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FINNISH BUSINESS REPATRIATES'
COPING STRATEGIES

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Finnish Business Repatriates' Coping Strategies

Key words: adjustment, coping strategies, emotion-focused, Finland, international assignments, problem-focused, repatriation

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

The globalisation of the world economy and the increasing scale of international business activities and operations have constituted major socio-economic changes in recent decades. These developments concern national economies and societies in many ways. They have led to the growing mobility among businesspeople across national borders. Internationally competent managers and experts are considered to be the key assets in achieving success in the global markets (Gregersen, Morrison and Black 1998; Bonache and Fernández 1999). This suggests that international human resources management issues will remain important in the future.

In today's global economy knowledge has been identified as the firm's key resource for enhancing competitive advantage, and for transferring tacit knowledge, cross-border personnel transfers are the most effective methods (Inkpen 1998). An expatriate is normally defined as a professional or managerial employee who is moved from one country to another for employment (Dowling et al. 1994). Firms' possibilities to increase innovations and access to a broader range of solutions to technical problems have also been linked to cross-cultural learning on the part of employees (Bartholomew 1997; Subramaniam and Venkatraman 2001). Earlier work, for example, Kamoche (1997), has pinpointed that an international assignment should be designed in such a way that it enhances the creation and utilization of knowledge on the part of employees and organizational units.

Repatriation can be defined as a process of return to the home country at completion of the foreign assignment, and a repatriate is a person who returns to his or her home country and home company after having been an expatriate (Adler 1997, 237-245). Bringing back expatriates to their country of origin and managing the repatriation process have become complicated tasks for international companies. Allen and Alvarez (1998) refer to repatriation problems as a potential barrier to the successful globalisation of companies. One of the symptoms of the failed repatriation process is the high turnover rates among repatriates. Several scholars (for example, Gomez-Mejia and Balkin 1987; Stroh 1995; Kamoche 1996; Groh and Allen 1998; Allen and Alvarez 1998; Black and Gregersen 1999) have pointed out how expatriates, the alleged key personnel, often leave their companies

soon after their return. For a company this means the loss of its potentially large development investment and high-potential employees. For example, Poe (2000) has reported that as many as approximately 50 per cent of employees leave their companies within two years of repatriation. Furthermore, repatriation failures may have negative impacts on other employees' attitudes towards accepting international assignments (Swaak 1997; Bonache and Fernández 1999).

The increasing interaction between business people across national boundaries means that employees face both work-related and socio-cultural demands in cross-border job changes (Evans and Pucik 2000). For an individual, repatriation can be a stressful change of life, which disturbs his or her daily routines, and his or her sense of 'being at home'. "To re-enter, it turns out, is to be temporarily homeless" (Storti 1997, 29). Behind this kind of emotional distress lie the many changes that have taken place at home as well as within an individual during the expatriation to the foreign country concerned (Black, Gregersen and Mendenhall 1992, 221-231). Besides various changes in non-work life, changes are likely to take place in the returnees' working life. During the assignment changes are likely to have happened in the parent company, such as changes in personnel, corporate strategy and policy (Stroh, Gregersen and Black 2000). These types of changes may be linked to work demands, and career development in the home company of a returning expatriate. Returning expatriates might be confronted with many demands with which they must cope, within as well as outside working-life.

Expatriates from a country like Finland may face particular additional challenges. Finnish employees almost always have to use a foreign language, often English, when working abroad. Returning to the home country may thus mean a greater shift in the linguistic and cultural milieu than for those who can operate in their native language abroad. It can also be claimed that Finland is becoming more multicultural, however, there are great regional variations and a relatively homogeneous culture has still remained. Thus, the relative homogeneity of the Finnish culture may pose more cultural demands upon returning expatriates whose identities usually develop towards greater cosmopolitanism.

In recent years there has been strong internationalization trend of Finnish companies. There are a number of ways to conceptualize and measure the degree of internationalization. To measure "globalness" of corporations, UNCTAD has developed a

composite Transnationality Index (TNI), as a weighted average of three indicators: foreign sales as a percentage of total sales; foreign assets as a percentage of total assets; and foreign employment as a percentage of total employment (Dicken 2003, 30). According to Ali-Yrkkö et al. (2000), Finnish companies have subsidiaries in over ninety countries. Over the past two decades Finnish companies have expanded their international operations in almost all parts of the world.

A significant part of the personnel of Finnish corporations work outside Finland. The situation has changed a lot over the past fifteen years. In 1983 only 16 per cent of the personnel of the ten biggest companies worked abroad; at present over half of them work in foreign units. This trend is likely to increase in the future. The locus of the growth of Finnish corporations has moved abroad, and more and more of investments are directed abroad. Table 1 shows the number of employees of the biggest Finnish multinational companies.

Table 1. Personnel of Finnish MNCs' in 1983 and 2002

Company	1983		2002	
	Number of employees	% of which abroad	Number of employees	% of which abroad
NOKIA	23651	17.5	51748	56.5
STORA-ENSO	15315	9.8	43853	66.5
UPM-KYMMENE	50061	9.4	35579	44.1
METSÄLIITTO	7891	7.5	30247	67.4
METSO	15371	12.8	28489	62.9
KONE	13137	66.2	35864	87.0
OUTOKUMPU	10089	1.4	21130	69.3
HUHTAMÄKI	4698	6.6	15909	95.5
FORTUM	7076	21.0	13118	43.3
RAUTARUUKKI	7712	1.6	12804	41.9

Source: Etna 2004

The degree of internationalization of Finnish companies is increasing, which implies that expatriation, and indeed repatriation, are important issues.

The development of the Finnish economy is significantly dependent on an educated and internationally competent work force. However, taxation in Finland is relatively high, and salaries are relatively modest by industrial country standards. Thus the alternative of staying and working abroad may become more attractive for many Finnish employees. When highly educated, young people increase their language skills and international work competencies, and become more aware of their enlarged possibilities on the international labour markets, they might find that pursuing an international career is more appealing than returning to work in Finland. The importance of questions concerning international human resource management and internationally mobile experts and managers are thus likely to remain relevant and challenging for Finnish companies in the future. This is also likely to be the case in companies from other countries.

1.2. Identifying the research gap

1.2.1. Adjustment research

Many studies in the field of international human resource management have addressed how to manage international work assignments (Dowling and Welch 2004). The main focuses have been recruitment and selection of suitable candidates (Lomax 2001; Shen and Edwards 2004), pre-departure training for both expatriates and their families (Selmer 2002b, Torbiörn and Leon 1998), and what facilitates or inhibits their adjustment to a foreign culture and work environment (Black, Gregersen and Mendenhall 1992a). However, researching repatriation adjustment is arguably even more complex than researching expatriation adjustment, because it involves at least a double geographical and indeed social movement.

In previous research on repatriation adjustment many scholars have drawn upon the so-called BMO-framework named after the authors Black, Mendenhall and Oddou (1992a), which focuses on mapping the factors which, positively or negatively, affect adjustment. Some previous studies have had a specific interest in the role of expectations in repatriation adjustment (Black 1992; Gates 1996; Hammer, Hart and Rogan 1998; Stroh, Gregersen and Black 2000; Suutari and Brewster 2003). The focus has predominantly been a corporate one, with repatriates mostly seen merely as resources to be managed and exploited. Even though there has been some increasing interest in studying repatriation adjustment by using

qualitative methods (for instance, Howell 2003; Begley and Morrow 2003), most studies have used quantitative methods and concentrated only on identifying factors influencing adjustment, thus giving a somewhat simplistic view of this phenomenon (Mendenhall 1999). Compared with qualitative methods, the possibilities for theory generation are also more limited when using quantitative methods (Weick 1989; Pfeffer 1989).

The theoretical formulations of the BMO-framework (Black et al. 1992a) implicitly include assumptions about how individuals' experienced level of uncertainty increases in cross-cultural transfers. Anticipatory adjustment includes changes in individuals' mental maps. The actual adjustment continues by learning to exhibit behaviours that are regarded as appropriate in the expatriates' host cultures. This same type of argumentation can be thought to concern also former expatriates who return to their home culture. The BMO-framework includes factors influencing adjustment. Implicitly it also includes the assumption that the relationship between an individual and his or her environment is in the core of adjustment. However, existing research has addressed the dynamics between individual and environment quite superficially and, consequently, relatively little is known about what expatriates or repatriates actually do to cope with their demands of the return. In this work I prefer to use the concept of 'demands', or specifically 'coping demands' rather than 'stressors', since the latter refers to a much larger area of interest and study (see Seymour 1999, 44; Williams 1999, 10).

1.2.2. The research process

The background of this doctoral study is provided by some of the insights from my licentiate study (Paganus 2000). That study was based on 22 interviews conducted with former Finnish business expatriates. The general aim of that study was to increase our knowledge and understanding of adjustment by linking the analysis of repatriates' experiences of adjustment more closely to their experiences of expatriation adjustment. More specifically, the licentiate study examined repatriates' experiences of adjustment in the dimensions of work, interaction and the general environment. Specific attention was paid to factors that might facilitate return adjustment and, on the other hand, factors that might inhibit adjustment.

The findings from the licentiate study (Paganus 2000) indicated that specific work-related characteristics, such as finding a suitable return position or a new position with new work tasks, and opportunities for utilization of the international work experience were significant facilitators of the repatriates' adjustment. Further, most of the challenges of interaction and communication were associated with the work domain. Hence, the research pointed to the importance of the role of the receiving work community for the repatriates' adjustment and organizational resocialization. The results showed that identity changes were mostly based on managerial competencies, but also to some extent on cultural issues. As in the work domain, the repatriates' own activity outside working life was also important for their adjustment. One of the conclusions from the licentiate study was that there is a need to analyse former expatriates' experiences of repatriation more closely.

This thesis builds on the licentiate study in two important ways. First, in the present study I discuss the insights of the BMO-framework, since some of them relate to domains that might be relevant for research on repatriates' coping. Second, I have reanalysed the data from my previous study on repatriates' adjustment (Paganus 2000) by focusing on their coping strategies. I have also conducted additional interviews in order to validate my data and findings on repatriates' coping behaviour. This doctoral work should be seen as an initial attempt to analyse repatriates' coping behaviour in a way that seeks to address the complexity of the situation, and as means of developing a research agenda for future research.

1.3. The need for research on repatriates' coping

While there has recently been an increasing interest in analysing expatriates' coping strategies (Selmer 2001; 2002c), so far only a relatively small number of studies have focused specifically on repatriates' coping. For instance, Nancy Adler (1981) has constructed a typology of re-enterers by analysing their attitudes to re-entry. She identified four different coping modes to re-entry: proactive, resocialized, alienated, and rebellious re-enterers. She concluded that 'active re-enterers attempt to change themselves and their re-entry environment in order to fit better in the organization, whereas passive re-enterers do not attempt such changes' (Adler 1981, 354). I will return to Adler's typology at the end of Chapter 3.

Feldman and Tompson (1993) conducted a quantitative study on repatriates' coping strategies in job changes. Their main finding was that psychological reappraisal, for instance, looking at the positive side of the job, affected job adjustment positively, while psychological withdrawal, for example, fantasizing about another job, was negatively related to adjustment. They also found that proactive strategies, for example, working long hours, were positively related to satisfaction with growth opportunities, but were negatively related to psychological well-being.

MacDonald and Arthur (2003) utilized both questionnaires and semi-structured interviews in their study on employees' experiences of returning to Canada. Concerning specific findings on adjustment strategies, two strategies that have not been previously cited in the literature emerged from the data. The first was goal setting and establishing a plan of action upon the return. The second was finding a new job in another organization.

Repatriation research has only to a limited extent paid attention to the business repatriates' coping strategies. Concentrating solely on factors influencing adjustment narrows our understanding of the dynamics between an individual and the environment, and the complexity of the processes that individuals go through during repatriation. Earlier studies on repatriation adjustment have not revealed much of the content of adjustment. Studying these types of questions benefits from a qualitative research method, as it deals with the individuals' own accounts of their attitudes, motivations and behaviour (Bossard and Peterson 2005). Hannabuss (1996, 22) has described qualitative research as focusing on seeing the social world from the 'actor's' viewpoint. People's own definitions of certain situations may allow rich descriptions and be a foundation for explaining the underlying behavioural processes at work (Yoddumnern-Attig et al., 1991).

Our knowledge concerning expatriates' responses to demands as they start to prepare for their return is still quite sparse, and we have scant knowledge about how changes in work roles might be related to their responses to demands during the return phase. Further, while interaction is one of three important dimensions of adjustment in the BMO-model, there is little empirical research on former expatriates' responses to the demands of interaction or communication during repatriation. There is also a lack of more detailed knowledge of how confronting cultural differences may be reflected in repatriates' responses to the demands on the dimension of interaction. Moreover, various stress reducing activities may

bring pleasure and happiness, and contribute to relaxing. They are part of individual factors that are assumed to influence expatriates' return adjustment positively (Mendenhall and Oddou 1985, 40). Still, previous research does not include much description and analysis of which specific kind of activities people engage in upon their return.

It has been argued that repairing one's self-image, and feeling being able to control or deal with unexpected situations in a new environment, are preconditions for, and the most important underlying processes of, cross-cultural adjustment (Black et al. 1992, 46; Mendenhall, Punnett and Ricks 1995, 415). Challenging and unfamiliar life events may prompt reflection on, and reassessment of one's self-image. Yet, there is little empirical research exploring the role of self and identity in mediating and regulating repatriates' behaviour in cross-cultural transfers.

The focus of this research lies primarily within the area of IHRM in general and repatriation coping in particular (Black, Mendenhall and Oddou 1991; Dowling and Welch 2004). In the latter field the dominant theoretical formulations derive from Lazarus and Folkman (1984).

1.4. The purpose of the study

The general aim of this study is to increase our understanding of how repatriates cope during repatriation. The research questions can be specified as follows:

- 1) What coping strategies and forms of coping do repatriates use?
- 2) What might influence the use of repatriates' coping strategies and forms of coping?

This study should be viewed as exploratory. I hope through this study to contribute to the development of a research stream on coping strategies employed by repatriates.

1.5. The structure of the thesis

The thesis consists of twelve chapters. This introductory chapter (Chapter 1) establishes the scope and purpose of the study. In the second chapter the so called BMO-model is introduced, and previous research on repatriation that is based on the BMO-model is

outlined. The literature review is supplemented by analysing and adding some alternative and critical perspectives in order to better identify the research gaps, and to ground the choice of research design and approach of the study. Chapter 3 presents the central theoretical formulations of coping used in the conceptual framework that informs this study. Chapter 4 presents theoretical ideas on identity formation.

Chapter 5 presents the methodological choices of the main study, Phase I, of the current research, which is based on the reanalysis of the data of the licentiate thesis. It also describes the collection of the empirical data and the unfolding of the 22 interviews with former Finnish expatriates in Phase I, as well as the analytical strategies applied for achieving the aims of the research.

Chapter 6 presents the findings on the repatriates' coping strategies in the preparation phase. Then, chapter 7 describes what kind of coping strategies the repatriates used in the context of different work role changes. Chapter 8 considers the repatriates' coping strategies in interaction and communication with the home unit's work community. Chapter 9 presents the findings on the repatriates' coping with demands outside working life. Chapter 10 presents the findings of Phase I. Chapter 11 includes a description of Phase II, involving ten follow-up interviews, as well as the analysis thereof. The follow-up interviews were conducted in order to check the external validity of the research results. Chapter 11 also presents the follow-up interviews from Phase II, and their analyses, and the propositions that were formulated based on the findings of Phase I. Chapter 12 summarizes the study, discusses research implications and managerial implications of the study, limitations of the study, and suggestions for further research.

2. PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON REPATRIATION

This chapter introduces the BMO-model (as already noted, named after the authors Black, Mendenhall and Oddou), which has been the basic framework for research on repatriation adjustment. The BMO-model as such will not be the main theoretical framework of this study, even though it involves some elements that may be relevant for my research on repatriates' coping strategies. This chapter reviews the repatriation adjustment literature, and discusses the need for complementary work. Section 2.1. introduces the three dimensions of the BMO-model: readjustment to work, readjustment to interacting with home nationals, and readjustment to the general environment. In section 2.2. factors that are assumed to influence expatriates' pre-return adjustment are introduced. Section 2.3. describes factors that are assumed to be important for individuals' adjustment after they return home. Finally, section 2.4. discusses the relevance of the BMO-model for this study.

2.1. The BMO-model

The dominant theoretical framework (BMO) used in most research on cross-cultural adjustment was originally formulated by integrating theoretical and empirical work of both the international and domestic adjustment literatures (Black, Mendenhall and Oddou 1991). Following the lines of argumentation on expatriate adjustment, Black, Mendenhall and Oddou (1991) constructed an explanatory theoretical framework on repatriate adjustment. The scholars who have formulated arguments for repatriates' adjustment assume that when people re-enter their home country and culture, they discover that many behaviours that they have learned in their ex-host country, are not appropriate in their home country¹. Cross-cultural transfers often mean entering a new, unfamiliar setting, which interrupts people's daily routines and causes psychological uncertainty. According to Black et al. (1991), people aim to reduce uncertainty by learning what is acceptable behaviour and by acting accordingly. When individuals enter a new environment, they are often uncertain as to what is deemed acceptable or unacceptable, or appropriate or inappropriate. When people go through cross-cultural transfers they can experience a culture shock due to

¹ It is often obvious which country is people's home country, which is also true for the interviewees of my study. However, there are at least four different circumstances that may characterise people: where they were born, where they were brought up, what their nationality is, and where they lived as adults prior to expatriation.

experienced differences between the home culture and the host culture (Dowling and Welch 2004, 160). This is the primary explanation for culture shock, which is defined “as a stress reaction where salient psychological and physical rewards are generally uncertain” (Weissman and Furnham 1987, 30).

“In the specific context of expatriation, adjustment is conceptualised as the degree of fit between the expatriate manager and the new environment in both work and non-work domains. Such a fit is marked by reduced conflict and stress and increased effectiveness” (Aycaan 1997, 436). This definition concerning expatriation adjustment could be reformulated for the repatriation adjustment context as follows: in the specific context of repatriation, adjustment is conceptualised as the degree of fit between the repatriate manager and the home environment in both work and non-work domains. Such a fit is marked by reduced conflict, stress and increased effectiveness.

Before examining the BMO-model in detail, I will briefly introduce the three dimensions of it. Researchers conceptualising readjustment have identified three specific dimensions thereof, namely readjustment to work, readjustment to interacting with home nationals, and readjustment to the general environment (Black et al. 1992a, 221-257). The first dimension, readjustment to work, refers to the degree to which the individual feels psychological comfort about his or her new work role and performs at an acceptable level in his or her job (Black 1988). The second dimension, interaction with home country nationals, refers to the degree to which the repatriate feels psychological comfort about being in contact with home country nationals and to his or her ability and desire to develop his or her interaction with them (Gregersen and Black 1990; Mendenhall, Punnett and Ricks 1995, 416). The third dimension, readjustment to the general non-work environment, refers to the degree to which the repatriate feels satisfaction in the general environment of his or her home country. This dimension includes such issues as housing, schooling, health care, transportation, and entertainment (Black 1988; Black et al. 1992a, 121).

In most of the literature on cross-cultural adjustment it is argued that several factors affect pre-return adjustment (see for example Black et al. 1992a). Appropriate pre-return adjustment is supposed to facilitate the actual adjustment to the home country. The nature of pre-return adjustment is mainly cognitive: before the actual return people start to make changes in their mental maps of what working and living will be like in their home country.

After living abroad for several years, most expatriates acquire new mental maps and rules of behaviour. From this follows that people often return home with mental maps that may lead to difficulties for them. Thus, successful pre-return repatriation adjustment demands modifications of these maps. That way people can engage in efforts of predictive control over their move. Pre-return adjustment depends on the expectations held by individuals. Accurate expectations reduce uncertainty, decrease the possibility of surprises and negative affective reactions and speed up the adjustment (Black et al. 1992a, 221-231).

The actual, in-country repatriation adjustment, and the success of it is influenced by both predictive and behavioural control. Through predictive control an individual learns to know what is expected of him or her and what rewards or punishments are likely to be associated with a single action or set of behaviours. Thus, successful repatriation adjustment involves exhibiting behaviours that are considered appropriate in a repatriate's home culture. The actual adjustment after the transfer is influenced by factors relating to the individual, to changes in work roles and the organization, and to the general, non-work environment. Thus, factors reducing uncertainty and determining appropriate or inappropriate behaviours in the home culture are generally associated with facilitating adjustment, while factors that increase uncertainty are assumed to inhibit adjustment (Black, Mendenhall and Oddou 1991; Black, Gregersen and Mendenhall 1992b; Black et al. 1992a).

Next, the BMO-model (see Figure 1) will be introduced in more detail by defining the factors, and by presenting previous research results based on the BMO-model. I will also discuss the need for complementary work to further build and expand the model. I will start by taking a look at the factors in the BMO-model, which are hypothesized to be important for expatriates' pre-return adjustment.

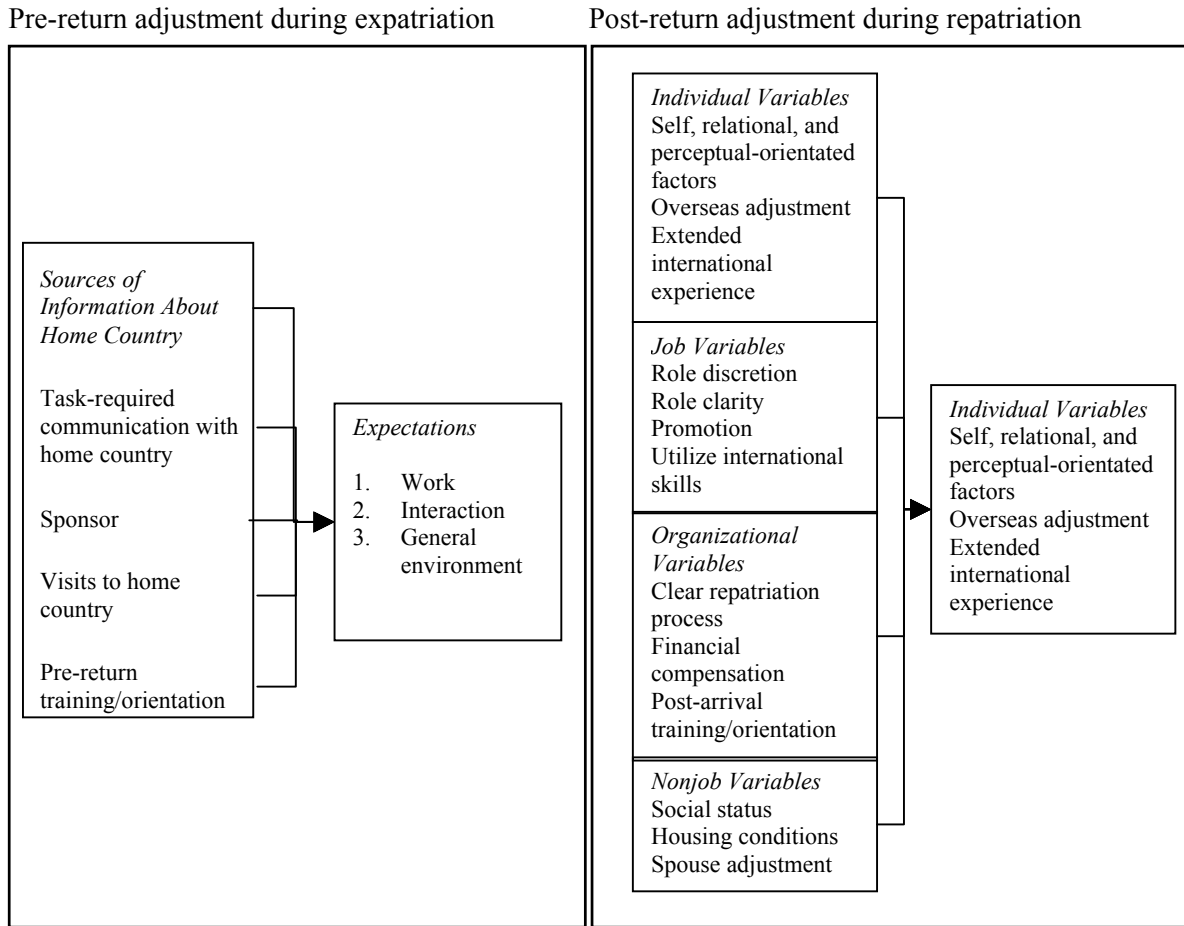


Figure 1. Basic Framework of Repatriation Adjustment. Source: Black, Gregersen & Mendenhall (1992, 230).

2.2. Pre-return adjustment

The factors that are identified as sources of information about the home country are grouped into the following categories: task-required communication with home country, sponsor, visits to home country, pre-return training or orientation. These factors are assumed to influence repatriates' expectations. The authors of the BMO-model have found that the factors either facilitate or inhibit repatriates' adjustment to one or more of the three dimensions. These dimensions are: work environment, interaction with home country nationals and general non-work environment.

According to some research literature, the information which is provided by the home company prior to the return is an important element of pre-return adjustment, because of the many possible changes in the home company and changes in the non-work environment. To have up-to-date information about both positive and negative changes in the home com-

pany helps the expatriate to form more realistic expectations regarding the return (Dowling et al. 1999, 208; Black et al. 1992a, 231). This kind of *information flow* can be facilitated in many ways, for instance, by sending newspapers and videos to the expatriates. Today, people may use the Internet for acquiring knowledge about their home country. Expatriates can also perceive changes during *visits* to the home company, for example, in the living environment and among their friends. Similarly, colleagues in the home company can affect the expectations of the expatriates themselves (Punnett and Ricks 1997, 396; Adler 1991, 246; Black et al. 1992a, 232; Solomon 1995; Allen and Alvarez 1998). This kind of communication can diminish an expatriate's 'anomie' and feelings of loneliness (Harris and Moran 1996, 153).

An *organizational sponsor*, mentor or "godparent" can help returning expatriates to effectively adjust to and communicate with home-country people during repatriation. A formally or informally assigned mentor can provide the expatriate with important information about structural changes, strategic shifts, political coups at work, promotion opportunities, and general job-related and company-related knowledge (Black et al. 1992a, 231).

Returnees can be provided with repatriation *training* about the re-entry process, potential problems, and the means for dealing with them. This can be assumed to diminish uncertainty about the return and thus facilitating it. It has been proposed that an increased understanding of the repatriation process on the part of expatriate can significantly facilitate the return (Harvey 1989; Mendenhall et al. 1995).

The underlying theme of many of the argumentations and studies on repatriates' pre-return adjustment is the management of people's expectations. People form expectations on the actual return home and on receiving a return position. The basic premise is that "if appropriate pre-return adjustments are made, the actual adjustment in the new international setting will be easier and quicker" (Black, Mendenhall and Oddou 1991, 305). The most important element in pre-return adjustment is the formation of accurate expectations. Accurate expectations decrease the uncertainty individuals experience, the possibility of surprises, negative affective reactions and culture shock (Black, Mendenhall and Oddou 1991).

While recognizing the value of efforts to try to avoid serious negative surprises and embarrassing situations on both the returnee's and the company's behalf in the critical return phase, it could be argued that the aim of perfect management of people's expectations is not realistic. Uncertainty is always present in varying degrees in organizational life, as Weick (2001, 46) puts it: "ambiguity is never fully removed, it is part of the normal context of organizational action". Concerning this kind of reality, Weick (2001, 376) further argues that an attitude that balances knowing and doubt is a basic principle of adaptation. He also says that face-to-face interaction rather than routines offers better possibilities to keep up with change in rapidly changing environments, and to see the core of organizing rather than routines (Weick 2001, 114). Since the critical return phase can be full of uncertainty, it seems to be more important for individuals to remain flexible rather than to have rigid expectations. This kind of argumentation gives more room for repatriates themselves to be the active agents of their return, and to control everything that is important for them on their return. It could also be argued that the feeling of being able to control the return reduces the uncertainty a returnee experiences and increases the utilization of active coping strategies when he or she faces disappointments.

Expatriates may also have unofficial contacts with their colleagues and superiors through which they receive important, up-to-date knowledge of the situation of the home company. This, in turn, helps them to figure out their possibilities concerning their return position and to be active in negotiations on it. The significance of networks for job searching has been recognized in the career literature. For example, Pfeffer (1989), in his political perspective on careers, presents research results which indicate that especially in circumstances where uncertainty is high (as in managerial jobs), the importance of using personal contact networks becomes highlighted. Further, the networks through which job information was passed on were noticed to be based on 'weak ties', casual acquaintanceship, rather than on family connections or many years of contact. People also tended to prefer the jobs which they found through their personal contacts (Granovetter 1973, 74). These research results are in line with Weick's (2001, 114) analysis on how people try to make sense of ambiguous situations.

2.3. Post-return adjustment

There are several variables that are assumed to be important for individuals' adjustment after they return home. These variables are divided into individual, job, organizational, and non-work categories. They are assumed to influence repatriates' adjustment on one or more of the three previously mentioned dimensions (work environment, interaction with home country nationals, and non-work environment).

2.3.1. Individual variables

The first category of individual variables consists of *self-orientated factors* such as strength of self-image. According to several scholars, the precondition and most important underlying process in cross-cultural adjustment is the maintenance and repair of one's self-image, and a feeling of being able to control or deal with unexpected situations in a new environment (Black et al. 1992, 46; Mendenhall, Punnett and Ricks 1995, 415). Related to this, Mendenhall and Oddou (1985) talk about self-respect, self-confidence, and skills and activities, which help to maintain one's mental well-being. The maintenance of mental and social well-being can work as an effective buffer against stress in new or surprising situations. The important skills for achieving this are reinforcement substitution, stress reduction and technical competence. These variables, as with expatriate adjustment, are likely to have a positive impact on repatriation adjustment. Reinforcement substitution refers to "replacing activities that bring pleasure and happiness in the home culture with similar – yet different – activities that exist in the host culture" (Mendenhall and Oddou 1985, 40). In any culture people are interested in food, music and so on, yet these interests are manifested differently in different cultures (Mendenhall et al. 1995). Expatriates' ability to deal with frustrations is important for successful adjustment and effective productivity. Interpersonal conflict, financial difficulties, differences in housing, climate, food and so on, can cause such frustrations (Abe and Wiseman 1983; Bardo and Bardo 1980). Ratiu (1983) calls those kinds of mental activities as "stability zones", which are helpful to reduce stress, something which is almost inevitable in cross-cultural transfers. Stress reducing activities can be, for example, meditation, religious worship, writing in diaries, and different hobbies.

The second category of individual variables are referred to as *other-orientated or relational factors*. Research suggests that social skills are important in every dimension of

adjustment. These skills enable people to meet and interact with people in everyday situations. Contacts to host cultural representatives are useful, because they can teach foreigners the rules of their culture, and how to navigate successfully in it. After receiving some basic level of language skills, individuals actually have to decide how deeply they want to go in their interactions with host culture people. After basic language skills, an individual's willingness to communicate is a more powerful factor of adjustment than absolute language abilities (Black et al. 1992a, 126; Mendenhall et al. 1995, 416).

The third category of variables is termed *perceptual-orientated factors*. "Perception is the process by which each individual selects, organizes, and evaluates stimuli of the external environment to provide meaningful experiences for himself or herself" (Adler 1991, 68). Perception skills help the individual to grasp and understand the invisible cultural maps and rules. "Obviously, people are not equal in this ability. For example, things that are not visible are not comprehensible to some people. Others are much better able to appreciate and understand the invisible and subtle determinants of people's behaviour" (Black et al. 1992a, 126). The better the individual can understand these rules, the better he or she is able to anticipate people's future behaviour, which reduces uncertainty. Perception skills are also very important for repatriation, because successful overseas adjustment demands some changes in people's mental maps. In repatriation, in turn, people may continue with "inappropriate cultural codes," which can result in a more challenging adjustment process (Ibid., 225).

Overseas adjustment and *extended international experience* are also grouped as individual variables. Self-orientated factors (such as the strength of self-image), relational-orientated factors (language proficiency and willingness to communicate with host nationals) and perceptual-orientated factors (ability to understand and grasp invisible cultural maps and rules) can help people to adjust during overseas assignment. But especially those who have been in cultures very different from their home culture and who have stayed abroad for extended periods, either through sequential international assignments or unusually long stays in them, can experience significant adjustment challenges during repatriation. When the host country has been the expatriate's point of reference, the dissimilarity between the host and home country increases the uncertainty and unfamiliarity of the home country (Black et al. 1992a, 233-234; Black 1994).

Scholars have also argued that the length of time of the most recent overseas assignment and the total time spent overseas influences how much uncertainty the expatriates experience when they face the return. The longer individuals have been away from their home country, the more it might have changed. Individuals themselves have changed as well, thus increasing the experience of uncertainty (Black 1994). This kind of argumentation has been supported by many research results (Black and Gregersen 1991; Forster 1994; Suutari and Välimaa 2002).

2.3.2. Job variables

After returning home, there are several factors that can facilitate or inhibit repatriates' adjustment to work. In this section I will introduce the variables of work dimension, role discretion, role clarity, promotion and international work experience.

Adjustment theorists (Black 1988; Dawis and Lofqvist 1984; Nicholson 1984; Mendenhall et al. 1995, 423) suggest that *role discretion* allows individuals to adjust to their work role by changing the role to fit the individual. Thus, it makes it possible for the individual to utilize past, familiar behaviours. Also, when being able to modify his or her role, an individual can create a more predictable and controllable role that facilitates the transition. This reduces some of the uncertainty associated with the new job and facilitates adjustment. Positive correlation between role discretion and work adaptation has been found in many research studies (Black and Gregersen 1991a, 1991c; Black 1988, 1993; Gregersen and Stroh 1997), including in Suutari and Välimaa's (2002) study of Finnish repatriates' work adjustment. They found that when an individual has some influence on the work he or she is doing, it facilitates his or her adjustment to the job. Greater role discretion has also been noticed to have a spill-over effect on satisfaction in general. This kind of autonomy to control the environment is more common in smaller than in bigger companies (Nicholson and West 1989; Janssen 1992). However, the positions obtained after the return have often been found to include less role discretion than the expatriate positions (Napier and Peterson 1991; Black et al. 1992a, 235; Forster 1994).

Role clarity refers to the extent to which what is expected of the individual is clear and unambiguous (Black, Gregersen and Mendenhall 1992a, 126). In international job transfers employees may experience role conflicts, that is, conflicting signals about what is expected

of them in a new work setting. In a new cultural setting this kind of situation can generate a high degree of uncertainty because individuals must first understand the messages and then select the right ones to follow. This, in turn, guides them to behave according to the demands of the new role (Black et al. 1992a; Black 1994; Suutari and Välimaa 2002). Role conflict may, for instance, result in diminution of work satisfaction, tension associated with work, frustration, reduction of self-confidence, experiences of threat to one's psychological and physical well-being, depression, reduction of self-respect, dissatisfaction with life, and reduction of work motivation. Often workers experiencing role conflict are also more reluctant to leave the company (Cooper and Marshall 1989, 85-86).

Researchers have found that role clarity is important because it reduces uncertainty associated with the new job and thus facilitates adjustment (Pinder and Schroeder 1987; Black, Mendenhall and Oddou 1991; Black 1988, 1993; Black and Gregersen 1990; Black and Gregersen 1991a, 1991c; Black 1994; Gregersen and Stroh 1997). Role clarity makes it possible to anticipate the consequences of different behaviours and to utilize previously successful behaviour. In other words, the employee does not have to learn everything by trial and error when confronting the expectations of the company (Misa and Fabricatore 1979). A positive linkage between role clarity and job adjustment is also acknowledged by Jassawalla et al. (2004). In their study task clarity appeared essential for: a) "increasing repatriates' focus on task and lessening their anxiety while overseas, b) creating a sense of accomplishment when their overseas task is completed, and c) lessening their anxiety upon their return, and easing their transition into the home base" (Jassawalla et al. 2004, 40).

A positive connection between role clarity and adjustment has been found also in general. When a an employee has a clear role, he or she does not have to use so much energy on work adjustment but can instead devote more attention to general adjustment (Black and Gregersen 1990; Black and Gregersen 1991a; Black 1994).

Promotion is a job variable that is assumed to affect repatriates' work adjustment. Scholars have found that companies often do not fully utilize expatriates' work experience. The repatriate's career development possibilities are uncertain, and actually his or her position can be lower in the home organization than before expatriation (Adler 1997, 245; Forster 1994; Engen 1995; Peterson et al. 1996a; Peterson et al. 1996b; Dowling et al. 1999, 210; Peterson et al. 2000; Beaverstock 2005.; Bossard and Peterson 2005). Positions can be

temporary, ill-defined, or not correspond to the levels of challenges a repatriate seeks. Thus, these conditions are very likely to increase the probability that a repatriate leaves the company (Gates 1996; Vermond 2001). This kind of uncertainty associated with career development has been found to negatively affect the expatriate's performance during the last months of the foreign assignment and to slow down the repatriation adaptation. It can also increase the likelihood of inter-organizational moves (Forster 1994; Brown 1994). Researchers have pointed out that linking international assignments to the repatriate's career development provides better utilization of their international work experience, and commits employees more to their company (Tung 1988; Feldman and Tompson 1993; Welch 1994; Gates 1996).

However, the research results presented above could be criticized, since they seem to be in contradiction with the assumption that reducing uncertainty is expected to facilitate repatriates' adjustment to work. Acquiring new tasks and responsibilities may, in fact, increase uncertainty. Even though promotion would give repatriates better possibilities for utilizing their international work experience, it could be thought that returning to the same job would decrease the experienced uncertainty, and thus facilitate repatriates' adjustment to work.

According to the BMO-model, *utilization of international skills* is also categorized as a job variable that is expected to influence repatriates' work adjustment. It is typical for international assignments that expatriates often work in higher positions than in their previous position. They have more responsibility and work more autonomously, they thus often also have a greater influence in subsidiaries. Because of this, there are many possibilities to learn new things on international assignments. Working with people from different cultures may help expatriates improve their communication and co-operation skills. They can obtain a broader view of the business of a company. They can also understand trends and other business issues better, because they have contacts to different cultural, political and economic systems. With this kind of experience the former expatriate should be in a position to contribute significantly to the internationalization process of the firm. On the other hand, researchers emphasize that expatriates' experience could be utilized more effectively and that the assignments could be more closely linked with their overall career development (Mendenhall and Oddou 1986; Engen 1995; Gates 1996; Peltonen 1997; Downes 1999; Kedia and Mukherji 1999; Selmer 1999; Riusala and Suutari 2000; Stroh et al. 2000; Bonache and Brewster 2001). Suutari and Brewster (2003), in their longitudinal

research on careers and expectations among Finnish expatriates came to the conclusion that foreign experience is good for an individual's career but that the subsequent utilization of the expatriate experience could be greater.

The basic assumptions concerning job changes are generally based on the perspective that discontinuities increase uncertainty and loss of daily routines, and that they thus have a negative influence on adjustment (Pinder and Schroeder 1987). Especially in the case of expatriates' and repatriates' discontinuities in terms of day-to-day autonomy, co-workers and job duties are significant and may be the most difficult issues with which to deal. Further, organizational changes for example in terms of corporate structure, the economic fortunes of the business unit, organizational culture, and the production technology can influence how well employees adjust to international transfers (Feldman and Tompson 1993).

Some critique was presented earlier against the basic assumption regarding the significance of uncertainty to repatriates' work adjustment, and research results on it. On the other hand, the same could be argued to be true for job changes and career development. Next, I will present some arguments for the importance of discontinuities in the context of international job changes.

The basic line of argumentation concerning job changes in the context of international transfers is that discontinuities, especially in terms of career development, have a negative effect on people's work adjustment. What is problematic with this kind of argumentation is that it neglects the fact that people differ in their capacity to deal with uncertainty. Neither does it pay enough attention to the diversity of individuals' experiences of how to motivate themselves. According to Sjöstrand, uncertainty represents a personal experience and it ultimately refers to the degree of confidence that individual actors have in their capacity to deal with a situation. Thus, it is "the individual's lack of confidence regarding information and capability that constitutes uncertainty, rather than any 'objective' qualities lacking in the information itself" (Sjöstrand 1997, 7).

Not all uncertainty and discontinuity can be eliminated during the return phase. This can influence repatriates' work adjustment either negatively or positively. People's immediate and natural reaction to an acute crisis is disgust. This is because people's psychic health is

threatened when their perceptions of reality are in sharp contrast to their expectations, basic beliefs or values (Pelzer 2002). While acknowledging this fact, a more central issue in work adaptation is how people deal with uncertainty both individually and in interactional processes (Sjöstrand 1997, 10), and in the longer run, what kind of attitude returnees have to adapting to discontinuities. Discontinuities place new demands on repatriates, and it is exactly these discontinuities coupled with the substance of the return job, which can make the return job more challenging and motivating. Discontinuities mean that there is a change compared to the previous situation – the expatriate work – and this change can include more possibilities for creativity, responsibility, professional advancement and growth. For some people temporary uncertainty in work situations can in fact be very stimulating and challenging (Sjöstrand 1997, 7).

Some studies have addressed the significance of a new work role for the employee's adjustment to a new job. Role novelty refers to the degree to which the current role is different from past roles. It is expected that role novelty increases the uncertainty associated with the job. For example, the more functional and hierarchical boundaries that the worker has to cross in the new job, the more difficult adjustment is likely to be. Role novelty has been found to relate negatively to job adjustment (Black 1988; Nicholson 1984; Pinder and Schroeder 1987). In Suutari and Välimaa's study the relationship between role novelty and repatriates' work adjustment was insignificant. Feldman and Tompson (1993) found that the degree of change in job duties positively influenced job adjustment in international transfers. Their results suggested that new challenges and responsibilities in the work itself motivated job changes.

2.3.3. Organizational variables

A clear repatriation process, financial compensation and postarrival training or orientation are specific organizational variables that are important during return adjustment.

Based on the premise of uncertainty reduction it has been argued that *the clarity of the preparation process* is an important organizational pre-return variable that influences adjustment (for some exceptions, see e.g. Black and Gregersen (1991b), and Gregersen and Stroh (1997)). Scholars have pointed out the need to pay attention to the whole repatriation process and the politics associated with it (Tung 1988; Black and Gregersen 1991b). Black

et al. (1992, 238) indicated that when the repatriation process was not clear, the managers were uncertain and concerned about matters such as their return positions, career progression, compensation equity and taxation assistance. A significant element of the clarity of the repatriation process is whether expatriates are informed about the completion of their current assignment early enough. The period of notice given to the repatriate can have critical bearings on adjustment. A longer preparation time facilitates the making of effective plans. Moreover, there are many practical issues that need preparation (Black 1994). Seeing that repatriation is a potentially stressful life event, a longer preparation time might be an important facilitator of adjustment and may give a sense of control over events for returning individuals (Forster 1994; Mendenhall, Punnet and Ricks 1995). Thus, the formation of realistic expectations on/ the return has been suggested to be the key variable for the clarity of the return (Hammer, Hart and Rogan 1998), and has been empirically confirmed to relate to higher levels of repatriation adjustment (Black 1992; Gates 1996; Stroh, Gregersen and Black 2000; Suutari and Brewster 2003).

Many expatriates experience a great downward shift in their living standards after returning from a global assignment. Because non-monetary rewards are generally quite low, repatriates pay particular attention to *financial compensation* and their expected standards of living after global assignments (Black et al. 1992a, 239).

The formation of realistic expectations on the return can be helped by providing returnees with repatriation *training about the re-entry process*, addressing potential problems and the means for dealing with them. This can be assumed to diminish uncertainty about the return and thus facilitating it. It has been proposed that an increased understanding of the repatriation process on the part of the expatriate can significantly facilitate the return (Harvey 1989; Mendenhall et al. 1995).

2.3.4. Non-job variables

The BMO-model includes social status, housing conditions and spouse adjustment as variables that are related to non-work adjustment.

After coming home, there are likely to be changes in expatriates' and their families' *social status*. They lose their formal status of being foreigners. "During an overseas assignment, expatriates typically feel like big fish in a little pond. After coming home, they are little fish in a big pond" (Black et al. 1992a, 240-241).

Housing conditions can significantly influence the repatriate's and, usually, his or her family's adjustment. Problems typically concern what type of housing arrangements will be available, what area repatriates will live in, and whether it will be possible to get comparable housing upon returning to the home country (Black et al. 1992a, 241; Phatak 1997, 365). However, in his research on Japanese managers' readjustment, Black (1994) did not find housing a significant factor affecting adjustment.

The *spouse's cross-cultural adjustment* has been found to be a major factor in returnees' adjustment. Similarly, as with repatriates' adjustment, other family members' readjustment is influenced by the length of the assignment, overseas adjustment, and extended international experience. Members of the repatriate family can feel like strangers in their own homeland (Torbiörn 1982, 42; Black et al. 1992a, 17; Gates 1996). The spouse's readjustment can include quite similar elements at both personal and professional levels as with expatriation. When coming home the spouse faces the challenges of reconnecting in some ways the home country. It may be difficult to return to the lifestyle of pre-expatriate days, but neither does the expatriate lifestyle apply in the home country. In the literature on repatriation or expatriation it is often assumed that the spouse is a woman and wife. Indeed this is often, but not always, the case in reality. When the spouse is a woman, she loses the role of an 'expatriate wife' upon return, and the likely support of the expatriate community. The returnee's spouse can find herself in a situation in which she has to cope alone, having probably lost many of her former contacts during expatriation (Harvey 1982; Cieri et al. 1991).

Even though women's international assignments are increasing (Dowling et al. 1999), it is quite typical that the expatriate's spouse is a wife. Some important and unique aspects of a spouse's repatriation have been found to be a function of the spouse's career prior to, during, and after the global assignment. Many wives can make significant career sacrifices in order to accompany their husbands on international assignments. It often means giving up the roles, which have been important for the construction of these women's self-respect. Simultaneously, these kinds of role changes can radically change the life of women during the assignment. Firstly, women usually have few work opportunities in the host country. Obtaining a work visa can be difficult for expatriate partners; they do not necessarily find appropriate work, and sometimes there are cultural barriers, which hinder women's working. Correspondingly, finding appropriate work after expatriation can also be difficult. Spouses might have lost some of their professional skills, or their skills may have become obsolete. Also, potential employers sometimes have a reserved attitude to recruiting spouses who can leave for other global assignments in the near future (Torbiörn 1982, 38; Black et al. 1992a, 242-243; Cieri et al. 1991).

The role changes that spouses go through in the return phase also pose challenges to their adjustment (Solomon 1995; Adler 1997, 276-77). While many North-American and European spouses face significant career-related challenges during repatriation, Japanese spouses face equally difficult, but different challenges when they return home. These challenges are associated with the changes they face in their many roles as household managers, as mothers or educators, and in their social roles in local communities. During the assignment Japanese women often learn to enjoy their new roles and gain a new sense of identity and self-esteem through them. When returning, the sudden withdrawal from these roles can be frustrating and difficult (Black 1992; Black et al. 1992a, 244; Black and Gregersen 1991b).

2.4. Discussion

Previous research on repatriate adjustment has mainly been conducted by using quantitative research methods. There are many studies that have provided us with knowledge about variables affecting readjustment, and some of them have focused especially on how accurate expectations influence the success of readjustment (Black 1992; Gates 1996; Hammer, Hart and Rogan 1998; Stroh, Gregersen and Black 2000; Suutari and Brewster

2003). The factors that are assumed to affect individuals' expectations before the actual return have been divided into the following categories; 1) task-required communication with home country, 2) a sponsor, 3) visits to home country, and 4) pre-return training.

The studies concentrating on factors affecting post-return adjustment have resulted in four general categories into which the above mentioned factors can be placed; 1) individual variables, 2) job variables, 3) organizational variables, and 4) non-work variables. It is suggested that these variables influence repatriates' adjustment regarding work, interaction, and adjustment to the non-work environment (Black and Gregersen 1991). However, the BMO-model implicitly includes issues such as national culture, organizational culture, interaction and communication. The BMO-model only concentrates on national culture, but issues and questions regarding the significance of organizational culture in repatriates' adjustment are also relevant. The basic assumption regarding the difference between organizational cultures in the context of international transfers is stated as follows: "the greater the difference between the organizational culture of the subsidiary organization in the foreign country compared to the organization in the home country, the more difficult the international adjustment would be" (Black, Mendenhall and Oddou 1991, 310). The assumption can also be regarded to apply to repatriates as they have to cross both organizational and cultural borders in the return phase.

The majority of the recent studies on expatriation adjustment (Selmer 2000; Selmer 2002a, 2002b; Takeuchi, Yun and Russell 2002; Andreason 2003; Hechanova, Beehr and Christiansen 2003; Morley and Flynn 2003) are just slight variations of the BMO-model, constructing their hypotheses based on the assumptions of the model and on the findings of previous research drawing upon it. Merely replicating the BMO-model and continuing to conduct research based on its theoretical and methodological presuppositions does not open up adequate room for developing new theory. In order to achieve a deeper understanding of the repatriation, and to hear "the voice of the expatriates", there is a need for more integration of different paradigmatic perspectives (Brewster 1997; Mendenhall 1999; Mendenhall and Frierson 2000).

However, the BMO-model involves some complications. One concerns how pre-return and post-return adjustment interrelate. Some issues categorized as pre-return adjustment may to some extent overlap with issues categorized as post-return adjustment. Yet, some of the

insights of the results on variables influencing repatriation adjustment may also be relevant for my research on coping strategies used by repatriates.

While it is obvious that repatriation is influenced by various elements of the relationship between an individual and his or her environment, the dynamics of this relationship has not been sufficiently explored by previous research. Similarly, much of the content of the phenomenon of repatriation is still unknown. The BMO-model includes the assumption that certain variables are universal and therefore always affect adjustment similarly, rather than being dependent on the context. The variables in the BMO-model cover multiple, significant domains of the demands of the return, and the return has been acknowledged to often be difficult. However, the BMO-model has not facilitated our understanding of how the expatriate experience might be reflected in individuals' responses to demands. What do we actually know about what happens when an individual goes through repatriation? How does he or she react when confronting various demands or challenges?

The concepts of adjustment and coping both deal with the complex and problematic relationship between an individual and the environment. Adjustment and coping aim to decrease uncertainty or manage the conditions that are experienced as threats to an individual's well-being and psychological balance. Generally, analyses using adjustment as their primary concept do not focus on an individual's ongoing efforts to deal with adjustment demands, but rather on the endpoint or outcomes of the adjustment process. Instead, coping defined as a process focuses on an individual's actual efforts² to manage the complicated relationship between the individual and the environment. Drawing upon the discussion presented above in this section, it can be argued that coping defined as a process is a more fertile concept for examining the complexity of repatriation. Therefore, in order to scrutinize former expatriates' experiences of the return in more detail, we need to explore them by utilizing the process approach to coping. I will return to this discussion in Chapter 3.

In the cross-cultural adjustment literature the question of identity has been acknowledged to be a crucial one, since cross-cultural transfers might expose an individual to unexpected

² The term "coping efforts" is used to refer to both to "coping strategies" and "forms of coping". Some people use the term "adjustment strategies" to refer to people's coping behaviour, for instance, MacDonald and Arthur (2003).

and unfamiliar conditions that threaten their self-image or identity. Maintaining or repairing one's self-image when conditions change is the most important underlying process for adjustment. "For most people, there is nothing as fragile and important as self-image" (Black et al. 1992a, 46). These issues will also be further discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

This study seeks to increase understanding of repatriates and repatriation by approaching it from a coping perspective, whilst also utilizing some elements of the BMO-model. The existing knowledge about repatriates' coping strategies is still quite limited. Identifying coping strategies and forms of coping, as well as what might influence the use of coping strategies and forms of coping, are considered very relevant issues.

This chapter introduced the BMO-model, and reviewed the repatriation adjustment literature. The following chapter presents theoretical ideas of coping, which represent the main framework used in this study.

3. FROM ADJUSTMENT TO COPING

This chapter introduces theoretical and methodological ideas on coping. Since the aim of this research project is to study repatriation by identifying different coping strategies and forms of coping, as well as what might influence their usage, Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) process approach to coping is the most appropriate one in this context. It is introduced later in this chapter (section 3.2.). First, I will present some definitions of coping, and some earlier studies on coping (section 3.1.). Thereafter, different theoretical approaches to coping will be discussed (section 3.2.). Then, classifications of different forms of coping strategies will be presented (section 3.3.). Nicholson's theory on work adjustment modes is discussed in section 3.4. Section 3.5. discusses the relationship between the concepts of coping and adjustment. Section 3.6. concludes the introduction of theoretical ideas on coping.

3.1. The concept of coping and the contextualization of coping

The concept of coping has been applied within various disciplines, and scholars have observed that "coping" has become an ambiguous concept (Menaghan 1982, 220; Burish and Bradley 1983; Ray et al. 1982). Stone et al. (1988, 183) define coping as "actions and thoughts that enable individuals to handle difficult situations". Their definition of coping refers to its success, saying that it consists of those actions and thoughts that "work". Silver and Wortman (1980, 281) define coping as "any and all responses made by an individual who encounters a potentially harmful outcome". Pearlin and Schooler (1978, 2), in turn, define coping as "behaviour that protects people from being psychologically harmed by problematic social experience, a behaviour that importantly mediates the impact that societies have on their members". None of the definitions of coping introduced here are adopted for this study. Instead, the definition of coping introduced by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) is more appropriate for this study, and I return to this later in this chapter.

Coping has been examined and conceptualized in many different contexts. The relationship between stressful life events, somatic health status, psychological symptoms, social support, and social health status has been found to be mediated by coping processes (Folkman, Lazarus, Gruen and DeLongis 1986a, 571; 1986b, 992). The linkage between coping and psychological well-being has been of interest in many contexts, particularly concerning

people's health states. Williams (1999) has provided an overview of the main characteristics of the literature on stress, coping strategies and social support. Seymour (1999) has explored the way in which five key concepts within the field of stress, coping and social support – stress, life events, coping, social support and vulnerability – are differently constructed across academic disciplines, and by welfare practitioners and lay people.

Moos (1977) has addressed the issue of coping with psychological illness. Andrews et al. (1978) examined the effects of life event stress, coping and social support on psychological impairment. Pearlin and Schuler (1978) studied how personality characteristics contribute to coping responses to psychological well-being in the context of chronic role strains in four different role areas: marriage, parenting, household economics, and occupation. Lazarus and Folkman (1980) have studied coping with the stressful events of everyday life. Pearlin et al. (1981) focused specifically on depression when they observed how life events, chronic life strains, self concepts, coping and social supports were interrelated to form a process of stress. Menaghan (1982) studied people's coping responses to marital problems. Parker and Brown (1982) aimed to identify coping behaviours that mediate between life events and depressive disorders. Mitchell and Hudson's (1983) study focused on coping with domestic violence, with a specific interest in social support and psychological health among battered women. Shinn et al. (1984) investigated the effects of coping on psychological strain and "burnout" produced by job stress. Moreover, coping has been studied in contexts as diverse as taking examinations (Mechanic 1962), political crises (Georg 1974), parachute jumping (Epstein, 1962) and the welfare system (Dill et al. 1980; Williams et al. 1998; Popay et al. 1998).

More recently, Folkman et al. (1994) analysed the narratives of the caregiving partners of men with acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). The partners were asked to report on the most stressful event related to caregiving. Moskowitz and Wrubel's (2000) study focused on stressful event narratives of human immunodeficiency virus positive (HIV+) men. Gottlieb and Gignac (1996) identified ways of coping by caregivers of people with dementia. Moreover, there are studies on coping in contexts such as families' experiences of mortgage repossession (Nettleton and Burrows 2001), the economic consequences of injury and the resulting family coping strategies (Mock et al. 2003). Snow et al.'s (2003) study examined the impact of work and work-family role stressors, coping, and work-related social support on psychological symptoms among female secretarial employees in

the USA. Stewart et al. (2004) conducted an empirical investigation into the link between information technology implementation barriers and coping strategies in the Australian construction industry. Haynes and Love (2004) investigated whether coping and affect (both negative and positive) influence adjustment (anxiety, depression and stress) among construction project managers. There has also been an increasing interest in studying coping in a leisure context. Leisure has been suggested to help people cope with stress (for instance, Coleman 1993; Compton and Iso-Ahola 1994, Iso-Ahola and Park 1996; Iwasaki and Mannell 2000). Coleman and Iso-Ahola (1993) have proposed leisure as a buffer against the adverse effects of stress on physical and mental health. Wolf Klitzing's (2004) study addressed how homeless women coped with stress, and the role leisure played in helping them cope.

Within the domain of coping research, new directions have emerged that are moving the field forward: for instance, around future-orientated proactive coping, and the social aspects of coping (Folkman and Moskowitz 2004). However, I am focusing on identifying coping strategies and different forms thereof by applying the process approach to coping (Lazarus and Folkman 1984). Most studies on coping focus on how people cope with events that occurred in the past or that are occurring in the present. Future-orientated proactive coping has to do with the ways people cope in advance to prevent or mute the impact of events that are potential stressors, such as having to deal with the results of a test that is scheduled in the near future (Aspinwall and Taylor 1997). Recent research directions of the social aspects of coping have addressed the impact of individual coping on social relationships and vice versa (for instance, Berghuis and Stanton 2002, Coyne and Smith 1991, DeLongis and O'Brien 1990). Moreover, there are also studies on the notion of communal coping (for instance, Wells et al. 1997; Dunahoo et al. 1998). As it has been shown above, coping as a research perspective is still growing and developing in new directions. Yet, even given all these more general research developments on coping, we still know quite little about repatriates' coping. For instance, Feldman and Tompson (1993) have studied repatriates' coping strategies in job changes. However, returning from an international assignment can be a critical life event full of various challenges confronting an individual, both in a work context and in their personal life. Next, I will consider different theoretical approaches to coping and different forms of coping strategies.

3.2. Theoretical approaches to coping

3.2.1. Traditional approaches to coping

In order to formulate their own definition of coping, Lazarus and Folkman have analysed and discussed the limitations and defects of traditional approaches to coping. These approaches emerged from two distinct literatures: animal experimentation and psychoanalytic ego psychology. The first approach “focused on the concept of drive (or arousal, or activation), and coping is usually defined as acts that control aversive conditions and thereby lower drive or activation” (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 139). Learning about human coping from the animal model is limited, since human coping includes cognitive coping and defence mechanisms (Ibid., 140).

Definitions of coping within the tradition of psychoanalytic ego psychology are commonly concerned with cognition. The focus is on the individual’s ways of perceiving and thinking about their relationship with the environment. Perception and reflection are the main differences to the animal model. The psychoanalytic ego psychology approach differentiates among a number of processes people employ to manage troubled person-environment relationships. Systems of coping based on this model usually conceive of a hierarchy of strategies that progress from immature or primitive mechanisms, which distort reality, to mature mechanisms. For example, Menninger (1963), Haan (1969, 1977), and Vaillant (1977) offer a hierarchy according to which coping refers to the highest and most advanced or mature ego processes. They are followed by defences, which refer to neurotic modes of adaptation, and are similarly hierarchically arranged. Finally, at the bottom, there are processes that Haan calls fragmentation or ego-failure. Menninger (1963) refers to these as regressive or psychotic levels of ego functioning (see Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 118-120; Edwards 1988, 234). Defence mechanisms always refer to some kind of intrapsychic conflict (Rychlak 1981). However, the conceptual relationship between coping and defence is theoretically difficult. Defence mechanisms are not regarded as pathological as such, but as necessary for the integrity of somebody’s personality. Besides bearing pathological aspects they can also be adaptive, psychological processes (Achté, Alanen and Tienari 1981). According to Haan (1977, 164) coping can be distinguished from defence. She uses adherence to reality as the major criterion to define processes in the coping mode. Distorting “inter-subjective” reality is not coping. Vickers, Hervig, Rahe and Rosenman

(1981) distinguish between individual coping and defence mechanisms as follows (see Table 2):

Table 2. Definitions of coping and defence mechanisms

<i>Coping mechanisms</i>	<i>Defence mechanisms</i>
Objectivity: Separates ideas and feelings as required by situation. Can be consciously of two minds.	Isolation: Affect is not related to ideas, or seems unable to put ideas together. Unable to generalize, synthesize, or integrate meaningfully.
Intellectuality: Can detach self from affect-laden situations to give impartial analysis, but still articulates and symbolizes feelings so they contribute to decisions and behaviour.	Intellectualisation: Retreats from affect into formulations of words and abstraction at level inappropriate to setting. (A subcategory of isolation).
Logical analysis: Systematically analyses causal aspects of situations, including motivational explanations.	Rationalization: Offers superficially plausible reasons for behaviour that omit crucial aspects of situation; needs to offer causal explanations including formulas, e.g., "It's fate."
Tolerance of ambiguity: Can make qualified judgements and deal with cognitive and affective complexity and uncertainty.	Doubt and indecision: Unable to resolve ambiguity or choose course of action; hopes problems will solve themselves; worries about past decisions and behaviour.
Empathy: Puts self in the other person's shoes and can imagine how they feel; takes other's feelings into account in making decisions.	Projection: Attributes objectionable tendency of self to another and does not recognize it as part of self.
Regression in service of the ego: Utilizes feelings and ideas that are not part of the situation to give better insight into problems and situation.	Regression: Resorts to evasive, wistful, demanding, dependent, ingratiating, nonage appropriate behaviour to avoid responsibility, aggression, or unpleasant demands.
Concentration: Sets aside disturbing or attractive feelings or thoughts to concentrate on task at hand.	Denial: Denies present or past facts of feelings that would be painful to focus on benign or pleasant ones.
Sublimation: Finds self-satisfying, socially acceptable means of expressing 'primitive' affect.	Displacement: Tries to control affects or impulses in relation to original object, then expresses them inappropriately in a more tolerant situation.
Substitution: Expresses tempered, domesticated feelings that are appropriate, flexible, metered, and purposive.	Reaction formation: Appears to have transformed 'primitive' impulses and feelings into opposites, but expression of both is excessively civilized, and sometimes breaks down.

Suppression: *Infeasible, inappropriate affect and feelings are controlled until time, place, and object are proper for expression.*

Repression: *Unconsciously and purposefully forgets, and is unable to remember past, or cannot elaborate.*

(Quoted from Vickers et al. 1981).

However, Lazarus and Folkman (1984, 134) critique the assessment of the accuracy of a person's intersubjective reality. The difficulties lie in defining such a reality. Moreover, there are differences in individuals' intersubjective (objective) reality (Ibid.).

“In both the animal and psychoanalytic ego psychology models, coping is equated with adaptation success” (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 133). The latter models include a hierarchy of coping and defence, meaning that some processes are automatically considered superior to others. In these models, especially in the ego psychology models, the concept of coping is typically equated with adaptation success, and unsuccessful or less successful efforts to deal with stress are called defence. When efficacy is implied by coping and inefficacy by defence, Lazarus and Folkman see that there is an inevitable confusion between the process of coping and the outcome of coping (Ibid.).

Following the line of argumentation of a process approach to coping, adopted from Lazarus and Folkman (1984) for this study, any attempts to make distinctions between the repatriates' coping responses and defence mechanisms are not regarded as relevant, since it would be inconsistent with Lazarus and Folkman's view on coping as a process.

3.2.2. Treatment of coping as trait or style

In many studies coping has been characterized in terms of relatively stable personal traits or styles. “Coping traits refers to properties of persons that dispose them to react in certain ways” (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 139). With this model we end up classifying people for example as a conformist or conscientious, a denier and so on. Styles are similar. The difference between traits and coping style is that the former are usually narrower in scope. For instance, coping-avoidance has been identified as a trait within coping. A coping style refers to broad, pervasive, encompassing ways of relating to particular types of people, for example regarding them as friendly or hostile (Ibid., 120-121).

Theories and research on *cognitive styles* are also rooted in the ego psychology model. Cognitive styles refer to automatic rather than effortful responses, and therefore Lazarus and Folkman do not consider them as coping or coping styles. The concept of cognitive controls has been developed to describe “the attributes of perceptual and memory apparatuses in the relatively conflict-free spheres of ego functioning” (Ibid., 126). Levelling-sharpening is an example of cognitive control. It is relevant to individual consistencies between new stimuli and memories experienced previously. “Levelling is the tendency to see things in terms of their sameness or similarity. Sharpening is a way of seeing things in terms of their differences” (Ibid.,127).

In order to elaborate on the traditional approaches to coping and the trait and style dimensions, Lazarus and Folkman discuss their limitations. They criticize the treatment of coping as a structural trait or style. The treatment of coping as trait or style implies that achieved ego-structures operate as stable dispositions to cope over the life course. Measuring coping traits does not add much value to predicting people’s actual coping processes, since it underestimates their complexity and variability. For example, to cope with physical illness, a patient confronts many different stressors, like pain and incapacitation, hospital environments, and the demands imposed by the professional staff. Simultaneously there are pressures for the patient to maintain an emotional balance, a satisfactory self-image, and good relationships with family and friends. “These multiple tasks require an array of coping strategies whose complexity cannot be captured in a unidimensional measure” (Ibid.,129). Edwards has also discussed the limitations of a personal trait or style approach to coping in similar terms (Edwards 1988, 235).

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) point out the important distinction between automatic and effortful responses, a distinction that is not made in traditional approaches to coping. The difference is that the early stages of skill acquisition require enormous effort and concentration, but in the later stages skills become automatic. For example, experienced drivers are usually not very conscious of using the clutch and brake. However, in an unusual situation such as a road closed for repairs, effort is required. Thus, Lazarus and Folkman highlight that not all adaptive processes constitute coping. Coping involves effort, and “does not include everything that we do in relating to the environment” (Ibid., 130-132).

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) emphasize that coping should not be confused with its outcomes. “If progress is to be made in understanding the relationship between coping and outcome, that is, what helps or hurts the person and in what ways, coping must be viewed as efforts to manage stressful demands regardless of outcome” (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 140). Accordingly, no strategy should be considered as inherently superior or inferior. Managing emotions and maintaining self-esteem, especially in the face of irremediable situations, has equal value in people’s coping repertoires to problem-solving strategies that aim to master the environment. Lazarus and Folkman suggest that judging the adaptability of a strategy must be made contextually, and principles are needed to guide that kind of evaluation. As an example they introduce denial or denial like behaviour that may be adaptive in some sense in certain situations and/or at certain stages of an encounter (Ibid., 134-135).³

The cognitive approach to personality provides a view of the strategies that individuals use to work on their life tasks. This view gets closer to the approach to coping as a trait or style presented above. When implementing goal-directed, achievement strategies, the strategic response is anchored in a cognitive construction. Yet, these strategies do not work in isolation from emotion and motivation, but involve a blending and a reciprocal interaction of cognition and emotion in the service of reaching for an important self-goal. In challenging and problematic situations individuals’ behaviour is guided by cognitive strategies. Challenges motivate individuals to set up aims themselves. An individual strives for his or her aims by creating various plans and strategies. Expectations and evaluation of your own opportunities are essential features of this process. Cantor (1990) characterizes achievement strategies as a mixture of cognition and coping efforts of “doing”. Through achievement strategies people can regulate anxiety and maintain or even enhance self-esteem. These strategies also help them gain control over events and outcomes, to persist in the face of obstacles, to reach goals and make task choices, and to learn from experience (Cantor 1990; see also Nurmi and Salmela-Aro 1992).

³ See the literature review on studies discussing denial and similar processes and their consequences (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 135).

3.2.3. Coping as a process

Cross-cultural transfers typically break up people's daily routines and include many stressful situations. The definition of psychological stress is based on the idea of discrepancy between the environment and the person. Lazarus and Folkman define stress as "a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being" (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 19).

Based on their critique of the traditional approaches to coping and the treatment of coping as trait or style, Lazarus and Folkman (1984, 141) define coping as "constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person". They want to pinpoint the process-orientation rather than the trait-orientation, which "is reflected in the words *constantly changing* and *specific demands*". Second, their definition implies "a *distinction between coping and automatic adaptive behaviour*", as it limits coping "to demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding a person's resources". This way coping is limited to "conditions of psychological stress, which requires mobilization and excludes automatic behaviours and thoughts that do not require effort". Third, *confusing coping with outcome* is avoided by defining coping as *efforts* to manage, thus including "anything that the person does or thinks, regardless of how well or badly it works". Fourth, they highlight that by using the word *manage*, they "avoid equating coping with mastery. Managing can include minimizing, avoiding, tolerating, and accepting the stressful conditions as well as attempts to master the environment".

The definition of coping provided by Lazarus and Folkman above is adopted for this study, since it is appropriate for two reasons. First, this study is focused on investigating repatriates' coping responses *per se*, and not on outcomes of their coping strategies. Second, although this study is not strictly a longitudinal one, it attempts to understand repatriates' coping as a process at different stages in the repatriation.

Van de Ven (1992,169) has identified three different ways in which process is used in the literature: "(1) as a logic used to explain a causal relationship in a variance theory; (2) as a category of concepts that refer to activities of individuals or organizations; and (3) as a se-

quence of events that describes how things change over time.” He concludes that “only the third approach explicitly and directly observes the process in action and thereby is able to describe and account for how some entity or issue develops and changes over time”. This last approach is the most relevant one for my study as well, since it reveals changes in repatriates’ coping efforts and also how they might accumulate over time.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) present two concepts that they argue mediate the person-environment relationship in stressful situations. The concept “cognitive appraisal” refers to an evaluative process that determines why and to what extent a particular transaction or series of transactions between the person and the environment is stressful. In other words, cognitive appraisal is the process of categorizing an encounter and its various facets, with respect to its significance for well-being. Lazarus and Folkman further make a distinction between primary appraisal and secondary appraisal.⁴ Three kinds of primary appraisal can be distinguished: 1) irrelevant, 2) benign-positive, and 3) stressful. An irrelevant encounter carries no implication for a person’s well-being. An encounter is categorized as benign-positive if its outcome is construed positively, that is, it preserves or enhances well-being or promises to do so. Stress appraisals include harm or loss, threat, and challenge. In harm or loss, some damage to the person has already been sustained. Threat concerns harms or losses that have not yet taken place but are anticipated. Challenge has much in common with threat, as it also calls for mobilization of coping efforts. “The main difference is that challenge appraisals focus on the potential for gain or growth inherent in an encounter and they are characterized by pleasurable emotions such as eagerness, excitement, and exhilaration, whereas threat concerns the potential harms and is characterized by negative emotions such as fear, anxiety, and anger” (Ibid. 33).

Secondary appraisal is a crucial feature of every stressful encounter. This complex evaluative process takes into account which coping options are available, the likelihood that a given coping option will accomplish what it is supposed to, and the likelihood that one can apply a particular strategy or set of strategies effectively. “Secondary appraisals of coping options and primary appraisals of what is at stake interact with each other in shaping

⁴ Lazarus and Folkman (1984, 31) have remarked that the choice of terminology, “primary” and “secondary”, was unfortunate for two reasons. “First, these terms suggest, erroneously, that one is more important (i.e., primary) than the other, or that one precedes the other in time. Neither of these meanings is intended. Second, these terms give no hint about the content of each form of appraisal. It is awkward to try to change

the degree of stress and the strength and quality (or content) of the emotional reaction”⁵ (Ibid. 35). Reappraisal can follow an earlier appraisal based on new information from the environment and/or the person (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 53).

Lazarus and Folkman further state that “the dynamics and change that characterize coping as a process are not random; they are a function of continuous appraisals and reappraisals of the shifting person-environment relationship” (Ibid. 142). Thus, the coping process is continuously mediated by cognitive reappraisals, since any shift in the person-environment relationship will lead to a reevaluation of what is happening, its significance, and what can be done. The reevaluation process, in turn, influences subsequent coping efforts (Ibid., 143).

3.2.4. Coping as specific methods or focuses

Coping has also been conceptualised as specific methods or focuses. This approach has produced classifications of coping efforts according to the method used or according to the focus, or target. For instance, Billings and Moos (1981) categorize coping methods as follows: (1) active-cognitive, where the individual attempts to manage his or her appraisal of the stressful situation or event, (2) active-behavioural, which refers to overt behavioural attempts to deal directly with the situation or event and (3) avoidance, where the individual attempts to avoid confronting the problem altogether (Billings and Moos 1981). The most common distinctions between focuses are the following: “(1) problem-focused coping, which involves attempts to manage or reduce stress by directly altering the situation or the individual’s appraisal of the situation, and (2) emotion-focused coping, where attempts are made to regulate the emotional responses to a stressful situation” (Edwards 1988, 239).

According to Edwards (1988, 239), the advantage of conceptualising coping in terms of specific methods or focuses is that it is useful for describing coping behaviours. Studies based on this approach have usually provided a fairly comprehensive assessment of actual

terms after they have found a place in the literature, however, so we think it is wise not to replace “primary” and “secondary” with connotatively more accurate terms.”

⁵ “This interplay can be quite complex, although our understanding here is still rudimentary. For example, other things being equal, if the person is helpless to deal with a demand, stress will be relatively great because the harm/loss cannot overcome or prevented. If the person has a high stake in the outcome, meaning that it touches a strong commitment, helplessness is potentially devastating. Even when people believe they have

coping behaviours. Despite its advantages, this approach also includes limitations. Making a clear difference between coping methods and focuses is difficult. For example, in Moos and Billings' classification each category (appraisal-, problem-focused and emotion-focused efforts) is described in terms of various methods used to cope with stress. For instance, logical analysis (a form of appraisal-focused coping) is described as "trying to identify the cause of the problem, paying attention to one aspect of the situation at a time, drawing on relevant past experiences, and mentally rehearsing possible actions and their consequences" (Moos and Billings 1982, 218). Logical analysis may result in a reappraisal of the situation (for instance, appraisal-focused coping), but it is defined in terms of specific methods by which the individual can accomplish this (Edwards 1988, 239).

It has also been noticed that the boundaries within the categories of coping methods and focuses are often unclear. This is mostly because a "particular coping attempt may involve a variety of methods or may be directed toward multiple focuses" (Edwards 1988, 239). Edwards offers an example of how an employee's attempt to resolve conflicting job demands by asking his or her superior's advice could be classified as gathering information, directly addressing the problem or seeking social support. Similarly, a single coping act may be classified as problem-focused or emotion-focused coping. "For instance, a student who takes a tranquilizer before a major exam may simultaneously dampen his or her emotional response and control anxiety which may interfere with exam performance" (Ibid., 239-240).

Considering the problems concerning the conceptual analysis of coping as a specific method or focuses discussed earlier, this study does not specifically aim to make differences between repatriates' coping efforts in terms of methods or focuses.

3.2.5. Coping as a sequence of stages

There is also a body of literature in which coping responses have been described in terms of a series of stages through which the individual passes. This model has typically been used to describe the individual's reactions to life-threatening illness and injury. One advantage of this approach is that studies using this approach often include data that has been obtained

considerable power to control the outcome of an encounter, if the stakes are high any doubt can produce considerable stress." (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 35).

from individuals responding to authentic stressful situations. This approach also taps into the multidimensional and dynamic aspects of coping, since it involves multiple assessments of coping efforts over time (Edwards 1988, 236). However, individuals may select from a wide array of coping strategies, and sequences of implementing different strategies may vary. There is empirical evidence showing that coping behaviours often do not occur in a specific sequence. It has also been pointed out that many stage approaches are inadequate in specifying either the exact duration or exact stage of the impetus for moving from one stage to the next (Silver and Wortman 1980).

In the next section I will examine different forms of coping in greater detail.

3. 3. Different forms of coping

In the psychological literature coping strategies are usually divided into two broad main categories: problem-focused and emotion-focused or symptom-focused strategies (cf. Folkman et al. 1986b; Folkman and Lazarus 1980; Lazarus and Folkman 1984; Pearlin and Schooler 1978).

3.3.1. Different forms of problem-focused coping

Problem-focused strategies address the problem directly, coping is directed at managing or altering the problem causing the distress. Problem-focused forms of coping are similar to strategies used for problem-solving more generally. However, an objective, analytic problem-solving process is primarily focused on the environment, and problem-focused coping also includes strategies that are directed inward. As such, problem-focused efforts are usually directed towards defining the problem, generating alternative solutions, weighting the alternatives in terms of costs and benefits, choosing among them, and acting. These strategies directed at the self include motivational or cognitive changes, such as shifting the level of aspiration, reducing ego involvement, finding alternative channels of gratification, developing new standards of behaviour, or learning new skills and procedures. Problem-solving forms of coping, those directed at the environment, include altering environmental pressures, barriers, resources, procedures and the like (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152-153).

Classifications of different forms of coping have been provided for instance by Feldman and Brett (1983), Folkman et al. (1986a, 1986b), and Stone et al. (1988). Let us consider some examples of these coping responses more closely. They are relevant since they help to identify repatriates' coping responses. I will start by presenting coping responses identified especially in the work context (Feldman and Brett 1983).

Work longer hours. It is assumed that coping with new work tasks and responsibilities happens partly through learning, which, in turn, takes time. By for example taking shorter breaks an individual attempts to reduce the time necessary for learning new job by increasing the amount of time on the job relative to time off the job.

Changing work procedures refers to utilizing different procedures on the new job. This can include for example changing the way to hold meetings.

Redefining the job refers to the employee attempting to facilitate his or her adjustment by altering the contents of the job. For instance, the employee only performs tasks that he/she enjoys and for which he or she has the skills.

By delegating responsibilities the employee can both decrease work demands and avoid doing less enjoyable tasks.

When the employee uses the strategy of *getting others to provide tasks help*, he or she can ask for (or be offered) help from superiors and co-workers. Others can for example assume more responsibility until the employee knows the job better or can work faster.

Seeking out information refers to a direct attempt to change the psychological condition of experiencing uncertainty. Information seeking includes, for example, information about performance standards, who controls evaluation, and how a positive evaluation can be obtained. Stone et al. (1988, 186) limit this coping response to looking for "specific expert information". Through information seeking the employee is better equipped to learn the fastest and most effective way of working with the least amount of anxiety. While the examples of coping responses described above can be identified especially in a work context, the following examples can be found generally in different contexts.

Seeking social support has been viewed as an effective means of coping and as a mediator of the stress process (Stone et al. 1988, 184-185). As with research on coping, that on social support has captured several researchers' interests for decades. For instance, researchers like Gottlieb (1981), Bell et al. (1982), Thoits (1982a, 1984), Eaton (1978), Lin et al. (1979), LaRocco et al. (1980), Pearlin et al. (1981), Cleary and Mechanic (1983), McFarlane et al. (1983), Bolton and Oatley (1987) and Turner (1983), have been interested in the connections between social support, life stress, and well-being of an individual. Moreover, Gottlieb (1981) and Bell et al. (1982), for instance, have explored the possibility that people who lack the support of friends, family or other social groups more often suffer from various health disorders.

The so-called "buffering hypothesis" – "basically the notion that social support can act as a form of "buffer" between stress and illness" (Titterton 1989, 22) has been popular among scholars (Cohen and Wills 1985, Barrera 1988). However, it has also been pointed out that social support and disorders may be linked to each other in a much more complicated way than what is usually assumed (Brown and Bifulco 1984, Schradle and Dougher 1985, 647).

Like the term "coping", "social support" has suffered from various definitional and methodological problems (Titterton 1989, 22-28). According to Feldman and Brett (1983), seeking out social support is designed to decrease work related stress and problems by leaning on the support of co-workers for lagging self-confidence and self-esteem. Folkman et al. (1986a) describe seeking social support as "efforts to seek informational support" (for instance, "talking to someone to find out more about the situation"), tangible support (for example "talking to someone who could do something concrete about the problem"), and emotional support (for example, "accepted sympathy and understanding from someone"). Stone et al. (1988, 184-185) divide social support coping efforts into problem-directed and non-problem-directed ones. Problem-directed support may include assistance from family and friends. This definition does not include gaining information from the professional community, which more closely resembles another category, information seeking. Non-problem-directed support or emotional support means simply expressing one's feelings to and receiving sympathy from another person without necessarily seeking advice.

Barrera and Ainlay (1983) have classified dimensions of social support. They identified the following categories describing the content of social support functions:

- material aid refers to the provision of tangible materials in the form of money or other physical objects,
- behavioural assistance includes sharing of tasks through physical labour,
- intimate interaction includes, for instance, traditional nondirective counselling behaviours such as listening, expressing esteem, caring and understanding,
- guidance refers to offering advice, information and instruction,
- feedback refers to providing individuals with feedback about their behaviour, thoughts and feelings,
- positive social interaction includes engaging in social interactions for fun and relaxation.

House (1981) has grouped support behaviour into four different categories. As different forms of *emotional support* he considers confidence, love, empathy and intimacy. By *appraisal support* he refers to acceptance, positive feedback and the stimulation of positive self-evaluation. *Informational support* includes helping people to help themselves, helping them make use of social services, helping them to find work. The exchange of practical help, and effective practical help which meets a need, are forms of *instrumental support*.

The role of social support in repatriates' coping and general well-being may be significant. Although this topic has been slightly touched upon in some earlier studies (Engen 1985), our knowledge of it as repatriates' form of coping is quite limited. The definitions of social support described above and classifications of support behaviour are helpful when identifying the contents of social support that repatriates have utilized (or have been offered) upon their return. Next, I will look at different forms of emotion-focused coping.

3.3.2. Different forms of emotion-focused coping

Emotion-focused coping strategies concentrate on the emotional response to a particular problem. Individuals tend to use emotion-focused coping strategies when they have made the appraisal that nothing can be done to harmful, threatening, or challenging environmental conditions. On the one hand, when such conditions are appraised as amenable to change, problem-focused forms of coping are more probable (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150).

Emotion-focused forms of coping are mostly *cognitive processes*, which are engaged to lessen emotional distress. Thus, “they involve mainly thinking rather than acting to change the person-environment relationship” (Ibid., 150). These processes include strategies such as avoidance, minimization, distancing, selective attention, positive comparisons, and wresting positive value from negative events. However, sometimes emotion-focused forms of coping are aimed at increasing emotional distress. For instance, individuals may increase their emotional distress in order to mobilize themselves for action, athletes “psych themselves up” for a competition (Ibid., 150).

Avoidance coping has a lot in common with disengagement responses. According to Stone et al. (1988, 189-191) behavioural avoidance consists of all forms of escape-avoidance responses, that is, behaviours which are used to avoid an unpleasant situation or remove oneself from one. Cognitive avoidance refers to the preoccupation of one’s mind with something other than the problem; for instance, the use of distraction.

In addition, Stone et al. distinguish *tension reduction* from avoidance. This strategy includes behaviours used to reduce stress without avoiding the cause of it. Instead of removing oneself from a stressful situation, the individual initiates specific acts, like drinking alcohol, using drugs, relaxation, exercising, eating, sleeping and so on.

Situation redefinition refers to “the cognition of seeing a situation in a different light that either augments or diminishes the perceived severity and/or cause of that situation” (Stone et al. 1988, 188). Lazarus and Folkman (1984, 150-153) use the term *cognitive reappraisal*, which “refers to cognitive manoeuvres that change the meaning of the situation without changing it objectively”. Certain forms of emotion-focused coping are reappraisals, but other forms are not. Lazarus and Folkman refer to Kahn (1964), when further clarifying that with the exception of developing new behaviour or learning new skills and procedures, they would call the inward-directed strategies cognitive problem-focused reappraisals.

3.4. Theory of work adjustment modes

When identifying repatriates’ coping strategies at work some of the ideas on work role transitions introduced by Nicholson (1984) are useful. Nicholson (1984) focuses on the change

to a new work role, and he argues that work role transitions can have profound significance for the future development of individuals and their organizations. Nicholson's theoretical interest was in the inter-relatedness of change and stability, and in the interaction between individuals and social systems.

Considering a person's adjustment to role transition takes into account changes in his or her frame of reference, values, or other identity-related attributes. This type of adjustment to role transition can be considered reactive, as a kind of personal development. A person's adjustment strategy can also be proactive, which can be labelled role development. When applying a proactive strategy, the person tries to change role requirements in order to get a better match with his or her needs, abilities and identity (Ibid.).

To further clarify these two strategies Nicholson introduces four adjustment modes (1984). Replication represents a strategy, by which the person performs much similarly as in former jobs, and in much the same manner as previous occupants. In this kind of transitions the new incumbent makes few adjustments in his or her identity or behaviour to fit into the new role and makes no changes in role requirements. When applying absorption strategy, the person does little to modify the parameters of the new role. Thus, it is dominated by role learning. The person mostly assimilates new skills, social behaviours, and frames of reference to meet the requirements of the new situation. In determination, in turn, the demands of the role transition do not affect the person, but they alter the new role. The person then actively determines elements in the content or structure of the role. Finally, exploration as a mode of adjustment represents cases in which there are simultaneous changes in personal qualities and role parameters. These four different adjustment modes describe an individual's adjustment modes in work role changes more specifically, and they therefore include elements that might be useful for understanding repatriates' coping efforts in different work role changes as well.⁶

The coping perspective has very rarely been applied to repatriation adjustment. One exception is Adler (1981), who has contributed strongly to the early research on returning expatriates. She has also been interested in the coping methods used by a group of

⁶ Though this study does not specifically adopt this kind of approach to repatriates' coping, in which personal development and traits would be the main interest, it draws on Nicholson's (1984) view on different work adjustment modes that take individuals' values and identity into account. This study also tries to address the linkage between repatriates' identity development and their coping strategies.

expatriates returning from an International Development assignment. Adler has further identified different types of people who use distinct coping methods. She defines the returnee's "coping mode" as the attitude with which he or she approaches re-entry and tries to fit back into a formerly familiar situation. She distinguishes between overall attitude, which can be "optimistic" or "pessimistic" and a specific attitude, which is termed "active" or "passive". Thus, active re-enterers attempt to change both themselves and their re-entry environment in order to fit best into the organization, whereas passive re-enterers do not attempt such changes at all. In these two dimensions of re-entry attitudes, Adler further identifies four different coping-modes (see Figure 2)⁷. Re-enterers defined as proactive are both "optimistic and active"; resocialized re-enterers are "optimistic and passive"; alienated re-enterers are "pessimistic and passive"; and rebellious re-enterers are "pessimistic and active".

Despite its merits, Adler's coping-mode scheme can be criticized because of the problem that one person's coping behaviour might include features of different coping strategies that could belong to several categories simultaneously. Similar to the treatment of coping as trait or style, Adler's typology involves the idea of individuals' coping behaviour as a stable to cope in a certain way over the life course. Thus, it does not pay enough attention to the complexity and variability of people's coping behaviour.

⁷ In her later work on returnees' coping strategies Adler (2002, 280) has identified only three different groups of returnees: "resocialized", "proactive", and "alienated".

OPTIMISM

RESOCIALIZED MODE

“*Resocialized re-enterers* ranked high on external validation but low on awareness of change. They rated themselves as quite low on recognition and even lower on use of cross-culturally acquired skills and learnings. They were rated by themselves and colleagues as highly and effective and were highly satisfied with their home country jobs, both before departure and at re-entry. Resocialized re-enterers tended to remove themselves from the foreign experiences.”

PROACTIVE MODE

“*Proactive re-enterers* ranked on external validation and awareness of change. They recognized and used their cross-culturally acquired skills and learnings to a greater extent and saw themselves as more effective and more satisfied with their jobs. However, they received only moderate effectiveness ratings from colleagues. Proactive re-enterers tended to integrate the foreign and home country experiences.”

PASSIVE

“*Alienated re-enterers* ranked low on external validation, awareness of change, and recognition and use of cross-culturally acquired skills and learnings. They ranked themselves low on self-assessed effectiveness and were seen as the least effective by their work colleagues. Alienated re-enterers tended to dissociate themselves from the home culture and home organization.”

ACTIVE

“*Rebellious re-enterers* received little external validation but a high awareness of change. They highly recognized and moderately used cross-culturally acquired skills. They received high effectiveness ratings from colleagues but gave themselves only moderate ratings. Rebellious re-enterers strongly attempted control the home-country and home-organization situation at re-entry.”

ALIENATED MODE

REBELLIOUS MODE

PESSIMISM

Figure 2. Re-entry coping modes (Adler 1981).

3.5. The relationship between the concepts of adjustment and coping

The conceptualization and operationalization of adjustment has so far been insufficient to uncover the richness and variety of individuals' behaviours when crossing both national and cultural borders. This section discusses the definitions of adjustment, the concept of

coping and how they are related to each other. I will start by introducing some definitions of adjustment.

Adjustment and adaptation have often been used interchangeably to indicate a feeling of acceptance and satisfaction (Brislin 1981). Adjustment has been used to refer to the acquisition of culturally acceptable skills and behaviours (Bochner, McLeod and Lin 1977), the nature and the extent of interaction with host nationals (Sewell and Davidsen 1961) or the lack of mental health problems such as stress or depression (Berry and Kim 1988).

Berry (1992, 73) defines adjustment as a state whereby changes occur in the individual in the direction of increased fit and reduced conflict between environmental demands and individual attitudinal and behavioural inclinations. A state of “homeostasis”, whereby an individual maintains a balanced psychological state which results in effective functioning is characteristic of successful adjustment (Torbiorn 1982).

The concept of adjustment has been identified as problematic in terms of its definition and operationalization (Church 1982). However, what is common to most definitions of adjustment is that adjustment as a phenomenon involves relative success, and some kind of a greater balance between an individual and his or her environment. The same ideas have been adapted to the specific context of expatriation, where “adjustment is conceptualised as the degree of fit between the expatriate manager and the new environment in both work and non-work domains. Such a fit is marked by reduced conflict and stress and increased effectiveness” (Aycañ 1997, 436). The specific definitions of adjustment in relation to the dimensions of work, interaction and general environment in the BMO-model have been presented at the beginning of Chapter 2. All these definitions of adjustment refer to the outcomes of an individual’s behaviour in the adjustment process.

As stated earlier, both adjustment and coping address the uncertain or stressful relationship between an individual and the environment. However, the concept of coping as defined by Lazarus and Folkman (1984, 141-142) involves some elements that distinguish it from how adjustment is defined in most of the expatriation literature. Lazarus and Folkman (1984, 141-142) have defined coping as “constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person”. They have formulated their definition of coping based on the

critique of traditional approaches to coping, and the treatment of coping as trait or style. This critique has already been presented in section 3.2.1. Some of this critique is relevant also when studying the relation between the concepts of adjustment and coping.

The first point that is relevant to a comparison of adjustment and coping is the treatment of coping as trait or style. In this approach people's coping behaviour refers to stable dispositions to cope in a certain way over the life course. Lazarus and Folkman have criticized the trait or style approach as underestimating the complexity and variability of people's own coping processes. Adler's (1981) early attempt to categorize returnees' adjustment modes into four groups can be identified as an example of the trait or style approach. This typology was presented at the end of section 3.4. In contrast to the treatment of coping as a trait or style, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) want to highlight the process orientation to coping, which refers to an individual's constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific demands.

The second point that is relevant for distinguishing coping from adjustment concerns the outcomes of an individual's behaviour in their relationship to their environment. Confusing coping with outcome is avoided by defining coping as the individual's efforts to manage, regardless of how well or badly these work. This can be contrasted with the definition of adjustment that is defined in terms of outcomes between an individual's behaviour and their environment, and where the idea of successful or relatively successful adjustment is crucial.

To conclude, what is important in defining adjustment in the context of repatriation is that it suggests the idea of an individual's successful behaviour, and a particular endpoint in their relationship to their environment as an indicator of adjustment. In contrast, in the process approach to coping, people's behaviours are not assessed in terms of relative success outcomes. Neither does it include ideas of the relationship between an individual and the environment that presume the achievement of a particular endpoint.

3.6. Concluding comments

In this chapter I examined definitions of coping, some earlier research on coping, different approaches to coping, and classifications of different forms of coping. In this research repatriates' coping strategies are studied by utilizing mainly Lazarus and Folkman's (1984)

process approach to coping. They divide coping strategies into two main groups: problem-focused strategies and emotion-focused strategies as presented earlier. This is useful when identifying repatriates' coping strategies and forms of coping. In the context of work role changes the analysis is completed with the help of Nicholson's ideas of proactive and reactive work adjustment modes as presented earlier.

In the next chapter I will introduce three different perspectives on identity formation: identity as a continuous, "emergent" process, identity development as linguistic discourses, and identity formation as interaction and balancing between indeterminacy and order. I will also discuss their relevance for studying repatriates' coping strategies.

4. IDENTITY FORMATION PERSPECTIVES

4.1. Introduction

This chapter introduces three perspectives on identity formation, and discusses their relevance for looking at the linkage between repatriates' coping efforts and identity development.

People crossing both cultural and national borders are subject to a wide array of experiences of cross-cultural contacts, various work role changes, and phenomena labeled "culture shock" and adjustment. Overseas assignments have often been found to be a transformational experience for expatriates, whose sense of themselves might become threatened under changing and uncertain conditions (Osland 2000). Successful adaptation to the host culture may predict a significant change in one's cultural identity. This kind of development process is likely to lead to significant readjustment difficulties (Sussman 2000).

When returning, people are likely to undergo a transformation process again, when they re-evaluate their personal values, cognitive maps, and behaviours against the prevailing cultural norms at home. Many repatriates may find that their newly formed cultural identity does not fit that of their home culture any more. Furthermore, they may notice that many of their previous behaviours that were appropriate in the "foreign culture" are not so functional any more. Becoming more aware of these kinds of changes increases feelings of being an outsider of many of the "home country's" social groups. Cultural readjustments, the lack of fit between cognitions and behaviours, which are no longer appropriate within the new cultural context, may lead to the modification of behaviours, cognitions, or both and, consequently, cultural identity (Sussman 2000; 2002). Though this discussion concerns construction of an individual's cultural identity, similar types of questions and problematics extend to the work domain in cross-cultural transfers.

New challenges, work role changes, and workloads connected to new responsibilities may all call upon expatriates' reflections on their managerial identity. There is some evidence on how expatriates' identity changed, based on managerial competencies and maturation (Kohonen 2004). When returning, individuals are likely to undergo a transformation process anew, also in working life. Employees might not find adequate fit between their

changed identities and increased competencies and the home unit's work setting, which is likely to disturb their self-image. On the other hand, challenges and changes that are considered mainly positive may also further prompt and open opportunities for repatriates' assessments of themselves.

Nicholson (1984) views adjustment to different work role changes as personal development. This shows in people's changed values and other identity-related attributes. Brake's (1997) conception of "transformational self" refers to similar issues; detachment from one's current situation and current thinking as well as engagement in personal exploration and reflection. Scholars have pointed to the value of identity construction for further developing global leadership competencies (Oddou, Mendenhall, and Ritchie 2000), as well in responding to stressors experienced during expatriation (Sanchez, Spector, and Cooper 2000).

Contemporary social theory has tended to see identity as a problematic issue, as uncertainty increases. The temporal and spatial certainties that have traditionally offered platforms for individuals' identity construction do not appear to exist any more. Instead, people have to face ever more frequent and complex challenges in their self-construction processes.

One important strand has been the exploration of identity development as a historicized narrative. Identity is conceptualized as self-identity, the individual's conscious sense of self. Cultural theories have focused on the problematics of identity and cultural difference, and on the theoretical deconstruction of identity categories. Such approaches to identity have critiqued the Enlightenment philosophical tradition, which conceives of identity as essential, unitary, fixed and unchanging. In particular, poststructuralist theories emphasize the instability, fluidity, fragmentary and processional character of identities (Roseneil and Seymour 1999, 2-3).

After the introduction, I will look at identity formation as a continuous, "emergent" process (cf. for instance, Watson 1994; Watson and Harris 1999), (section 4.2.). Thereafter, an alternative approach in which the language is assumed to have a central role is introduced (see, for example, Potter and Wetherell 1987; du Gay 1996), (section 4.3.). Section 4.4. addresses identity development as interaction and the balancing between indeterminacy and order (see, for instance, Kondo 1990). These three approaches have been developed in analysing identity in work, organization and management. They draw upon the social

theory strand and the poststructuralist cultural theory strand. The last section (section 4.5.) summarizes the conceptual framework of this study.

4.2. Identity formation as a continuous, “emergent” process

In the previous chapter it was stated that repatriation can be the kind of life event that powerfully mobilizes individuals' coping responses. In Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) process approach to coping, an individual makes continuous appraisals to evaluate whether a particular coping encounter is stressful, and to what extent it perhaps is stressful. Coping is a transactional process between an individual and his or her environment. What kinds of coping efforts are actually triggered, is largely influenced by an individual's view on his or her own abilities to handle different coping demands. Going through an expatriation is expected to influence individuals' identity changing processes, since responding to various demands both in personal and occupational life usually changes individuals' view of themselves (Black et al. 1992a, 224). Thus, it can be assumed that there is a linkage between repatriates' identity formation and coping efforts.

The work of Tony Watson on managerial identity offers us a suitable platform to look at how identity formation might be linked to repatriates' coping strategies. Watson distinguishes the identity perspective from other approaches to organizational behaviour (Watson 1994; 1999; Watson and Harris 1999). He wants to pay attention to what forms the core of identity formation. In mainstream psychology individuals are typically seen as quite stable constructs. The identity perspective differs from this by taking a standpoint where individuals' identity is not a package of fixed elements, rather, the self is constantly created through interaction in serial situations; identity is “emergent”. This point is comparable to that made by Chia (1966), who makes a distinction between the “being” view and the “becoming” view on individuals. The former implies the static, foundational properties of social actors, and the latter concerns a process view where the reality of the self is always “emergent” and “under construction”.

In the process of identity reconstruction people struggle with opposing questions. On the other hand there is a need to find a suitable “fit” between themselves as a person and the job that they do. These questions deal with the experience of a continuity of self as they have a sense of themselves as a person moving through all the different situations they face

every day. On the other hand, people have simultaneous experiences of discontinuities. But these discontinuities are valuable points that include possibilities for moving forward and for achieving a sense of personal growth and development. Discontinuities can raise uncomfortable questions as well, when people have to reflect on whether their new work situation suits them or their life in general. Working out these experiences influences individuals' social self, their collective, external and social notions of being a manager and their "personal self", the private sense of themselves as unique individuals with their own way of seeing the world (Watson and Harris 1999, 116-118).

The approach to identity formation as a continuous process, as "emergent", is relevant when looking at repatriates' coping efforts especially in the context of work role changes, and coping with demands of interaction and communication in the home unit. It could be concluded that responding to demands during expatriation has called upon the utilization of expatriates' coping efforts, and influenced their identity formation. When repatriating, they change the socio-cultural environment again, and confront demands in that socio-cultural context both in their occupational and personal lives. This kind of process further triggers their coping efforts to which they might try to respond by drawing upon their identity development.

4.3. Identity development as linguistic discourses

In an alternative approach to identity shaping, Potter and Wetherell highlight the central role of language. They state in their text on discourse analysis that "the question becomes not what is the true nature of the self, but how is the self talked about, how it is theorized in discourse". They point to how identity is formed in the articulation of "personality", or "the real self". The exact semantic and conceptual form that the articulation of "the real self" takes is central to identity formation (Potter and Wetherell 1987, 102).

The cultural elements that are significant in this kind of identity work, might also shape repatriates' individual identity both through developing a repertoire of personal practices and shaping a notion of personal integrity through a set of values (cf. Watson 1994). The construction of identity takes place in social conditions, where the mechanism of a "generalized other" has a significant role in the shaping and cultivating of individuals' morals and values. The process of becoming self-reflexive and the development of a person's sense of

who he or she is, is bound to mirror and incorporate the general morals and values of the wider society. These enter consciousness through communication and, particularly, language (du Gay 1996, 30).

It can be assumed that going through expatriation draws the repatriates into personal and social identity projects. New experiences in a different socio-cultural environment modify their “social self” and their “personal self”. After going through the expatriation, individuals have perhaps learned the communication codes of the host culture and absorbed some of its values. Becoming involved in this kind of multi-faced identity work means that repatriates have new, different aspects of themselves, which demand more self-reflection and inner negotiations how to relate this “changed self” to the outside social world. In the repatriate’s role “the old self” has become a part of “the new self”, and this kind of multidimensional identity shaping process might create tension between the repatriate and his or her social environment. These types of insights introduced above, which draw upon the role of language and communication in identity formation, might also be relevant when studying repatriates’ coping efforts in the context of social interaction.

4.4. Interaction and the balancing between indeterminacy and order⁸

Dorianne Kondo’s (1990) ethnographic fieldwork in a Japanese factory offers us an example on the dynamics between order and indeterminacy as an approach to identity formation. As an US-Japanese researcher Kondo herself faced the typical outsider or insider dilemma. She looked ethnically like an insider but lacked most of the cultural competence to act like a full member of the cultural community. Kondo’s oppositional position became explicit when her Japanese colleagues and friends tried to frame her as a “genuine Japanese”, and when she herself had a need to resist this kind of “ready” positioning and the non-Western norms and behaviours connected with that identity. Similarly, the repatriate, who has internalized foreign habits and frames of mind, is in an oppositional position when facing home colleagues’ expectations of sameness.

Kondo’s (1990) research illustrates the ongoing process of interaction and dialogue in which cultural norms work as a “guide” for the shaping of the self and in the construction

⁸ I wish to thank Tuomo Peltonen for this formulation.

of cultural and work identities. The identity construction process is in a way defined by the individual's confrontations with strangers, which raises the question of defining "us" and "them", as well as clarifying these two categories. The dynamics of this identity formation is born from the situation where the stranger cannot stay as a "total stranger", and is left living between the categories. Efforts are typically made to mark the stranger as "we", implying an identification based on sameness, or as "them", implying an identification based on otherness.

Since identity is not constructed in a social vacuum, the dimension of being an "insider" or "outsider", or "sameness" or "otherness", is important for identity shaping. These dimensions of being guide individuals' organizational identity construction and offer possibilities for identification. Organizational social norms and rules offer its members references through which to create a sense of belonging to an organization (Watson 1994; 1999; Watson and Harris 1999).

Kondo (1990) recognizes the problem that no essential referent can be identified for these identity categories to which everyone belongs. Thus, no transcendental "reality" exists, where individuals could construct their identities, instead, it is strongly based on the cultural appeal of the categories and on the power of the categorizers to impose their frameworks onto the other. Even though individuals are in some sense vulnerable beings in the middle of these categorizing efforts, they also have their chance to escape these efforts in the same field of interaction. When identity formation depends on social interaction and discursive dialogue, individuals can always resist and try to modify the identities offered to them by calling upon other identities and meaning systems.

In addition to the outsider or insider dilemma, the repatriates typically have to somehow handle their own strangeness in relation to the receiving work community. Living and working in a different cultural context submitted them to other cultural norms, which shaped their sense of themselves. When coming home and changing cultures anew, the repatriates in a way become more sensitive and aware of their own "strangeness". The strangeness reflects the tension between their "old" and "new" selves. They become more aware of the distinction "we", identification based on sameness, and "them", identification based on otherness.

The repatriate does not necessarily fit very well into any ready or clearly formulated classifications systems. The repatriate's identity is neither based on the role of the insider not that of the outsider, instead it is best described as a hybrid role. In this kind of nexus of different role changes the repatriate's identity formation can become a complex process where the repatriate works out various kinds of discontinuities.

When going through an expatriation process, individuals' identities and understandings are shaped by locally specific ways but are also influenced by understandings and identities that circulate within society more widely. These identifications are not static – they are orderings that are refined, revised and contradicted on a day-to-day basis (Parker 2000, 5).

Oppositional identities as well as other organizationally positioned work identities become defined through social categorization and ranking. The identities of an employee, of an expert, and of a manager are examples of these kinds of oppositional identities as well as organizationally positioned work identities (Jacques 1996). In semiotics (Jackson and Carter 2000) these kinds of categories are organized as a network of concepts related to each other. Thus, a manager can be identified by the opposition of that position to the positions of an employee or an expert. This way identities becomes defined through positional roles, for example, a manager is what an employee or an expert is not, and vice versa.

Repatriates' identity formation through positional orderings is more complicated since the repatriate is neither inside nor outside an organization, dichotomy typically taken for granted in management discourse. The repatriate's situation is different, since the repatriate's identity does not fit into any stable social categories or ranks. As a balance seeking between indeterminacy and order, the repatriate's identity is emergent; a continuous, multi-dimensional process. It can even imply quite contradictory processes like, on the one hand, leaving one socio-cultural context behind but, on the other hand, a kind of re-fitting into other socio-cultural contexts.

The repatriate's role is characterized by a mixing of different cultural and organizational role definitions, which distinguishes it from other social categories or subject positions. Being positioned in the criss-cross of different cultural and corporate boundaries, the repatriate can become over-loaded by inconsistent expectations, which contribute to

readjustment problems (Torbiörn 1985). In this unconventional role, the repatriate's identity work moves towards continuous balance seeking, in that he or she carries memories of his or her former role while simultaneously trying to formulate a conception of his or her new role, and to learn cultural norms regarding behaviour appropriate to that role.

These theoretical views on managerial identity formation presented above provides us with the means to utilize the perspective on the dynamics between indeterminacy and order for repatriates' identity construction, and to look at the linkage between it and repatriates' coping strategies. It is relevant especially in the context of coping with demands of interaction and communication in the home unit.

4.5. Summary of the conceptual framework

This section summarizes the discussion on the overall conceptual framework of this current doctoral study.

Having introduced the BMO-model, and discussed the need to go beyond examining repatriates' responses in terms of adjustment, coping defined as a process was presented as a more fertile approach to repatriates' responses. The significance of identity construction in explaining the dynamics of the relationship between the repatriate and his or her environment was also addressed.

The introduction of the conceptual framework of this current doctoral study was completed by reviewing previous studies on coping, and introducing the theoretical approaches to coping. The discussion on the relevance of the coping perspective to study repatriates' responses to adjustment demands was further expanded by examining the relationship between the concepts of adjustment and coping. The discussion gave reasons to argue that the process approach to coping (Lazarus and Folkman 1984) is a more fruitful view for studying the repatriation than adjustment. Different forms of coping were also discussed.

Coping theory (Lazarus and Folkman 1984) suggests that people respond to coping demands by appraising and categorizing encounters either as irrelevant, benign-positive or stressful. They also appraise which coping options are available and their own resources to apply a particular strategy or a set of strategies effectively (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 33,

53). Based on this argumentation, it could be assumed that identity is important when explaining an individual's responses to demands.

This chapter has introduced three different perspectives on individuals' identity formation: identity formation as a continuous, "emergent" process, identity development as linguistic discourses, and identity development as interaction and the balancing between indeterminacy and order. This chapter also discussed the relevance of those three different perspectives for studying repatriates' coping efforts. All of them are valuable when studying repatriates' coping strategies. However, identity formation as a continuous, "emergent" process is the most central perspective for this research, even though other approaches to identity formation are also relevant. This applies in two ways. Conceptually the "emergence" process approach to identity seems to be compatible with the process approach to coping; and empirically, this is what I found more frequently.

Next chapter discusses the methodological choices of this study, introduces the data collection process of Phase I, and describes the method of analysing the data in this Phase.

5. METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses the choice of the qualitative research methodology for this study (section 5.1.). It introduces the data collection procedure, and the participants of the study of Phase I (section 5.2.). Then, it presents in detail the empirical investigation and data analyses procedures that were used in order to achieve a greater understanding of repatriates' coping behaviour (section 5.3.).

5.1. Research methodology

This study has been conducted using qualitative research methods. Such methods have been claimed to be appropriate when aiming to understand people's experiences (Silverman 2000, 90). As the aim of this research is to increase understanding of repatriation, collecting the data by interviewing repatriates seemed to be the most suitable strategy. Previous studies have used quantitative research methods and focused on factors that influence repatriates' adjustment. Thus, many aspects of repatriates' responses to the demands of the return have still remained unexplored.

This study consists of two phases. Phase I involves 22 former expatriates' initial interviews, and their analysis. In Phase II, ten follow-up interviews were collected from four "old" and six "new" participants in order to verify the findings. The "old" participants had also been interviewed in Phase I, but the "new" participants were interviewed only in Phase II. The method of conducting the follow-up interviews in Phase II, and the strategies used in the analysis of the informants' feedback on the initial conclusions, are discussed in Chapter 11.

5.2. Data collection

5.2.1. General rationale

Having discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 the concepts of adjustment and coping, it was concluded that the process approach to coping is more fertile for analysing an employee's experiences during the return to the home country after an assignment abroad. However, the concepts of adjustment and coping defined as a process overlap in the sense that both deal with a person's relationship with his or her environment that is perceived as somehow problematic or challenging, and therefore likely to cause stress. Moreover, both concepts

focus on linkages between a person's experiences of stress, and changes in behaviour and /or well-being. The concepts of coping and adjustment are close enough to each other to enable me to use the data that I had gathered for my licentiate study on repatriates' adjustment for the present analysis of repatriates' coping strategies and their various forms. The adjustment and the process approach to coping share a relation to the same social substance, but they differ in terms of their focus. Adjustment research presumes a particular fit or endpoint defined in terms of a successful outcome of the relationship between a person and the environment, whereas coping defined as a process gives a more prominent role to a person's responses to demands as such. Most research on adjustment seems to view the interaction between a person and the environment as a relatively stable state, whereas coping defined as a process views the interaction as a continuously changing, dynamic and more complex process.

5.2.2. Selection of interviewees

The interviewees were employees of Finnish companies. They had been on foreign assignments in different parts of the world. For the purposes of the research it was important to select repatriates who were going through a readjustment process or who were already expected to have gone through the readjustment process during the last two years prior to the time of the interview. In other words, the data had to be collected from repatriates who had repatriated not too long before the interviews, to ensure the presence of fresh information on their experiences of the return.

In view of the nature and purpose of the study, special emphasis was placed on the selection of repatriates. The selection of interviewees was not a random sample but was based on certain criteria. Earlier research results based on North American studies (for instance, Black 1994; Gregersen and Stroh 1997) show that, among other things, the age of returnees, the time since re-entry and the cultural distance between home and host country affect repatriates' adjustment experiences. To get as complete as possible a picture of repatriates' experiences of the return, the interviewees were selected so as to differ in background factors: the length of the assignment, the time since re-entry, the cultural distance between home and host country, age, and organizational position. Some of them had worked as specialists, others as managers during their assignments or in their re-entry job. This choice was made to reveal more of the variance across repatriates (LeCompte and

Preissle 1993, 69). More details of the distribution of the sample according to the background factors will be presented later in this chapter.

It is thus reasonable to expect that the interviewees had confronted demands both during their expatriation and after re-entry. All interviewees had to have been on a foreign assignment for at least 12 months. Moreover, in order to study the influence of other family members on repatriates' adjustment, attention was paid to including interviewees who had had accompanying family members on the assignment.

The selected companies included in the research were the biggest multinationals in the economic region of Turku. The companies are presented in Table 3. To find suitable repatriates to interview, the human resource managers of these companies were contacted by phone or by letter to start with. The contact information was also collected from the personnel working in the wages and salaries office. Some interviewees were found by using a "snowball sampling" method where one appropriate person found led on to other repatriates (Patton 2002; 237). The interviewees were first contacted by telephone and asked to take part in the research and to reserve time for the interview. Everybody whom I contacted personally, promised to participate in the research. The actual number of the interviewees who met the selection criteria at the moment of collecting the initial data in Phase I was 22.

Table 3. Companies of the participants

	Number of personnel	Sector	Persons interviewed
Company A	2900	food industry	7
Company B	8000	food industry	1
Company C	8000	power engineering	4
Company D	160	shipbuilding design	3
Company E	50	shipbuilding design	2
Company F	300	pharmaceutical industry	1
Company G	300	sports equipment	2
Company H	220 000	electrical engineering	2

5.2.3. Presentation of the interviewees

At the time of the interviews the interviewees had returned from their assignments, the duration of which varied from eleven months to almost eight years. The duration of the assignments and the numbers of participants are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. The duration of the assignments

The duration of the assignment	Participants
11 months - 18 months	10
22 months - 3 years	7
4 years - 8 years	5

Three of the interviewees had returned from two consecutive assignments (they were transferred from one assignment immediately to another one in another country). The duration of their assignment was calculated based on the total time they had spent abroad during both assignments. As their stay abroad was uninterrupted during the two assignments they were considered equal to those who returned from their first assignments. The number of those who returned from their first assignments amounted to 14, while eight of the interviewees had been on previous assignments.

Two of the interviewees had returned from Scandinavia, seven from Central or Eastern Europe, three from Southern Europe, five from the USA, one from Canada, one from the Middle East and three from South-East Asia. One of the interviewees who had been on two consecutive assignments had been in two countries in Central Europe, another had been in the Middle East and in South-East Asia. One of the participants had been on three consecutive assignments: in the USA, and in two countries in Central Europe.

At the time of the interviews, the interviewees had returned within a time period that varied between two months and about two years. It can be expected that some of the interviewees were still in the middle of their repatriation processes, while most of them had already passed it. It can therefore be assumed that it was very timely to collect data on their experiences of repatriation. The time that had passed after re-entry is presented in Table 5.

The educational backgrounds of the interviewees were as follows: ten of them were college-educated engineers, six were university engineers, five were business school graduates, and one was a technician. During their assignments as well as after the re-entry they worked as managers or as specialists. After the expatriation fourteen of them worked as managers while the rest worked as specialists. One of the interviewees was female, the rest were men. Sixteen of them were married, four were unmarried, one was common-law married, and one was divorced. The mean age of the interviewees was 37 years. The age divisions are presented in Table 5. Table 5 also presents gender, age, time passed after the return at the time of the interviews in Phase I, place of the assignment, and change of company.

Table 5. Gender, age, position, time passed after the return at the time of the interviews in Phase I, place of the assignment, and change of company

Gender	Age	Manager/Specialist	Phase I	Continent	Have changed company	
male	30		x	13 months	US	
male	43		x	1 year and 5 months	US	
male	38	x		1 year	Middle East	
male	32	x		1 year and 5 months	US	
male	42	x		1 year	Eastern Europe	
male	45		x	7 months	South-East Asia	
male	50	x		1 year	US	
male	43	x		1 year and 2 months	Central Europe	
male	38		x	1 year	Southern Europe	x
male	28	x		5 months	Eastern Europe	
male	40	x		10 months	Canada	
male	28		x	9 months	Scandinavia	
male	30		x	7 months	Scandinavia	
male	33	x		6 months	US	
male	37	x		1 year and 4 months	US and Central Europe	
male	33	x		2 years	Western Europe	
female	33		x	8 months	Southern Europe	
male	34		x	5 months	Southern Europe	
male	33	x		2 months and 5 weeks	South-East Asia	
male	35	x		2 months and 5 weeks	Middle East	

Note: to ensure anonymity of the interviewees, the above listing (Table 5) is not linked to the pseudonyms used in the text.

5.2.4. Interviews

Before starting with the interview questions, the purpose of the research was explained to the interviewee and he or she was told that neither their own real names nor the real names of their companies were to be revealed in the study. The interviewees were asked to give permission for tape recording the interviews. All participants agreed to this. The initial interviews were conducted during the winter and spring of 1998. The interviews took place during working hours, either in the repatriates' offices or in the conference rooms of the companies. The duration of the interviews was on average 1 hour and 40 minutes.

Several interviews started by having some coffee and cakes, which in a way made the beginning smoother and helped create a less formal atmosphere. In two companies the informants took me on a little "sight-seeing" tour of the company's production units. These were also opportunities for me to form a picture of the companies and to discuss it with the informants. Usually the interviewees had reserved plenty of time for the interview, and even those who claimed to be quite busy at the beginning of the interview had enough time to answer all the questions. Sometimes the interviews were interrupted by telephone calls, but in general, there were no remarkable disturbances and the interviews took place in a spirit of peaceful cooperation. One of the participants worked simultaneously on his computer while answering the questions. Though I myself found that kind of behaviour a bit unpleasant at first, it did not diminish the value of the interview. Generally speaking, the informants were very positive about being interviewed, and they were ready to talk about their experiences.

Some background information was collected using open questions at the beginning of the interview. The questions included information on the selected companies, the duration of the time that the participant had been working in the company, and their former and latest assignments. The questions also included personal background information like age, marital status, family situation, and the participation of family members in the latest assignment.

The main interview questions were based on the BMO-model and repatriation adjustment research literature (see Appendix 3). In some cases I asked some additional questions in order to clarify the initial interview question concerned. This happened mostly when there was some confusion between issues concerning the time as an expatriate and issues concerning the time after expatriation.

The semi-structured interviews followed the themes presented in the BMO-model. At first, the questions addressed issues that have an anticipatory role in repatriation, in other words, the informants were asked what might affect their preparing for the return. Then, there were questions about some individual factors, about different work roles, and organizational factors. Moreover, the questions also addressed the participants' experiences of socio-cultural demands, their family members' experiences of the return, and living conditions. Finally, the informants were offered an opportunity to tell more about their experiences of the return, if that had not been discussed earlier.

I did all the interviews personally. I tape recorded them in order to concentrate on the communication itself with the interviewees and the substance of the interviews (Patton 1980, 247-248). The recorded interviews were transcribed as soon as possible after the interview. I sometimes edited the quotations used from the interviews in order to avoid repetition, as I was not conducting detailed conversation analysis. I changed the names of the persons, the companies, and places the participants referred to in the quotations to ensure the anonymity of the participants.

Generally, in answering the questions the informants talked more about things with which they had had difficulties or in which they were personally interested. Correspondingly, when the informant did not have anything special to mention, the answers were usually much shorter. Usually the answers were very consistent. Generally, I do not think that there were any large problems of trust. I think most of the interviewees found me quite easy to talk to. For instance, in one interview I noticed very clearly the increase of trust, when the informant at first told me a shorter and somewhat "lighter" version of an issue that was quite difficult for him, and then later during the interview I heard a much longer and "thicker" version of the same issue. I got the impression that the informants mostly enjoyed the interviews and found it positive that somebody was interested in listening to their experiences. Sometimes I had the feeling that the interview was a kind of "therapeutic" op-

portunity for the informant to talk about things, which he or she had probably not talked to anybody else about before.

I preferred to show empathy and respect for the informants' right to decide what and how much they wanted to tell about something. Sometimes I had a slightly uncomfortable feeling of being in a position in which I could ferret out information about things that were probably very sensitive for the informants. But as stated above, I did not find it too difficult to get the informants to talk.

5.3. Data analysis

5.3.1. Background

As stated earlier, this current study is partly based on data collected for my licentiate study (Paganus 2000). This section starts by briefly introducing the data analysis process of my licentiate study. In that study I analysed repatriates' adjustment on the dimensions of work, interaction, and general environment (Black et al. 1992a). The analysis provided explicit answers to the research questions posed in the licentiate study, in which the focus was on repatriates' experiences of adjustment and the factors influencing them.

After the licentiate study, I started to reanalyse the data by trying to apply the identity formation perspective to it. The original research questions focused on repatriates' adjustment, and not specifically on their identity; the data provided some implicit information on repatriates' identity changes, but only to a limited extent. Applying an identity formation perspective to the analysis of the data appeared to be appropriate for some particular parts of the data, but not for the whole data. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, the identity formation perspective remains relevant for the current study. The information on the repatriates' identity development was mainly linked to the usage of problem-focused coping strategies in the context of work role changes. Identity changes were linked to both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies in interaction and communication in the context of the home unit's work community and outside working life.

After having tried to apply the identity formation perspective to the analysis of the data, as discussed earlier, I realized that the coping perspective might be a particularly fruitful way

to understand repatriation. By utilizing the concept of coping defined as a process, it is possible to examine repatriates' efforts to manage his or her relationship with the environment. While the concept of adjustment points to the outcomes of a person's behaviour, the process approach to coping focuses on a person's coping behaviour *per se*. The qualitative data that I had gathered was also relevant for analysing coping, thus making it possible to shift the focus from identifying factors influencing repatriates' experiences of adjustment to their responses to the demands of the return. Hence, the original data focusing on adjustment also provided data that could be used to analyse repatriates' coping. Nonetheless, the fact that the interview questions were formulated on the basis of the theoretical assumptions on adjustment presented in the BMO-model (Black et al. 1992a) influenced the categories, which I used for the analysis of the repatriates' coping strategies. In this study the analysis of coping still operates to a large extent within the same categories as adjustment in the BMO-model. This shows how problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies, and various forms of them, were linked to particular contexts and situations, such as "coping in the context of preparing for the return". Since I used the categories of the BMO-model to structure the interviews, it probably limits the interviewees' descriptions of their experiences of the return to cover certain issues, but, on the other hand, it could be argued that similar types of issues and questions that are critical for repatriates' adjustment are also relevant when examining their coping behaviour during the return.

5.3.2. Elaboration of data analysis

First, I started to recode the transcribed data by identifying the interviewees' reactions to demands and their experiences of the return. To put it more precisely, preliminary *within-case* and *across-case* comparisons were made already at this stage in order to find out which coping strategies seemed to be linked to certain situations. However, in this study I analyse processes across a number of individuals rather than focusing on each individual separately. In this way it became possible to reduce and structure the coded data loosely by grouping it into four main themes:

- *coping strategies that the expatriates used when they started to prepare for the return,*
- *coping in the context of work role changes,*

- *coping strategies in the context of the home unit's work community,*
- *coping strategies outside working life.*

The four themes listed above roughly follow the three dimensions of adjustment to work, to interaction, and to non-work environment, which have been identified in the repatriation adjustment literature. The first theme, *“preparing for the return”*, was further divided into three subthemes: *“finishing the assignment”*, *“seeking a return position”*, *“confrontation”*, *“dealing with disappointments”*. The second theme, *“coping in the context of work role changes”*, was further divided into two subthemes according to the two main coping strategies identified in the data: problem-focused strategies and emotion-focused strategies. The third theme, *“coping in the home unit's work community”*, was divided into two subthemes: *“the time before the actual return or the physical relocation to Finland”*, and *“the time after the actual return”*. The first subtheme addressed issues such as forming expectations and working with attitudes. The second subtheme involved responding to demands in interaction and communication. The fourth theme, *“coping outside working life”* was similarly divided into two subthemes: *“the time before the actual return”*, which addressed handling expectations and attitudes towards the return, and *“the time after the actual return”*, which included an analysis of confronting cultural demands, finding social support, and engaging in leisure time activities.

After identifying the four main themes and their subthemes, I reread the data and looked at what kind of coping strategies and their different forms were linked to the subthemes and the various particular social situations. In analysing the data, two main categories of coping strategies were identified; problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies. They are the two main categories into which coping strategies are usually located in the psychological literature (Lazarus and Folkman 1984). The same division seemed to be the most appropriate one to describe the repatriates' coping efforts at a general level, and indeed they were both found within all the four main themes discussed above. I will illustrate how the data was coded with some examples later in this section.

The definition of problem-focused coping points to how coping efforts are directed to change the particular relationship between an individual and the environment. Problem-focused coping addresses the problem *directly*, and such coping is directed at managing or altering the problem causing the distress. In contrast, emotion-focused coping strategies

concentrate on the emotional response to a particular problem (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152-153).

The identification of the informants' descriptions of adjustment from the data, either as forms of problem-focused or emotion-focused coping, was made by comparing them with the definitions of these concepts. When the informants' descriptions referred to his or her efforts to change the environmental conditions, it was identified as a form of problem-focused coping. When the description indicated that the informant "let it be" rather than specifically tried to do anything in order to actually change the environmental conditions, the coping effort was identified as emotion-focused coping. In addition, examples of different forms of coping from earlier studies were sometimes used for comparing and identification of the repatriates' coping efforts.

After making this basic distinction between problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies, more detailed analyses were carried out by making systematic comparisons across cases and with the existing literature on coping in order to find any similarities between different examples of types of strategies, or to understand differences or variations in ways of coping. Thus, within the two main categories different nuances or forms of the main coping strategies were found. By comparing them with the strategies identified in Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) theory of coping, it was possible to say which of them were newly recognized features of the main categories, problem-focused strategies and emotion-focused strategies that emerged from the data.

Several challenges are associated with conceptualizing coping in terms of specific methods used or in terms of a specific focus or target of the coping efforts. Distinguishing between coping methods and focus of coping can be difficult. In addition, the boundaries *within* the categories of coping methods and focus are often somewhat unclear. This is primarily due to the fact that a particular coping attempt may involve a *variety* of methods or may be directed towards *multiple* focuses. For instance, a worker confronting conflicting job demands may consult his or her superior in an attempt to resolve this conflict. "Do we categorize this method as gathering information, directly addressing the problem or seeking social support?" (Edwards 1988, 239).

The example below illustrates the difficulty of distinguishing between coping methods and focus. Problem-focused coping efforts in this context could be described as, for instance, analysing the situation and estimating possible consequences of making decisions. Thus, the coping attempt to bring external problems under one's own control may include many different coping methods, such as making a decision to quit the job abroad. The example also indicates the difficulty of distinguishing between particular coping attempts within the category of problem-focused coping. What makes this example even more complicated is that emotion-focused coping efforts were included (Edwards 1988, 239).

A problem-focused strategy entails individuals bringing, or seeking to bring external situational problems under their own control (Feldman and Tompson 1993). For example, one expatriate, Petri, used this kind of controlling and self-initiative as a coping strategy in order to return control of the situation to himself. Petri was frustrated and perhaps also worried, when he felt stuck in an unclear situation. At first, he presumably used an emotion-focused strategy (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150-151) as he dealt with this distress, but he then simply quit the expatriate job and returned to Finland, having had enough of his unclear situation. The negative feelings did not stop him; instead, the uncertainty of the situation and the frustration experienced triggered Petri's active and decisive way to resolve the problematic situation. He used a problem-focused strategy, and made his decision to quit independently:

Petri: The whole autumn was like it was prolonged, it was not clear at all. [The assignment] could have been continued, but then I told them that I wanted to leave. I announced that I did not want to stay there any more, because everything was so unclear.

The following example illustrates the difficulty of identifying a particular coping effort either as emotion-focused or problem-focused coping. Dealing with lower work role discretion is identified as a form of emotion-focused coping, handling frustrations. But this particular coping attempt could also be identified as problem-focused coping, if interpreted as including motivational and cognitive changes (Ibid.).

Jari had to struggle in order to find a new balance between his expatriate work role and lower discretion repatriate work role. His coping efforts occurred mainly as emotion-focused coping (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150), dealing with the frustration of loss of

role discretion. Further, Jari's strategy in this situation is reminiscent of replication as well (Nicholson 1984, 176), in which he, in his specialist position, had limited opportunities to affect his work role discretion, instead, he had to submit to the situation. He learned to be more patient, but waiting was still hard for him:

Jari: It was difficult to get used to work with less role discretion. It is irritating when one has to wait to be able to do something. When I work alone, I can do things in the order I see fit. Waiting for something demands patience.

As illustrated above, a given coping attempt may simultaneously have multiple focuses (Edwards 1988, 240). For example, a student who takes a tranquilizer before a major exam may simultaneously dampen his or her emotional response and control anxiety which may interfere with exam performance. This single coping act may be classified as both emotion-focused and problem-focused coping (Ibid.).

5.3.3. The overall approach to the analysis

Qualitative data can be analysed using a range of approaches, from "realist" to "narrative". When following a "realist" approach, informants' answers are regarded as indications of potentially true pictures of reality. According to this approach, informants provide indications of "some external reality (for instance, facts, events) or internal experience (for example, feelings, meanings)". In "narrative" approaches the research material does not represent arguments about reality, but is part of the reality. It is seen as a source for producing plausible accounts of the world. This approach considers the "situated", or locally produced, nature of accounts (Alasuutari 1999, 114-115; Silverman 2000, 122-123).

The analysis approach used in this study derives mainly from the "realist" approach, meaning that I have looked at the data by paying attention to the substantive details of what the interviewees told me about what they did during repatriation. They answered the questions quite spontaneously. In general, they did not spend much time reflecting on how to answer my questions, nor did they ask me several times what I meant by a certain question.

On the other hand, the data is limited in the sense that the interviewees perhaps did not tell me about all their negative experiences directly, but rather expressed such things more implicitly on in a more neutral way.

In the following chapters a number of interview quotations are presented in order to illustrate the repatriates' responses to various psychological, social and material demands, and to support the description and interpretation of the data. The background information collected about the repatriates was utilized to add richness to the descriptions of the repatriation, and in order to find explanations for the variations in coping strategies. The background information consisted of personal information about the respondents, their life situations, their assignments, and their companies.

At certain points the analysis addressed the repatriates' identity formation. Though the aim of this research is not to look at what kind of persons the repatriates are, or at their identities or personalities, an identity formation perspective has been utilized to strengthen the analysis. The interview questions addressed issues such as repatriates' self-confidence, their conception of themselves, and whether they had noticed changes in themselves. The analysis of repatriates' identity formation was illuminated by Watson's (1994; 1999) theoretical ideas on identity as an "emergent" process, identity development as linguistic discourses (for instance, Potter and Wetherell 1987), and identity development through interaction and balancing between indeterminacy and order (cf. for instance, Kondo 1990).

In this methodology chapter, the methods and procedures of collecting and analyzing the data have been discussed. Questions concerning validity, reliability, and the limitations of the study will be returned to in Chapter 12. Chapter 6 presents the analysis of the data concerning the pre-return phase.

6. PREPARING FOR THE RETURN

The empirical findings of the repatriates' coping strategies in the preparatory phase are presented in this chapter. First, the results on the repatriates' coping strategies concern finishing the assignment (section 6.1.). The second section addresses finding a return position (section 6.2.). Then, the repatriates' coping efforts regarding handling their disappointments in the immediate return position are described in section 6.3. Section 6.4. summarizes the findings concerning the repatriates' preparations for the return.

Going through an international assignment and returning to the home country included using various coping strategies by the repatriates. The necessity to be able to cope with changing life conditions and situations was essential for the returning expatriates who had to confront the transfer between different socio-cultural contexts both in their occupational and personal lives. The repatriates' actions and choices between different coping strategies was contextualized so that certain structural conditions either gave the returning expatriates more possibilities or limited their possibilities to apply different coping strategies (cf. Heiskala 2000, 65-76). But although the understanding of these kinds of social phenomena requires contextualization, it should not overlook the position of the returning subject. Behaviour cannot be explained only by the social structures, but exploring the connection between the structures and behaviour should include at least implicitly references to the beliefs, attitudes and values internalized by the subject (Sayer 1997).

6.1. Finishing the assignment

This section addresses the questions that were important when the repatriates' prepared for the return. The results on these issues mainly concern the actual finishing of the assignment and finding a return position. The coping strategies that were linked to these questions fell into two main types of coping strategies: problem-focused strategies and emotion-focused strategies. First I will consider what kind of coping strategies the expatriates used when they started to prepare for leaving the assignment.

In the context of finishing the assignment nine of the expatriates used problem-focused strategies (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150). They reached a mutual understanding with their companies to either prolong the assignment, or to leave earlier than was tentatively planned. Problem-focused strategies were typically also used in very unclear situations; in

order to clarify the situation for themselves, the expatriates strove to control the timing of the return.

The exact length of the assignment was not always very well known when the expatriates left for it. Companies use different types and lengths of assignments in order to advance their own strategic interests and to develop their international expertise (Dowling, Schuler and Welch 1999, 169; Edström and Galbraith 1977). The expatriates could act under certain prerequisites determined by the staffing and assignment policy chosen by the company in order to clarify the end of the assignment for themselves. Sometimes the assignments ended before the tentatively set time. The option to leave earlier included in the work contracts was not necessarily used, but those expatriates who had that type of contract were better able to prepare themselves for an earlier return. The expatriates took the attitude that they were prepared to leave earlier. This was identified as problem-focused coping (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152). Kai explained what kind of work contract he had and the reasons for his earlier return:

Kai: I had a contract for at least one year. We agreed that we would see later if it would be necessary to stay another year. In April it became clear that their business there will end, so there was no reason to stay longer.

The assignments could also end at very short notice, which meant a quick return for the expatriate. Nevertheless, in these types of rare situations the two expatriates who returned on very short notice were well aware of the policy of their company concerning their assignment, and they accepted the change. So, for instance, one expatriate could orientate himself for that kind of quick return beforehand through problem-focused coping. Markus received information about his leaving on short notice. But as he had prepared for it beforehand, the situation did not seem to cause him too many problems or excess stress. He reported:

Markus: I was informed one day in advance. So I had time to pack my suitcase and book the tickets. They have these kinds of contracts, that when the work is finished, it is finished. So because I knew this beforehand, it did not cause me so much stress, because I was prepared for that.

A well-known phenomenon in the context of international assignments is the dual-career dilemma, which refers to the impact of the accompanying spouse's or partner's career orientation upon the international assignment (Dowling, Schuler and Welch 1999, 95). My

research clearly showed how the spouse's or the partner's work situation and working life interests influenced the expatriates' decisions concerning the timing of the return to Finland. Eight of the expatriates returned earlier, despite the fact that they themselves could have stayed or were willing to stay longer on the assignment. An earlier return was chosen as a result of what appeared to be an evaluation of their priorities and values. These situations pointed to the use of problem-focused coping (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 151), where the expatriates considered their life situations as a whole. It meant paying attention to the needs and interests of their spouses. On the other hand, one might ask whether it was a question of some kind of occupational sacrifice. In the following example the expatriate simultaneously gave up his interesting work abroad when making this kind of choice. Teppo did not hesitate in his decision to return to Finland, despite being asked to stay by the representatives of the host company:

Teppo: If I had been after the money very much, I would still be there. They asked me three times to stay, the local company asked whether I would like to continue. But on the other hand [there was] the situation of my wife and the continuity of her workplace, so I did not only think about my own career and future...

Quite often the expatriate had to stay longer on the assignment than was tentatively planned. It was quite common that the assignments could be prolonged indefinitely, which demanded adaptability and flexibility from the expatriate. One of the expatriates had been in a similar situation before. By learning from her earlier experiences she had increased her understanding of the nature of the work and the local conditions. Thus, she was better able to deal with the prolongation of the assignment. Henna had some experience of being in this type of situation on her previous assignment. She applied problem-focused coping when she used her experience to "forecast" something similar to happen to her in the same host company again:

Henna: At first my work was supposed to last until Christmas, I myself knew that it would not be like that, it would last longer, because I have done that kind of work before and seen that it is not finished that quickly. Based on the experience of the first time, I knew that it would be similar, one month at a time, so I was able to see it that way.

Also, when the work contracts were formulated in agreement with the companies in such a way that they included a certain "flexibility time" or option, the expatriate anticipated the prolongation of their assignment and used this knowledge to be prepared to stay abroad

longer. Tapio's family members had accompanied him on the assignment, but they had returned earlier. They started to lose their patience with waiting for him to return, but he himself did not see any major problem when his assignment was prolonged:

Tapio: I left for two years, but then it was postponed, I did two years more. Then it was still postponed with half a year by agreement between all the parties. Mainly it just caused a little bit of tension in my family. My family was here in Finland and they waited for me to return.

Forecasting likely consequences and making backup plans is an active way to cope with unclear situations (Welds 1991). At least one expatriate told me about this kind of problem-focused coping (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152), when he started to prepare for the prolongation of the assignment. At first Jukka used problem-focused coping, but despite his active efforts, he had to wait for clear answers concerning the end of the assignment. He had already been on the assignment in two countries for three years altogether, and he was ready to return. Because of the unclarity of the situation, he also applied emotion-focused strategy (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150-151) to be able to handle his worries and anxiety concerning the situation. The following example demonstrates the continuation of coping efforts where previously used strategies may still trigger further coping. He described how he started to reflect upon his future more profoundly, and to consider the situation from a more personal perspective:

Jukka: There was a discussion regarding whether I would still stay for another year, it was not clear, I myself already wanted to return, there was talk around this question. It was not fun at all, when I did not know what the continuation would be. And another thing was, that we had already been separated for a year, had there been one additional year we would have needed to start thinking about other solutions.

On the other hand, the expatriates themselves had possibilities to influence the length of their assignment. This kind of independence offered the expatriates more flexibility. The expatriates could utilize problem-focused coping (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152) by empowering themselves to finish it. It included for example recruiting new personnel, as one expatriate did when he looked for a successor and introduced the new employer to the job. The expatriates changed their behaviour, for instance, they made plans for work and decided to work overtime to get their job finished. Jouni worked as a project manager and he decided his schedules quite independently:

Jouni: *This project was not prolonged any more. I decided that it would be finished before a certain day, so we worked overtime to get it finished.*

In problem-focused strategy, individuals can bring external situational problems under their own control (Feldman and Tompson 1993). One expatriate, Petri, used this kind of controlling and self-initiativeness as a coping strategy in order to return the control of the situation to himself. Petri was frustrated and perhaps also worried, when he felt stuck in an unclear situation. At first, he presumably used an emotion-focused strategy (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150-151) as he dealt with this distress, but he then simply quit the expatriate job and returned to Finland, having had enough of his unclear situation. The negative feelings did not stop him; instead, the uncertainty of the situation and the frustration experienced triggered Petri's active and decisive way to resolve the problematic situation. He used a problem-focused strategy, and made his decision to quit independently:

Petri: *The whole autumn was like it was prolonged, it was not clear at all. [The assignment] could have been continued, but then I told them that I wanted to leave. I announced that I did not want to stay there any more, because everything was so unclear.*

Naturally, the expatriates' preparations also included arranging for the physical transfer back to Finland, and in this context they applied various planning efforts in order to manage all the practical details of the return. Cross-cultural transfers, especially in cases including families contain many life changes, which demand practical arrangements concerning the whole family, such as housing, children's day care, and schooling. To implement their physical transfers the expatriates used problem-focused strategies (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152), which included a lot of organizing for the return. In order to facilitate their planning and organizing for the return the expatriates tried to get information about the exact date of the return in good time. Preparing these kinds of arrangements demanded considering the life situations of other family members as well. Esa told me that he managed to plan and arrange everything well. He could count on the timetable and he believed that this saved him from many disappointments:

Esa: *Fortunately, which does not happen often, my contract for one year remained valid, I believe that it made my return much easier. I was able to arrange everything for that year, and there was no need to change anything, or regret anything, and this concerns the whole family.*

People can disengage themselves both behaviourally or mentally from situations (Carver and Scheier 1998, 190). After having clarified the date of the return one expatriate applied this strategy by distancing himself mentally and by disengaging from activities in the host country. Jukka started to prepare for leaving by becoming less interested in and less motivated for his staying abroad. He used withdrawal as his emotion-focused coping strategy (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152). He started to wait for and orientate towards his life in the home country. This, in turn, could be interpreted as another form of emotion-focused coping; Jukka started to fantasize about his future life in Finland. He described the things he had longed for:

Jukka: To be honest, I was very glad when I could return. I looked forward to return back to normal life, all my friends and hobbies are here. The whole time was prolonged for three years, after that I thought I would like to be back in Finland, it was enough.

Next, I will look closer at the kind of coping strategies the repatriates applied in order to find themselves a return position at work.

6.2. Seeking a return position

In negotiating for a return position, mostly those repatriates who were managers applied problem-focused coping efforts (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150). The coping efforts were characterized by the repatriates' aim to control their return process. They involved taking an active role in the negotiations for the return position, and utilizing contacts for that purpose. Those four, who had to deal with the disappointments concerning their immediate return position also mostly used problem-focused strategies. They tried to change the disadvantageous situation to a better one. Emotion-focused strategies (ibid., 150-151) might also occur in situations where repatriates handle their negative feelings caused by disappointments.

To find a suitable return position in the home organization was an important part of the preparation process for the return. Most of the expatriates took an active role themselves in dealing with this question, by using various forms of problem-focused strategies (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152). This kind of initiative taking was especially important for the ten expatriates working in managerial positions, since they were at a bigger risk to end up in a holding position compared to the expatriates working as specialists.

When embracing these strategies, the interviewees pointed out the importance of “the right attitude” as an essential way of coping. This was manifested in problem-focused coping (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152); the expatriates first evaluated the situation, and, based on that, adopted an attitude of being active.

Firstly, the expatriates seemed to be very aware of the typical “out of sight, out of mind” problem associated with repatriation, which meant they understood the risks of repatriation, where a returnee can find him- or herself in a temporary position (Dowling, Schuler and Welch 1999, 208). Jukka emphasized the importance of thinking about these things before leaving for an assignment:

Jukka: It depends on your own head. Already before leaving for an assignment you should ensure your return. Many think that it is great to leave for an assignment and are not aware that there might be a problem, because leaving happens like in a state of intoxication. All those fine things that come along with it; you forget to consider some important things. You have to accept the risk that it is not certain that there will be a position for you when you return. You have to think about it as a whole, and not just leave. If you leave for the assignment acting like Elvis⁹ and you quit everything, it will be a catastrophe after a year.

Secondly, the repatriates highlighted the point that having the right attitude was followed by taking an active role in the negotiations with the home company regarding the return. It was typical that the expatriates tried to control the process, in which they planned and looked for different means to find a good return position themselves. Tapio highlighted the importance of being active:

Tapio: It was worthwhile to be active and take your own initiative, to start doing that work in good time. To bring up the issue in good time, because if you are out of sight, you are out of mind.

According to Welds (1991), people can develop a new base of support at work through networking. When pursuing their problem-focused strategies (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152-153) the expatriates first of all aimed at building up and enlarging their support networks in the home organization. The official information transfer between the expatriate and the home organization was in many cases intensive, and a natural part of many

⁹ “Acting like Elvis” refers to a Finnish expression, which denotes arrogance.

expatriates' work. In their expatriate position they sometimes even had better access to the information networks than they would otherwise have had in the home organization. Tapio told me how he, as the CEO of the host office, had good possibilities to get all information concerning the company:

Tapio: The contacts were regular, several times a week. If I think about the whole organization, the information flow was better outwards than within the home unit. Of course it also depended on my position there as a CEO, I got the same information there as the CEO here in Finland. I was on the same mailing list.

Although the expatriates usually had tight contacts to the home unit they also recognized the consequences of becoming more and more distanced from it, especially during long term assignments far away from the home unit. Thus, the expatriates tried to keep themselves updated both through informal networking in their work and by actively following the company's official information bulletins, such as weekly reports and personnel magazines. Tapani had tight contacts to the home company during his assignment:

Tapani: I was in touch daily by e-mail. I was well up to date, because my former position involved a lot of contacts and I got a lot of information. It was by e-mail. It was quite difficult by telephone because of the lack of common work time. It was absolutely important considering the return. You can grasp your work much quicker when you know what is going on. Of course I also got all those personnel magazines and other messages by post.

One expatriate was quite interested in IHRM and he had, for example, read articles on repatriation. That way he became more involved in the HRM activities of his company and in developing them. Also, by taking an interest in IHRM he could use his knowledge to prepare for his own return and to consider what was important to think about. This kind of information seeking was one form of problem-focused strategy, a direct attempt to change the psychological condition of uncertainty (cf. Feldman and Brett 1983). Anssi told me about his interests in IHRM in following words:

Anssi: I have tried to be quite active in HRM matters. At the time I came to this company, I commented quite heavily on our introduction practices, which resulted in that I myself ended up developing and implementing them. I also commented heavily on our company's quite non-existent way of handling repatriation. Then, as I myself had to prepare for the return, I found out what to expect; I read articles on repatriation and so on.

When becoming more and more aware of their vulnerable position the expatriates made greater efforts to activate themselves regarding maintaining and creating contacts to the home company. They also used their unofficial contacts to obtain up-to-date information on the home company. This form of problem-focused coping seemed to be a more significant way to strengthen their networks than official information channels. Despite their quite close contact with the home unit, the expatriates sometimes still felt that they had gaps in their knowledge concerning the development of the business and other things that might have interested them. Further, despite access to information technology and their tight contacts, the expatriates realized the vulnerable position they were in during the expatriation, being at risk to be forgotten regarding career opportunities in the home company. Tapani had also felt these kinds of worries during his first assignment in North America. Thus, he was engaged in emotion-focused coping efforts (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150) when he tried to handle these kind of feelings, which certainly were new and unique to him:

Tapani: It is a quite interesting feeling there abroad; that loneliness and distance from Finland. In a way, the longer you stay there the more distanced you become, and the more easily you are forgotten. You get the feeling that now I am here and I am being excluded from all the opportunities of the home organization. It is quite natural, and it came to my mind many times, too, that something like this might happen.

In order to strengthen their networks the expatriates also could ask visitors from Finland to visit their home in the host country. This way of creating contacts and obtaining information was especially valuable for those expatriates, whose locations were very distant from Finland and who could rarely visit Finland during their assignments. Also during their visits to the home company the expatriates especially reserved some time to spend with their colleagues and to talk with them about business. These were also problem-focused strategies (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152-153). Mauri used to update his knowledge of current projects in the home organization by visiting his colleagues. Based on the knowledge he could make evaluations of the work situation of the home unit, and also some kind of estimations concerning which kinds of opportunities were available to himself regarding the return job. He told me how he used his visits to the home unit for the purpose of collecting unofficial information on the work situation:

Mauri: I got a lot of unofficial information through informal discussions. In a way I always spent one day doing that kind of 'work disturbance' here, I went around and said hello to my former colleagues, and I got to know who is working in some certain project and so on. I always got this kind of up-to-date information, and from my superior I got information about new projects, and about business in this unit in general.

Tapani utilized his familiarity with the home company and found his favourite office space through his former contacts. By using this kind of form of problem-focused strategy he believed that his interest in finding a suitable position better matched the interests of the home company. Employing a similar type of coping, another of the expatriates participated in meetings in the home unit during his visits. Tero used a form of problem-focused strategy (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152), which could be called "making yourself visible", or showing up to avoid the problem of being forgotten when abroad. He had been on a five-year assignment and he had extensive international work experience. Tero told me how he used the contacts he had created during that time to become empowered to the extent that he was able to choose a return position for himself:

Tero: I have often and continuously been here for internal meetings. When I thought about my return I knew exactly what would happen. I had an opportunity to choose what I wanted to do.

SP: Did your company plan your return?

Tero: No, but I affected it myself very strongly. I reflected on which unit it was worth returning to. I continuously screened it. I was active and we started negotiations already during my assignment. A couple of units asked me if I liked to join them and then I returned to this current unit.

One expatriate's problem-focused coping (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152) could be described as building an image. Timo planned his return very strategically. He had appraised the risks of the return, and based on this he asked for prolongation of his assignment to get more time to achieve better results in his expatriate job. In this way he was able to increase his possibilities to find a good return position. He also took the attitude that he had to earn his return position by performing as well as possible in the expatriate job, not just expect to get it automatically upon return. This kind of attitude certainly helped him to motivate himself to do his best in the expatriate job. Timo described how he, through applying this kind of problem-focused strategy, found his return position:

Timo: *I had a position when I returned, it is not self-evident; if you are not able to do anything, how can you think [that you will be offered a position], this company is not the Salvation Army, we do work here. I did my job well, I got a lot of results and we kept in touch. The company in Finland asked me what I was going to do when I came back, whether I would be interested in that and that job. If you do not succeed in your task, can you then suppose that you will return to the same job in Finland? I think that you cannot, you have to be fired in that case, [if you fail].*

The expatriates strive for self-management or empowerment to find a suitable return position also appeared necessary in the two cases of the expatriate being offered a job or a position in the home company. Teppo tried to obtain information concerning his return job, which pointed to the use of problem-focused strategy in the process of acquiring his return position. The following example demonstrated how the expatriate might, by choosing the certain strategy, decrease the possible demands of further coping. Teppo explained that the home unit actively expressed an interest in him and suggested a certain job, but he preferred to further clarify the character of his future work before accepting the offer:

Teppo: *I started myself, the company offered me this and that, but I started the negotiations for what would be included in my work in good time. I think that the person who is out there somewhere in the world has to be active himself, the company cannot keep track of everybody.*

Being conscious of the risks of the return, especially the expatriates in managerial positions strove to start the negotiations for the return position in good time, something which they specifically emphasized. Tapio's return position was discussed a long time before the actual return:

Tapio: *My return was prepared for a long time, perhaps about one year. Of course you have to show initiative and bring it up in good time, in order to find a suitable position [when you return].*

Despite their active efforts the repatriates were not always able to save themselves from disappointments concerning their return position. Next, I will look at how the repatriates dealt with their disappointments in the immediate return position.

6.3. Confrontation and dealing with disappointments

A group of four repatriates experienced disappointments in the return phase, regardless of their active efforts to find a suitable return position. The disappointments were due to the contradiction between the repatriates' expectations and the reality, which they confronted. Most of them had already agreed with the home unit on a suitable return position, which however proved to be different to what had been promised. All of these repatriates felt they had been cheated, but all except one recovered relatively quickly and started to reflect on their possibilities to change the situation to something better. This kind of problem-focused coping strategy (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152) helped the repatriates to find better positions. Though their first reaction to the disappointments concerning their immediate return position was usually a kind of panic, including intentions or real efforts to look for a job in some other organization, most of them still stayed with the same company. What is significant here is that though all of them experienced strong negative feelings they did not remain inoperative for a long time, instead, they reacted to negative surprises by utilizing problem-focused coping strategies.

Tapani told me that he was disappointed in his immediate return position, and how he handled his negative feelings by using emotion-focused coping efforts, like seeking explanations (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150-151). He continued on how the disappointment made him apply for a job somewhere else. This demonstrated the use of a problem-focused strategy (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152), which showed how strongly he reacted to the situation:

Tapani: There was a phase when I did not have a certain position, I was not sure about the future, and I applied for a job somewhere else. I was very close to leaving. If I had been offered another job I would probably have taken it, because there was a phase of disappointment. I was promised different things, but it just happened to turn against me, there was a certain person with whom many had had difficulties. It was temporary, but it irritated me very much for a while.

Positive denial or reappraisal includes re-evaluating and reinterpreting the impact of setbacks (Welds 1991). When Tapani did not get the job he applied for, he used problem-focused strategy (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152) by taking some time to himself and by evaluating his opportunities to find another position in the same company. He could see his unpleasant situation as temporary and took a positive attitude to the future. He believed that it was first and foremost a question of bad chemistry between himself and his

colleague. Probably due to his long history and familiarity with the company, he was able to realistically evaluate his possibilities to find another position in the same company. Tapani described his situation as follows:

Tapani: I saw it as a temporary thing, I was not so committed to continuing. It was not a position to my liking at all.

Another repatriate also told me how he, in his previous return as a much younger repatriate, almost left the company when he was disappointed in his return position. But the second time, being an older and more experienced repatriate, he reflected on his opportunities and came to the conclusion that at this more advanced career stage and age he would have less opportunities to find an equivalent position somewhere else. Thus, repatriates' possibilities and intentions to change workplaces varied according to their age and their stage of career development. Sami compared his experiences of his two returns to the home organization:

Sami: It is a very critical phase when you are younger. At my age, when you are close to a 50 years of age crisis, you change a little bit. Your ability to take a risk to change jobs is not so strong, or your demands are higher. Returning is very critical for younger people. When I returned from my first assignment thirteen years ago and realized that I was not expected, I was very close to leaving. Now, when I have been doing this work for so long, I have to think about where I could actually leave for, there are not that many positions like the one I have. Thus, after you get really bored with the situation, you could accept whatever. You reflect on it more deeply.

One young repatriate seemed to be quicker to plan to leave the company than the older ones when facing disappointments in their career development in the return phase. His commitment to the company had not grown as strong as that of the older employees'. The expatriate work experience had increased his competencies, hence he was more aware of and open-minded about his increased possibilities to identify opportunities outside his home company. These were identified as problem-focused coping efforts (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152). Anssi was disappointed in his return position at first, and he told me how this weakened his commitment to the company. He explained his thoughts about his opportunities as follows:

Anssi: My commitment has changed, on the one hand I see more good opportunities in [company X] now, my network has become stronger. But on the other hand my loyalty to the company suffered due to the way of taking care of these things and the frustration associated with it. So I am more aware of other opportunities as well.

In the following example the young repatriate sought support from his superiors in order to handle his disappointment with the immediate situation in his return job, and to change the situation. His support seeking was one form of problem-focused strategy (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152). Stress and anxiety can be diminished with the support and feedback from colleagues, which strengthens the individual's belief in his or her own capabilities. Social support networks can function as a way to relieve pressure; it is a group of people to whom you can tell your problems (Feldman and Brett 1983). As mentioned earlier, younger repatriates' resources to handle disappointments and uncertainty can be more limited than older returnees' resources. Anssi told me how he at first had a good return position contract, but when he actually returned he lost the position because of sudden changes in his home unit. He explained how chaotic the situation was, and it certainly called for an array of coping efforts to handle the negative feelings caused by this unpleasant surprise. The young repatriate got significant support from his former superior, who helped him to re-evaluate the situation and to believe that it would change for the better:

Anssi: I got a very interesting contract, which had to be rewritten about a week before returning to Finland. Changes were being made to the organization and my superior left for an international assignment himself; it was a regular mess. At that stage I was really fed up, and I was thinking about other possibilities. But my current superior, the man for whom I had worked earlier, and I respect him very much, persuaded me and asked me to wait and then we got things in order. I knew him from before and trusted him totally. Because of his support I could re-evaluate the situation and see it as temporal, that things will clear up. Maybe the experience of older people tells them that when you get slapped in the face it is only temporary, maybe they do not need that man there. The beginning was quite chaotic.

Only one repatriate actually resolved the frustration concerning the return position by looking for a job in another company. He was not very disappointed, but his frustration increased over a long period of time in connection with several returns. Ville told me that he had been on several assignments. He had started to long for stability in his life, while at the same time hoping for career development. He explained that regardless of his former experiences he still had expectations on his career development. Finally, however, he made the decision to resign from the company. He ended up using that kind of problem-focused coping when he saw his very limited possibilities to change the situation (Feldman and Thompson 1993) in his former company because of its small size. After becoming disappointed in his career development Ville applied a problem-focused strategy by changing his job and his company:

Ville: *I waited for better work tasks or more responsibility, some kind of development, or, if not more responsibility, at least more meaningful work tasks, not the same ones as before. I waited for some kind of career development, but it did not happen. At first I did not realize it, but after several times I already knew. But I still waited for it, you can always hope for something. Maybe that's why I left the company, I realized that I was at the same starting point again.*

One of the repatriates was very disappointed in his return position and his coping could be described as quite passive, occurring as a mixture of various, mostly emotion-focused ways of coping. Esa told me that he had had a clear agreement on his return position before leaving for an assignment. Relying on this agreement he thought it was not necessary to think about the return, things would get organized anyway. Instead of worrying about the return beforehand, he engaged in active planning for the expatriation; it became a hobby for him. In this phase he used escape as an emotion-focused coping strategy (Feldman and Tompson 1993), when he refused to think about possible problems with the return and instead prepared for the expatriation. Thus, regarding his forthcoming assignment Esa pursued an emotion-focused coping strategy. He explained how he engaged in planning for the expatriation, but not for the return:

Esa: *An assignment requires investing energy and time. In my case it became a hobby; you have some months time to clarify it to yourself, to study, to read books. So I did not think about the return, I thought on purpose, that I do not have to invest in it, which [in hindsight] I should have done. I believed that everything would fall into place naturally, but it was not at all as easy as I imagined.*

He seemed to be aware of the risks of the return but he still continued escaping, and remained quite passive:

Esa: *I knew that there was no way I would get the same position, I almost knew how it would work. I did not see it as being important. I remained passive on purpose.*

Before the return he thought that things would be arranged with a couple of phone calls. Esa noticed that the home company was not very interested in his expatriate work, and he believed that this partly led to weak communication between himself and the home company during the expatriation. When he finally actually faced the return, he realized that he did not have a return position, however, one was arranged for him and it turned out to be a typical holding position. He was not at all satisfied with it:

Esa: I had a contract saying I would return to this unit. It was clear when I left that I would be away a year and then return. But the work I did when I left was transferred to somebody else, the whole organization changed, and there was no possibility to return to it. But then, by accident during my vacation, I visited [the home unit] and like chickens, the Human Resource Manager and I started to go around asking if anybody had a job. Then somebody happened to have some ideas that day and we made a deal that I would take that job.

Strategic suppression involves the conscious decision to defer attention to painful issues (Welds 1991). Esa explained how he at first tried to stand the situation, but then he noticed it was insufficient. After this emotion-focused coping effort he continued coping by trying to find explanations and to understand why it had happened. After becoming disappointed, an individual has to rationalize the situation through reanalyzing it because of the need to return the equilibrium (Louis 1980). Esa expressed emotion-focused coping efforts (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150) by starting to blame the HRM functions of his company. In any case, step by step and by using emotion-focused strategies, Esa strove for some kind of psychological equilibrium, not without reproaching the HRM function for how they dealt with his situation. He explained:

Esa: There were lots of technical difficulties [in my work area], things had just got worse, and nobody was responsible for those tasks. Then, by a strange twist of fate I appeared with my background, which was known to them from before, and somebody got the idea that the problem would be solved by giving me the position. My trust in the HRM [function] of this company grew weaker, and it was already weak before.

Still, he did not even think about trying to look for a job elsewhere and instead stayed in the same company. This kind of passivity regarding looking for alternative opportunities outside the home company can be explained partly by the repatriate's lower educational background associated with more limited social capital. It is also possible that during his long work history, the employee had grown into the ideology and culture of the company thus enhancing his loyalty to it, which in turn limited his ability to see beyond it and to think about his own interests in a more strategic way (cf. Kunda 1992).

6.4. Discussion

To summarize, the results indicated that the repatriates mostly used various forms of problem-focused strategies, both when finishing their assignments and when trying to find a return position in Finland. The repatriates' problem-focused coping strategies varied

considerably. For example, one repatriate made backup plans and worked overtime in order to cope with the uncertainty concerning the exact timing of finishing his assignment, while another repatriate prepared for the prolongation of the assignment based on her earlier experiences, and yet another repatriate accepted to stay on longer. On the other hand, two of the expatriates prepared for a quick return from the assignment. The expatriates occasionally made the decision to leave very independently. In order to facilitate it, one expatriate planned the timetable for his work, one worked overtime, and one looked for a successor. The findings showed that the expatriates often prioritized their spouse's or partner's professional interests. One repatriate's planning for the practical arrangements of the return was recognized as his coping strategy in the context of finishing the assignment. In addition, one of the interviewees prepared for the return by withdrawing from the host country's social life and fantasizing about his life in Finland, which I interpreted as a form of emotion-focused coping strategy.

In order to find a suitable return position, half of the expatriates applied problem-focused strategies (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152-153). The managers in particular used problem-focused coping efforts, since they tended to face bigger risks of ending up in temporary positions than specialists. The expatriates often used their former contacts or created new ones to find better return positions. One expatriate participated in meetings during his visits to the home unit and thus made himself visible. Another consciously aimed to enhance his image in the home organization through achieving excellent results in his expatriate position. Staying in touch with the home unit was important when it came to gaining opportunities for return positions. Most of the expatriates kept themselves up-to-date, for instance by reading weekly reports and personnel magazines, or through official and unofficial contacts. Three of the expatriates specifically mentioned that they had had visitors from the home unit on their assignment. One took a special interest in international human resource management in order to better prepare for the return. Some of the interviewees had been fully aware of the risk of ending up in a temporary position and had realized that they themselves had to be active and start negotiations for their return position in good time. One of them mentioned clarifying future work tasks before accepting a job offer. The repatriates sometimes pointed out the importance of their increased occupational opportunities, even though the opportunities to find new jobs depended on the stage of their career.

The four interviewees who experienced disappointments concerning their immediate return position mostly used problem-focused strategies to improve their jobs or to find a better one. They thought that the unsatisfactory situation concerning the immediate return position was likely to be temporary. One repatriate changed companies, one was going to apply for a new job, and one applied for a new job in another organization. The support of the superior was especially important for one young repatriate when he used a problem-focused strategy to deal with his disappointment in his immediate return position.

The repatriates also used forms of emotion-focused strategies in handling their disappointments. One of them had planned for the expatriation, but ignored planning the details of the return. This form of coping strategy was identified as escaping, as he had avoided thinking about the possible risks of the return. He also talked about tolerating the unpleasantness for a while, and blamed the HRM function of the company. It is worth noting that all those who experienced disappointments had sought explanations for their unpleasant experiences.

This chapter has reported the findings on the expatriates' coping efforts when they prepared for the return. The chapter also described how they dealt with disappointments in their immediate return positions. Chapter 7 presents the findings and the analysis of the repatriates' coping efforts in their different work role changes.

7. COPING IN THE CONTEXT OF WORK ROLE CHANGES

This chapter shows what kind of coping strategies were linked to different work role changes. First, I will present the findings on the usage of emotion-focused coping strategies (section 7.1.). Then, I will describe to what kind of work role changes the repatriates' problem-focused coping strategies were connected (section 7.2.). The results on the repatriates' coping strategies in different work role changes are summarized in section 7.3.

Beside the challenges of organizing a meaningful return position for themselves, the repatriates confronted challenges concerning their actual work tasks. Thus, various kinds of coping efforts were found in the data. The repatriates strove to improve their performance in their repatriate work, or simply to cope with the change.

After operating for some time in a foreign location a person may have made significant changes to his or her role behaviour. His or her role conceptions remain influenced by the foreign assignment, which might cause demands (Dowling, Schuler and Welch 1999, 211). The data also showed changes in the repatriates' work role behaviour, which thus shaped their coping efforts.

7. 1. Emotion-focused coping strategies and a reactive work adjustment mode¹⁰

In this section I will look at which kinds of work role changes caused the repatriates to use emotion-focused coping strategies.

The specialists, who upon their return continued more or less in the same position and with the same work tasks typically used emotion-focused coping efforts more than the managers (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150). The specialist's work role allowed them little scope for making changes to it. In this kind of reactive coping the change direction was towards the repatriates' personal development (cf. Nicholson 1984), as they worked out their personal relationship to their work, and reflected on the changes of its character. The repatriates were engaged in working with their feeling of frustration, with their values and perhaps

¹⁰ This is the term used by Nicholson (1984).

also with some identity modifications. First, I will take a look at the repatriates' emotion-focused coping strategies (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150) and to which kinds of work role changes these coping efforts were linked.

Two repatriates talked about coping with the change or with the contrast between the nature of their expatriate work and the nature of their repatriate work. Their coping was likely to include the elements of an absorption strategy. In this reactive coping they mostly assimilated new skills, social behaviours and frames of reference to meet the requirements of the new work situation (Nicholson 1984, 176). The repatriates reflected on their demands and tried to analyse their own responses to them. Their coping was also emotion-focused and directed towards handling negative feelings, like frustration. On the other hand, the repatriates might experience a similar type of change in their work positively by applying psychological reappraisal as their way of coping (Lazarus and Folkman 1984), as when, for instance, they appreciated having a less hectic and less socially obligating repatriate job. Satu spoke about the change in her repatriate job in the following words:

Satu: This is like a period of rest, just the fact that I have less working hours, and there are not that many social relationships here in the workplace. I cannot keep up the speed [of the expatriate work] any longer, so in that sense this is good.

Sami had to handle his restlessness in the return phase. He had traveled a lot between the host and the home country during several weeks in the transition phase, and getting used to sitting in one place was difficult for him. At the beginning, when he faced the new working conditions, he had difficulties concentrating on his work tasks. Slowly, he got used to the change and moved toward a more stable stage in his process. He told me what he had found to be the most demanding change related to his job:

Sami: The hardest thing was settling down in one place, after spending almost a year moving around. Now I have [settled down], though of course I travel a lot, but anyway it was a big change. It took some getting used to. It makes one restless.

Henna suffered from the same "symptoms" and clearly also from some kind of frustration, calling upon her emotion-focused coping efforts (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150), when she had to give up some pleasant features of her expatriate work. She told me how her personal life had changed significantly, and she thus pointed out that she did not have any special expectations on her repatriate work. However, she obviously also went through a

shock phase, when she confronted the reality of her repatriate work for the first time. Nevertheless, she coped with the change in her work setting relatively quickly by accepting the situation. Henna reflected on the nature of her repatriate job compared to the expatriate job she had had, and how the feeling of restlessness was also part of that change:

Henna: While I was abroad, I was quite busy towards the end, I visited the ship and the office, I took care of things and I moved around a lot, I didn't just sit in front of a computer. When I returned to work I realized that here I just sit for eight hours in front of the computer and I hardly move at all. I felt very restless; it was difficult for me to sit in one place. It takes a couple of weeks to settle down, to realize that it won't always be as I feared for a moment: will it be like this for the rest of my life? There was a boring moment, but it passed.

Two of the specialists' positions did not change, but they got new work tasks and used emotion-focused coping efforts in relation to their work. They found the positive features of their work and took advantage of its benefits. In other words, they found their new work tasks very motivating through psychological reappraisal (Feldman and Thompson 1993). Kari started in a new work role, but in the same position. He was an excellent example of how somebody can appreciate his or her repatriate work as a specialist right from the beginning:

Kari: This is not less interesting, I work with the newest technology in the world. We will develop a new product for the market, and I will work with that. I do not have anything to complain about.

In the transition phase from the host unit to the home unit, two repatriates had simultaneous work tasks in both units for a short period of time. In this situation they could not concentrate on finishing their expatriate work or on the forthcoming repatriate work, and their energy was dispersed between the different work roles. Having a dispersed work role for some time in the transition phase seemed to be very constricting. As the following example illustrates, it was difficult for the returning expatriate to apply any coping strategies, however, knowing that the situation was temporary made it easier to bear. In this case the work role change demanded tolerating a dispersed role, and the repatriate's coping was focused on regulations of emotions (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150). He recognized the need for letting go of his expatriate work role and paving the way for the repatriate work role. Jani described his transition as "schizophrenic" and was relieved when the difficult period turned out to be quite brief:

Jani: *It was a somewhat schizophrenic situation in the beginning, I traveled to Ireland and I could not concentrate on the new work tasks. When I was there I had to take care of things of [the home unit], and when I was here I had to take care of things both [of the host unit] and [the home unit]. Fortunately, it didn't last for a long time, but it was difficult. I couldn't leave that work and concentrate solely on this.*

Two of the repatriates, who were project managers, actually lacked proper work tasks in the beginning of the return phase. They reacted very differently and applied opposite coping strategies to the situation. First, I will take a closer look at the case where emotion-focused, or reactive coping was used. Later, I will consider the other case, where the repatriate applied more problem-focused or proactive coping efforts to cope with the demands.

To finish his expatriate job, Jouni, a project manager, had used a problem-focused strategy by working longer days (Feldman and Brett 1983). In the return phase his holiday was disturbed by many phone calls from work and he felt that he had not actually had a real chance to recover from his exhausting expatriate work before entering the home unit. Jouni told me how his holiday was spoiled by the many work-related phone calls:

Jouni: *After my expatriation I had a very negative experience. I tried to have a holiday, because I did not take any time off during my expatriation. Anyway, I could not take any time off, because my colleagues called me at home about this and that. I did not have a chance to recover. I was terribly tired and that preceding autumn was very hard, we worked weekends and long days all the time.*

Also, the repatriate experienced frustration due to the lack of work tasks, but he did not actually try to change the work situation. The heavy workload he had had shortly before his repatriate work might also be a contributing factor when considering how he remained quite passive at work at first, and used emotion-focused coping strategies.

The project manager remained quite passive and spent a considerable amount of time drinking coffee and reading newspapers, or simply letting time pass. Simultaneously, he sought compensation for his frustration at work by turning his attention to, and by investing in, his hobby outside the work sphere (cf. Nicholson 1984). It is interesting to notice that building a summer cottage offered him a possibility to continue and to reconfirm his occupational identity of a project manager. Jouni told me how he was frustrated at work, but he used a problem-focused strategy outside the work context (Lazarus and Folkman

1984, 152) to cope with the situation. After all, he seemed to be quite happy with his achievements in his leisure time:

Jouni: I did not know what my new job was going to be like, I did not have any idea of it. In the spring I did not have anything meaningful to do, it frustrated me. When I came to work in the morning, and I did not know what to do that day, I really had to find a way to get through the day. It was boring. But I had one big hobby; I built a summer cottage. It was my personal project.

Changes in work role discretion can typically be quite significant in work role transitions. Next, I will look at how the repatriates dealt with the changes concerning work role discretion.

Mainly those repatriates who worked as specialists did not confront any remarkable changes in their role discretion, when they underwent the role transition from being an expatriate to being a repatriate. Apparently, they did not change their behaviour that much but mostly performed in much the same manner as in their expatriate jobs. Therefore, they were likely to use replication (Nicholson 1984, 176) in the transitions phase. Tero's work role discretion remained at the same level in his work transition. He told me that he had not recognized any significant changes in his work role discretion:

Tero: My work here is very independent, like it was on the assignment. It is not less independent now, it is almost the same.

Further, the repatriates, who did not experience any significant changes in their work role discretion quite typically identified their repatriate work role relatively clearly as well. This involved a clear conception of work contents and a relatively quick internalization of work tasks (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150). This presumably refers to the use of replication (Nicholson 1984, 176); the repatriates did not see it necessary to modify their work roles. Instead, they could concentrate on the important things right from the beginning. Kai, a young manager, was of the opinion that the clarity of the work role called for less coping efforts in his repatriate job, because he internalized his work tasks quicker:

Kai: Of course it is important. The more precisely they are defined, the better you are able to internalize what you are going to do, and the fewer disappointments there will be.

Only one specialist had to struggle to find a new balance between the expatriate work role and the lower discretion repatriate work role. Jari dealt with the frustrations of loss of role discretion, and therefore his coping was emotion-focused (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150). Also, Jari's strategy in this specific situation is reminiscent of replication (Nicholson 1984, 176), in which he, in his specialist position, had limited opportunities to affect his work role discretion and instead had to submit to the situation. He learned to be more patient, but the situation was still quite hard for him. Jari described his feelings related to a lower role discretion:

Jari: It was difficult to get used to working with less role discretion. It is irritating when one has to wait to be able to do something. When I work alone, I can do things in the order that pleases me. Waiting for something demands patience.

This section showed that the repatriates used emotion-focused coping strategies in those work role changes where their possibilities to change their roles were limited. Next, I will look at what kind of work role changes often caused the repatriates to use problem-focused strategies.

7.2. Problem-focused coping strategies and a proactive work adjustment mode

The repatriates' relatively high role discretion usually gave them more room to modify their roles (cf. Suutari and Välimaa 2002). It was especially typical for managers in higher organizational positions and it meant that they could find a suitable match between their new role requirements in changed positions, and their needs, enlarged professional qualifications, and changed identity. They often used problem-focused strategies (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152), which also were similar to a proactive work adjustment mode (Nicholson 1984). Their coping efforts were directed towards the work situation itself and towards the change in role requirements. Thus, it was presumably more a question of determination and exploration. Next, I will look more closely at what kind of work role changes triggered the managers' problem-focused coping efforts.

Five of the repatriates' work role discretion decreased, but because of their managerial positions it still remained relatively high. They returned from small host units to their larger home unit. They started in new and different positions, so their coping mostly included

elements of a proactive strategy (Nicholson 1984). The repatriates had learned to know both the positive and negative aspects of their expatriate jobs, and by drawing on this experience they made comparisons between the expatriate job and the repatriate job. That way they could better identify and appreciate the positive aspects of their repatriate job. Hence, concerning especially the diminution of their work role discretion, they used psychological reappraisal (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 151) as their problem-focused coping way. Both Lauri and Sami told me how they had experienced a pressure to manage on their own in their expatriate job with a high role discretion and responsibility. In return they found it alleviating to have their colleagues' support and a little bit less responsibility in their repatriate work:

Sami: Of course, the role discretion was higher on the assignment. It has its own appeal and it has its own negative sides too. The high role discretion is appealing, and you pay for that, to get the salary. And there is the risk that you get sidetracked.

Lauri: Maybe the role discretion was higher there, but there was no support either. I find it a better situation when you have role discretion but you also have support.

Tapio also experienced a diminution of his work role discretion. His coping was directed towards renegotiations of his identity as a manager and towards changes in his work role parameters. Tapio had worked in a country characterised by a great power distance. He used to use power differently, in a manner that was not necessarily functional when he returned. In the beginning he was probably a bit shocked to face such significant organizational cultural differences and he probably made some mistakes, breaking the bureaucratic rules of his home unit. By learning, however, he internalized new kinds of power relationships to facilitate interaction with his colleagues and to improve his work performance. He tried to define the boundaries of his work role, which in his case meant learning the bureaucratic rules of his home unit's work environment, which were different to those he had applied as a CEO in his expatriate job. Tapio's problem-focused coping efforts (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152) also included learning the work descriptions of other colleagues. Correspondingly, his efforts most likely referred to the use of exploration (Nicholson 1984, 176). Tapio returned from a smaller host company unit to the larger home unit and he commented on the biggest challenges in his return job in the following way:

Tapio: The most difficult part was the adaptation to this kind of line organization. When there are many departments there is a heavy bureaucracy, you have to know everybody's tasks, and then you have to be cautious not to step on your colleague's toes. If you do something, which actually is not your task, somebody will get angry, 'why does he come here', 'why does he interfere with this'. It demands adapting because in a small organization you participate in everything and everybody expects it, too.

Despite the fact that Kai had a higher role discretion in his repatriate job, the change was challenging for him. Obviously, he was briefly shocked when the real work situation did not correspond to his expectations. He made an evaluation of the situation and started to “fight” in order to clarify his new role and position in relation to his colleagues. His coping efforts could be identified as exploration; he tried to imprint his identity and unique skills upon his role and its surrounding milieu (Nicholson 1984). He talked about how he, as a young manager, aimed to clarify his new role and new responsibilities to his colleagues by using problem-focused coping and by redefining his repatriate job (Feldman and Brett 1983):

Kai: When my new job description was defined and the work contract was signed, I was perhaps a little bit naive thinking that everything would be clear. Then, upon return, there is somebody who is used to taking care of certain things, and there are certain routines for certain tasks. So having something on paper does not help that much. It is sort of like 'okay, all these tasks are mine now, don't mess with them'. You have to deserve your own position.

SP: You have to learn the limits?

Kai: The whole organization has to learn them. As in, now we have this person, who has these [specific] responsibilities, and so on.

In their “identity projects” people are always open to both negative and positive experiences, which make their view of themselves a constant subject for questioning. It affects how they see themselves dealing with situations in everyday life, and how others view and respond to them. In different socio-cultural environments people are drawn to situations, in which these reflexive identity projects are powerfully influenced by experiences, which are defined by a certain cultural context. Thus, people's notion of themselves is strongly derived from their cultural knowing – what they have seen, heard and read in their lives (Watson and Harris 1999; Watson 1997).

Naturally, already during expatriation, the interviewees had gone through work role changes, which brought on strong identity shaping processes. This kind of development also influenced their coping strategies. Working in different cultures with different people in new circumstances was reflected in changes in their personal identities. This meant a lot of working out their sense of themselves, where new experiences, sometimes difficult matters, had to be dealt with. Jani thought that the challenges of his expatriate work had influenced his personal development and identity shaping:

Jani: Of course, my personality has become more mature. I've got more experience, both professionally and otherwise. I had to work with different people from different cultures while being there. It was a maturing experience.

Beside the socio-cultural challenges, the expatriates had also enlarged their views of their managerial roles and of doing business, which influenced their identity formation processes.

The expatriates had, by perhaps applying an exploration copying strategy (Nicholson 1984, 176) tried to actively determine elements in the content or structure of the expatriate work role. The expatriate work had involved reconstructing their managerial roles, and redefining their work tasks. Through this kind of professional development the expatriates had clearly increased their self-confidence. Twenty of the repatriates seemed to be very conscious about this strong positive change. Mauri had been on two assignments spanning four and a half years altogether. He returned from cultures that are quite distant from the Finnish culture. He wanted to pinpoint how important it is to believe in yourself in doing challenging work tasks during expatriation:

Mauri: My identity has changed. My self-confidence has grown remarkably. When one receives this kind of job, one has to believe in what one is doing one hundred per cent. Otherwise it is not possible to get other people from different cultures wholeheartedly involved in it, if you yourself are not convincing. What follows from that is that at first you have to internalize you own work very well and be able to lead the project consistently, otherwise you will lose the foundation for the work, which you do with them.

The repatriates had learned to use high role discretion for modifying their work tasks in order to be able to meet the requirements of their very challenging expatriate work. They had, for instance, learned to make decisions much more decisively. This kind of work experience also resulted in a stronger self-confidence, because they usually could not draw

upon existing support. Instead, they had to try to manage on their own, more so than in their home country. Teuvo compared his repatriate job to his expatriate job:

Teuvo: My expatriate work was very much like my repatriate work. In America I had more things to do, in that way it was more challenging, I was forced to do everything from scratch. In this job I have an existing organization, work tools, and so on. I just concentrate on doing.

Next, I will examine how the repatriates utilized their rich international work experience and personal development in order to cope with the challenging repatriate work role changes.

Earlier, we looked at how a repatriate manager, Mauri, remained quite passive due to lacking proper work tasks, turning his attention to his leisure time activities. In a similar type of a situation, another person, a project manager, was active and used problem-focused coping efforts (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152). Mauri told me how his first reaction to the lack of work tasks was rather panicky, but he quickly recovered from it and started to apply a problem-focused strategy by trying to face the problem in order to change the situation. This coping strategy is comparable to positive denial, or reappraisal (Welds 1991). After re-evaluating and reinterpreting his work situation, Mauri started to see it as a great opportunity to influence his forthcoming work. He strove to cope by thinking strategically, and by using his time for learning things, which he had missed during this expatriation. By applying an active problem-focused strategy he could feel better and maintain his self-esteem (Feldman and Brett 1983), while waiting for a new project. Simultaneously, he most likely moved towards another form of problem-focused coping involving forming expectations on his forthcoming work tasks.

In their arguments concerning identity constitution, Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) state that people are drawn to situations, in which they are able to show themselves in a positive light and present valuable features, rather than be drawn to situations where they need to hide or present themselves negatively. People tend to seek esteem-enhancing or positive self-definitions, and are motivated to maintain and increase their self-esteem (based on a sense of competence and power or achievement) and self-worth (based on a sense of morality and moral worth) (Shamir 1991).

The repatriates' active strive towards confirmation and reconstruction of their identity was reflected in their use of problem-focused coping strategies. Mauri very consciously took on the role of a "student". His problem-focused coping (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152) guaranteed the possibility to renegotiate his identity and achieve a certain coherence in it. Using his time for studying, Mauri changed the lack of proper work tasks to an identity-enhancing experience. There was also a strong need to try to fill in the gaps and ensure the continuation of his career identity. After reappraisal, he considered it very fortunate that there was no fixed identity position for him in the beginning. That way he could leave his identity formation as open and freely negotiable as possible. Having been back in Finland less than three months at the time of the interview, Mauri explained his viewpoint like this:

Mauri: Now I have to learn all these new systems, so that I know what these new methods are. But I have to say that I had a slightly negative reaction in the beginning, it was like 'well, let's see', so I fought against the situation quite strongly. But I think that by becoming involved in many things I can also further others' efforts regarding how to see things. I think I am in a better situation than if I had stepped into a ready-made box, which somebody had already set the boundaries for.

As a result of pursuing active, problem-focused strategies (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152) to achieve a suitable return position, 13 of the managers had the opportunity to start their repatriate work in a new work role. It was very common that the repatriates did not have so clear ideas of the content and the tasks of their new work role in the beginning.

By implementing problem-focused strategies the repatriates aimed to clarify the work tasks of their new work roles. Two of them started to use various forms of problem-focused strategies even before the return. This kind of preparing and making an effort to get a grasp of the repatriate work refers to that they tried to evaluate forthcoming work challenges. One expatriate aimed to increase his possibilities to influence his forthcoming repatriate work tasks through strategic planning. Anssi told me that he planned the timing of his return in order to have better chances to influence and define his repatriate work content. The young manager found the beginning of the autumn as a good time to return:

Anssi: The beginning of the autumn is a good time to return. That is when decisions concerning the plans and budgets for the following year are made. So in the beginning of the following year you can start with a clean sheet and you can have more influence on things, it is easier for you to commit to them.

Another repatriate visited the home unit to gather information in order to get a picture of his repatriate work (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152). His orientation towards the repatriate job was a form of problem-focused coping strategy. This kind of information can help the employee to learn the fastest, most effective way of working with the least anxiety (Feldman and Brett 1983). Tapani had facilitated his return to work by finding out about it beforehand:

Tapani: I visited [the home unit] in the spring and it made my return smoother. In fact, I already started to do some of the home unit's work at that point. I tried to learn a little bit and familiarize myself with the work beforehand, before my return.

In their new work role the repatriates working as managers had better possibilities to utilize their expatriate work experience more effectively. This paved the way for their “emergent” identity development and they did not have to identify with any certain identity positions. Instead, their identity formation was left open and they seemed to be very motivated and content with the situation.

Having a new work role also meant a having a better possibility to create a suitable fit between the repatriate's changed self, and his or her current work. In the new work role the repatriate could identify him- or herself as a developer, as somebody who starts changes, and that way associate some part of him- or herself with business development. Through new challenges and possibilities for identification the repatriate recreated his or her new work role accordingly. That way it was possible to achieved a better congruence with the enlarged international work experience as well (cf. Downes and Thomas 1999). The repatriate could create a natural path for identity development and reaffirmation of some parts of the “old self”.

The said repatriates, who were mostly managers, drew upon their strengthened self-confidence and were ready to assume more responsibility in order to achieve their work aims more effectively. This refers to what Carver and Scheier (1998, 196) say about how feeling doubtful stops people from trying to move towards their goals, whereas more confident people keep trying.

The managers found the unclear, new work role as a challenging opportunity to be creative in their work and to define the guidelines for their work to their own liking. It was also

common to see the situation as a chance for continuous learning, which was associated with better work motivation (cf. Inkpen 1998). Thus, these kinds of very positive attributes associated with an unclear work task come close to argumentation on curiosity (Loewenstein 1994). In order to experience curiosity, people must experience a contrast between a higher reference point and a lower present knowledge. The lack of correspondence between these elements has a stimulating effect (Carver and Scheier 1998, 213). Tapio returned as the organization was in a transformative stage and he found the situation to be a great opportunity to affect and define his work content and work tasks. He strove to define his repatriate work role, which was akin to exploration (Nicholson 1984, 176). He utilized the possibility to conduct some preliminary work in order to formulate his repatriate work role. Tapio was satisfied with this kind of a work situation:

Tapio: It was not clear. Maybe because our organization changed a lot when I returned. That way it was quite nice that I had an impact on the job I received. It was a good time, some kind of developmental phase, I could get involved in it already in my former position.

The interviewees had increased their work experience in many different ways by learning new things and by using their skills more extensively in their challenging expatriate work. They had often worked in broader sectors and they had learned to look at their business from new and different perspectives. These strategies were mainly reminiscent of exploration, in which people use their unique skills to define elements in the content or structure of their role (Nicholson 1984, 176). They had learned to question things more, and to identify problems and potential areas of further development. Anssi used this kind of problem-focused coping, and found benchmarking, and questioning things to be very valuable for his work. He explained why he found benchmarking valuable for his repatriate job:

Anssi: It is important for the company to get a repatriate or a foreigner, either from within or from outside the company every now and then to question things, it works well.

The repatriates utilizing determination or exploration (Nicholson 1984, 176) continued in a similar vein. They found the development perspective an important motivational element in their repatriate job. By being able to initiate progress the repatriates felt more committed to their work and to their company. The repatriates used their increased ability to analyse things better and to react to situations quicker. Based on this, they were able to draw

conclusions regarding further action. These kinds of problem-focused coping efforts in the context of a new work role can be described as a continuous shifting between evaluating and shaping the work role. Timo commented on the usefulness of the expatriate work experience, whereas Tero talked about an orientation towards the future as being the essential element of his work:

Timo: You learn how to analyse things more systematically and to react very quickly when you act in different cultures with different people. And you can make anticipatory evaluations.

Tero: When you know that you will take a certain direction for at least two, three years, trying to reach a certain level at that point, it increases your motivation.

Two of the interviewees implemented problem-focused strategies (Lazarus and Folkman 1984) so that they managed to link their work tasks to their expatriate work experience. Hence, that experience was seen and utilized more as a preparatory phase for the repatriate job. Others also spoke in comparable terms, mentioning that through their expatriate work experience they had got a more realistic picture of work in the host companies, which was very helpful also in their repatriate work. The use of these kinds of coping efforts was akin to exploration, by which a change occurs both in individuals' personal qualities and role parameters. These processes are typical for jobs, in which "social contracting" and interpersonal role negotiations are central features (Nicholson 1984). One young manager highlighted the fact that the expatriate work experience helped him to put himself in his client's shoes. Anssi found the identification with his client's position as an important coping strategy in his new position:

Anssi: This current job is such that you would not be able to do it had you not worked abroad. All customers are abroad, and all that I do requires being able to understand and assume their position in a different way, and see things from outside Finland.

Problems or just normal work tasks can be broken down into more manageable, sequential steps, or, on the other hand, difficult tasks can be integrated better. Kari gave the following example of using problem-focused coping and solving problems one by one:

Kari: If there are problems, I try to split them up and solve them one at a time. Another way can be, that when I concentrate more on the whole thing I solve many problems at the same time, as one group.

As their coping strategy, individuals can ask their supervisors and co-workers for help (Feldman and Brett 1983). The expatriates had enlarged their networks on the assignment both by establishing new contacts with other expatriates and with other colleagues in the host company. By implementing these kinds of problem-focused coping efforts (Feldman and Tompson 1993) the repatriates used their new contacts to solve unclear issues in their job (cf. Dougherty, Munir and Subramaniam 2002). Mauri handled his challenging work tasks with the help of his contact network:

Mauri: When you have a difficult problem, and you have this kind of network of specialists from different parts of the world, it always makes it possible to ask for help.

During long-term assignments the expatriates' technical skills can become obsolete (Black et al., 1992a). Even though it was not so common, some of the repatriates admitted they had had these types of challenges. When they sometimes needed technical support in order to get their tasks done they asked colleagues who had the skills and the knowledge for help. Further, beside technical challenges, some repatriates' work was more like team work, thus in accomplishing their work tasks they needed help from their colleagues. Those coping efforts were forms of problem-focused strategies as well (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152). Riku spoke about the importance of team work in his highly specialized area:

Riku: There is this quite small team that takes care of the grain starch industry, so it is a very tight organization. It would certainly not be successful, if you could not cooperate, you could not do anything alone.

7.3. Discussion

In this chapter the focus has been on the relationship between the repatriate and his or her work environment. Two main categories of coping were identified: emotion-focused and problem-focused coping strategies. Forms of an emotion-focused coping strategy (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150) occurred in those work role changes, which offered the repatriates less room for change. Those repatriates, usually working as specialists, often continued in similar types of positions and with similar work tasks. Using Nicholson's (1984) terminology, their work adjustment mode was reactive. By using replication and assimilation, the repatriates mostly continued behaving in the same manner as before. Many repatriates analysed their work role changes to gain a better understanding of the demands

caused by the work role changes. Greater appreciation of these occurred when two repatriates' coping was significantly directed towards appreciating their repatriate work role. Apart from the specialists, some managers also used emotion-focused coping strategies (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150) as their coping was directed towards dealing with emotions, typically frustration. These forms of emotion-focused coping varied, so that by reflecting on their situation two repatriates coped with the stark contrast between their expatriate and repatriate work roles. Two repatriates coped with lower work role discretion by accepting the change. One repatriate tolerated a dispersed work role and defined it as a temporary situation. When a project manager had to wait for the start of his next project at the time of his return, and he lacked proper work tasks, he spent a lot of time in his workplace drinking coffee and reading newspapers, remaining quite passive and letting the time pass. Thus, he dealt with his frustration by using an emotion-focused strategy (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150). To deal with the frustrating work situation, the same manager used a problem-focused coping strategy outside working life: he aimed to balance the situation by building a summer cottage.

The repatriates whose positions changed and who started in new work roles were often managers. This was the group that most commonly utilized problem-focused coping strategies (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152-153). When using such strategies, the repatriates could draw upon their changed identities and rich work experience. They had more opportunities to define their work tasks and change the structures of their work roles. Thus, their coping efforts most likely included elements of exploration (Nicholson 1984). The findings indicated that one of the repatriates redefined the content of his work. Two used psychological reappraisal to cope with a lower work role discretion. One interviewee told me how he found breaking down problematic or normal work tasks into more manageable, sequential steps as a useful strategy. More than half of the repatriates also found support among their former and new contacts, for instance, regarding clarifying new work tasks. In order to define and clarify the boundaries of their new work roles, two repatriates' coping efforts were focused on internalizing new power relationships and studying the job descriptions of other colleagues. One interviewee even used the expression "fight" in this context, when he had to establish a new position and clarify his responsibilities. Moreover, two interviewees spoke about planning the timing of the return as an opportunity to influence forthcoming work tasks.

Furthermore, one of two project managers, who waited for his next project emphasized his own positive attitude and saw the situation as an opportunity to influence his forthcoming work tasks. Seven repatriates found their new and typically unclear work tasks as an opportunity for continuous learning. It was also found that one of the repatriates compared expatriate work situations to repatriate work situations, one questioned work-related issues, one used identification with a client's position, and another used orientation towards the repatriate work tasks beforehand as their coping strategy. Two included a future or developmental perspective on their work. After their experiences as expatriates, two mentioned having a more realistic view of many things associated with their work, which was helpful after their return. Moreover, two repatriates visited the home unit beforehand in order to orientate themselves towards their forthcoming work tasks.

This chapter has presented the findings on the repatriates' coping strategies in relation to different work role changes. The next chapter describes their coping efforts with the demands of communication and interaction with their colleagues and superiors in the home unit.

8. COPING IN THE HOME UNIT'S WORK COMMUNITY

This chapter considers what kind of coping strategies the repatriates used in order to cope with their challenges of interaction and communication with their superiors and colleagues. The repatriates used both emotion-focused and problem-focused coping strategies with these kinds of demands. First, I will look at how the expatriates prepared for entering into the home unit (section 8.1.). Then, I will describe their coping efforts in the confrontation phase in the home unit (section 8.2.). The findings on coping in the home unit's work community are summarized in section 8.3.

The repatriates mainly used problem-focused coping efforts when preparing for the return. These strategies (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152) first of all referred to motivational and cognitive changes. In certain situations the repatriates' coping was emotion-focused (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150).

8.1. Forming expectations and working with attitudes before entering into the home unit

This section considers how the repatriates prepared for entering into the home unit and for confronting their colleagues.

In the first phase of organizational socialization individuals build up expectations concerning the organization and their work. The experienced uncertainty is high at this stage when individuals only have little knowledge. The more advanced the anticipatory socialization, the quicker and easier the repatriation (Black et al. 1991). The repatriates thought about what it would be like to return and to confront the work community of the home unit after the assignment. These coping efforts were problem-focused strategies (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152). The repatriates also discussed their emotions; they stated that they engaged in working out their worries or thoughts concerning their return to the home unit. Anyhow, they did not seem to use only emotion-focused strategies, and could not do anything for the situation.

Tapani had been on his first assignment in North America. He told me about the strange feeling of loneliness and becoming more distanced, when working so far away from the

home unit. He spoke quite directly about the feeling of fear, when asked about his feelings of the return:

Tapani: In a way, the longer you are abroad, the more distanced you become, the more easily you are forgotten.

SP: Perhaps you become afraid of it a little bit?

Tapani: Certainly many are afraid, and even afraid of returning. Returning to the work community after having been away for a very long time.

The expatriate post was typically a very fertile ground for a more cosmopolitan identity formation, which also refers the repatriates' identity development as "emergent" (Watson 1994; Watson & Harris 1999). As already said, the expatriates' learning was various and extensive. But especially learning new approaches to business and getting a larger picture of the functions of their own company enhanced their ability to question things more and to better see what should be developed. This kind of general, widened awareness was a natural path to a more "cosmopolitan" identity formation.

This kind of identity development is illustrated by the next case. Mauri had been on an uninterrupted assignment altogether five years, in the Middle East and in South-East Asia. He told me how he had used his expatriation period as an opportunity to develop his cultural knowledge by engaging in social activities in the host culture's multicultural environment in his leisure time. Then he talked about how, as a project manager in his very challenging expatriate job, he had learned to deal with difficult situations and relationships, and actually even to establish norms for the staff in order to get things done with his subordinates from different cultural backgrounds. He also discussed how the challenges of the expatriate job had demanded of him to be as consistent as possible. This meant that he simultaneously went through a strong identity formation process. He had learned to stand by his opinions more confidently. Mauri highlighted the importance of being attached to a "global" value system in his current repatriate work, but he also acknowledged that it created new challenges when interacting with other colleagues:

Mauri: I think I have become a more difficult person in a way. I question the Finnish way of doing things much more than before, and in general I feel that I am a more difficult person everywhere, because I question things more. Earlier, my view was very European or very Scandinavian.

Problem-focused coping efforts (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152) occurred in Mauri's case, as his greatest worry concerned whether he had lost the ability to communicate with his colleagues after having been away for such a long time. He was afraid that he would have difficulties discussing with his colleagues after having got used to discussing different things in different contexts. This kind of identity change might refer to, for instance, Potter and Wetherell's (1987, 102), and du Gay's (1996, 30) view of identity construction. According to them identity is constructed through linguistic discourses and takes place under social conditions. Mauri's identity shaping was influenced by new experiences in different socio-cultural contexts. When returning, Mauri found himself in a different social category, which demanded the incorporation of new identity aspects into his sense of who he was. Mauri's coping was quite specified, as he tried to foreshadow the forthcoming interaction with his colleagues. The stage ended when he met his colleagues and realized that communication would not be a problem:

Mauri: Before my return I was thinking that just because of these different people I talked about totally different things at different levels with customers, compared with my colleagues [in the home unit]. I wondered whether it had been too long a period, having been in a different environment and having talked about different things. After a break of several years, I wondered whether I could create any contact at all, whether I could talk at the same level at all, I worried about this last autumn. But right from the first day after returning, I have not had that problem any more.

Teppo continued in similar lines. His comments illustrate how the expatriates prepared mentally to return to the home unit. They tried to estimate the possible reactions of their colleagues for self-protective purposes, and this was typically mentioned in the context of how to present themselves when talking about their experiences. This refers to the usage of a problem-focused strategy (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152). Teppo even discussed the issue with his wife, and came to the conclusion that it was best to pay quite much attention to how, or how much to talk about his expatriate experience. He mentioned things like these:

Teppo: As I said, I guess that if I speak too much about the assignment, it makes it more difficult to me. I talked about it with my wife in advance, how we should discuss the assignment. Of course I can talk about it if somebody asks, of course, but I can't keep on talking about it all the time, not talking about anything else at all.

As a part of forming expectations one repatriate raised the significance of the right attitude when communicating with colleagues. Thus, while achieving a deeper understanding of their identity changes, some repatriates also highlighted a more humble attitude to learn new things in the home unit. This kind of problem-focused strategy (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 153) manifested itself in motivational and cognitive changes. By being open-minded and ready to learn new things the repatriates were better equipped to confront the challenges of interaction in the home unit, more so than had they not understood these things. Anssi, a young manager, told me how this certain kind of attitude prepared him for the return:

Anssi: Paying attention to the fact that the home organization might have developed, though you do not notice it through only occasional connections, and also that things have progressed over here and people have developed and learned. It's easy to think that when you have been abroad yourself and learned a lot of new things, you might come back with the idea that you have seen and learned a lot. You had better forget the arrogant attitude, because things progress over here as well. It is better to be prepared for that, that there might be things to catch up on.

Two expatriates found problem-focused strategies (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152) useful when they made plans for their return to the home unit's work community. One expatriate handled his worries by planning the timing of his return very strategically and decided to return to work straight from the assignment without having a vacation. In so doing he sought to avoid creating a mental threshold that would make it difficult for him to confront the work community and start working. Another expatriate, Kari, made plans for his return for similar reasons, however, he used a problem-focused strategy (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152) and found it to be a good idea to visit his colleagues shortly beforehand to make his actual return smoother:

Kari: At least for me it was good to visit [the home unit] three, four months before the actual return. It certainly helps before returning. In general, just to drop in, to talk and to see old friends and to tell them when you are going to return. That is what everybody can do, drop in and have a little chat with colleagues.

This section showed that the repatriates' mostly used problem-focused strategies when they formed expectations on what it would be like to return to their home unit and meet their colleagues and superiors.

8.2. Responding to demands in interaction and communication

As it was shown, the repatriates engaged in more or less conscious preparing processes before the actual return, and this certainly prepared them for the challenges of interaction and communication with their colleagues. Next, I will take a closer look at which coping strategies that were identified as being used when the repatriates tried to handle the demands of the return to the home organization.

The repatriates' experiences of the re-entry to the home organization and the use of coping strategies varied depending on how familiar or unfamiliar the receiving work community was to them. Having the chance to return to a familiar work community decreased the expatriates' worries about re-entry to some extent. In order to get this chance, one expatriate applied a problem-focused strategy (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152), which manifested itself in active planning in order to organize space among colleagues he knew. By using his detailed knowledge of and contacts to his former work community, he managed to arrange it. Thus, the repatriate anticipated a need for emotion-focused strategies (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150-151), and he strove to ensure his possibilities to get emotional support from his former colleagues. On his return, Kari was placed among his former colleagues, who were well-known to him. He highlighted the significance of the colleagues' attitudes to the returnee:

Kari: I think that the actual office space that a guy returns to is of big significance. If there is something [negative] there, it certainly has a big influence. It is like everything is spoiled for the guy, he starts to think about why he left [for the assignment] in general, if the return is somehow repulsive. It is very significant what kind of attitudes other colleagues have. In my case I knew everybody, it was very easy to return.

Seeking social support is a behavioural strategy, which can decrease stress and anxiety through the affirmation of abilities from friends and colleagues (Feldman and Brett 1983). While there were those repatriates who did not seem to miss not having support from their colleagues, there were also two who much appreciated having this opportunity and used this type of problem-focused coping (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152). Besides seeking social support from their colleagues in general, a couple of repatriates joined together in order to help each other in learning their work tasks. Thus, they shared the situation and challenges associated with their repatriate work.

The significance of the opportunity to get social support in the repatriates' coping became very clear in Esa's story about his return. Esa had been unlucky concerning his return position and he had ended up into a holding position, which he was not satisfied with. His physical placement also changed from where it was before leaving for the assignment. After working in the same work unit for several years he had built a support network of his colleagues, whose help he had learned to lean on also regarding problems outside work. Esa talked about how his new placement in the building complex of his workplace detached him from his familiar colleagues and from the familiar daily social life like sharing coffee-breaks and so on. This change was in dramatic contrast to his sense of self. He had lived in the middle of a "shadow-organization", as he called his support network, and he had learned to trust in its help. He continued by describing how his new life in the large home unit was like the life of a hermit. He probably felt lonely and a little bit as a stranger, which demanded emotion-focused coping efforts (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150). Still, he took a positive attitude and hoped to be able to construct a new network little by little. Esa discussed how his current social relationships at work differed dramatically from the situation before leaving for an assignment:

Esa: All my old social relationships were cut off because of the changes in my physical placement. Like with whom you have lunch, a little social circle, I call it an informal organization. For example, work issues, or private issues, when you have to organize something, everybody has these people that they can trust in, a social organization, it disappeared and collapsed. I have been living like a hermit here and little by little I hope to find a new group. It influenced my adjustment negatively.

Esa had returned from his first assignment; he was disappointed in his position, and obviously these kinds of hard experiences were unique to him. Thus, he clearly had a need to talk about his experiences, but finding himself in the middle of colleagues he did not know, he seemed to lack the possibility of getting emotional support.

When he was asked whether he got support from his colleagues, he further continued dealing with his emotions (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150-151), and started to look for explanations and reasons for his situation through analysing his colleagues' potential for giving support. He started from the engineering profession and Finnish nationality, and he went on wondering whether it actually was a question of gender. He drew upon the typical stereotype that Finnish men do not speak about their emotions. His engagement in this kind

of coping, scientific analysing, can be described as contextualization; he seemed to find many explanations for his experiences in the home unit's social environment. He explained:

Esa: No, I did not get any support, and I do not really believe that I would have got it even if I had wanted to, we are not good in that sense. I do not know, whether it is because we are Finns or that this is the engineering profession, a collection of a certain type of people who work in a company like this. First of all, we are of course Finns, and secondly we are men. I do not know, whether that is the reason, but the fact is that we are really poor in all kind of social interaction and support. If you act as a problematic person, they leave you alone very much. The only way of solving those kinds of problems is that the organization tries to get rid of the person.

Thus, in order to further facilitate interaction with their colleagues, the repatriates in certain social situations tried to handle social demands, like minimizing the handling of certain issues. In these situations they used emotion-focused strategies by dealing with their emotions, which arose in their interactional relationships (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150-153).

However, it could be asked whether this happened partly at the cost of neglecting the repatriates' social needs. But it was not a question about completely striving to avoid social situations, but trying to navigate the interaction relationships of the work community. Five repatriates told me how they, by being perceptive, quickly realized that though the experiences of their assignment were quite unique to themselves, their colleagues probably had their own experiences, or were for other reasons not necessarily very interested in hearing about them so much. Esa, who worked in a relatively big company made these kinds of observations, and based on his experiences he saw it better to almost refrain from talking about his experiences of the assignment:

Esa: My colleagues were not interested in listening. I have talked very little with anybody about that assignment. Everybody travels, they know things and they have seen things. The conversation is on the level of somebody asking where I have been and I tell them and then there is 75 per cent probability, that he says 'yes, I have also once been there, it is like so and so, isn't it?'

As discussed earlier, the repatriates seemed to be quite conscious of the changes in their identity and their different position as employees (cf. Watson 1994, 1999; Watson and

Harris 1999). Through this kind of understanding of their developmental processes, and of their changed position, they tried to figure out what was going on in the interaction between themselves and the receiving work community. The home unit's work community might have changed during the assignment and was thus unfamiliar to the repatriates at least to some extent. It was relatively common that the repatriates had to work out the tension between themselves and their colleagues, even among colleagues he knew. This kind of tension was a result of the gap that had developed between the repatriates' increased professional qualifications and changed identities, and those of their former colleagues, who tended to see the repatriates as threats or competitors to themselves. The repatriates' identity formation was influenced by becoming more aware of the distinction "we", identification based on sameness, and "them", identification based on otherness (Watson 1994, 1999; Watson and Harris 1999).

Especially the repatriates in managerial positions had to handle this kind of tension for quite a long time, when interacting with their colleagues. It seemed that implementing these strategies mostly included features of emotion-focused strategies, when the repatriates strove for the regulation of emotional distress (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150-151). Thus, these strategies can best be described as a continuous balancing between engagement and disengagement in social situations.

Sami told me that he had returned from Asia under somewhat unusual circumstances after having lived and worked there for almost eight years. Originally, he was not going to return to Finland at all, but because of unforeseen changes in his work situation and his spouse's decision to return he had had second thoughts and decided to return. But his contacts to the home unit were already tense because of tough negotiations concerning changes in his work situation. These kinds of events might also have lingered in the background, when he told me how he had gone through quite a long-lasting and complicated return process.

He continued with how he, by applying the strategy of balancing between engagement and disengagement, tried to cope with the social demands of interaction. He engaged himself in emotion-focused (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150) self-analysis, and accepted his position as a repatriate. Because of his changed position he was identified as a threat by his colleagues, and thus, he also had to deal with a certain kind of discomfort. He said that he

tried to handle the tension between himself and the rest of the staff on an individual by individual basis, by observing their interaction and by trying to learn from his experiences. On the one hand his coping efforts were directed at establishing a new position, and on the other hand they were directed at narrowing the distance between himself and his colleagues. Simultaneously, he had to adopt a patient attitude to the situation, as he realized it was going to be quite a long-lasting process.

On the other hand, Sami's case could also be interpreted somewhat differently. Interestingly, he elaborated on his emotion-focused (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150-151) coping efforts by generalizing. He found that what he went through regarding the negative "measuring atmosphere" of his department was actually not exceptional at all. It is difficult to say to what extent his evaluation was true, or whether it was more a question of a kind of effort of self-deception (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 151) from the repatriate's side. Sami had been back in Finland for almost two years and he described his experiences of the socialization process as having been quite tough:

Sami: I was in the kind of situation that people started to look very closely at me as the person who has been away for a long time, I was a thorn in the side to in the work community. I was still a member of it, only far away, but when I was not visible I did not exist. Then, when I suddenly appeared in some corner, those people who work here everyday surrounded me and started to check out what kind of bloke has come. And then a kind of measuring [me up] started. It is possible that a repatriate is perceived as a kind of threat to those people and to their aims. They have to test you and see you, because those people do not know for sure. A certain tension develops until everything falls into place, or not. You can be accepted or not. Certainly, this kind of process continues for a long time, because you go through it individual by individual, before it stabilizes. This kind of measuring mentality was very obvious here. It was amusing to discover it but it was of course also irritating, because it is unnecessary. Of course it influenced my adjustment negatively in some sense.

Another repatriate had moved to a company in which he had not worked before and thus all his colleagues were new to him. He also analysed his relationships to his colleagues by describing it as a kind of "measuring", but Tapio found this kind of interaction as quite neutral, he did not experience it as an arena for doing "emotion-work". Instead, his strategy included some kind of socio-psychological explanations, and he pointed out that conclusions based on first impressions can be wrong. This kind of analyzing can be identified as problem-focused cognitive reappraisal (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 153). He could probably draw upon his expatriate experience of equivalent situations, and based on it

he could look at the situation quite neutrally, or even positively. Tapio described his experiences as follows after being back for about one year:

Tapio: It is a kind of exploring with the colleagues for quite a long time. They are new to me and I am new to them, and when I come from a different environment, this phase takes about half a year. I do not think that it is so negative, I think it is typical for the Finns, you measure [others up] yourself, too. You do not trust your first impression, everybody is so reserved anyway, you cannot conclude so much from it.

According to Watson and Harris (1999), “managers do a great deal of ‘emotion work’, controlling themselves, taking care to present themselves in appropriate ways to achieve a particular effect, dealing with feelings of others, addressing and trying to resolve conflict, motivating and encouraging others” (see also Hiillos 2004). As one form of problem-focused strategy (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152-153), the repatriates carried out “emotion work” by utilizing their interpersonal skills to facilitate their interaction with colleagues. Especially in the context of expressing opinions regarding work issues, the repatriates highlighted how they tried to pay attention to how they presented their probably new and exceptional ideas, to get a better response from their colleagues. They reminded themselves that resistance to change is a common and natural phenomenon. And to overcome it, they utilized their familiarity with their colleagues to find the appropriate ways for presenting their ideas.

Similarly, one repatriate emphasized that by being sensitive to other colleagues’ opinions and by identifying with their position he had a better chance of avoiding difficult discussions, especially in critical situations like decision making. Tero had been on three consecutive assignments in the USA and in Europe, giving him a large perspective on the company’s business. Tero pointed out that he tried to be sensitive to other colleagues’ opinions, especially when he could not agree with them:

Tero: When I tell my opinions, I frame them against the listener’s background. If I know that the person has lived his whole life in Finland, has worked and seen certain things here, his or her opinion relates to that background. It is like that, and I always remember it, even if I do not see it as a reasonable opinion at all, but looking at it against his or her background it is what it is.

Based on studies concerning Finnish communication culture it can be assumed that the use of indirect and negative politeness strategies is very common in communication between

Finns, especially people who are unfamiliar to each other, while in the American national culture, the use of positive politeness strategies is relatively more common among people who are unfamiliar to each other, or among people who are mere acquaintances¹¹ (Salo-Lee 1996, 54).

The repatriates also confronted other types of challenges of interaction, which were most likely due to intercultural communication differences. Especially those two repatriates, who during their assignments had learned the rules of the American communication culture, which is quite opposite to the Finnish one, specifically paid attention to these kinds of questions. It was quite typical that they identified many differences between the American and the Finnish communication styles, but there seemed to be a lack of deeper understanding of what these differences stem from. The repatriates tended to interpret the Finnish communication style quite simplistically – as merely a negative attitude – without undertaking any deeper reflections on the different nuances or features of different communication styles. But it was clear that these types of demands stirred the repatriates' feelings, as it shook their sense of who they were. In this context the repatriates' identity developed through linguistic discourses (Potter and Wetherell 1987, 102). To cope with cultural differences, the repatriates were most likely drawn into quite profound emotion-focused coping efforts (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150-151). These kinds of feelings and thoughts are well reflected in the following two repatriates' accounts. Sami had been on an assignment for almost eight years and he analysed the differences between communication styles as follows:

Sami: If I move between two extremes, from a society where people have the most positive attitudes, to a society where they have the most negative attitudes, and where everything is expressed in a negative way. You can say the same thing in a negative or positive manner.

Tero had spent three years in the US and two years in Europe. He compared the differences between Finnish and American communication styles, but he probably made a misinterpretation when he linked a certain communication style to the personality of an

¹¹ "Positive politeness includes things like unity, mutual understanding and the atmosphere of closeness and warmth created by linguistical mechanisms. Negative politeness includes things like leaving the other person alone, respecting privacy and creating distance. Indirect politeness includes things like preserving room for manoeuvre and a possibility of moving back for the listener" (Salo-Lee 1996, 51-52).

individual. Becoming trapped by these types of simple interpretations, the repatriates tended to limit their coping efforts to emotion-focused strategies, like perhaps even labelling other colleagues as “negative persons”. Tero drew upon explanations regarding how “negative persons” are treated differently depending on the cultural context:

Tero: You never notice positive things here in Finland, you just concentrate on the negative ones. There are lots of negative people in Finnish organizations, who, for example, would get fired straight away in an American organization. In Finland you tolerate them.

As already mentioned when discussing work role transitions, the challenges of interaction also arose in the context of a changed power distance. Through a problem-focused strategy (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152-153) of relearning and assimilating the codes of social behaviour and communication, which better matched the Finnish communication culture, the repatriate coped with demands of interaction. Tapio had been on a five-year assignment in an Arabic country. In his expatriate job he had learned a new, different communication style to be able to manage his work in a culture where great power distances exist. In the return phase the work role transition required of him to give up the communication style, which had functioned in his expatriate work. He also took the prevalent values of Finnish communication culture more into account. This meant that he had to reflect deeply on the difference between asking, and giving orders. He told me how he at first experienced quite a shock, when he realized that there was a great mismatch between his sense of self and some elements of his new repatriate work role. He tried to change the frames of reference and communication codes, which were necessary for performing better in the repatriate job. Tapio told me how deeply he experienced the different demands of social interaction, when he underwent the transition phase:

Tapio: Time influences it, I think I experienced the biggest shock in work cultures. Because you come from a totally different work environment. Maybe it is also easier to be a manager in that kind of culture than being one here. When you go there, at first you have to get used to that local style, where the employer has the power. Here you always have to think about what somebody else thinks. There you did not have to do that. For instance, how to present things; here you ask, there you give orders. Here you ask: ‘Please, can you take care of that?’, or ‘Please, can you do that, if you do not have something else?’ There you say, ‘You have to do that, then it will be ready then’. If you do not tell somebody to do it, it will not be taken care of, or things will get done slowly, and you will be used if you are not a strong enough manager.

There were also other cultural differences, and coping with them involved emotion-focused strategies (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150-151). According to Mead (1990), different ideas of time manifest themselves in working life, for instance, as punctiliousness, respect for timetables, attitudes to returning visitations and rearrangements, and what is regarded essential and what is not (Salo-Lee 1994).

During their assignment the expatriates might have experienced significant cultural challenges when they, for instance, had had difficulties in getting used to the unpunctiliousness or unreliability of the representatives of the host culture. In other words, their challenges on the assignment had a lot to do with differing concepts of time and moral.

Correspondingly, in the return phase the repatriates often used emotion-focused strategies (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150-151). They made positive comparisons, when they started to value certain features of the Finnish communication culture more, like honesty and frankness. These features' counterphenomena had demanded coping efforts from them during the assignment. The use of these kinds of coping strategies could be interpreted as a need to distance oneself psychologically from the expatriate experience and from living in the host country culture. This might facilitate the repatriates' integration into the Finnish culture.

Teppo had been on a one-year assignment in the US. He told me how he found the people there friendly, but getting to know them better was not so easy. He described the kindness of people in the US as superficial, and their true nature was not revealed to him. In his expatriate job he had had to deal with their dishonesty, which certainly had demanded coping of him. Thus, it was quite natural that he engaged himself in quite deep reflections on cultural differences. On the other hand, his accounts of his experiences indicated that he may not have progressed in his coping that much in his short-term expatriation assignment. Teppo explained how he had grown to respect Finnish values, and how these values appeared clearer to him through his expatriate experience:

Teppo: Here I noticed more positive sides. The probability that when a Finn says something he really means it and that you can trust a Finn's word, is much bigger than in America. There I was suspicious all the time, I had to think about it all the time, whether he really meant it or whether he just told a white lie in order to get rid of me, especially in

business situations. There people have been taught that if you can take care of your business well and you are not caught lying, you can do that. When I noticed and learned this, of course I respected that society less, as I have learned Finnish values.

8.3. Discussion

To conclude, both emotion-focused and problem-focused strategies were identified in the context of interaction and communication with the home unit's colleagues. The results showed that the repatriates' identity changes affected their coping efforts.

Already before the return some of the repatriates engaged in problem-focused coping efforts. Seven of them started to form expectations on what it would be like to return to the home unit's work community. It was found that as a part of his preparation, one expatriate specifically planned the exact timing of his return to the home unit. Three reflected on how to tell others about their expatriate experience. One reflected on his attitudes to interaction with his co-workers and to learning new work-related issues. In addition, two repatriates visited the home unit beforehand, and one returned directly to work without going on vacation.

When the repatriates entered into the home unit's work community, they shifted their focus between emotion-focused and problem-focused coping according to the demands of the situation. In their "emotion work" they had to handle the tensions between themselves and their colleagues and deal with the discomfort arising in certain social situations. One repatriate used positive comparison as his emotion-focused coping strategy when he valued certain features of the Finnish communication culture, like honesty and frankness. Two used generalizing, and six analysed or searched for some kind of scientific explanations to cope with the demands of interaction and communication. One repatriate's coping strategy was identified as the acceptance of his role as a repatriate in the home unit's work community. These kinds of coping efforts can best be described as a continuous balancing between interaction engagement and disengagement. The repatriates tried to judge how to best deal with their colleagues. The repatriates often found social support more easily among more familiar colleagues, which was identified as a form of problem-focused strategy.

The repatriates also employed many strategies that were identified as forms of problem-focused coping in the return phase (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150-152). As such forms of coping it was found that one repatriate organized his office space among colleagues he knew. One repatriate's coping was identified as cognitive appraisal when he analysed his interaction with other colleagues. The findings showed that one repatriate monitored his behaviour and tried to adjust it to Finnish cultural demands in certain situations. When interacting with their colleagues, five repatriates thought about how to present themselves appropriately. Sometimes it entailed holding back in communication situations and deciding not to discuss certain things. One repatriate changed his communication style by adjusting it to the different cultural demands, and one used identification with a colleague's position as a means for coping.

This chapter has reported the findings on which coping strategies the repatriates used in order to deal with the demands in communication and interaction in the home unit. Next, I will report the research results on the repatriates' coping efforts outside working life.

9. COPING OUTSIDE WORKING LIFE

In this chapter I will look at what kind of coping strategies the repatriates used outside working life. The repatriates' coping efforts outside their working life can be divided into problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies. The first section (9.1.) considers the repatriates' coping efforts in the context of coping with demands as they prepared for their return. The second section (9.2.) presents the findings on how the repatriates responded to cultural demands. The third section (9.3.) addresses the repatriates' social support. The fourth section (9.4.) shows the results on issues related to their leisure time activities. The last section (9.5.) summarizes the results on coping outside working life.

In the preparation phase problem-focused coping efforts (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152) were directed towards the formation of expectations, which the repatriates typically claimed to be realistic, and towards attitudes. Also, problem-focused strategies (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152) were used as the expatriates tried to keep themselves up-to-date concerning Finnish society and their personal relationships and lives there.

In the return phase the repatriates used either problem-focused or emotion-focused coping strategies (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150-152).

The changes in the repatriates' social life were linked to the usage of both emotion-focused (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150) and problem-focused strategies (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152). When the repatriates continued and rebuilt some of their former contacts, on the one hand they were more selective in their contacts, and on the other hand they had created new contacts to other expatriates. Also, they looked for social and emotional support from their relatives and friends. Through their hobbies and leisure time activities the repatriates integrated into the local social life, established daily routines, and found opportunities for relaxation.

9.1. Handling expectations of and attitudes to the return

The repatriates confronted similar kinds of demands outside their working life as they did in the work environment context. Thus, many of their coping strategies were similar in working life as well as outside it. In this part I will look more closely at how, especially for

those repatriates, who had a more extended international experience and had been on longer assignments, the coping strategies had a lot to do with their changed identities, value worlds, and with experienced cultural differences.

The repatriates orientated themselves for their return through problem-focused coping (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152), which in many cases first of all meant the formation of expectations on the return. Eighteen of the repatriates claimed that they had realistic expectations. They tried to keep themselves up-to-date regarding what was going on in Finnish society by following, for instance, newspapers and they had quite a realistic picture of Finland in this sense. During their assignments many of the expatriates also visited or spent their holidays in Finland when they acquired knowledge about what was going on in the lives of people who were important to them, allowing them to form more realistic expectations of their life in Finland after the assignment.

But another trend of these expectations was that expatriates sometimes seemed to have quite high expectations, or they were quite excitedly looking forward to social life in Finland, expecting their daily life to become easier. While the repatriates did not seem to experience any serious disappointments in these regards, one of them probably had somewhat too high expectations concerning social life back in Finland. Ville had been on several assignments, and after the most recent one he had started to plan a more stable life, both personally and professionally. Maybe because of this change in his orientation towards his future, he had quite high expectations for returning back to Finland. But he also realized that people went on with their daily lives as usual and did not necessarily pay any special attention to the returning repatriate. Ville had these kinds of notions of the return phase, and his experiences called upon the use of emotion-focused coping (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150), as he was slightly disappointed in peoples' reactions to his return:

Ville: I had quite high expectations. In particular because I was on the assignment alone without any family members. I was a little bit disappointed when I noticed that life had gone on, and people did not react to the fact that I had been away.

One significant part of problem-focused coping (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150) was the formation of attitudes, which was often mentioned by the repatriates. Nine of them spoke in terms of how they strove for the formation of positive attitudes, with the help of which they could confront the return in an open-minded manner. They discussed flexibility and

initiative in similar terms. Another example of working with attitudes was adopting an everyday realism, rationalizing things, which helped to set emotions aside in order to avoid getting trapped in only emotion-focused coping for too long a time. Tapio explained:

Tapio: Those people who have been, let's say, in less pleasant places, they have a lot of a certain kind of everyday realism. They start to take a somewhat harder attitude to things.

Naturally, they had reflected on these issues already when they went abroad, thus, by learning from their experiences they made the conclusion that similar questions would also concern the return. One repatriate especially raised the question of preconceptions. His opinion was that if an individual has strong negative preconceptions when leaving for an assignment, he or she learns to confirm them during the assignment and will subsequently transfer the same preconceptions to the return phase. Gertsen (1988) says that prejudices, unconscious and assessing stereotypes, and ethnocentric attitudes cause an individual to make inadequate observations and interpretations of the environment. Others have also explained intercultural misconceptions in the same manner (Hammer, Gudykunst and Wiseman 1978; Ratiu 1983).

Mauri had been on a five-year assignment in the Middle East and in South-East Asia. He had thus lived in cultures, which are very distant to the Finnish culture, and he had certainly reflected a lot on his attitudes to facing people from different cultural backgrounds. In the return phase Mauri engaged himself in analysing how the formation of attitudes, and especially preconceptions, can influence what kind of observations and interpretations he might make in the return phase. Mauri explained how he saw the influence of preconceptions on return:

Mauri: If you have a very negative and prejudiced attitude to new cultures and to new people, it makes the re-entry more difficult. It is because when you have prejudices you constantly pay attention to the worst things that you see. If you are afraid of new people and new cultures, you experience much more negative things than you normally would and that way you become even more critical. When you return you are not able to see even those few positive things that you saw when you left.

An interesting feature, which occurred when talking about attitudes, was a kind of polarization. One repatriate criticized this kind of temporary outlook heavily, instead suggesting a more permanent attitude to confronting challenges. While this was in line with the thoughts according to which the interviewees could help themselves to return by showing a

greater initiative themselves, it might simultaneously mean the loss of flexibility to some extent. Namely, the repatriates who were of the opposite opinion said that through the temporary attitude they remained flexible and more ready for the idea of a possible new assignment, which in turn functioned as a kind of spiritual buffer against the many challenges of the repatriation. Having a temporary attitude might also in some cases be linked to an emotion-focused coping strategy: psychological withdrawal, fantasizing about a new assignment (Feldman and Tompson 1993).

Kai had visited the location of his assignment, New York, several times during ten years before his actual assignment. He told me how he had learned to know many people there during these visits. Having such long-term ties and social contacts to the host country probably made him more positive towards to the idea of a new assignment. Simultaneously, he very clearly referred to having used psychological withdrawal to be able to decrease his negative feelings during the return. Kai commented:

Kai: Of course ones attitude to life is very important. It has made it a lot easier to have made it clear to myself that it was not the kind of experience, which could not be repeated. Staying here is no more final than staying there. [I did not feel that] now, when I have returned, I am here like in a prison and can't get out. It is not like that. When the time will come and the situation will change, it is possible that I will be back there again pretty soon.

On the other hand, as a form of emotion-focused strategy and in order to process their feelings and experiences, three repatriates highlighted the significance of a truncated perspective of time. By this they meant refraining from living too much in their expatriate past. Satu seemed to use this kind of strategy:

Satu: I don't miss Italy. It was a great experience, and there were good things there, but it was there and then.

Like Kai, also other interviewees might have had previous contacts to the representatives of the host culture before leaving for the assignment. Through their former contacts or by showing an interest in local activities and possibilities, the expatriates integrated better into the living environment of the host country. Further, by learning the communication codes from the locals the expatriates engaged in the local social and cultural life. These coping efforts represented problem-focused social coping strategies (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152), when the expatriates were stimulated by the various socio-cultural challenges of their

living environment. On the other hand, there could simultaneously be emotion-focused coping (ibid., 150), when the expatriate decreased feelings of loneliness and of isolation due to living in a foreign environment by participating in the social life of his host country. Teuvo told me about the social activities on his assignment as follows:

Teuvo: You have to be active yourself. In our workplace there were all kinds of activities, there was the football team, the ice hockey team, everybody participated in some kind of sport, and if not, at least were strongly involved in supporting the teams. I did not do any sports, but I went to watch their games. Another thing is that you participate in all these kinds of cultural events. They love to organize all kinds of festivals immediately when they have a reason for it. It is about having fun and eating.

This section showed that the repatriates mostly used problem-focused coping strategies to work with their expectations and attitudes when they started to prepare for the return to Finland.

9.2. Confronting cultural demands

This section considers the repatriates' coping efforts when dealing with the cultural demands outside work life after returning.

Those repatriates who had returned from longer assignments and who had a more extended international experience reacted to cultural differences more drastically, and they recognized different phases of their repatriation more clearly than those, who had less experience of living in foreign cultures. In this section I will take a closer look at which kind of coping strategies the repatriates used in this context.

No matter how much the repatriates worked with their attitudes, they still had to go through the demands of the return. Ten of the repatriates recognized, and were quite well aware of, the different stages in their repatriation. Through this kind of understanding and perception they could accept more easily that going through repatriation took its time. Their feelings during the process varied from positive to negative ones, thus calling upon the usage of emotion-focused coping efforts (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150). Talk about coping in this context did not necessarily include any specific encounters, but the repatriates' coping could rather be characterized as letting time pass, and getting used to life changes and to the change of the socio-cultural environment.

Kari had worked abroad during several short-term periods in his career. His latest one had been in South-East Asia, thus quite a distance from Finland. He told me how he had clearly recognized the typical developmental stages in his own repatriation. He concluded that he was probably still going through the process of repatriation at the time of the interview:

Kari: At the beginning it was very easy and nice to meet all those people and to see how things are at that moment, but then there was this change of apartment after three months. It was a landmark, exciting, I could move to my new apartment, get all my stuff and put it in their places. Then there was a low period, I wondered whether it would be like this for many years. After that exciting beginning it was not a high-flying life at all, there were all these daily routines, normal weekdays. Then it became more stable, I do not think about it at all anymore, whether it will be like this. Before I am able to say that I am completely adapted, I have to find something else, I have a feeling that something is still missing. I just have the feeling that something is missing, maybe that is exactly why I miss being there. I cannot define any single thing.

Behind the cultural misunderstandings lie, among other things, things connected to perceptions and interpretations: subconscious cultural blinders. People are not aware of their own assumptions and their constraints (Adler 2002, 84-99). Neither your own culture nor communication with its members force you to scrutinize these assumptions. Another thing is the lack of consciousness of your own culture. One often believes that the biggest challenge in intercultural interaction is to know the foreign culture. In reality, the greater difficulty actually involves becoming aware of one's own cultural conditioning and how it effects one's own behaviour. The third point according to Adler (Ibid.), is projected similarity. You believe that people are much more similar to yourself than they are in reality. One also assumes that communication situations and their rules are similar. Behind the projected similarity lies unconscious cliquishness. One assumes that there is only one way to do things, in other words, "my way".

Further on, when I discuss the interviewees' reactions to cultural differences, it is not necessarily a question of pure misconceptions, instead, behind their reactions might lie inaccurate interpretations and perceptions, as described by Adler. The points of Adler (2002, 84-99) introduced above might have influenced the repatriates' coping efforts when dealing with cultural differences, but this study does not specifically explore repatriates' subconscious or unconscious coping efforts.

Strong reactions to cultural differences told more about the individual repatriate's more progressed expatriation abroad, or more extended international experience in general, rather than that they had had to cope with the cultural distance directly related to the most recent return.

Though the challenges caused by experienced cultural differences were not so huge, especially those repatriates who had learned the communication codes of their host culture had to work out these issues in the return phase. Their notions of cultural differences concerned different communication styles. For instance, they compared the cultural differences of greeting. This cultural feature is a significant code of communication, and some of the repatriates reacted strongly to these types of cultural differences, thus calling for the usage of emotion-focused coping strategies (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150).

Kai had spent several periods in the US during several years, and he had learned to know the American culture well. He told me about his quite tough experiences in the return phase, but he also remembered the positive sides, when he had made some comparisons between the Finnish and American cultures during his visits to Finland. When reflecting on cultural differences, Kai identified himself with a foreigner. He further continued his emotion-focused coping (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152) by searching for explanations to cultural differences in the differences in climates. He remembered how he made very different observations regarding the Finnish way of greeting in the winter and in the summer. He described his experiences in following words:

Kai: I have reacted to cultural differences and probably most so in the return phase. At first I found it very strange, when people do not greet to each other. You enter into an elevator and you say Hi! Then he or she just turns away to stare at the walls or a corner. I'm very used to greeting unfamiliar people, and I find it natural. When you do not do that, it feels very unnatural and you start to wonder, wow, are we really like this, and in a way you are ashamed of being a Finn, that how terrible it must be for foreigners to come here when they always see it. What is the danger in that, if you say 'Hi' or 'Good morning'? And when you walk down the streets, you see people walking with their collars turned up, heads down and you see very few happy faces. As people we are much closer to the Russians than the Europeans. Maybe it is because of the climate. I found things were the opposite, when I visited in the summer. Then it was great to be here, it was right in the beginning of June, when a hot period started. Then it was even beyond life in the US, when the Finns really came out of their shells and people smiled in the streets and were happy and the sun shone.

The repatriates also spoke about the cultural differences that they had experienced in interaction with people in Finland. For instance, they found that the Finns are too easily irritated, they are uptight and they overreact to small setbacks with pessimism. These kinds of perceptions and experiences related to the experienced differences in social control and norms. In order to facilitate their social interaction the repatriates had to deal with the conflict between the norms and social control systems of their host and home cultures. On the other hand, by applying the emotion-focused strategy of psychological reappraisal (Feldman and Tompson 1993) the repatriates started to appreciate certain features of the Finnish culture more, the opposite manifestations of which had typically been their coping demands during the assignment. These kinds of features were, for instance, the concept of time and honesty (Salo-Lee 1994). Some of the expatriates had had experiences of the lack of honesty, which had brought negative challenges especially to their expatriate work.

Teppo had been on a one-year assignment in the US. His experiences of the US and his description of that time period was about the fact that he had not progressed very far in his expatriation. He told me how he had become very good friends with another expatriate from Finland, which probably decreased his need to engage in social life in the US during his leisure time. Probably based on this kind of “semi-finished” expatriation, his experiences of the US remained quite superficial. An emotion-focused strategy of psychological reappraisal (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150-151) was natural; he highlighted the positive characteristics of the Finnish culture. Teppo told me how cultural features can become highlighted especially in certain lines of work, like in his own sales job:

Teppo: It is very easy to be there as a kind of average Joe, but if you think at all more profoundly about those things and people's behaviour, then you realize that the superficiality, it is just gloss. But of course, in that sense it is very nice to become part of that society, people talk and are friendly and those kinds of things. But after going through that phase, when you want to go further, then you notice that it is not that easy at all. It is easy to be with Americans, but you cannot get anything out of them, they won't tell you their real thoughts, real feelings or personal things so easily. Well, I don't know whether Finns are that social, but the honesty, and how the Finns speak directly, there are some very positive things to it.

As mentioned earlier, the expatriate experience had modified the interviewees' identities towards a more cosmopolitan one. These continuous, “emergent” identity shaping processes seemed to call for problem-focused (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150; Watson 1994; Watson & Harris 1999) coping efforts. In association with the identity shaping

processes, the repatriates' world views had changed and their opinions tended to become much more critical in general. The interviewees looked at many aspects of Finnish society as outsiders and their criticism was thus sharper than it had been before. But naturally, this kind of comparison also produced an increased appreciation of other things. In general, the repatriates' coping on this mental level was a continuous modifying of their values and world views, rather than striving for some stable or coherent viewpoint. Tero told me how he, for instance, saw society's values manifesting themselves differently in Finland and in the US in people's work motivation:

Tero: When you look at [the Finnish] society, it is very much a social democracy, an uniform system. In that sense, if we talk about the work motivation of people, this has clear effects, in that only a few Finns run and work that intensively somewhere else, where they have an opportunity to receive some kind of award. Here you are not rewarded, but not punished either. It is reflected through the whole of society, this kind of similar thinking.

This section considered the repatriates' coping efforts when dealing with cultural differences. Both emotion-focused coping strategies and problem-focused strategies were used in this context.

Next, I will look at what kind of coping strategies the repatriates applied in their social life.

9.3. Finding social support

Naturally, during the assignment the expatriates' social life changed, and especially for those on longer and further distanced assignments it was more difficult to keep all their former contacts to Finland active. Some coping efforts were identified as problem-focused strategies (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152). They prioritised their social relationships; they tended to be selective and to concentrate on the most important and closest ones. Lauri had been in South-East Asia and during the assignment some of his former contacts had disappeared. Lauri spoke about accepting certain changes in his social relationships as follows:

Lauri: Somehow I feel that when I have been there, I have noticed who are my friends and who are not, at work and otherwise. Because the distance was so great and we visited Finland only once a year, we noticed with whom we kept in touch, and who kept in touch with us. [You realize] that your real network of friends is not as large as you thought when you were in Finland. Actually, you have only a few friends.

Many expatriates usually spent more time with their families on the assignment, and especially those who had children while being on the assignment. One of the repatriates spoke about how the ties between family members had become stronger, and how the importance of the family was emphasized also in the return phase. The young manager told me about the role of his family as follows:

Anssi: During the assignment I did not meet my old friends that much anymore, I spent more time at home, naturally also because we had children and started a family. The importance of a family became highlighted when I left [for the assignment], and it remained when we returned, family comes first. That has perhaps been the biggest change.

Naturally, cross-cultural transfers can be very stressful for the partner and the rest of the family. Despite that the changes might have caused tension in the repatriates' relationships with their partners, there were usually no dramatic changes. The young manager travelled between the host and the home country for a certain period, which put his family life under pressure. He used problem-focused coping (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150) by appreciating the role of the spouse in this stressful life phase:

Jani: Unfortunately, I did not have the time then [to organize things], I left [for the assignment]. So I appreciated it a lot, when my wife was able to organize practical things in Finland with two little children, they went to day care for the first time, and she herself returned to work.

On the other hand, the repatriates found their primary social relationships consisting of relatives and friends as a valuable source of both emotional and instrumental support (Titterton 1989), referring to the usage of both emotion-focused (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150) and problem-focused coping efforts (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152). In particular, families with little children also used these kinds of sources of support as a buffer against stress, when they re-established their lives after the assignment. Anssi, a young manager, told me how he had returned with his wife and two little children. He made comparisons between his opportunities for social support in the host and in the home country. He appreciated knowing people in the home country, who were able to give support, and help out with everyday life. He explained:

Anssi: Relationships to friends and relatives help you feel at home, that this is where you belong in a way. For instance, if you have an old car that breaks down somewhere, then I always know that I have a friend somewhere, who can come and help me. In Poland, in turn, you automatically have to ask your workmates for help or you have to call an

outsider. Here you know that there is some relative or some friend, you can always find somebody, who comes to your help. But in a foreign country you never know those people and you have to get to know them in a different way.

While the expatriates' former contacts and relationships had partly disappeared during the assignment, the expatriates simultaneously also re-established them, which was natural due to the change in the social environment. During their assignments the expatriates set up new contacts to other expatriates, and in the repatriate phase other former expatriates who had had similar experiences were a valuable source of emotional support for the repatriates (cf. Engen 1995). Teppo told me that the expatriate experience formed a unique base for establishing new friendships:

Teppo: Of course it is kind of a life stage you have in common. As such it is a very impressive experience for both, and when you are in a foreign country, that common experience develops a much deeper friendship compared to what it would be here in Finland. We know some other couples who also have been there, they have become more significant friends just because of this unifying experience.

One repatriate had an interesting viewpoint on coping, when he utilized his contacts to the representatives of the host culture in order to keep his ideas of life in the host culture as realistic as possible. He found this kind of emotion-focused strategy (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150) as a good means to avoid a potential tendency to start utilizing the more passive form of emotion-focused strategy of psychological withdrawal (Feldman and Tompson 1992), like daydreaming. He thought that he could facilitate his return to Finland by having as realistic a picture as possible of life in the host country. Anssi explained how he consciously thought about keeping the challenges of his expatriation in mind:

Anssi: I think that it has been useful to maintain contacts to the host country after the return. You can preserve the picture of how things are there and you also remember the challenges. I kept in touch with the families I befriended and I heard about the challenges in working life and also outside it. You do not have too rosy memories or miss being there, when you remember that okay, it was nice being there, but there were also less pleasant things.

In their social interaction with other people than colleagues, the repatriates confronted similar types of challenges as in their working lives. On the one hand, the repatriates perceived other people's envy, and on the other hand, they sometimes noticed a lack of interest in their expatriate experience. In order to make the interaction smoother and to avoid negative reactions they paid more attention to how to present themselves and in what

kind of social situations, and if or how to tell about their experiences to other people. Besides the fact that these kinds of coping efforts can be described as quite passive, they were simultaneously problem-focused strategies, aiming to change the standards of behaviour (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152). Tapio had perceived expressions of envy even in official contacts with unfamiliar people. His coping efforts were obviously directed towards dealing with other people's emotions as well. He told me how he had learn to be more cautious when speaking about his expatriation:

Tapio: I have learned to be more like a listener, you have to be a little bit careful with how other people react. They think that your pockets are full of money. You notice it in every institution, even in official ones. People think like that, because you have been away for such a long time, and you have not had to pay tax in Finland, and then you return with a removal van. It is amazing how much people envy it. It shows in many people and in some relatives as well. People imagine that it has been so great and such fun but it is not always like that at all.

One of the expatriates had got used to the nightlife typical of the host culture on her assignment, which had meant a much more active social life for her than the one she had had in Finland. When returning, Henna subsequently went through a remarkable change, which demanded coping of her. She had to give up the lifestyle and the nightlife, which she had become used to in the host country. Because of the cultural differences, and also because of certain changes in her personal life, for her returning meant having a more quiet and different social life. But by keeping in contact with her friends in the host country and by accepting the change in her life situation, she was able to see the change in her social life more positively. To actively keep in contact both with the people in the host country and with the relatives in the home country represented an emotion-focused coping strategy (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150), as the repatriate decreased her feelings of isolation and of loneliness by seeking social, emotional support. Henna told me about her life change experiences as follows:

Henna: But of course the fact that I am divorced, regardless if I had been on an assignment or not, that itself diminishes my social contacts, some of them disappeared. But I do not mean that I am divorced because of leaving for the assignment. Well, partly it was because of that, it includes a disappointment of its own, but I would still have left. To return has not been difficult for me at all, it is more like I have many good friends over there who are not here now. It means that my phone bills are three times more expensive. I have many more friends over there than here in [the town of the home unit].

Ville also referred to a similar issue, of having had to cope with a change in lifestyle. As usual, the change in lifestyle in his case was connected to a change in consumption habits. Four of the repatriates told me about changing their consumption habits when they returned. Such coping was problem-focused (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152), aiming to control a changed life situation, and the consumption habits that were linked to it. Ville told me about the change as follows:

Ville: Always, when I return, I have to live on my savings the first couple of months, when my net salary is not enough. I do not mean that I have an extravagant lifestyle abroad either, but I live differently, I use taxis and I go out more. Here I have to change that lifestyle. If I go out, I cannot call a taxi just like that, I first look at bus timetables.

When the repatriates were asked about their experiences of the change in the standard of living, they pinpointed the significance of the quality of life. They valued family life, especially those who had been separated from their families. They also compared the quality of the living environment between the host country and the home country. Then they discussed things like a clean environment, the four seasons, having certain things more easily at hand, and safety, which they found enhanced their quality of living in Finland. This kind of positive comparison (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150) was a form of emotion-focused strategy. Jukka explained his views on this issue in the following words:

Jukka: My standard of living has increased, when I think about it as a whole. I think I have a much better standard of living here, than somewhere in Brussels or in England, but I do not mean the salary, I consider other things. For instance, in Brussels, if you have to go to a language school that is located at the distance of five kilometres, it takes fifty minutes by car, I found it very depressing. Everything was much more difficult.

9.4. Engagement in leisure time activities

After the move back to Finland the repatriates were typically very busy in their free time. Besides the fact that leisure time activities offered the repatriates possibilities for social engagement, many of them simultaneously used these activities for tension reduction (cf. Titterton 1989). Next, I will take a closer look at these issues.

The repatriates typically had lots of things to do associated with housing. They repaired their houses, changed apartments and so on, in order to resettle their lives. By keeping themselves busy with housing arrangements, the repatriates filled their leisure time with

meaningful activities, and achieved the feeling of being at home. Thus, through the activities associated with housing the repatriates attached themselves to their place of return, and included elements, which represented something more permanent and continuous into their lives. These types of activities were identified as problem-focused strategies (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152), which for some of the repatriates simultaneously functioned as a buffer against stress. Tapani explained what founding a new home meant for him in the return phase:

Tapani: For me it was a re-establishment of home, we had this kind of little temporary flat, we fit all our things into it, [then there was] the selling of it and buying a new one and the establishment of a new home. Of course that is quite a significant thing. I found it satisfying in the summer.

Naturally, leaving for the assignment had meant giving up many things that expatriates valued, like, for instance, the Finnish nature, their pets, or other things, which were not possible to compensate for abroad. After going through this learning process of giving up, the repatriates correspondingly valued those things more, and spent time with and enjoyed them more after the assignment. Four of the repatriates specifically wanted to have a holiday in the return phase in order to organize more time for things they enjoyed doing. Satu told me about having a longer holiday in the return phase:

Satu: I had a long, three months long, holiday. In a way it was a kind of prize for all that hard work. I played golf, jogged with my dog, and pottered around my new flat.

Thus, they applied both emotion-focused coping (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152) and problem-focused strategies (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152). Tapio had missed certain outdoor activities on his assignment:

Tapio: In the beginning of the year I am going to go jigging for all the lost years and do a little bit of skiing...

Sometimes expatriates found new hobbies while being on the assignment, but in general the expatriates engaged themselves less in activities outside the home than what they had used to do in Finland. Half of the expatriates had children who were either below school age or in school, and they thus spent more time with their families, or, on the contrary, they worked longer days, or just because of the lack of suitable companionship they did not

necessarily obtain new hobbies. Some of the expatriates' way of spending their leisure time could be described as being more passive, and more akin to spending time like a tourist than what it had been like before the assignment. This more passive style of spending their leisure time was not necessarily satisfying, and it might even highlight the expatriates' feelings of loneliness or of isolation. Tapani said that he did not have that much leisure time in his expatriate work:

Tapani: In New York I mostly just worked and I had relatively little free time. When I had free time, I spent my time like a tourist and went shopping.

The repatriates had also become inspired by their experiences of their host culture and learning new things about it. They might even find new hobbies that they wanted to develop further or continue in some form in Finland.

The significance of hobbies and leisure time activities for the repatriates' coping was very clearly revealed in the following repatriate's comment. Mauri, who had returned quite recently at the time of the interview, said that after the busy period with all kinds of housing arrangements and so on, he decided to make plans for his leisure time, specifically in order to alleviate the possible harder times of his return. Through this kind of problem-focused coping (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152) he estimated that he could avoid the more difficult demands by trying to keep himself motivated through leisure time activities. He mentioned things like the following:

Mauri: I guess it will be like this, that after having arranged all things and having established all the daily routines, I have to find some free time activities, and make some preliminary plans. When I will have the time, I will start doing that, if I do not have any further plans, I guess there will be a kind of low period, when I will feel like I have to get away from here and go somewhere else.

It was very common that the repatriates actively sought their former hobbies and activities, through which they rebuilt their former contacts and integrated into the social life of their home region. These problem-focused strategies were both socially and psychologically rewarding. The repatriates could achieve the feeling of "being at home", as one of them described the significance of former hobbies and contacts linked to them. Problem-focused strategies (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152) also functioned as tension reduction (Titterton 1989). Through active social participation the repatriates spent their leisure time in a rich

and meaningful way, which, in turn, served as an effective buffer against stress, and opened up a possibility to confirm their social identities. The repatriates talked about returning back to their “old lives” and re-establishing their old social networks. Two of the repatriates told me about feeling more motivated to start something new, one of whom started studying for a second academic degree. Teuvo told me how much he appreciated his former hobbies and the social contacts linked to them:

Teuvo: I continued with the hobbies, which I had had, the same ones as before the assignment. All kinds of woodwork; constructing a violin, a grandfather clock and furniture. It has been going on for at least fifteen years now. It is important, because one returns to the same patterns, which one used to have, it comes back to that. One meets old friends.

Another significant element of these problem-focused strategies (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152), and typically regularly conducted social activities, was that the repatriates were able to return to a certain familiar rhythm of everyday life, thus stabilizing their daily routines. Beside the achieved stability, the repatriates could fulfil themselves by engaging in hobbies, and they could learn and develop themselves through things, which they found personally significant. Tero continued his basketball hobby after the assignment:

Tero: Of course, because I have done sports my whole life, played basketball, I played abroad all the time, and then I continued to play here, when I returned. It was important, that I knew that I had a possibility to play here, too. I have played basketball since I was a little boy.

9.5. Discussion

Outside their working lives the repatriates used both emotion-focused and problem-focused strategies. In particular, those with a more extended international experience tended to react to, or notice cultural differences more than those with less such experience. The repatriates’ reactions to cultural differences were linked to their identity formation, as when identity changes prompted their experiences of cultural differences.

In the context of preparing for the return to working life, most of the expatriates used problem-focused coping efforts by starting to prepare for their return by forming expectations on their life outside working life. For instance, some of them tried to keep themselves up-to-date by reading Finnish newspapers. But an even more significant part of their

preparation seemed to be the formulation of certain attitudes. By taking a positive attitude, and by working on their possible preconceptions, nine of the repatriates sought to make their demands more manageable. One repatriate also used a truncated time perspective. This meant that the repatriate tried not to become stuck in memories of the expatriate time. On the other hand, it was found that two of the repatriates referred to fantasizing about new assignments; this was identified as an emotion-focused coping strategy.

In the return phase, some forms of emotion-focused coping strategies were found. In particular, ten repatriates with a more extended international experience, or who had returned from longer assignments, seemed to be quite well aware that they had gone through different phases of repatriation. Through this kind of awareness and understanding they could accept more easily that repatriating took time. That way they could also work on their feelings more effectively by using emotion-focused strategies, which in turn varied in different phases of the return.

Even though the repatriates seemed to experience cultural differences, mostly at a quite superficial level, dealing with these experiences called upon both emotion-focused and problem-focused coping efforts (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 150-153). For instance, one repatriate paid special attention to the Finnish way of saying "Hello". The repatriates occasionally used identification with the position of a foreigner, sought scientific explanations for their experiences of cultural differences, and paid attention to how to present themselves as forms of problem-focused coping. More than half of the repatriates clarified or modified their values, which also occurred in the context of coping with cultural differences.

The coping strategies that the repatriates used in their social life included emotional social support and more instrumental forms of social support; all of which could be identified as forms of problem-focused strategy (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152). One of the interviewees was divorced, but otherwise the basic structure of the repatriates' closest relationships remained unchanged. They found the support of the family and the time spent with the family to be important. One of the interviewees found the role of his spouse as important specifically for the return of the whole family. Three of the repatriates with young children particularly leaned on the support of their closest relatives.

There were other changes in the repatriates' relationships and contacts. During the assignment some of the repatriates' former contacts had disappeared. Four of the interviewees referred to prioritizing their social relationships. They reflected more deeply on their resources for keeping in contact. On the other hand, half of the interviewees had created new contacts with other expatriates and representatives of the host country. These social coping efforts were problem-focused strategies (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152). In particular, other, former expatriates were a significant support in the return phase. Another feature of problem-focused coping (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152) linked to interaction, was that five repatriates paid more attention to how to present themselves and how to talk about their expatriate experiences. An interesting phenomenon was that keeping in touch with the host country was for one repatriate a way to keep his ideas of living there more realistic, and in this way to decrease his feelings of missing being there.

Other forms of problem-focused coping efforts (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152) manifested themselves as active engagement. Over half of the repatriates willingly returned to their former hobbies and leisure time activities, through which they rebuilt their former contacts. By spending their time in ways that were meaningful for them they found ways to relax, and by having regular activities they could also maintain a certain rhythm of everyday life. For many, engaging in hobbies meant keeping or returning to the same lifestyle they had had before the expatriation. Two of the repatriates mentioned that they had to some extent give up the lifestyle that they had become accustomed to in their expatriate cultural environment. Because of cultural and economic differences it was no longer possible to keep up a similar lifestyle. The changes in lifestyle were also closely linked to consumption habits. All in all, four of the repatriates found it better to accept their lower income and to change their behaviour regarding consumption; they used a problem-focused strategy (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152).

This chapter presented the findings on the repatriates' coping efforts outside working life. In the next chapter (chapter 10) I will present the initial conclusions from Phase I.

10. FINDINGS OF PHASE I

This chapter presents problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies and the initial conclusions from Phase I.

10.1. The strategies used by the repatriates

This study has examined repatriates' coping strategies, a phenomenon that has been studied relatively rarely. The coping strategies were studied in the context of the preparation phase before the actual return, the context of work role changes and the home unit's work community respectively, and life outside work. Previous research, often drawing heavily on the BMO-framework, has tended to see the repatriate as somebody who needs to be managed, and neglects to pay adequate attention to what a repatriate him- or herself can do for his or her return. In contrast, this study shifts the focus from examining the factors influencing the success of former expatriates' readjustment towards their responses to demands *per se*. Accordingly, the research questions can be restated as follows:

- 1) What coping strategies and forms of coping do repatriates use?
- 2) What might influence the use of repatriates' coping strategies and forms of coping?

MacDonald and Arthur (2003) have explored the repatriation experience and adjustment strategies of employees returning to Canada. Their research questions were specified as follows: 1) What has been your experience with repatriation? and 2) What strategies have you used to cope with repatriation issues? Their data consisted of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, and the interview data was subjected to qualitative analysis. The study indicated an association between strategies and adjustment; the more strategies used, the greater the adjustment. Many of the strategies identified by MacDonald and Arthur (2003) are similar to the problem-focused and emotion-focused forms of coping that were found in this study on Finnish business repatriates' responses to the demands of the return. One of these, and one of the most effective strategies found in MacDonald and Arthur's study was goal setting accompanied by a plan of action. Some interviewees found seeing the move back to Canada as another foreign assignment a useful strategy. Their findings indicated that flexibility, a positive attitude, and patience were often important for adjustment. Some repatriates thought that finding a job with a new corporation would be a

useful strategy upon returning to Canada. Others saw repatriation only as a temporary or part-time solution. Their findings revealed that the ability to identify opportunities, positive experiences and learning outcomes was also noted to be a helpful strategy upon the return. In addition, one repatriate mentioned keeping a journal, that is, taking the time for him- or herself to reflect through writing, and attending a one-day repatriation seminar. These two latter strategies recognized in MacDonald and Arthur's (2003) study do not show similarities to the forms of coping found in this study. Next, I will discuss the repatriates' coping strategies that were identified in this study.

In accordance with the literature on coping (Lazarus and Folkman 1984), two main forms of repatriates' coping strategies were identified in this study: problem-focused strategies and emotion-focused strategies. The findings revealed that many identified forms of both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping show similarities to processes identified either in the literature on repatriates' adjustment or to the literature on coping (see Table 6). The findings also showed some forms of problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies that have not been found earlier (see Table 6). Thus, they contribute both to the coping literature and to the literature on repatriates' adjustment. Next, I will present those forms of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping that have not been recognized in previous studies.

In the context of preparing for the return, one expatriate looked for a successor for his job, and many pinpointed the formation of attitudes of activity concerning the return position as forms of problem-focused coping. When the repatriates coped with their work role changes and used problem-focused coping, one compared expatriate work situations with repatriate work situations, one used questioning the way business was conducted in their organization, and another one identified with the client's position. Two repatriates included a future or developmental perspective in their work tasks. One repatriate's emotion-focused form of coping was to remain passive, and let the time pass when lacking proper work tasks.

In the context of coping with the home unit's work community, one repatriate organized a working space among colleagues he knew, and another identified himself with the position of a colleague, both of which are forms of problem-focused coping. As their emotion-focused coping forms one repatriate used generalizing as he referred to Finnish men's weak

abilities to support their colleagues, and another generalized when he thought that workplaces' atmospheres are usually bad. One repatriate accepted his role as a repatriate in the home unit's work community, which was identified as a form of emotion-focused coping.

Outside working life two repatriates used identification with the position of a foreigner as their problem-focused form of coping.

Table 6. The forms of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies

	<u>The forms of problem-focused strategies</u>	<u>The forms of emotion-focused strategies</u>
<u>Preparation phase:</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - prioritizing the values of life and taking into account a partner's professional interests - preparing for an earlier leave from the assignment - estimating the prolongation of the assignment based on earlier experiences - making back up plans - deciding quite independently to finish the expatriate work - planning timetables for the work - working overtime - planning for the practical arrangements of the return - looking for a successor for the expatriate job - formation of attitudes of activity concerning the return position - keeping oneself up to date by following week reports and personnel magazines - information seeking through official and unofficial contacts, asking visitors from home company to visit the place of the assignment, taking an interest in international human resource management - starting the negotiations for the return position in good time - using the former contacts, and creating new ones, participating in meetings in the home unit, and image building through the expatriate job for finding a return position - becoming conscious of the risk of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - planning for the expatriation, but ignoring planning for the return - escaping: denying thinking about the possible risks of the return - seeking explanations - trying to tolerate the unpleasant situation - blaming the human resources functions of the company - withdrawing from the host country's social life - fantasizing of one's life in Finland

ending up in a temporary position,
and increased occupational opportunities

Work role changes:

- internalizing new power relationships and learning the work descriptions of other colleagues
- influencing the forthcoming work tasks by planning the timing of the return
- finding the lack of proper work task as a possibility to influence to the content of a job
- finding unclear work tasks as a possibility for continuous learning
- comparing expatriate work situations with repatriate work situations
- questioning
- identifying with the position of a client
- orientation
- including a future or developmental perspective in work tasks
- visiting the home unit before the return for orientation towards the forthcoming work tasks
- redefining the content of the repatriate job
- psychological reappraisal
- finding social support
- reflecting on the contrast between the expatriate and repatriate work role
- accepting the lower work role discretion
- tolerating the dispersed work role
- remaining passive and letting the time pass when waiting for the next project
- seeking compensation for frustrations at work outside work life
- valuing the repatriate job

In the home unit's work community:

- forming expectations
- planning the timing of the return
- thinking about how to tell about the expatriate experience
- reflecting attitudes to interaction with co-workers
- visiting the home unit before the actual return
- returning directly to work without any holiday
- organizing placement among familiar colleagues
- developing the standards of behaviour and adjusting them to Finnish cultural demands
- changing the communication style
- identifying with a colleague's position
- cognitive reappraisal
- generalizing
- analysing
- searching for "scientific explanations"
- confirming and clarifying values
- accepting one's role as a repatriate in the home unit's work community
- positive comparison

Outside working life:

- keeping oneself up to date what was going on in societal life of Finland
- fantasizing about new assignments
- becoming aware of passing through

- forming expectations on the return
 - forming attitudes, and working out possible preconceptions
 - having a truncated perspective of time
 - appreciating the role of the spouse
 - identifying with the position of a foreigner
 - searching for “scientific explanations”
 - paying attention to how to present oneself
 - clarifying or modifying value worlds
 - reflecting more deeply on resources for contact keeping
 - keeping in contact with the host country as a way to keep images of living there as more realistic, and in that way decreasing the feelings of missing it
 - engaging in leisure time activities
 - changing life style and consumption habits
 - finding social support among family, relatives and friends
- different phases of the repatriation
- reflecting on Finnish ways of greeting
 - finding social support

10.2. Phase I: Initial conclusions

The first research question addressed in this study concerned what coping strategies and forms repatriates use. When problem-focused coping is used, coping efforts are directed at managing, or altering the problem causing the distress. In contrast, emotion-focused coping concentrates on the emotional response to a particular problem (Lazarus and Folkman 1984, 152-153).

In general, the repatriates in this study used problem-focused coping efforts more often than emotion-focused coping efforts. In the preparation phase the uncertainty related to the return position triggered problem-focused coping efforts in almost all the managers, probably because they were at a bigger risk to end up in a temporary position upon their return to the home country. For most of the repatriates, working in higher-level organizational and new positions, the high rates of using problem-focused coping efforts were related to challenges in their new work tasks. In addition, the forms of problem-focused coping were identified in the context of coping in the home unit's work

community. The usage of problem-focused coping strategies was also common outside working life, probably due to the repatriates' active engagement in various hobbies and other leisure time activities. These results lead to the following first initial conclusion (initial conclusion 1):

1: the repatriates used different forms of problem-focused strategy more often than various forms of emotion-focused strategy. They also used a larger range of problem-focused strategies than emotion-focused strategies.

Next, I will discuss the initial conclusions related to the second research question, which addressed what might influence the use of coping strategies and the various forms of them. I will start by formulating a general initial conclusion to this question, and then continue by introducing more specific initial conclusions.

Regarding what might influence the use of coping strategies, the study demonstrated that there are several influences, which were associated with the repatriates' coping responses. In Lazarus and Folkman's process approach to coping (1984, 141-142), coping is defined as "constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person". Not all of the repatriates avoided disappointments concerning their immediate return position and work tasks. Their coping efforts started to accumulate, which meant that earlier coping efforts triggered new coping efforts. Dealing with disappointments demanded the employment of additional coping efforts that shifted between various forms of problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies. Typically, the repatriates' initial reactions to the setbacks concerning their immediate return positions were a kind of shock or panic that led to the usage of emotion-focused coping. Some of them started to look for another workplace, which indicates the use of problem-focused coping. But after the immediate very emotion-laden period, they started to make sense of the situation and to reflect on the possibilities to find a better position inside the company they had returned to. The experienced disappointments occasionally seemed to influence the repatriates' self-worth negatively.

Generally, the managers had more possibilities to find a new position compared to the specialists. Moreover, the older repatriates were differently equipped to deal with the

setbacks compared to the younger ones. By drawing upon their earlier experiences of handling disappointments, their sense of mastery was not so deeply shaken, whereas the younger ones were more dependent on more experienced superiors' support. A clear majority of those few who confronted these kinds of setbacks were able to change their situation for the better by implementing mostly problem-focused coping efforts.

Returning was a time period involving many simultaneous life events, thus increasing various demands. When demands increased so much that they started to exceed or heavily tax the repatriate's resources and abilities to employ a larger scale of coping strategies, he or she tended to get caught in a circle of coping efforts where the usage of emotion-focused strategies dominated. Searching for explanations and analysing causes of disappointments were the most important forms of emotion-focused strategy. Breaking out of the circle and changing the situation became more difficult when the repatriate became trapped by the same problem for a longer time. This kind of circle of coping efforts was identified only once in this study.

Serious disappointment with the return position and work tasks might damage the repatriate's self-esteem badly, if changing the situation turned out to be very difficult. The interrupted career-identity, and the feelings of powerlessness and of losing control led to the repatriate's coping efforts mostly focusing on dealing with negative emotions.

A cumulative pattern of the managers' problem-focused coping efforts occurred when they acquired new positions and new work tasks that were unclear to many of them in the beginning. Coping with these kinds of new challenges further mobilized their problem-focused strategies. The repatriates' coping efforts also accumulated in interaction and communication in the home company. As the shifting of the repatriates' coping efforts was identified, a general conclusion was formulated (initial conclusion 2A):

2A: the repatriates shifted between different forms of problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies, depending on the situation and the coping demands.

It was further concluded that (initial conclusion 2B):

2B: the repatriates' coping efforts might also accumulate over time.

The managers' relatively independent positions offered them more room and possibilities to implement a larger range of problem-focused coping efforts. The high rates of their problem-focused coping efforts were also likely to be related to their experience of learning to cope. It can be argued that through their diversified expatriate experience, the managers had increased their professional accomplishments (cf. Inkpen 1998; Downes and Thomas 1999), and that they had learned to develop and implement coping strategies creatively. In order to cope with challenging, often unclear repatriate work tasks in their new positions, they continued to develop and reshape their coping efforts to fit new situations. Based on the findings on the repatriates' coping efforts in the work domain, it was concluded that (initial conclusion 3):

3: in contrast to the specialists, the repatriates occupying higher-level organizational positions (managers) used a greater number and a greater variety of different forms of problem-focused strategy than emotion-focused strategy, especially in the context of preparing for the return and in different work role changes.

Overseas assignments have often been found to be a transformational experience for expatriates (Osland 2002). In addition, learning the codes of behaviour and communication of the host culture may lead to a significant change in one's cultural identity. This kind of development process is likely to lead to difficulties upon the return (Sussman 2000). In the present study the repatriates' coping efforts with work demands were linked to their identity formation processes. They became more aware of their possibilities and their limitations. The repatriates were generally very clearly aware of a general increase in self-confidence as a result of their expatriate experience, and likely due to the experiences of success at the expatriate work. Increased self-confidence strengthened their professional identity and it prompted the implementation of their problem-focused coping strategies in work tasks that were often unclear. New work tasks opened up an opportunity for their continuous identity formation; thus these repatriates found unclear work tasks as challenges and opportunities to utilize their work experience rather than as problems too difficult to handle.

In their repatriate jobs the repatriates based their coping efforts on their earlier experiences of coping with demanding expatriate work tasks, and through this kind of learning they

could further enhance their identity development as “emergent” managers. Thus, they were prepared to confront new situations and continuously develop their coping efforts. Among the specialists, identity formation processes seemed to be reflected more in expressions of frustration at work, thus demanding emotion-focused coping efforts. For instance, their expatriate work roles were typically more independent and more social than their repatriate work roles. When they then to some extent had to give up these kinds of similar features in their narrower repatriate work roles, it pushed them to reshape their identities again.

The findings concerning the linkage between the repatriates’ identity development and coping with their work tasks gave grounds for formulating the fourth initial conclusion as follows (initial conclusion 4):

4: the repatriates’ coping efforts in work tasks were linked to their identity formation processes. They could draw upon their increased self-confidence, and utilize their earlier experiences of coping when clarifying their new work tasks to themselves.

Particularly the managers, whose positions changed, were sometimes experienced as threats by other workmates. These kinds of polarized positions caused some tension in the repatriates’ interpersonal relationships, and in order to deal with this they employed both emotion-focused and problem-focused strategies. The repatriates’ identity formation processes were related to these coping efforts as well (cf. Marx 2001, 62-64). The repatriates had become more critical in their opinions, and they had taken on enlarged and more diversified perspectives on how to do business. In order to better communicate their ideas, or simply to keep the interaction functioning more effectively, they employed both emotion-focused and problem-focused strategies, such as changing their communication styles. In addition, besides the fact that going through the expatriation process meant changes in their professional identity, it simultaneously included changes in their personal identities. Most of the repatriates recognized this kind of development. Identity development processes can be interpreted in terms of identity as “emergent”; the self is constantly created through interaction in serial situations. The repatriates’ identity development might be also reconstructed partly through linguistic discourses, when their identity was formed in the articulation of “personality” or “the real self”. The perspective that discusses identity development as positional orderings, such as “insiders” or “outsiders”, as balance seeking between de-

terminacy and order, also included insights for the repatriates' identity development, since in the repatriate's situation one is neither inside nor outside an organization.

In the repatriates' views new and more self-reflective aspects of themselves had developed. The expatriate experience also clarified their opinions or their values. For instance, some repatriates did not find changes in their financial situation to be a significant issue. Instead, in this context the interviewees usually started to talk about the quality of the living environment and the quality of life. When repatriating, living between cultures causes a shock to their sense of who they are. This kind of identity reconstruction might for instance include different forms of both emotion-focused and problem-focused coping efforts for dealing with differences between communication styles.

It can be concluded that during their assignments the expatriates gained more experience of dealing with socio-cultural demands. This kind of cultural learning was related to their changed identities, which, in turn, crystallized their experiences of cultural differences when returning. They could draw upon their earlier experiences of coping in similar types of situations, and thus develop ways of coping in interaction with their colleagues in the home country organization.

The discussion of the repatriates' coping efforts in interaction and communication both with colleagues and generally, and the fact that their coping efforts in these situations were linked to their identity formation, were used as a basis for the following initial conclusion 5 (initial conclusion 5):

5: coping with cultural demands in interaction and in communication both with colleagues and generally were linked to the repatriates' identity changing processes. While, on the one hand, it triggered their demands, on the other hand, it enabled them to utilize their earlier experiences of coping with similar types of situations in the return phase.

The length in time of the most recent assignment and the total time spent overseas have been argued to influence how much uncertainty the expatriates experience when they face the return (Black 1994). In interaction with colleagues as well as in handling cultural demands in general, the repatriates with more extended international experience and deeper experience of living in the host culture confronted cultural demands more often than those

with less international experience. The former had learned the codes of communication of the host culture that differed from the Finnish ones. Thus, while this increased their demands, they could also draw upon their earlier experiences of previous returns. As stated above, they could develop and reshape their problem-focused and emotion-focused coping efforts during their repatriation process.

The repatriates' coping efforts also accumulated for most repatriates when extended international experience and deeper experience of living abroad led to the recognition of different phases in their repatriation. The initial phase typically included a kind of sharpened awareness of the cultural differences, and dealing with them through analysing and searching for explanations. After that some of them psychologically experienced a clearly more depressive period in their repatriation. When increasing their awareness and accepting that repatriation takes its time, the repatriates' psychological experiences of the return started to stabilize.

Since the findings indicated that the repatriates' coping efforts with cultural demands were linked to their earlier experiences of living abroad, it was concluded that (initial conclusion 6A):

6A: the repatriates with a more extended international experience and a deeper experience of living abroad confronted cultural adjustment demands more often than those with less international experience.

Further, it was concluded that (initial conclusion 6B):

6B: to cope with these kinds of demands the repatriates employed both problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies.

The results suggest that the repatriates' organizational position and corresponding role requirements, extended international experience, experience of living abroad, and experience of earlier returns may explain most of the variance in coping efforts. In addition, both the variety and the accumulation of the repatriates' coping efforts were linked to their identity formation processes.

This chapter has presented the preliminary findings of Phase I. Chapter 11 describes how the follow-up interviews were conducted, and presents the analysis of the interviewees' feedback on the initial conclusions.

11. PHASE II INTERVIEWS

This chapter describes the follow-up interviews, and discusses the justifications for using a “direct” method of conducting follow-up interviews (section 11.1.). By the term direct method I mean that feedback from the informants was collected by freely discussing the content of the initial conclusions, and not by using ready-formulated, semi-structured interview questions based on the initial conclusions. Then, it presents the interviewees in this second phase of the research process (section 11.2.). Subsequently, the follow-up interviews are analysed, and the modified conclusions based on the feedback from the follow-up interviews are presented (section 11.3.).

11.1. Phase II: The follow-up interviews

The purpose of conducting follow-up interviews based on the initial conclusions from the first phase of the study was to test the validity of the conclusions rather than to obtain additional information as such. Providing research subjects the opportunity to give feedback on research results has been emphasized in qualitative methods. Reason and Rowan (1981) state that good research involves going back to the subjects with the tentative results, and refining them in the light of the subjects’ reactions. Fielding refers to Douglas (1976, 146) who suggests procedures of “testing out” and “checking out” for data verification. The former means comparing members’ accounts with “the most reliable ideas and generally patterned facts the researcher has from his prior experience”, while the latter refers to “comparing what one is told by others against what can be experienced or observed more directly” (Fielding 1993, 164-167). The procedure of testing out is comparable to the use of a direct method that made it possible to compare the follow-up interviews’ information to the information gained from the initial interviews.¹²

The initial conclusions from the first phase of the study were based on the summary of the research results. In seeking to get feedback on the initial conclusions from the informants, two methods were considered: the “direct” method and the “translation” method. The direct

¹² More generally, Langdrige (2004) argues that data triangulation has the aim of transcending the particular limitations of any one method of data collecting by engaging with a number of different methods. He refers to Flick (2002, 227) who argues that “triangulation is less a strategy for validating results and procedures than an alternative to validation...which increases scope, depth and consistency in methodological proceedings”

method means that the initial conclusions would be sent to the informants and they would then have a chance to give feedback on them in discussions with the researcher. The translation method means that, based on the initial conclusions, the researcher would formulate interview questions around the initial conclusions, and then receive feedback from the informants by interviewing them. The advantages and disadvantages of these two methods were considered by comparing how the “old” and the “new” participants might react differently to the methods. The old participants I had interviewed earlier when collecting the initial interviews. The new participants I interviewed for the first time, so they were not part of the original data collection process.

It was concluded that if the direct method was used the old participants who had taken part in the study earlier might be more motivated to think through the conclusions and give feedback on them than would the new participants. On the other hand, it was thought that by the translation method, it might be easier to get more feedback from the new informants, since they would be answering pre-formulated questions. In general, using the translation method would not demand that much reflecting of the participants, because the pre-formulated questions would give some “input” for their thoughts. After reflecting on the advantages and disadvantages of these two different methods, the direct method was decided upon. Using the direct method was considered to give more space to the informants’ own reflections and thoughts, and to interrogate the ideas of the conclusions from Phase I. Thus, it was aimed at avoiding the problem of guiding the informants’ thoughts in a certain direction, which might have happened had they been asked to answer pre-formulated questions. Anyhow, regarding the difficulty of understanding the topic of coping, there was still some guidance included in using the direct method. This issue is discussed in more detail below.

The researcher contacted four “old” and six “new” informants and asked whether they would like to participate in the research and give feedback on the conclusions. The direct method was briefly described to the informants and they were encouraged to express their opinions freely in the Phase II interviews.

(Langdridge 2004, 315-316). In this study, conducting the 22 initial interviews and ten follow-up interviews have been used as a method for data triangulation.

The initial conclusions were sent to the informants in advance by e-mail. In order to better orientate the informants towards giving feedback, the significance of the concepts of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies, following Lazarus and Folkman's (1984, 150-153) definitions, was briefly explained in the same words to all the informants in the e-mail messages, which included the initial conclusions. In addition, concrete examples of both types of strategies were given. Nine of the actual interviews were conducted face-to-face with the informants and one was conducted by telephone. This was due to practical reasons, as the informant had already cancelled the interview twice because of his work trips.

At the beginning of the interviews the four main themes of the research results (preparation for the return, coping with work role changes, coping in the home unit's work community and coping in their leisure time) were introduced to the informants. For the old participants this was more like refreshing their memory, because they were likely to be more familiar with the research topic than were the new participants. Again, at the beginning of the interviews, I tried to emphasize that problem-focused coping does not mean that it is used only for coping with problems, rather, it is the name of the strategy. Also, I pointed out that neither one of the strategies, problem-focused or emotion-focused, is inherently superior to the other. Despite this kind of preparatory work, the informants sometimes tended to identify problem-focused strategies as better than emotion-focused strategies to deal with their coping demands. I found it necessary to further clarify the general meaning of the concepts to the informants.

I decided to attempt to follow certain general guidelines for conducting the interviews. The opinions of the old participants on the initial conclusions, that were covered one by one, were asked about quite directly in order to try to avoid guiding their answers in a certain direction. They were likely to be more familiar with the research topic as well. The new participants were introduced to the discussion by clarifying the meaning of the conclusions and by presenting arguments for how the researcher had come to certain conclusions. This involved providing them with concrete examples of the different coping strategies that the repatriates had used according to the research results.

After the interviews some of the informants commented that when they had read the conclusions for the first time, they had seemed quite abstract, but after the discussion they found the content of the conclusions more comprehensible.

11.2. Phase II participants

Two of the informants, who worked as specialists upon their return, I had interviewed earlier when conducting the original interviews. There were two others whom I had interviewed earlier as well, and who then worked in managerial positions. Six of the informants were new participants whom I interviewed for the first time, and they were thus not part of the original data collection process. Two of these six repatriates worked as specialists and four in managerial positions upon their return (see Table 7). Thus, apart from the fact that the informants represented both old and new participants, specific attention was paid to the interviewees' organizational positions, duration of the assignments, and the time that had passed after the re-entry. I thus aimed at finding appropriate informants to give feedback on the initial conclusions.

Table 7. The number of managers and specialists of the initial interviews and the follow-up interviews

	Initial interviews only	Initial interviews + follow-up interviews	Follow-up interviews only
Managers	17	2	4
Specialists	5	2	2

The duration of the new informants' assignments varied from twelve months to four years (see Table 8). The time that had passed after the re-entry at the moment of the follow-up interviews varied between four months and five years (see Table 9). The average age of the new informants was 45,5 years (see Table 9).

Table 8. The duration of the new informants' assignments

The duration of the assignment	Participants
12-15 months	2
24-26 months	3
four years	1

The educational backgrounds of the new participants were as follows: two were college educated engineers, two were university engineers, one was a business school graduate, and one was an interior designer. Two of the new participants were women and four were men. Five of them were legally married and one was common-law married. Four of the participants had returned from Central Europe and two from the US (see Table 9). One of the informants' spouses was on her own assignment with the informant (a dual-career couple), one was with his spouse, and the rest were on their assignments without family members.

Table 9. Gender, age, position, time passed after return (in Phases I and II), and place of the assignment at the time of the interview of Phase II

Gender	Age	Manager/Specialist	Phase I	Phase II	Continent
male	37	x	1 year and 1 month	7 years and 6 months	Central Europe
male	50	x	1 year and 5 months	7 years and 5 months	South-East Asia
male	44	x	1 year	6 years and 4 months	Middle East
male	39	x	1 year and 5 months	7 years and 5 months	US
male	32	x		4 months	France
female	57	x		5 years	France
male	50	x		2 years	US
female	33	x		10 months	France
male	52	x		10 months	France
male	49	x		4 months	US

11.3. Analysis of the feedback on the initial conclusions

The initial conclusions from Phase I were mostly confirmed by the informants. The informants presented examples of the coping strategies used, told me about their experiences of repatriation and provided opinions linked to the issues of the initial conclusions. When considering the differences in answers between the old participants and the new ones, the former were more certain in their answers than the latter. The new participants were more reflective than the old ones. They asked for clarifications more often and discussed the meanings of the conclusions more before expressing their opinions, whereas the old participants provided their opinions after less reflection. This was probably due to the fact that the old participants were somewhat more familiar with this study's topic.

Some modifications and redefinitions of the initial conclusions were made based on the informants' feedback.

Initial conclusion 1: "The research results indicated that the repatriates used different forms of problem-focused strategy more often than various forms of emotion-focused strategy. They also used a larger range of problem-focused strategies than emotion-focused strategies."

Seven of the informants confirmed the first conclusion. Since the other participants did not challenge nor clearly disagreed with the ideas of the first initial conclusion, it remained unchanged. For instance, one "old" informant working as a manager agreed on this by stating that "*I believe that this is exactly the right order. People who have worked abroad have a kind of proactive way to approach problems. They do not wait, they try to be active themselves and look for alternatives.*" Another participant also confirmed the initial conclusion: "*I think this first conclusion is OK, a larger range of problem-focused strategy is used.*" Another "old" participant working as a specialist commented on the same conclusion as follows: "*I would say that problem-focused coping is more common for people working in a technical area and I guess it concerns life in general. When I have problems, I try to divide them into smaller ones, and then to solve them one by one. If it does not work, I will try some other way.*" One "new" specialist commented: "*I think this*

is more like everyday life. Talking about specialists, the usage of problem-focused strategies is so typical for them. I do not believe that they ever become very emotional.”

Proposition 1: Repatriates are likely to use different forms of problem-focused strategy more often than various forms of emotion-focused strategy. Moreover, they are also likely to use a larger range of problem-focused strategies than of emotion-focused strategies.

* * *

Initial conclusion 2A: “The repatriates shifted between different forms of problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies, depending on the situation and the coping demands.”

The idea of shifting between different forms of problem- and emotion-focused coping strategies was refined, since only a few Phase II participants confirmed it and the majority of the participants did not fully agreed with it. They pinpointed the dominance of a problem-focused strategy. They found arguments in support of this view by referring, for instance, to the rationality of problem-focused coping. One “old” manager said that people who have been in less pleasant places become more realistic, and get a somewhat harder attitude. According to him it depends on where one has been and for how long. He told me about his formation of attitudes, which was identified as a form of problem-focused coping: “*I rather try to make sense of things than paying so much attention to my emotions.*” Another “old” participant, a specialist, believed that “*problem-focused coping is more common, because becoming angry does not help very much.*” One “new” manager said: “*In this kind of work it is necessary to be able to use both problem-focused and emotion-focused forms of coping because otherwise you cannot cope with these people. And the form changes all the time.*” One “new” specialist confirmed this by offering an example to support the conclusion: “*When I was on holiday, I was busy all the time. Then I came to the office to start my work, and I did not have anything. I became frustrated, I started to think about having to be there eight hours. I started to think through all possible alternatives; which customers could I contact, who are there in our own organization whom I could ask for help, or are there possibilities somewhere else.*”

Thus, the conclusion on shifting was refined in order to highlight shifting between any forms of coping efforts. This implies, for instance, successive shifting between different

forms of a problem-focused strategy. A “new” manager pinpointed the shifting between active coping efforts with the help of a metaphor: *“It is the result of the analysis of a problematic situation. If I have a screw, I use a screwdriver, and if I have a nut, I use a spanner.”* Another one commented: *“Different forms vary depending on the situation.”* On the other hand, two informants’ comments referred to strengthening the original idea of shifting between problem- and emotion-focused forms of coping. One “new” manager mentioned that *“a human being is not a ‘problem-solving-machine’ all the time, both problem- and emotion-focused coping efforts are included.”* One “new” manager said: *“When I think about emotions and problem-focused coping, in my work I have things that I just have to take care of. On the other hand, in my sales work I have to use a whole range of strategies.”*

Proposition 2A: Repatriates are likely to shift between different forms of coping strategies, depending on the situation and the coping demands.

* * *

Initial conclusion 2B: “The repatriates’ coping efforts might also accumulate over time.”

The initial conclusion concerning the accumulation of coping efforts was not changed. The informants did not question it; everybody admitted that coping is a continuous process. They confirmed the idea that one situation leads to the next. One “new” specialist gave an example of the accumulation of coping efforts in a work context: *“Usually it goes like this: at the beginning you try to figure out what it is all about, then you make some progress and then it perhaps comes to a halt at some point. Then you might try some other way. And you use both problem- and emotion-focused strategies”.* Another “new” manager said that: *“Coping is continuously changing, because the world and things develop and change all the time. On the one hand, you find new opportunities, but what follows from it is that you continuously have to develop your coping ways.”* One “old” specialist expressed the idea of the accumulation of coping efforts as follows: *“If some means does not work, I will try another one. This is an area that one does not even think about, somehow one just always finds new means.”* After the idea of accumulation was explained to one “new” manager, he just admitted: *“Yes, I think it is true.”*

Proposition 2B: Repatriates' coping efforts are likely to accumulate over time.

* * *

Initial conclusion 3: "In contrast to the specialists, the repatriates occupying higher-level organizational positions (managers) used a greater number and a greater variety of different forms of problem-focused strategy than emotion-focused strategy, especially in the context of preparing for the return and in different work role changes."

Seven informants confirmed the third conclusion. Since only two disagreed slightly with the contents of this conclusion, but did not present any arguments for their opinion, the initial conclusion remained unchanged. One old informant spoke about differences between specialists' and managers' coping efforts: *"I think this conclusion is logical, when I think about what types of people managers and specialists are. Those people who move to managerial positions have a different profile to those who work with specialist tasks, which can also be very demanding. When I think about our own organization, there is a clear difference between managers and specialists. I can imagine that specialists are a bit more passive in their coping, and that they are more emotional persons otherwise as well."* One "old" manager said: *"I think this is totally true. Maybe it is due to the fact that people in managerial positions confront so many different situations, and he or she acquires experience of them, and different perspectives. If one works as a specialist, he or she circles around his or her special area."* Another "old" manager explained: *"It is probably like that. A specialist's area [of knowledge] becomes deeper, but a manager's area becomes larger. Specialists might have a slightly different personality as well, they are not necessarily so extrovert, they might be more like researchers by nature."* Three informants did not see that the use of different coping efforts can differ according to the level of organizational position. One "old" specialist disagreed with the idea that managers use problem-focused strategy more and on a larger scale than emotion-focused strategy. He said: *"I do not recognize having used emotion-focused coping efforts in my work."* And another "new" specialist just commented: *"I don't see the existence of this kind of difference."*

Proposition 3: In contrast to specialists, repatriates occupying managerial positions are likely to use a greater number and a greater variety of different forms of problem-focused

strategy than emotion-focused strategy, especially in the context of preparing for the return and in different work role changes.

* * *

Initial conclusion 4: “The repatriates’ coping efforts in work tasks were linked to their identity formation processes. They could draw upon their increased self-confidence, and utilize their earlier experiences of coping when clarifying their new work tasks to themselves.”

All the informants fully agreed with the idea that international work experience had increased their own self-confidence and that they could utilize their experiences of coping efforts also in their repatriate work tasks. Most of them had received new positions and work tasks. One “new” specialist said: *“Yes, this is certainly true. It follows from that extended work experience, you get the feeling that you know that you know.”* One “new”, young manager found it very positive to be given the opportunity to try: *“My work there was much more independent, so that I could try things. That increases your self-confidence, when you can try things and you manage to do it.”* One “new” specialist commented on the utilization of earlier coping efforts at work: *“Because I have my own experience, I know what it is, I can compare and form my own picture of it. I have a more realistic picture, when somebody introduces something, I can see through it a bit more.”* One “old” manager confirmed the conclusion in the following words: *“Yes, I can agree on this. Of course it develops a human being, perhaps it also changes you, and gives you new perspectives. But on average, if it goes according to plan, yes, then it supports your self-confidence.”*

However, one informant suggested that when the challenges of repatriate work did not match the broader, increased international work experience and increased self-confidence, this might decrease the satisfaction with the repatriate work to some extent. Thus, the fourth conclusion was somewhat modified and enlarged based on the participants comments in order to better pinpoint the significance of a position in this context. One “new” specialist said: *“The increased self-confidence can be a drawback too. When I returned, I wondered how I would get used to the smaller circles and the paperwork, after having been used to working with much larger things. And typically these kinds of shipbuilding projects are*

very international, there are lots of people from different parts of the world, but here in Finland I work on a small project and in a very different type of position.”

Moreover, four informants commented on how they had witnessed how some expatriates had returned home before their assignment was completed, probably because of an inability either to handle the new responsibilities effectively or to cope with the demands in the host country. An “old” manager told me: *“If you fail on your assignment, you can get a very negative stigma, since it effects other colleagues’ esteem. It is more difficult for that person to proceed after that.”* A well-known metaphor among the repatriates to express the same thing seemed to be the following: *“Some guys come home with their tail between their legs”*. One “old” specialist said: *“Yes, it increases your self-confidence, but of course it depends on the outcome. Of course there are also cases that are not that successful, and it can go really badly. But I do not think it is that common.”* A “new” manager commented: *“Not everybody can adjust to living there, they just do not stand up to it.”*

Proposition 4: Repatriates’ coping strategies in work tasks are likely to link to their identity formation processes. They are likely to draw upon their increased self-confidence, and especially those who get new positions and new work tasks are likely to utilize their earlier experiences of coping when clarifying their new work tasks to themselves.

* * *

Initial conclusion 5: *“Coping with cultural demands in interaction and in communication both with colleagues and generally were linked to the repatriates’ identity changing processes. While, on the one hand, it triggered their demands, on the other hand, it enabled them to utilize their earlier experiences of coping with similar types of situations in the return phase.”*

The informants also agreed with the fifth conclusion that their coping efforts in interaction and communication were linked to their identity changing processes. Learning from experience provided them with a better equipped “toolbox” to cope with cultural demands upon their return. One “old” manager commented: *“I think it is clear, it does go like that. A human being is intelligent, and when you have learned something you can use those skills and that knowledge in different situations. I believe that living in different cultures*

develops your social skills. You have a more versatile arsenal than if you have lived in only one culture.” One “new” manager said: *“I would not like to say this aloud, but I have noticed a little more distrust here. But I have not cared about it that much. If somebody has questioned my assignment, I have told them, but if not, I have not told them.”* Another “new” manager commented on his way of presenting things: *“I have always had to think about this. In order to get you message across you have to think about who is there, to whom you want to present something. And like I said, a human being is a ‘learning animal’, it does not burn its fingers twice on the same hot coal.”* One “old” specialist referred to his large experience of earlier assignments and returns, and to what he had learned from his earlier experiences of coping: *“You have to remember the normal behaviour of a human being in the context of assignments. That is that you remember the positive things and forget the negative ones.”*

Proposition 5: Coping with cultural demands in interaction and in communication both with colleagues and generally are likely to link to the repatriates’ identity changing processes. This, on the one hand, is likely to trigger their coping demands, but, on the other hand, they are likely to utilize their earlier experiences of coping with similar types of situations in the return phase.

* * *

Initial conclusion 6A: “The repatriates with a more extended international experience and a deeper adjustment experience confronted cultural demands more often than those with less international experience.”

The informants basically confirmed the conclusion that repatriates with a more extended international experience and a deeper adjustment experience confronted cultural demands more often than those with less international experience. Still, this conclusion was slightly sharpened in order to better pinpoint the significance of the experience of living in the host culture on the assignment. This was done since the repatriates’ comments on this conclusion referred more to their experiences of the assignment itself than to their experiences of living in foreign cultures in general.

A “new” specialist confirmed the conclusion in the following words: *“If you have only spent a short time somewhere, you tend to construct stereotypes. But after spending a longer time somewhere, you understand things better. It depends on what kind of phase you are going through in your adjustment process, when you return; whether it feels like nothing is good or whether you have learned to accept and enjoy that lifestyle there. It might make your return adjustment much more difficult”*. One “old” specialist commented: *“It is certainly like that, that sentence is good, that ‘those with a deeper adjustment experience...’, if you never get deep into the society there, it does not influence your return adjustment that much.”* One “new” manager said: *“It has not been [a] totally steady [process], I had a somewhat strange feeling, I could have stayed on longer or something, but I now have got used to staying in Finland again”*. Another “new” manager explained: *“Being abroad without any breaks long enough makes your return much more difficult. There are also so many things that have changed in your brain cells.”*

Proposition 6A: Repatriates with a more extended international experience and especially with a deeper experience of living in the host culture, are likely to confront cultural demands more often than those with less international experience.

* * *

Initial conclusion 6B: To cope with these kinds of demands the repatriates employed both problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies.

Dealing with cultural demands by using both problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies was confirmed by the informants’ illustrative comments. Thus, the analysis did not point to any reasons to modify this conclusion. A “new” manager told me what he thought about his coping concerning cultural demands. His thoughts illustrate the use of an emotion-focused strategy, including a reference to his values: *“Perhaps the seasons come first, they give you some kind of reference; ‘this was in the spring’, and ‘that happened in the autumn and so on’...”*. One “new” specialist gave an example of looking for social support, one form of problem-focused coping: *“I have had a chat with other repatriates, and some of them miss being back there terribly. Even one visit over there is effective. You become stuck in a certain mood, and it does not disappear before you get the facts of that issue and visit [the former host country]. If you miss being there terribly, just pay a visit*

and it ends". The study revealed how one informant of the initial interviews had for example taken a strong position on some social issues, and how many things might irritate him. One "old" specialist had used emotion-focused coping and confirmed the conclusion: *"Yes it happens very easily. But it is difficult to change those kinds of things, it is too hard a nut to crack"*. One "old" manager analysed the changes in the psychological level during his return, he used emotion-focused coping. He described his changes in mood as follows: *"It depends on the time and culture. At the beginning it is very nice to be back in Finland. Then I had the kinds of feelings that I really wanted to leave at some point, then it was OK again. It kept changing, at least for me it was a kind of wave movement."*

Proposition 6B: In order to cope specifically with cultural demands, repatriates are likely to employ both problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies.

This chapter has introduced the conducting of the follow-up interviews in Phase II. It has also provided illustrations of the analysis of the feedback from the participants, and the initial conclusions were modified where necessary. The final chapter discusses the theoretical implications for repatriation, expatriation and coping research. After that it presents ideas for managerial implications. Finally, it discusses the limitations of the study and presents ideas for future research.

12. CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

This final chapter begins by summarizing the research, and presents the main findings formulated as propositions. Theoretical implications for repatriation, expatriation and coping research are discussed, and some implications for management practice are introduced. The final two sections address the limitations of the study, and suggestions for future research.

12.1. Summary

There exists a sizeable literature on repatriation; however, much of it is still quite limited. To increase the understanding on repatriates' behaviour upon the return, there is a need to go beyond only analysing the repatriates' adjustment during the repatriation process. In this dissertation I have argued that coping defined as a process might be a particularly fruitful approach to study repatriation. Therefore, the general aim of this study was to increase understanding on how repatriates cope with the demands of their return. The following two research questions have been addressed:

- 1) What coping strategies and forms of coping do repatriates use?
- 2) What might influence the use of their coping strategies and forms of coping?

The comparison between the concepts of adjustment and coping in Chapter 3 demonstrated that both adjustment and coping deal with the perceived uncertainty and the conditions that are experienced as threatening to individuals' well-being and psychological balance. Adjustment research does not examine an individual's ongoing efforts to deal with adjustment demands, but focuses rather on the endpoint or outcomes of the adjustment process. The process approach to coping focuses on a person's responses *per se* to demands in challenging or stressful conditions, and does not assume a particular fit or endpoint in the relationship between a person and their environment. In addition, coping defined as a process does not emphasize the outcomes of a person's behaviour. Therefore, by adopting a process approach to coping, it is possible to examine repatriates' reactions as such to the demands of their return.

This study utilizes the data from my licentiate study and reanalyses it through the process approach to coping, the main theoretical framework of this study. An identity formation

perspective was also included as a part of my theoretical framework. Linking identity development to coping was regarded as relevant, since theoretical argumentation on repatriation assumes identity to be important when individuals confront demands upon their return (Black et al. 1992, 46). Coping theory (Lazarus and Folkman 1984) also discusses individuals' resources and abilities to handle stressful demands. Hence, it is reasonable to assume that individuals' views of themselves impact their coping efforts.

The qualitative data used for this study involved 22 initial interviews in Phase I, and ten follow-up interviews in Phase II. The data from the initial interviews was analysed by applying the process approach to coping. Based on the analysis of the data from Phase I, and the results of Phase II, the main findings of this study were formulated as propositions in Chapter 11. These propositions are as follows:

Proposition 1: Repatriates are likely to use different forms of problem-focused strategy more often than various forms of emotion-focused strategy. Moreover, they are also likely to use a larger range of problem-focused strategies than of emotion-focused strategies.

Proposition 2A: Repatriates are likely to shift between different forms of coping strategies, depending on the situation and the coping demands.

Proposition 2B: Repatriates' coping efforts are likely to accumulate over time.

Proposition 3: In contrast to specialists, repatriates occupying managerial positions are likely to use a greater number and a greater variety of different forms of problem-focused strategy than of emotion-focused strategy, especially in the context of preparing for their return and in different work role changes.

Proposition 4: Repatriates' coping strategies in work tasks are likely to link to their identity formation processes. They are likely to draw upon their increased self-confidence, and especially those who obtain new positions and new work tasks are likely to utilize their earlier experiences of coping when clarifying their new work tasks to themselves.

Proposition 5: Coping with cultural demands in interaction and in communication both with colleagues and generally is likely to link to the repatriates' identity changing

processes. This, on the one hand, is likely to trigger their coping demands, but, on the other hand, they are likely to utilize their earlier experiences of coping in similar situations in the return phase.

Proposition 6A: Repatriates with a more extended international experience and especially with a deeper experience of living in the host culture, are likely to confront cultural demands more often than those with less international experience.

Proposition 6B: To cope with cultural demands repatriates are likely to employ both problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies.

12.2. Implications for research

12.2.1. Repatriation research

By using qualitative research methods and applying the concept of coping defined as a process to repatriation, this study mainly seeks to make a contribution to repatriation research. The focus is particularly on identifying Finnish business repatriates' coping strategies, and forms of coping. The study also focuses on what might influence their use of coping strategies. In addition, this research utilizes qualitative methods, which have been relatively rare in research on repatriation.

Most earlier studies on repatriation have focused on identifying factors affecting readjustment upon returning to the home country (see, for instance, Black, Gregersen and Mendenhall 1992a). Thus, much of repatriates' responses to the demands of the return have remained unexplored. Repatriation can include many simultaneous life events, thus exposing individuals to various kinds of coping demands in both their professional and private life spheres. This study attempts to increase knowledge and understanding of a repatriate's behaviour when he or she goes through repatriation. The multidimensional quality and contents of the repatriates' coping responses are illustrated. The repatriates used different forms of problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies simultaneously in different situations in order to deal with demands in both their working and non-working life. The findings add to previous studies on repatriation by describing the repatriates' responses to the demands of the return in three different areas. First, the study describes the repatriates' responses to the demands in the context of preparing for the return, in work role

changes, in interaction and communication in the home unit, and outside working life. Second, the repatriates' coping efforts both accumulated and changed. Third, the repatriates' coping and identity development were related to each other.

In the study it was found that many repatriates face considerable uncertainties towards the complementation of the assignment, and therefore experience a lack of clarity in the return arrangements. The study thus both confirms earlier research results on repatriation (Black et al. 1992a) and brings some new insights on repatriates' responses to these types of demands. The study reveals what kind of questions they have to struggle with or work with, and what seems to motivate them when repatriating. Therefore, these issues should be addressed in pre-return training for repatriates. The clarity of the return concerned two important issues: finishing the assignment and finding a suitable return position in the home organization. The repatriates used mostly problem-focused coping strategies to clarify for themselves when exactly to finish the assignment. It was also important to start the negotiations for the return position already during the expatriation period, and therefore many of the repatriates' problem-focused coping strategies were directed towards keeping in touch with the home company. The repatriates were aware of the risks of the return and became active and self-directed in order to find themselves a suitable return position.

Previous studies have frequently shown repatriates' uncertain career opportunities and revealed that repatriates often leave their company upon return (Black and Gregersen 1999). However, a more detailed analysis of how repatriates respond to these kinds of setbacks has been rare. This study demonstrated repatriates' frustrations when they experienced disappointment and how this was also reflected in their coping strategies outside working life. Interestingly, the repatriates mostly aimed to improve an unsatisfying situation within their home company. Though disappointments threatened their organizational commitment, it was still so strong that with the help of their contacts most of them found better positions inside their home company. Yet, handling disappointments called upon deeper reflections on their career stage and the opportunities available to them.

Some differences were found between the managers' and the specialists' coping behaviour. Coping with work role changes demonstrated that the specialists had less opportunities to change their roles, and hence, the use of emotion-focused strategies often framed their coping behaviour. This confirms Nicholson's (1984) idea of work adjustment as personal

development, as the specialists engaged in forms of "inner negotiations" in their coping. The managers had more opportunities than the specialists to manipulate their work roles by using problem-focused coping strategies, which can be described as role development (Nicholson 1984).

The repatriates' coping efforts were analysed in terms of their relationship with social interaction and communication. The findings contribute to repatriation research by detailing the repatriates' behaviour in interaction with their colleagues. These issues should also be included in pre-return training. Though social interaction has been identified as one of the central dimensions of expatriation and repatriation (Black, Gregersen and Mendenhall 1992b), there is a dearth of earlier studies on this issue. Because of their expatriate experience, the repatriates were often experienced as threats by other colleagues. Dealing with this kind of tension called upon both emotion-focused and problem-focused coping efforts. The repatriates tried to continuously balance engagement and disengagement in the interpersonal relationships in the home unit's work community. The repatriates' were often found to get involved in "emotion-work", for instance, controlling themselves, carefully considering how to present themselves in appropriate ways, and dealing with their co-workers' feelings.

The results showed the repatriates' reactions to cultural differences. Coping with cultural demands meant engagement in self-reflection and inner negotiations concerning the repatriates' values, attitudes, prejudices, and hopes for the future. Especially those repatriates who had a more extended international experience and deeper experience of living in the host country confronted more cultural demands. The repatriates occupied a kind of hybrid position, which was related to their increased cultural awareness and sensitivity, and coping demands in social interaction and communication.

Coping outside working life indicated that the repatriates very willingly returned to their former hobbies. The social aspect of hobbies seemed to be particularly important; hobbies were used as an arena to find social support. Linking the repatriates' free-time activities to their social life is new as compared to previous studies that have tended to treat these issues separately.

Another contribution of the present study is that it was found that the repatriates' coping efforts changed and accumulated over time. They used a wide range of coping strategies and implemented them in a variety of sequences. The cumulative pattern of repatriates' coping efforts was identified when they acquired their return positions, and coped with their new work tasks. Changes in positions also prompted coping demands in social interaction and communication with their co-workers and superiors. Moreover, the repatriates' coping efforts accumulated in the context of coping with cultural demands outside working life.

Linking the identity formation perspective to repatriates' coping efforts is relevant for repatriation research. Identity is important in repatriation, but not many previous studies have focused on how identity is related to repatriates' behaviour upon their return. This study has utilized Watson's (1994), and Watson and Harris's (1999) ideas on managerial identity as "emergent", and applied them to the repatriation context. This was particularly relevant in the work domain, since coping with new challenges in the repatriate job continuously called upon the further construction of identity. To cope with their work challenges, the repatriates usually used problem-focused coping efforts leaning on their increased self-confidence, and changed or expanded occupational identity. Identity development as "emergent" was also relevant in coping with the demands of interaction.

I have also analysed how the repatriates' identity might develop through linguistic discourses (cf. Potter and Wetherell 1987, 102). Moreover, identification with "insiders" and/or "outsiders" (Kondo 1990; Watson 1994, 1999; Watson and Harris 1999) might influence repatriates' identity shaping. These ideas have been further elaborated on by showing that repatriates' identity formation is continuously reconstructed and that this process might influence their coping efforts. The repatriates were in a nexus of various identity development processes, and responding to various demands both in occupational and personal life during expatriation changed their view of themselves, which, in turn, was linked to their coping in the return phase.

12.2.2. Expatriation research

The repatriates used many identifiable forms of coping strategies during the whole expatriation process (see Table 6). For instance, in the preparation phase the expatriates prepared for leaving the assignment earlier or staying longer based on their earlier

experiences. Coping with new work tasks called upon many coping efforts, such as internalization of new power relationships. In general, coping with work role changes is particularly relevant for expatriates, since they typically work in different roles and with new challenges than prior to leaving for the assignment. The repatriates aimed to further develop or change their standards of behaviour when confronting challenges in interaction. Similarly, expatriates are also likely to confront demands of interaction and communication. Engaging in social hobbies in their leisure time was important for the repatriates. Correspondingly, individuals might find engaging in leisure time activities and hobbies significant while on their assignments.

Another implication for expatriation research is the accumulation and shifting of coping efforts, which very likely concern expatriates' coping as well. Moreover, linking identity changes to expatriates' coping is relevant, since expatriate experiences might strongly shape individuals' views of themselves.

12.2.3. Coping research

Coping has been studied in many different contexts (see Titterton 1989), but few attempts have been made (Feldman and Thompson 1993; McDonald and Arthur 2003) to apply the coping perspective to a repatriation context. Therefore, this study adds to coping research, and in addition the focus is particularly on Finnish business repatriates' coping. The results confirm the existence of the two main coping strategies of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping efforts (Lazarus and Folkman 1984). A contribution to coping research is that in this study certain, previously unidentified forms of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies were found. The repatriates' coping efforts changed and accumulated over time, and therefore the results support the process approach to coping.

The repatriates' coping efforts accumulated when they tried to increase their possibilities to find new return positions. Dealing with disappointments in the immediate return positions concerned only a few repatriates in these situations found to be associated with an accumulation of their coping efforts. Acquiring new positions and coping with new work tasks further demanded implementation of various forms of coping strategies, which were typically problem-focused. Accumulation of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping efforts were also identified in the context of social interaction and communication with co-

workers and superiors. Due to the changes in their positions, some repatriates were experienced as threats by their colleagues. This caused tension in social interaction, which triggered the repatriates' coping efforts. Moreover, the cumulative pattern of coping efforts was noted in the context of coping with cultural demands outside working life when the repatriates, especially those with extended international experience and deeper experience of living in the host country culture, passed through different phases of their repatriation.

The repatriates' coping behaviour in social situations both in their working life and spare time has implications for the approach to coping that considers the social aspects of coping. This involves the impact of individual coping on social relationships and vice versa (see for instance Berghuis and Stanton 2002). Further, linking the repatriates' identity development to their coping strategies has implications for the discussion of the linkages between coping, meaning, and positive emotions. Integrating the occurrence of the stressor with one's beliefs about the world and the self (Janoff-Bulman 1989, 1999) has been stated as important in coping with severe stress. Coping processes as related to positive emotions also includes linkages to the individuals' values, beliefs, and goals that comprise the individuals' sense of meaning (Folkman 1997). Correspondingly, this study indicated that the repatriates' increased self-confidence and changes in values were related to their identity development processes and coping behaviour.

Future research could focus more on the social aspects of repatriates' coping. The linkages between repatriates' identity development, emotions, and coping could also be more fully addressed in future studies. I will return to this in the last section of this chapter.

12.3. Managerial implications

The repatriates' subjective experiences of demands and challenges and the coping strategies that they employed to overcome them point out some key issues that are important to understanding repatriation. However, it should be noticed that the companies that participated in the study neither had an official expatriation policy nor any special material for pre-return training.

Particularly in the context of preparing for the return and in work role changes the findings of this study indicate that repatriates themselves can play a remarkable part in their

repatriation, and not be totally dependent on their companies' support functions. However, this does not mean that repatriates or expatriates should be left on their own at the critical stage of finishing the assignment and returning back to their home country.

Concerning the exact timing of finishing the assignment it appeared that foreign assignments were sometimes prolonged, or there was a transition phase during which the returning expatriate simultaneously did both expatriate and repatriate work typically including intensive travelling between countries. These types of situations were quite typical and demanded flexibility and coping efforts from the expatriates. Sometimes, due to the lack of clarity around the timing of the return, the expatriates had to be very proactive themselves to reduce uncertainty related to the ending of their assignments. Clarifying the timing of the actual return would make both leaving the expatriate work and preparing for the return, including all practical arrangements, much less complicated for an expatriate.

Other important issues that very much triggered the interviewees' coping strategies were the relocation to the home organization, finding the suitable return position and various work role changes linked to it. Job changes should be made in mutual agreement between the returning expatriate and the company, ensuring a high level of communication and giving the expatriate opportunities to clearly express his or her hopes and opinions concerning his or her repatriate position and work.

In addition, in line with earlier research results (for example, Bonache and Brewster 2001), a job change could give repatriates opportunities to utilize their international work experience as well as opening up opportunities for further personal and professional growth and development. Many repatriates found even an unclear work role as a good opportunity to utilize their work experience, rather than seeing it as something negative. Offering repatriates the possibility to start in a new position and with new work tasks, or at least with somewhat different work tasks, creates opportunities for their further development. It is also important to provide the repatriate with opportunities to utilize his or her international contacts to further share the knowledge acquired during the expatriate work experience.

The findings concerning work role changes have implications for how employees cope with organizational changes and restructuring. The repatriates went through many changes in their work roles during the repatriation, for instance, in terms of work role clarity or

discretion. Companies should be aware that during organizational change and restructuring, employees might also be subjected to several work role changes, which are not necessarily experienced as positive ones.

The role of the receiving work community, managers as well as co-workers, turned out to be important for repatriation. Correspondingly, employees in situations of organizational change and restructuring might confront similar types of coping demands. Thus, efforts to improve interactional relationships in the receiving work community and encourage open discussion would simultaneously very likely facilitate a repatriate's repositioning and positive interaction with his or her colleagues. Both the returning expatriates and the home unit's work community should be more aware of what it means to go through an expatriation process. This issue includes, for instance, deeper awareness of identity changes, and challenges in intercultural communication. Awareness could be spread through pre-return training addressed at both the repatriate him- or herself and at the home unit's work community.

Companies could develop systems for collecting feedback from former expatriates and repatriates that could be used as material in pre-return training programmes. Moreover, the home units may consider offering possibilities for a repatriate to locate his or her office space among familiar colleagues to enhance his or her possibilities for receiving social and emotional support. Also different kinds of informal social activities could be developed, where recently returned employees could meet and share their experiences with former expatriates.

12.4. Limitations of the study

Two important aspects of methodological limitations concern validity and reliability. The following three tests presented by Yin (2003, 35-38) are discussed for evaluating the validity and reliability of this research: construct validity, external validity, and reliability:

- *construct validity*: establishing correct operational measures for the concepts being studied
- *external validity*: establishing the domain to which a study's findings can be generalized
- *reliability*: demonstrating that the operations of a study – such as the data collection procedures – can be repeated, with the same results. Reliability concerns, first, the description of the research procedures (the accuracy of their documentation), and second, the

results of a case study. Yin (1994) suggests using a case study protocol and developing a case study database as ways of increasing reliability in case studies.

I will first discuss the construct validity of the findings in Phase I. Though I did not use specific measurements, the construct validity test is still relevant for this study. The interview questions have been formulated based on the theoretical framework introduced by Black, Gregersen and Mendenhall (1992a) and on earlier studies on repatriates' adjustment. However, the conceptual framework on coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) has mainly guided the data analysis. Construct validity has been increased by comparing the concept of coping defined as a process to the concept of adjustment. Coping defined as a process has been used as the key concept in the data analysis. Despite certain differences between the concepts of adjustment and the process approach to coping discussed earlier, they share a relation to the same social substance. Both focus on the relationship between a person and an environment perceived as somehow problematic or uncertain. Moreover, both concepts focus on the linkages between a person's experiences of stress, changes of behaviour, and well-being in that particular relationship.

Second, the reliability of the findings in Phase I has been improved by using a case study protocol. In practice, particular rules were followed in the conduct of the interviews. In addition, a database was established by preserving the tape-recorded interviews and transcriptions of them in MS word files, documenting company information, and documenting background information of the informants in order to provide an opportunity to check the data of the study.

Phase II, which entailed conducting the follow-up interviews and verifying the findings based on the interviewees' feedback, strengthens the external validity of the findings.

The reliability of the feedback information in Phase II is weakened by the fact that the "old" informants did not necessarily remember their experiences of repatriation and coping very well anymore. Another weakness is the informants' tendency to see problem-focused strategy as superior to emotion-focused strategy, and ignoring the profitability of emotion-focused coping efforts in some situations. There might also have been difficulties for some interviewees in understanding theoretical definitions of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategy, particularly in recognizing the use of emotion-focused coping

strategy. Another explanation for the informants' motivation to highlight the superiority of problem-focused strategy might be due to how they wanted to present themselves to the researcher.

Moreover, the reliability of the method in Phase II is influenced by the fact that the situation of the "old" participants is more complicated compared to that of the "new" ones. The point in time of the initial interviews is different to that of the interviews in Phase II, since in this phase there might have been other processes going on that might influence the interviewees' opinions. Another point is that it is unclear to what extent they reflected on themselves or on the conclusions.

In earlier research on repatriates' adjustment scholars have often used quantitative methods and concentrated on identifying factors that influence adjustment. As looking at repatriation from a coping perspective has been largely neglected, the present study has sought to increase understanding of repatriates' behaviour upon the return. The Phase I data was originally collected for a different purpose, for studying factors that influence repatriates' adjustment. Although the Phase I data does contain many references to the repatriates' coping strategies, future studies are encouraged to focus specifically on coping behaviour.

The data used for this study stems from interviews conducted partially over time, but they are not longitudinal in a strict sense. It has therefore provided limited possibilities for identifying shifts and accumulation in repatriates' coping efforts. In future research, longitudinal data – ideally collected in real time – would provide a more complete picture of repatriates' coping efforts as a process, and provide opportunities to uncover other coping strategies not identified by this study.

Further, the data has limitations in terms of causality. Future studies would benefit from focusing more on the linkages between identity formation and coping in order to advance knowledge of causality. Moreover, most of the interviewees in this study occupied managerial positions, while only a few of them were specialists. Therefore, the results on what might influence the usage of coping strategies, and their various forms, might be biased. In addition, because of the small sample size, and the fact that most of the interviewees came from one certain region of Finland, the findings on experienced cultural differences, and how that was reflected in the interviewees' identity formation process

might be limited in terms of generalizing them to larger populations in Finland and other countries. Coping with cultural demands is an even more critical issue for repatriates in countries that are culturally distant to their home country. In addition to the small sample size, the fact that this study included participants from companies that did not have any official international assignments policy brings limitations in terms of generalization to a larger population.

Therefore, future research needs to sample repatriates from different organizational levels more broadly, from longer-term assignments, and expatriates returning from countries culturally more distanced in order to better uncover coping strategies in different contexts. Also, those expatriates who return to other countries than Finland should be included in future studies' samples. Expatriates returning to other regions of Finland and receiving, respectively not receiving pre-return training should be included in samples for comparative purposes. Moreover, those repatriates' coping efforts who have left their companies soon after return could be compared to those who have stayed in their companies. There might be substantial differences between groups of repatriates in terms of sample characteristics.

12.5. Suggestions for future research

This study has aimed to identify repatriates' coping strategies, their different forms of coping, and what might influence the use and forms of their coping strategies. However, there are still many possible aspects of these phenomena that would deepen and enrich knowledge and understanding of repatriation.

This study indicated the significance of the new repatriate work role including new work tasks and the possibility to utilize the international work experience more fully for motivating the repatriates to use problem-focused strategies. Future research could benefit from taking an even closer look on this issue and explore it more in detail, for example, regarding what kind of global mindsets repatriates have developed and how these mindsets might be related to their identity development and coping behaviour (cf. Kedia and Mukherji 1999). According to Rhinesmith (1993, 24), "a global mindset means the ability to scan the world from a broad perspective, always looking for unexpected trends and opportunities that may constitute a threat or an opportunity to achieve personal, professional and organizational objectives". This research topic could be further developed

by investigating how expatriates' and repatriates' identity changes are part of global mindsets and coping efforts within repatriate work tasks, and vice versa.

The findings on repatriates' coping with cultural demands indicate that cultural learning is a multi-faceted construct. More detailed analysis is needed on how changes in values, attitudes and priorities might be linked to repatriates' coping strategies, and how these issues affect repatriates' willingness to accept future foreign assignments.

Until now, research has paid relatively little attention to interactional relationships between the repatriate and his or her work community. This study has shown how significant a role the receiving work community occupies in repatriation. Thus, researchers could further explore the different coping strategies central to interaction and communication by including, besides the experiences of the repatriates', the perspectives of different focal actors, for example superiors', into the sample. Also, the handling of emotions seemed to be central in this context and as such needs a more detailed investigation.

By including some findings on the repatriates' coping strategies outside working life, the present study has tried to approach the issue from a more holistic perspective. In order to develop this perspective even further, more detailed data should be collected about repatriates' social relationships in general, their relationships to other family members and the role of family members for his or her repatriation in particular. Social support was identified as one problem-focused or emotion-focused coping strategy in this study. As with socializing with colleagues, the contents of repatriates' social support could also be studied further. Seeman, Seeman and Sayles (1985) see social support as a complex and multi-faceted construct. In receiving social support an individual's own control can play a significant role. Without this element it cannot be assumed that social support is solely good or adequate for an individual's well-being. However, when there is a suitable correspondence between the quantity and quality of social support and an individual's need for social support, it has been found to be a good buffer against stress – assuming that those giving the social support are not the source of stress in the first place (Hearn 1998, 149).

It is also important to consider that foreign work experiences and types of assignments are much more diversified nowadays, for instance, assignments can be short-term and project-based. Employees do not necessarily return to their home country, but may take on another

assignment in some other country. They might have several contracts simultaneously. In these types of complex situations the categories of “expatriate” and “repatriate” may be insufficient, as might be “home country” and “host country”. Therefore, in future studies much more attention should be paid to such more complex aspects of expatriation and repatriation that bring greater and different challenges for international human resources management, in both research and practice, for researchers, managers and specialists.

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Etla: personal discussion 15.3.2004

Appendix 1. Initial conclusions after Phase I

1: The repatriates used different forms of problem-focused strategy more often than the various forms of emotion-focused strategy. They also used a larger range of problem-focused strategies than emotion-focused strategies.

2A: The repatriates shifted between different forms of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies, depending on the situation and the coping demands.

2B: The repatriates' coping efforts might also accumulated over time.

3: In contrast to the specialists, the repatriates occupying higher-level organizational positions (managers) used a greater number and a greater variety of different forms of problem-focused strategy than emotion-focused strategy, especially in the context of preparing for the return and in different work role changes.

4: The repatriates' coping efforts in work tasks were linked to their identity formation processes. They could draw upon their increased self-confidence, and utilize their earlier experiences of coping when clarifying to themselves their new work tasks.

5. Coping with cultural demands in interaction and in communication both with colleagues and generally were linked to the repatriates' identity changing processes as well. While it, on the one hand, triggered their demands, on the other hand, they could utilize their earlier experiences of coping with similar types of situations in the return phase.

6A: The repatriates with more extended international experience and a deeper experience of living abroad confronted cultural demands more often than those with less international experience.

6B: To cope with these kinds of demands the repatriates employed both problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies.

Appendix 2. Initial conclusions after Phase I in Finnish

1: Tutkimustulosten mukaan repatriaatit käyttivät enemmän erilaisia ongelmanratkaisukeskeisen selviytymisstrategian muotoja kuin erilaisia tunteiden käsittelyyn liittyvän selviytymisstrategian muotoja. Toisin sanoen, he käyttivät laajempaa skaalaa ongelmanratkaisukeskeisestä selviytymisstrategiasta kuin tunteiden käsittelyyn liittyvästä strategiasta.

2.A: Repatriaatit vaihtelivat erilaisia selviytymisstrategioitaan näiden kahden päätyypin, ongelmanratkaisukeskeisen ja tunteiden käsittelyyn liittyvien strategioiden välillä.

2B: Näin selviytymisstrategiat voivat myös kasautua pitkällä aikavälillä.

3: Johtoasemassa työskentelevät repatriaatit käyttivät asiantuntijoita enemmän erilaisia ongelmanratkaisukeskeisen selviytymisstrategian muotoja kuin tunteiden käsittelyyn liittyviä keinoja, erityisesti paluuseen valmistautumisen yhteydessä ja varsinaisten paluutyötehtävien yhteydessä.

4: Repatriaattien selviytymisstrategiat paluutyössä liittyivät heidän identiteetissään tapahtuneisiin muutoksiin. Heidän itseluottamuksensa oli kasvanut ja he hyödynsivät aikaisempia kokemuksiaan selviytymisstrategioiden käytöstä selvittääkseen itselleen paluutyöhön liittyvät uudet työtehtävät.

5: Kulttuurierojen kokeminen ja niiden yhteydessä käytetyt selviytymisstrategiat liittyivät vuorovaikutukseen ja kommunikaatioon työtovereiden kanssa että yleensä muidenkin ihmisten kanssa. Myös näiden selviytymisstrategioiden käyttö liittyi repatriaattien identiteetin muutoksiin. Toisaalta kulttuurierojen kohtaaminen käynnisti selviytymiskeinojen hyödyntämistä ja toisaalta repatriaatit saattoivat nojautua oppimiskokemuksiinsa ja hyödyntää aiempia kokemuksiaan samankaltaisista tilanteista.

6A: Ne repatriaatit, joilla oli laajempi kansainvälinen kokemus ja/tai heillä oli enemmän kokemusta elämisestä ulkomailla, kokivat enemmän kulttuurien välisiä eroja kuin ne, joilla oli vähemmän kansainvälistä kokemusta.

6B: Kulttuurierojen käsittelyssä repatriaatit käyttivät sekä ongelmaratkaisukeskeisen strategian että tunteiden käsittelyyn liittyvän strategian eri muotoja.

Appendix 3. Interview questions in English

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Background information

When were you born?

What is your marital status?

What is your educational background?

Number of children during the assignment:	under school age?	at school age?
after the assignment:	under school age?	at school age?

The Corporation

What is the industry area of the company?

How many years have you worked in the company?

What was your position during the assignment?

What was your position before the last assignment?

In which position do you work currently?

How many years have you worked in this current position?

On how many foreign assignments have you been in this company?

On how many foreign assignments have you been in other companies?

How long was your recent assignment?

Where have you been on the assignment?

When have you returned to Finland?

Anticipatory adjustment

In what ways and how often did you have contacts to the home unit during the assignment?

Did contacts to the home unit help you keep yourself up-to-date during the assignment?

Did you have a specific sponsor in the home unit, who had informed you about the possible changes and what had happened?

Did you have a specific contact person in Finland who had informed you about the changes and what has happened?

If you had, how do you comment his work?

Did you have a sponsor during the assignment? If you had, what do you think about his role in your adjustment?

Did your company pay your trips to Finland?

How did your company prepare your return back to Finland?

Was there any pre-return training? During the assignment and/or after it?

How did your prepare for the return or together with the family?

What kind of expectations did you have concerning the return, or in general?

Post-return adjustment

How do you spend your leisure time?

Has your assignment changed your identity? How?

Has the assignment effected your development as a person? How?

If you felt any stress during the return, did you try to reduce it somehow?

Have your relationships to your relatives, friends and other family members changed?

Have you kept in touch with those people who you met on the assignment?

How was the host country culture as compared to the Finnish culture?

To what features or habits of the Finnish culture have you paid attention to, and what has demanded you to get use to?

How has your adjustment to the host culture effected your return adjustment?

How would you describe your adjustment on the assignment?

What things have facilitated it and what not?

How long has the return adjustment taken?

How has your expatriate experience influenced your views on Finland, company, co-workers or the way the company takes care of business?

How has the social environment reacted to your changed views? How has this influenced your communication and interaction with the social environment?

How do you think the time you have spent abroad (extended international experience) has influenced your return adjustment?

How clear was your work role in the return position?

How would you describe your work role discretion?

Is your repatriate work role discretion different as compared to your expatriate work role?

How would you describe your return position as compared to that one on the assignment?

What is your return position? The same as before leaving for the assignment or a new one?

How has your return position influenced on your work effectivity?

Has the company somehow considered your assignment when you returned?

Have you been able to use your expatriate work experience at your return work?

What have you learned at your expatriate work?

Are there any differences between organizational cultures between the home unit and the foreign unit and how does it occur?

When did you get to know the exact date of your return?

Did have any holiday when returning?

What kind of expectations did you have concerning your return? Have they become fulfilled?

What was the most difficult at your work?

Did you get any support from your work-mates and superiors?

How has the assignment effected your plans of your career?

How has it affected your commitment to your company? Especially the return phase?

How do you estimate the significance of the return adjustment considering whether you want to stay in the same company or move to somewhere else?

Did your salary change as compared to the salary of your expatriate work?

If you get any benefits during the assignment, have they somehow been taken account when you returned?

How is your standard of living as compared to that one on the assignment?

Has your social status somehow changed?

Have the home company helped you with practical arrangements, like with housing? Was there any need for that?

Did your spouse or partner work during the assignment?

What did she start to do after the assignment?

How have your other family members adjusted back to Finland?

If there have been any difficulties, what might have caused them?

What do you understand with 'adjustment'?

Do you recognize different phases in your return adjustment process (U-curve), how long did the adjustment take, and was it different at work and elsewhere?

What is your opinion, how well have you readjusted to Finland?

If you have any experiences of earlier returns, do you think that has somehow affected your return adjustment?

How could the functions of the HRM become further developed concerning returnees or a company?

Would you like to leave for an assignment again?

Is there something else you would like to discuss or add?

Appendix 4. Interview questions in Finnish

HAASTATTELUKYSYMYKSET

Taustatiedot

Kuinka vanha olet?

Mikä on siviilisäätyysi?

Mikä koulutus sinulla on?

Lasten lukumäärä komennuksen aikana:	alle kouluikäiset ?	koulussa?
paluun jälkeen:	alle kouluikäisiä ?	koulussa?

Yritys

Millä alalla yritys, jossa työskentelet, toimii?

Kuinka monta vuotta olet ollut tämän yrityksen palveluksessa?

Mikä toimi sinulla oli komennuksen aikana?

Mikä toimi sinulla oli ennen viimeistä ulkomaankomennusta?

Missä toimessa työskentelet nyt?

Kuinka monta vuotta olet työskennellyt tässä toimessa?

Kuinka monella ulkomaankomennuksella olet ollut tässä yrityksessä?

Kuinka monella komennuksella olet ollut muiden yritysten palveluksessa?

Kuinka kauan viimeisin komennuksesi kesti?

Missä olit komennuksella?

Milloin palasit Suomeen?

Lähtöä edeltävä sopeutuminen

Miten ja miten paljon olit yhteydessä Suomen konttoriin komennuksen aikana?
Auttoiko yhteydenpito pysymään ajan tasalla yhtiön tapahtumista?

Oliko sinulla erityisesti nimetty yhteyshenkilö Suomen konttorissa, joka olisi informoinut tapahtumista ja muutoksista?

Jos oli, miten kommentoit hänen työpanostaan?

Oliko komennuksen aikana asemamaassa sponsori? Jos oli, miten arvioit hänen rooliaan sopeutumisesi kannalta?

Kustansiko yrityksesi matkoja Suomeen?

Miten yritys valmisteli paluutasi Suomeen?

Oliko paluukoulutusta? Komennuksen aikana ja/tai paluun jälkeen?

Miten valmistauduit omatoimisesta tai yhdessä perheen kanssa paluuseen?

Millaisia odotuksia sinulla oli kotimaahan paluun suhteen (yleensä)?

Paluun jälkeinen sopeutuminen

Miten selvä työroolisi (työtehtävät) oli siinä toimessa, johon palasit?

Miten paljon voit käyttää työssäsi omaa harkintavaltaa (mitä ja millä tavoin työskentelet)?

Miten tämä eroaa komennuksen aikaisesta työstäsi, onko työn itsenäisyys muuttunut?

Miten kuvailisit paluun jälkeistä tointa verrattuna komennuksen aikaiseen toimeen?

Minkä toimen saitte komennuksen jälkeen? Saman, uuden?

Miten paluun jälkeinen toimi on vaikuttanut työtehokkuuteesi?

Millä tavalla yritys on huomionnut ulkomaankomennuksen palattuasi?

Oletko voinut hyödyntää komennustyökokemusta, kielitaitoa paluutyössä?

Mitä olet oppinut?

Eroavatko organisaatiokulttuurit (komennusmaan yksikössä ja kotimaan yksikössä) ja missä asioissa se ilmenee?

Milloin saitte tietää kotiinpaluustanne?

Saitteko riittävästi paluuseen liittyvää tietoa?

Oliko paluuvaiheessa lomaa, sopeutumisaikaa?

Millaisia työtä koskevia odotuksia sinulla oli paluun yhteydessä? Ovatko ne täyttyneet?

Mikä työssäsi oli vaikeinta paluun jälkeen?

Saitko paluun jälkeisessä työssäsi tukea muilta työtovereilta, esimiehiltä?

Miten komennus on yleensä vaikuttanut uraasi, urasuunnitelmiisi?

Miten se on vaikuttanut sitoutumiseesi yritykseen? Erityisesti paluuvaihe?

Miten arvioit paluusopeutumisen merkitystä siltä kannalta haluaako jäädä yritykseen tai vaihtaa muualle?

Muuttuiko palkkasi verrattuna komennustyöstäsi saamaasi palkkaan?

Jos sait komennuksen aikana joitakin etuisuuksia, niin onko niitä jotenkin huomioitu paluun jälkeen?

Millainen on elintasosi verrattuna komennuksen aikaiseen tilanteeseen?

Onko sosiaalinen statuksenne mielestänne muuttunut?

Onko kotimaan yritys auttanut järjestelyasioissa (asuminen)? Olisiko siihen ollut tarvetta?

Miten vietät vapaa-aikaasi? (harrastukset yms.)

Millä tavalla komennus on muuttanut käsitystäsi itsestäsi? (ammattillinen osaaminen)

Millä tavalla se on vaikuttanut kehitykseesi ihmisenä?

Jos koit paluuvaiheen stressaavaksi, pyritkö joillakin erityisillä keinoilla vähentämään stressiä?

Ovatko suhteesi ystäviin, sukulaisiin tai perheenjäseniisi muuttuneet?

Oletko komennuksen jälkeen pitänyt yhteyttä komennuksella tapaamiisi ihmisiin?

Millainen oli komennusmaan kulttuuri verrattuna suomalaisen kulttuuriin?

Mihin suomalaisen kulttuurin piirteisiin/tapoihin olet kiinnittänyt huomiota paluun jälkeen tai mitkä ovat vaatineet totuttelua?

Miten mielestäsi siirtyminen komennusmaan kulttuurista suomalaisen kulttuuriin on vaikuttanut sopeutumiseesi?

Miten kuvailisit sopeutumistasi ulkomailla?

Mitkä asiat ovat helpottaneet tai vaikeuttaneet sitä?

Miten paljon aikaa on mielestäsi kulunut paluusopeutumiseesi?

Miten komennus on vaikuttanut käsityksiisi Suomesta, yrityksestä, työtovereista tai yrityksen tavasta hoitaa liikeasioita?

Miten ympäristö on suhtautunut muuttuneisiin käsityksiisi? Miten tämä on vaikuttanut kommunikaatioon?

Miten arvioit ulkomailla kaikkiaan viettämäsi ajan (laajentunut kansainvälinen kokemus) vaikutusta paluusopeutumiseesi?

Työskentelikö vaimonne komennuksen aikana?

Mitä hän ryhtyi tekemään komennuksen jälkeen?

Miten muut perheenjäsenesi/puolisosi ovat sopeutuneet takaisin Suomeen?

Jos on ollut jotain vaikeuksia, niin mistä ne ovat lähinnä johtuneet?

Mitä mielestäsi on sopeutuminen, miten sen ymmärrät?

Tunnistatko sopeutumisprosessissasi erilaisia vaiheita (U-käyrä), kauanko sopeutuminen kesti, ja oliko se erilaista työssä/muualla?

Miten hyvin olet mielestäsi sopeutunut takaisin?

Jos sinulla on kokemusta aiemmista paluista, miten kertynyt kokemus mielestäsi vaikuttaa?

Miten henkilöstöhallinnon toimia voitaisiin kehittää paluun edistämiseksi, palaajien kannalta ja yrityksen kannalta?

Haluaisitko lähteä uudelle komennukselle?

Onko jotain muuta mieleen tullutta tai haluaisitko lisätä jotain?

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