

The impact of characteristics of expatriation on expatriates' perceived career success



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Research in Public Administration and Organizational Science

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Abstract

The impact of expatriation on perceived career success of expatriates remains relatively unknown. This study has therefore focused on the influence of characteristics of expatriation on the perceived career success of expatriates. The influence of characteristics at the organizational level and at the individual level on both perceived internal and perceived external career success were studied. Data were collected using an online questionnaire from 73 expatriates from 26 different home countries working in 11 different countries in various industries. Results using regression analyses showed that network mechanisms and contact with the parent organization are important for a positive perceived career success of expatriates. The results are discussed in terms of theory and organizational practice.

1. Introduction

In our globalizing world organizations are becoming global as well. Production can be outsourced to low-cost countries, trade and labour restrictions are disappearing, suppliers and customers are now from around the world and new technologies make the possibilities for communication almost endless (Caligiuri, 2006; Castells, 2004). These developments make both people and labour increasingly mobile: people are able to work all over the world and employers are able to hire people from around the world, thus making the labour force in organizations more multinational. Companies that are active in multiple countries rely on expatriates for connecting, coordinating and aligning their worldwide operations. Expatriation means that an individual works abroad for a certain amount of time, varying from several months to several years. An expatriate is defined as an individual that lives and works abroad (Suutari & Brewster, 2000). Expatriation can be both self-

initiated, the employee applies for a job abroad, and through a company that sends an employee abroad, the more traditional expatriate assignment. This study takes both types of expatriation into account.

Although expatriation is becoming more common, for organizations it proves increasingly difficult to find people who are willing to accept expatriate assignments. Employees are concerned about the impact of an expatriate assignment on their family life and they are increasingly dependent on the willingness of their spouses to give up their careers in order to follow the expatriate abroad (Van der Velde, Bossink & Jansen, 2005).

But also their own career is a major concern to expatriates when considering an expatriation (Riusala & Suutari, 2000). The same concerns apply to self-initiated expatriates. Especially the uncertainty about their task after the expatriation and whether they can use their developed skills and competences in their new job are important concerns (Riusala & Suutari, 2000). However, expatriation is appreciated as an opportunity for personal and professional development (Doherty & Dickmann, 2008; Inkson, Arthur, Pringle & Barry, 1997; Suutari & Brewster, 2000), and career advancement is seen as a key motivator for people to expatriate. Studies show that many repatriates leave the company that sent them abroad in their first year upon return (Ashamalla & Crocitto, 1997; Hechanova, Beehr & Christiansen, 2003; Riusala & Suutari, 2000). Thereby they are taking their international experience and newly acquired knowledge and skills with them, something very costly to the company that sent them abroad (Doherty & Dickmann, 2008; Black & Gregersen, 1999).

Today, it seems, a career is no longer a lifelong employment with scheduled promotions and pay-rises. An established definition of career, and the one used in this study, is the definition of Arthur, Hall & Lawrence (1989:8): *'the evolving sequence of a person's work experiences over time'*. Careers are increasingly mobile: on average an individual works for 8 to 10 employers in many different jobs (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994; Inkson & Arthur, 2001). Careers are no longer 'bounded' to a certain employer, region or occupation: instead they tend to span multiple work arrangements and competencies (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994; Seibert, Kraimer & Crant, 2001). This new career concept is also known as the boundaryless career, defined by DeFillippi & Arthur (1994:307) as *'[...] career paths may involve sequences of job opportunities that go beyond the boundaries of single employment settings'*. Research suggests that boundaryless careers are becoming the pattern for expatriates (Inkson et al., 1997; Stahl & Cerdin, 2004; Sullivan & Arthur, 2006), since expatriation moves across various types of boundaries: both geographical, physical and psychological.

Now that careers are no longer bounded to a certain employer, region or occupation, career development becomes something an individual can influence. However, what development is seen

as successful by an individual may not be considered successful by his friends, his boss, or in a broader sense, public opinion (Arthur, Khapova & Wilderom, 2005). These different views can be captured by two different perspectives on career success: the internal and the external perspective (Derr & Laurent, 1989). Characteristics of expatriation can have a distinctly different influence on perceived internal career success from the one they have on perceived external career success. Therefore internal and external career success are studied separately in the present study.

With career success being a major concern for both organizations and expatriates, it is remarkable that the career consequences of expatriation remain unclear. Of course expatriation has many different aspects, which could each influence the perceived career success of an individual. So far studies have only looked at the impact of expatriation as a whole (Dickmann & Doherty, 2008; Dickmann & Harris, 2005; Feldmann & Thomas, 1992; Riusala & Suutari, 2000; Stahl, Miller & Tung, 2002), and by looking at different aspects of expatriation, this study seeks to indicate important aspects of expatriation influencing career success. Therefore, the present study will focus on the following main question:

Which characteristics of expatriation affect the perceived internal and external career success of individuals?

2. The contribution of the present study to the theory on career consequences of expatriation

Gaps remain in our present understanding of the outcomes of expatriation. Although career success has been studied extensively, studies focussing on the impact of expatriation on career success remain scarce (Dickmann & Doherty, 2008; Stahl et al., 2002). There is a need for more empirical research linking international work with career success (Doherty & Dickmann, 2008). There have been several calls for more research into the outcomes of expatriation and especially the effects on career success of individuals (Bonache, Brewster & Suutari, 2001; Stahl et al., 2002).

Most previous studies looking at the impact of expatriation on the career of an individual regarded expatriation as a whole (Dickmann & Doherty, 2008; Dickmann & Harris, 2005; Stahl et al., 2002), while looking at specific characteristics of expatriation could develop new knowledge as to which aspects of expatriation are important to the career success of individuals, and which aspects matter less to career development. This could help develop knowledge about the role of expatriation in career success theory and could provide clues for further research.

3. Theoretical perspectives and hypotheses

3.1 Career Success

In a boundaryless career the emphasis is on mobility and unpredictability (Eby, Butts & Lockwood, 2003), and whether a career is considered successful depends on the perspective you take. Eby et al. (2003) suggest to not only look at traditional objective criteria of career success such as salary, marketability and promotions, but also at the psychological and subjective criteria. In subjective terms a career is successful when an individual is intrinsically satisfied with his or her career (Arthur, et al., 2005). A similar distinction in the definition of career success is used by Derr & Laurent (1989), who describe career success as being defined as either internal or external.

First, internal, or subjective career success is described as the accomplishment of desirable work-related outcomes at any point in an individual's work experience over time (Arthur et al., 2005). The authors (2005:179) quote Van Maanen's definition of subjective career success: *'the individual's internal apprehension and evaluation of his or her career, across any dimensions that are important to that individual'*. Factors like salary, employment security, status, the location of work, progression through different jobs, access to learning, and work-life balance will be valued differently by different individuals. Or, as Cerdin (2008) puts it, internal corresponds to subjective measures and individual aspirations. This reflects the importance of internal apprehension and self-evaluation of people's careers that are also important for subjective career success.

Second, external, or objective career success is defined by Arthur et al. (2005) as an external perspective that delineates more or less tangible indicators of an individual's career situation. Indicators involve occupation, mobility, income, marketability, job level and task attributes. For objective career success official position and social context are very important. It reflects a shared social understanding rather than an individual understanding of career success. Derr & Laurent (1989:456) outline the external career as *'the realities, constraints, opportunities and actual job sequences in the world of work'*. The external career success criteria are defined 'outside' the individual, for example by their employer or by society as a whole (Cerdin, 2008).

Both the concepts of objective and external success, and subjective and internal career success are considered equal. In this study the terms internal and external career success are used. When studying career success by looking through an exclusively internal lens or an exclusively external lens a limited picture emerges that cannot explain differences between the influence of different characteristics. If a variable has a positive influence on internal career success, this does not mean that it has a positive influence on external career success as well. These differences can be valuable

in explaining the career effects of expatriation, and thus internal and external career success are both studied separately.

3.2 Characteristics of expatriation

Most studies on expatriation do not look into the outcomes of expatriation. Recently explorative studies have been published (Dickmann & Doherty, 2008; Dickmann & Harris, 2005) investigating the impact of expatriation on the career development of an individual. Both studies found that the career impact of expatriation can be equivocal for individuals. Expatriation was not seen as a critical success factor for career advancement, and respondents reported mixed career outcomes of their expatriation. Organizational policies and practices seemed to have a fundamental impact on individual perceptions of career advancement (Dickmann & Doherty, 2008). Besides organizational elements, individual aspects also appear to play a role. Expatriates found building and preserving professional contacts during their expatriation harder, something potentially harmful for career development (Dickmann & Harris, 2005).

In this study the above mentioned characteristics will be taken into account, when looking at the impact on the career success of an individual. The characteristics of the expatriation are divided into two categories: the organizational characteristics and the individual characteristics. These two categories cover a broad range of aspects that can potentially influence the career success of the individual. By looking not only at the organizational characteristics, a more detailed picture can be created of the influence of expatriation on the career success of the individual.

3.2.1 Organizational characteristics

Organizations use various policies to make an expatriation a success. Suutari & Brewster (2001) distinguished several management practices to support expatriates in the different stages of their expatriation. They studied organizational policies and practices concerning preparation, communication during the expatriation, repatriation and career management. Only the last mentioned area is directly career related, the others are not, but may well have a big impact on the career of individuals. A smooth repatriation, for example, may prevent the expatriate from looking for a job elsewhere. Good expectation management (i.e. the expatriate knows what to expect in terms of his or her career) may also contribute to the expatriate being more satisfied with his or her achieved career success.

Career management

During the entire expatriation period career management programmes can play an important role. These programmes were perceived as important by expatriates (Dickmann & Doherty, 2008), but there seems to be a clear inconsistency between the perceived necessity and the actual use of career-related support programmes (Riusala & Suutari, 2000). Many expatriates felt career-related programmes would be very useful, especially to clarify their job options upon return. Stahl et al.'s (2002) findings show that expatriates experience a lack of long-term career planning and company support during expatriation.

Career management may be important from both the individual's and the organization's point of view. For an individual expatriation is an important part of his or her personal career development, and for the organization expatriation is necessary to its overall international development (Cerdin, 2008). Riusala & Suutari (2000) found that career-related policies would be highly appreciated by expatriates, but few companies actually use these programmes. However, in their recent explorative study Dickmann & Doherty (2008) found that when companies have formal career management programmes this leads to a perceived positive impact on career development. Given these findings, the following hypotheses are derived:

Hypothesis 1a. The more career management is offered during the expatriation, the more positive the impact on perceived internal career success will be.

Hypothesis 1b. The more career management is offered during the expatriation, the more positive the impact on perceived external career success will be.

Expectation management

Expatriates' career expectations are a returning theme in expatriate research (Feldman & Thomas, 1992; Stroh, Gregersen & Black, 1998; Suutari & Brewster, 2003). Before expatriating individuals have certain expectations about the expatriation, and when the actual experience fails to live up to the expectations the individual has to deal with this disappointment. The gap between expectations and reality could result in a lower performance and a higher turnover among expatriates (Mezias & Scandura, 2005). Expatriates that have the right expectations are more committed to their company, and are more likely to stay upon return (Stroh et al., 1998; Suutari & Brewster, 2003).

There is a need to fill the gap between expectations and reality for expatriates' career development. Stahl & Cerdin (2004) found that managing the career expectations of expatriates can help in the successful career-pathing and repatriation of expatriates. Expatriates receiving realistic career

previews are less likely to be extremely discouraged by initial disappointments (Feldman & Thomas, 1992), and more likely to be successful in their expatriation (Mezias & Scandura, 2005). Active expectation management seems to have a positive influence on career-pathing, success and repatriation, areas closely connected to internal and external career success. Thus the following hypotheses are derived:

Hypothesis 2a. The more expectation management is offered during the expatriation, the more positive the impact on perceived internal career success will be.

Hypothesis 2b. The more expectation management is offered during the expatriation, the more positive the impact on perceived external career success will be.

Pre-departure programmes

Many pre-departure programmes exist for expatriates. The most important ones are cross-cultural training, language training, look-see visits to the organization, family training, child education advice, arranged meetings with other expatriates and partner employment advice (Caligiuri, 2006; Morris & Robie, 2001; Scullion & Brewster, 2001). These pre-departure programmes help individuals prepare for their expatriation, improve the overall performance (Morris & Robie, 2001; Mezias & Scandura, 2005) and are highly valued by expatriates (Selmer, 2001).

Moreover, pre-departure programmes are expected to have a positive influence on both internal and external career success. Since individuals highly value these programmes, it is more likely that they will be satisfied with their expatriation career move and thus with their internal career. Since overall performance is also affected, the programmes are likely to also positively impact external career success. The following hypotheses are derived:

Hypothesis 3a. The more pre-departure programmes for working abroad are offered, the more positive the impact on perceived internal career success will be.

Hypothesis 3b. The more pre-departure programmes for working abroad are offered, the more positive the impact on perceived external career success will be.

Repatriation policies

Repatriation is an essential stage in the career development process of expatriates (Mezias & Scandura, 2005), and often repatriation causes problems (Stahl & Cerdin, 2004). These problems include: *“loss of status, loss of autonomy, loss of career direction, loss of income and, in addition, a*

feeling that their international experience is undervalued by the company” (Scullion & Brewster, 2001:358). To date very few effective repatriation programmes exist, even though the turnover rate among returning expatriates is high. Stahl & Cerdin (2004) argue that effective repatriation policies could help retain expatriates. When companies do not have adequate opportunities for career development upon return of the expatriate, they may lose them to other companies that offer interesting opportunities (Lazarova & Cerdin, 2007). Repatriation policies help retain expatriates and are therefore important to companies.

While expatriates also view these repatriation policies as extremely important, they rated the support as not sufficient (Suutari & Brewster, 2003). Suutari & Brewster (2003) did not find a significant relationship between repatriation support practices and future career expectations of expatriates. This could be due to their small sample, or the relation does not exist. However, given the importance of the repatriation policies to both expatriates and companies, the policies are expected to have a positive influence on both internal and external career success. The following hypotheses are derived:

Hypothesis 4a. The more repatriation policies are offered, the more positive the impact on perceived internal career success will be.

Hypothesis 4b. The more repatriation policies are offered, the more positive the impact on perceived external career success will be.

Cultural similarity

The national culture of the home country may differ greatly from the one of the host country. Cultural similarity has been positively linked to the willingness to accept an expatriation assignment (Aryee, Chay & Chew, 1996), but it is very likely that it also influences the career success of the expat. Clues for this impact are found by Caligiuri (2006) who showed that expatriates find working with people from different countries gives them a career advantage in dealing with people from different cultures. Expatriates see their expatriation in a different culture as an enriching experience, valuable to their career. However, certain knowledge and skills acquired overseas prove to be useless once back home due to differences in habits and culture (Black & Gregersen, 1999; Doherty, Brewster, Suutari & Dickmann, 2008). A different culture would then prove to have a negative impact on the career success of the expat.

Cultural similarity seems to have different effects on career development, and these differences might be contributed to the differences between internal and external career success. The following hypotheses are derived:

Hypothesis 5a. The more similar the culture in the home and host country, the more negative the impact on perceived internal career success will be.

Hypothesis 5b. The more similar the culture in the home and host country, the more positive the impact on perceived external career success will be.

Duration of the expatriation

In addressing the problem of a lack of people willing to expatriate, organizations have come up with a range of alternative expatriation forms. Short term expatriation (shorter than 1 year), flexpatriation (flying home for the weekend) and frequent flying or business commuting (flying abroad frequently) are a few examples of such arrangements (Mayerhofer, Hartmann, Michelitsch-Riedl & Kollinger, 2004). All these assignments are considerably shorter than the conventional expatriate assignment (3-5 years), and they are often used as development assignments for high-potentials (Tahvanainen, Welch & Worm, 2005). Yet little is known about the impact of these shorter assignments on the career success of individuals (Collings, Scullion & Morely, 2007).

Feldman & Thomas (1992) found that staying too long hurt the external career success of expatriates. Long-term expatriates are labelled as permanent expatriates, and they are not considered for promotions: 'out of sight, out of mind' it seems. Mayerhofer, Hartmann & Herbert (2004) found that short-term expatriates were more pro-active in dealing with career issues than traditional expatriates. However, they also reported that expatriate assignments were thought to provide a better career boost than flexpatriate assignments by their respondents. This is a remarkable finding, since Collings et al. (2007) found that shorter periods of expatriation minimized the interruption to an individual's career. And since short-term assignments are often used as development assignments, it can be expected that more attention is given to career enhancement by both the organization and the individual.

On the whole, it appears that there is a difference in the impact of duration on internal and external career success. Self-initiated expatriates often control the duration of their expatriation themselves, but the same argumentation holds for them as well and there are no other reasons to suppose the effect of the duration may be different for them. Therefore, the following hypotheses are derived:

Hypothesis 6a. The shorter the duration of the expatriation, the more negative the impact on perceived internal career success will be.

Hypothesis 6b. The shorter the duration of the expatriation, the more positive the impact on perceived external career success will be.

3.2.2 Individual characteristics

Individuals can influence certain characteristics of expatriation as well. Notably, there are the individual's performance and how the individual keeps in touch with overseas parts of the company. These individual characteristics will be discussed here.

Performance during the expatriation

A hotly debated issue is expatriate performance (Harzing & Christensen, 2004; Scullion & Brewster, 2001; Suutari & Brewster, 2001). In this study good performance is defined as: "*the ability of the expatriate [...] to perform according to the expectations of the organization*" (Harzing & Christensen, 2004). A large part of the discussion focuses on performance management, something that has been increasing in recent years. This trend reflects the growing use of expatriation for developmental purposes and the integration of expatriation into the overall career development process (Scullion & Brewster, 2001). Rosenbaum (1989) found that work (or job) performance is an important criterion for promotion.

However, performance management systems are far from universal, due to practical reasons. It is complex to measure objective performance of expatriates because of varying standards and circumstances in different countries (Suutari & Brewster, 2001). Therefore the effect of performance during expatriation on career success remains unknown. Although objective performance is difficult to measure, performance can be measured using self-reporting measures and these will be used in this study.

Considering that expatriation is often used for developmental purposes of employees and that performance is an important criterion for promotion, the following hypotheses are derived:

Hypothesis 7a. The better the performance of an individual during the expatriation, the more positive the impact on perceived internal career success will be.

Hypothesis 7b. The better the performance of an individual during the expatriation, the more positive the impact on perceived external career success will be.

Contact with parent organization

For traditional expatriates contact with the parent organization during their expatriation is important for their career success (Suutari & Brewster, 2001). For self-initiated expatriates this is a non-existent issue, and so they are not included in this hypothesis. So far the effects of contact with the parent organization have not been widely researched, and little is known about the effects. A lack of contact (out of sight – out of mind) seems harmful to an expat's career success (Suutari & Brewster, 2001). However, the authors found that communication in their sample was extensive, and expatriates found the contact frequency sufficient. The more contact expatriates had, the more satisfied they were. Baruch & Altman (2002) studied the impact of maintaining relations with the parent organization and support from the parent organization. They showed that the maintenance of these relations and receiving support are positively related to the success of the expatriation.

Although the above studies did not study the relation between contact with the parent organization and the career success of the individual, it shows that individuals find the contact with colleagues at home important. The positive impact on the success of the expatriation hints that maintaining contact is also important to the company. It is expected that more contact with the parent organization will lead to more perceived external career success. There are no clues that more contact with the parent organization would lead to changes in perceived internal career success and therefore the following hypothesis is derived:

Hypothesis 8. The more contact an individual on expatriation has with the parent organization, the more positive the impact on perceived external career success will be.

Networking mechanisms

When working as an expat, individuals are likely to see a change in their social capital. The networks of expatriates are likely to extend and split into global, home and host contacts (Doherty &

Dickmann, 2008). Doherty & Dickmann (2008) argue that expatriates have more access on a daily basis to senior hierarchical levels, and have more contacts outside the organization in the new location. However, there is a potential loss of network contacts in the home country. Depending on the importance of the different types of contacts (global, home or host), the effect on career success may not be positive. Stahl & Cerdin (2004) noticed that as a solution organizations set up formal networks that allow expatriates to maintain contact with key people in the organization, which help successful career-pathing and repatriation. Dickmann & Doherty (2008) also found that formal networking mechanisms have a positive impact on the career success of the individual. When networking activities are organized they are likely to be beneficial for both the perceived internal and external career success, leading to the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 9a. The more networking mechanisms are offered during the expatriation, the more positive the impact on perceived internal career success will be.

Hypothesis 9b. The more networking mechanisms are offered during the expatriation, the more positive the impact on perceived external career success will be.

3.2.3 Covariates

Five covariates are used in the analyses of this study. First, two demographic variables are included as covariates. Since the age and gender of the expatriate may be related to perceptions of career success (Eby et al., 2003) these variables are used as covariates.

Likewise, previous international experience and the number of years of international experience are used as covariates. We expect that previous experience, and more years of international experience positively affect perceived internal and external career success. If experienced expatriates were not satisfied with the career success they achieved after their expatriation or during their current expatriation, they would be unlikely to expatriate again or continue their expatriation.

Finally, in the literature two types of expatriates are distinguished: the traditional expatriate that is sent abroad by his or her company, and the self-initiated expatriate that chooses to apply for a job abroad. Suutari & Brewster (2000) found that both types of expatriates expected that their international experience will have a positive influence on their future career. However, self-initiated expatriates were less optimistic that their international experience is valued by future employers (Suutari & Brewster, 2000). This may cause a higher perceived internal career success for self-initiated expatriates and a higher perceived external career success for traditional expatriates.

4. Methods

4.1 Participants

An online questionnaire was used to collect the data. A draft version of the questionnaire was first presented to two expatriates during two pilot interviews. Both expatriates were living and working in the Netherlands, one with an international non-profit organization and one with a multinational company with headquarters in the Netherlands. They were asked to fill out the draft questionnaire and asked for their opinion on the clarity and the design of the questionnaire, and if they missed any answering options. Remarks were incorporated in the final questionnaire and useful additions to the various company programmes for expatriates were also added to the questionnaire.

A link to the questionnaire was placed on two websites of social expatriate clubs in the Netherlands (www.clubscandinavia.com, www.icenl.org) and a message including this link was sent with three newsletters of expatriate organizations (Connect International, Expat Centre Amsterdam and Elynx). Through the network sites Hyves and Facebook the message including the link was sent to acquaintances and placed on the walls of the public Facebook groups 'I am an Expat' and 'I am an Expat in the Netherlands'. Because of the unknown background of the respondents two selection questions ("Are you currently living abroad?" and "Are you currently working abroad?") were included in the questionnaire to make sure only real expatriates filled out the questionnaire. Both questions had to be answered with "yes" before a respondent gained access to the rest of the questionnaire.

With this method of data collection it is impossible to count the number of people that saw the link to the questionnaire, and thus to measure the non-response. However, 138 people approached the link to the questionnaire, of which 104 (75,4%) filled out the questionnaire. For the purpose of the present study people that did not live and work abroad were excluded, leaving a sample of 73 respondents (N=73).

Of the respondents 64% were male and 36% were female. The age of the respondents differed from 23 years to 62 years, with the average age being 35,8 years. 86% of the respondents had a University Bachelor's degree or higher. A large percentage (68%) of the respondents were self-initiated expatriates, 32% were traditional expatriates, i.e. there were sent abroad by their company.

66% of the respondents had previous work-related international experience, and including their current expatriation the average international experience of the respondents was 6 years. A broad range of in total 26 nationalities were represented in the sample: varying from South African to Australian, Tunesian, British and Dutch. The respondents worked in 11 different countries. Varying types of industries and occupations were represented as well.

Overall, the present study involves a varied and unique sample: a large number of nationalities, with a large variance in age and both self-initiated and traditional expatriates. The respondents work in various industries, for example in education, energy and utilities, the public sector or banking and financial services. They have varying occupations, for example in sales and marketing, research and development, IT, engineering, general management or accounting.

4.2 Measures

The complete questionnaire was in the English language, and was the same for all respondents (including Dutch nationals). Reliability analysis was performed on the scales.

4.2.1 Internal and External Career Success

To measure career success the research instruments of Greenhaus, Parasuraman & Wormley (1990) and Eby et al. (2003) were used. Perceived *internal career success* was measured using a five-item measure developed by Greenhaus et al. (1990) (sample item: 'I am satisfied with the success I have achieved in my career'). The respondents were asked in how far they agreed with the statements on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree". The α coefficient was .88, the same as the α coefficient found by Greenhaus et al. (1990).

External career success was measured by using the six-item measure of Eby et al. (2003) (sample items: 'There are many opportunities available for me in my company' and 'I could easily obtain a comparable job with another employer'). Respondents were asked in how far they agreed with the statements on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree". Eby et al. (2003) reported an α coefficient of .74, in the present study an α coefficient of .75 was found.

The number of *career management programmes* was measured by asking respondents to indicate which programmes were used by their company. A list of possible programmes was given (composed by all programmes named in the literature and given by respondents in the pilot interviews), including an 'other, namely' option. A total of 8 career management programmes (including the 'other'-option) was presented. Respondents could indicate which programme was offered to them by their company. Of the programmes that were checked, the respondent was asked to rate the quality on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = "very poor" to 5 = "very good".

The number of *expectation management programmes* was measured by asking respondents to indicate which programmes were used by their company. A list of possible programmes was given (composed by all programmes named in the literature and given by respondents in the pilot

interviews), including an 'other, namely' option. A total of 7 expectation management programmes (including the 'other'-option) was presented. Respondents could indicate which programme was offered to them by their company. Of the programmes that were checked, the respondent was asked to rate the quality on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = "very poor" to 5 = "very good".

The number of *pre-departure programmes* was measured by asking respondents to indicate which programmes were used by their company. A list of possible programmes was given (composed by all programmes named in the literature and given by respondents in the pilot interviews), including an 'other, namely' option. A total of 13 pre-departure programmes (including the 'other'-option) was presented. Respondents could indicate which programme was offered to them by their company. Of the programmes that were checked, the respondent was asked to rate the quality on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = "very poor" to 5 = "very good".

The number of *repatriation programmes* was measured by asking respondents to indicate which programmes were used by their company. A list of possible programmes was given (composed by all programmes named in the literature and given by respondents in the pilot interviews), including an 'other, namely' option. A total of 11 repatriation programmes (including the 'other'-option) was presented. Respondents could indicate which programme was offered to them by their company. Of the programmes that were checked, the respondent was asked to rate the quality on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = "very poor" to 5 = "very good".

The *cultural similarity* in the home and host country was measured using Hofstede's (1991) dimensions of cultural differences. Hofstede distinguishes five dimensions of culture: Power Distance Index (PDI), Individualism (IDV), Masculinity (MAS), Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI) and Long-Term Orientation (LTO). These dimensions cover the most fundamental and defining aspects of cultures. Hofstede scored 50 countries on the first four dimensions, and 23 on the fifth as well. Scores were given by Hofstede on a scale from 0 to 100. Since not all the home countries of the respondents are scored on the fifth dimension (Long-Term Orientation), only the scores on the first four dimensions are used. These scores were used to calculate the relative cultural difference between a respondent's home and host country.

The expected *duration* was measured in months, respondents were asked to indicate the expected duration of their current expatriation.

Performance was measured by using Holopainen and Björkman's (2005) self-reporting four-item measure instrument of performance (sample item: "I met the business goals that were set"). Respondents were asked in how far they agreed with the statements on a 5-point Likert scale,

ranging from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 “strongly agree”. Holopainen and Björkman (2005) reported an α coefficient of .80. In the present study, an α coefficient of .89 was found.

Contact with the parent organization was measured by using the method of Suutari & Brewster (2001), measuring both the amount and type of contact. In 2001 Suutari & Brewster distinguished the categories telephone, letter, fax, and other. In the past decade the letter and fax have largely been replaced by e-mail, and so e-mail was used in the questionnaire instead of letter and fax. Face to face contact was added as a category. Respondents were asked to indicate per type of contact (telephone, e-mail, face-to-face, or other) how often they had contact with their parent organization, varying from 1 = ‘no contact at all’ to 5 = ‘daily’.

The number of *networking mechanisms* was measured by asking respondents to indicate which mechanisms were used by their company. A list of possible mechanisms was given (composed by all mechanisms named in the literature and given by respondents in the pilot interviews), including an ‘other, namely’ option. A total of 5 networking mechanisms (including the ‘other’-option) was presented. Respondents could indicate which networking mechanism was offered to them by their company. Of the mechanisms that were checked, the respondent was asked to rate the quality on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = “very poor” to 5 = “very good”.

4.3 Data analysis

As the first step in the data analysis the scores on the variables were converted to Z scores, in order to standardize the different scales.

As the next step in the data analysis the correlation coefficients between all the variables in the study were computed. The coefficients are presented in Table 1.

After the correlation coefficients were computed, regression analysis was performed to determine the influence of the variables on internal and external career success, respectively. The analysis is performed stepwise to determine the unique contribution of each group of variables. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 1

Correlation coefficients between study variables (N=73)

	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1. Internal Career Success	.45**	-.08	-.15	.02	-.16	-.15	.30*	.24*	.34**	.17	-.10	.18	-.03	.03	.33**
2. External Career Success	-	-.20	.05	.10	-.20	-.18	.47**	.45**	.39**	.35**	.13	.00	.07	.09	.62**
3. Age	-	-	-.16	.31*	.59**	-.12	-.04	-.03	.12	.11	.03	.13	.09	-.19	.10
4. Gender	-	-	-	-.14	.02	.22	-.08	-.19	-.24*	-.08	.16	-.16	-.11	-.03	-.01
5. Previous experience	-	-	-	-	.32**	.05	.07	.03	.04	-.04	.14	.11	.07	-.23	.02
6. Years of international experience	-	-	-	-	-	.14	-.04	-.13	-.11	.00	.15	.04	.09	-.29	-.03
7. Expatttype	-	-	-	-	-	-	-.28**	-.42**	-.42**	-.36**	.02	.16	-.28**	.26	-.34**
8. Career management	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.56**	.68**	.71**	.15	-.07	.21	-.16	.54**
9. Expectation management	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.70**	.61**	-.04	-.12	.24*	.10	.48**
10. Pre-departure programmes	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.72**	-.09	-.10	.38**	-.17	.58**
11. Repatriation programmes	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.14	-.09	.22	-.10	.58**
12. Cultural similarity	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-.07	.32*	-.03	.01
13. Duration	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-.04	-.04	.05
14. Performance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.18	.22
15. Contact with parent organization	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-.18
16. Networking mechanisms	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

* p < .05

* p < .01

Table 2

Summary of regression analysis of variables predicting internal and external career success
($N = 73$)

	Variables	Internal career success β coefficient	External career success β coefficient
	<i>Covariates</i>		
1.	Age	-.15	-.08
	Gender	-.19	-.10
	Previous international experience	.15	.43
	Years of international experience	-.01	.00
	Expatttype	-.03	-.07
	<i>Adjusted R²</i>	-.05	-.02
	<i>Organizational variables</i>		
2.	Career management	.15	.40
	Expectation management	.12	-.05
	Pre-departure programmes	.41	-.45
	Repatriation programmes	-.39	.12
	Cultural similarity	.09	-.08
	Duration	.20	.44
	<i>Individual variables</i>		
	Performance	-.32	-.14
	Contact with parent organization	<i>not tested</i>	.61*
	Networking mechanisms	.20	.61*
	Total adjusted R²	.06	.62*

* $p < .05$

Note. Each analysis is performed in two steps. First, the covariates age, gender, previous experience, years of international experience and the expatriate type are entered in the first step. In the next step, the other variables are entered after the covariates have been included in the regression equation.

5. Results

As presented in Table 1, the correlation coefficients show that some of the predictor variables are higher than .50, indicating there might be multicollinearity present in the regression analyses. However, the variables that show a strong correlation coefficient are the programmes offered to expatriates by their companies. It seems logical that if a company offers one programme, there is a good chance it offers another programme as well. The programmes can still be very different in their effect on career development, therefore the variables are separately included in the regression

analyses. The direction of the correlation coefficients shows no surprises. Only the small negative correlation between performance and internal career was not expected.

The results of the regression analyses are presented in Table 2. They show a big difference in predicted proportion of variance for internal career success ($R^2 = 0.06$) and external career success ($R^2 = 0.62$). Moreover, the total proportion of explained variance for internal career success was not significant, whereas the proportion of explained variance for external career success was significant ($p < .05$). In more detail Table 2 shows that the covariates, age, gender, previous international experience and years of international experience, did not significantly affect internal or external career success.

The variables at the organizational level, hypotheses 1 to 6, were tested in the next step. Career management programmes have, as predicted in hypotheses 1a and 1b, a positive effect on both internal and external career success. However, this effect is not significant. Expectation management programmes also have, as predicted in hypothesis 2a, a positive effect on internal career success. But contrary to what was expected in hypothesis 2b a negative effect was found on external career success. Again, the effects are not significant.

With respect to pre-departure programmes a large positive effect is found on internal career success, as expected in hypotheses 3a. A large negative effect on external career success is found, contrary to what was expected in hypotheses 3b. Although these effects are not significant, the large effects are remarkable.

With regard to repatriation programmes a negative effect was found on internal career success, as opposed to what was expected in hypothesis 4a. A positive effect on external career success was found. None of these effects are significant. The rating of the repatriation programmes does not significantly affect internal or external career.

Cultural similarity has a small positive impact on internal career success, and a small negative effect on external career success, as expected in hypotheses 5a and 5b. The effects are not significant.

For the duration of the expatriation a positive effect is found for both internal and external career success. This is unlike what was expected in hypothesis 6a, but confirming the direction of hypothesis 6b. Again, the effects are not significant.

The variables at the individual level (hypotheses 7-9) show some interesting results. The performance of the expatriate has a negative effect on internal career success, as opposed to what was expected in hypothesis 7a. It also, unexpectedly, negatively impacts external career success, but both effects are not significant.

As for contact with the parent organization, this has a significant and large positive impact on external career success, thereby confirming hypothesis 8.

Networking mechanisms have a significant positive impact on external career success, thereby confirming hypothesis 9b. Networking mechanisms also have a positive effect on internal career success, however, this effect is not significant.

Overall, the tested variables combined help to explain a large proportion of the variance in external career success. Remarkably, the proportion explained variance in internal career success is very small and not significant.

6. Discussion

The present study has focused on the influence of different characteristics of expatriation on the career success of expatriates. At the *organizational level* some remarkable results, although not significant, were found. First of all, not all the programmes companies offer to expatriates have a positive effect on perceived career success, and the effects also differ for internal and external career success. No fundamental impact of organizational policies and practices on perceived career success are found. This finding is opposite to Dickmann & Doherty's (2008) findings, that showed a fundamental impact of organizational policies and practices on individual perceptions of career advancement. To make sure the quality of the policies did not influence the impact of these policies on perceived career success a post-hoc regression analysis was performed, which showed that the perceived quality of the programmes did not influence this impact.

Second, the similarity of the culture in home and host country indeed seems to positively affect internal career success, and negatively affect external career success. Finally, the duration of the expatriation appears to have a positive effect on both internal and external career success. Further research is needed to confirm these results.

At the *individual level* interesting results were found as well. Contrary to what we expected, performance seems to negatively influence perceived career success. Both contact with the parent organization and networking mechanisms have a large significant positive effect on perceived external career success. Networking mechanisms also appear to have a positive effect on perceived internal career success.

Overall, the total proportion explained variance of perceived internal career success is very low, and the studied characteristics do not seem to play a major role for the expat's perceived internal career success. For external career success, however, a large proportion of the variance can be explained by

the studied variables. It appears that the individual characteristics of expatriation, and more specifically the network mechanisms and the contact with the parent organization, have the highest influence on the perceived career success of expatriates. The organizational characteristics, such as the programmes offered to the expat, seem less important.

6.1 Alternative explanations for the findings

The study produced some unexpected findings. The most prominent example being that the studied characteristics of expatriation did not significantly influence the perceived internal career success. It is possible that the internal career success is more influenced by personal factors, not related to the expatriation. The regression analysis showed some high β 's, which indicates that with a larger sample these could become significant.

Moreover, the programmes companies offer to expatriates had no significant effect on the perceived internal and external career success. This could be due to the fact that not all companies offer these programmes to their expatriates. This resulted in a large number of respondents that had no programmes offered to them. Therefore, the variance in the answers was low, which could be an explanation for the few significant results in the regression analyses.

However, the direction of some of the effects is remarkable. The pre-departure programmes offered seem to have a positive effect on perceived internal career success, as expected, but they appear to have a negative impact on perceived external career success. Repatriation programmes, on the contrary, have a negative effect on internal career success, and a positive effect on external career success. There are no logical explanations for these findings, and further research is necessary.

Furthermore, the duration seems to have a positive effect on both internal and external career success, where it was only expected for the former. An explanation could be that expatriates that expect companies to value their international experience, value a longer international experience, and that they don't see the side-effects of a longer duration.

At the individual level there was also a surprising result: performance seems to negatively effect perceived career success. Although the results were not significant, further research is needed to find out the cause of this finding.

6.2 Limitations of the present study and suggestions for future studies

The present study has a few limitations which should be discussed. The most important one being that it could only look at *perceived* career success. The actual career success has not been researched here, and it will be valuable for future studies to study ex-expatriates who have experience with their career success after expatriation. In order to see if expectations about career success match the reality, a longitudinal design would be preferable in a future study. In such a design expatriates can be followed during the whole expatriation cycle: from preparations to repatriation. It would provide a possibility to measure the actual influence on internal and external career success. There have been more calls for such a study (Doherty & Dickmann, 2008; Bonache et al., 2001; Stahl et al., 2002) and it would certainly add to our understanding of the impact of expatriation on career success.

Another limitation of the present study is the sample. The respondents were recruited through various ways on the internet, but no direct contact details of the respondents were available. It proved difficult to reach people in this way, and reminding them in order to enlarge the sample was impossible. Also, the background of the respondents remains relatively unknown which makes alternative explanations hard to test. However, through this way of recruitment the sample became enormously varied in numerous ways. For future studies such a varied sample is preferable, but the contact possibilities of the respondents need improvement.

Finally, as a result of the sample size, very few significant results were found. Part of the lack of significant results could be explained by the fact that not all companies offer their expatriates programmes in which they can participate. This resulted in a lower variance in answers of the respondents which makes analyses more difficult. In future studies a larger sample will be needed to produce more significant results.

6.3 The implications of the findings

Despite its limitations, the present study has some important implications for both theory and practice. From a theoretical perspective the findings show that there is a major difference between the influence of characteristics of expatriation on internal and external career. Where most studies look at career success from an external point of view, this study shows that looking at internal career success is important as well and can provide different results. This finding suggests that in future studies on career success and career development not only the external career, but also the internal career, should be taken into account.

Overall, organizational aspects such as company policies, cultural difference and duration seem to have less influence than originally predicted, whereas individual aspects such as network mechanisms and keeping in touch proved to be important to perceived career success. However, further research needs to be done in order to confirm these findings.

For practice, the results indicate that companies and individuals should first focus on networking and personal relations to promote perceived external career success. Companies that organize networking activities can benefit from this. For individuals it is important to keep in touch with their parent organization and to make sure their network is well cared for.

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