given enough necessary support during pre-departure preparation. Although the look-see-visit was hailed by many expatriates as an effective intervention, there seems to be misalignment or miscommunication between Head Office HR and the local HR in terms of expectations from this “look-see-visit”. Evidence from the interviews shows that Head Office HR seems to expect certain service or support levels from local HR, which they did not communicate to the local HR. This kind of support has left many with a feeling of disappointment, lack of trust and confidence in Head Office HR. These assertions were attested by participants, 5,8,11 and 13 in chapter 4. In confirmation, Mayrhofer and Scullion (2002) remarked on the bad grades the HR department received from the study conducted on female expatriates’ experiences in terms of usefulness.

5.3.3 *Characteristics that prepare expatriates for international assignment*

According to Tung (1982), the success of expatriates overseas is determined by the calibre of people selected right up front. The results of this study have revealed that not everybody can be an expatriate. The respondents believe that one needs to possess certain inner qualities to survive in foreign countries such as believing in yourself, being strong-headed, having a can-do attitude, being a people’s person and being adventurous.

Open-mindedness, people and goal-orientedness seem to be the most common ingredients for expatriates' resilience and success in foreign countries. Respondents in this study believe that possessing these characteristics helped them prepare mentally for the assignment and carried them through. Although the respondents of this study mentioned these characteristics without any reference, they appear to be somehow related to the big five personality traits that can be used to predict the expatriate's desire to terminate the assignment or not, as explained in Huang, et.al (2005) and Caligiuri (2000). For example, Caligiuri (2000) describes an agreeable person as someone who is extroverted, emotionally stable, conscientious and who may deal with conflict collaboratively (Black, 1990). This personality can be related to what the respondents in this study describe as people-oriented. On the other hand, the extroverted, who are described as those with the ability to navigate through the hierarchy of their social environment to achieve personal success, seem to be closely aligned with what the respondents refer to as adventurous. Such people are not scared to try out new things or challenges. According to Black (1990), these individuals have the ability to learn the social culture of the host country effectively and therefore one can assume that they are likely to adapt to a foreign environment easily and are likely to stay (Caligiuri, 2000). At the same time, emotional stability seems to be related to "strong-headed" as described by the respondents. This refers to the expatriates' ability to cope with stress (Caligiuri, 2000; Black, 1990). Although the respondents in this study were not assessed against these personality characteristics when recruited, they claim that they were able to adjust in their respective host countries because they possess these qualities. These results are somewhat related to Huang, et al. (2005) in their study conducted with the Americans in Taiwan culture where they discovered that expatriates with strong personality traits that match the local culture's most relevant aspects were likely to adjust. On the same note, adaptability and flexibility were considered as top priority selection criteria by US firms in Tung (1982)'s study. Mendenhall and Oddou (1986) propose the relationship between specific acculturation profiles and specific countries as important to be looked at. They believed in the possibility that some profiles might be more suited to certain types of cultures/countries than others.

5.3.4 *Impact of pre-departure preparation*

The results of this study implied an influence between pre-departure preparation and experience in the host country. Some respondents expressed the pressure of having to “learn on the fly” meaning learning fast while doing the work without any assistance, as a result of insufficient or irrelevant content covered during pre-departure training. For others, pre-departure preparation had a substantial impact on their children’s schooling as the school terms in those other countries are not the same as in South Africa. Participant 11 for instance, had to take her child out of school when she was about to sit for Grade 10 final exam and made her repeat the same grade in Ghana. This evidence implies that, if Participant 11 was given sufficient information about schools and time to prepare her family, she would have probably left her child to complete the grade before joining her in Ghana. Disruption to children's education is seen as one of the major barriers to future international mobility in many different countries (Collings et al., 2007; Harvey, 1998).

5.3.5 *The role of coaching during pre-departure*

Taking an international assignment is a form of change in expatriates’ lives. It means amongst other things, change in lifestyle, change in work environment, change in culture and change in support structure. It is therefore critical that expatriates are sufficiently prepared to ensure readiness before departure.

Although none of the respondents have been coached for expatriation before, there is an overwhelming positive sentiment around the possible role of coaching during pre-departure preparation, especially for the first timers. The respondents believed that the role of a coaching programme in this instance would be to prepare the expatriates for adjustment in a foreign country. This idea is supported by Grant (2014) as, in his study, he found that coaching has an impact on change readiness. Change is also supported by Rogers (2012), that although the client is a director of change, change cannot happen if the client is not ready. Grant (2014) further believes that coaching can help the coachee to become more skilful and confident in dealing with organisational change and turbulence. He also relates coaching with greater ability to deal with

anxiety and stress. At the same time, Avril and Magnini (2007) advise that the minimum of coaching programmes should at least include coaching in topics such as business culture, etiquette, inter-personal communication and conflict resolution.

Most respondents in this study are however of the opinion that the coach should have expatriate experience. The respondents believe that such a coach will be more relevant as a result of their experience and therefore have a better understanding of what expatriates are about to embark on. When referring to matching a coach with a coachee, Bozer, Joo, and Santora (2015) claim that an appropriate coach with relevant coaching experience and approach may be a more important aspect of matching than similarity in gender or other personal characteristics, depending on the purpose of coaching. Furthermore, Joo (2005) argues that a good match and relationship between the coachee and coach plays a critical role in enhancing self-awareness and learning. In their doctoral coaching development project in Godskesen and Kobayashi (2016) chose coaches who were independent of the doctoral students' context to the coaches (doctoral students) and some of the mentioned benefits which resulted out of this projects were heightened self-awareness, self-acceptance, improved goal-setting and goal attainment. Therefore, their results firm up the criticality of ensuring that the right match is in place.

The importance of a coach-client relationship is also advocated by Rogers (2012) and Stober (2006). It is on this premise that a coach with expatriate experience seems necessary for expatriates.

The findings in this study have also proven that as much as the expatriates have mixed feelings before they depart, their families, especially those who stay behind, are also anxious and stressed about their family member leaving them. It is on those grounds that the respondents felt a strong need for coaching for the family that is staying behind to equip them with coping skills. Although Chew (2004) does not refer to coaching as such, she supports the importance of involvement of family during pre-departure training.

5.4 Discussion pertaining to Research Question 2

This section covers discussion of the research findings as it relates to research question 2, *what are the experiences of expatriate executives during the international assignment in South African Multinational Corporations, and how can coaching support that experience?*

5.4.1 Experiences of expatriates in host country

The first few months of expatriation have been described by previous researchers as a “honeymoon” (Salminen, Mantilla, & Jokela, 2016; Baruch & Altman, 2002; Black & Mendenhall, 1991).

The results of this study discovered that the expatriates had a range of experiences while working in foreign countries. These include experience in terms of the work environment, work ethics and their experience in terms of the country itself and its people. It was a bag of mixed experiences, to some it was pleasant and others not so great. It appears that induction or on-boarding was one of the neglected HR processes in the SA MNCs. Although leadership transitioning can be challenging, most executives were never inducted/on-boarded and yet were expected by Head Office to walk in and perform. To many, this caused confusion as one has to, in the first place, adjust to the culture and, at the same time, understand what their role in the host country is and deliver results. The negligence by Head Office management is however, in contrast to Ndunguru (2012)’s advocacy that executive on-boarding should be strategic and should accelerate the executive’s contribution to enhance strategic achievement. One would wonder how executives can achieve strategic objectives if they have not been given the necessary support.

On the other hand, others were pleasantly surprised as they experienced what is called “CEO on-boarding”. According to respondents from Company X, this is a programme that orientates the executive into the company, equips them with the company’s strategy, structure, values and culture and most of it walks them through their role for the first few months. One can pick up that this programme

is valuable, however, the challenge is the inconsistency of the MNCs in the implementation.

Handover is one of the most critical processes for transitioning as it ensures continuity. This process is taken very seriously, especially in the health-care environments where, for instance, when the patient's information is transferred between clinicians during shifts (Alvarado, Lee, Christoffersen, Fram, Boblin, Poole, & Forsyth, 2006). Absent or inaccurate information can have harmful results to the patient. However the results of this study indicate that handover is one of the "not taken so seriously" processes by MNCs. Most respondents confirmed that handover was never done, in instances where it was done, it was by phone, and the respondents deemed it ineffective.

In terms of reporting lines, for those who were on expatriation in Head Office found the reporting lines experience a bit strange and different from those in their home countries. Head Office organisational structures appeared less rigid and teams were more self-directed than in the operating countries. However, due to lack of orientation and handover, these types of structures left some of the respondents lost and frustrated. On the other hand, others saw opportunities for growth in this kind of structure as it exposes them to work more in cross-functional teams as the members are from different organisations, different nationalities with different expertise which also allows for more autonomy and accountability.

Although some of the respondents have attended some cultural awareness training or received some information about their respective host countries of assignment, they found their experience of the work environment challenging. It appears that either false or unrealistic expectations were created during pre-departure preparation as was found in the study conducted by Caligiuri, et al. (2001, p.366), where some of the findings were that "the less relevant the CCT, the more expatriates assumed the global assignment was going to be easy, and vice versa". Work ethics has been revealed as one of the biggest challenges facing expatriates working for South African MNCs. The impact of this challenge has been shown in four sub-themes, that is, work ethics in terms of accountability, ethics of doing business, quality of work and commitment levels.

These sub-themes seem to be all inter-related. The respondents in this study felt that there is lack of accountability from local colleagues, for instance, time is not respected. People do work whenever they feel like. There is no sense of urgency. This kind of behaviour then translates into poor quality of work and low levels of commitment, such as in Guinea Bissau and South Sudan, as cited by some of the respondents. The observation was that Nigerians are considered to be more hard-working, confident and highly committed than South Africans. Although this observation sounds to be stereotyping (Caligiuri, et al., 2001), the rationale behind it was related to lack of jobs in Nigeria by one of the respondents which resulted in more perceived commitment.

The most alarming sub-theme was that of ethics in terms of doing business in those markets. When compared with the South African way of doing business, South Africa is likened with the Western culture of doing business, where processes and certain policies and standards are followed, whereas in West Africa, it is mainly all about relationships. This means that one has to know someone in order for their deal to go through. Otherwise the general observation was that there is always an expectation of a bribe by external stakeholders or sabotage.

Participant 2: *“In Nigeria there is no process, so when you get there money talks. To be honest with you money talks...”*

Participant 8: *“Either you fall in line or if you don’t fall in line people can really work against you and sabotage or try and put... I have been offered things which you can’t accept...”*

Bribery and corruption in business dealings were also alluded to by Dhrampal (2013) and John (2013) in their studies conducted with South African expatriates in Sub-Saharan countries. Olatunbosun and Oluduro (2012) confirmed these findings by stressing that bribery and corruption are so deeply rooted in many of the countries’ systems in such a way that one can hardly do anything without conforming.

The results of this study has also exposed that expatriate executives had experienced their host countries and the people differently. Some enjoyed living

in those countries, such as Ghana and Nigeria especially, since they are English-speaking countries, whereas others had a bad experience in countries such as Guinea Bissau and South Sudan, where expatriate cultural norms and customs were significantly different from those of the nationals.

Whilst African people are generally considered to be warm and receptive, for example, in South Africa the concept of “*Ubuntu*” is associated with compassion and communality (Mangaliso, 2001), the experience of the South Sudanese by some of the respondents was different. They experienced some of the South Sudanese people as aggressive. This kind of attitude and behaviour is attributed to the historical political conflict between North Sudan and South Sudan. Therefore, the anger is then transferred to any foreigner as they perceive them as enemies. The implications of this behaviour to the expatriate executives are that they would need to find ways to deal with this kind of attitude if they are to meet the obligations of their assignments.

5.4.2 *Balancing Head Office (HO) and Host country’s expectations*

Many of the studies in literature highlight balancing Head Office and host country’s expectation as a challenge to expatriates as they have to find a way to manage conflicting priorities between Head Office and host country (Plourde, Parker, & Schaan, 2014; Collings et al., 2007; Allen & Alvarez, 1998; Hogan & Goodson, 1990; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1988).

Black and Gregersen (1992), in their study, found that each year thousands of expatriates find themselves torn between their loyalty to the parent company and loyalty to the host company. The results of this study have confirmed these statements. The respondents reacted with high emotions which appeared as a clear frustration to the researcher. Their responses have been categorised into sub-themes as illustrated in Figure 7 in chapter 4.

As much as the MNCs have high intentions of expanding their businesses globally, it appears that they still struggle in ensuring the alignment in those markets in which they operate. This struggle seems to be prevalent in all three MNCs sampled in this study. Many underscored this issue as being caused by

the fact that South African MNCs operate with a South African mentality. It was evidenced that the strategists in Head Office do not understand their local markets. The respondents claim that Head Office formulates strategies for the local markets as if they are planning for the South African market, and they refer to this behaviour as having a “*South Africa mentality*”. These results suggest that those strategies do not fit the market in which they operate. The most alarming point in this evidence is the allegation that most of those responsible for formulating strategies have never even set foot in the host countries. Allen and Alvarez (1998) also confirm that expatriates often find themselves in conflict with Head Office managers who may have no expatriate experience and thus lack context to understand the conflict. Other respondents made mention of the frustration which is caused by the local shareholders who come up with their own expectations which are not in alignment with Head Office expectations. This misalignment has been proven to create frustration and confusion to the expatriates. Previous research by John (2013) has also proven the inability of Head Office to render the fit-for-purpose and required support to expatriates due to lack of understanding and disconnection from the realities of expatriates in host countries. On that note, Black and Gregersen (1992) also highlighted the confusion that expatriates go through in serving two masters. They warn that the unbalanced loyalty between the parent company and the host company can lead to a mixture of failures during and post international assignment. Furthermore, Black and Gregersen (1992) contend that many expatriates end up directing their commitment too far to one direction in such a way that it ends up causing problems to both the expatriates and their companies.

Despite the frustrations caused by misalignment of priorities between their two masters, expatriates in this study still display high commitment levels to ensure that the MNC’s strategy is understood and implemented in the host countries. Continuous communication was cited by most respondents as the best strategy to ensure embedding of Head Office strategy by all levels.

Participant 8: “*Very clearly my way of work I make sure that I communicate ... continuously to everyone to say this is a Head Office priority...*”

Participant 1: *“In those markets you communicate and communicate and communicate”.*

The expatriates in this instance seem to be playing the role of a “spider” as described in Harzing (2002, p. 369), that is, control through the weaving of informal communication networks within the MNC.

At the same time, the exploration revealed that the SA MNCs put too much pressure on the expatriates. The respondents alleged that Head Office bombard them with loads of requests with unrealistic time lines from many different business areas in Head Office. This evidence is supported by Plourde et al., (2014) and Mendenhall and Oddou (1985) by highlighting conflicting performance expectations of Head Office management and those of their subsidiary colleagues which impact on the expatriates’ performance. The evidence provided by respondents in this is a clear indication of lack of planning and communication amongst Head Office departments.

There is a call by respondents of this study for Head Office to localise content for the benefit of the business and the markets in which they operate. Localisation of content will benefit both parties in the sense that Head Office will be able push its agenda with minimal difficulties to its markets while, at the same time, remaining relevant in those markets (Bondy & Starkey, 2014; Plourde, et al., 2014). Some believed that localisation can be possible if power is shared appropriately between Head Office and host countries. Allen and Alvarez (1998) assert that the problem is caused by the fact some companies treat the international side of their business as secondarily important and that also affect repatriation.

Expatriation is consequently acknowledged as a means to align the Head Office agenda with the host country’s agenda and to enhance the economic status of the operating markets.

5.4.3 Challenges experienced during the assignment

Ten sub-themes emerged from evidence given on challenges experienced by expatriates during their international assignments. These sub-themes range from acceptance by locals to well-being. Although they could still be categorised into personal and work-related, it seems like most of these challenges are generally related to expatriates' adjustment in host country. Based on respondents' responses, one could also conclude that it takes, on average, six months for a first time expatriate in South African MNCs to settle in host countries with cultural differences and acceptance by the locals being the main contributors to the adjustment. This evidence therefore makes targeted pre-departure preparation, amongst other things, and coaching even more critical to help reduce the adjustment period of the expatriates.

The observation that emerged in terms of acceptance by the locals is the fact that an expatriate will always be reminded that they are guests in the foreign country. Having these words come from someone who spent eight years in Iran and a few years in other countries, one would think that this kind of treatment would not apply. This is clear evidence that expatriates are not easily accepted by locals. Acceptance is related to cultural differences and has an impact on adjustment. According to Pires, et al. (2006), cultural barriers pose a significant challenge to expatriates' ability to adjust. It appears that most respondents expected the culture in their respective host countries to be the same as their home countries and/or the people in their host countries to understand and accept them the way they are as individuals without them having to make any adjustments. One would term this kind of expectation "*stereotyping*" or perhaps the expatriates were going through "*culture shock*" at that time (Black & Mendenhall, 1990). Pedersen (1994) describes culture shock as the process of initial adjustment to an unfamiliar environment and it happens inside an individual who meets unfamiliar events and unforeseen circumstances. At the same time, Caligiuri, et al. (2001) contend that stereotyping causes expatriates to categorise all host nationals on the basis of their nationality. For example,

Participant 12: *"In Ghana where I come from people are friendlier, even on the job... where in Africa or West Africa you shake hands... when you come here you... no shake hands..."*

Participant 1: *"... In South Africa for example, we are individuals. I talk for myself and only myself. In the many countries that I have been we talk for ourselves. For example, in South Sudan there was also this thing that... for example, "Inshallah" God permitting..."*

Participant 4: *"You will get people smiling and talking to you and agreeing with you, but somehow you don't seem to be moving because the resistance is under here, it is hidden. There is a hidden resistance..."*

Participant 8: *"...in Iran the culture is very different and normally you can expect everything quite fast from people...I realised in South Africa I was lost initially..."*

Most South African MNCs operate in impoverished countries such as Guinea Conakry, Guinea Bissau and South Sudan where the education levels are still very low. These facts have been noted by Kamoche, Chizema, Mellahi, and Newenham-Kahindi (2012) by reporting the shortage of skills as one of the greatest challenges for MNCs operating in Africa. They emphasised that MNCs operating in Africa need to therefore think of how to recruit, develop, and retain talent. This background information is attested by the results of this study highlighting low skills levels as one of the challenges that the respondents have experienced. Instead of putting Head Office strategy as the number one priority, the expatriates then find themselves forced to start with the basics to improve the skills levels as it was the foundation to some of Head Office priorities. The classic example was cited by Participant 6 when she was sharing her frustrations.

"But the biggest, biggest problem was your skills levels. I cannot be talking leadership, talent and whatever and fancy things, when I am busy trying to teach someone how to use a toilet set. That is how bad and basic it is..."

On the other hand, this prioritisation has an adverse impact on meeting Head Office targets on time or, if not, totally failing to meet them.

Language has been an interesting aspect of the results which was marked under challenges. This study has proven that speaking the local language goes a long way in building relations, especially with external stakeholders. External stakeholders tend to believe that the expatriate associates her/himself as one of them if they speak the local language, and that makes it easier to negotiate business deals with them. The advantages of the ability to speak foreign language was also cited by previous researchers, such as Dhrampal (2013), Okpara and Kabongo (2011), Bhaskar-Shrinivas, et.al. (2005), Naumann (1993) and Hogan and Goodson (1990).

These researchers believe that expatriates with the ability to speak foreign language are likely to have more success in social integration and cross-cultural adjustment.

Most respondents' families appeared to be struggling during the assignment whether they are in the host country with the assignee or not, especially with school going children. Some children drop their grades as a result of adjustment, others either could not join their parents on time as a result of the difference in school terms or low quality standards of the schools in host country. Harvey (1998) also found disruption to children's education as one of the major barriers to future international mobility in many different countries.

Another aspect here is the high performance expectations by Head Office. Almost all current expatriates and repatriates have experienced pressure from Head Office with limited resources. These unrealistic expectations are attributed to lack of understanding of the host country's context by Head Office strategy planners.

Having discussed all these challenges, the question is what kind of support do expatriates have during the assignment?

5.4.4 Support during international assignment

Tung (2000) in Hogan and Goodson (1990) has emphasised the importance of support for traditional international assignments.

Although respondents in this study expected support from different sources, it is evident that very little support was received from Head Office. Almost all current expatriates and repatriates have confirmed lack of interim performance checks by Head Office. Respondents felt that interim checks should be conducted at least every six months. Others suggested that interim checks should not only focus on performance, but should also focus on the well-being of an expatriate. These could be face-to-face or done virtually. Support from Head Office was also noted in John (2013) and Chew (2004). Chew (2004) further acknowledges that for well-established MNCs, Corporate HR support can either lead to the success or failure of the business. On the other hand, the respondents in this study attribute the HR's failure to support expatriates to lack of alignment between Head Office and host country. In spite of misalignment between Head Office and host country, the respondents in this study acknowledged receiving support from the host country, particularly from the local HR team, during their assignments. What is interesting is that contrary to the expatriates' claims, is the HR Mobility managers' testimonials. All three HR mobility managers who participated in this study claim that Head Office provides the necessary support except for instances where expatriates have been in the same country for many years.

It would appear that expatriates' social clubs play a great role in providing support to expatriates during their stay in foreign countries (Black & Gregersen, 1991). Respondents claim to have received support ranging from networking with other nationalities to baby-sitting. However one is puzzled by the low uptake percentages of this support structure. In this study just over a quarter of the respondents have subscribed to expatriate social clubs. It seems as if these low numbers could be attributed to some of the characteristics that prepare the expatriate for international assignment as discussed in chapter 4 and as cited by Huang, et.al (2005) in the literature review particularly "being goal-focused" and having a "can-do attitude". Perhaps some of the respondents found

themselves being self-sufficient and not needing any additional support. However, it would appear that the self-sufficiency does not take away the respondents' need for support from Head Office as attested in this report. It is also interesting to note that there is not enough literature on expatriates' social clubs. John (2013) mentions peer support as one of the factors that impacts on the expatriate's adjustment, however it is not clear whether peer support includes social clubs or support from colleagues at work

It was intriguing to note that some of the respondents acknowledged receiving support from the embassy in host countries. It appeared that the embassy plays a critical role in providing support for various reasons, such as adjustment and establishing relations with external stakeholders, especially with government officials.

One of the sensitive aspects which came out of this study is expatriates' development. MNCs seem to be indecisive in terms of whether they should develop expatriates or they should arrive with the requisite skills and perform; this aspect is also supported by Mayerhofer et al. (2004) exclaiming about the extent of lack of HR support that expatriates are expected to take care of their training and development. At the same time, Kigo (2016) has warned that talent management has become a top priority for organisations across the world and has therefore urged organisations to put the right strategies in place. Confirming lack of training and development for expatriates, one HR Mobility manager in this study has also confirmed that expatriates are treated as experts and therefore do not need to be trained, unless there is a need for a specialised technical skill. It seems as though this expectation has not been clearly communicated to the expatriates as they appeared to have an expectation to be developed.

Adding to this aspect is the revelation on lack of performance support from head office HR. Most respondents complained of lack of interim performance check-ups by head office. As most respondents are CEOs, they highlighted that the only time they get checked is when they have quarterly reviews which are also considered to be a rushed work.

5.4.5 *Expatriates experience with external stakeholders*

Most expatriates, in this study, hold or have held the most senior roles in host countries. Hence, part of their responsibilities involves building relations with external stakeholders, so that the business can grow in those countries. This was also alluded to by John (2013) in her study, where most of her respondents had to interact regularly with local Home Affairs, Port and Harbour Authorities and Customs during their international assignments. Although some of these executives had a pleasant experience dealing with external stakeholders, the majority experienced a tough time. This challenging experience was attributed to lack of trust of the stakeholders in the expatriates. The results of this study have suggested that before external stakeholders could trust an expatriate, the expatriate should prove their credibility that they were worth working with in the country. Looking at most countries where the SA MNCs operate, one could relate the stakeholders' rationale to lack of employment opportunities in those countries. On the other hand, speaking the local language in building relations with external stakeholders, seems to have an impactful advantage. This aspect is supported by Hogan and Goodson (1990) who maintain that language skills improve cultural understanding and build relationships. Those who could speak the local language found it easy to build relationships and had longer lasting stakeholder relations than those who did not. At the same time, to some, being a South African in a foreign country, to others have created positive impressions and high expectations of external stakeholders. The testimony is that stakeholders create impressions that the expatriate knows what they are doing and since they are from South Africa, the assumption is then that they are bringing positive change into the host country.

Lastly, foundational attributes for maintaining stakeholder relations were disclosed and have appeared to have worked before. These attributes have been articulated in chapter 4 of this report. They are; one has to be people-oriented, results-driven, know why they have embarked on an expatriate assignment, be tolerant towards people and have patience. The researcher could not find literature related to foundational attributes for maintaining stakeholder relations in host countries.

5.4.6 *The role of coaching during international assignment*

Recent research has highlighted the importance of an on-site coach for expatriates and repatriates alike (Mendenhall & Stahl, 2000; Feldman & Bolino, 1999).

The common opinion from both respondents who have been coached before and those who have never been coached was that coaching has a critical role to play, especially during the first year of the international assignment. A few suggestions in terms of the focus areas for coaching came out of the findings and are outlined in this section of the report.

Understanding the role of an expatriate as frustrating and as cold sometimes, the coach as a sounding board, emerged as a possibility to alleviate this challenge. Although others confused this role with that of a mentor, the emphasis was, however, on the need for an expatriate to have someone in-country they can talk to about their challenges.

Transitioning executives into new roles in the host country emerged as one of the proposed roles of coaching during expatriation. According to Louis (1980), transitions occur when an individual adopts a new and different orientation to an existing role. Since lack of on-boarding and induction came out strongly as one of challenges experienced during pre-departure preparation in this study, coaching was identified as a possible alternative for transitioning executives into their new roles. However, the respondents asserted that a local coach with expatriation experience would be the most appropriate to help expatriates transition into new roles. At the same time, Bozer et al., (2015) note relevant coaching experience and approach is the most important factor in matching. They however warn that the purpose of coaching should be considered. In agreement are Wycherley and Cox (2008) and Joo (2005) who also regard selection and matching of coaches as the key element in the success of a coaching relationship. In this instance, the relevant experience required would be expatriation and knowledge of the host country. Wycherley and Cox (2008), however, warn the decision makers to be cautious when matching coaches with coachees. They recommend that the decision makers must ensure that they do

not match coaches with coachees because of their previous rapport. They must rather focus on the need for which coaching is required. This statement therefore seems to highlight the importance of goal focus in coaching (Grant, 2012; Grant, Curtayne, & Burton, 2009). On the other hand, recent literature condones the client-coach relationship as the ingredient for effective coaching (Godskesen & Kobayashi, 2016; de Haan, Duckworth, Birch, & Jones, 2013; Rogers, 2012; McKenna, & Davis, 2009).

South African MNCs invest significantly in deploying expatriates to foreign countries and yet, according to the respondents in this study, they fail in planning careers for them. It is on this premise that the respondents found coaching playing a critical role in career advancing, that is, to assist the executive in building their careers in the host countries and, at the same time, building these for the future. At the same, Feldman (2001) and Feldman and Bolino (1999) have introduced a new coaching construct, “career coaching” which seems to be more relevant for expatriation and perhaps even more relevant for helping expatriates transition into their new roles in host countries. Feldman (2001) describes the aim of career coaching as that of preparing managers to improve adjustment to their current host company’s norms and values and to improve performance. According to Mendenhall and Stahl (2000), expatriates need real time support because of their highly demanding roles, they reckon that career coaching will be the most appropriate intervention for this purpose. Coaching for transitioning on the other hand is in line with what Grant, Passmore, Cavanagh and Parker (2010) refer to as “*developmental coaching*”. They describe developmental coaching as the type of coaching that focuses on improving a person’s ability to meet the current and future challenges.

Although respondents saw a need for coaching for the assignee, some also felt a critical need for coaching with special attention on the family. They believe that for the family to be able to support the assignee well, they need to first of all adapt to the host country’s cultural nuances and way of life. Furthermore, one respondent suggested coaching specifically focusing on assisting the spouse to fit in with other spouses. The rationale behind this is, spouses have abandoned

their different career profiles back in the home country. Some career profiles are in executive roles. It is on these premises that there is a need for them to get support on how to deal with the loss of that autonomy and at the same time, accept new roles of supporting the spouse and fitting into the spouse's social clubs. Previous researchers have cited cross-cultural training for family and mentoring for the assignee (Okpara & Kabongo, 2011; Mendenhall et al., 1987; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985) and it appears as if there is still a gap in terms of specific coaching for spouses.

5.5 Discussion pertaining to Research Question 3

This section covers discussion of the research findings as it relates to research question 3, *what are the experiences of expatriate executives post the international assignment in South African Multinational Corporations, and how can coaching support that experience?*

According to Forster and Johnsen (1996), repatriation has somehow has been neglected by companies and researchers.

Discussion focuses on specific themes as emerged during the research.

5.5.1 Repatriation strategy

It would appear that a repatriation strategy is the cornerstone of the repatriation process. It either exists or it does not. The respondents' experiences suggest that the outcomes of the repatriation process are determined by the existence and the quality of the repatriation strategy. The results of this study imply that South African MNCs do not take repatriation seriously. Most respondents mentioned repatriation strategy as non-existent. This is in keeping with Tung (1998b)'s respondents who were reported to be unhappy with the repatriation process. On the other hand, Dhrampal (2013) has also attested to the fact that South African MNCs are falling short in terms of the repatriation of expatriates upon completion of their international assignments. Those who have been on expatriate assignments in this study, for many years, shared how they have never repatriated (Naumann, 1993). At the same time, Bossard and Peterson

(2005) conducted a study on repatriation and they confirmed that some expatriates could stay in foreign countries for as long as five years and Peterson, Napier and Shim (1996) describe those kinds of expatriates as “*internationally mobile*”.

The findings of this study have also suggested that some expatriates get re-assigned to new projects in other countries before their contracts expire while others stay for a long time without knowledge of whether their contracts will be renewed or not. Lack of career planning and communication by Head Office HR seem to be the biggest contributors to the confusion experienced by these expatriates. The implications for this evidence is that the same people end up getting exposed to the expatriate opportunities over and over again, whilst their fellow colleagues never get a glimpse of these international assignments. Hence, seventeen per cent of Finnish respondents in Suutari and Brewster (2001) were already on at least their third international assignment. One wonders what impact would this have then to the talent pipeline in the long run. This question was also testified by Participant 6 in this study when she was questioning the effectiveness of the Head Office Talent Management team in Company X. It did not make sense to her that a big MNC such as Company X could find itself sitting with three vacant CEO positions at the same time. This example is an implication of a lack of repatriation strategy and effective talent management in MNCs.

Career planning as part of the repatriation strategy has emerged as a big gap in the South African MNCs. Some respondents reported lack of clarity about whether one has a job or not back in the home country or in Head Office. Participant 3, in particular, mentioned that repatriates get put in the so-called “*pool*” on their return for a period of three months while the company is still looking for a job for them.

Participant 3: “...*in terms of the group policy that is not something that is clear. In terms of the policy you would be coming back into a role, into a pool for a three months*”

This evidence is supported by Baruch and Altman (2002) by confirming how some repatriates often find themselves in a “*holding pattern*” with no serious job to do. Participant 4 in this study also attested to this statement:

“...when you are outside as an expatriate for a while, the biggest complaint is you get forgotten. So when you come back sometimes you don’t even find a place to land. ...You might just be put in a corner because there is no job for you...”

This is a strong suggestion for poor career planning by Head Office. Respondent 15 is the HR Mobility manager in Company X. She has estimated an amount of between \$20 000.00 to \$90 000.00 as recruitment cost per assignee. One would then wonder, if these MNCs invest so much on expatriates, why do they have to wait until the expatriate is back in the home country to decide whether they have a job for them or not. Out of all three SA MNCs studied, only the HR Mobility manager from Company SO has confirmed that his company does not have repatriation challenges as they view every international assignment as a career. He confirmed that all their repatriates have jobs back in the home country.

It was also evidenced in the study that poor or lack of career planning by MNCs have a great impact on repatriates’ turnover. Although only a few people in this study have experienced repatriation before, the results suggest that the South African MNCs lose great talent to the competition as a result of a poor repatriation strategy. These are some of the testimonials:

Participant 1: *“One of the losses of many countries is repatriation. People like ourselves are gone for fifteen years. You come back and in eighteen months’ time you resign and go somewhere else. These are high calibre individuals and I think it is a loss”*

Participant 2: *“companies need to wake up and realise you know a lot of expatriates come back and they leave the company. Most of them...And I also experienced colleagues, when we speak as expatriates, all of them are saying ‘when I go back I am going there to give notice and I go”*

Black et.al, (1992) have these experiences by sharing the results of their study which proved that the repatriation turnover is almost double domestic turnover rates for managers and executives. Suutari and Brewster (2003) and Allen and Alvarez (1998) have also confirmed loss of great talent by MNCs upon repatriation. Finally, Scullion and Collings (2006) have also confirmed the retention of expatriates as a major international talent management.

It would appear that the SA MNCs look at repatriation from one angle, which is the expatriate returning to their home country but are short-sighted in terms of looking at the impact of repatriation to the host country. One wonders why MNCs are doing this because even at the beginning of expatriation lack of on-boarding and handover was highlighted as a gap. Could this be as a result of lack of unstructured skills transfer that the respondents have testified against? If there is to be business continuity, how will that happen if these kinds of plans are not thought through? One respondent has claimed some kind of negligence on this aspect of repatriation:

Participant 6: *"I guess there was no preparation to say if I leave then what happens, who continues or takes over?"*

When commenting about the role played by MNCs in host countries, Asiedu (2004) acknowledges knowledge and skills transfer is a critical benefit of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) for African countries. While the HR Manager from Company O has emphasised how seriously her company takes transfer of skills, most respondents have confirmed lack of structured skills transfer which can play a significant role in ensuring business continuity. A few executives that have confirmed to have transferred skills, have done so out of their own will and it also seems like their efforts have not been documented anywhere.

A few challenges facing expatriates during repatriation then came out of their frustrations with the repatriation strategy.

5.5.2 Challenges during repatriation

One of the themes that emerged from data analysis under research question 3 was the challenges during repatriation. It would appear that repatriates experience diverse types of challenges as per evidence provided by the respondents which have been organised into three sub-themes, that is, adjustment at work, family adjustment and adjustment to culture which somehow are related to lack or poor repatriation strategy by MNCs. This grouping of challenges is in keeping with Black and Gregersen (1991) and Harvey (1989)'s repatriation framework.

Adjustment at work

Evidence from this study has revealed that most repatriates find it difficult to adjust back at work. To some, this is as a result of many years of being away from the home country and for others, this is as a result of the amount of personal growth that an individual has gained as opposed to where the former colleagues are. Relocation, then, becomes a painful exercise which the researcher could see through the eyes of Participant 3 when explaining with emotions.

“Iran was probably the most difficult to repatriation because after spending seven years there you almost become local. It becomes home for you... everything that is familiar with you is there – your clothes, everything that you own, your whole world is built there. So it is a big relocation back to SA, and I found that integration back into SA was difficult for me. I don’t think I ever fully fitted back into SA...”

One would have thought adjusting back home would be easier than to a foreign country, however, some respondents in this study found it difficult to respond to situations appropriately as they claim that their mind-set was still absorbed in the host country's outlook. The implication is that these executives are then required to be always conscious of what they think and say to check if it is in the right context or not. Although these executives seemed to have found a way to deal with these challenges, the researcher found it depressing to learn that no support was provided by their home country to deal with the situation.

Although international assignments, by their very nature, provide opportunities for growth for expatriates, some repatriates found going back home uninteresting as they discovered that the level at which their former colleagues operate is still the same as when they left them many years ago. As a result, this difference in the level of growth made it difficult for them to fit back into their workplace. This evidence is supported by Black and Gregersen (1991). They claim that 38% of the expatriates in their study indicated that they had difficulty "fitting back into" the style and pace of life in America. Black (1992) highlights that although the repatriates have found that their peers at home have changed, they themselves have also changed. Perhaps that is why Participant 3 in this study has felt like the people have been paused. This implies the level of growth he has acquired over the years through international assignments as compared to his peers at home. On the other hand, it is also interesting to see some similarities between Black and Gregersen (1991)'s study with the study in discussion. Although one was conducted in America and the other one in Africa, the results seem to be the same.

Family adjustment

Family adjustment has been cited by previous researchers, Chew (2004) and Black and Gregersen (1991), as one of the principal challenges to repatriates. The results in this study have revealed that there are numerous aspects with regard to family adjustment.

Evidence has revealed that although to some, the family was happy to re-unite with them, it took both parties a significant amount of effort to adjust to how things are going to run in the family. The example that stood out was that of Participant 3 who alluded to how difficult it was for his sons who were used to ask their mother for everything during his absence, they continued to do so even during his presence as it was difficult for them to adjust. The opposite side of this narration is that it was a challenge to the repatriate as well to assume those roles. This evidence is supported by Baruch and Altman (2002)'s statistics that forty per cent of the repatriates had experienced negative interpersonal relationships at home.

Black and Gregersen (1991) claim that twenty five per cent of repatriates in their study, have indicated that they had a financial issue upon return. The results of this study have proposed this literature true. The number one challenge has been highlighted as the adjustment of earnings from foreign currency to local currency. Further to that is the tax issue, as most expatriates' salaries are tax-free when they are abroad. It has been evident this change has an impact on a number of factors, such as adjustment on type of school for the children and lifestyle. These results did not come as a surprise as they are in keeping with previous literature (Gregersen & Stroh, 1997; Black, Gregersen & Mendenhall, 1992; Black and Gregersen, 1991; Harvey, 1989).

Participant 4: *"I am now financially worse off than I was there ... because my tax has increased"*

Participant 6: *"...a huge adjustment....because it is not like you are swimming in dollars anymore, you are earning in rands"*

Participant 1: *"...first of all you can't even afford that type of international school. So that on its own also needs some adjustment you know."*

Adjustment to culture

The most intriguing evidence that came out of research question 3 of this study is how culture plays a significant role when an expatriate goes to foreign countries and still when they return. This is what literature refers to as "reverse culture shock" (Ahad, Osman-Gani & Hyder, 2008; Harvey & Novicevic, 2006, Bossard, & Peterson, 2005; Chew, 2004; Arthur & Bennett, 1995; Forster, 1994). One would have thought it must be easy to adjust back home culturally since you have lived there most of the time and it is your home. However, testimony from Participant 3 in this study has proven that it is not as easy as one would think.

" Culturally as well coming back, I couldn't hear English at the beginning (looks frustrated), I battled to understand, my brain works in Farsi, so I battled, I couldn't change...I couldn't hear the accent, and I really battled... So I will come back one day but..."

One would always ask the question, “What support did these repatriates get to overcome these challenges?”

This question is answered in the next section of this chapter.

5.5.3 *Support during repatriation*

Evidence retrieved from this study made it apparent that there are mixed feelings as far as support during repatriation is concerned. Data gathered also revealed that support in this regard does not only refer to support from Head Office but includes support from local HR, as they are part of the repatriation process.

The testimonials received have once again proven the inconsistent treatment of repatriates by Head Office. One respondent recalls receiving an offer to see a psychologist upon return, on the other hand the other one testifies finding a psychologist by herself after realising she has not fully adjusted back home. At the same time, the HR Mobility manager from the same organisation claims her organisation offers psychological support to repatriates, however, in her defence, the organisation offers this service at the choice of the repatriate.

Although the HR Mobility manager of Company X specifically, claims very strongly to be offering support during repatriation, some repatriates shared how negligently the repatriation process is handled in such a manner that when Participant 11 arrived back at Head Office, the same HR Mobility manager was not even aware that she was back. These statements prove conflicting experience between the repatriates and the HR Mobility manager.

Some repatriates however felt that although they expect Head Office to support them during the process, they too have a role to play. One respondent in particular blames herself for the decisions she made for her repatriation.

Even though respondents demonstrated dissatisfaction with Head Office, they seemed satisfied with support received from the local HR team. There seems to be consistency in terms of the support from the local HR team. Most respondents acknowledged receiving support from the HR local team during

pre-departure look-see visits and again during the early stages of repatriation, that is, support in terms of shipping of luggage back home, claims, tax clearance and arrangement for travel back home.

Suutari and Brewster (2001) and Forster and Johnsen (1996) highlight the fact that some MNCs do offer support to their employees during repatriation; support such as job planning and mentoring. No support in terms of coaching was mentioned.

5.5.4 *The role of coaching during repatriation*

Previous researchers, such as Adler (1981) and Black et al. (1992), have recommended a few interventions to reduce the impact of the reverse culture experience during repatriation. Interventions such as pre-return training, mentorship programme for the repatriates and repatriation career policies. Although there is not enough literature on coaching for expatriates, the respondents in this study saw a great need for coaching for expatriates, especially during repatriation.

Repatriation has been cited by some of the respondents as a process that involves a great deal of emotion. It is believed that some expatriates do not want to go back home. This anxiety is attributed to fear of losing power and autonomy (Harvey, 1989). It is on this premise that coaching was deemed an appropriate solution to prepare expatriates for the final stage of their international assignment journey. The respondents have made a few recommendations in terms of specific focus areas for coaching repatriates.

Advice and support on finances seem to be critical during both pre-departure and repatriation phases. When expatriates are leaving their home country, they experience a financial status change as a result of change in currency. The same thing applies when coming back home. They go through another leg of a financial challenge as a result of a change in currency. It is interesting to notice that the financial change during pre-departure is more positive as the expatriate gets to experience their pay in foreign currency and a tax-free salary. The reverse then happens during repatriation. This time around the change appears

to be a bit negative as the repatriate salary gets paid in local currency and gets taxed. It has been attested that some repatriates become depressed as a result of this steep financial change. It is on this premise that some respondents found coaching playing a big role there. Although the client has been cited as the director of change in the person-centred coaching approach (Stober, 2006; Feist & Feist, 1998), Rogers (2012) emphasises the fact that change cannot happen unless the client is ready to change which will also require a reasonable amount of self-awareness (Goleman, 2004). Therefore, the repatriate would need to be aware of the change in their financial status and want to be coached on the matter if it is to be effective. Perhaps the right approach to coaching could be solution-focused coaching as Grant and O'Connor (2010) promotes that the solution-focused approach increases positive affect, decreases negative affect and increases self-efficacy. It is interesting to see the respondents believing very strongly that coaching can assist repatriates on financial matters. One would have thought that financial advisors from approved financial institutions would be the right authorities to offer this kind of support.

Another recommendation was on coaching with specific focus on career planning. Since career planning has been proven to be lacking in SA MNCs, other respondents found coaching to have a significant role in assisting the repatriates with their career plans. Although it sounded like the respondents would prefer coaching on finances to be completed before return, they felt it would be appropriate if repatriation coaching for career planning takes place back in the home country. The frustration about lack of career planning seems to have also been revealed by Baruch and Altman (2002) and Engen (1995). They see returning home from international assignment as a potential career disaster for many repatriates. Although coaching for repatriates was highly recommended by respondents, they however, prefer that the coaching be someone with previous expatriate experience; Allen and Alvarez (1998) suggest that repatriates should be utilised as trainers for future expatriates.

5.6 Conclusion

This section has underlined the findings of the study and shows the links to the existing literature.

To conclude this chapter, a summary of the answers to the research questions is presented as follows:

5.6.1 *Research question 1*

With regard to the research question: “what are the experiences of expatriate executives prior to taking positions in South African multinational corporations, and how can coaching support that experience”, the study revealed experiences of expatriates before departure and the possible roles that coaching can play during that phase of expatriation.

The chapter discussed the mixed experiences of the respondents’ prior to departure for their international assignment. Some had good experiences whilst others had a bad experience. This section also discussed the inconsistency of some of the SA MNCs with regard to how they prepare their expatriates before departure in the midst of a whole range of pre-departure programmes that emerged from the findings.

The experience of executives in terms of support received prior to departure was also discussed in this chapter. It is apparent that the SA MNCs are still lacking in terms of adequate support from head office HR. Misalignment and miscommunication between head office HR and host country HR was discussed as a red flag for the SA MNCs.

The characteristics that prepare an assignee for expatriation were discussed at length showing the links to previous literature in this chapter. Furthermore, the impact of pre-departure preparation to expatriates and to their families was also highlighted. This shows a strong relationship between pre-departure and experience in host country.

Finally, the potential role of coaching prior to departure was also discussed at length.

5.6.2 *Research question 2*

Regarding the research question: “what are the experiences of expatriate executives during the international assignment in South African Multinational Corporations, and how can coaching support that experience” this chapter discussed the experiences of expatriates in host country at work and outside work. In addition to that, it also looked at the possible role of coaching during the assignment.

Experiences at work, amongst other things, included work ethics, adjustment, on-boarding and handover. The respondents had varied experiences.

How expatriates balance head office and host country’s expectations was discussed at length in this chapter. This was then followed by another lengthy discussion of challenges experienced by expatriates with language emerging as the interesting topic in this section.

Various sources of support experienced by expatriates during the assignment were discussed. Sources mentioned included Head office, local HR, peers, social clubs, family and the High Commissioner. Furthermore, the expatriates’ experiences with external stakeholders was discussed as answering research question 2.

The final topic in research question 2 was the possible role of coaching during the assignment. A few coaching roles, such as transitioning and career planning, were discussed in this section.

5.6.3 *Research question 3*

Regarding the research question: “what are the experiences of expatriate executives post the international assignment in South African Multinational Corporations, and how can coaching support that experience” this chapter

discussed the experiences of expatriates during repatriation and the possible role of coaching during repatriation.

Lack of a proper repatriation strategy was discussed at length, and all other subsequent topics seemed to emanate from that. Within the repatriation strategy was the loss of great talent by the SA MNCs.

Further discussions to answer research question 3 were on the challenges experienced during repatriation. Those challenges included challenges at work, challenges at home and challenges related to adjustment to home country culture.

The next topic for discussion was the experiences of repatriates in terms of support.

Finally, the possible roles of coaching during repatriation were discussed. Roles included adjustment back at home, coaching on finances and career planning.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This section is a summary of the key findings of the research regarding the experiences of expatriate executives taking positions in South African multinational corporations and the role that coaching can play to support those experiences. The summary of the findings is presented in all three phases of the expatriation lifecycle.

6.2 Conclusions of the study

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of expatriate executives taking positions in South African multinational corporations and also to examine the possible role of coaching in all three phases of expatriation, that is, prior to departure, during the assignment and post the assignment. The respondents of this study are from three SA MNCs in telecommunication, oil and hospitality industries with the majority coming from the telecommunication company. It is interesting to note that the nationality of the respondents is not only South Africans, but also from Cote D'Ivoire, Ghana and Iran.

The findings of this study revealed both positive and negative experiences in all three phases of the expatriates' lifecycle. The findings also revealed different roles that coaching can play in each phase of the expatriation lifecycle.

6.2.1 *Pre-departure*

In phase 1 of the expatriation lifecycle, the findings reported the expatriates' mixed experiences prior to departure. Some confirmed good experiences which involved cultural awareness training with family, psychological assessment and look-see-visits whereas others reported bad experiences which included a hasty two-week preparation before departure. Although most previous researchers cited CCT as used by most MNCS and some thought it was ineffective, the findings of this study have revealed more pre-departure programmes which can

be considered by MNCs and have been confirmed by the respondents as effective. Programmes such as information pack which the assignee receives before departure, banking and benefits sessions with spouse and look-see visits. Look-see-visit was acknowledged by most respondents as the most effective preparation tool. Most expatriates reported a positive perspective after the look-see-visit.

What came as a surprise is readiness or preparation that expatriates get out of prior international assignments. Those who had this opportunity confirmed they did not need further preparation before taking long-term assignments. Although this thinking or attitude was discouraged in literature with the view that it could lead to high expatriate failure rate, when one looks at those who praised the advantages of prior international experience in this study, they have been expatriates for more than three years and others in more than three countries, so one may claim that prior international experience does have its place in preparing expatriates for long term assignments.

Still in the pre-departure phase, the results suggested a set of characteristics that respondents deemed are required for adjustment and success in international assignments. Although these characteristics have not been scientifically proven, they align fairly well with Caligiuri (2000)'s big five personality characteristics that predict the expatriate's desire to terminate the assignment or not.

In terms of support prior to departure, this study focused mainly on lack of alignment and miscommunication between head office HR and host country.

The impact of pre-departure preparation for expatriates had an important effect on the expatriate's experience in the host country. For example, those who did not have on-boarding had to learn on the fly when they got to the host country. Others regret why they took their children out of school instead of waiting until the children finish the school term in the home country. At the same time, those who were adequately prepared confirmed smooth adjustment to culture and work.

Most previous researchers have recommended cross-cultural training before departure, but the results of this study suggest the addition of coaching to interventions an expatriate would have gone through during pre-departure. Coaching, mainly for the first time expatriates, should have a special focus on preparing the individual for adjustment into the new culture, to deal with political nuances and to navigate the new role. Special emphasis is needed in coaching for South Africans as they are deemed arrogant and insensitive to other cultures. It is important to note that a strong preference is made for a coach with previous expatriate experience and who should be of the host country's nationality. This revealed that pressure will be on head office HR as they will need to ensure the right coach is matched with assignees, at the same time bearing in mind the importance of client-coach relationship. Ultimately, it would depend on whether the coachee feels connected to the coach or not, as it is supposed to be a relationship of trust (Stober, 2006).

The exceptional finding in this aspect is the recommendation for coaching for the family that is staying behind in the home country. Previous researchers have recommended pre-departure training for family accompanying the assignee as they are considered key for the expatriate's failure to adjust, and there is not much literature on preparation for family staying behind. It is therefore important to note that family staying behind in the home country plays as critical a role as family accompanying the assignee in terms of support for the expatriate's adjustment and success in the host country. It therefore deserves equal attention and support.

6.2.1 *During the assignment*

Phase 2 of the expatriation lifecycle focused on mixed experiences of expatriates in the host country. Experiences in terms of induction and handover, work ethics, the country and its people, managing head office expectations against host company's expectations, challenges experienced, dealing with external stakeholders and finally, the role of coaching while in the host country.

SA MNCs are not consistent in terms of induction and handover of the responsibilities to a new job incumbent. Handover, especially, is a vehicle for

business continuity. Unless MNCs want to frustrate the expatriate, then handover must be included in MNCs HR policies as standard to all.

The common thread in terms of how expatriates experienced work ethics in their respective host countries is accountability and commitment by local employees. The results recommend the relationship between commitment, accountability and quality. The experiences of expatriates are that in some host countries, local colleagues would arrive at work and in meetings whenever they want to and not even feel bad or see anything wrong with it, which signifies lack of accountability and commitment which in turn, affects the quality of their work. Nigerians were however, commended by most respondents as more committed, hard-working and confident, as compared to their fellow counter-parts.

In terms of challenges experienced by expatriates, what stood out was acceptance by local employees and external stakeholders. It is evidenced that not whether one is in Africa or in the Middle East, expatriates are not easily accepted by locals. In some countries, such as Iran, Nigeria and South Sudan, hierarchy still plays a critical role. Some experienced difficult acceptance not because of the roles they occupy but because of their gender. However, the common conclusion is that once the expatriate has proven credibility, interest in the host country's welfare, potential and ability to speak a foreign language, then everybody becomes happy. Previous researchers have cited women expatriates experiencing lack of acceptance because of their gender (Tahir & Ismail, 2007). This was however, not implied in this study.

Expatriates' experience in terms of unethical business dealings did not come as a surprise in this study as most researchers who conducted research in Africa have mentioned it as a big challenge (Dhrampal, 2013; John, 2013; Olatunbosun & Oluduro, 2012). Surprisingly, the results of this study showed the impact of this unethical behaviour on expatriates. The results of this study has also implied that unethical behaviour has a potential to cause fear (fear of being sabotaged) and lack of trust in expatriates.

Balancing head office objectives with host country's expectations came as the crux of expatriates' experience during their assignment in all respondents.

Misalignment of head office objectives with host countries causes a lot of confusion and frustration to expatriates working for SA MNCs. This is attributed to the fact that most decision makers and strategy planners in head office have no understanding of the host countries' context. This dilemma has been cited by previous researchers (Collings et al., 2007; Allen & Alvarez, 1998; Hogan & Goodson, 1990; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1988). However, the exception in this study is the call for the SA MNCs to localise content. The results of this study suggest the benefits of localisation of content as being the enhancement in investor confidence, improvement in stakeholder relations which will, in the long run, increase MNCs productivity in the market.

In terms of support during the assignment, lack of interim performance check-in by MNCs head office was revealed. It would appear that SA MNCs assume that once an expatriate has landed in the host company, their job is done and the expatriate will do well. The results suggest that SA MNCs conduct interim check-ins every six months. The benefit of these sessions is viewed as being to assist head office to ascertain a need for any interim intervention to both expatriate and the family. It is also interesting to note that the respondents see this as the responsibility of head office and not the host country.

A positive finding was the supporting role played by expatriates' social clubs and the High Commissioner in the host country. Although not all current expatriates and repatriates have enjoyed these services, however, those who did, have confirmed the effectiveness of these institutions in terms of adjustment and building stakeholder relations. There is however, limited literature around this aspect.

The findings of this study suggest that coaching can support the expatriates experience in the following ways: sound boarding, cultural adjustment, transitioning and performance. These different ways are aligned to what literature referred to as career coaching. However, emphasis was more on the most appropriate time for coaching in-country, which is the first three months of expatriation. A surprising finding on this aspect is coaching the spouse on how to fit in with other spouses. This is an implication that can be explored further as there is a gap in the literature in this regard.

6.2.1 *Post assignment*

Lastly, phase 3 of the expatriation lifecycle focused on the experiences of expatriates after their international assignments.

Lack of a proper repatriation strategy has emerged as the crux for experiences of expatriates during repatriation. With a poor repatriation strategy, this study has discovered a loss of great talent by MNCs. One of the HR Mobility managers has estimated between \$20 000.00 and \$90 000.00 spend on recruitment costs per expatriate, which does not warrant poor career planning and loss of talent.

Career planning still exists as a big gap in MNCs. This is confirmation from previous literature except that most of it was not focused on South African MNCs.

Previous literature has reported expatriation as used by many MNCs as a vehicle to invest in other markets. Subsequent to that, many researchers have also reported lack of repatriation planning and strategy in many MNCs. However, it would appear that some MNCs focus more on preparing the repatriate for coming back home and neglect the potential challenge that the host country might face when the expatriate has gone back home. It is on this basis that the findings in this study have revealed a lack of structured knowledge and skills transfer policy in SA MNCs as a vehicle for business continuity. It would appear that even those who transferred knowledge and skills did it voluntarily and no record of their efforts were kept.

The findings of this study also noted that although some MNCs do offer psychological support during repatriation, others leave it up to the discretion of the repatriate. One would have thought this service as critical for repatriates' adjustment back in home country. There is however the link between psychological assessments during pre-departure and psychological assessments post assignment. It would appear that perhaps if MNCs did not deem psychological assessments important at the beginning of the lifecycle, what would make them consider them post the assignment?

The study further suggests that expatriates working for South African MNCs are not different from other repatriates of other countries, they too have experienced reverse culture shock.

In this phase, the respondents indicated coaching as best suited for building financial skills since repatriates generally go through a significant financial change which has an impact on their lifestyle. Career planning was also discovered by respondents as an appropriate role for coaching since it was evident that most repatriates do not know whether they will have jobs upon return except for Company TS in this study, which confirmed that all their expatriates are guaranteed jobs upon return to the home country. Expatriation in this company is regarded as a career and not a project. The results of this study also suggest a coach with expatriate experience. It is interesting to note that most respondents suggested repatriates from the same MNCs should be used as coaches and leaders in formulating the expatriates' strategy.

Generally this study confirms poor repatriation and support by SA MNCs.

In conclusion, the most absorbing finding in this study is the fact that, apart from the mixed experiences the respondents are going through, or have gone through in foreign countries, they have all confirmed very strongly that they would take expatriation assignments over and over again if given the opportunity. They also all confessed enduring the challenges mentioned in this study because of personal goals at hand. This therefore implies that expatriates are goal-driven.

6.3 Recommendations

As more and more companies are entering the global market, competition for talented employees is ever increasing. It has therefore become imperative for the MNCs to differentiate themselves from the rest on how they recruit, develop and retain their expatriates.

As indicated in Chapter 1 of this research report, a variety of stakeholders will benefit from the significance of this research and the recommendations provided.

These stakeholders have been identified as follows:

- South African MNC's doing or considering doing business outside South Africa
- Head-office HR employees whose role is to administer and manage expatriates working for the South African MNC
- Current expatriates working for South African MNCs
- Potential expatriates in South African MNCs
- Host Country HR practitioners employed by South African MNC companies whose role is to support expatriates in their countries
- Current and potential coaches for expatriates

Twenty eight (28) recommendations have been made for the above stakeholders respectively in a table format in **Appendix E**.

What follows are the details of those the researcher deems the most significant recommendations:

South African MNCs have an option to utilise local skills in their subsidiaries, however most of them have decided to go on an expatriate route. At the same time, a lack of a clear expatriate strategy was revealed in this study, it is therefore recommended that before SA MNCs send anyone abroad, the strategy planners should first of all ask themselves a question why they need expatriates in their operating markets. Once that strategic intent has been established, then all other strategies and policies can be defined as recommended in **Appendix E**.

The results of this study also displayed that pre-departure preparation was mainly focused on the potential expatriate, their families and the support that head office provides to the expatriate. No attention was mentioned about how locals are prepared to receive and support the expatriate. This study therefore recommends that especially, host country HR practitioners and the team or

department in which the expatriate will be placed, also be prepared. Head office HR practitioners should ensure that host country's preparation content includes learning the culture of the prospective team member, the highlights of the expatriate's career and the rationale behind the expatriate's appointment in their country, that is, their mandate. This will reduce resistance to change, improve acceptance levels, build tolerance levels, and encourage collaboration and support.

Another key point under recommendation is the point that is leaning towards assisting SA MNCs to reduce repatriation turnover. It is recommended that SA MNCs should consider creating a pool of roving expatriates instead of long-term expatriate assignments. Roving expatriates are those individuals who are available and skilled to take up on any international assignments at any time. An organisation can have a pool of them and whenever there is a need for an expatriate in any of their operating markets, they can extract from the pool depending on the expertise required. Roving expatriates can be used on a short-term basis. They do not need to originate from the parent company's country. They can be from anywhere where the MNC operates. This can save the MNC pre-departure training costs, especially family related costs such as schooling, improve adjustment levels and relocation costs. Roving expatriates can rove for a year or less and give another pool member an opportunity to rove when there is a need. By so doing, multiple career opportunities will be created. At the same time, this will be in line with what Stahl, Miller, and Tung (2002) refer to as boundaryless careers.

As literature has reported extensively that MNCs use expatriates as a vehicle to expand into other markets, on the other hand, it has also been discovered in this study that most respondents focused more on the assignee when talking about repatriation and less on the host company. Many researchers have also suggested support interventions, such as mentoring, and the respondents in this study recommended coaching for the repatriate. This argument somehow is an indication of lack of attention to business continuity. What is going to happen to the host company once the expatriate has returned home? Will the host company be able to carry on without reducing performance levels? Although

there are high performance expectations from the expatriates, they do not work in a vacuum. They need contributions from their team members. It is on this basis that this study recommends that MNCs Head office HR factor a structured knowledge and skills transfer process in their expatriate strategy to ensure business continuity.

Insufficient support to expatriates came out as one of the challenges the expatriates have experienced in all three companies in this study. On the other hand, lack of capacity has been cited by some of the HR Mobility managers as one the reasons for lack of support. In light of these statements, this study recommends a dedicated team for Global Mobility. Having this kind of a team will help the MNCs in providing adequate support to expatriates in all phases of the expatriation. The support will also contribute towards reducing expatriates' complaints and failure rate.

As coaching has been implied as a fairly new concept as part of expatriation strategy, it is recommended that the MNCs establish a culture of coaching as part of their talent strategy overall. That is, talent strategy for expatriation should not be seen as separate for the entire business and a coaching culture should be created as a vehicle to drive talent strategy. As coaching has been referenced by many as helping in unlocking potential, improving personal satisfaction and performance (Whitmore, 2010; Passmore & Law, 2008; Feldman & Lankau, 2005), this study suggests that a coaching culture will help the MNCs in developing the right talent that is aware of themselves, self-directed and able to execute the strategy in all their markets.

Learning a foreign language is also recommended for the current expatriates and those who are considering taking international assignments to pursue their careers. Learning a foreign language will give the candidates an added advantage over others, especially when dealing with external stakeholders as the results of this study has implied.

Please refer to **Appendix E** for spread of recommendations per stakeholder.

6.4 Suggestions for further research

This research builds on the existing body of knowledge that has been established, both globally and in South Africa. It focused especially on experiences of expatriate executives working for South African MNCs and an examination on the possible role for coaching. This research has covered all three phases of the expatriation lifecycle. It has also included expatriate executives of other nationalities, but further research is needed.

Firstly, although this study included experiences of Head Office Mobility managers, further research could be carried out on experiences of host country HR managers on their experiences of the management of expatriates and examine how coaching can support those experiences. This will help in terms of hearing the other side of the story. Related to this could be another qualitative study on how host employees working for South African MNCs have experienced the expatriates working with them and how coaching can support them.

Secondly, while the experiences of expatriates during repatriation has been covered in this study, the study only focused on experiences of repatriates of a South African nationality (Parent country nationals) as there was no opportunity to interview non-South Africans on this topic. It would be interesting to see if other nationalities (Third country nationals) would have different experiences in their home countries still under the umbrella of South African MNCs.

Furthermore, the role of coaching has emerged as critical in all three phases of expatriation, further study could be carried out to examine the effectiveness of coaching in all phases of expatriation. Since coaching is still a new concept in most South African companies, the scope could also be extended to other MNCs and not just South Africans.

Strong recommendations were made in this study for a coach with expatriate experience, a recommendation is for further study on the effectiveness of expatriate coaching by a coach with expatriate experience compared to expatriate coaching by a non-expatriate coach. This study will help in terms of

knowing whether it is necessary for an expatriate to be coached by a former coach or not.

While the majority of respondents in this study were not accompanied by their spouses, further study could be carried out to explore the experiences between expatriates with spouse accompaniment and those without spouse accompaniment. This will add value to the body of knowledge to see the impact that each category has on the success of an expatriate.

While repatriation was implied as one the painful experiences some of the respondents of this study went through, almost all repatriated respondents recommended a need for the MNCs to capitalise on the repatriates' experience to draw or refine expatriate strategies. It is on this premise that a further qualitative research to explore the role of repatriates in ensuring business continuity in MNCs Global strategy is recommended. This exploration will assist in incorporating strategies such as knowledge and skills transfer to both home country and host country.

It appears as if enough previous literature, and this study, has touched on the need for support to families accompanying the assignee, there is little about support for families remaining at home for the duration of the expatriate assignment. For that reason, this study recommends a further study on the experiences of stay-home families during expatriation, and examination on the role that coaching can play to support that experience. This study will help all the current and future expatriates in deciding whether they need to take their families along or not. Secondly, as cost has become an issue in expatriation, this further study will help the MNCs in looking at different cost-effective global mobility strategies. Lastly, further research in this recommended topic will also add value to coaches in terms of opportunities for coaching and different coaching approaches to support that experience.

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APPENDIX A: RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

1. Research Instrument 1: For expatriate executives

Research question 1

“What are the experiences of expatriate executives prior to departure in South African Multinational Corporations, and how does coaching support that experience?”

Question 1:

How did your organisation prepare you for your international assignment?

What kind of support did you receive?

Research question 2

“What are the experiences of expatriate executives during the assignment in South African Multinational Corporations, and how does coaching support that experience?”

Question 2:

How was your experience while you were on assignment in foreign country?

What kind of support did you receive?

Research question 3

“What are the experiences of expatriate executives post international assignment in South African Multinational Corporations, and how does coaching support that experience?”

Question 3:

How was your experience during repatriation?

What support did you receive?

If you had the opportunity and the authority to improve the experience of expatriates in South African multinational corporations, what would that be? and why?

Question 3:

Is there anything we did not cover regarding your experience as an expatriate you would like to share?

Closing

Thank you for your participation. I will get in touch.

2. Research Instrument 2: For Human Resource Personnel managing international assignments

Research question 1

“What are the experiences of expatriate executives prior departure in South African Multinational Corporations, and how does coaching support that experience?”

Question 1

What kind of pre-departure preparation do you offer your expatriates before they leave for their international assignments?

Research question 2

“What are the experiences of expatriate executives during the assignment in South African Multinational Corporations, and how does coaching support that experience?”

Question 2

How do you support your expatriates while on assignment in a foreign country?

Research question 3

“What are the experiences of expatriate executives post international assignment in South African Multinational Corporations, and how does coaching support that experience?”

Question 3

As Head office, how do you handle the repatriation process of your expatriates?

If you had the opportunity and the authority to change anything in the expatriates’ life cycle, what would that be, and why?

3. Discussion guide

Background demographics of the participant

Name of participant	
Marital status	
Date, venue and time of interview	
Industry	
Nationality of the participant	
Job level of the participant while on international assignment	
Your role in the organisation	
Current country of international assignment	
Other countries previously worked in and duration	
Any exposure to coaching at any stage of your international assignment and how?	

APPENDIX B: CONSENT LETTER

The Graduate School of Business Administration

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Johannesburg, 2193,
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Website: www.wbs.ac.za



MBA RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

Exploring the experiences of expatriate executives in South African Multinational Corporates: the role of coaching

INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM

Hello, I am Bonga Mnengisa. I am conducting research for the purpose of completing my Masters in Management and Business Executive Coaching at Wits Business School.

I am conducting research on the *experiences of expatriate executives in South African Multinational Corporations, and how coaching supports that experience*. I am conducting a qualitative study with 18 experts to establish the experiences of expatriates:

1. before embarking on the international assignment (pre-departure)
2. during the expatriation and
3. post the international assignment (repatriation)

I am asking you whether you will allow me to conduct one interview with you. If you agree, I will ask you to participate in one interview for approximately one hour. I am also asking you to give us permission to tape record the interview. I tape record interviews so that I can accurately record what is said.

Please understand that **your participation is voluntary** and you are not being forced to take part in this study. The choice of whether to participate or not, is yours alone. If you choose not take part, you will not be affected in any way whatsoever. If you agree to participate, you may stop participating in the research at any time and tell me that you don't want to go continue. If you do this there will also be no penalties and you will NOT be prejudiced in ANY way.

Any study records that identify you will be kept confidential to the extent possible by law. The records from your participation may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including my academic supervisor/s.

All study records will be destroyed after the completion and marking of my thesis. I will refer to you by a code number or pseudonym (another name) in the thesis and any further publication.

At the present time, I do not see any risks in your participation. The risks associated with participation in this study are no greater than those encountered in daily life.

There are no immediate benefits to you from participating in this study. However, this study will be extremely helpful to us in understanding the experiences of expatriate executives in South African Multinational Corporations and how coaching supports that experience.

If you would like to received feedback on the study, I can send you the results of the study when it is completed sometime after March 2017

This research has been approved by the Wits Business School. If you have any complaints about ethical aspects of the research or feel that you have been harmed in any way by participating in this study, please contact the Research Office Manager at the Wits Business School, Mmabatho Leeuw. Mmabatho.leeuw@wits.ac.za. If you have concerns or questions about the research you may call my academic research supervisor, Kerrin Myers on +27 114853055.

CONSENT

I hereby agree to participate in research *the experiences of expatriate executives in South African Multinational Corporations, and how coaching supports that experience*. I understand that I am participating freely and without being forced in any way to do so. I also understand that I can stop participating at any point should I not want to continue and that this decision will not in any way affect me negatively.

I understand that this is a research project whose purpose is not necessarily to benefit me personally in the immediate or short term.

I understand that my participation will remain confidential.

.....

Signature of participant

Date:.....

I hereby agree to the tape-recording of my participation in the study.

.....

Signature of participant -----

Date:-----

APPENDIX C: DEFINITION OF THEMES

Research question 1: What are the experiences of expatriate executives <i>prior</i> to taking positions in South African Multinational Corporations, and how can coaching support that experience?"	
Theme	Definition
Pre-departure experience	This is a combination of experiences experienced by respondents before their departure for international assignments. That is both positive and negative experiences
Support during pre-departure	The support received or offered to expatriates before leaving their home country
Characteristics that prepare expatriates for international assignment	The qualities that the respondents found important for one to have before taking an international assignment
Impact of pre-departure preparation	The effect of the preparation before leaving home country on the expatriate and others
The role of coaching during pre-departure	The possible role of coaching before leaving home country
Research question 2: What are the experiences of expatriate executives <i>during</i> their international assignment in South African Multinational Corporations, and how can coaching support that experience?"	
Theme	Definition
Experiences of expatriates in host country	How expatriates have experienced host country. This includes both pleasant and bad experiences.
Balancing head office expectations with host country expectations	How expatriates have experienced balancing both head office and host country's objectives.
Challenges during international assignment	The kind of challenges facing expatriates in host country. This includes both work-related and non-work-related
Support during international assignment	The kind of support expected and received by expatriates while in host country. This includes support from head office and host country.
Expatriates experience with external stakeholders	How expatriates experienced their relationship with external stakeholders in host country. This includes how they built and maintained stakeholder relations.

The role of coaching during the assignment	The possible role of coaching during the assignment as seen by respondents.
Research question 3: What are the experiences of expatriate executives <i>post</i> their international assignment in South African Multinational Corporations, and how can coaching support that experience?"	
Theme	Definition
Repatriation strategy	How expatriates experienced the kind of plans that the three MNCs had to repatriate their expatriates
Challenges during repatriation	This represents challenges experienced by expatriated during repatriation. This includes both work-related and non-work related.
Support during repatriation process	How expatriates experienced support during expatriation. This includes support from host country and head office
The role of coaching during repatriation	The possible role of coaching during repatriation to support the experiences as seen by respondents.

APPENDIX D: ACTUAL PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

Participant Number	Sample group	Gender	Age	Nationality	Countries of expatriation	Position in MNC	Coached before or not
1.	Currently working for South African MNCs as an expatriate	Male	51	South African	Swaziland, Sudan, South Sudan, Guinea Bissau	CEO	Yes
2.	HR personnel managing international assignments & currently working as expatriate	Female	36	South African	Nigeria	Head of HR	Yes
3.	Currently working for South African MNCs as an expatriate & has repatriation experience	Male	43	South African	Nigeria, Guinea Conakry, Cote D'Ivoire, Iran, Dubai, South Sudan	Head of HR	No
4.	Repatriated within the last 3 years in SA MNC	Male	48	South African	Tanzania, Angola, Benin, Lesotho	Executive	Yes
5.	Currently working for South African MNCs as an expatriate	Female	35	South African	Guinea Bissau, South Sudan	Executive	No
6.	Repatriated within the last 3 years in SA MNC	Female	43	South African	Swaziland, South Sudan	General Manager	No
7.	Currently working for South African MNCs as an expatriate	Male	30	Iranian	Dubai, South Africa	Senior Manager	Yes
8.	Currently working for South African MNCs as an expatriate	Female	37	South African	Uganda	Executive	Yes
9.	Currently working for South African MNCs as an expatriate	Male	50	Ivorian	Togo, Congo Brazzaville	CEO	Yes
10.	Currently working for South African MNCs as an expatriate	Male	47	South African	Namibia, Mozambique, Benin	CEO	Yes
11.	Currently working for South African MNCs as an expatriate & has repatriation experience	Female	47	South African	Ghana, Tanzania	Executive	Yes

12.	Currently working for South African MNCs as an expatriate	Male	36	Ghanaian	South Africa	Senior Manager	No
13.	Currently working for South African MNCs as an expatriate	Female	36	Cote D'Ivoire	South Africa	Senior Manager	No
14.	Currently working for South African MNCs as an expatriate	Male	37	South Africa	Nigeria	Senior Manager	Yes
15.	HR personnel managing international assignments	Female	35	South African	Dubai	Senior Manager	No
16.	HR personnel managing international assignments	Male	54	South African	Never an expat	HR Head	No

APPENDIX E: NATIONALITY, CURRENT HOST COUNTRY AND PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE

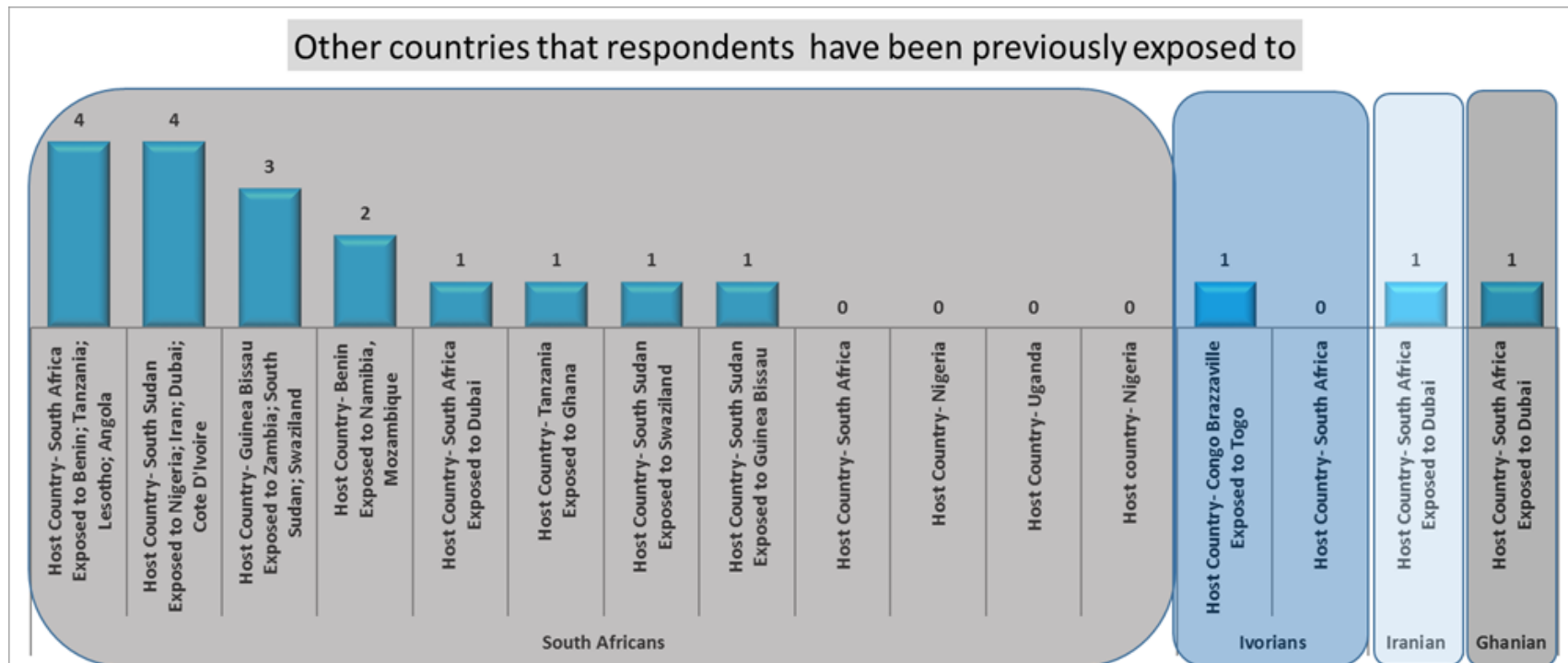


Figure 15: Nationality, current host country and previous experience

APPENDIX F: RECOMMENDATIONS PER STAKEHOLDER

Legend:

√= the stakeholder must drive the recommendation

#= the stakeholder is not the driver but support

			Stakeholder impacted by recommendation				
Focus area	Recommendation	Benefit	MNC	Head office HR	Host country HR	Current/Future Expatriate	Expat Coach/potential coach
Strategy	Establish reasons for having expatriates in your subsidiaries	Makes design for expatriate strategy clear and relevant	√	#	#		
	Formulate expatriate strategy	Keeps business focus	√	#	#		
	Consider implementing short-term international assignments	Saves relocation costs for the assignee and their family	√	#	#		

	Involve former experienced expatriates in strategy planning	Makes strategy more relevant Enhances the alignment between head office and host countries	#	√	#		
	Consider implementing *roving expatriates	Saves pre-departure preparation costs, reduce adjustment challenges Allows for career opportunities for all potential expatriates	#	√	#		
	Consider a portion of projects to be done virtually	Will shorten the expatriate duration in foreign country Empowers locals to lead projects Saves relocation costs Instils shareholder confidence in-country	√	#	#		
	Understand the business rationale for expatriation	Keeps business focus Gives clear direction	√	√	√	√	√
	Have a dedicated team for global mobility	Ensures each expatriate gets adequate support Reduces expatriates complaints Reduces expatriates failure rate	√	√	#		

	Incorporate expatriate HR policies into the Company Talent strategy	Builds global talent pool Reduces expatriates turn over Creates career opportunities for expatriates and all staff	√	√	√		
	Obtain the intent for coaching before embarking on a coaching journey	Helps in ensuring coaching is person-centred and not what the coach wants to achieve		√	#	#	√
Pre-departure	Contextualise pre-departure preparation interventions	Eases adjustment period Improves alignment between preparation and actual experience		√	√	#	#
	Ensure all expatriates are assessed for readiness before departure	Improves adjustment Reduces expatriate failure rate Saves costs		√	#	#	#
	Communicate expatriates strategy to host country HR	Allows for clear role clarification Allows for adequate support for expatriates Eliminates misalignment between head office and host country		√	#		

	Offer pre-departure preparation for locals(<i>content to include cultures of expatriates coming into their departments</i>)	Educates host country employees about the cultures of expatriates coming into their teams Eliminates the short-sightedness of expatriation Improves expatriates acceptance rate by locals Improves tolerance Improves culture of “Ubuntu”		#	√		
	Create a coaching culture for expatriation	Creates self-awareness Improves expatriates emotional intelligence Instils self-directedness Improves adjustment levels		√	√	#	#
	Be prepared for the unexpected	Reduces culture shock Improves adjustment turnaround time				√	#
	Have an open mind	Allows for learning and growth to take place Enhances tolerance and patience Helps handle challenges objectively				√	#
	Know what you want to get out of the assignment	Helps focus				√	#

		Helps manage challenges better Reduces early return Saves the MNC costs					
	Leave your family behind for the first three months	Allows for easy and quicker settlement without pressure Provides ample time for family to prepare mentally and otherwise		#	#	√	#
During	Conduct interim checks	Helps spot challenges before it is too late Improves relationship between expats, head office and host country Improves performance		√	#	#	#
	Conduct an on-boarding programme to all expatriates regardless of level of responsibility	Allows for smooth transitioning Instils confidence into expatriates		√	√	#	#
	Be curious	Reduces elements of biasness Allows for learning and growth to take place				√	

	Understand your role in the organisation	Helps network with relevant stakeholders Helps provide relevant support to relevant people Helps staying out of trouble		√	√	√	√
	Learn foreign language	Gives an added advantage when dealing with stakeholders Improves local people acceptance				√	√
	Allocate a peer to orientate the expatriate	Helps the expat to adjust Helps with acceptance from both expat and host Builds trusts			√	#	
Repatriation	Ensure repatriation strategy and policy is in place (<i>including for short or long term expatriates</i>)	Allows for business continuity Reduces expatriates turnover	√	√			
	Familiarise yourself with repatriation strategy and establish how your role fits in it	Clears expectations Reduces anxiety and improves adjustment	√	√	√	√	√
	Give repatriates opportunity to transfer knowledge and skill to	Allows for business continuity		√	√		

	peers in host country and upon return	Builds confidence into the repatriate Reduces expatriate turnover Improves return on investment Allows the MNC to reflect and build on lessons learnt Allows for career progression					
	Provide coaching support for repatriation	Reduces reverse culture shock Instils confidence in the repatriate Allows for self-reflection		√			√

**roving expatriates* are individuals who have made themselves available for any assignment outside their country. An organisation can have a pool of them and whenever there is a need for an expatriate in any of their subsidiaries, they can extract from the pool. Roving expatriates can be used on a short-term basis. This can save the MNC pre-departure training costs, low adjustment rates and relocation costs. In this case, the roving expatriates do not necessarily need to have long-term accommodation.