



EXPATRIATE ASSIGNMENT SUCCESS: A MULTIPLE STAKEHOLDER VIEW

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Master Dissertation in Human Resource Management

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2014

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Acknowledgements

I dedicate this dissertation to António. I'm deeply grateful for the long hours, your perfectionism and endless patience. Thank you for your unconditional support and companionship throughout this endeavour.

A special recognition to my family, for always supporting me and my choices. This is also for them.

My gratitude goes to my closest friends too, especially Mónica, whose strength, kindness and confidence were truly motivational. Thank you for the laughs and the long talks.

I also want to thank my supervisor, Professor Luísa Pinto, not just for the guidance but also for her unique commitment and genuine concern.

Last but not least, a deep acknowledgement to all participants, for sharing such enriching experiences. None of this would have been possible without their collaboration.

Abstract

Expatriate assignments are strategies commonly used by multinational companies. A qualitative study was conducted to 1) identify salient stakeholders in an expatriate assignment, 2) explore the criteria different stakeholders use to appraise success, 3) assess what can help make an assignment successful and 4) how success should be demonstrated. It takes a multiple stakeholder view, thus analysing information from expatriates, repatriates, spouses and organisational managers. In total, nineteen participants were interviewed, from two different organisations.

The results show that an expatriate assignment encompass, indeed, multiple stakeholders and that individuals and organisations perceive salience of stakeholders differently. Furthermore, expatriates and spouses use multiple criteria to appraise success, comprising a personal and a professional component, whilst organisations adopt a job-centric view. Moreover, relocation support and specific support for the families are regarded, by expatriates and spouses, as important organizational contributions towards success. In turn, a successful assignment should be recognised by organisations by promoting the expatriate, although this is not guaranteed by the employing entities.

Overall, this paper highlights the main differences and commonalities between an individual and an organizational perspective and shows that, regarding expatriate assignments, there are opposing views, interests and goals.

Keywords: multiple stakeholders expatriate assignment, success, managers, expatriates, spouses, family, organisation.

Resumo

As missões de expatriação são estratégias frequentemente utilizadas por organizações multinacionais. Foi conduzido um estudo qualitativo com o objetivo de 1) identificar os *stakeholders* salientes numa missão de expatriação, 2) explorar os critérios que diferentes *stakeholders* usam para avaliar o sucesso de uma missão, 3) avaliar o que pode contribuir para uma missão bem-sucedida e 4) como o sucesso pode ser demonstrado. É adotada uma visão de múltiplos *stakeholders*, analisando informação proveniente de expatriados, repatriados, esposas e gestores. No total, dezanove pessoas foram entrevistadas, de duas organizações diferentes.

Os resultados mostram que uma missão de expatriação compreende, de facto, múltiplos *stakeholders*, e que indivíduos e organizações têm perceções diferentes acerca da saliência dos mesmos. Mais ainda, expatriados e esposas utilizam múltiplos critérios para avaliar o sucesso de uma missão, abrangendo uma componente pessoal e uma profissional, enquanto as organizações adotam uma visão centrada no trabalho.

Adicionalmente, apoio na mudança e apoio específico para as famílias foi mencionado, por expatriados e esposas, como sendo relevante para uma missão bem-sucedida. Por sua vez, o sucesso deve ser reconhecido pelas organizações através de uma promoção de carreira, apesar de tal não ser garantido quando os trabalhadores são convidados a desempenhar uma missão internacional.

Em suma, este estudo coloca em evidência as principais diferenças e semelhanças entre uma perspetiva individual e organizacional, demonstrando que, no que respeita as missões de expatriação, existem visões, interesses e objetivos opostos.

Paravras-chave: múltiplos *stakeholders*, missão de expatriação, sucesso, gestores, expatriados, esposas, família, organizações.

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Introduction

Facing an increasingly global market, companies feel the need to internationalise and be present worldwide. Although there are different ways of doing so, transferring workers, on a temporary basis, has been a common choice for organisations that need global expertise (GMAC, 2014).

According to the latest GMAC (2014), 47% of respondents claimed an increase in the number of international assignees. Although lower than expected, this number is still significant. The survey also shows that filling managerial skill gaps in the host country is the most frequent reason for organisations to use international assignments, followed by filling technical gaps (GMAC, 2014). Most assignees are male, married and aged between 30 and 40 years old. In fact, 71% of male and female assignees confirmed to have a partner/spouse and, in 78% of the cases, the partner relocated with the employee (GMAC, 2014). Additionally, 47% were accompanied by children (GMAC, 2014). These numbers show that families can be greatly affected by international assignments, for they frequently relocate alongside the expatriates, which suggest that multiple stakeholders are involved.

Regarding the assignment destinations, the United States of America remains the most frequent destination country, followed by China (GMAC, 2014). The BRIC countries – Brazil, Russia, India and China – lead the top emerging new destination countries for international assignments and China is deemed as the country posing the greatest difficulties for assignees (GMAC, 2014).

An important feature of the study developed along this paper is the consideration of multiple stakeholders, whose definition and identification is arguable (Mitchell, Agle, and Wood, 1997). Hence, it is important to understand what entities the expatriates feel to have influence on or to be influenced by their decisions of mobility. Using a multiple stakeholder approach (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997), it will be possible to identify the stakeholders in an international assignment (hereafter IA) from the point of view of the expatriates themselves and spouses. Moreover, asking the employing organisations the same question will also allow for an interesting comparison. From the relevant literature, it is likely to presume the existence of multiple stakeholders for an IA, from the home and host countries to the expatriate him/herself and family (Ayca, 1997;

Haslberger and Brewster, 2008; Haslberger, Brewster, and Hippler, 2013; Miao, Adler, and Xu, 2011; Mitchell *et al.*, 1997; Mol, Ph. Born, and van der Molen, 2005; Shaffer, Harrison, and Gilley, 1999; Takeuchi, Yun, and Tesluk, 2002; Toh and DeNisi, 2005; Zimmermann, Holman, and Sparrow, 2003).

While earlier expatriate research adopts a common and coincident perspective, assuming that the organisation's interests correspond to the individual's, thus leading to a shared idea and appraisal of success, some authors demonstrated that the motives to expatriate differ from the motivations to go abroad (Dickmann, Doherty, Mills, and Brewster, 2008; Doherty, Dickmann, and Mills, 2011; Hippler, 2009; Pinto, Cabral-Cardoso, and Werther, 2012b), which suggest opposing views. Furthermore, studies have also shown that individual interests are not shared by the organisation, and vice versa (Benson and Pattie, 2009; Bonache, Brewster, Suutari, and De Saá, 2010; Crawley, Swailes, and Walsh, 2013; Dickmann and Harris, 2005). Moreover, there seems to occur some miscommunication regarding the expatriate goals among home and host country managers, as well as expatriates themselves (Benson and Pattie, 2009; Crawley *et al.*, 2013).

The main focus of expatriate research has been the measurement of one possible aspect of success at a time, whether the criterion used is adjustment, turnover, job performance or career patterns. Furthermore, scholars have only been focusing on one stakeholder at a time. However, an international assignment encompasses far more than a mere dichotomy between expatriate and organisation or expatriate and family: all these stakeholders, as well as host country managers and colleagues will have their own expectations regarding the outcomes and their own perceptions about expatriation success. Thus, this study adopts a 360-degree approach that better highlights the key differences and similarities among stakeholders.

Using descriptive, instrumental and normative arguments, a stakeholder theory will be presented (Donaldson and Preston, 1995), following a model of stakeholder identification and salience (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997). The aim is to provide a theoretical background to better understand the potential role of different stakeholders in an IA. Next, follows an analysis of an important body of literature on international assignments that explores the drivers and barriers both to expatriate and to accept being expatriated, the problems with goal-setting and the different interests involved. This is of utmost

importance for this paper, because all these aspects have a crucial impact on success criteria. Following, a critical review of the main literature on expatriate assignment (hereafter EA) success is presented, highlighting the main flaws and contributions, as well as explaining why, in spite of all the literature on expatriate assignment success, there are still lacking elements, some of which this study explores.

For all these reasons, the research questions of this study are:

- 1) Who are the stakeholders of an international assignment? To whom do expatriates, spouses and organisations pay attention?
- 2) Which criteria do the stakeholders of an international assignment use to appraise success?
- 3) What could make an expatriate assignment successful?
- 4) How should expatriation success be recognised?

Exploring these questions will contribute to the understanding of who the stakeholders of an expatriate assignment are. Furthermore, it shall be possible to present a wider and more detailed vision of EAs and the ways success is perceived, hence enabling an increased interconnection between individual and organisational perspectives (Bonache *et al.*, 2010).

The research approach is explained in detail, followed by a description of the main results. These are then interpreted, discussed and final conclusions and implications are presented.

Literature Review

The Multiple Stakeholder View

Given the mentioned purposes of this paper, it is important to draw the theoretical grounds for identifying who the stakeholders are in an expatriate assignment. But first, why should organisations be concerned with stakeholders? Why should this paper rest on a stakeholder theory?

To answer these questions, Donaldson and Preston (1995) provide arguments on why the stakeholder theory should “be accepted or preferred over alternative conceptions” (Donaldson and Preston, 1995, p. 73). This theory looks at organisations as a set where “diverse participants accomplish multiple, and not always entirely congruent, purposes” (Donaldson and Preston, 1995, p. 70).

The justifications underlying a stakeholder theory are descriptive, instrumental and normative, and these three levels are “nested within each other” (Donaldson and Preston, 1996, p. 74), *i.e.*, they all play a role in building this argument.

The external layer of the stakeholder theory is descriptive, for it presents and explains external relationships. The descriptive arguments rest on the observation that managers, although not explicitly acknowledging a stakeholder management strategy, tend to adopt practices that express a concern with a wider set of entities than merely the shareholders (Donaldson and Preston, 1995). Also, the existence of legal institutions which tend to protect the employees, suppliers, communities, etc., constitutes another set of descriptive justifications that supports the notion that “stakeholders are defined by their legitimate interest in the corporation” (Donaldson and Preston, 1995, p. 76). Nevertheless, these facts alone are not sufficient for a stakeholder theory of management for it would be invalid if managers suddenly abandoned stakeholder orientations (Donaldson and Preston, 1995).

This external layer is sustained by a second level of analysis: instrumental. This type of arguments reflects “a connection between stakeholder management strategies and organisational performance” (Donaldson and Preston, 1995, p. 77). Due to the lack of reliable tests that prove the hypothesis that stakeholder management strategies lead to better performance (Donaldson and Preston, 1995), analytical arguments were further pursued. According to these, managers engage in relationships with stakeholders

because this allows for a more efficient way to achieve organisational goals, hence linking this model to better performance (Donaldson and Preston, 1995). Another set of analytical arguments regards the organisation as a set of multiple contracts, with different parties, each with their own interests (Donaldson and Preston, 1995). Thus, corporate performance is dependent upon the satisfaction of all stakeholders' interests (Donaldson and Preston, 1995). However, although initially building upon an instrumental basis, these arguments use non-instrumental rationale to further develop (Donaldson and Preston, 1995) and, therefore, instrumental arguments alone do not validate a stakeholder theory.

The core of this model is normative (Donaldson and Preston, 1995). There are groups with moral claims over the activity of organisations because it impacts different entities and not merely the organisations themselves (Donaldson and Preston, 1995). This is supported by the theoretical concept of private property which “clearly does not ascribe unlimited rights to owners and hence does not support the popular claim that the responsibility of managers is to act solely as agents for the shareowners” (Donaldson and Preston, 1995, p. 84). Thus, managers should pay attention to stakeholders, acknowledging and truly considering their interests, because it is the moral thing to do, *i.e.*, that is “a moral requirement for the legitimacy of the management function” (Donaldson and Preston, 1995, p. 87).

These arguments can easily be applied to an international assignment. Organisations often put forward cross-cultural training programs for the expatriate and the family to engage in (GMAC, 2014), which supports a descriptive argument that managers pay attention to stakeholders. Moreover, home and host organisational support to the expatriate and the family has been linked to higher levels of adjustment (Aycan, 1997; Malek, Budhwar and Reiche, 2014; Miao *et al.*, 2011; Toh and DeNisi, 2005; Zimmermann *et al.*, 2003), prevention of turnover (Avril and Magnini, 2007; Toh and DeNisi, 2005) and job performance (Harrison and Shaffer, 2005; Toh and DeNisi, 2005), thus supporting instrumental arguments. Normative arguments rest on the fact that an international assignment impacts not only the home organisation and the expatriate, but also the family and the host country managers and colleagues. Therefore, these groups of stakeholders have a moral claim, for they can be deeply affected by and also affect an expatriate assignment.

A justification for stakeholder theory has been presented, but it is also important to understand who the stakeholders are and how important they are to managers. For that, the Mitchell *et al.* (1997) multiple stakeholder model is used, thus focusing on the questions of who the stakeholders of the IA are and to whom managers pay attention. The model adopts a “normative theory of stakeholder identification” (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997, p. 853) and a “descriptive theory of stakeholder salience” (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997, p. 853), which are useful to address both questions. The main goal is to provide “a theory of stakeholder identification that can reliably separate stakeholders from nonstakeholders” (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997, p. 854) of an IA.

To identify an organisation’s stakeholder, there are three essential, interdependent attributes: power, legitimacy and urgency (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997). These attributes have some relevant properties: a) they are not steady, which means they may be present or absent at different points in time; b) they are of a perceptual quality, meaning that the way stakeholders perceive their attributes isn’t necessarily similar to the way managers do; c) possession of attributes doesn’t imply its actual use, because consciousness of this possession and will to use them are required and are variable.

One important theoretical contribution of this model, is the assumption that power and legitimacy are different concepts. Due to the difficulty in defining power, the authors take upon Slancik and Pfeffer’s definition (1974, p. 3, *cit. in* Mitchell *et al.*, 1997, p. 865) which expresses the ability of one social actor to get another one to do something that the latter wouldn’t have done. As for legitimacy, they didn’t provide a new definition, but rather echoed Sucham’s (1995, p. 574, *cit. in* Mitchell *et al.*, 1997, p. 866) in saying it is “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions”. Although different, stakeholders’ power and legitimacy are related and interdependent: even if a claim of a stakeholder is legitimate, that entity needs power to impose its will or this claim has to be perceived as urgent, otherwise managers will not see this stakeholder as salient.

The last attribute is urgency and it is essential for the stakeholder model to be conceived as dynamic, rather than static. It is defined as “the degree to which stakeholder claims call for immediate attention” (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997, p. 867). Thus, it depends on two features: time sensitivity and criticality.

It is the number and combination of attributes that define the degree to which stakeholders' claims are attended by managers, *i.e.*, determines the stakeholder's salience. It is also important to note that it is the managers' perceptions of these conditions that dictate the salience of stakeholders.

Given these assumptions, the authors created seven subcategories, which are detailed in table 1, and can apply to an IA.

| Category | Stakeholders Subcategories | Main Features | International Assignments |
|---|-----------------------------------|--|--|
| Latent Stakeholders (low salience) | Dormant | They possess power, but without legitimacy or urgency, it remains unused | |
| | Discretionary | They possess legitimacy | |
| | Demanding | They possess urgency | |
| Expectant Stakeholders (medium salience) | Dominant | Power and legitimacy are combined: they have both legitimate claims and a capability to act on them. | |
| | Dangerous | They have power and urgency: without legitimacy, they are likely to use coercive and violent means to impose their will. | |
| | Dependent | They have urgent and legitimate claims; Without power, they have to rely on other agents to carry out their will. | Expatriates before IA; Family, at the moment of the decision to expatriate; Host country organisation. |

| Category | Stakeholders Subcategories | Main Features | International Assignments |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|--|
| High Salient Stakeholders | Definitive | All attributes are present. It is the most salient stakeholder | Home country organisation; Expatriates; Family, especially if relocating with the expatriate |

Table 1 - Multiple Stakeholder View, adapted from (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997, p. 874).

When a stakeholder only possesses one attribute, it is called a “latent stakeholder” (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997, p. 874) and, because this is a low salience category, managers are not likely to take action on behalf of them or even recognize them. When the only present attribute is power, the stakeholder is “dormant” (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997, p. 874) and its power remains unused. Nonetheless, managers do not fully ignore this group, for they can, at any moment, acquire a second attribute and increase their salience. If a stakeholder only possesses legitimacy, it is “discretionary” (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997, p. 875). Finally, if the sole attribute is urgency, the stakeholder is “demanding” (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997, p. 875).

When two attributes are present, the stakeholders are “expectant” (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997, p. 876), and this is a medium salience category. If power and legitimacy are combined, the stakeholders can be considered “dominant” (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997, p. 876) and, by possessing both legitimate claims and the ability to act on them, they will matter to managers. “Dependent stakeholders” (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997, p. 877) are the ones who have urgent and legitimate claims, but they have to rely on other entities to pursue their will. When power and urgency are combined, stakeholders are likely to rely on coercive and violent means to carry out their will, being defined as “dangerous stakeholders” (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997, p. 877).

Finally, in the presence of the three attributes, the stakeholder is considered “definitive” (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997, p. 878), being the most salient.

On the basis of this model, it is likely to presume that an IA has multiple stakeholders and the salience of these stakeholders may vary according to different

contextual aspects, such as, the stage of the expatriate assignment, the role of the employee in the organisation or the marital status of the employee. For example, before the assignment, if the worker is given freedom of choice regarding the acceptance of the assignment (which is not always the case, according to Cerdin and Pargneux (2009)), the future expatriate may be considered a definitive stakeholder, because he/she possesses all three attributes. If not, the individual may be considered dependent. At the moment of the decision, in the home country organisation, the family may be a “dependent stakeholder”, because not being presently involved in the decision-making process implies dependence on the expatriate to carry out the family’s will. Nonetheless, during the assignment, the situation may change, especially if the family relocates with the expatriate, becoming, in that case, a definitive stakeholder. Additionally, if the expatriate is not married or in a committed relationship, the composition of the family as a stakeholder and also its role in the international assignment can be altered. Some salient stakeholders can be presumed: the home country managers who participate in the decision to expatriate, the expatriate him/herself, the expatriate’s family, the host country nationals that are responsible for the expatriate’s reception and the home and host country colleagues. Therefore, it is a key aim of this study to identify who the stakeholders are in an IA (research question 1).

Success in terms of Motives and Goals Alignment

Expatriate assignment success has traditionally been explored in terms of cross-cultural adjustment (Miao *et al.*, 2011; Zimmermann *et al.*, 2003), turnover (Aycan, 1997; Mol *et al.*, 2005; Cerdin and Pargneux, 2012; Avril and Magnini, 2007; Harzing and Christensen, 2004), job performance (Harrison and Shaffer, 2005; Martin and Bartol, 2003), and career patterns (Cerdin and Pargneux, 2009, 2012). With only a few exceptions, these studies adopted an individual perspective, thus assuming consistency between individual and organisational goals and outcomes.

However, several authors (Benson and Pattie, 2009; Bonache, *et al.*, 2010; Crawley *et al.*, 2013; Dickmann *et al.*, 2008; Dickmann and Harris, 2005; Doherty *et al.*, 2011; Hippler, 2009; Pinto *et al.*, 2012b) have been arguing for a different scenario, in which individual and organisational interests are substantially different and often conflictual.

Research has shown that individual and organisational perspectives on the motives to accept an international assignment may not fit (Dickmann *et al.*, 2008; Doherty *et al.*, 2011; Pinto *et al.*, 2012b). Expatriates accepting or seeking an assignment are most influenced by job and career prospects and development of skills (Dickmann *et al.*, 2008; Doherty *et al.*, 2011; Hippler, 2009), as well as by family concerns, such as the “willingness of spouse to move” (Dickmann *et al.*, 2008, p. 738); while organisations regard the developmental and career progression opportunities as less important factors (Dickmann *et al.*, 2008) and may overestimate the financial impact of an assignment and the location of the destination country (Dickmann *et al.*, 2008). Furthermore, expatriates are not always eager to perform international assignments, and might as well be forced to accept those (Pinto *et al.*, 2012b). Whilst personal and professional challenges and career prospects may act as “pull factors” (Pinto *et al.*, 2012b, p. 2300) for individuals to go abroad, being “compelled” (Pinto *et al.*, 2012b, p. 2300) by the employing organisation to accept an international assignment may be a “push factor” (Pinto, *et al.*, 2012b, p. 2300). Negative reasons to go abroad also include professional, personal and financial dissatisfaction at home (Pinto, *et al.*, 2012b). Moreover, “an adequate balance between personal and professional life influences the decisions of expatriates to go more than is appreciated by organisations” (Dickmann *et al.*, 2008, p. 743).

This body of literature shows that individual interests regarding expatriation are not always aligned with the organisations’ goals for the assignment. For instance, individuals frequently accept an international assignment because of career prospects (Dickmann *et al.*, 2008; Doherty *et al.*, 2011; Hippler, 2009; Pinto, *et al.*, 2012b), but, when returning home, repatriation can be a main issue, as organisations experience difficulty in assigning repatriates to a position that fits the newly developed or acquired skills (Benson and Pattie, 2009; Bonache *et al.*, 2010; Crawley *et al.*, 2013; Dickmann and Harris, 2005). For instance, Kraimer, Shaffer, and Bolino (2009) analysed 84 repatriates and concluded that individuals who had performed only one assignment overseas experienced career advancement upon repatriation, but those who had performed more than one were actually experiencing “more harm than good with regard to career advancement within the same organisation” (Kraimer *et al.*, 2009, p. 40). Moreover, by finding that the acquisition of managerial skills abroad was negatively

related to career advancement, Kraimer *et al.* (2009) pointed out the feeling of underemployment experienced by repatriates, when their skills are not put to use.

This literature also acknowledges the impact of family considerations on the individuals' decision to accept an IA, thus further suggesting the importance of different stakeholders. In addition, the difference in perceptions between organisations and individuals, regarding the motives for accepting an overseas experience, "may fundamentally impact on the 'perceived' success of an international assignment" (Dickmann *et al.*, 2008, p. 747). Hence, to better understand this dependency, the adoption of a multiple perspective approach is required (Dickmann *et al.*, 2008), as pursued in this study.

Some authors also draw attention to the fact that the expatriate assignment goals set are not always the same in the home and host organisations. In fact, goal setting can be "[a] major area for discussion" (Crawley *et al.*, 2013, p. 185) in international assignments, where both home and host representatives play a role in setting the goals to be achieved by the expatriate (Benson and Pattie, 2009; Crawley *et al.*, 2013). It may be the case that, where there is a lack of communication and familiarity, goals set at the headquarters may not be consistent with the specific context of the host country (Crawley *et al.*, 2013). Additionally, the needs of the headquarters may significantly differ from the subsidiaries'. For instance, Benson and Pattie (2009) aimed to explore the roles of home and host supervisors regarding different aspects of IAs, finding that due to different interests, home supervisors adopted a long-term developmental posture, whilst host supervisors were more concerned with "short-term adjustment and performance" (Benson and Pattie, 2009, p. 55). Hence, it is possible that "local supervisors perceive the goals of expatriation differently than home supervisors" (Benson and Pattie, 2009, p. 61), thus affecting the perception of IA success.

Another major criticism regarding expatriation success refers to the fact that most of the research has focused mainly on the parent company and the expatriate, thus somehow neglecting the influence of local employees on a successful assignment (Toh and DeNisi, 2005).

Despite this criticism, earlier research shows that a) the reasons to expatriate are often different from the motivations to go abroad (Dickmann and Doherty, 2010; Dickmann *et al.*, 2008; Dickmann and Harris, 2005; Doherty *et al.*, 2011; Hippler,

2009; Pinto *et al.*, 2012b); b) the interests of expatriates and organisations are not always aligned (Benson and Pattie, 2009; Bonache *et al.*, 2010; Crawley *et al.*, 2013; Dickmann and Harris, 2005; Pinto *et al.*, 2012b); c) expatriation goals are often perceived differently by the home and host country managers and by expatriates (Benson and Pattie, 2009; Crawley *et al.*, 2013). These findings suggest that if disagreement exists from the inception of IAs, it is likely to persist along the assignment further influencing the assessment of IAs success.

Success in terms of Cross-Cultural Adjustment

The adjustment process has been largely explored by scholars, who have regarded it as a multifaceted phenomenon (Aycan, 1997; Haslberger *et al.*, 2013; Miao *et al.*, 2011; Shaffer *et al.*, 1999; Takeuchi, 2010; Zimmermann *et al.*, 2003). Cross-cultural adjustment has been generally defined as the degree of fit and psychological well-being in regards to a new environment, and its understanding has been three-fold: work-related adjustment (work adjustment); interaction with others (interaction adjustment or socio-cultural adjustment); adjustment to the general living conditions (general adjustment or psychological adjustment) (Aycan, 1997; Pinto, Cabral-Cardoso, and Werther, 2012a; Takeuchi *et al.*, 2002).

It has been argued that adjustment should be conceptualized “as part of a process of mutual adjustment” (Zimmermann *et al.*, 2003, p. 16) and that it depends on the relationship established with host country stakeholders (Miao *et al.*, 2011; Takeuchi, 2010; Toh and DeNisi, 2005; Zimmermann *et al.*, 2003). For example, communication and understanding between individuals from such different cultures can be enabled if host country stakeholders also adopt some of the expatriates’ home country culture (Zimmermann *et al.*, 2003). Furthermore, the adjustment of expatriates makes it more likely for them to adopt the organisational behaviour most beneficial to the host environment (Takeuchi, 2010). In turn, host country nationals may feel “obliged” to contribute to this relationship, in order to maintain it. Hence, one can expect “some of the variables related to the host country nationals to moderate (or interact) with expatriate-related factors to affect expatriates’ level of adjustment (and outcomes)” (Takeuchi, 2010, p. 1057). Local staff can be a great facilitator of cross-cultural adjustment, due to having information about the culture and the host organisation,

which has been overlooked by multinational companies (Toh and DeNisi, 2005). They can assist the expatriate in the process of socialisation and establishment of his/her role in the host unit, preventing counter-productive work behaviours, turnover and absenteeism (Toh and DeNisi, 2005). Hence, emotional support from these stakeholders can help the newcomer feel welcomed and esteemed, and in turn “can reduce the level of stress experienced by the individual” (Toh and DeNisi, 2005, p. 136).

By arguing that the relationships established among different stakeholders and the satisfaction of their interests contributes to success (Miao *et al.*, 2011; Takeuchi, 2010; Toh and DeNisi, 2005; Zimmermann *et al.*, 2003), research emphasizes that expatriate success depends on the fit with the expectations of different stakeholders (Miao *et al.*, 2011).

The home organisation also reciprocally interferes with expatriate cross-cultural adjustment. A strategic human resource management perspective suggests that cross-cultural adjustment of the assignee depends on the strategies of the organisation, *i.e.*, “multinational strategy acts as a moderator of the relationship between HR systems and expatriate adjustment” (Takeuchi, 2010).

The perceived support from the organisations and host country nationals can also impact on the levels of adjustment of expatriates and their spouses (Malek *et al.*, 2014), further contributing to good job performance of expatriates. Thus, adjustment may also be regarded as a mean and not an end in itself (Malek *et al.*, 2014). Furthermore, expatriates and their partners rely on different sources of support: the expatriates’ adjustment is significantly influenced by perceived support from the organisations but not from the host country nationals; and the spouses’ adjustment is more influenced by perceived support of host country nationals (Malek *et al.*, 2014), suggesting different ways of appraising EA success. These conclusions are an important step towards not only the acknowledgement of different stakeholders but also of how these stakeholders, organisations and host country nationals, can contribute to a successful expatriate assignment (Malek *et al.*, 2014; Toh and DeNisi, 2005).

The dimension of adjustment has also been explored from the point of view of the family (Haslberger and Brewster, 2008; Shaffer *et al.*, 1999; Takeuchi *et al.*, 2002). The key point here is that family adjustment has an impact on the expatriate, thus playing a role in the success of an IA. At the same time, there’s also a “within-domain

effect” (Takeuchi *et al.*, 2002, p. 6) when a relationship between variables of the same domain occur, for example, between role stress and job satisfaction (both variables of work adjustment). Between dimensions, there can be a “spillover effect” (Takeuchi *et al.*, 2002, p. 6), meaning that nonwork and work domains impact on one another. Finally, individuals can have a “crossover effect” (Takeuchi *et al.*, 2002, p. 6), which means, for instance that the adjustment of a family member can impact on another (Haslberger and Brewster, 2008; Shaffer *et al.*, 1999; Takeuchi *et al.*, 2002). Thus, a maladjusted family member will create stress for the rest of the family (Haslberger and Brewster, 2008). Similarly, “the impact of positive coping behaviours of one member will be felt by the others as well” (Haslberger and Brewster, 2008, p. 329). This notion is further developed by Takeuchi (2010), who argued that most literature on expatriate cross-cultural adjustment has been centred on the individual alone, thus underestimating the role of other stakeholders. The author adopted a multiple stakeholder view of expatriate cross-cultural adjustment to argue that the assignee influences and is influenced by different entities, establishing non-linear relationships with them (Takeuchi, 2010). From a work-family and family-work conflict perspective, there seems to be a more complex relationship between family members and expatriates than acknowledged by previous research, which traditionally focus a limited number of variables (Takeuchi, 2010).

Success in terms of No Turnover

One of the consequences of poor adjustment is premature return, which has been used as a sign of poor expatriation success (Aycan, 1997; Haslberger and Brewster, 2008; Haslberger *et al.*, 2013; Shaffer *et al.*, 1999; Takeuchi *et al.*, 2002; Zimmermann *et al.*, 2003). Withdrawal from the assignment may bring time and financial loss to the organisation, representing an investment with no return.

Nonetheless, cross-cultural adjustment and satisfaction with the assignment are not related (Pinto *et al.*, 2012a), and only work adjustment might result in assignment withdrawal intentions, but not in organisational or job turnover intentions (Pinto *et al.*, 2012a). Other dimensions of adjustment (interaction and general adjustment) are not preconditions of assignment withdrawal intentions either (Pinto *et al.*, 2012a), which can be explained by the importance of career outcomes for expatriates: even if

expatriates experience poor interaction and/or general adjustment, they may feel satisfied with the assignment, thus wishing to perform it until the end, motivated by career prospects (Pinto *et al.*, 2012a). The opposite may happen as well: well-adjusted but professionally unfulfilled individuals may consider assignment withdrawal because career and/or financial benefits do not fit their initial expectations (Pinto *et al.*, 2012a).

There are important predictive organisational elements, such as headquarters and host support and pre-assignment preparation that prevent turnover and thus impact expatriation success (Aycan, 1997). The selection and training of the adequate candidates, taking into account the family situation, personal characteristics, lifestyle and applicants' learning orientation, can further prevent turnover (Avril and Magnini, 2007). In fact, it has been argued that there are characteristics which, combined with the right training, can be predictive of the expatriates' capability of completing the assignment: technical skills, previous international experience and emotional intelligence (Avril and Magnini, 2007).

Despite the interest of these presumptions, most have not been tested, up to our knowledge. Moreover, they suggest that simple indicators as adjustment and turnover are not enough to characterise the success of an IA. Furthermore, some authors (Harzing and Christensen, 2004; Hemmasi, Downes, and Varner, 2010) have issued important concerns regarding the measurement of expatriate assignment success through turnover rate. Harzing and Christensen (2004) urged researchers to look at turnover in a different way. Mainly, the authors criticised the tradition of defining expatriate failure in terms of turnover without considering the very nature of the phenomenon (Harzing and Christensen, 2004). By doing so, they drew attention to an essential assumption of earlier research: "we must realize that what might be regarded as an expatriate failure from an organizational perspective, might not be an expatriate failure to the expatriate and vice versa" (Harzing and Christensen, 2004, p. 621) and that "[s]ome expatriate assignments might be considered failures when interpreted from the home country cultural context, but successes when interpreted from the host country context" (Harzing and Christensen, 2004, p. 623). These arguments presuppose the existence of different stakeholders and also that different stakeholders evaluate expatriate success through different, if not opposed, criteria.

From an organisational point of view, turnover does not necessarily equate expatriate failure. For example, reorganisation or restructuring processes may create redundancies and the organisation may be better off by terminating an international assignment earlier (Harzing and Christensen, 2004). It does not mean that it failed; it can perhaps mean that the expatriate or repatriate is not part of the organisational strategy anymore. Also, the organisation can benefit from the premature return of a low-performing expatriate, thus being a “functional turnover” (Harzing and Christensen, 2004, p. 621).

From an individual perspective, the expatriate may choose to voluntarily terminate the assignment before it has been fully performed due to a more attractive job offer, either in the home country or abroad. In this case too, turnover itself is insufficient to correctly assess the IA outcome in terms of success: although it may result in loss for the organisation, the individual is likely to experience different and possibly positive consequences (Harzing and Christensen, 2004).

Ultimately, success and failure must be contextually defined, because they depend on the different stakeholders’ expectations, interests and goals (Harzing and Christensen, 2004; Hemmasi *et al.*, 2010). A flexible and comprehensive approach to the study of expatriate success (Harzing and Christensen, 2004; Hemmasi *et al.*, 2010) is required to address all these issues.

Success in terms of Assignment Performance

Another criterion for evaluating expatriate success has been job performance, and it has been further linked to adjustment (Harrison and Shaffer, 2005; Mol *et al.*, 2005).

It has been argued that psychological adjustment, in its multiple facets, impacts individuals’ effort regulation (allocation of personal resources to job activities), which, in turn, determines job performance (Harrison and Shaffer, 2005). Harrison and Shaffer (2005) tested this model collecting data not only from expatriates but also from spouses and work colleagues, thus highlighting the importance of multiple stakeholders. However, these participants only expressed themselves over a limited number of established measures, which does not permit the emergence of other criteria perceived as more adequate or salient to assess expatriate success.

Mol *et al.* (2005) also relied on the criterion of job performance, calling for an effective method for assessing it. These authors referred to turnover as EA failure, resulting from poor job performance. Similarly to others (Harzing and Christensen, 2004; Hemmasi *et al.*, 2010), Mol *et al.* (2005) acknowledged that the consequences of an early return (criterion used to assess expatriation failure) are very different for the organisation, for the expatriate and for the family, thus supporting the notion that if a certain outcome has different impacts on different stakeholders, then it is possible to predict that those stakeholders may choose the criteria to evaluate the IA success accordingly.

Success in terms of Career Fit

Cerdin and Pargneux (2009) developed a model of expatriate success as a fit between career attitudes and international assignments. They considered three stages of an international assignment – pre-expatriation, expatriation and repatriation. Moreover, by considering an individual and an organisational perspective, they acknowledged that the definition of success might be different for each stakeholder. Individuals measure success in terms of career outcomes, job success and development success (Cerdin and Pargneux, 2009), while career success comprises knowledge, skills and abilities during the expatriation stage, employability acquired during repatriation, and the structuring of networks and relationships during both stages. Organisations appraise EA success during the expatriation and repatriation stage, by the achievement of specific goals and tasks (Cerdin and Pargneux, 2009). Another criteria for assessing EA success is the retention of expatriates and knowledge transfer (Cerdin and Pargneux, 2009). In fact, organisations are increasingly dependent on knowledge management and, with internationalization, geographic dispersion of subsidiaries can be a barrier for knowledge transfer. In fact, international assignments are key strategies to transfer knowledge and expertise between subsidiaries (Bresman, Birkinshaw, and Nobel, 1999).

More recently, Cerdin and Pargneux (2012) pursued an empirical testing of the model. They focused on the expatriation stage, and distinguished the perspective of the individual and that of the organisation. They emphasised the notion that companies measure success by the intentions of the expatriates to leave their organisation

prematurely (Cerdin and Pargneux, 2012), whilst considering both company-backed and self-initiated expatriates. This may constitute a clear limitation, because the relationship between individual and organisation is substantially different in both cases of international mobility, for organisational success to be defined in the same way. When an organisation sends an employee on an international assignment, there is a rather large investment and the consequences of the individual leaving the organisation are intrinsically related to the context of the expatriate assignment. A self-initiated individual working abroad does not have the same status as a company-backed expatriate, since the decision to move abroad did not come from the organisation. Also, being a self-initiated expatriate is not suggestive of the importance of the duties performed by the individual, whereas a corporate expatriate traditionally assumes a more demanding position abroad (GMAC, 2014).

Nonetheless, Cerdin and Pargneux (2012) were able to establish a connection between different types of career attitudes and international mobility success. Moreover, by introducing the notion of “subjective fit”, the authors acknowledged that individual perceptions play an important role in assessing the success of an EA (Cerdin and Pargneux, 2012), which is consistent with the view pursued in this research.

Expatriate Assignment Success – Why further Investigation is Required

As shown, expatriate assignment success has long called for the attention of scholars. Yet, earlier research contains several gaps. Only one element of success/failure has been explored at a time, whether we consider goals alignment, adjustment, turnover, performance or career advancement. Furthermore, most of the literature presented has followed a deductive and quantitative approach in that a criteria is pre-defined and then individuals are asked about it. Despite the results that success can be measured in terms of these criteria, this dominant approach is still one-dimensional. For instance, an individual may have a good performance, meaning that the organisation may consider the IA successful, but it does not mean that the initial expectations of the expatriate were met. Another example is the fact that an early return may present loss for the organisation but, if the expatriate is leaving for a better job offer, the individual may not see it as being unsuccessful (Harzing and Christensen, 2004; Hemmasi *et al.*, 2010), but rather the opposite.

While the role of different stakeholders in shaping the IA success has been recognised by several authors (Aycan, 1997; Haslberger and Brewster, 2008; Haslberger *et al.*, 2013; Miao *et al.*, 2011; Mitchell *et al.*, 1997; Mol *et al.*, 2005; Shaffer *et al.*, 1999; Takeuchi *et al.*, 2002; Zimmermann *et al.*, 2003), a theoretical framework considering multiple views of EA success is still lacking.

Hence, the research questions of this study are:

Research question 1: Who are the stakeholders of an international assignment?

To whom do expatriates, spouses and organisations pay attention?

Research question 2: Which criteria do the stakeholders of an international assignment use to appraise success?

Research question 3: What could make an expatriate assignment successful?

Research question 4: How should expatriation success be recognised?

Research Approach

A reliable set of criteria proved to be adopted by different stakeholders to appraise expatriate assignment success has not yet been developed, so this study was designed to be exploratory (Eisenhardt, 1989). Thus, in order to get in-depth information from different participants, semi-structured interviews were considered to best fit this purpose (Eisenhardt, 1989).

To approach participants for this project, several international companies with presence in Portugal were contacted, by email, beginning in October 2013. The selection criteria for these companies were: a) to have international presence, b) to currently have workers on expatriate assignments, c) to have experience running international assignments. Companies with presence in Portugal were first contacted, regardless of the headquarters origin, due to enhanced possibilities of face-to-face interviews. Only a few companies replied and most declined, arguing for the great amount of work and projects underway. Nonetheless, it was possible to establish a positive contact with two different companies. In each company, the aim was to enrol different participants according to their involvement in the expatriate assignments. To this purpose, participants were targeted based on the following selection criteria: a) being currently an expatriate or b) being a repatriate, having returned to the headquarters for less than two years; c) being a headquarters manager and having played a role in the expatriation process; d) being a headquarters colleague of an actual or former expatriate; e) being a headquarters supervisor of an actual or former expatriate. Furthermore, it was also explained that a host company/subsidiary perspective would be useful, from interviewing f) a person responsible for welcoming expatriates at destination, and e) local colleagues and supervisors. Whenever possible, expatriate family members were also targeted, depending on expatriates' agreement.

In sum, this paper collected primary data through a case study approach, combined with documental analysis and semi-structured interviews to different people involved in expatriate assignments.

The Case Organisations

Data were collected from two different companies, which preferred to remain anonymous.

The first organisation – Organisation A – was founded 20 years ago, in Portugal. It is a multinational company operating in the Information Technology sector, specialized in providing management software solutions to Small, Medium and Large Organisations, as well as the Public Administration Sector. It can be considered to be in an earlier stage of internationalisation, mainly due to limited subsidiaries control and high dependence on headquarters (Harzing, 2000). In 2013, its sales volume was €17.9M (latest data available). Up to March 2014, the company employed around 260 workers and had nine expatriates, who were displaced in Angola, Mozambique and Dubai. The organisation is also present in Spain. According to a headquarters' Human Resource (HR) Manager, this number has slightly increased over the years, due to the internationalisation of the company.

In this company, five people were interviewed: two expatriates (one assigned to Mozambique and the other to Angola), two repatriates and one headquarters manager. The interviewed repatriates were previously displaced in Mozambique and Angola, where they performed the role of Country Managers overseas, and so were responsible for welcoming newcomers from the headquarters. They both had returned definitely at the time of the interviews. The headquarters manager was, at the time of the interview, part of the work team of the expatriate displaced in Angola. Due to scheduling constraints, it was not possible to interview the person involved in the decision-making process to expatriate to Mozambique and the organisation did not authorise the contact with other stakeholders. In Organisation A, the expatriates were not accompanied by their families, except for the expatriate in Angola, whose spouse moved nearly three years after the beginning of his assignment. They were not married before, although they were in a relationship already. Both expatriates were asked permission, by the researcher, to interview their spouses. Although they both agreed to do so, these interviews did not take place, due to scheduling conflicts and time constraints. The two expatriates, the home country manager and one repatriate were interviewed in December 2013, when the expatriates visited Portugal, thus allowing for four face-to-face interviews. The other repatriate was interviewed in January 2014, via Skype. These

five interviews were conducted in Portuguese. Table 2 describes the participants' demographics.

The other company involved in this study – Organisation B – is based in the United States of America and was founded in the nineteenth century. It is a multinational company with a long history, comprising several brands in the marine, recreation and fitness industries. This company is in a more advanced stage of internationalisation, due to its common use of expatriates and international experience (Harzing, 2000). Subsidiaries have more control (than in Organization A), but major differences can be found amongst foreign units in terms of interdependence (Harzing, 2000). In 2013, total net sales were approximately \$3.9 billion. It has around 16,000 employees worldwide, namely in Europe, Canada, the Pacific Rim, Latin America, Africa and the Middle East. According to one Human Resource Manager, there were twenty-five expatriates in June 2014. Most displacements occur from the United States to Europe, but there has been an increasing number of expatriate assignments to Brazil and China. It is predictable that these longer assignments will tend to decrease due to the growth of local recruitment.

The first contact was made with the office in Portugal, who then provided the contact of the European headquarters, since there are no expatriates coming to or going from Portugal. An email explaining the guidelines of this research was sent by an HR manager from the European subsidiary to all expatriates and repatriates that met the selection criteria aforementioned. Twelve workers agreed to participate: ten expatriates and two repatriates (who had returned in the last 6 months). Due to scheduling constraints, only nine out of these twelve were interviewed. Eight of these expatriates were married. Except for one single expatriate, they were all accompanied by their families from the beginning of the assignment. They were asked permission to interview their spouses. While seven agreed to do so, only three interviews were possible.

To represent the organisation, two Human Resource managers involved in designing and accompanying expatriate programs were interviewed: one from the European subsidiary and one from the North American headquarters. They both had contact with expatriates coming to and going from their unit, thus being able to give a general perspective over expatriate assignments. Within international mobility, their

main duties were to handle compensation plans for international assignments, to manage expatriate programs and to make interface with expatriates.

Overall, fourteen interviews were conducted within this organisation, all via Skype, given the constraints associated with the geographic location of the participants. All of them were conducted in English between February and April 2014.

Participants

Overall, nineteen interviews were conducted: four were face-to-face interviews and fifteen were Skype interviews. All were tape-recorded upon verbal consent of the interviewees. Five of them were conducted in Portuguese, and the rest in English. They were then integrally transcribed and sent to the participants for validation.

Four interview scripts were elaborated and adapted according to the involvement of the interviewee with the expatriate assignment: one to use with expatriates, one to use with the spouses, one for the HR Managers from Organisation B and the headquarters manager from Organisation A, and one for the repatriates in Organisation A. The scripts encompassed questions regarding the expatriation process, the identification of stakeholders, the criteria used to appraise the expatriate assignment success, the specific contribution of each stakeholder to success and how this should be demonstrated. Demographic data were also collected. Table 2 presents the demographic characteristics of the interviewees. Some information was only relevant for some stakeholders: where this is the case, the table is filled with “N/A”, standing for Not Applicable.

| Interviewee | Type of Stakeholder | Age / Gender | Marital Status | Home Country | Host Country | Time spent in the Host Country so far | Assignment length (years) |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|--------------|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| | | | | | | (years) | |
| Organization A | | | | | | | |
| Interviewee 1 | Expatriate | 43 (M) | Divorced, but in a relationship, 2 daughters | Portugal | Mozambique | 2 | 3 |
| Interviewee 2 | Repatriate | 39 (M) | Married | Portugal | Angola | N/A | 3, back for 2 years |
| Interviewee 3 | Repatriate | 42 (M) | Married | Portugal | Mozambique | N/A | 3, back for 1 year |
| Interviewee 4 | Home Country manager | 40 (M) | N/A | Portugal | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| Interviewee 5 | Expatriate | 35 (M) | Married, no children | Portugal | Angola | 4 | 6 |
| Organization B | | | | | | | |
| Interviewee 6 | Spouse | 50 (F) | Married, 1 son | United States of America | Belgium | 4 | 3 to 5 |
| Interviewee 7 | Expatriate | 48 (M) | Single | United States of America | China | 6 | 8 |
| Interviewee 8 | Headquarters HR Manager | 39 (M) | N/A | United States of America | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| Interviewee 9 | Spouse | 52 (F) | Married, no kids | Australia | United States of America | 0.5 | 3 |
| Interviewee 10 | Subsidiary HR Manager | 40 (M) | N/A | Belgium | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| Interviewee 11 | Expatriate | 48 (M) | Married, 4 children | United States of America | China | 3 | 3 to 5 |
| Interviewee 12 | Expatriate | 37 (M) | Married, 4 children | Mexico | Brazil | 2 | 3 to 5 |
| Interviewee 13 | Expatriate | 51 (M) | Married, 1 son | United States of America | Belgium | 1.5 | 3 to 5 |
| Interviewee 14 | Expatriate | 42 (M) | Married, 3 children | United States of America | Belgium | 0.5 | 3 to 5 |
| Interviewee 15 | Repatriate | 56 (M) | Married, 2 children | United States of America | Belgium | N/A | 5, back for 5 months |
| Interviewee 16 | Expatriate | 28 (M) | Married, 2 children | Mexico | Brazil | 1.5 | 2 |
| Interviewee 17 | Spouse | 49 (F) | Married, 2 children | United States of America | Belgium | 5 | 5 |
| Interviewee 18 | Expatriate | 40 (M) | Married | Mexico | Brazil | 1 | 3 |
| Interviewee 19 | Expatriate | 54 (M) | Married, no children | Australia | United States of America | 0.5 | 3 |

Table 2 - Socio-demographic characterisation of participants

In terms of different stakeholders (table 3), the sample is composed as follows: ten expatriates, three repatriates, three spouses and three organisational representatives (two headquarters representatives, one of each Organisation and one subsidiary representative from Organisation B. The corporate representatives from Organisation B are HR managers who interact regularly with incoming and outgoing expatriates.

This sample is greatly dominated by male interviewees. All eleven expatriates are male, which is in line with a recent survey (GMAC, 2014): the inquired companies reported a small 20% of female assignees. The spouses interviewed are the only female participants.

The eldest expatriate/repatriate was 56 years old and the youngest worker was aged 28. The average age was 43.3 years old. As for the spouses, the average age was 50.3 and the organisational representatives were, on average, 39.6 years old.

Overall, five expatriates/repatriates are from the United States of America, three are from Mexico, four are from Portugal and one is from Australia. One manager is Portuguese, one is Belgian and the other is American. Two spouses are from the United States of America and one is from Australia.

Regarding the destination countries, Belgium and Brazil were the most common destinations, being followed by China, United States of America, Angola and Mozambique. This geographic distribution is similar to other reports with expatriates (GMAC, 2014).

The longest expatriate assignment was of eight years. The shortest was of two years and most assignments were planned to last three to five years, which is in line with other studies involving expatriates (GMAC, 2014).

At the time of the interviews, the expatriates and their families had been living in the host country for an average of 2.21 years.

| Stakeholders interviewed | Number of interviews |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Expatriates | 10 |
| Spouses | 3 |
| Repatriates | 3 |
| Headquarters representatives | |
| Human Resources Managers | 1 |
| Home Country Manager | 1 |
| Subsidiary representatives | |
| Human Resources Manager | 1 |
| Missing Stakeholders | Reason |
| Home organisation colleagues | None available |

| Missing Stakeholders | Reason |
|------------------------------|----------------|
| Host organisation colleagues | None available |
| Expatriate children | None available |
| Home supervisors | None available |
| Host supervisors | None available |

Table 3 - Composition of interviews by stakeholder type and missing stakeholders

Data Analysis

The nineteen interviews were integrally transcribed and then imported to *QSR NVivo 10*. They were subject to a categorical and thematic analysis (Bardin, 1977). To ensure an accurate and reliable analysis and interpretation of the data, a three-step process was adopted. Initial nodes were created based on the literature and interview questions (e.g., main stakeholders, expatriate assignment success, contribution towards success and demonstration of success). Then, other nodes and sub-nodes were added and refined according to findings from iterative readings. The third step involved data examination and interpretation, resulting in final re-coding and minor refinements. At this stage, Matrix Coding Queries and Coding Queries were used to cross-tabulate the coded content and further explore the data connections. Finally, to better illustrate the major findings, quotes were extracted from the interviews. The quotes are presented in a way not to compromise the confidentiality of all interviewees.

Research Findings

The results from the analysis are organized into the main themes that reflect the research questions:

Research question 1: Who are the stakeholders of an international assignment?
To whom do expatriates, spouses and organisations pay attention?

Research question 2: Which criteria do the stakeholders of an international assignment use to appraise success?

Research question 3: What could make an expatriate assignment successful?

Research question 4: How should expatriation success be recognised?

Research Question 1 – Stakeholder Identification

This study aimed at assessing who the relevant stakeholders are in an expatriate assignment. Thus, to get an individual and an organisational perspective, expatriates, repatriates, spouses and managers were asked to name a) the entities most affected by the expatriate assignment and b) who affected the expatriate assignment the most.

According to the analysis, there were no relevant differences between the interviewees of Organisation A and B, despite the dissimilarity of contexts. Table 4 comprises the main results by interviewee type.

| | Most salient stakeholders | Most affected stakeholders |
|--------------------|---|---|
| Expatriates | <p>- Organisation as a whole <i>“Also [my company], I know that it is not an easy situation having an expatriate”.</i> (Expatriate from Organisation B, displaced in Brazil)</p> <p>- Family <i>“First, my family, of course. It was one of the important aspects to consider when I was presented with this opportunity. I could never make a decision like this without involving my wife and thinking what’s best for my daughters”.</i> (Expatriate from Organisation B, displaced in Brazil)</p> | <p>- Expatriates <i>“Well... I was also affected even though I already knew what it was like to live abroad”.</i> (Expatriate from Organisation B, displaced in Brazil)</p> <p>- Social networks <i>“My friends were also affected”.</i> (Expatriate from Organisation A, displaced in Angola)</p> <p>- Host country organisation <i>“It was certainly the guys overseas, because when I moved over there we completely reorganised the whole structure of the company”.</i> (Expatriate from Organisation B, displaced in Belgium)</p> |

| | Most salient stakeholders | Most affected stakeholders |
|--|---|--|
| Repatriates | <p>- Host country organisation <i>“There is great impact at destination, both for the Country Managers and for the rest of the team working with the expatriate”.</i> (Repatriate from Organisation A, previously displaced in Mozambique)</p> | <p>- Expatriates <i>“The expatriate is deeply affected, of course, since he is the one moving and experiencing big personal and professional changes”.</i> (Repatriate from Organisation A, previously displaced in Angola)</p> |
| Spouses | <p>- Family <i>“It all comes back to the family”.</i> (Spouse in Belgium)</p> | <p>- Organisation as a whole <i>“My husband and I would probably both say that his organisation was most affected, by having him come over here”.</i> (Spouse in Belgium)</p> <p>- Expatriates <i>“Certainly my husband”.</i> (Spouse in the United States of America)</p> |
| Headquarters - HR Manager | <p>- Home country organisation <i>“[T]he home country has the greatest burden, because the home country is losing someone who is of value to them and they also have to find a role for that person, when they return from the assignment”.</i> (Headquarters representative - HR Manager from Organisation B)</p> | <p>- Host country Organisation <i>“The host organisation is also affected by having someone coming over but that’s usually positive”.</i> (Headquarters representative - HR Manager from Organisation B)</p> |
| Headquarters - Home Country Manager | <p>- Expatriates <i>“I think the expatriate himself because he was the one moving to such a challenging country”.</i> (Headquarters representative - Home Country Manager from Organisation A)</p> <p>- Home country organisation <i>“We faced a great challenge as a result of the assignment, having to find someone to replace the expatriate”.</i> (Headquarters representative - Home Country Manager from Organisation A)</p> | <p>- Host country organisation <i>“At destination, they were affected too, having someone new coming over”.</i> (Headquarters representative - Home Country Manager from Organisation A)</p> |
| Subsidiary HR Manager | <p>- Home country organisation <i>“For the home country in the early days I think it’s a bit more complicated but, after a while, if it’s clear that the previous expatriate responsibilities are well transferred to other individuals, then life continues”.</i> (Subsidiary representative – HR Manager)</p> | <p>- Host country organisation <i>For the host entity it is usually positive because either there’s a position available and for some reason having an expatriate at that position is, at the moment, the best solution, or it’s a new position and it’s more of a career development opportunity for the individual and so there’s definitely a</i></p> |

| | Most salient stakeholders | Most affected stakeholders |
|--|----------------------------------|--|
| | from Organisation B) | <i>positive impact on the host country</i> ". (Subsidiary representative – HR Manager from Organisation B) |

Table 4 - Stakeholder identification by interviewee type.

a) The Expatriates

The company as a whole was reported by expatriates as the most salient stakeholder, being both affected and affecting the assignment. Expatriates also identified their families as a salient stakeholder, confirming that families play a key role in expatriates' decisions. Among the most affected stakeholders, expatriates identified themselves as suffering the main impact, which was followed by their social networks. On a less important tone, the host organisation was also mentioned.

b) The Repatriates

The repatriates showed different views from the expatriates, thus it is important to separate these results. It is also important to stress that the repatriates from Organisation A were performing the role of Country Managers whilst abroad, which may contribute to a view more related to the host organisation. The key difference was the identification of the Host Organisation as the most salient stakeholder, and the absence of references to the family. This can also be explained by the fact that these assignees were not accompanied by their families. Similarly to the expatriates, the assignee was regarded as being most affected by the expatriate assignment.

c) The Spouses

The most salient stakeholder identified by the spouses was the family, affecting and being affected by an IA. As another affected stakeholder, the company as a whole was identified. These references reveal a job-centred view, clearly expressed in the quote provided in table 3.

It is also very important to note some differences in the opinion of the interviewed spouses. One of them had been part of previous expatriate assignments and manifested a higher self-confidence, as illustrated:

[A]nd also the company. It involves great investment to have someone expatriated, so I'd say the company is deeply affected. (Spouse in the United States of America)

d) Organisational Representatives

The key difference between the organisational representatives and international workers (e.g. expatriates and repatriates) was that the former explicitly distinguished the home and host organisations. The results portrayed in table 3 reveal an organisation-centric view, because organisational representatives mainly focused on the impact the company suffers, although this was expressed differently by each of these stakeholders, as following.

a. Headquarters representative – HR Manager

The home country organisation was identified as the most salient stakeholder and there are two reasons underlying this. On the one hand, the decision comes from the home organisation, in this case, from the headquarters. On the other hand, great importance was put on what happens after the expatriation, justifying a great burden for the home country. Expressing similar views to the expatriates', the host organisation was regarded as being most affected, from a headquarters perspective. Nevertheless, this was deemed as a positive impact since the host country organisation benefits from having someone with a specific set of skills, which, at that point in time, are required in that unit.

b. Headquarters representative - Home Country Manager

The main difference here is the identification of the expatriate as the most salient stakeholder. This manager stated that, in Organisation A, the expatriates are the ones making the decision to go on an assignment, rather than being invited to perform it. This may explain such a divergent result in comparison to fellow organisational representatives. As the most affected stakeholder, it is recognized that the host organisation suffers an impact similar to what was expressed by the fellow headquarters representative, revealing no differences between organisations.

c. Subsidiary representative – HR Manager

The home organisation was reported as the most salient stakeholder, because it bears the greatest burden of finding a replacement for the assignee. Once again, the host organisation was perceived as mostly affected but in a positive way.

Overall, the organisation as a whole is a salient stakeholder, as was mentioned by individuals and organisational representatives. While expatriates and spouses agree that the family is the most salient stakeholder, this is not the view of organisations. In turn, organisational representatives consider expatriates to be the most affected, as well as host country organisations. Repatriates in Organisation A were the only ones referring the host country organisation as the most salient stakeholders.

Research Question 2 – Success Evaluation

The second research question aims to assess the criteria that different stakeholders adopt to evaluate an assignment’s success. Table 5 summarises data analysis regarding the success criteria used by different stakeholders.

| | Expatriate | Family | Home Organisation stakeholders | Host Country stakeholders |
|--------------------|--|--|---|--|
| Expatriates | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Performance - Cross-cultural adjustment - Career development - Repatriation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Family well-being; - Life quality - Happiness; - Making new friends - Feeling home | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Job performance through numbers - Making profit - Achievement of organisational goals | |
| Repatriates | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Performance - Cross-cultural adjustment - Career development - Repatriation | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Achievement of EA goals; - Making profit; - Cross-cultural adjustment - Having the expatriate happy |
| Spouses | | - Feeling home | - Job | |

| | Expatriate | Family | Home Organisation stakeholders | Host Country stakeholders |
|--|--------------------------------------|---|--|----------------------------------|
| | | - Happiness - Children's well-being - Job performance - Career progression | performance, numbers | |
| Headquarters - HR Manager | - Career progression – employability | | - Assignment completion; - No assignment turnover; - Repatriation | |
| Headquarters - Home Country Manager | - How good or bad they felt abroad | | - Job performance - Achievement of EA goals - No assignment turnover | |
| Subsidiary - HR Manager | - Career progression – employability | | - Assignment completion; - No assignment turnover; - Repatriation | |

Table 5 - Stakeholders expatriate assignment success evaluation, differences and commonalities.

a) *The Expatriates*

The main criteria used by expatriates were performance and cross-cultural adjustment. There were no significant differences between expatriates and repatriates. However, it is important to note that the two repatriates from Organisation A talked about the criteria they used to evaluate the success of their fellow expatriates' assignments, as Country Managers (higher hierarchical position). This was very similar to the way they evaluated their own assignments.

The references coded under performance express a concern in making profit for the organisation and fulfilling organisational goals:

... Hm... you know, for me it's quite straightforward what my mission currently is: the division that I run is unprofitable so it's actually turning around this division to make it profitable. (Expatriate from Organisation B, displaced in Belgium)

Cross-cultural adjustment was regarded as an important part of the assignment. Being in a different country and facing a new culture was deemed as rather challenging, and foreseen as an additional outcome. In fact, as best illustrated below, adjustment is verbalized as a consequence of performance:

An expatriate assignment can't be just about work and performance stuff... we're also supposed to learn other cultures, to try new things, to get familiar with their ways of living...not to criticize but to learn to live with them... being able to adjust to their culture there, and that's what's most difficult to happen as well... (Expatriate from Organisation A, displaced in Angola)

Similarly, a second outcome is family cross-cultural adjustment, as following:

From your personal standpoint, I think it is also about having a situation where your family is comfortable. How they're handling the new experience is also important. (Expatriate from Organisation B, displaced in Belgium)

A sub-dimension of cross-cultural adjustment, work adjustment, was also regarded as an important criterion playing a role in the definition of expatriate assignment success by expatriates.

Career development and career advancement were also important aspects, regardless of it taking place inside or outside the current employing organisation.

From a career perspective, it is important that you develop new skills that will allow you to grow professionally. For me, as an expatriate, coming here is also an investment in my career so I expect this to pay off. (Expatriate from Organisation B, displaced in Belgium)

b) The Spouses

For the spouses, having themselves and the rest of the family well-adjusted was reported as being essential. Additionally, on a lower level, their husbands' job performance was regarded as a component of success.

Once again, the spouses revealed a lot of uncertainty and hesitation, as best illustrated below:

(Long silence) I don't know... hum... I think it's pretty much about my husband being successful in his job... but... hum... I don't know... (Spouse in Belgium)

c) Organisational Representatives

Performance of the assignees was the most important criterion to all organisational representatives, despite their different roles in IAs.

a. Headquarters representative - HR Manager

The HR Manager at the headquarters of Organisation B had an understanding of EAs as a developmental opportunity for the expatriate, distinguishing his opinion from the organisation's view. From a corporate perspective, performance (also expressed as assignment objectives completion) and turnover (merely expressed as assignment turnover and not organisation turnover) are the important criteria used to evaluate success.

The company sees it more just as a business thing, so for the company it's more about performing the assignment in the time originally set and getting the job done well, and it's not much about finding a suitable role afterwards and keeping the expatriate within the company and using their new expertise back home. (Headquarters representative - HR Manager from Organisation B)

b. Headquarters representative - The Home Country Manager

At home, job performance and assignment completion are the most important indicators of success.

Whilst there is reference to job performance, in this case, the challenges faced abroad that can impact performance seem to be underestimated, as illustrated:

In the end, there's an assignment, there's that particular job... that's a specific job, particular tasks and we have mechanisms that help to assess everyone's performance, regardless of the location. That's an organisational tool... (...) there's no difference either the work place is in Africa or Portugal (Headquarters representative - Home Country Manager from Organisation A)

Additionally, if the assignment is completed, then it can be considered as successful.

Success should also be measured by assignment completion... it's an assignment for a certain amount of time, currently we're making it a three-year assignment, we're inviting people to be at a certain place for three years... if after a while they're not satisfied (...) and they wish to return home... well... for an expatriate assignment process... hum... I think those are the pillars of success or failure. (Headquarters representative - Home Country Manager from Organisation A)

c. *Subsidiary representative - HR Manager*

The HR Manager at the European subsidiary reported very similar views to his fellow colleague at the headquarters of Organisation B. Hence, expatriate assignments are regarded in a two-fold way, *i.e.*, success is not only about performance or assignment completion, but also about having the expatriate moving into a higher role upon repatriation:

And so, yeah, I think that's a big success when the assignment objectives are fulfilled. If the person is then able to grow into a higher role and contribute even more to the company, that's a big plus. Unfortunately, that does not happen all the time... It's difficult, you know? (...)For sure, because if you set up an assignment specifically as a development opportunity and somebody by working for 3 years in a different country and in a different role is prepared to come back and fulfil a higher role and after 6 months that person leaves the company, you're losing a capital investment. (Subsidiary representative – HR Manager from Organisation B)

Perceived criteria among different stakeholders

The criteria different stakeholders use to appraise expatriate assignment success have just been described. Thus, it was also assessed how stakeholders perceive each other's adopted criteria.

a) *The Expatriates about their families*

Expatriates were asked how they thought their families would appraise success. They seem to have a clear idea that their families look at the personal side of the experience and measure it by their happiness whilst overseas. Thus, this was coded under cross-cultural adjustment and family well-being (which included quality of life, social networks and happiness):

Hummm... that's a good question... well I think my family will be much different. For them it is all about the impact on their lives which is very different from mine. So I would say that success for them would be, first of all, do they consider that they became better persons by living here and learning a new culture and a new language and having new friends? (...) And I think at the end of the day that's what really matters to them. It's about them being happy.
(Expatriate from Organisation B, displaced in Brazil)

The interviewed repatriates did not make references to how they thought their families would appraise success. The explanation for this may be related to the fact that they were not accompanied by their families during the earlier assignment.

b) The Expatriates about their Companies

There was a clear consensus that organisations look exclusively at performance. The interviewees showed no uncertainty nor hesitation, as explained:

It must be about the numbers, no doubt there! (Laughs) sales, numbers, profits (laughs). (Expatriate from Organisation A, displaced in Mozambique)

c) The Spouses about the Companies

Similar to their husbands, the spouses were very confident that the organisations' criterion to appraise success is performance.

I think, in the end, we're talking about business and a company, I think, goes by performance. Probably by the numbers, depending on what your position is, if it is sales, the numbers are very important, if it is marketing, I think there's a different managing tool. (Spouse in the United States of America)

d) The Organisational Representatives about the Expatriates

a. Headquarters representatives – HR Manager

According to this type of stakeholder, expatriates assess their assignments in terms of career prospects. It is important to highlight the perception among headquarters HR representatives that expatriates and organisations evaluate success in different ways, as explained:

I think expatriates, for sure, see the assignments as something which can be helpful for the rest of their careers and the company might see the assignments as “hey, this is a good guy, he has done this in another company, now he can do this in our company” but not necessarily as someone who can grow into the organisation. So, I mean, the expatriate might have different ways at looking at an assignment’s success. (Headquarters representative – HR Manager from Organisation B)

b. Headquarters representatives – Home Country Manager

This organisational representative expressed the opinion that expatriates look at assignments in a twofold way, involving a personal and professional component. The personal component is expressed in terms of cross-cultural adjustment:

They will probably look at how good or bad they felt whilst abroad. More of a personal side to it. (Headquarters representative - Home Country Manager from Organisation A)

The professional aspect that matters to expatriates, according to this manager, is performance. The following quote is also illustrative of adjustment as an outcome of performance:

But I don’t believe an expatriate would say he felt good abroad if his performance was not good as well, so there’s also this professional aspect. (Headquarters representative - Home Country Manager from Organisation A)

c. Subsidiary representative – HR Manager

In this case too and similarly to the results aforementioned, expatriates evaluate success in terms of career advancement.

It's about how their resume looks now in comparison to what it looked three years before, and what they can now either offer [their current company] or what they think they can offer other company. (Subsidiary representative – HR Manager, Organisation B)

In summary, five different success criteria emerged: performance, cross-cultural adjustment, career development, turnover, and repatriation. Expatriates and spouses define expatriate assignment success by professional (performance, career progression) and personal components (cross-cultural adjustment, family well-being). In turn, organisations regard successful EAs as assignment completion and achievement of organisational goals.

The way expatriates perceive their spouses to evaluate success is relatively similar to the criteria cited by the spouses. The criteria cited by headquarters and subsidiary representatives are also similar to the way expatriates and spouses perceive the home organisation to evaluate success.

Research Question 3 – Contributions towards Successful Assignments

Participants were asked how different stakeholders could contribute to EA success.

The expatriates, the spouses and the organisational representatives were asked how stakeholders could contribute to success. A thorough analysis of the speeches revealed an implicit distinction between home and host stakeholders, even though it was not always explicitly made by the interviewees. Table 6 sums up the main findings.

| | Expatriate | Family | Home Organisation stakeholders | Host Country stakeholders |
|--------------------|-------------------|---------------|---|----------------------------------|
| Expatriates | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Autonomy - Providing Resources - Relocation support - Support for the family - Communication - Cross-cultural training | - Welcoming attitude |
| Repatriates | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Relocation support -Continuous | - Welcoming attitude |

| | Expatriate | Family | Home Organisation stakeholders | Host Country stakeholders |
|--|-------------------|---------------|---|----------------------------------|
| | | | feedback - Repatriation | |
| Spouses | | | - Relocation support - Cross-cultural training | - Welcoming attitude |
| Headquarters - HR Manager | | | - Pre-moving visits | - Welcoming attitude |
| Headquarters - Home Country Manager | | | - Cross-cultural training | - Welcoming attitude |
| Subsidiary - HR Manager | | | - Support for the family - Communication - Repatriation | - Welcoming attitude |

Table 6 - Stakeholders' roles in contributing to success as conceptualised by each set of participants.

a) *The Expatriates*

The home country stakeholders are regarded as having an important role towards success. Out of this, six categories emerged that reflect different types of support to make the assignment a successful experience for the assignees: providing resources, relocation support, family specific support, autonomy, cross-cultural training and communication.

Help in finding house, school and getting acquainted with the area is highly valued by expatriates:

They gave the opportunity to, together with my wife, do a house hunting and school hunting trip and that helped a lot to get familiar with the area and to choose a good school for our daughters and a good house for us. I think all those aspects were very well covered by the company. (Expatriate from Organisation B, displaced in Brazil)

Providing the necessary resources was also mentioned because it enables expatriates to do the best job possible and succeed in terms of performance, as illustrated:

Well, I mean, just mostly by continuing to provide the kind of support and the right tools and the right people that I need to successfully run the company and they're doing exactly that. I have everything I need here in terms of the

resources and the people. (Expatriate from Organisation B, displaced in Belgium)

Having the family happy, as analysed previously, is a very important aspect to consider when expatriates evaluate EA success. This is confirmed by the role these interviewees attributed to the organisation in specifically supporting the family. This was, however, expressed with discontentment, as shown below:

I think if there was anything that [my company] would have to do for successful expatriate assignment it would have to consider supporting the family a little more. And I'm going to give you an example: so you come over here and as part of your expatriate assignment package you get a car for the first four weeks. Now, you get a car, ok, that's one car. During the first four weeks you get a car and you commute to work. But what does your family do during the first four weeks? I mean, they can't just be sitting at home. I guess the point that I'm making is: if there was more emphasis on what your wife is doing and your family is doing and that they also need to commute until something is settled in... You know, they could give more support for the family members. (...) It's little things like that that you realize "Ooops!". There's a lot of things to reconsider here and that was just one example. (Expatriate from Organisation B, displaced in Belgium)

Autonomy was deemed as necessary for professional growth and skills development:

Also the confidence that [my company] has in me: basically they give me autonomy, I can make decisions because they are confident in me, they don't micromanage me and for me that is very important too. Of course I report to my supervisor but I have autonomy in my daily activities and that makes me very happy with this assignment. (Expatriate from Organisation B, displaced in Brazil)

Cross-cultural training was mentioned but as a much less important contribution towards success. This is important to note because expatriates claimed to, at least, have had the opportunity to enrol in cross-cultural training programs, but the perceived importance for a successful assignment was extremely low.

In terms of communication, expatriates were concerned with honesty in negotiations. If someone is accepting an EA for the first time, it is presumed that his/her information about this process will not be as accurate or as complete as if he/she had experienced that before, which may put individuals in a disadvantageous position when negotiating the EA contract.

Three years ago when I came here and they presented the contract, I kind of took it like “oh I’m going to be treated fairly” and, in hindsight, it seems “well, they maybe took advantage of the situation because they knew more than what I knew”. So there were some benefits and pitfalls that they addressed in the contract but now I think “if I knew what I know now, I would have asked for something different” but I had never been an expatriate before and I kind of think they took advantage of it. (Expatriate from Organisation B, displaced in China)

The sole role expatriates attributed to host country stakeholders was a welcoming work team that accepted them well:

I think having a strong local team around you that can help you understand how the organisation works and the general culture. It is important to work in a team where you feel welcomed. (Expatriate from Organisation B, displaced in China)

b) The Repatriates

The roles attributed by the repatriates are somehow different from the expatriates'. The main difference was the importance attributed to communication, constant feedback and regular positive reinforcement, as is further explained:

Although you’re an expatriate, there is more or less connection to the home organisation... thus, it is important that expatriates feel they’re not out of sight, out of mind (...) it’s very helpful that the HR department in the home organisation continues to communicate with expatriates and gives them constant feedback. (Repatriate from Organisation A, previously displaced in Mozambique)

Another important key difference was that the main role was attributed to the host country organisation. These repatriates performed the role of Country Managers overseas, bearing responsibility for welcoming new expatriates, which is slightly different from the “welcoming attitude” verbalized by expatriates (mainly directed at local employees):

To be honest, the home organisation can provide a good package and the necessary resources but that's all. It's what happens overseas, the people working and socializing with the expatriate that can really make a difference. When I was Country Manager, my main concern was to provide a warm environment for the expatriate to feel well, to feel welcomed in our work team. That's what really impacts on success. (Repatriate from Organisation A, previously displaced in Angola)

c) *The Spouses*

Relocation support was mentioned as a highly important matter for the spouses, as best illustrated below:

[A]nd, of course, they paid for us to come over twice to visit and pick up a place to live. That, together with helping us find a school for our kids, was very important for us. (Spouse in Belgium)

Regarding cross-cultural training programs, there were mixed views about its importance. This type of support was generally regarded as not being significant. Nevertheless, when mentioned, it was expressed as extremely helpful in contributing to success, as best explained below:

... I had a few conversations with other expatriates that live here in the area, which is quite a fluent suburb, and when I mention that I had cultural training focused on this State, some people were shocked and said “what is there to train, especially in regards to [this State]?” and for me that was a contradiction because that is exactly why it was so helpful to get this training! (Spouse in the United States of America)

The thought of a welcoming attitude to be adopted by host country stakeholders was also reported as essential by the spouses:

It has an important role. I think he's doing the job here that he came to do, and I think they accepted him well, and he has become kind of part of the corporate culture here, and he likes that they have that international kind of point of view, you know, there are Belgians, and French, and he works with different people...

(Spouse in Belgium)

d) Organisational Representatives

There were mixed views on the contribution of the company towards a successful expatriation. The home and host country organisations were mentioned, although different roles were attributed.

a. Headquarters representative - HR Manager

According to this type of stakeholders, providing visits to the host country prior to the assignment is a very important type of support because it enables expatriates to get acquainted with the work culture before they relocate:

Hum... (pause)... I would say probably exposing the employee well in advance of the proposed assignment, exposing to the group they'll be working with, whether that's a year of business trips over to the host country to kind of get them acclimated a bit well in advance, rather than going there on the assignment and feeling strangers once they get there on a permanent basis. (...) I think they would really benefit from that. I don't see that happening all that often, I must say. (Headquarters representative – HR Manager from Organisation B).

In turn, host organisation stakeholders are responsible for adopting a welcoming attitude. The concern expressed regarding host country stakeholders is similar to the expatriates', as illustrated:

Hum... that's difficult because I think when the assignee gets to the host country, it's going to be more of a personal interaction, just making sure the employees in that particular location are welcoming and inviting of this foreigner into their business and their office. It's not so much, I think, from a business perspective but more from a personal perspective. (Headquarters representative – HR Manager from Organisation B)

b. Headquarters representative – Home Country Manager

The home organisation bears the responsibility of repatriation, as stressed following:

A very important matter, and I believe that is what distinguishes us from other companies, is that besides all the benefits the expatriates enjoy, they know they have a secure place back home at the end of the assignment. That is something that we always promise our assignees. (Headquarters representative – Home Country Manager from Organisation A)

The host organisation, in turn, can contribute to success by adopting a welcoming attitude for the expatriate, an opinion rather similar to the HR Manager at headquarters, expatriates and spouses.

c. Subsidiary representative - HR Manager

In line with the expatriates' view, the kind of support the home organisation provides should be extended to the family, as best explained below:

[P]urely from and HR point of view, we need to provide constant support and that has to be extended to the wives. It's the practical stuff, for instance, different languages that can be stressful. Sometimes, it is more stressful for the wives because in the organisation everyone speaks English, but outside that may not be the case. (Subsidiary representative - HR Manager from Organisation B)

The home organisation has also an important role in terms of communication. Lack of communication can make the expatriate feel insecure, impacting on his/her performance:

[C]ommunication wise, if you set up something for three years, after two years you need to be able to communicate what the next step will be: will the assignment be extended? Or is there a plan to bring the person into a different role in the home country or another country? Communication is very important. The last thing you want is having the expatriate feeling very insecure and not knowing what is going to happen and then, maybe, one month before the assignment ends or was supposed to end, there is a decision made. Communication is extremely important and it's definitely something where we

can do a better job. (Subsidiary representative - HR Manager from Organisation B)

Another important role for the home organisation relates to the repatriation stage, which, as previously stated, is a rather sensitive matter, as the following quote best illustrates:

I think the role of the home country is very important on what needs to happen after the end of the assignment. The assignee should be able to return into a higher position and that's not always the case. (Subsidiary representative - HR Manager from Organisation B)

Similarly to the types of stakeholders analysed above, a welcoming attitude, rather expressed as a concern, was the role attributed to the host country.

To summarise, expatriates, repatriates and spouses agree that relocation support provided by the home country organisation can help make the assignment successful. Expatriates also expect their organisations to provide the necessary resources for them to be able to achieve organisational goals. In turn, organisational managers believe that pre-moving visits and cross-cultural training are important, which was not confirmed neither by expatriates nor spouses.

Research Question 4 – Demonstration of Success

Expatriates and spouses were further asked about how they would like their organisations to reward them for a successful expatriate assignment. In turn, organisational managers were asked about the mechanisms companies have in place to reward the successful assignees. Table 7 summarizes the results.

| | Organisational Rewards |
|--|--|
| Expatriates and Repatriates | - Career progression - Verbal recognition - Financial compensation |

| | |
|--|--|
| Spouses | - Career progression - Verbal recognition |
| Headquarters - HR Manager | - Career progression - Financial compensation |
| Headquarters - HR Manager | - Career progression |
| Subsidiary - HR Manager | - Career progression - Financial compensation |

Table 7 - Demonstration of success by types of stakeholders

a) *The Expatriates*

The expatriates were asked how they would like the company to demonstrate it had been a successful EA. Out of this question, three sub-themes were mentioned to express ways of rewarding the expatriates for a successful international assignment: career progression opportunities, verbal recognition and a financial bonus.

When the expatriates expressed the desire to have career development opportunities, it was always associated with a promotion.

Well, by giving me new opportunities: continuous professional growth, different challenges and different responsibilities. (Expatriate from Company B, displaced in Brazil).

As previously claimed, repatriation was a sensitive issue. An analysis of the statements coded under “career progression opportunities” reveals that expatriates are insecure about the opportunities their employing organisation will be able to provide at the end of the assignment.

A rather pragmatic view was also expressed. A financial bonus was regarded as a “realistic alternative” to what is really valued, as illustrated:

Financially... I'm working to make money, put food on the table, and put my kids through college. Of course I'd like some kind of verbal recognition and appreciation for all the hard work, all the long nights and lost weekends but that never happened. In three years, I've never heard that. So I have to be realistic and a financial package or bonus would be the best way to

demonstrate that I was successful. (Expatriate from Organisation B, displaced in China).

In fact, a verbal recognition was considered to be important amongst expatriates, which is best explained following:

That's a good question. Because in a certain way, you're out of sight, you're out of mind. And when you're an expatriate, you're making huge sacrifices, leaving your family and leaving your homeland, you need to be away, and... hum... it's important that the senior manager recognizes the sacrifices that we're making. (Expatriate from Organisation B, displaced in China)

Other interviewees focused on the difficulty of the job in their particular facilities:

I would say getting recognition for the good things you're doing because, for most times, you're out of sight, out of mind. And a lot of the things that you do require a certain feedback and, in my particular situation, I'm the only expatriate at my facility. So, I have to make a lot of decisions and I do a lot of things without direction and a lot of that goes unnoticed. You're kind of out here, kind of in an island by yourself. I mean, there's nothing wrong with the people here but the job is much harder because when you have to work with the people [in my home organisation] everything is a day or two delayed. Or even worse, they ignore or spend a couple of days before they get back to you on your emails. Or I have to stay up until midnight, one o'clock, in order to make phone calls to get answers and none of that is recognized. (Expatriate from Organisation B, displaced in China)

b) The Spouses

The most important way of demonstrating success was by providing career opportunities to the expatriates, namely a promotion. They all expected that to happen:

Ok... hum... well, that usually comes with a promotion. (long silence) It's nice to see that your husband is successful, it's definitely more important to him but usually what happens if they send you overseas and then you come back, it comes with a promotion as well. (Spouse in Belgium)

One of the spouses had accompanied her husband on expatriate assignments before, and, interestingly, mentions the importance of a verbal recognition, as illustrated:

I know my husband would like to have a... the acknowledgement... and I don't know what to say to this because we have done this four times, we've moved four times with two different companies, and each time your reward is, if that's what you strive for, in the next step of your career. (Spouse in the United States of America)

c) Organisational Representatives

As for the organisational representatives, they expressed mixed ideas about demonstration of success.

a. Headquarters representative - HR Manager

A promotion was regarded as best indicative of expatriate assignment success. In turn, financial compensations were mentioned as a reward for good job performance, although not exclusive to EA but rather to all employees:

[A]nd the other way is our annual compensation plan, you know, we do have a pretty generous bonus plan, most employees are on the compensation plan, not just expatriates. There's opportunities for employees to earn more, to get a premium, if you will, based on their individual performance. (...) The individual that had an outstanding performance may earn a little more. So there are ways to do that, either during or at the end of the assignment to say "here's a little extra in your bonus to show our appreciation of the good work that you did". I guess that's not directly tied to the international assignment program because that's really to all employees but it certainly does happen with our expatriates as well. (Headquarters representative – HR Manager from Organisation B).

b. Headquarters representative - The Home Country Manager

A promotion upon repatriation was regarded as the most adequate demonstration of success that fits the expatriates' expectations.

In the specific case of expatriates, when they return, there is an opportunity and, in fact, it has happened that repatriates are invited to perform some kind of duties that can be classified as a promotion. (Headquarters representative – Home Country Manager from Organisation A).

When asked about how feedback is provided, the home country manager showed hesitation and confirmed the expatriates' concern of "being out of sight, out of mind", by expressing the difficulties of a close follow-up at distance:

We're talking here about... well... something that... that... is about people management... and.... Hum... it will be done, surely, at two levels: on one hand, we have the Country Manager, who is the top manager either in Angola or Mozambique and... hum... that's who can actually report how the things are going, performance wise, and that person should make use of the Human Resource Department (located in Portugal) to provide some feedback. I believe that we're so distant here and we don't have a Human Resource Manager going to Africa even every year, so the opportunities to provide direct feedback and accompany the expatriates' performance are very little. (Headquarters representative – Home Country Manager from Organisation A)

c. Subsidiary representative – HR Manager

As a subsidiary representative, this HR Manager expressed similar views to his fellow colleague at the North American headquarters. A successful expatriate assignment may be rewarded with a promotion, following financial compensation.

Organisational representatives were also asked about the mechanisms the organisation had in place to communicate if an EA had been (un)successful. In Organisation B, this communication was done through an annual performance review process:

Well... hum... the company has a performance management process which is an annual process based on objectives, competences... during the performance management process there are at least two conversations per year, midyear and year, obviously, so that's a perfect way of addressing it, I think. Hum... on top of that there is an annual succession planning process within the company, during which I would say high potentials are being discussed and also candidates for assignments are being put into kind of an assignment pool. Then,

it is up to the HR managers and all the direct managers of the person involved to communicate and if something is to be underlined, from an assignment point of view, it should be then communicated. So there are various processes to communicate if the assignment is being successful or not, but also processes to make sure that the assignee doesn't get the news "oh you're going back in three weeks!". Because there's some practical stuff involved, you know, you don't want to move the children in the middle of the year, it's disruptive. (Subsidiary representative – HR Manager from Organisation B)

Overall, expatriates expect their organisations to reward them with career progression opportunities, which were also mentioned by spouses, and financial rewards. They also expressed the importance of a verbal recognition of the sacrifices made to go alongside a promotion. Organisational managers confirmed that a promotion is the best way to reward a successful assignee but also acknowledged that organisations do not guarantee it in practice.

Discussion

This study is exploratory and attempts to examine the relevant stakeholders in an expatriate assignment and the way they appraise EA success. This is a descriptive study which collected primary data from nineteen interviews, within two distinct organisational contexts.

Participants were asked to identify the entities most affected by and most affecting an expatriate assignment, following Mitchell's *et al.* (1997) definition of stakeholder. They were asked to name the criteria used by each stakeholder to appraise the success of an expatriate assignment and were further asked to explain how home and host organisations could contribute to success and reward a successful expatriate assignment.

Despite the collection of data in two distinct organisations, content analysis showed no relevant differences among the stakeholders of Organisation A and B. While the companies were from very distinct contexts, they adopted similar expatriation policies and followed an ethnocentric approach (Toh and DeNisi, 2005) towards international assignments, mostly neglecting the importance of host country stakeholders. Interestingly, participants from these two companies agree in most features, thus revealing a similar stakeholder view across companies.

Research Question 1 – Stakeholder Identification

The first research question asks who the stakeholders of an EA are, from the points of view of expatriates, their partners/spouses and their organisations.

The main findings are in line with earlier studies which assume that international assignments are impacted by and have an impact on different entities (Aycan, 1997; Haslberger and Brewster, 2008; Haslberger *et al.*, 2013; Miao *et al.*, 2011; Mitchell *et al.*, 1997; Mol *et al.*, 2005; Shaffer *et al.*, 1999; Takeuchi *et al.*, 2002; Toh and DeNisi, 2005; Zimmermann *et al.*, 2003). Moreover, the outcomes of this research echo Mitchell's *et al.* (1997) assertion that the perception of attributes among stakeholders is variable, meaning that the way one entity perceives its attributes isn't necessarily the way other entities perceive it. In fact, different parts involved in an expatriate assignment have different views about relevant stakeholders: the family was considered

an extremely important stakeholder by expatriates and spouses, but not by the organisational managers, thus revealing that organisations underestimate the role of families in EAs. This is also in line with earlier studies which assume that organisational and individual interests are not always aligned (Benson and Pattie, 2009; Bonache *et al.*, 2010; Crawley *et al.*, 2013; Dickmann and Doherty, 2010; Dickmann *et al.*, 2008; Dickmann and Harris, 2005; Doherty *et al.*, 2011; Hippler, 2009; Pinto *et al.*, 2012b).

Additionally, the organisation and the expatriate were the only entities identified by all sets of participants as salient or most affected stakeholders, which further shows that the perceived possession of attributes is variable.

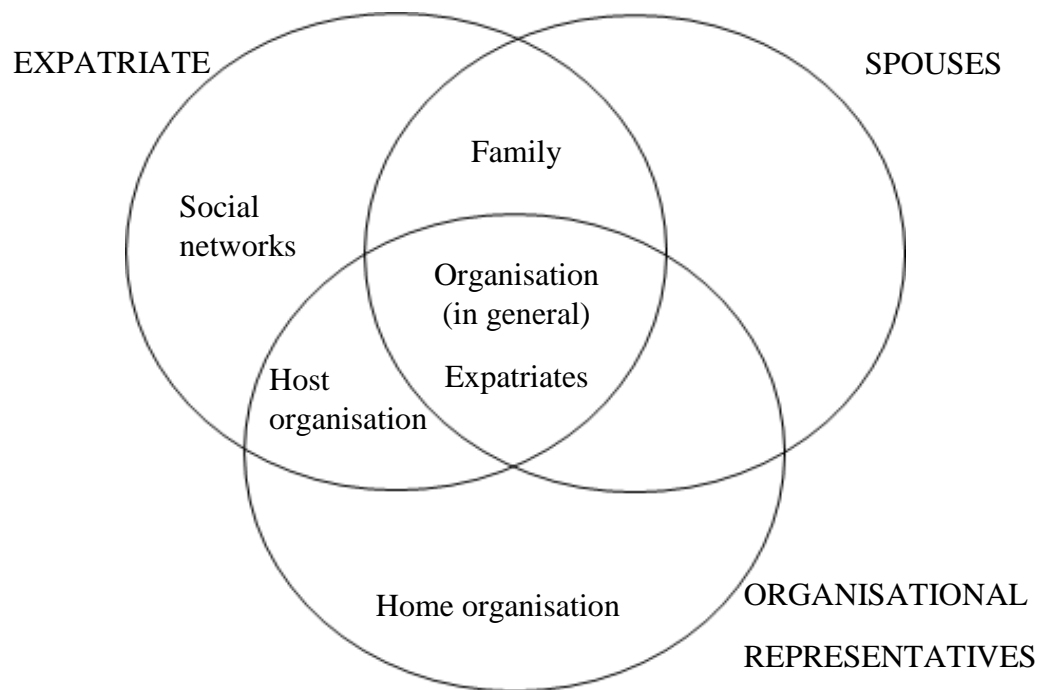


Figure 1 – Salient stakeholders identified by sets of participants, adapted from (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997, p. 874)

Mitchell *et al.* (1997) propose seven subcategories of stakeholders according to the presence or absence of some attributes and their combination, such as power, legitimacy and urgency. The data of this study allows us to distinguish between high, medium and low salient stakeholders (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997), according to the verbalisations of participants, as proposed in figure 1.

In the context of a corporate expatriate assignment there are different salient stakeholders, depending on the view point, so one may presume that:

Proposition 1: Family is a definitive (i.e. high salient) stakeholder for expatriates and spouses, but not for organisations;

Proposition 2: Expatriates are definitive stakeholders for expatriates, spouses and organisations;

Proposition 3: The employing organisation is a high salient stakeholder for expatriates, spouses and organisations.

Another contribution of the data is that individuals do not distinguish between home and host organisations, but rather look at the company as a whole. This distinction is especially made by the organisational representatives. This may have several explanations: on the one hand, the expatriates moving from the United States of America to Europe are actually moving within headquarters, and the differences in terms of size of the company, hierarchy and processes developed are not significant. Moreover, the expatriate assignments taking place in Brazil (three assignees in total) were planned at the very top level, in the North American headquarters, so it was not a decision from the “home country organisation”, since these employees were working in Mexico and that unit was downsized. Furthermore, these three interviewees revealed to be building a facility in Brazil, so there was no host organisation prior to their assignment.

A broader explanation is that these findings suggest an ethnocentric view of expatriate assignments (Toh and DeNisi, 2005). Some expatriates claimed their organisational goals were to turn a division around and make it profitable or even build a new facility, *i.e.*, reasons intrinsically related to the host country organisation, yet, they do not acknowledge host country stakeholders as salient.

The findings of this study provide descriptive, instrumental and normative justifications of a stakeholder theory for IAs (Donaldson and Preston, 1995). *Descriptive arguments* are based on the support expatriates and families claimed to have

received, even though family was not identified as an important stakeholder by organisational representatives, which shows that managers' concerns in an IA might go beyond the assignee (Donaldson and Preston, 1995).

This kind of support was also referred to as impacting on an EA success: if the family is well settled, the expatriate can focus on the job, thus revealing an *instrumental argument* for IAs (Donaldson and Preston, 1995).

Normative justifications, for instance, lie on the high salience of the family: spouses and kids often relocate with the expatriate, experiencing great changes in the family dynamics and facing new challenges. These arguments reveal that the family is a group with legitimate and moral claims in an EA (Donaldson and Preston, 1995). The same is applicable to host country stakeholders, who also play an important role in IAs.

Research Question 2 – Success Evaluation

The results described are, to some extent, in line with the Cerdin and Pargneux (2009, 2012) model as career and performance were commonly used by expatriates as a criteria to appraise expatriate assignment success. It is possible to conclude that expatriates are driven by career prospects (Dickmann *et al.*, 2008; Doherty *et al.*, 2011; Hippler, 2009; Pinto, *et al.*, 2012b), because most expatriates claimed having accepted the assignment for career development reasons, whilst some focused on the career challenge associated with this experience. This may explain the importance attributed to performance, because good performance was expected to enhance the chances of career progression. However, repatriation was a sensitive matter portrayed throughout the expatriates' speeches. On the one hand, expatriates expressed concerns about their future within their employing organisations. On the other hand, the citations presented showed that organisational representatives are aware that sometimes it is not possible to have the expatriate grown into a higher role upon return to the home organisation, thus echoing previous research (Benson and Pattie, 2009; Bonache *et al.*, 2010; Crawley *et al.*, 2013; Dickmann and Harris, 2005) which claims organisations are not always capable to provide career progression to assignees. Contextual information about the assignments was collected, suggesting some more possible explanations. On the one hand, in general, expatriates were aware that returning to their home countries and growing into a position of at least equal importance is difficult, so adopting this

criterion could increase the chances of them feeling unsuccessful after the assignment. On the other hand, they were aware they were acquiring a great set of skills that will be valued in the market, so even if there is not a suitable position for them to go back to in their home organisations, other companies may be interested in their curriculum.

Furthermore, some expatriates stated they accepted the assignment because the business unit in their home countries had downsized, or because they had exhausted their career prospects back home. Hence, they were not expecting to be repatriated into their home organisations in the first place. This finding confirms earlier evidence with Portuguese expatriates suggesting that people are often compelled to go abroad rather than being intrinsically motivated (Pinto *et al.*, 2012b).

Therefore, results show that these organisations regard international assignments not as a developmental opportunity for individuals, but rather as a way of achieving certain organisational goals, that might not be in line with the aimed individual career outcomes. This was clearly expressed by some managers, which is in line with earlier evidence (Benson and Pattie, 2009; Bonache *et al.*, 2010; Crawley *et al.*, 2013; Dickmann and Harris, 2005; Pinto *et al.*, 2012b), and is consistent with the following proposition:

Proposition 4: Organisations use expatriate assignments to achieve organisational goals, which may differ from expatriates' goals.

There was a clear personal component associated with success, verbalized as cross-cultural adjustment and family well-being. This is in line with several studies which claimed that family adjustment has an impact on the expatriates, thus contributing to a crossover phenomenon (Haslberger and Brewster, 2008; Shaffer *et al.*, 1999; Takeuchi *et al.*, 2002). It is also indicative of the family's salience as a stakeholder, more than is appreciated by organisations (Dickmann *et al.*, 2008; Haslberger and Brewster, 2008; Shaffer *et al.*, 1999; Takeuchi *et al.*, 2002). However, cross-cultural adjustment was verbalised as a consequence and not as an antecedent of job performance, thus reflecting a distinct view from previous research (Harrison and Shaffer, 2005; Mol *et al.*, 2005).

Moreover, the results allow for an important contribution: expatriate assignment success is a multifaceted phenomenon for these expatriates, because they assess it in a two-fold manner, comprising a professional component, based on good performance and career prospects, and a personal component, based on cross-cultural adjustment of themselves and their families. This extends earlier findings which had defined success in terms of one sole criterion, whether it's cross-cultural adjustment (Aycan, 1997; Haslberger *et al.*, 2013; Miao *et al.*, 2011; Shaffer *et al.*, 1999; Takeuchi, 2010; Zimmermann *et al.*, 2003), performance (Mol *et al.*, 2005) or career fit (Cerdin and Pargneux 2009, 2012). Based on the findings of this paper, the following propositions can be presented:

Proposition 5: Expatriates use multiple criteria to evaluate an assignment's success, whereas

- a) Unaccompanied expatriates focus on financial and career outcomes,*
- b) Accompanied expatriates are more likely to evaluate success by a personal component (e.g. personal and family well-being abroad) and a professional component (e.g. financial and career outcomes).*

The spouses' criteria to evaluate an assignment's success are focused on the family's cross-cultural adjustment and well-being. Nonetheless, they were also aware of a professional component, thus, the following can be proposed:

Proposition 6: Expatriate spouses use three main criteria to evaluate an assignment's success:

- a) family well-being, while abroad,*
- b) expatriates' job performance abroad,*
- c) expatriates' career progression abroad and upon return.*

A deeper analysis into the spouses' speeches showed some discomfort in expressing their opinions, many hesitations and often uncertainty about several aspects of the assignment. This can be interpreted as a sign of subordination, because they focused on success of expatriates and the benefits they could achieve. Therefore, these

spouses agree to become involved in such a big change in family's dynamics, perceiving the assignment as required to their husbands' career, but knowing and understanding very little about it.

As for the way organisations look at international assignments, the findings second Bresman's *et al.*, (1999) idea that organisations define success by being able to transfer knowledge and expertise to subsidiaries, thus looking for good performance.

Proposition 7: Organisations evaluate EA success by a) assignment completion and b) job performance, through the completion of assignment goals.

In table 5, missing spots were presented regarding the host country stakeholders views on expatriate assignments. This further suggests an ethnocentric understanding of expatriate assignments: the assignee is sent abroad to perform specific organisational goals that require the use of an EA, but the actual impact of this assignment for the host organisation/locals is completely put aside (Toh and DeNisi, 2005). This may have several explanations. The expatriates, as argued above, are driven by career prospects and expect to return home and fill in a higher position. Since these issues are mainly centred on what happens in their home organisations, after the assignment, it is presumed that expatriates are more, if not only, concerned about how their home organisations, perceived as their employing entities, will rate their performance. This argument might as well apply to the spouses who also wish their husbands to grow professionally at the home organisation. The managers at headquarters may rather look at "the big picture" and focus on the impact on the organisation as a whole. Another possible rationale is simply a disconnection between home and host organisations and a disregard for the host country's interests. Yet, in both cases, home organisations correspond to headquarters, so a different perspective might be enforced when expatriates are displaced from third country companies, which might be further explored in future research.

Organisational representatives showed a job-centric view, mainly centred on performance and assignment completion. Nonetheless, they recognize that the expatriates adopt personal criteria to appraise EA success, which certainly is not contemplated by the way organisations evaluate success. Moreover, the absence of

references to the family's understanding of EA success further suggests a neglecting attitude towards this high salient group of stakeholders (from the expatriates' standpoint).

Research Question 3 – Contributions towards Successful Assignments

The criteria expatriates use to appraise success is congruent with the kind of support they expect from their organisations: relocation support, which helps families adjust; and providing the required resources to perform their mission. These findings extend the literature that claims organisational support can impact expatriates' adjustment (Aycan, 1997; Malek *et al.*, 2014; Miao *et al.*, 2011; Toh and DeNisi, 2005; Zimmermann *et al.*, 2003) and job performance (Harrison and Shaffer, 2005; Toh and DeNisi, 2005).

It is interesting to note that the spouses, despite appreciating relocation support, also looked for a “welcoming attitude” from the host organisations (Harrison and Shaffer, 2005; Toh and DeNisi, 2005). Once again, the spouses did not express any views on how the host organisation would appraise success but still acknowledged it can contribute to it. It shows the spouses are driven by the impact the assignment might have on the expatriates' careers, and recognize that host organisations can facilitate that. It further suggests the notion of subordination: the spouses agree to relocate and expect to be adjusted and yet centred their speeches exclusively on how their husbands' success could be enabled.

The organisational representatives also expressed a concern about a “welcoming attitude” from the host organisation, which can be a clue to what was claimed by these stakeholders: in the host country, individuals are not that eager to have an outsider coming over to, more often than not, fulfil a higher position in the venture.

Cross-cultural training programs were given very little importance. This can be an indication of what has been documented, that these programs are often very vague and their impact on adjustment is not as valuable as expected (Caligiuri *et al.*, 2001).

It is also possible to conclude a discrepancy between what expatriates and spouses value and what the organisational representatives have in place to ease their assignments. The missing spots documented in table 6 demonstrate a burden put on the headquarters as the main contributors towards success. This can be indicative that, in

fact, expatriates and their families experience great changes and challenges motivated by an organisational need, thus expecting, in return, some kind of support and reward. Additionally, this does not mean that expatriates and spouses are regarded as having no impact on a successful assignment, but rather that individuals focused on what might concern them, their employing organisations.

Research Question 4 – Demonstration of success

Expatriates want their organisations to reward the sacrifices they are making by providing them the opportunity to progress in their careers. This supports Cerdin and Pargneux (2009) and Pinto *et al.*, (2012b) arguments that expatriates value the career outcomes of international assignments.

Additionally, expatriates expressed an idea of sacrifice for being overseas and for working long hours and weekends, a sense of devotion to their organisations, which should be verbally acknowledged by senior managers. Ribeiro (2012) while studying the dimensions expatriates adopt to evaluate success, concluded that being recognised by their home and host colleagues was an important aspect. The results of this study are slightly different because verbal recognition was not expressed as being suggestive of success, but rather as something appreciated to go alongside a promotion.

It is important to note a discrepancy between the expatriates' expectations and the mechanisms organisations have in place to validate success. Because organisations focus primarily on "getting the job done", rather than looking at the assignment as a developmental opportunity for assignees, it is not guaranteed that the expatriates will come back and grow into a higher position. The organisational representatives stated that a promotion was indicative of success, but also acknowledged the difficulties of putting this mechanism into practice. Once again, organisations and individuals have different and even opposing interests and goals (Benson and Pattie, 2009; Bonache *et al.*, 2010; Crawley *et al.*, 2013; Dickmann *et al.*, 2008; Dickmann and Harris, 2005; Doherty *et al.*, 2011; Hippler, 2009; Pinto *et al.*, 2012b). It further highlights a contradiction that one may regard as unethical: the organisations expect dedication from the expatriates to fulfil organisational goals overseas but do not guarantee the reward that is most appreciated by expatriates. This lack of fit between different expectations might as well underlie the differences in defining EA success.

Conclusions and Implications for Research

This was an exploratory study that, using a multiple stakeholder view, attempted to a) identify salient stakeholders in an expatriate assignment, b) assess the criteria different stakeholders use to appraise success, c) investigate what could make an assignment successful and d) explore how success should be recognized. This study provides an in-depth analysis of the views of different stakeholders from two case-study organisations. Despite the dissimilar contexts, Organisations A and B use similar expatriation practices and participants from both companies revealed very similar views, according to their stakeholder role.

One of the main conclusions of this study is that organisations are not very keen on sharing their experiences about international assignments. As previously reported, several companies with presence in Portugal that met the aforementioned criteria were asked to participate in this study, and most of them declined. Also, Organisation A gave permission to consider a limited number of expatriate assignments and this choice was not random. A thorough analysis showed that the selected interviewees were considered by the HR department to have been successful. Once again, instead of analysing and trying to understand unsuccessful assignments, it seems that organisations choose to put them aside. Furthermore, organisations were asked permission to interview other stakeholders, such as home and host country colleagues and supervisors, and they failed to fulfil this request, thus suggesting an unspoken concern about host country nationals (HCN) views.

The aforementioned outcomes and conclusions are indicative that expatriate assignments encompass, indeed, multiple stakeholders (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997), each playing important and different roles towards the ultimate goal of organisations and individuals: a successful expatriate assignment. In turn, the perceptions of success among stakeholders are substantially different. Hence, future research on expatriate assignments shall acknowledge and further explore this complexity.

Implications for Practice

The outcomes of this study suggest a few practical implications for managers and individuals seeking a successful expatriate assignment.

Given the importance of individuals and families in shaping EAs, managers should consider their interests and goals if they wish to establish a balanced relationship between the stakeholders impacting and being impacted by assignments. Also, the commonly reported concern regarding the HCN attitudes towards the assignee, expressed by the requirement of a “welcoming attitude” from the host organisation, further echoes previous research that argued there is a disregard for host country stakeholders’ interests and goals (Toh and DeNisi, 2005). Hence, it is of utmost importance to acknowledge the effects suffered and caused by all parts involved. This should encompass stronger communication with and involvement of the host organisation in the decision-making process and design of expatriate programs.

Moreover, the expressed fear of being left out, of being “out of sight, out of mind” is worth the organisations’ attention. This is based on complaints that expatriates overseas make great sacrifices, leaving their families and friends, putting their partners and/or kids through significant changes, dealing with distance from headquarters and sometimes incompatible time zones that further difficult communication between the expatriate and the home organisation. Most expatriates fear a lot of this goes unnoticed by their superiors. Continuous communication, positive reinforcement and verbal recognition are important actions for organisations wishing to attract and retain talented international workers.

This study also stressed the different and often opposing views and expectations between individuals and organisations. Career prospects are an important motivation for individuals to accept an international assignment, expecting to grow into a higher position upon return. Thus, organisations should make strong efforts to put into practice development plans for these individuals, which was not the case, in this study.

Families were confirmed as high salient stakeholders for expatriates and spouses, being greatly impacted and also impacting EAs. Thus, managers cannot ignore such a relevant part of an international assignment and should develop ways of supporting spouses and children and not only the expatriate.

The divergent views about the organisational role in contributing towards success suggest organisational representatives should analyse what is valued and what actually impacts from the point of view of different stakeholders, thus adjusting the expatriate programs to the needs of the parts involved.

Overall, by articulating an individual and an organisational perspective, this paper provides a deeper understanding of expatriate assignments. This enables organisations to achieve a more aligned action with different stakeholders' interests, and individuals to better negotiate their explicit and implicit goals.

Limitations and Future Investigation

This was an exploratory study and, as such, it was not aimed at providing generalised results. The findings presented are not argued to be representative and, therefore, the reader shall consider this when interpreting the results achieved. Yet, the purpose of drawing research propositions from the findings was achieved so future research might test them and focus on a larger sample of multiple stakeholders.

Moreover, this study is claimed to draw on a multiple stakeholder approach. Although different types of stakeholders were interviewed, it was not possible to collect information from other members of the family (e.g., children), home and host country colleagues and home and host country supervisors. Thus, further research is required to expand the intended 360-degree view on expatriate assignments.

To identify the salient stakeholders of an EA, the Mitchell *et al.* (1997) model was used. A content analysis of the participants' speeches made it possible to formulate some hypotheses about the salience of stakeholders (figure 1). Future research could detail how power, legitimacy and urgency (Mitchell *et al.*, 1997) are perceived by expatriates, their families, home and host managers, supervisors and colleagues. Expatriate assignment policies and further contextual aspects may impact on perception of attributes, and this may also vary according to the stages of expatriation – pre-expatriation, expatriation and repatriation (Cerdin and Pargneux, 2009). Therefore, a longitudinal study could further detail on salience of stakeholders by considering these assumptions.

Contextual data may also impact on one's appraisal of expatriate success, suggesting that criteria may vary according to the different stages of an expatriation (Cerdin and Pargneux, 2009). Research could adopt a longitudinal approach to ascertain if and how appraisal of success varies during the assignment.

Future research could further explore why expatriates, spouses and organisational managers do not speak about individual roles in contributing to success. A deeper analysis into this is required, also extended to host country stakeholders.

The pursuit of the challenges proposed could further extend the understanding of expatriate assignments from the point of view of multiple stakeholders, for they play important roles in shaping this experience, both for individuals and organisations.

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Appendix

Appendix 1 - Interview questionnaire: Expatriate

1. Characterisation:

- a. Age
- b. Marital Status
 - i. Did your family move with you? Why? Why not? From the very beginning?
- c. Years working in the home organization
- d. Years working in the host organization
- e. EA initial length
- f. EA actual length
- g. Main tasks in the home organization
- h. Main tasks in the host organization

Stakeholders

2. Who do you think affected the most your expatriate assignment? Why?
3. Who do you think was most affected by your expatriate assignment? Why?
4. Were these entities involved in the decision of expatriation? If so, how?

Departure

5. Can you tell me how you were invited to perform an assignment abroad?
6. What do you think were the most important factors for the company to choose you and not a fellow colleague?
7. Why did you accept the mission?
8. Would you accept again today?

9. What are the goals of this expatriation? Did you know these goals from the very beginning?

10. Did you know what you would find in the destination country? Was it a shock?

Expatriate Assignment Success

11. In your opinion, what is a successful expatriation?

12. How can different stakeholders contribute to a successful assignment?

13. How do you think different stakeholders will appraise expatriate assignment success?

14. How would you like your company to show that it was a successful mission?

Arrival

15. What do you expect to happen when you return to your home country?

16. What are the main consequences of this expatriation?

17. What would have been the consequences of not having accepted this mission?

Appendix 2 - Interview questionnaire: Repatriate

1. Characterisation:

- a. Age
- b. Marital Status
 - i. Did your family move with you? Why? Why not? From the very beginning?
- c. Years working in the home organization
- d. Years working in the host organization
- e. EA initial length
- f. EA actual length
- g. Main tasks in the home organization
- h. Main tasks in the host organization

Stakeholders

2. Who do you think affected the most your expatriate assignment? Why?
3. Who do you think was most affected by your expatriate assignment? Why?
4. Were these entities involved in the decision of expatriation? If so, how?

Departure

5. Can you tell me how you were invited to perform an assignment abroad?
6. What do you think were the most important factors for the company to choose you and not a fellow colleague?
7. Why did you accept the mission?
8. Would you accept again today?
9. What are the goals of this expatriation? Did you know these goals from the very beginning?

10. Did you know what you would find in the destination country? Was it a shock?
11. Can you tell how your fellow expatriate, whose reception you were responsible for, was invited to perform this assignment?
12. Do you think he knew what to expect in the host country?
13. Tell about your experience in welcoming expatriates.

Expatriate Assignment Success

14. In your opinion, what is a successful expatriation?
15. How can different stakeholders contribute to a successful assignment?
16. How do you think different stakeholders will appraise expatriate assignment success?
17. How would you like your company to show that it was a successful mission?
18. As Country Manager, how did you demonstrate it had been a successful assignment?

Arrival

19. What are the main consequences of this expatriation?
20. What would have been the consequences of not having accepted this mission?

Appendix 3 - Interview questionnaire: Spouses

1. 1. Characterisation:

a. a. Age

Stakeholders

2. Who do you think affected the most your expatriate assignment? Why?
3. Who do you think was most affected by your expatriate assignment? Why?
4. Were these entities involved in the decision of expatriation? If so, how?

Departure

5. Do you remember or do you know how your husband was invited to perform this assignment?
6. Why do you think that the company chose your husband to perform this assignment and not a fellow colleague?
7. Why did you, as a family, decided to accept?
8. Did you know what the goals for this assignment were?
9. Did you know what you would find in the destination country?

Expatriate Assignment Success

10. In your opinion, what is a successful expatriation?
11. How can different stakeholders contribute to a successful assignment?
12. How do you think different stakeholders will appraise expatriate assignment success?
13. How would you like the company to show that it was a successful mission?
14. What is important for you to feel happy in this assignment?
15. What are the aspects that you most enjoy regarding the whole expatriation process?
16. What are the aspect that you least enjoy?

Arrival

17. What do you expect to happen when you return to your home country?
18. What are the main consequences of this expatriation?
19. What would have been the consequences of not having accepted this mission?

Appendix 4 - Interview questionnaire: Organisational Manager

1. Characterisation:

- a. Age
- b. Years working in the home organization
- c. Main tasks in the home organization

Stakeholders

2. Who do you think most affects expatriate assignments? Why?
3. Who do you think is most affected by expatriate assignments? Why?
4. Are these entities involved in the decision of expatriation? If so, how?

Departure

5. What are the reasons to expatriate?
6. What is your selection criteria of potential expatriates?
7. How are assignees invited to perform an assignment?
8. Is it difficult to proceed with expatriate assignments?
9. Does the company provide any kind of preparation before departure?
10. Do you think expatriates have a clear idea of what to expect in the destination country?

Expatriate Assignment Success

11. In your opinion, what is a successful international assignment?
12. How do different stakeholders appraise EA success?
13. How can different stakeholders contribute to success?

Arrival

14. How is the final assessment of the assignment, in terms of success or failure, communicated to the expatriate?
15. How is a successful EA rewarded?
16. What are the consequences of not accepting an expatriate assignment?
17. What are the most important consequences of expatriate assignments?