

BETINA SZKUDLAREK

Spinning the Web of Reentry

[Re]connecting reentry training theory and practice



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Het spinnen van het terugkeer web

Het (her)verbinden van de theorie over en de praktijk van terugkeer trainingen

Thesis

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1. Reentry - introducing the research theme

1.1 Preamble

The story of Edith Coron, Paris 27.05.2005

I basically left this country [France] for good in 1981, when I went studying in the United States, to do a master's degree in Radio and Television. I moved from the US to Western Africa where I spent about a year. In 1983, I established myself in Central America, where I stayed for five years, based in-between Salvador and Nicaragua. That is also where I met my husband. He was a British correspondent there, while I worked for "Liberation" and Radio France. It was a very challenging time of civil war in that part of the world. From Central America, I moved on to Argentina, where I lived for two years and worked as a correspondent for "Le Monde". In 1991, we moved to Israel (it was the time of the Gulf War) and we stayed there for four years during which I gave birth to our two children. In 1994, I moved to Russia, Moscow, where together with my husband and two children we stayed for four years. I came back to France in 1998. Moving back was a very conscious decision from our side, because we wanted to root our children in a country which could be theirs (as my children are Franco-British by birth). We have been living here [Paris] since then. We haven't changed apartment since 1998; we have stayed in the same place for seven years, which has never happened to us before.

The repatriation process was a two-sided experience. On the one hand, in my professional life I was lucky because before I arrived here [Paris] I and my husband already had jobs. And for me, what was essential was that I came back as a correspondent for a British newspaper (so I arrived as a foreign correspondent to this country, which I had left almost twenty years before). That was good in the sense that it gave me some distance to this country [France]. However, on the other hand I discovered that twenty years had gone by... I had a huge hole in terms of my knowledge about this country, something I was tested by every day I had to write a story about France and explaining it to the Brits. I was more knowledgeable about the Middle Eastern conflicts or the political situation in

Russia than about French domestic policy. Obviously, I have missed so much about the general culture in France. That was a bit difficult professionally. Particularly it was a problem in the eyes of French I talked to, because they had a very hard time understanding why I didn't know a certain amount of things and why I was so ignorant on some topics. For them I was French so I was supposed to know and understand. The problem was that the world has done its normal job of rotating around, and solar system has been functioning while I was not here [laughs] and it was very hard to find back a place professionally because I hadn't been in my professional circles.

Another problem was the huge gap in terms of people not being aware of the various experiences one has accumulated and how multifaceted one has become after twenty years of living on four different continents. The person who is coming back is not the same person who has left. I found that I was probably not patient enough towards my fellow French countrymen because there were a certain number of things I would take for granted, which were not that obvious to them. I had become probably quite a hybrid person. I was not a Franco-French person anymore and in terms of my reactions and my attitudes there were times the French were surprised by me and I was equally surprised by them. This process was absolutely more difficult than the expatriation. While moving abroad you expect a shock. In repatriation, you don't expect that people will not understand you. In expatriation, people have a certain level of tolerance towards you because they know that you are a foreigner. When you come back to your own country it is not the case. That is what makes it much more difficult.

I was trying to cope with it on my own and I really asked myself whether there was something wrong with me. Eventually, I went to see a psychoanalyst. The first thing he gave me was a book called "Outsiders" by Howard S. Becker. It is an essay on jazz musicians and drug addicts in Chicago. I was neither a drug addict nor a jazz musician [laughs], but it was the concept of being an outsider, which was so crucial. He gave me that book and everything became clear: of course, I was an outsider! That was the moment when I started to read more books about the repatriation process and I got into all the intercultural literature. I discovered that I was just a product, a fruit, of what I had gone through. There was nothing particularly wrong with me. I was just experiencing reentry shock [laughs].

This is the story of Edith Coron, the story of a strong woman who had to admit defeat in confrontation with the challenges of the reentry transition. Her story is not an isolated case. Countless repatriating individuals struggle with their reentry move after spending numerous years abroad. But can they be spared the pain and distress of repatriation? Can they be provided with strategies preventing breakdowns or at least easing the

reentry process? Intercultural trainers provide an affirmative response to this question. According to them, reentry training is what Edith and other repatriates need. But what is it that the trainers provide? The present dissertation is an attempt to answer this question.

1.2 Motivation

In today's increasingly globalized world, cross-border mobility has become a reality of everyday life. Cross-border resettlement in business, education, leisure or the political setting has been increasing in the last number of decades (Bonache & Brewster, 2001). An increase in cross-border mobility is accompanied by a need for a better understanding of psychological, social and practical matters associated with the transition. As Magala (2005) argues, the crossing of cultural bridges comes with a price. The challenges associated with sojourns and work in a culturally dissimilar setting to that in which an individual was socialized, find a very prominent place in literature, in fields such as cross-cultural psychology, intercultural communication and international human resource management. Countless numbers of intercultural communication handbooks and cross-cultural management manuals have been published in response to an increased need for easily-applicable successful foreign culture adaptation strategies. At the same time, the issue of returning home remained largely neglected within the academic community as well as among the practitioners managing the cross-border mobility of intercultural sojourners.

As defined by Adler (1981), cross-cultural reentry is:

"[T]he transition from a foreign culture back into one's home culture. It is the experience of facing previously familiar surroundings after living in a different environment for a significant period of time."

(Adler, 1981: 343)

Accordingly, this transition can be potentially very troublesome and therefore requires special attention on the side of the returning individuals and their organizations. In fact, research indicates that individuals who are prepared for repatriation do not experience the negative aspects of reentry (such as psychological stress and anxiety) to the same extent as those individuals who come back unprepared (Sussman, 2001). Taking the above-mentioned issues into consideration, the dearth of intercultural reentry transition research is rather surprising.

Cultural adjustment to a new environment is one of the core topics in international HRM literature. Among the writings, intercultural training for expatriates is one of the most often recommended strategies for the successful adjustment of expatriates to the host-

country environment. Countless publications are devoted to the effectiveness (Black & Mendenhall, 1990; Brewster & Pickard, 1994; Forster, 2000), methodology (Bennett, 1986; Littrell & Salas, 2005; Mendenhall & Stahl, 2000) and content (Bennett et al., 2000; Caligiuri et al., 2001; Bhawuk, 1998; Landis & Brislin, 1996) of intercultural interventions in HRM related literature. At the same time, despite a range of studies describing the difficulties of the repatriation process within a corporate context (Adler, 1991; Black et al., 1992b; Forster, 1994; Harvey, 1982, 1989; Linehan & Scullion, 2002; Peltonen, 1997) and among exchange students (Arthur, 2003; Rogers and Ward, 1993; Rohrlisch and Martin, 1991; Uehara, 1986; Thompson and Christofi, 2006, Westwood et al., 1986, Wilson, 1993), publications related to reentry training that deal with these problems are few and far between. Seeing that coming home is not only understood to be one of the biggest challenges of the international transition cycle, but also potentially (Adler, 1981, 1991; Baughn, 1995, Linehan and Scullion, 2002, Martin 1984) can be even more difficult than moving abroad, these issues are in need of attention.

In brief, the presented assessment of the field indicates the following concerns. While reentry transition is documented as problematic and challenging, little do we know about existing practices, such as reentry training, which could help the returning individuals. In addition, the fragmentation of writings on reentry training and the very limited empirical accounts of existing support practices justify the decision to pursue the reentry training topic in this dissertation. In the remaining paragraphs of this introduction, I will present the main goals of this dissertation as well as the theoretical and empirical approach chosen for investigating the research subject. I will close this chapter with a detailed outline of this book.

1.3 Aims and scope

The above-described assessment of the outlined research field allows me to define the focus of this dissertation.

The main aim of this research is to explore the phenomenon of cross-cultural reentry training; its design, setup, potential applications and utilization within international HR practices. By doing so, I endeavour to provide a comprehensive overview of the available corporate reentry training services¹ and offer a number of considerations for consequent utilization of this HR practice. This analysis will help in achieving two objectives. The first one is filling the existing gap within the reentry literature about the reentry training phenomenon. The second is to provide the interested parties (potential trainees, trainers and HR managers responsible for international relocation of

¹ By training services, I am also referring to coaching activities. This overlap is a reflection of current state of affairs in the literature and among interviewees, where those terms are often used interchangeably.

employees) with information on the course and setup of this HR intervention. Such information would allow the three groups to consider ways of utilizing this support measure as well as to evaluate and revise currently available practices.

This aim will be achieved by conducting an analysis grounded in two distinctive research modes. In the first mode, dominant within the investigated research field, the focus will be on the content of the intervention. In the second mode, rarely employed within international HR, I will take a close look at the process-related aspects of designing and executing reentry training (those two modes are described in detail in the next section of this Chapter). Through such an approach, I want to reveal the aspects of reentry training's design and implementation, which are not visible when applying content-oriented methods only. Additionally, such investigation can reveal the often hidden aspects of organizational dynamics and, as with the case of reentry training, show ways in which these dynamics influence many similar organizational practices and other undertakings. Consequently, the second aim of this dissertation is to explore the utility of process-oriented, reflexive approaches for organizational studies in general and HRM in particular. This will be done by conducting a compelling adaptation of one of the reflexive approaches to a chosen object of study.

1.4 Approach

In order to achieve the identified aims, a careful delineation of both the empirical investigation and the theoretical framework is needed.

1.4.1 Empirical investigation

To achieve a thorough understanding of the reentry training phenomena, this study involves three primary sources of information. First of all, a thorough literature review helps in identifying available writings on both the reentry process and reentry training. Secondly, in-depth interviews with reentry trainers as well as a review of training materials provide further information about current practices within the field. Last, but not least, participant observations of training for trainers sessions allow for the identification of overall trends and the prediction of future developments in the reentry training domain. In order to provide a comprehensive and wide-ranging view of the current situation, this research includes a review of the reentry services of the leading intercultural training providers as well as smaller intercultural training and coaching businesses, servicing several Fortune 500 companies (Exxon Mobile, General Electrics, Bank of America and Motorola among others) as well as a number of non-US multinationals (including Royal Dutch Shell, Siemens and Sony).

1.4.2 Theoretical framework

Taking into consideration the complexity of organizational practices, in this dissertation I adopt a dual theoretical perspective and provide a thorough investigation of the subject of study throughout two separate, yet, as I argue complementary, lines of inquiries. Cooper and Law (1995) argue that researchers in their academic endeavours have been always applying two distinctive modes of thinking. On the one hand, we have the *distal* mode (dominant in organizational research) which focuses on stable end products, results, clarity and order. On the other hand however, we have the *proximal* mode of thinking which privileges process, precariousness, transformation and continuity of organizational processes. These two separate modes of thinking will be brought together in this research and will serve as theoretical lenses through which I will examine the empirical data gathered throughout the research process.

The first theoretical lens employed in this research is the cross-cultural reentry and international business literature, which describes the difficulties and challenges of the reentry transition. In line with these writings, reentry training is one of the HR practices that could be applied by HR managers alongside other international transition support measures. This field of research focuses on aspects such as the psychological discomforts of the reentry process, cross-cultural readjustment and readjustment to home-organization. The theories developed within this field will be used in order to analyze the collected data and compare the existing theoretical assumptions with available reentry training services. This approach is representative of the distal mode of thinking and is dominant in available subject-related literature.

Nevertheless, in this dissertation I argue that such a singular perspective is insufficient for comprehending the “problematic, negotiated and situated” (Star, 1992: 398) nature of organizational practices. If we define organizations as “complex combinations of activities, purposes, and meanings” (March, 1981: 574), understanding of organizational practices, interactions and motives underpinning any of the decision making processes are of utmost importance. To achieve such an understanding, the second theoretical stream this research draws on is literature on Actor-Network Theory (ANT). This proximal mode of theorizing allows catching the complexity of the object of study and shows its constant transformation as well as its multifaceted and compound character. In line with the ANT method, reentry training phenomena will be presented as a carefully managed network of interdependencies and relations. This study aims at revealing the constant work, multiplicity and continuous change behind what we call *reentry training*. The self interest of the actors involved will be exposed, the problematic training designs examined and the ordering struggles (Law, 1992) captured and analyzed.

Through such twofold analysis, I hope to extend the distal structural prescription mode, dominant in management research, with proximal processual deconstruction (Lee & Hassard, 1999) necessary for recognising and comprehending complex realities.

1.5 Guide

To provide the reader with a foretaste of this dissertation and to bring in a guiding structure for further lecture, in the following paragraphs I will briefly introduce the outline of this study.

To start with, Chapter 2 of this dissertation will introduce the research materials collected and the methodological approach chosen. Data collection methods will be revealed and an overview of collected research material will be presented. This chapter will also exemplify the rationale for choosing qualitative methods in this study.

The core of this dissertation is divided in two parts. Part 1 (Chapter 3 & 4), in accordance with the theoretical framework presented above, is representative of a distal mode of thinking - dominant within organizational research. In Chapter 3, I will provide a thorough review of the reentry literature that falls into this research domain. This includes both the general literature on reentry transition as well as the specific writings on reentry training. This overview of existing theories and trends will provide the first theoretical lens through which the collected empirical data will be analyzed (Chapter 4).

The second part of this dissertation starts with an introduction to Actor-Network Theory. In particular, Chapter 5 provides an overview of the ANT method, as well as introduces its relevance for organizational research. This framework will be subsequently used (Chapter 6) to provide a second theoretical lens through which we can make sense of collected research material. Accordingly, part 2 of this research is representative of the proximal approach in organizational studies. Both parts are richly complemented by excerpts from the interviews and other empirical data collected.

Finally, chapter 7 brings together Part 1 and 2, and exemplifies the main issues of concern in reentry training design and execution. This last section provides a critical reflection on both, reentry training – the ontological object of this research, as well as on theoretical developments within organizational studies. Last but not least, Chapter 7 presents the managerial relevance of this research and indicates directions worth further investigation. The dissertation closes with a post scriptum note. For an overview of this dissertation, please refer to Figure 1.1.

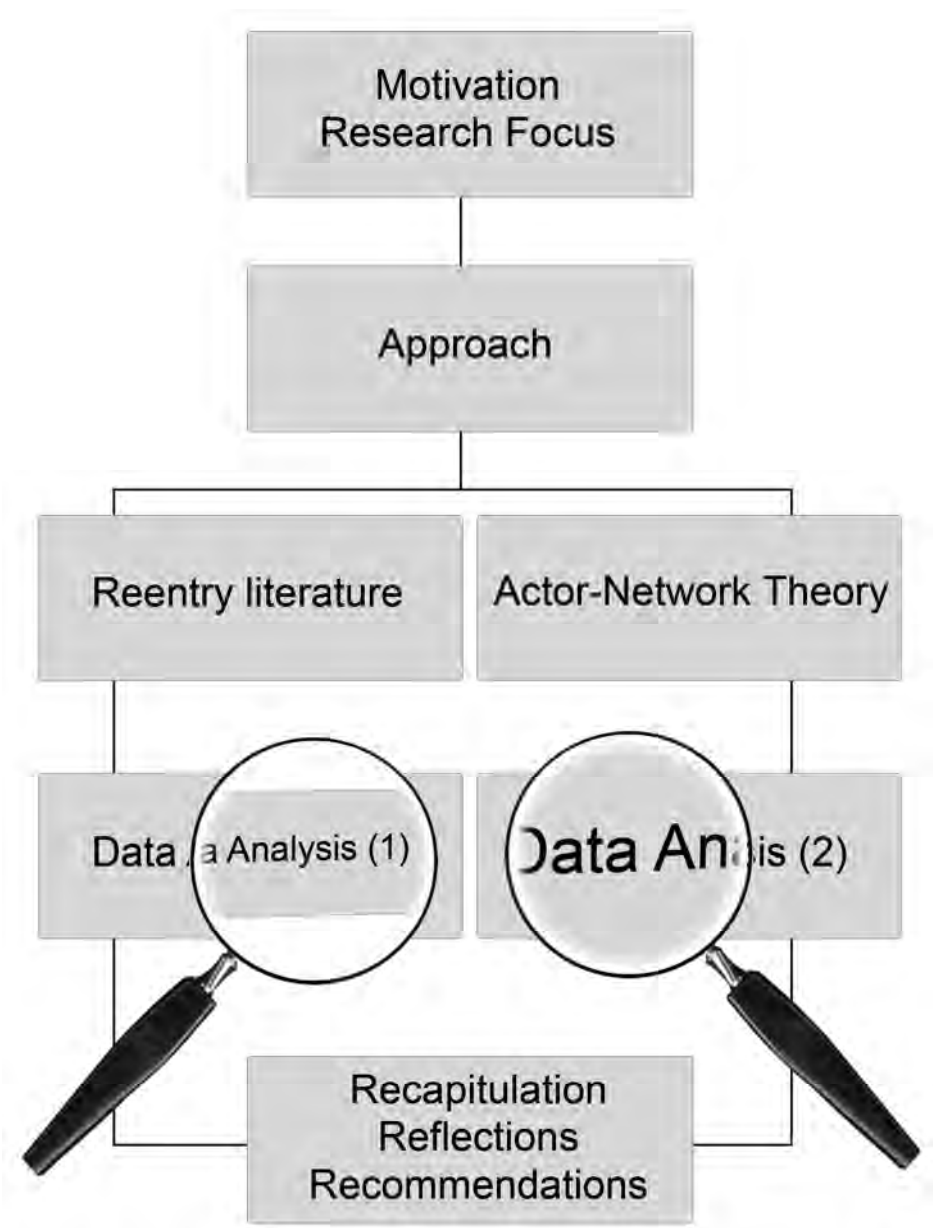


Figure 1.1: An overview of the dissertation

2. Methodological considerations

2.1 Introduction

How can we improve our theoretical understanding of the complexity of organizational practices? How can such practices be conceptualized, comprehended, described and analyzed in spite of their density, multiplicity and continuous change? First of all, the qualitative paradigm in the sociology of organizations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) offers a convenient starting point.

“Qualitative data are attractive for many reasons: they are rich, full, earthy, holistic, ‘real’; their face validity seems unimpeachable; they preserve chronological flow where that is important, and suffer minimally from retrospective distortion; and they, in principle, offer a far more precise way to assess causality in organizational affairs than arcane efforts like cross-lagged correlations”

(Miles, 1979: 590)

Miles' (1979) account of the merits of qualitative data leaves no doubts as to why one would engage with this methodological approach. Strauss and Corbin (1998) bring forward other reasons. According to the authors the nature of the research problem is one of the most important factors in choosing a methodological approach. Currently, very little is known empirically about the design, implementation and uses of reentry training sessions. Novelty, as well as the complex design and multifaceted process of setting up of an intervention make this particular research area an exploratory topic that is perfectly suited to the pursuit of qualitative empirical research. Patton (1990) adds to this list a number of other considerations. The dynamics of the investigated systems and attention to constant, ongoing transformations is according to the author an important reason for choosing qualitative inquiry. This in turn is closely related to design flexibility and the researcher's openness to new directions emerging in the process of the inquiry, which allow for the adaptation of the investigative process to changing circumstances (Patton, 1990). Moreover, a holistic perspective allows for

understanding a phenomenon in its entirety, rather than as a collection of loose parts (Patton, 1990).

Qualitative research is sometimes erroneously thought to be an “easy choice”. I sympathise with Daft’s claim (1983) that this kind of scientific investigation is more a craftsmanship than a routine. Accordingly, I support Miles’ (1979) assessment of the qualitative research process as being labour-intensive and stress-inducing for even the most experienced scholars. The most serious difficulty, according to the author, is the lack of well-formulated guidelines about the analysis process undertaken in qualitative investigations.

In the following sections, I will delineate the choices that guide this research project. Firstly, I will introduce the specificities of the investigated intercultural training field. Secondly, I will present the sources of data used in this investigation and describe ways in which sampling of the chosen target group was performed. Thirdly, I will explain the methodology of data collection, with the emphasis being on interviews and participant observations. Fourthly, I will describe the data analysis process, through which the tremendous amount of data gathered has been systematized and examined. Finally, I disclose my own involvement and the experiences gained throughout this research project.

2.2 The intercultural training field

This research is located within the intercultural training domain, which is situated within the larger field of intercultural relations and is characterized by an exceptionally broad interdisciplinary focus. Among the areas the domain draws upon are anthropology, linguistics, psychology, history, management, education and communication studies. Edward T. Hall is considered by many to be the father of intercultural communication and intercultural training fields. His work for the Foreign Service Institute resulted in the implementation of various intercultural communication training approaches which were successfully employed among the US diplomatic staff relocating internationally (Pusch, 2004). From here, the idea of providing cultural briefings to sojourning individuals spread to other areas, such as education and business.

This dissertation focuses on corporate intercultural training and presents the research theme in respect to an organizational context. Pusch (2004) reports that multinational corporations became interested in intercultural training due to the high turnover rates of international assignees. Accordingly, a majority of intercultural training focused on country orientation sessions and was offered only to expatriating individuals. While we do know that one of the first studies on reentry was published by Gullahorn and

Gullahorn in 1963, little is known of early corporate reentry training approaches. It can be hypothesized that just as the outbound intercultural briefings developed in response to the high frequency of failed international assignments, so, an interest in reentry training was evoked by substantially higher rates of post-reentry turnover and by the accounts of reentry distress reported by returning employees.

From the perspective of services offered, the corporate reentry training field is very fragmented. Next to a number of big intercultural training providers, such as Berlitz and Prudential Relocation, countless smaller providers and individual contractors operate. The concentration of the industry is in the United States of America, but an increasing number of trainers operate in Europe and Asia (many of them, *nota bene*, are US citizens, who relocated to other parts of the world).

2.3 Sources

Three sources of primary data have been used in this qualitative investigation: interviews, participant observations and training materials. These primary sources have been corroborated with an exhaustive review of secondary materials.

2.3.1 Interviews

Interviews with reentry trainers were the most important source of data about the design and implementation of reentry training. 31 semi-structured interviews were conducted. Maximum variation and theory-based sampling, within the framework of purposeful sampling described by Patton (1990), were initially employed. Internet training databases were the first sources of information about the reentry trainers and their activities. Further on, the information about the ongoing research was forwarded to mailing lists bringing together intercultural trainers (e.g. Delta Intercultural Academy and Intercultural Insights) as well as to the internal e-mailing lists of SIETAR (Society for Intercultural Education, Training and Research), the world's largest interdisciplinary network for professionals working in the field of intercultural communication. Through the above-mentioned sources the information about the research was disseminated further due to the occurrence of snowball sampling.

The interviewed trainers were based in the following countries: the United States of America (13), the Netherlands (8), the United Kingdom (2), Australia (1), Canada (1), Germany (1), France (1), Japan (1), and Taiwan (1). Several of the interviewees conduct training in more than one country. The sample group included reentry trainers working for the largest internationally operating intercultural training providers as well as

medium and small-sized training businesses. A number of non-profit trainers were also approached.

The final sample-related statistics are as follows: 62 intercultural training providers (individuals and companies) were directly approached. 7 of them responded that so far their company had not conducted any reentry training despite promoting this service within the company's portfolio. Out of the remaining 55 training providers, 25 agreed to participate in the research, giving a response rate of 40%. An additional 6 interviewed providers responded to open calls at the various internet sites and mailing lists. The moderate rate of non-response could be at least partially explained by the fact that, as mentioned above, several of the reentry training providers, despite promoting their reentry services, have never had any opportunity to deliver such relocation assistance.

The interview guide approach (Patton, 1987) has been used in this study. This method takes as a starting point a number of themes that are explored throughout the interview, but does not presuppose rigidity of the questions and their order. The themes enlisted in the interviews are summarized in Table 2.1. The interview agenda oscillated between content mapping and content mining questions, in order to assure the breadth and depth of collected data (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Each interview lasted on average 60-90 minutes. 27 interviews were carried out over the phone, while the remaining 4 were face-to-face interviews. A protocol introducing the interview themes, the practicalities of the meeting (or the telephone call), confidentiality issues, as well as the treatment and further application of the collected data was sent to each of the respondents prior to their interview. All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. In the final report, each of the interviews was assigned a random number in order to guarantee the anonymity of the respondents.

In all cross-cultural research, language and cultural factors constitute a major obstacle to adequate data collection and even more so to its interpretation. Language is a pre-condition for articulating our thoughts and impacts the way we perceive and make sense of reality. Since every language is historically shaped by and within the social group that uses it, the impact of cultural factors on linguistic resources is enormous (Burr, 1995). From the perspective of the social constructivist paradigm, we can observe that meaning-making is a collective effort, shaped by conventions of language and other social processes (Schwandt, 1994). Accordingly, language issues arising from the different countries of origin of the interviewer (myself) and the interviewees might be seen as an obstacle to effective research. While this is a valid constraint, what needs to be recognized is that in the majority of cases both the researcher and the interviewees

Interview guide themes

- 1) Work experience (as intercultural trainer)
 - 2) Current employment situation
 - 3) Experience with designing and running reentry training
 - 4) Experience with promoting reentry training
 - 5) The importance of reentry training
 - 6) Design of reentry training
 - Goals and objectives
 - Timing
 - Duration
 - Location
 - Participants
 - Family involvement
 - Agenda
 - Client's role
 - Methods
 - Related literature
 - Evaluation
 - Changes in design
 - 7) Repatriation vs. expatriation training
 - 8) Problems faced
-

Table 2.1: Interview guide themes

used English as their first language². Moreover, similar frames of reference and shared context-specific vocabulary had a moderating effect for common understanding between the researcher and people investigated.

In addition to the explicit research interviews with the trainers, a small number of informal conversational interviews with the repatriates took place. These interviews were carried out in the very initial stage of this research, in order to enrich the understanding of the reentry phenomenon and related to it challenges. During these informal encounters, the repatriates shared their experiences of the reentry process,

² The term 'first language' is used in this context in relation to its functional primacy, as the language used most by the speakers.

and described ways in which they dealt with readjusting to their home-country. No interview protocol was employed in this phase.

In a later stage of this research project, one focus group took place. The focus group approach was used in order to add to the researcher's understanding of the studied phenomenon (Morgan, 1996). This focus group was organized by a non-profit association supporting repatriating individuals in their transition. About 10 repatriates participated. The agenda of the meeting was centred on the challenges of repatriation and participants' strategies for a successful readjustment. Extensive field notation was employed throughout the session.

2.3.2 Participant observation

The second primary source of data were participant observations of what could be classified as various kinds of training for trainers sessions. These sessions were conducted by practising intercultural trainers, who shared their knowledge with other training providers and newcomers to the intercultural field. Except for the first session, where the aim was to explore preliminary ideas for this research project, all the remaining sessions were chosen on the basis of their relevance to the researched themes. I actively participated in these sessions, occasionally proactively searching for answers to my research questions. In view of this, these participant observation sessions at times assumed the character of a focus group approach (Morgan, 1996). An interaction of participating individuals, in response to my research concerns, led to participants' reflection on the issues in question and need to reconcile conflicting views emerging within the group. These highly interactive sessions broadened my understanding of the researched theme and allowed for critical assessment of emerging finding.

8 sessions took place between 2006 and 2007. The number of participants taking part in different sessions ranged from 7 to 80 individuals. In addition to the intercultural trainers, several academics also participated in a number of sessions. There were three types of scholars present: those, who were considering leaving the academic profession in order to pursue an intercultural training career; those, who were working on part-time training activities in addition to their scholarly occupation; and those, who were interested in the topic from an academic point of view. Two of the sessions were additionally attended by corporate employees such as HR managers and international relocation officers. Through participation in such training seminars, they were hoping to gain an understanding of the cultural aspects of international business and gain insight into the intercultural training industry in order to be able to provide better services to their employees. Parts of two sessions were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Observations of all 8 sessions were supplemented with extensive field notes. An intensive free form memoing of thoughts (Silverman, 1993) assured systematic recording of observational information throughout all events. Due to anonymity concerns, no names or other data allowing for the identification of the participating individuals or moderators will be revealed.

2.3.3 Training materials

Among the additional primary sources employed in this investigation were training materials provided by the interviewees and publicly available web announcements advertising trainers' services and introducing the 'product' to potential clients. First, training outlines and other materials, such as training agendas were thoroughly inspected. These data were cross-examined with accounts gathered during the in-depth interviews and were primarily used in the first part of this dissertation. Second, reentry training advertising materials taken from the websites provided information about the training-related image the reentry trainers want to project to potential clients.

2.3.4 Secondary data

An extensive literature review of international HRM research devoted to the reentry process in general and reentry training in particular was conducted. A number of computerized databases were examined, including: JSTOR, ProQuest and ISI, with Google Scholar³ being the primary web search engine. Next to scholarly writings, this review also included articles addressed to a practice-oriented audience. This investigation resulted in the identification of a number of articles written by the trainers themselves and published across various managerial periodicals and on different internet platforms.

To sum up, a variety of resources have been used in order to achieve a thorough understanding of the research object. This variety is a response to the call for triangulation of data sources strongly advocated by Patton (1990).

2.4 Data analysis

In order to systemically approach the analysis of the collected qualitative data, the Nvivo7 program was used. Nvivo is a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis

³ Recent research shows that Google Scholar is a very valuable internet-based search engine (Kousha & Thelwall, 2007).

software allowing the researcher to manage the voluminous amount of data within rich qualitative research projects (Bazeley & Richards, 2000). The application of data analysis software was intended to increase thoroughness in the analysis process (Ozkan, 2004).

2.4.1 Data Analysis – Part 1

Two kinds of coding have been applied in the initial treatment of raw data. The first step involved theory driven coding, using sensitizing concepts (Charmaz, 2000)⁴. In the second step, selective coding was performed, where the initially introduced codes were redefined and systematized (Lofland & Lofland, 1995)⁵. This approach prepared the ground for the content analysis of interview data reported in Part 1. Relevant themes were defined and systematically grouped according to the predefined, literature-based categories. Throughout the analytical process, the following steps advocated by Miles and Huberman (1994) were taken. The analysis started with noting patterns and themes. The similarities and differences between different predefined categories were systematically noted and clustered. Within these clusters a number of quantifying operations have been performed in order to provide a clear picture of tendencies within the collected data set. Finally, in the last analytical step of Part 1, the categorized primary data was corroborated with secondary sources and the results of these analytical steps are presented in Chapter 4.

2.4.2 Data Analysis – Part 2

Since the initial content analysis of the data brought much more complexity and apparent contradictions than anticipated, additional in-depth, reflexive analysis followed the initial data examination. The reflexive approach towards interviews makes it possible to capture the variety of individual experiences - embedded in their context and interdependent with the phenomenon under investigation (Alvesson, 2003). It acknowledges the ambiguity of the investigated objects, encourages alternatives to the dominant lines of data interpretation, and stimulates the employment of a variety of departure points.

Alvesson (2003) provides eight metaphors, which guide a more reflexive interview analysis. These metaphors provide clues to implicit elements of the collected material and can serve as complementary to the traditional, main stream, theory-driven departure points. Among these, the issues of power, interests and politics; the challenges related to adopting by the interviewees a contextually appropriate self-

⁴ This approach has its roots in *Grounded Theory* (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

⁵ Appendix 3 provides a list of codes developed throughout the research.

position; the problem of interviewees' hidden agendas; and the self-impression management work performed during the interviews were the most informative and valuable for the understanding of the collected data. Such an approach forces the researcher to look at the data from different angles, without privileging one set of assumptions or one predominant line of reasoning (Alvesson, 2003). Applying a reflexive type of analysis enhances the traditional line of inquiry and produces a richer understanding of the world. Consequently, the researcher might arrive at more appealing interpretations which will result in more than one "type of result" (Alvesson, 2003: 25). Taking the above into consideration, Part 2 of this dissertation provides a considerably different data analysis process and results in a radically different description of the object of study. Law and Urry (2004) claim that academics are aware that different methods applied and different analytical strategies used, will produce inconsistent results. Yet, the methodological choices made are often narrow and one-dimensional. This research project takes a different course. Consequently, the reader can observe an evolution of the analytical view and transformation of the object of study from content-oriented (Part 1 of this dissertation) to process-oriented (Part 2 of this dissertation).

As in Part 1 of this research project, noting patterns and themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994) is the first analytical step taken in Part 2. While in the first part of this dissertation, the noting process focuses on content-related aspects of the investigated object; in the second part, the processual elements come under close scrutiny. The recorded observations are organized into functional clusters. While, in the first part of this dissertation, little between-cluster analysis and links exploration is performed, in Part 2 this association-building process is actively executed. The metaphors employed within Actor-Network Theory are a source of inspiration for making sense of the data and its consequent reporting. Accordingly, from a methodological and analytical point of view, the application of Actor-Network Theory is central to understanding the author's aspirations in shaping the design of the second part of this dissertation. With its focus on the process (the creation of reentry training), rather than on the end-product (the reentry training itself), Part 2 of this research project looks at the associations between the actors, analyzes the links connecting them and follows the transformations occurring throughout the process (Latour, 1991). Chapter 5 of this dissertation introduces the specificity of the ANT (Actor-Network Theory) method.

2.5 The research journey

Before proceeding with introducing the theoretical underpinnings of this dissertation and present the data analysis, there is one more step I needed. Following Lofland and Lofland (1995), I will recount for the reader how the project was conceived, how my

attitudes towards the subject of the study changed, as well as how the project's focus was modified over the course of my PhD. I will also try to outline the transformation of the ethnographic self (Coffey, 1999). Acknowledging and describing the co-evolution of the project and that of the researcher will help the reader to make sense of the presented data and the interpretation of the reported findings.

To start with, I need to state that this is a report of a truly inductive adventure, where the collected data guided the direction of the research. Since an explorative qualitative study is open to emerging issues, problems and challenges, rather than imprisoned in a dominant, predefined scheme and main-stream discourses, this project has undergone numerous transformations.

In my initial research proposal, submitted at the end of the 1st year of my PhD, I wrote the following:

"This research aims at assessing the impact cross-cultural reentry training has on readjustment of repatriates to their home-country environment. Through qualitative analysis of individual and group sessions designed and conducted for repatriates coming back from international assignments, I will investigate the impact those reentry interventions have on repatriates' effective or unsuccessful re-adaptation."

(Szkudlarek, 2005: 4)

Undertaking this particular research project was related to two factors. First of all, it came as a result of my passion for intercultural training and experience in this field after having been an intercultural trainer, in the non-profit sector, for more than 5 years. Secondly, having had a chance to observe a good friend of mine trying to put her life together after returning to Poland from a short-term international project in the USA, I got a sense of what reentry stress could be about. Moreover, as the initial literature review revealed, while reentry challenges are relatively well-documented, there are no systematic accounts (not to even mention evaluations) on reentry training. (Un)fortunately, the initial idea to conduct a qualitative evaluation of the reentry training of a large multinational corporation failed, when the company contacted withdrew its initial consent. This was the decisive point when the focus of this research shifted from big multinationals and within-company training, to individual trainers contracting sessions with a variety of clients. The initial aim of conducting a small number of interviews with those training providers was to assess current developments within the field and gain access to the trainees. However, the conflicting accounts, collected as early as in the first couple of interviews, raised a number of unexpected issues. The trainers were contradicting their own arguments, within as little as a few minutes. Depending on the questions' contextual framing, the trainers would claim one

thing about their design choices and then contradict or cast doubt on it a couple of minutes later. When these inconsistencies were pointed out to them, several interviewees would attempt to resolve this cognitive dissonance by trying to create plausible explanations. Many, however, would openly admit little logical support for their actions. I followed Alvesson (2003), who encourages the researcher to challenge their initial interpretations and premature hunches about the state of the reality. This led to two important developments. On a personal level, from being an uncritical enthusiast of intercultural interventions, I became a cynical malcontent of the services provided by the trainers. On a theoretical level, I realized that the reentry literature I based my framework on was insufficient for making sense of what I encountered. This is when the writings of Michel Callon and the "Sociology of Translation" proposed by him afforded me a perfect framework for making sense of my research findings, and helped to understand the complex processes witnessed.

But these were not to be the last transformations the researcher and her research underwent. Despite the drastic change of attitude towards the research object I remained responsive to the issues emerging. Consequently, as the research progressed and more data came in, my cynicism was supplanted by careful, open-minded observations and receptivity to new developments and interpretations. Empathic neutrality⁶ was what I was striving for (Patton, 1990). On the theoretical level, Callon's framework was undergoing transformations. The data started re-shaping the model; the model was not constrained anymore and naturally adapted to evolving events.

The interviews with the reentry trainers were initially conducted in order to get an understanding of current reentry training practices and forthcoming trends. While some of the interviewees seemed to stay at the level of 'promotional' language, many others opened up about their practices and described in detail the ups and downs of their daily work. These rich accounts slowly moved the research project in a new direction. I realized that in order to understand the design of the training, I had to take a closer look at the process of setting up of these interventions; a process full of contradictory statements and conflicting interests, which led to the emergence of a new research angle: a processual, reflexive account of the reentry training industry.

Together with the project's evolution a new issue arose. I was challenged with a crucial question faced by many qualitative investigators: an evolving relationship between the researcher and her informants. The collected interview accounts were rich and heterogeneous. Consequently, I became aware that within the present analysis some of the interviewees are going to recognize their reentry training worlds better than others.

⁶ Patton (1990) defines empathic neutrality as the passion of the researcher, who brings in empathic insights and genuineness in producing research accounts.

Yet, as a researcher I had to deal with this complexity and find my way of making sense of these multiple occurrences. I struggled with what Hoskins and Stoltz describe as:

"[T]he discomfort that arises when moving beyond the meaning participants make of their own experiences to the meanings generated through constructivist analysis."

(Hoskins & Stoltz, 2005: 97)

Hoskins and Stoltz (2005) write about the challenges related to finding a balance between the voices of the interviewees and that of the researcher. How does one deal with the eventual conflict between a responsibility towards the participants and the responsibility to provide a meaningful account to the broader community?

I was trying to stay open to the emerging patterns and confront my initial hunches with the interviewees. Consequently the interview scheme was evolving. While the main research themes remained the same, the framing of the questions underwent transformation. These transformations aimed at direct examination of a framework emerging within the research process. A framework, which came as an answer to my efforts to make sense of complex and often contradicting accounts collected throughout the research process. My initial hunches were surprisingly well corroborated with the participant observations during training for trainers events. The framework gained coherency and became more robust. Yet, now that the project is over, I still struggle with a feeling of uneasiness. In attempting to remain faithful to the participants' accounts, how can I put forward an analysis that might be perceived by the interviewees as much more critical than that which they may have been expecting? Interviewees, with whom in some cases, the bond became stronger than just one interview encounter. Interviewees, who were extremely willing to share their materials and reflections on reentry training. These are the people who made this project possible in the first place. I find myself facing an onerous task therefore...

It is my intention that this research will open a discussion about organizational practices such as intercultural training and help to improve the often questionable systems functioning in our societies. This is because, while this dissertation happens to be a research project devoted to reentry training practices, I believe that the processes described in the following pages are symptomatic of many other organizational realities.

Almost two decades after Callon's (1986a) publication and the principle of agnosticism, Thompson (2002) openly admits that to be truthful to the account of the events, he needs to acknowledge his own involvement and partiality in both the occurring events, as well as in produced account. Five years later, Law (2007) adds this partiality (resulting from the moral obligations of a researcher) to the spectrum of ANT methods. Another translation has taken place. And also I sympathise with this notion and openly confess

my immersion in this PhD project. Consequently, the final report produced is definitely marked by with my experiences over the course of this research⁷. The results of this immersion and the constant transformations that occurred may be seen in the following pages.

⁷ I want to acknowledge that a use of passive voice and 3rd person singular form in reporting research results is done because of convenience and not due to absolute truth claims of mine.

Part 1

3. Cross-cultural reentry – an overview

3.1 Introduction

Despite numerous publications on expatriation, cross-cultural reentry (its course, impact and features) still remain largely neglected and underestimated in the sojourner's transition trajectory. At the same time, available empirical investigations point to a number of substantial concerns, which affect the psychological wellbeing, social readjustment and cultural identity of returning individuals.

The significance of these concerns strongly suggests that reentry should become an issue of highest priority to both sojourning individuals as well as people managing the reentry trajectories of travellers. Regardless of a growing number of articles and books reporting on reentry difficulties, the understanding of the phenomenon has not changed much since 1984, when Judith Martin in her account of reentry research and practice stated that challenges, which arise upon returning home are largely unexpected. At the same time, the intercultural field has not contributed much to the work of drawing together the available research on repatriation.

The following literature review attempts to systematize existing knowledge on cross-cultural reentry and provides a comprehensive framework for conceptualization of the repatriation phenomenon. More than 100 articles, book chapters, conference papers and other publications have been reviewed. This chapter attempts to systematize the available reentry literature and provide theoretical scaffolding for the analysis of empirical data collected in the course of this research.

In order to systematize the existing body of scholarship, the following review has been divided into 3 functional parts, according to the three main reoccurring themes within reentry research. Accordingly, the consecutive sections deal with the *process*, *people* and *practices* of reentry, and comprise a full picture of up-to-date reentry research (Figure 3.1).

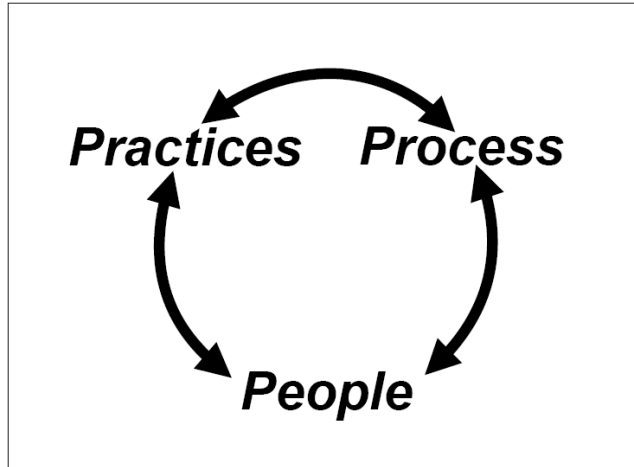


Figure 3.1: Process, People, Practices – a comprehensive view on reentry

The first issue discussed in this review is the process of repatriation. Three views on the reentry process will be presented focusing on the comprehension and structuring of the reentry phenomena from the perspective of transformations undergone by individuals during their international sojourns.

Secondly, this review presents an overview of available writings devoted to returning corporate employees, their problems and reentry challenges.

The third part of this chapter looks at the reentry support practices applied in managing the repatriation transition. Special attention will be given to literature related to reentry training.

3.2 Reentry: process

This section presents a number of reentry theories and models developed for a better understanding of the complexity of transition. The amount of literature devoted to different streams varies considerably, since different issues have received disproportionate attention from reentry researchers. This difference of attention is closely related to two trends. First of all, the expatriation issue remains unchangeably the core focus in international business. Multinationals struggling with premature returns and ineffective performance of their assignees, urge the academic world for publications on effective ways of expatriating people internationally. Consequently, limited empirical investigation is currently directed at exploring the multifaceted process of reentry, leading to fragmentation of the field. In this chapter, a broad spectrum of issues will be discussed in order to sketch a full picture of the repatriation issue and identify areas requiring further investigation. Such a thorough overview of

reentry literature will make it possible to better understand the dynamics of the reentry training.

3.2.1 Reentry process: theoretical frameworks

Presenting an up-to-date review of reentry theories, I will closely follow the framework proposed by Martin and Harrell (2004) by grouping the theoretical streams into three functional categories: *affective*, *behavioural* and *cognitive*. Such a grouping is consistent with the acculturation (ABC) model introduced by Ward et al. (2001), who argue that cultural transition is a multifaceted phenomenon encompassing different aspects of Affection, Behaviour and Cognition.

3.2.1.1 Reentry theories – affective aspects

The first category of concerns is the psychological wellbeing of returning individuals. Reentry transition is conceptualized in terms of feelings, emotional reactions and mental responses of the repatriate. The most influential writing within this theoretical stream is the work of Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) and their *reverse culture shock* model (called also the *W-curve* theory). This model is a theoretical extension of the U-curve hypothesis, whose authorship is attributed to Lysgaard (1955). Oberg's work (1960) supports the U-curve theory of intercultural adjustment. Moreover, the author introduces the term "culture shock" in order to describe experiences related to living in an environment which differs culturally from the settings one grew up in. The U-curve model describes four distinctive phases of an intercultural sojourn: (1) *euphoria*, positive excitement about a new environment, (2) *culture shock* caused by surprising, mostly negative, experiences in a new environment, (3) *acculturation*, the learning process of adaptation to a new environment, and finally, (4) *a stable state*, achieved if the acculturation process is accomplished successfully.

The W-curve (Figure 3.2) is an extension of the abovementioned model and describes the four previously mentioned elements: euphoria, culture shock, acculturation and the stable state, experienced by a repatriate after his/her return to a home-country. These four stages are accompanied by strong affective responses, which in turn influence repatriates' readjustment to their home-country environment and their performance in the workplace.

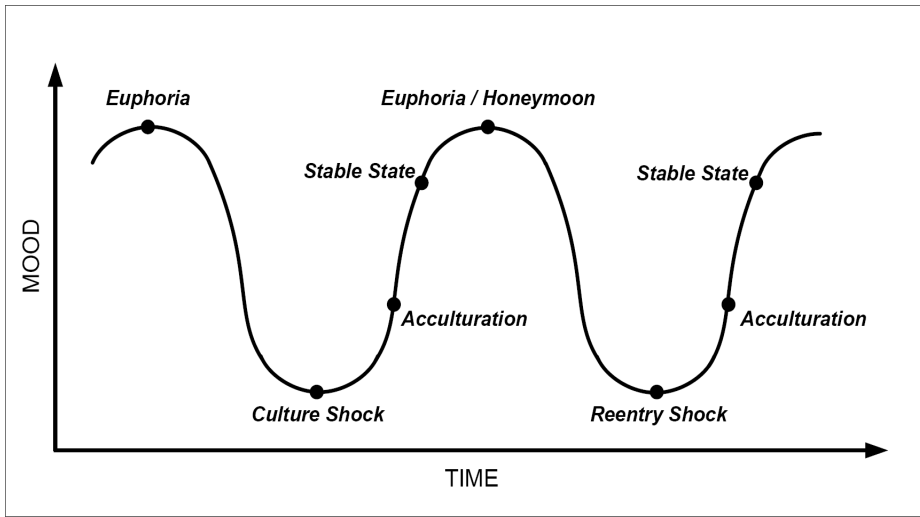


Figure 3.2: W-curve of international transition (adapted from Gullahorn and Gullahorn, 1963)

The psychological consequences of reentry have been thoroughly documented in the literature. Black et al. (1992a) report that as many as 70% of returning individuals experience significant discomforts related to repatriation. It is even argued that the difficulties experienced upon return can be more psychologically challenging than those of the expatriation phase (Adler, 1991; Baughn, 1995; Chamove & Soeterik, 2006; Linehan & Scullion, 2002; Martin, 1984). The challenge of returning home is related to issues such as the unexpectedness of the difficulties encountered, a lack of preparation for reentry, or grief for the lost expat life. Individuals can display considerable emotional distress even six months after their reentry (Furukawa, 1997). Research shows that the magnitude of this distress can reach clinical levels (Sahin, 1990). Chamove and Soeterik (2006) show that the intensity of grief experienced by returnees can even be comparable to that experienced by bereaved individuals. Issues of psychological distress have been widely documented among different returnee groups, e.g. students (Cox, 2006; Gaw, 2000; Kauffman et al., 1992; Sahin, 1990; Sorimachi, 1994; Thompson & Christofi, 2006; Uehara, 1986) international assignees (Black et al., 1992a; Forster, 1994; Stevens et al., 2006) and refugees (Harrell-Bond, 1989; Sundquist & Johansson, 1996).

3.2.1.2 Reentry theories – cognitive aspects

The second stream of reentry theory focuses on the cognitive aspects of repatriation. Within this stream, I will discuss two sub-streams, which are relevant to the

understanding of reentry, namely the expectations model and the cultural identity model.

Expectations model

The Expectations Model provides a detailed explanation of the confrontation between expectations and reality. This well documented stream describes the way in which pre-reentry expectations influence the process of readaptation to the home-country environment. As with the reverse culture shock model, this theory was initially developed to address the expatriation/outbound experiences familiar to the cross-cultural field (e.g. Black & Gregersen, 1990; Caligiuri et al., 2001; Kealey, 1989). However, while the outbound difficulties and the need for preparation prior to expatriation were acknowledged relatively quickly and accepted by travelling sojourners, the discomforts associated with reentry still remain largely unexamined and unexpected (Black et al., 1992a). This is a consequence of the apparently commonsensical assumption that home-country and home-organization are well known entities and do not need further 'explanation'. A 'reality check', however, often reveals that both the home environment and the returning individual have changed substantially during the period of intercultural sojourn.

Several empirical investigations on the influence of expectations on the repatriation process have been conducted, but without any consensus in their conclusions (Forster, 1994; Hammer et al., 1998; Martin et al., 1995; Stroh et al., 2000; Sussman, 2002). While Rogers and Ward (1993) do not observe a direct relationship between realistic expectations and psychological adjustment, MacDonald and Arthur (2003) claim that expectations, which are met or exceeded, lead to a smooth readjustment. Meanwhile, Stroh et al. (1998) suggest similar patterns in a job-related context and claim that while met expectations support repatriates' commitment to and intention to stay in their home-country organization, exceeded expectations might lead to an even higher dedication to the workplace. Black's (1992) research does not confirm these findings and concludes that accurate expectations result in the highest level of readjustment and job performance. Consequently, Black et al. (1992b) argue that while taking the importance of accurate expectations into consideration, the adjustment process should be made not only after reentry, but most importantly it should include cognitive anticipatory adjustment prior to return, in order to build up a realistic level of expectation. This has been confirmed by later research, which shows that if there is less preparation and understanding of the reentry process, distress upon return grows proportionally (Chamove & Soeterik, 2006). As reported in an analysis of the managerial repatriation process:

"[T]hose sojourners who had the least preparation for repatriation and therefore presumably the least understanding of what was about to transpire when they returned home, experienced repatriation more distressfully than for those who had a better understanding of the repatriation process."

(Sussman, 2001: 119)

Cultural Identity Model

The Cultural Identity Model is a second sub-stream within this cognitively oriented stream of research. Representatives of this course of inquiry look at the identity changes during an international sojourn and after the return. In line with this theoretical notion, one assumes that returning individuals have undergone a profound personal transformation, influencing their cultural identity and sense of belonging.

Sussman (2000) proposes a theoretical model with four types of identity alteration: subtractive, additive, affirmative and intercultural. These identity shifts come as a consequence of behavioural and social adaptations made in the host-country environment, which become salient upon return to the home-country. Therefore, the reentry process and, related to it, an increasing awareness of one's own cultural identity alteration may be a source of distress for those individuals who undergo subtractive (reporting weakened links with the home-country culture during the sojourn) or additive (reporting strengthened links with the host-country) identity shifts. At the same time, individuals, who experience affirmative (reporting strengthened links with the home-country culture during the sojourn) or intercultural/global (reporting a strengthened intercultural worldview during the sojourn) identity shifts, will experience less reentry distress and will have fewer difficulties readjusting. Sussman's (2001) empirical research indicates support for these theoretical assumptions (out of 11 individuals studied during repatriation, 8 reported unchanged or more difficult readjustments in their consecutive re-entries). A consequent investigation of the cultural identity model confirms the influence of identity shifts on readjustment processes (Sussman, 2002).

An alternative cultural identity model has been proposed by Cox (2004). The author presents four patterns of intercultural identity formation (home favoured, host favoured, integrated, and disintegrated), empirically derived from a study analysing US American repatriates returning from international assignments in 44 different countries. In this model, reentry processes categorized as integrated and home-favoured were related to easier readaptation trajectories than those categorized as disintegrated and host-favoured. These findings differ from Sussman's model and indicate an adaptation pattern similar to the one proposed by the culture-learning theory, where a successful host-country adaptation will be related to a successful readaptation upon reentry. They

also indicate the importance of both sustaining bonds with the home-culture and building new cognitive structures within the host environment and could be related to Bennett's research on developing intercultural sensitivity (Bennett, 1986, 1993). In his six-stage Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) Bennett elaborates on an individual's ability to experience cultural differences. In a move from ethnocentric to ethnorealtive stages, the model illustrates the importance of expanding one's worldview to include relevant constructs from different cultural points of reference. Consequently, one could hypothesize that adaptation to cultural differences (phase 5 of the DMIS) and a constructive form of integration of cultural differences (phase 6 of the DMIS) would be related to a successful readaptation on reentry.

3.2.1.3 Reentry theories – behavioural aspects

The third stream within reentry research describes the behavioural aspects of repatriation and is derived from the culture learning theory (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). This stream was initially labelled: social skills model (Argyle, 1980). While during the intercultural transition sojourners undergo profound personal transformations, they also learn and internalize a new spectrum of behavioural responses, which are expected from them in the host environment. Subsequently, some of the home-country learned behaviours are forgotten and replaced by the host-country equivalents. As a result, the returning individuals have to relearn social skills often disregarded during their time abroad and regain familiarity with a set of home-country norms and behaviours (Smith, 1998). Black et al. (1992b) claim that one of the most important aspects of post-return adjustment is behavioural control. This behavioural adjustment, according to the authors, can be facilitated by previous anticipatory cognitive adjustment. Within this stream, it is theorized that successful adaptation upon expatriation will be related to successful re-adaptation on reentry (Brabant et al., 1990; Ward et al., 2000). This will occur because the returning individuals, who adapted well during expatriation, will be able to re-use these adaptative skills in the reentry process. At the same time, an unanswered question in the reentry literature remains: should the skills acquired abroad be discarded upon repatriation (Selmer et al., 2000) or should truly bi/multicultural integration of the behavioural code take place upon reentry, so that the newly learned behavioural system could be reactivated when needed? Among the critiques of the theory, Sussman's (2002) empirical research suggests that adaptation on expatriation is unrelated to the reentry processes, consequently questioning the validity of the cultural learning theory.

The three above-mentioned streams cover the most significant areas of research focus and provide a framework for conceptualization of the cross-cultural reentry process.

3.2.2 Reentry process: modes of reentry

While Sussman (2002) and Cox (2004) attempt to categorize individuals' cultural identity responses to reentry, Adler (1981) and Pusch (1998) strive to create more comprehensive models for classifying the possible repatriation modes.

Adler (1981) proposes a four element matrix distributed over two dimensions: overall attitude and specific attitude. The overall attitude dimension comprises optimism and pessimism, while the specific attitude includes a passive and active dimension. This coping-mode diagram, then, describes four attitudinal responses, which may be experienced by individuals on their reentry: resocialized (optimistic and passive), proactive (optimistic and active), alienated (pessimistic and passive) and rebellious (pessimistic and active). According to this model, active repatriates aim at changing themselves and the environment in order to fit best within the home-country organization. This is not observed amongst passive returnees, who do not undertake anticipatory actions in order to co-facilitate the reentry transition. On the other continuum, optimistically oriented repatriates evaluated their reentry positively, while their pessimistic colleagues had a negative opinion about the process. Even though this model has been created in order to describe the reentry experience within a corporate context, an empirical application of the framework to a student sample has also been undertaken, which illustrates the applicability of the model to different repatriating groups (Behrens & Bennett, 1986; Thompson & Christofi, 2006).

Pusch (1998) proposes a classification of the reentry styles with four categories: free spirit, detached, reassimilator and integrator. Those four styles have been pictured across three dimensions, which have been defined by Pusch as crucial to the reentry process. The three dimensions cover: (1) the main concern individuals might have about their repatriation, (2) the fundamental internal commitment of repatriates towards their home-country readjustment and (3) the role they might desire to play or might be inherently playing upon reentry. As claimed by the author, such conceptualization of repatriation might be helpful for rethinking the going-home process, both in the anticipatory and retrospective stages of reentry. Even though this model has not been adopted by the reentry scholars, it seems to be gaining popularity among reentry practitioners (La Brack, 2007).

3.2.3 Reentry process: the individual perspective

A substantial number of studies related to the reentry phenomenon focuses on sojourners characteristics and situational/ individual factors. Research shows that a number of factors can influence the distress experienced upon return, as well as the

psychological readjustment and the overall satisfaction with repatriation. The following sections examine these differences.

3.2.3.1 Sojourners characteristics

Gender

A significant number of empirical investigations suggest that men and women tend to experience reentry differently (Rohrlich & Martin, 1991). Brabant et al. (1990) show that women more often reported problems with family and daily life and were more inclined to notice changes within their friends group than men. According to the authors, gender was the most important variable for predicting the reentry problems. Similar results have been reported by other researchers. (Wang, 1997). Gama and Pedersen (1977) describe family challenges experienced by returning women and their struggle to fulfil their relatives' expectations of their roles upon return. Suda (1999), on the other hand, portrays the difficulties experienced by female returnees in adjusting to their home society. In the work context, Linehan and Scullion (2002) stress the importance of the pioneering role (and consequent difficulties) of female expatriates, while Cox (2004) emphasizes the assumed responsibilities of household maintenance and family life management of female respondents (regardless of their regular working hours). Contrary to the above-mentioned research Sorimachi (1994) and Sussman (2001) report no significant relationship between gender and reentry difficulties, indicating a need for further investigation of gender related reentry concerns. As pointed out by Martin and Harrell (2004) more studies should be devoted to the relationship between gender and the character of the sojourn, and their influence on the readjustment. For example, the experiences of dependent trailing female-spouses are expected to be considerably different from those of female-expatriate-managers.

Age

Age is the second most frequently researched reentry variable. Research indicates a positive correlation between age and reentry adjustment: the older the repatriates, the less the reentry distress (Black & Gregersen, 1991; Cox, 2004; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Hyder & Lovblad, 2007; Moore et al., 1987; Rohrlich & Martin, 1991). Cox (2004) shows that age relates not only to psychological distress, but also to social difficulties upon reentry. The author claims that this could be related to the higher culture learning abilities and adjustment skills of younger individuals, resulting in more profound identity changes during the international sojourn and increased reentry distress upon return.

Some researchers question any relationship between age and reentry satisfaction or the level of experienced reentry difficulties (Hammer et al., 1998; Sorimachi, 1994; Uehara, 1986). Only one empirical investigation gives an account of an opposite trend. Suutari and Valimaa (2002) state that among Finish repatriates older people reported more difficulties with readjustment than did young repatriates. The authors hypothesize that such results could be a consequence of relatively strong ageism within Finish corporations.

An additional, important factor related to age and reentry readjustment is the type of reentry concerns expressed (Martin, 1986). While young individuals are more concerned about rebuilding personal relationships, older repatriates emphasize work- and career-related anxieties.

Personality

Several empirical attempts have been made to explore personality traits' influence on different aspects of reentry trajectory. Martin and Harrell (2004) describe three attributes (openness, personality strength and positivity) relevant in reentry adjustment. Black et al. (1992a) claim that strong self-image has a substantial role in readjustment. Similar conclusions have been reached by Feldman (1991), who theorizes that hardiness and self-efficacy will have a positive influence on successful reentry transition. Furukawa (1997) investigates the reaccluturation process of Japanese students coming back from international exchange programs and concludes that neuroticism has an influence on mental health of returning individuals. In the work context, O'Sullivan (2002) investigates the influence of personality traits on proactive repatriation behaviours. The author theorizes that those repatriates, who score highly on the Big Five characteristics of emotional stability⁸ will exhibit more positive and proactive work behaviours.

Religion

Religion can play an important role in the process of dealing with the emotional and psychological aspects of repatriation. Brabant et al. (1990), on the example of students from the Near East and other Islamic countries, show that religion is a significant variable related to problems upon return. Those problems have been reported predominantly in relation to family interactions and the readjustment to daily life. Martin and Harrell (2004) speculate that such relationship difficulties might be a result

⁸ The five characteristics are Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism.

of newly acquired liberal behaviours and values, which conflict with those of the family members back in the home-country.

Marital status

Also, the marital status of the returnees seems to correlate with the readjustment difficulties experienced upon return. Cox (2004) shows that single sojourners were more likely to experience depression than their married colleagues. His research also indicates that single repatriates have greater social difficulties upon return and that they tend to identify more strongly with the host culture than do married sojourners. Cox explains that such outcomes could be related to the supportive role the spouse plays in the reentry process. Hyder and Lovblad (2007) support such a line of reasoning and present a model in which single marital status would negatively impact the reentry experiences.

Socioeconomic status

Despite the fact that a number of researchers looked at the effect of a loss of social status and a decrease in financial resources associated with returning corporate employees and how these processes influence repatriation (Black & Gregersen, 1991; Gregersen & Stroh, 1997; MacDonald & Arthur, 2005), there is surprisingly little research about the ways in which the broadly understood socioeconomic status of sojourners influences their readjustment. The limited empirical research does not indicate a relationship between socioeconomic status and the problems associated with reentry (Brabant et al., 1990; Gregersen & Stroh, 1997; Suutari & Valimaa, 2002). As indicated by Martin and Harrell (2004) and Szkudlarek and Magala (2008), this limited interest in socioeconomic factors is symptomatic of a broader problem within intercultural research, where empirical explorations are limited to white, middle-class North American or Western European individuals.

Prior intercultural experience and reentry

Martin and Harrell (2004) hypothesize that previous cross-cultural experiences should have a positive influence on consecutive cultural transitions. Yet, empirical examinations by Hammer et al. (1998) and Cox (2004) find no relationship between prior intercultural experience and reentry satisfaction or the level of experienced reentry difficulties. These findings question the relevance of the culture learning theory.

3.2.3.2 Situational variables

Length of intercultural sojourn

The results of the research related to the influence of the length of an international sojourn on reentry readjustment are inconsistent. As indicated by Black et al. (1992a) repatriates, who spent a substantial number of years abroad, have a much more difficult time readjusting than those, who were on short-term assignments. This has been confirmed by other researchers (Forster, 1994; Sahin, 1990).

Black and Gregersen (1991) show that the length of the period spent abroad is indeed associated with reentry readjustment, but only within the work context. The opposite conclusion has been reached by Suutari and Valimaa (2002), who claim that time abroad can be a predictor only with regard to general adjustment, and is irrelevant for forecasting job and organizational outcomes. Gregersen and Stroh (1997) show, that while Finnish repatriates and spouses faced some of the greatest adjustment difficulties at work and at home, their total years overseas was not a significant predictor of general readjustment. Finally, a number of researchers show no relationship between the length of an international sojourn, reentry distress and home-country adjustment challenges (Hammer et al., 1998; Sorimachi, 1994; Uehara, 1986).

Cultural distance

As argued in the literature (Black et al., 1992a; Kiddler, 1992; Triandis, 1989), cultural differences between the home and host-country environments have a substantial influence on the course of repatriation. Cultural distance, defined as differences in norms between two environments (Kogut & Singh, 1988), can have a huge impact on readjustment processes. For example, Black et al. (1992a) describe the differences experienced by Japanese returnees, in comparison to their North American or Western European colleagues. In this research, the accompanying Asian spouses experienced the limited social interactions within Japanese society as very difficult. This could be related to what Triandis (1989) describes as the difficulty of transition from loose societies, with few restraining norms and rules, to tight societies, where a behavioural code of conduct is strictly defined. Such a line of reasoning is supported by Kiddler (1992), who describes the challenges of reentry experienced by Japanese students. Similar results have been reached in the Finnish context, where cultural novelty was a substantial factor in reentry readjustment (Gregersen & Stroh, 1997).

It is important to acknowledge that in the US American context, research does not support the hypothesis of cultural distance and its impact on reentry (Black & Gregersen, 1991). It is hypothesized that in-country heterogeneity might contribute to the relatively lower importance of cultural distance here (Gregersen & Stroh, 1997). Consequently, Rohlich and Martin (1991) suggest that not cultural distance but the particular attributes of the home and host environments (e.g. food, climate) may have a higher impact on cross-boarder readjustments.

Time since return

Similar to the length of stay abroad, the time elapsed since return has also been used as a predictor of reentry readjustment. Gregersen and Stroh (1997) show that time elapsed since return related significantly both to work and general adjustment for repatriates and their spouses. On the other hand, Cox (2004) maintains that there is no relationship between the time since return and the process of readjustment. Such conflicting results put in question the validity of the W-curve model of reentry readjustment and its explanatory power for explaining cross-cultural transitions.

Contact with home-country individuals

The amount of contact with home-country individuals during expatriation has been reported as significantly related to home-country readjustment. Research shows that maintaining personal relationships with home-country individuals during foreign sojourns can have substantial influence on reducing the distress of reentry. Brabant et al. (1990) show that frequency of visits home is also positively associated with repatriation. However, more recent research indicates that the quality of those encounters might be more important than their quantity; quality being defined as a personally satisfying and/or informative communication process (Cox, 2004: 208). Moreover, e-mail and other methods of internet communication are being reported as very satisfying for maintaining relationships with home-country nationals and are rated by individuals as equally or even more satisfying than several face-to-face communication modes (Cox, 2004).

Contact with host-country individuals

Researchers argue that the frequency and quality of interactions with host-country nationals is directly related to expatriation adjustment (Kim, 2001). Consequently, Rohlich and Martin (1991) hypothesize that both the kind and the frequency of

communication encounters with host-country nationals have an impact on reentry readaptation. Existing empirical scrutiny (Hammer et al., 1998) does not find any relationship between those variables, however, suggesting a need for further investigation of the influence of contact with host-country individuals on sojourners' readjustment.

Housing conditions

Post reentry housing conditions seem to be a factor relatively often accounted for in reentry transition (Napier & Peterson, 1991). This is closely related to the fact that expatriating individuals often gain a number of financial benefits related to their relocation abroad, including preferential, high-comfort housing. At the same time, upon return, repatriates usually need to adjust back to a much more modest life-style. As indicated by the researchers, housing conditions are significantly related to the general readjustment of Finnish repatriates (Gregersen & Stroh, 1997) and to spouse and repatriate readjustment of the US returnees (Black & Gregersen, 1991). Therefore, it is recommended that organizations dealing with reentry transitions facilitate adequate housing arrangements for returning individuals (Black et al., 1992a).

3.3 Reentry: people - corporate repatriates

Corporate repatriates are the most thoroughly researched group within the reentry field, due to the fact that work-related difficulties are among the most often reported concerns upon return (Adler & Bartholomew, 1992; Baruch et al., 2002; Black et al., 1992a; Furuya et al., 2007; Harvey, 1982; Kraimer & Shaffer, 2004; Linehan & Scullion, 2002; Paik et al., 2002; Peltonen, 1997; Stevens et al., 2006; Stroh et al., 2000; Ward et al., 2001). Issues related to workplace readjustment, commitment, transfer of knowledge, productivity and post-reentry turnover rates among returning individuals have been widely discussed in international management literature. Even though Lazarova and Caligiuri (2004) argue for individual treatment of different corporate assignee groups (technical, developmental/high potential, strategic/executive, functional/tactical), the majority of reentry literature approaches the corporate reentry in a uniform manner. Consequently, this review will not differentiate among different types of corporate returnees.

Research shows that while the majority of repatriates are satisfied with the career related outcomes of their expatriate experience, many report a number of work-related challenges upon repatriation (Gomez-Meija & Balkin, 1987; Suutari & Brewster, 2003; Westwood & Leung, 1994). Among other issues, repatriates report a lack of adequate

career post upon reentry, a lack of challenging work and responsibilities, as well as a lack of understanding of their new experience and knowledge by their home-organization colleagues. Another issue is what Paik et al. (2002) describe as the discrepancy in defining a successful repatriation between the repatriates and their HR managers. While the returning individuals focus on country culture readjustment, the HR managers are primarily interested in work-related outcomes and expect the returning individuals 'to hit the ground running' immediately.

In fact, research demonstrates that multinational corporations seem to largely neglect the issue of reentry. Black et al. (1992a) show that among researched organizations, as few as 4.3% of US organizations informed their employees of their return date with notice of half a year, or more. The majority of the returning individuals received arbitrary notification, indicating little preparation on the company's part for the repatriation of their employees. The situation is similar upon the employees return. As indicated by the authors, 60-70% of repatriates only learned about their new home work positions after repatriation. Additionally, the new work places were a poor match with repatriates' newly acquired experiences, knowledge and skills; as little as 25% of Finish and about 10% of Japanese and US repatriates received a promotion upon return and many were downgraded to lower-level positions than those which they held abroad. Among other issues reported as problematic are the loss of autonomy, locally-bounded technical and managerial obsolescence, a reduced range of responsibilities and the loss of within-company networks (Forster, 1994; McDonald, 1993). Black et al. (1992a) report a confession of one of the frustrated business returnees:

"Now that I'm home, it seems like my overseas assignment is a punishment, a real 'ball and chain', in terms of my career."

(Black et al., 1992a: 221)

Caligiuri and Lazarova (2001) describe a number of considerations to be taken into account by managers attempting to create strategic repatriation policies. The authors stress the importance of coherence between selection procedures, expatriate performance management and the repatriation system. They also emphasize that, while a substantial number of writings discuss in detail the retention strategies of the home organization, in fact, a certain level of turnover upon repatriation is functional and should be included in strategic planning of international assignments. In the paragraphs below, I will discuss the two most relevant in this study aspects of work reintegration: knowledge management and turnover intentions.

3.3.1 Knowledge Management

The transfer of knowledge upon return is one of the most important strategic objectives related to successful repatriation management. Expatriating individuals gain not only substantial knowledge related to particular, local management practices and local market conditions, but also develop a number of overall management skills and interpersonal relations competences (Lazarova & Tarique, 2005). Unfortunately, the returning individuals more than often face resistance when attempting to transfer newly gained foreign knowledge to the home organization, what Adler (1981) calls a 'xenophobic response'. A closed and reserved attitude among home-country employees is found to hinder the transfer of knowledge from the host to home-country organization and negatively influence the readaptation of the returning individuals. The author suggests two strategies that could be applied here. First, repatriates could mask the source of their knowledge and, in this way, prevent a prejudiced response. Second, the home-country managers should be offered assistance (training) in recognizing the benefits of the international experiences their repatriated colleagues have gained.

Lazarova and Tarique (2005) add that for an effective transfer of knowledge upon repatriation there must be a fit between both, the organization's interest and openness, and the repatriate's readiness to share the information. Proactive organization could also undertake a number of actions supporting the knowledge transfer (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2004). Such procedures should be organised in the form of anticipatory policies rather than being implemented as crisis management interventions (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001). Research shows that both appropriate HR practices and self readjustment efforts of the returning individuals contribute to the within-company learning processes (Furuya et al., 2007).

3.3.2 Commitment and turnover intentions

Reentry discomforts and challenges as well as dissatisfaction with the company's management of this process are often accompanied by a lack of commitment to the home-organization and consequently a higher presentation of turnover intentions among repatriates.

The most important factor predicting individuals' commitment to their home organization is the demonstrable value placed on the international experiences of returning assignees (Gregersen, 1992; Gregersen & Black, 1996; Stroh, 1995). Among other factors influencing commitment to a home-unit are tenure within the home-organization, predeparture training (Gregersen & Black, 1992), role discretion and clarity (Gregersen 1992) and adequate career development planning (Stroh, 1995). Similar

predictors have been found in relation to work adjustment (Black & Gregersen, 1991; McDonald, 1993; Suutari & Valimaa, 2002).

Despite relatively small number of empirical studies of turnover rates, those few, which have been published, report unusually high levels of turnover among repatriated employees. The 2005 GMAC Global Relocation Trends Report states that among 125 surveyed organizations, more than 40% of international assignees left their companies within two years of their return. Consequently, the issue of employee retention after repatriation has been frequently addressed in international HRM literature. Lazarova and Cerdin (2007) notice that the majority of available research related to repatriate turnover inadequately focuses on individuals' inability to manage the reentry process and their more or less complete dependence on organizational arrangements and support measures. The authors argue that such a view is one-sided and does not account for the proactivity of returning individuals. According to the authors, the repatriates might voluntarily choose to change their employer in the hope of a better match between their newly acquired skills, job ambitions and work responsibilities. Such "protean careers" (Hall, 1996) lead repatriates to opt for boundless careers, running independently of a particular organizational setting, rather than having a life-long commitment to one employer (Lazarova and Cerdin, 2007). This newly emerging line of research opens up a new perspective on understanding the concept of work commitment and post-reentry retention.

3.3.3 Spouse/partner reentry

While it is questionable to differentiate spouse/partner reentry as being a distinctive category of repatriating sojourners, several researchers have done so. While many readjustment factors are identical for both partners, research indicates several unique areas of spousal readjustment. Black et al. (1992a) describe the significant percentage of spouses, who did not work during the international assignment phase and consequently found it very challenging to come back to the workplace after their return. Those who wanted to find employment in their home-country reported significant difficulties in finding a new work placement. At the same time, only 2% of US organizations and 15% of Finnish employers offered job-finding support to the returning spouses. These numbers are surprisingly low when taking into consideration that spouse's reentry adaptation has been largely acknowledged as one of the key factors in the readaptation of returning individuals, especially within the corporate context (Black et al., 1992a). Research shows that partners' general readjustment patterns tend to positively reinforce each other. This in turn has a direct influence on employees work readjustment and their performance in the workplace (Black et al., 1992a; Gregersen &

Stroh, 1997). Consequently MacDonald and Arthur (2005) identify a number of support practices that should be provided by the organization.

In response to the above-mentioned difficulties, Pascoe (2000) published a guidebook addressed especially to returning spouses and partners. Written from a perspective of a repatriating woman, the book exemplifies a number of concerns relevant for the majority of trailing spouses. Bearing in mind the particular demographics of this returning group, we can learn more about the specifics of their repatriation from research exemplifying gender differences in reentry.

3.4 Reentry: practices

Despite the fact that reentry challenges have been widely documented in the literature, surprisingly few reentry support practices have been systematically investigated. While a number of writings describing corporate repatriation support practices are available (e.g. Adler & Bartholomew, 1992; Furuya et al., 2007; LaBrack, 2007; Stevens et al., 2006), a great majority of them lack empirical support and consequently should be seen as tentative suggestions rather than definitive recommendations. Caligiuri and Lazarova (2001) combine a comprehensive list of practices that should be taken into consideration in dealing with a reentry transition of returning employees. These strategic repatriation practices include pre-departure briefings, reentry training and coaching, career planning meetings, written guarantees of employment, mentoring, organization reorientation programs, financial counselling, lifestyle counselling, transition periods for reintegration as well as proactive and extensive communication scheme during the expatriation phase. Reentry training, the most relevant for this research and best documented practice will be discussed here in detail.

3.4.1 Reentry training

Several publications on international HR provide brief recommendations for successful repatriation. Reentry training and coaching are among the most often recommended strategies for effective repatriation of intercultural sojourners (Adler, 1991; Arthur, 2003; Black et al., 1992b; Black, 1992; Black & Gregersen, 1991; Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2001; Cox, 2004; Forster, 1994; Furuya et al., 2007; Gomez-Mejia & Balkin, 1987; Hammer et al., 1998; Martin & Harrell, 2004; McDonald, 1993; Stroh et al., 1998; Tung, 1998). Sadly, the literature assessing the content, the potential impact and the utility of such services is scant and mostly limited to theorizing about the potential design of reentry sessions (Hammer et al., 1998; Harvey, 1989; Martin & Harrell, 1996 & 2004; Sussman, 1986).

The most thorough theoretical outline of a reentry session is provided by Martin and Harrell (1996, 2004). Their publications contain a detailed reentry training outline with four distinguished training phases: pre-departure, overseas experience, pre-reentry and the reentry phase itself (Appendix 1). Among other publications on reentry training and coaching, Sussman (1986) reviews the literature on the reentry process and points out three elements, which should be considered first while designing any reentry session: the background of the trainees, the timing of the reentry session and the place where the session should be conducted. Hammer et al. (1998) stress the importance of shaping accurate expectations (for the repatriate and the spouse) in the reentry training programs. Isogai et al., (1999) disclose the shortage of existing reentry assistance programs for Japanese repatriates and advocates the establishment of widely available reentry sessions. Such sessions should deal with a number of issues including awareness, knowledge, emotions and skills. Finally, Harvey (1989) discusses the perceptions of personnel administrators of repatriation programs and concludes that instead of looking at the broad spectrum of issues related to return transition, the administrators centre their ideas on tangible aspects of reentry, such as financial and tax assistance. His research indicates that an ideal reentry training program should include issues such as psychological distress and the personal concerns of the returning repatriates and their families.

While the scientific community does not provide much information on the traditional mode of reentry training and coaching, practitioners in the field have been publishing numerous articles on the role and impact of reentry training in a carefully planned repatriation strategy. Unfortunately, all of these publications rely on anecdotal evidence, mostly drawn on the personal experiences of the authors. Still, they are an indication of the fact that there are several issues of importance, which had not yet been addressed. Solomon (1995) describes the successful repatriation of a US American couple returning from an international sojourn in Belgium and stresses the fact that a reentry training program had a considerable influence on their effective readaptation. Frazee (1997) writes about the importance and similarities between pre-departure training and post-arrival sessions. In her view, the more successful the adjustment in the host-country, the more difficult the repatriation process in the homeland. However, training can play a crucial role in recalling and reapplying the skills developed in the expatriation phase. Askalani (1998) quotes one of the training participants who confesses that such training was the best opportunity to think over and talk through all the emotional and cultural issues related to repatriation. Breukel (2003) advocates pre-reentry training and coaching, which (next to information on current developments in politics, culture and other social issues) could provide an opportunity to evaluate the expatriation experiences. Ripmeester (2005) claims that only individual, customized, one-on-one session with a repatriate and their family can provide a thorough and

relevant learning experience. Klaff (2002) presents a similar opinion, suggesting that a counsellor might be a great help for repatriates attempting to reintegrate into the home-country environment. Similarly, Hurn (1999) strongly recommends tailor-made, individual sessions. Last but not least, Beauregard (2007) stresses the value of reentry training for the corporation:

“In repatriation orientation — with the co-operation of the company — there is time to formulate an action plan which helps enhance the employee's productivity by easing the challenges of this major transition.

At the same time, this success then sets an example for upcoming expats which illustrates that a trip over the rainbow is worth the effort and sacrifice.”
(Beauregard, 2007)

3.5 Conclusions

While the intercultural field thoroughly deals with expatriate assistance (such as outbound intercultural training), the subject of reentry support practices, their value and application, still waits to be addressed within repatriation research. This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the existing reentry literature. As shown, a limited number of theories on repatriation is available and even fewer issues have been investigated empirically in a systematic way. At the same time, these few theoretical streams and considerations presented in this chapter indicate the importance of the repatriation transition for sojourning individuals. This review also finds and presents a number of recommendations with regard to support practices that could be implemented in carefully planned reentry transition trajectories; reentry training being the most often recommended repatriate intervention. Nevertheless, it seems that reentry training, despite its theoretical potential in addressing many of the issues described in this literature review and consequently in facilitating a smooth reentry transition of sojourning individuals, has not received sufficient attention either from intercultural or from management scholars. In fact, almost all of the available scholarly publications related to reentry training interventions are speculative in nature and have little or no connection with empirical data gathered within existing research streams and interpreted in the framework of existing reentry models. Consequently, theoretical themes documented above constitute a good departure point for this research and suggest a relatively strong analytical base for data investigation. In the following chapter, the results of empirical investigation in relation to the above-mentioned reentry theories and models will be described.

4. Reentry training – a distal perspective

4.1 Introduction

This chapter brings together data from 31 in-depth interviews conducted with reentry training providers. The collected research material is broken down into a number of operational themes (Table 4.1). Each thematic part is reported thusly: the first sub-section exemplifies the collected interview data; the second sub-section discusses the data’s correspondence with related reentry theories⁹. Finally, the last section of this chapter introduces a number of support measures, which could replace or enrich traditional reentry training.

Theme	Description
Timing	Time when the training takes place
Location	Place where the training takes place
Duration	Duration of the training
Participants	Composition of the training group and involvement of the spouse/partner and children
Methods	Methodological approach employed during the training
Topics	Thematic composition of the training session
Alternative Support Measures	Alternative approaches to the dominant reentry training and coaching delivery methods

Table 4.1: Summary of the analyzed training designs and training delivery themes

⁹ In order to avoid repetitions I refer to the analytical themes I borrow from only by name (in bold). Their authors and years of publication can be found in Chapter 3 of this manuscript.

4.2 Data analysis

4.2.1 Timing

4.2.1.1 Timing – empirical data

The first major unaddressed issue in cross-cultural reentry training is the optimal timing of a training event. Table 4.2 summarizes the factual timing of the training sessions as currently conducted versus the favoured timing as declared desirable by the interviewed trainers.

Factual timing	Ideal timing
79% - after 7% - before 14% - before or after	54% - after 15% - before 10% - before or after 21% - before and after

Table 4.2: Timing of reentry training

The majority of interviewed trainers offer their services as **post-reentry** interventions, between 2 and 12 weeks after the repatriation. However, a combination of reentry transition excitement and the trainees’ inability to focus on specific issues such as training could become reasons to postpone the session until 3-6 months after the return. Trainers point out the following issues, among the main reasons for post-reentry delivery:

- trainees’ lack of motivation and inability to perceive the need to follow a reentry session;
- design of the training itself;
- logistical concerns related to setting up of the session.

According to the trainers, reentry transition is largely neglected by both the repatriates and the organizations¹⁰. While the majority of the international assignees are aware of the difficulties related to the outbound part of an international assignment, very few expect any difficulties on return. In fact, according to the interviewed trainers, it is much easier to build a reentry session in the post-return phase, since several repatriation discomforts have already been experienced by the trainees and therefore the repatriates can directly relate their actual experiences to the topics discussed in the

¹⁰ The role of the organization in planning and executing reentry support will be dealt with in the second part of this dissertation.

session. As some respondents argue, the motivation for learning and participation in the training is higher once a repatriate is going through reentry problems:

"Only once [the repatriates] are back, they start to really feel how difficult it is, and they tend to deny that when they are still abroad. They tend to deny that it's going to be difficult. They don't expect it and...are not aware of it. You know, once they are back here, they start to experience then... they need these workshops"

(21)

"We tend to have a greater rate of acceptance when they are actually returned because I think they start feeling a little uncomfortable and then they realize that maybe it would be a good thing to talk to someone about that."

(10)

Consequently, the lack of motivation and inability of the repatriating individuals to see a need to follow such training diminish when individuals are confronted with the challenging reality of the post-reentry phase:

"Once they moved in, maybe once the kids are back in school, that's when usually the reverse culture shock hits for the lady and then it's a little bit more impactful. Otherwise, you would be just talking about what may be happening to you, this may not be happening to you, then...its left in theory rather than, you know...having an experience lately of reverse culture shock."

(16)

Another reason for post-reentry delivery is returnees' difficulties in processing the information, knowledge and experiences in the pre-return stage. The design of the training around trainees' experiences and the highly interactive nature of the training's methodology support post-reentry delivery. Several trainers admit that their training is exclusively built around the challenges experienced by repatriates - as reported by the returning individuals. Accordingly, a pre-repatriation delivery would not even be considered by several interviewed providers.

"So we have richer programs if people have been home longer. Because they have begun to experience some irritation with respect to their own culture, they are experiencing the loss of their friends and new network abroad, they are experiencing the irritation at trying - people trying to pull them back in the social

situations that they no longer want to be a part of. So they actually just bring a lot more to the table and they have more to talk about.”

(8)

“Well, it doesn’t really make sense before...I have done some before but really, you can’t really debrief it until then. The whole purpose of the repatriation is...partly with debriefing this experience and also talking about some of the difficulties that are: coming back and readjusting again. So, if you do it beforehand, you know, you don’t have that information”.

(16)

After critical issues, such as the nature of the training and particular design dilemmas, a number of logistical concerns play a crucial role in deciding on a post-reentry delivery. First of all, many trainers experience that it is very difficult to assess who has the responsibility of preparing the repatriates for their reentry. Both external and internal company trainers have acknowledged the limited influence of home-organizations on the repatriation assistance, prior to reentry. For example, while still employed by the host-organization, it seems to be the responsibility of the home-organization to provide smooth return conditions for the repatriating employees. This issue becomes salient especially in relation to the financial aspects of providing reentry support:

“With the repatriation, I see two problems: one – sometimes, that is when they come back, whose budget is going to pay for the return training and secondly sometimes the people just get so busy that they forget”

(15)

Next, several of the training providers stress their own geographical location as a reason to offer training in the post-reentry phase. They implicitly admit that feasibility and delivery costs play a substantial role in shaping reentry services. Expenses related to the relocation of trainers to the host-country, and the rare and relatively short visits of the repatriates to their home-country in the pre-reentry period, result in very few opportunities for pre-return sessions:

“Because I’ve been the primary person delivering this program, it is not cost effective for me to travel around to all these places, I mean even within [country’s name], I mean, companies are getting less and less interested in paying for travel.”

(15)

"I think the main reason for [post-reentry delivery] is just one of logistics: getting the training to them or bringing them back early for a brief visit. And I think it's also that most people are very focused on where they are living."

(14)

Q: *"Is it also possible to actually run [the training program] before coming back?"*

A: *"That probably would be desirable but we didn't do that. Our model was... because we were basically looking after the people in [location's name], so when they were away, we didn't have any influence unfortunately over them from the training point of view or intercultural side. You know, what we can do is reach people before they go abroad or when they come back. It is more connected not with the philosophy or whatever but just the organizational structure."*

(25)

Last but not least, the trainers' routines contribute to sustaining the dominance of post-return training design. In extreme cases, post-reentry training is used as a time filler (on occasions when there is no work for the returning individuals) or as lay-off compensation. In the former example, the company offers a reentry program in order to keep the repatriate 'busy' and prevent him/her from focusing on negative aspects of organizational HR arrangements related to his post-return placement. In the latter case, reentry transition is linked to non-voluntary employee turn-over, specifically, when no appropriate home-based position is available. In such cases, reentry training is a part of the lay-off compensation package.

"Sometimes it is, they have a program like this at that floating period when they have no particular job, when they come back from [country's name] and there is no post waiting for them in [city's name]."

(13)

Trainers, who opt for the **pre-reentry** design, present three main arguments supporting their choice. These arguments could be summarized as follows:

- creating accurate expectations related to reentry and providing appropriate preparation;
- stimulating the proactive behaviours of the repatriates and their home-organizations;
- accounting for logistical concerns related to setting up the session.

First of all, the trainers stress the fact that creating accurate expectations has a huge impact on the readjustment processes. This is particularly important since the so-called

“reentry shock” is largely unexpected. Consequently, the difficulties experienced upon return, if unanticipated, are perceived as even more challenging and unmanageable:

“The main problem with these things is always expectations setting, expectations management and because if you go in, if you have the right source but you have the wrong expectations you're not going to succeed. So you need to know what you're getting into and have the right mindset”

(3)

Secondly, the pre-reentry sessions can greatly influence the proactive behaviours of the returning individuals and stimulate them to take control over their reentry process. Instead of waiting for organizational arrangements, repatriates should become the managers of the reentry process, contributing to making their own return smoother and more successful. This will in turn contribute to the proactive prevention of difficulties rather than the reactive management of crisis situations as they arise.

“We feel that anything we can do to prevent people from becoming depressed or things like that, anything we do beforehand would be better than when they actually now have problems after they go back and have reentry shock, and then have to come back and talk to somebody like a counsellor for support and things like that.”

(31)

“It becomes a matter of either you can do preventative work or you can do restorative work. I would much rather think that people would do preventative work. I think this is a much better approach.”

(9)

At the same time, according to the trainers, home-organizations often seem to neglect the importance of reentry transition. Many HR managers do not offer any anticipatory support and seem to have forgotten about the expatriating employees. Consequently, as maintained by the interviewees, home organizations frequently appear completely unprepared for the reception of repatriating individuals. Through organizing the training in the pre-reentry stage and bringing the issue of repatriation to the surface, some trainers reported success in increasing the ability of HR departments to take care of the necessary arrangements and to think about the situation of the repatriating employees even before their return.

“I think the training should occur before reentry in order to notify people of what is going to happen to them. Yeah, to let them realize that when it happens, they know what it is. On the second.....second part is that, at that moment, they are in

touch with the company and the human resource department is aware that they are going to come back and they might have problems. Yeah, so it's on both sides, it's a warning like something is going to happen. It's like an alarm bell going on: it's in the organization and somebody's coming back we have to focus on this to get it smooth"
(18)

Paradoxically, some of the proponents of pre-reentry training brought forward arguments closely resembling those advanced by the supporters of post-reentry interventions. Among those are the design issues (e.g. being used to a particular training delivery) or the logistical concerns (e.g. geographical location of the trainer). Also content-wise, the trainers listed similar concerns as those referred to by the proponents of post-reentry sessions. For example one of the respondents mentioned repatriates' lack of motivation to participate in post-reentry sessions:

"When people are already back in the place, their mind kind of shuts down and they think 'oh I am back, I've already made the reentry, and I am too busy, and I don't want to admit that I am having any kind of reentry shocks'. So I think it's harder for people to make the time when they are already back in the country. I think it would be harder issue for them also to admit that they might have any issues whereas before they leave they are already feeling a little bit of anxiety and they might be more willing to talk about things."
(30)

Such corresponding argumentation, from proponents of both the post and pre-reentry training delivery, indicates contextual influences of the trainer's situation and the impact of work experience on their preferred training design. In fact, such convergence is also a manifestation of the fact that currently undertaken decisions about the timing of reentry interventions are in a very limited way governed by available theoretical writings and empirical research.

It is important to acknowledge the fact that over 20% of the trainers advocate the need for two sessions, one prior and one after the return. Those sessions could be organized in various ways – for example as telephone coaching, which could eliminate some of the objections and difficulties in bringing trainers and trainees together. While a pre-reentry session could cover issues such as expectation setting, current developments in the home-country, a debriefing on the international assignment, interpersonal change and psychological readjustment; the post-reentry session could elaborate further on interpersonal transformation and additionally cover issues such as managing reentry stress and dealing with unexpected difficulties.

"I think ideally it should happen twice. So there should be a session prior to the post and after the look-see and I think there should be a follow-up session when the people get into the country."

(28)

To sum up, the main unanswered timing-related question influencing the training organization is whether the reentry session could prevent potential repatriation difficulties and help in handling the reentry challenges (by creating a proactive attitude in the returnees)? Or perhaps, should the training be seen as a debriefing or a crisis management session, at times, when a repatriate is already struggling with the problems of reentry?

4.2.1.2 Timing – theory revisited

Existing reentry theories provide several clues for the advisable timing of reentry interventions. The post-reentry training design finds support within the **Cultural Identity Model**. This model focuses on changes experienced and undergone by the returning individuals prior to and after the reentry. It can be hypothesized that many profound identity changes only become salient upon reentry. Consequently, a reentry session assessing identity changes in the post-transition period might be more impactful than reentry training in the pre-reentry stage. It remains highly speculative whether consciousness of one's own identity transformations could be triggered by carefully designed pre-reentry exercises or simulations.

Two reentry models strongly support the pre-reentry design. The most prominent substantiation for pre-return sessions is provided by the **Expectations Model**. Forming accurate or even creating over-dramatic expectations of reentry difficulties can contribute to better readjustment to the general environment as well as to the workplace. Accordingly, these expectations can contribute to anticipatory investments (investments understood in a broad context), resulting in a smoother reentry transition. It can be hypothesized that the preventive nature of pre-reentry training could be more effective in achieving smooth readjustment than post-reentry interventions. Nevertheless, one of the questions that needs to be addressed is whether trainers can accurately foresee and realistically signalize a broad range of potential reentry difficulties. Westwood et al. (1986) suggest that a guided visualization exercise could be helpful in achieving this goal. According to the authors, imagining the reentry process prior to returning could help in preparing the returning individuals to anticipate eventual challenges of the transition. Accordingly, exploring the utility of exercises such as guided visualization is vital in light of empirical data suggesting that pre-reentry

trainings might become too theoretical and too abstract and, as a result, appear irrelevant to training participants.

The second supportive pre-reentry design notion is the **Protean Careers** model. Lazarova and Cerdin (2007) show that many repatriates do not actually rely on the organizational support and work arrangements (which, for a long time, has been viewed as standard reentry behaviour). In fact, many repatriates decide to research alternative employment options prior to return. Accordingly, reentry session in the pre-reentry phase would be exceptionally beneficial, since the trainers could discuss with the returning individuals their existing options, both within and outside of the home-organization. In fact, several of the interviewed trainers already focus on these issues in their reentry sessions. These developments could be an indication that practice surpasses theoretical developments.

The third supportive pre-reentry design notion is Adler's **Modes of Reentry** model (1981). While Pusch (1998), in her description of reentry modes, is very careful about value judgments regarding different types of returning individuals, Adler (1981) strongly supports the Proactive category as ultimately the most desirable within a corporate context. This Proactive mode characterizes optimistic and active returnees, who take anticipatory actions and try to facilitate their own reentry transition. Consequently, if such attitudes could be trained, the most suitable timing for an intervention would be prior to reentry.

Literature on reentry illustrates the importance of **contact with host-country individuals** for the readjustment process (Kim, 2001). While the limited empirical research does not find support for a relationship between the contact with host-country nationals and home-country readjustment, many trainers stress the significance of appropriately "closing" the expatriation period. This closure is particularly important with respect to interpersonal relations. The appropriate closing of relationships will be especially important to individuals from cultures, in which interpersonal bonds are of high importance (Hofstede, 1994). In fact, the proponents of pre-reentry training stress the significance of saying 'good bye' and bringing some of the dimensions of personal relationships to a close. According to the trainers, this closure is important to both the returning individual and the host-country nationals and should be considered in a personal as well as a professional context.

The behavioural aspects of cultural learning are relatively difficult to address in relation to the ideal timing of a training session. **Culture Learning Theory** stresses the importance of relearning behaviours and social skills discarded in the expatriation phase, as well as acquiring new ones, freshly developed within the home-country

culture. Whether this learning process should occur prior to reentry or be automatically recalled upon return is unspecified and difficult to estimate. Consequently, it is difficult to assess which different reentry training deliveries could enable successful behavioural readjustment.

The majority of available theories on reentry readjustment strongly support the pre-reentry design. In fact, these theories are also closely followed by the reentry trainers in their reentry sessions. Consequently, it is very surprising that the majority of the training providers offer their services in the post-return stage of the reentry transition. This research reveals that many of the offered reentry sessions are helpful in ‘surviving’ the stress of reentry, rather than in preventing it. Post-return training is long overdue for achieving proactive behaviours and smooth repatriation for the returning individuals.

4.2.2 Location

4.2.2.1 Location – empirical data

According to the respondents, the location of the reentry session can influence the process of training. Almost half of the trainers choose to run the reentry sessions at their own premises (if such are available). This guarantees both access to all the necessary equipment and materials as well as the neutrality of the location. This detachment of the training session from the individuals’ daily activities is crucial for the training. Therefore, a number of trainers emphasize that the location does not matter as long as it secures the neutrality of the process. As a result, for the majority of respondents, the repatriate’s office (and for some the repatriate’s house) is not an alternative for the training session:

“The most important consideration in my mind is the idea that [trainees] are removed from their responsibilities, not physically but at least psychologically. So the room, if you have a room where you are in the same building where they have their office or if they are in their home and people are coming and going and the phone is ringing and everything, you know, then you don’t get their undivided attention and...so I think the most important consideration as far as where you do the training is that it’s most ideally somehow removed from their day-to-day responsibilities whether work or home wise.”

(11)

While almost half of the respondents believe that the trainer’s premises are the most suitable location for a training session, almost a quarter of the training providers argue that reentry sessions should take place in the repatriates’ homes. Among the

advantages of home as a training location, the interviewees indicate privacy and the ability to ensure trainees comfort and freedom of expression. A number of trainers claim that these advantages can only be achieved in one's own home surroundings.

"Usually those sessions are done in the... expatriate's home. So that there is more freedom of movement for the family."
(28)

Hotel conference rooms and client's conference premises were also considered by several respondents as satisfactory locations.

In summary, site's neutrality, participant comfort and to a lesser extent, the logistical concerns of the trainers are the leading factors in choosing suitable location for reentry training.

4.2.2.2 Location – theory revisited

None of the available repatriation writings relates directly to the optimal location of a training session. The literature that could be helpful in understanding the dynamics of the reentry training location points to the fact that different groups have significant difficulties in seeking help. For example the research by Mau and David (1990) reveals that, in comparison to an American sample, the Chinese have more difficulties in asking for help and tend to evaluate their problems as less severe (especially if these problems are related to the personal sphere). Therefore, it can be hypothesized that one's office would not be an optimal location for a coaching session. This is closely related to individuals' reluctance to admit that they might need help and consequent fear of being judged by the colleagues (especially, since participation in training might be perceived as a symptom of one's inability to cope with readjustment issues). These assumptions are partially confirmed by the research material gathered from the corporate setting. The interviewees pointed out that the repatriating employees might experience difficulties in admitting publically that reentry training could be beneficial for them. Looking at the above, trainers might want to avoid organizing the training sessions in the offices of the repatriating individuals.

4.2.3 Duration

4.2.3.1 Duration – empirical data

The length of the training ultimately determines its design restrictions (e.g. the number of issues that can be discussed along with the possibility of in-depth analysis of particular themes). Therefore, the duration of training sessions must be carefully considered. Table 4.3 summarizes the results of the factual and ideal duration of the reentry training as declared by the respondents.

Factual duration	Ideal duration
66% - 1 day, 2 days if needed	48% - 1 day, 2 days if needed
17% - 0.5 day	28% - split-session design
10% - 2 days or more	17% - 2 days
7% - split-session design	7% - 0.5 day

Table 4.3: Duration of reentry training

The majority of the training providers offer one-day-long reentry sessions. An additional day can be organized in exceptional cases. Two kinds of exceptional cases were identified by the trainers: cultural readjustment after a long-term assignment and returning with children.

“If it is training for a family it is always two-days training. [...] if it's a family we might have two-days training with the parents and one-day training with the kids.”
(3)

The majority of the interviewees find the given 1-to-2-day timeframe sufficient and would not wish for longer sessions. Those trainers, who were asked to deliver half a day’s training, tend to find the timeframe insufficient and would opt for a full-day meeting with the repatriate. According to the trainers, a 3 to 4-hour-long session only allows for the mentioning of some reentry issues and lacks the opportunity for an in-depth investigation of trainees’ reentry concerns. Several of the respondents declare that they would not accept reentry training projects lasting less than 6 hours. Financial issues and difficulties with scheduling are the most commonly named problems related to deciding upon the length of a reentry session. One of the newly emerging ideas in training delivery is a split-session design, strongly advocated by more than a quarter of interviewed trainers. According to the respondents, split-session design allows the trainees to gradually process the training material and to return with

additional questions and concerns during consecutive meetings. The separating breaks could be as short as one night and as long as several weeks.

"I think it is nice to have 1, 2, 3 coaching sessions of half a day for example. It has to be, you know, more than a day. Because just one day I find very... you have to find a way, when you design these sessions to give the people time to assimilate the information, because they're in a real change process. So you have to find the trick where they have a day and maybe a night to think about it and a second day and then coaching sessions. [...] So that they have time to let the information sediment"

(13)

Scheduling of split-session training might be particularly problematic in corporate setting, where employees' agendas might be particularly inflexible to multiple training events. Additionally, the issues of potential higher costs related to a split-session design are not without importance.

In short, while one or two day sessions seem to be optimal for the majority of training providers, the split-session design is a newly emerging approach, which has not yet been sufficiently explored by practitioners.

4.2.3.2 Duration – theory revisited

Three theoretical considerations seem to be closely related to the optimal timing of reentry sessions. **Age** seems to be one of the best predictors of reentry difficulties (younger individuals having more problems with reentry readjustment). Consequently, it can be assumed that training for younger repatriates might require more time than reentry sessions for older returnees. This assumption however, is a cautious and speculative guess, as younger individuals tend to demonstrate higher culture learning abilities and adjustment skills, which might reduce the time necessary to train them for reentry (Cox, 2004).

The work of Cox (2004) shows that **marital status** is another factor associated with reentry difficulties. The author argues that committed relationships provide mutual support for partners during the difficult reentry transition phase. Contrary to these research findings, the practice of reentry training reveals that not single individuals but returning families need considerably more time for reentry interventions. This is strongly related to two factors. First, reentry transition has a huge impact on the returning couple and individuals' perception of their relationships. These findings are consistent with previous research on the impact the expatriation move has on partners'

relations (Immundo, 1974). Accordingly, extra consideration should be given to preventing and/or managing within-family conflicts resulting from the challenges of international transition (Bielby & Bielby, 1992). Second, children’s reentry seems to be one of the most important concerns of returning parents (Black et al., 1992). Consequently, family-related issues tend to consume a substantial amount of time in reentry training.

The **length of stay abroad** also has a considerable impact on individual’s reentry difficulties. This relationship is confirmed by the trainers, who identify long-term assignees as the ones in need of relatively longer reentry training sessions. This can be explained by two factors. First, long-term sojourners have undergone more profound personal changes; consequently more issues need to be discussed during the reentry session. Second, the home-country and home-organization might have also undergone larger transformations than those expected by the returnees. That leads to a situation where the returning individual needs to be updated about a greater number of events in comparison to short-term assignees.

4.2.4 Participants

The following section deals with results related to a number of individuals participating in a training session. Firstly, the concept of individual coaching vs. group training will be discussed, followed by the description of spouse/partner participation and assistance to repatriating children.

4.2.4.1 Group sessions vs. individual coaching

4.2.4.1.1 Group sessions vs. individual coaching – empirical data

Factual group composition	Ideal group composition
71% - Repatriating employee and the spouse/ partner	71% - Repatriating employee and the spouse/ partner
52% - Group sessions	39% - Group sessions (small groups)
- 16% - group session as main approach to reentry training	
- 36% - sporadically conducting group sessions	
31% - Repatriating employee	16% - Repatriating employee

Table 4.4: Participants in reentry training (multiple answers possible)

The majority of the interviewed providers run their sessions in a very intimate setting, with only the repatriate and his/her spouse/partner involved (Table 4.4). Those one-on-one or one-on-two sessions are also referred to as coaching rather than training. There are numerous reasons for such a setup. First, the trainers argue that the confidentiality and privacy call for a very intimate setting. This need for confidentiality could be related to both personal as well as professional concerns of the returning individuals. According to the trainers, many of the issues discussed in the training are so delicate and intimate that it would be impossible to run reentry sessions in a group setting.

"No. We have not, had not ever run a group session. We really don't feel that it is [suitable] for either expatriate or repatriate training. We think that it could be counter-productive. [...] I'm just not a big fan of that. Because I feel that once you get to know a couple it is the... the personal treatment should be woven through the entire session and there are some things that people don't want other people to know about their lives."

(28)

"I think individual training or training with 3 people or family or so is much better because it's very personal - reentry training. It's extremely personal and it depends on how successful their expatriation has been, how the woman has adapted herself, the wife of... how the kids did and how they are in this process. Are they excited to go back? It's a very personal thing. And you should have one day either with the family or the person"

(18)

Second, several respondents indicate that companies offer their reentry services predominantly to the top executives or high potential employees and their families. Consequently, according to the trainers, those individuals tend to perceive themselves as being in an exceptional position, requiring unique, tailor-made sessions.

"They [trainees] are usually high potentials. So they've been designated as the high potential leaders and they've usually had and continue to have ongoing promotions. [...] They are generally people that are sort of up-and-coming, if you know what I mean."

(29)

"The executive, him or herself, but usually himself, really sort of see themselves as being in a unique position with regard to their own organization, with regard to the social circle, the networks and so rather than focusing on training [...] we

focus more on coaching, which is more about growth and development. And then it can be really personalized to that person and his or her family.”
(23)

Special position of executives within the organization is also related to their status within the company. As acknowledged by several trainers, asking for organizational support could be viewed as a sign of weakness. Consequently, while some trainers strongly advocate individual sessions, others argue for a group setting. According to the group-session proponents, a setup with a bigger number of returning employees participating in one training event allows the trainers to transfer knowledge without stigmatizing individual repatriates. Some trainers go even further and advocate mandatory participation in such reentry sessions.

“The good thing is that everybody's required to go, so in that way, it's not like: ‘oh you are having trouble, you are weak’. [...] Once you make it mandatory for everybody then everybody says: ‘oh I am only going because I have to go’. Even though the truth is this is exactly what they need to do for themselves.”
(9)

Other potential advantages of group sessions include sharing experiences and peer learning opportunities among participating individuals. Moreover, according to the trainers, group training has an added value of confirming to the participants that reentry stress is a likely occurrence and should be seen as a natural part of an international assignment cycle.

Seeing the importance of shared experiences and the value of the affirmative element of group sessions, several interviewed proponents of individual coaching invite guest speakers into their sessions. These visitors are mostly former repatriates, who themselves struggled with reentry issues. Other informants who discuss the changes within home-country culture or home-country organization are also occasionally invited. It is important to note that those few trainers, who more frequently run group reentry sessions, claim that in the majority of the cases a group setting would be optimal:

“When people are functioning normally then I would execute the group sessions because it has this extra interaction. [...] And then emphasize where you have specific problem, then you can come after it for an individual session.”
(21)

“We also have been asked to do group programs occasionally when for instance an international assignment centre was coordinating the return of multiple

people or families and wanted to handle this together. So we have done that for actually 2 clients, group programs, one of them in a half day format and one in a full day format. Those are actually quite useful I think because it connects people who are in the same circumstances, who might not otherwise meet. So the repatriating families often find that very comforting to have other people sharing their experience and being able to debrief their international experience with other people who understand that. So we like, I like to do those when they happen but they don't happen very often."

(8)

Additionally, a group setting creates the possibility of developing a new network within the company and supports team building processes among returning employees.

"For [company's name] we offer group sessions and they want that because they see that as a kind of team building, so they offer dinner afterwards as well. But that has also got to do with the start, we train them as a group when they are going to [country's name] as well."

(26)

It is worth noting that, among trainers who advocate individual coaching, those who had a chance to run group sessions consider these as very helpful and effective. Group support and sharing of reentry experiences was stressed as highly beneficial for the repatriating trainees. Nevertheless, among trainers, who run both individual and group sessions, only one opted for a group setting being an ideal approach to reentry assistance.

"We did a group session for [company's name] of probably 15 families repatriating back to [country's name] from [country's name] and I think that was a very valuable experience for them. They have never done anything like that before and this was the case where they did it before repatriating. So we talked about, you know, what people would be going through or might be going through and how to prepare for it and how to adjust to it. Again it is one of those cases when people had no clue that it is going to be a problem going home and so they are so appreciative of just learning about what might happen and giving them some very specific recommendations on how to handle it, if it happens to them. And so you know, again I was very pleased with the session in that the feedback was very, very positive, especially by the spouses. It was interesting that, 'cause the spouses were invited to come to the session as well and to the dinner and evening session."

(17)

In summary, the majority of the trainers prefer personalized coaching sessions with a returning employee and his/her spouse or partner. Especially in a corporate context, such a preference is evident and the trainers emphasize the unique position of each repatriating individual. Trainers working in the non-profit sector are more inclined to run group sessions and stress the importance of sharing the reentry experience and high impact of group-learning.

4.2.4.1.2 Group sessions vs. individual coaching – theory revisited

The three main theoretical reentry streams seem to suggest incompatible recommendations concerning the set up of the reentry session. The **Expectations Model**, with its focus on preparing individuals for their reentry by modelling realistic expectations of the forthcoming future, provides a number of concerns relevant for any returning individual. Among these concerns are issues related to communication with home-country-individuals and readjustment to the home-country environment. Accordingly, it can be assumed that individuals returning to the same home-country will be exposed to many similar reentry challenges. Consequently, they could participate in group training, where a number of topics applicable to all of them would be discussed. A parallel suggestion could be made in response to work related issues. The likelihood of xenophobic reactions towards the repatriates coming from their home-based co-workers seems to be, according to the literature, a universal phenomenon (Adler, 1981). Limited available empirical research makes it impossible to establish a definite conclusion about the relationship between the expectation model and the ideal set up of a training session.

The **Cultural Identity Model** suggests a uniquely individualized approach to reentry training. Since identity changes are central in this reentry stream, it could be assumed that different individuals might undergo different transformations. Consequently, sessions on cultural identity alteration might differ substantially, especially if the individuals have been posted to different locations. Additionally, discussing identity transformations might be a very intimate issue and many individuals might not feel comfortable to share their thoughts and feelings with others.

Culture Learning Theory provides additional information related to training design. The theory focuses on individual behavioural changes. From this perspective, the spectrum of unlearned home-based behaviours and the set of newly acquired host-based behaviours can differ among the returning employees. This will certainly be the case if the individuals have sojourned to different places. Consequently, personalized coaching could be considered as beneficial in approaching a diverse group of repatriating individuals. At the same time, the experience of outbound training and intercultural

awareness sessions shows the power of group exercises in learning and experiencing cultural diversity (Fowler, 1994). Simulations, which exemplify the difficulties of entering an unknown cultural territory and interacting with people culturally dissimilar to oneself, have proven to be highly effective in preparing sojourners for their intercultural encounters (Gudykunst, 1977)¹¹. Consequently, it can be hypothesized that designing comparable simulations related to repatriation and enacting those in a reentry training session would be a valuable learning experience for the returning individuals.

More recommendations on reentry training design can be inferred from the corporate reentry literature. First of all, group reentry training (within a single corporation) can be seen as an opportunity for **knowledge sharing**. This is an issue of high importance within companies dealing with the management of international assignees. Additionally, research shows (Mitchell & Lee, 2001; Mitchell et al., 2001) that links with co-workers significantly influence an individual's job embeddedness and satisfaction in the workplace. Group reentry sessions could be a first step in reestablishing the social links of the repatriate within the organization. This, however, needs to be well balanced with empirical accounts brought by the trainers, who report that the returning executives often consider themselves to be privileged and may show resistance to participating in group training.

The individual characteristics of repatriates, as well as numerous situational concerns related to the reentry process, influence the eventual setting of a training session and need to be taken into consideration in carefully planned reentry interventions. To start with, the **age** of repatriates will not be without importance in deciding upon an optimal composition of a training group. Since different age groups show unique readjustment patterns, dissimilar concerns and different levels of reentry distress, it could be crucial to ensure that age disparities among the training's participants are addressed.

Similar concerns can be voiced in relation to families returning with underage **children**. According to the literature, children's reentry has a huge impact on the concerns and stress levels of repatriating parents (Harvey, 1989). As a result, parenting duties will have a prominent position among the reentry anxieties of returning families and might need to be proportionately addressed in training. This suggests that bringing together returning families and repatriating individuals without parenting concerns could require incorporating separate training blocks within one event.

The **prior intercultural experience** of participants is another source of information for the reentry training designer. Both successful and unsuccessful reentry accounts can be

¹¹ Simulations such as "BaFa BaFa" and "Barnga" are among activities the most often employed by the trainers in the intercultural field.

used as case studies to discuss and share the learning points from previous reentry transitions.

The **length of intercultural sojourn** can be considered a potential obstacle to a group-session design. The length of time spent away from the home-environment will have an impact on several areas related to reentry (e.g. the readjustment process, cultural identity changes, the discrepancy between reentry expectations and the home reality, etc). So will the **cultural distance** of the home and the host-country environments. Both of these situational factors might cause many difficulties in designing group programs adjusted to meet the needs of all the participating returnees.

Last but not least, the **time since return** will influence the range of issues discussed, increasing the number of considerations in a group design.

4.2.4.2 Spouse

4.2.4.2.1 Spouse – empirical data

Since personal circumstances greatly affect the reentry adjustment of both partners, the interviewed trainers argue that family support is an extremely important element in any transition. 94% of the training providers believe that the returning spouse/partner should be invited to join the session. According to the trainers, the participation of a spouse or partner is crucial for the work-life balance of the returning family unit. While the working repatriate is mostly concerned with his/her job transition, a spouse or a partner is often left with the difficulties related to family readjustment.

“For me it is the employee and a spouse working together, ‘cause I think it's often that the businessperson has different issues but the family also is impacted by that and so I think it is important that husband or wife who is the employee hear what the spouse is experiencing and vice versa. So I feel it's more of a joined thing”

(15)

“And especially with couples, most often they don't have a chance to work together, to think together or talk much about what each other is going through or with their children and so you know [...] the whole idea of just giving them simply structured space and time to reflect.”

(11)

"The spouses in particular were really pleased that you know we were talking about the impact on the family because they think they found their husbands... in almost every case the spouses were women, they thought their husbands didn't understand that psychological impact of reentry for the family."

(17)

It is important to keep in mind that despite some demographic changes within international expatriate population, a great majority of the assignees are men and consequently, the majority of the trailing spouses are women¹². While women tend to leave their home-country workplace and follow the expatriating husbands, one of the main problems related to the spouse's repatriation is post-reentry work placement. Consequently, several interviewed reentry trainers offer career counselling to returning partners.

"Often we focus a lot on how you take your international experience and [...] even the things that don't directly transfer back to, for example: the [country's name] market. How can you use it? And again, usually for women who have not worked, we look at what they have done while they have been expats and how that could go on to a CV."

(14)

"And spouses might say they would want to start taking classes or go looking for work. So I ask them to come up with an action plan for the next two months, and then the next six months and so by one year they have a plan for what they want to accomplish by then. So that's something to take back with them and have something of a timeline that they can start working on when they go home."

(31)

It is important to realize that not all employers are willing to support reentry services for returning spouses and partners. Financial concerns and the business focus of international assignments often lead to negligence of returning partners during the planning of reentry training. One of the trainers described the reasons for excluding spouses from reentry sessions in the following way:

"The companies were worried about top-level people that they don't want to lose, so the issues were mainly for the company, not losing those competencies or

¹² One of the respondents acknowledged that the companies started to recognize the status of homosexual partnerships and invite also these family units to join reentry sessions. These developments are however hardly reflected in mainstream training practices.

those profiles and there was no question about worrying about the spouse.”
(13)

In brief, the participation and assistance to the returning family members is considered essential for the majority of the training providers. Consequently, it should be included in the planning of reentry training assistance.

4.2.4.2.2 Spouse – theory revisited

Several researchers have differentiated spouse/partner reentry as a distinctive category of repatriating sojourners. Research indicates several unique areas of spouse's readjustment, although many of the readjustment factors are identical for both partners. Black et al. (1992a) point out that a significant percentage of spouses, who did not work during the international assignment phase, found reentry to the workplace very challenging. Those who searched for employment in their home-country reported significant difficulties in finding a new work place. At the same time only 2% of US organizations and 15% of Finnish employers offered job-finding support to the returning spouses. These numbers are surprisingly low taking into consideration that spouse reentry adaptation is acknowledged as one of the key factors in the individuals' reentry readaptation, especially within the corporate context (Black et al., 1992a). Research shows that spouses' general environmental readjustment influences employees' work readjustment and their performance in the workplace (Black et al., 1992a; Gregersen & Stroh, 1997).

Gender differences in readjustment patterns are also not without importance in reentry. If, as reported by the researchers, women experience the reentry as more problematic, it is of utmost importance to provide support for the returning female spouses and partners. Attention should be given to issues such as social expectations and religious constraints associated with the role of women in the family and society. These challenges are expected to be more demanding for women returning from loose cultures to tight ones.

Therefore, while the company might only be interested in work-related aspects of reentry and the consequences repatriation has on employee's work outputs, the transition also encompasses challenges in the private lives of returning individuals. These two areas are interdependent and assistance to the returning spouse and children should be seen as an integral part of reentry support package. This argument is supported by research on family-related reentry challenges and their potential influence on repatriates' work performance (Black, 1992; Black et al., 1992b; Gregersen & Stroh, 1997).

4.2.4.3 Children

4.2.4.3.1 Children – empirical data

More than 70% of the interviewed training providers address the reentry problems of the youngest members of the repatriating families. The trainers offer youth reentry programs to children as young as 5. Table 4.5 exemplifies child-support measures provided by the reentry trainers.

Children’s involvement in training
47% - separate session for children
20% - combined session for the entire family with separate modules for children
33% - no involvement of children in the session

Table 4.5: Children’s involvement in reentry training

The majority of training providers, who offer reentry assistance for children, invite an additional trainer, who deals with activities designed for kids. Due to different learning needs of the youngest trainees, activities designed for them substantially differ from those used in adult reentry sessions. In some cases, especially if the returning children are in their late teens, they might be invited to join parents during several modules of the training.

“It is often, you do a family repatriation program and, you know, you cover all the important issues and they like it very much and then they come back and say: ‘well, we have a 14-year-old daughter or son that is really having a very, very hard time at school, cannot make friends, the teachers aren't very helpful’. And then we will provide additional support with the program like that. You know, sending a specialist who will meet with the child and work with the child and maybe over a period of a month or two some counselling and giving them advice on what to do, and how to make friends, and how to deal with their frustrations”.
(17)

“We have a trainer who specializes in working with the children. And they have different material, they are doing games with them and all that, and I think that’s appropriate because child learning and adult learning are two different things and...in one case, where we had teenagers who were... I don’t know, something like 15 years old and 18, I think... They got a separate program but we brought

them into the parents program for a few hours during one part of the program.”
(11)

The trainers stressed that children’s wellbeing is one of the biggest concerns of the returning parents. According to the respondents, these concerns might affect parents’ performance in the workplace. Hence, many trainers work separately with children and additionally support the parents with advice and guidance on making the reentry process a success for all the family members.

“The parents work here and so they are the ones who are feeling guilty and feeling: ‘oh my god what is happening to my child? This child was wonderful overseas and now suddenly they have all of these problems and I feel like there is no communication’ and all of that stuff. So I end up working with the parents to reassure them, to tell them...”
(9)

Depending on the length of the stay abroad and the age of the repatriating children, reentry training might consist of activities and exercises more appropriate to outbound training. This is related to the fact that children who were born abroad or sojourned in their early childhood might not know or not remember the home-country environment. Thus, reentry sessions for younger children will be an introduction to the home-country culture and will resemble expatriation training rather than a reentry intervention.

“For the parents, it’s a repatriation program, but for the children, depending how long they have been expats... it’ll probably be more like expat training.”
(14)

The trainers who do not provide additional assistance to repatriating children note two main reasons for excluding young repatriates from reentry sessions. First, several trainers stress a strictly work-related focus of their programs. Second, several providers admit lack of expertise in kids’ reentry sessions.

To conclude, the majority of training providers offer reentry assistance to returning partners. Reentry child support is still neglected at times. The interviewees point to lack of skills and experience in running children’s programs as a main reason for omitting young returnees in reentry programs. This problem is also more frequently present among independent contractors or small training providers, who do not have sufficient resources or available networks to hire specialized youth trainers.

4.2.4.3.2 Children – theory revisited

Children's reentry is a largely neglected topic within repatriation literature. A number of theories suggest that young returnees might experience even greater challenge with the reentry transition than their returning parents. **Cultural Identity Model** elaborates on the identity changes in the expatriation stage and the salience of those changes upon return. Since the adolescent years are crucial in identity formation, it can be expected that young returnees will undergo profound identity shifts and, consequently, they will experience more difficulties upon reentry. This hypothesis is partially confirmed by research on the relationship between **age** and reentry readjustment. The younger the repatriates, the higher their reentry distress. Therefore children and adolescent repatriates will be among repatriates in potentially highest need for reentry support. Nevertheless, as this research indicates, this returning population often is not included in corporations' reentry support schemes.

Culture Learning Theory highlights the assumption that individuals have the ability to reuse upon repatriation the adaptive skills developed in the outbound phase of international transition. The question then is, to what extent are individuals who expatriated in their very early childhood able to recall their foreign adjustment process. Many youngsters, raised in different locations, cannot consider their arrival to their homeland as a return. Consequently, the youngest repatriates might not have sufficient expatriation experiences to reuse in the reentry stage. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that this repatriating population would be the least prepared for the transition and, it should be offered expatriation support rather than reentry training. Moreover, parents can have a substantial influence on the cultural identity formation of their children. They can contribute substantially to the smooth readjustment of their children by bringing them up in line with both the home and host-country cultures. The repatriation transition of Third Culture Kids¹³ is a relatively new issue in the reentry literature and should be further explored in relation to the training needs that these young individuals have.

4.2.5 Methods

4.2.5.1 Methods – empirical data

Numerous publications on intercultural outbound training activities are available on the market (e.g. Brake & Walker, 1994; Folwer & Mumford, 1995; Kohls & Knight, 1994). At

¹³ Third Culture Kids are defined as individuals who have grown up in a culture different from their parents' culture and have an identity that is rooted in a blend of cultural influences (Pollock & Van Reken, 1999).

the same time, the reentry training field is still largely undeveloped. This gap in the literature has impact on reentry practice, where a structured conversation between trainer and trainee constitutes a basic and most commonly applied approach to conducting a reentry session.

"It's mostly a discussion, you know. Discussion and coaching. It's really asking questions and letting people reflect upon and then come up with answers and then discussing those answers, kind of reflecting on them all. The question of helping them to be aware of what happened and who they are. So we have a manual but it is very... is very short, very brief. So most of the pedagogy is communication and reflection also. So we give them some time to reflect on who they are and what happened. So it's very, in pedagogy, it's very interactive obviously it's very human-to-human. It's a lot of communication and interaction and discussion."

(12)

"I always question the word 'training'. 'Cause a lot of this is coaching quite frankly. It's not really training anybody to do anything. You're really having discussions with them about some issues that could arise and how they can successfully cope with them, you know. And everybody's different. Some people don't really experience a lot of this and some do. So, you know, either the word training... I think coaching is probably more of what we do because we are dealing with families; we deal with sometimes very personal issues."

(2)

"Most of this is... you know... is essentially just a guided process, it is more like coaching rather than training."

(8)

"Open your heart, open your mind and here is the fire, here is the...right environment to come with your frustrations."

(26)

Next to structured discussions, mini-lectures and presentations are most often employed. These working methods are typically utilized in order to exemplify issues such as the stages of reentry transition or updates about developments in the home-country. Guest visits are included in the training program of every fifth trainer. Among the invited guests are: former repatriates, who talk about their strategies for going through the reentry transition; and employees of the home-organization, who elaborate on changes within the firm. Several respondents designed a number of role-playing games and simulations, during which the returning employees have a chance to practice

work-related as well as more generally-focused interpersonal interactions. Among other techniques employed in the reentry sessions, many originated in the cultural awareness, diversity and cross-cultural outbound training. For example, self-assessment tools, case studies, critical incidents, storytelling and journaling are sporadically used throughout the sessions. Almost all of the training materials used in the sessions are designed by the trainers themselves and were not made available to a broader audience.

"I invented them myself, and then, later on, when you also work for other companies, you see that, they have more or less the same things, but you know you learn a lot by going to... by attending classes. I mean by the intercultural education, you know. From there, I started to design my own programs."

(18)

"I have done a lot of research and I... if I, for example, find a model of something that someone had published, I acknowledge, you know, where that came from and all that, but I don't buy anything that is on the market that I use for that. Things I use I design personally and specifically for the people I am working for."

(6)

The trainers, who cooperate with big training conglomerates, are often obliged to use the contractor's manuals. In many cases, trainers need to follow an orientation course about ways in which the manual should be employed. However, due to highly personalized approach towards training's delivery, in most cases the trainers can selectively apply parts of the manuals in ways which seem the most appropriate in a given context.

"You're not completely obliged to follow the outline. They have to have a level of trust in you, the trainer that...they have to have confidence that you are a professional as a trainer and then you know how much to adapt and how much not to adapt from their material. And in both cases, [contractors' names] do understand and expect that you will adapt the program in certain ways. Like in the case of when [contractor's name] went over their manual with me, they said, 'you know, this is something that we consider to be really important. We like to do this in every program' [...] They will emphasize certain parts of the program that they consider to be more important than others. You know like: 'we always like to do this, this and this. We like to do this right at the beginning of the program; you know, we like to do this at the end of the program, that kind of thing. And then you know you, the trainer adapts it."

(11)

In very few cases, the application of the manual's materials is strictly limited by very specific requirements of the contractor.

"Well it depends, I think. With one company, they have a manual and they expect you to use it mostly with some supplementary things. Another company has a very minimal manual and they expect the trainer to use lots and lots of their own materials. And another company even tells you in the initial training of trainers that if you bring in anything that's not in the manual, any of your things, that has to be pre-approved."

(30)

Due to various restrictions and privacy clauses, it was impossible to analyze in detail the differences between the training materials of big intercultural training providers. The trainers, who contract with multiple large training providers, state that differences among the respective training manuals as related to general approaches towards the training delivery rather than to specific themes discussed.

"The [company's name] material I found to be...in general a little bit more... not a very scientific term... but a little more touchy feely."

(11)

"This manual for reentry is so reflective and there's so much writing and thinking."

(28)

"We redevelop the curriculum every 3 or 4 years, just looking at it and with talking to trainers and asking them what they would like to do or what's missing or what's working and what's not working. I think we invented some of it but I think a lot of it... if you could examine the curriculum from let's say 5 different training companies, I bet you would find that it would be very similar. Because some of it comes from the public literature [academic publications] that's developed since the 70's in the intercultural world."

(8)

A conversational methodology of reentry training delivery contributes to the transformation of training into a coaching session. Both group sessions and individual coaching events are highly interactive and contributions from the participants constitute a substantial part of the training agenda. Therefore, the role of the trainer (and his/her ability to ensure full participation of each trainee in the process) is crucial. In addition, the trainers are also responsible for creating an open and secure training environment.

"A good trainer is all important; a good trainer is highly responsive to the participants. He is not married to the agenda, and he comes to the training room with the power using the participants' experiences as a primary resource in the training. That he's able to turn all the time when presented with something that he needs to respond to in the training room that's perhaps somewhat different from what was there in the outline."

(11)

The scarcity of publicly available reentry training materials was a theme reoccurring in all the interviews. With an exception of a few visual teaching aids (videos, for instance), none of the interviewed trainers could point to publicly available resources containing reentry training methods. This indicates a strong need for the development of reentry-specific methods and exercises, and a potential market for visual and other webcast aids for reentry training.

4.2.5.2 Methods – theory revisited

The collected data revealed that, with respect to the training methods, existing practices are remotely related to theoretical developments. Due to the scarcity of publication on reentry training methods, this section will focus on method-related recommendations based on available repatriation theories.

The **Expectations Model** indicates that the methods employed in the training session should prepare the repatriates for the challenges they may encounter upon their return. Videos, case studies, guided visualization exercises and critical incidents could be employed in order to picture potential issues related to repatriation. In addition, guest presentations could contribute greatly to forming accurate expectations about the reentry process among the participating trainees. For example, first hand accounts of reentry difficulties, as reported by former repatriates, could increase trainees' preparedness for the challenges of their own repatriation. This could in turn increase the impact of pre-reentry interventions and minimize the scepticism of the repatriates about potential reentry problems.

Individuals' self-reflection and ability to recognize their identity transformations are at the core of the **Cultural Identity Model**. Self-assessment tools, storytelling and journaling should be considered by the trainers in their attempts to evoke the awareness of changes the repatriates have undergone in the years of sojourn. Individual coaching and structured conversation approach would be advisable in order to elaborate on depth and profundity of uncovered identity changes.

Culture Learning Theory focuses on the behavioural aspects of reentry. Consequently, the training session should create possibilities for identification and practice of appropriate home-country behaviours. Among a variety of training methods role-playing and simulations provide opportunities for the trainees to rehearse the behaviours expected from them upon reentry. These exercises could also be a training ground for practicing more difficult tasks that the repatriates might want to undertake upon return. Approaching one's boss with new job-related aspirations and transferring host-country-specific knowledge to sceptical colleagues are examples of challenges, which could be rehearsed. Such specific simulations are currently run by very few trainers.

A short overview of training methods potentially applicable to different reentry theories reveals an important aspect of the learning process. Kolb (1985) describes a variety of personality-bound learning styles. Following his theoretical framework, Bennett (2007) advises intercultural trainers to design cross-cultural interventions with attention to the preferred learning styles of individuals as well as with consideration for various modes of content delivery and in-training work. This approach is equally valid in reentry. In fact, the above analysis of three main repatriation theories indicates a need for employment of a variety of methods in reentry training.

An analysis of the situational factors related to the delivery of reentry training brings forward two arguments. First, **cultural distance** can have a considerable impact on the methods used in the training. In cases where cultural distance between home and host-country is large, the necessity and possibility for designing simulations, role-plays, case studies and critical incidents exemplifying the issues of cross-cultural reentry transition are greater than in cases where such distance is small. Second, **prior intercultural experience** will be not without importance in choosing appropriate training methods. In cases where such prior reentry experience is 'available', trainers could focus on repatriates' recollections of successful reentry strategies and elaborate on previously encountered reentry problems. More trainee-centred methods could be used, and the need for creating artificial simulations of reentry will be reduced.

Finally, since the sessions are highly personalized, reentry trainers, in their pre-training assessment, should assess participant's learning preferences and tailor the training accordingly.

In summary, the existing theories do not sufficiently guide currently applied training methods. The methodological choice of structured discussion, dominant in the reentry training, seems to be an option dictated by the limited training resources available on the market rather than by careful theoretical considerations.

4.2.6 Topics

4.2.6.1 Topics – empirical data

While providers’ general descriptions of reentry sessions (for example those published on their websites) can look very similar, the sessions themselves can differ dramatically. Interviewed trainers list a broad range of issues covered during their training events. Table 4.6 summarizes the diverse themes discussed in reentry training.

Topics covered in the training session
75% - New skills, knowledge and experiences gained abroad (general)
75% - New skills, knowledge and experiences gained abroad (work)
68% - Interpersonal change
64% - Review of international experiences; closing the old – opening the new
54% - Career planning and goal setting
50% - Family experiences and challenges on return
50% - Personal planning and goal setting
46% - Update on political and social affairs in home-country
39% - Emotional issues of reentry
39% - Setting expectations
36% - Communication strategies/styles – communicating about your international experiences (within the company and in a private setting)
21% - Practical matters of coming back
18% - Networking (including 2 trainers directly supporting the network building)
11% - Traumatic experiences and therapeutic treatment
7% - Update on within company changes
7% - Spouse reentry placement assistance

Table 4.6: Topics covered in reentry training (multiple answers possible)

Among the most often discussed issues are: debriefing international experiences and reviewing newly gained skills, knowledge and attributes. During these assessment sessions the returning individuals learn how to verbalize their new skills and abilities and how to transfer their expertise to the home-country setting. Other commonly discussed areas are: cultural readjustment, interpersonal change and dealing with reverse culture shock.

One of the striking results of the data analysis is the fact that while trainers refer to similar materials, which inspire them in designing sessions, the choices and priorities given to the numerous reentry themes often differ radically among the training providers. One of the biggest thematic controversies is the issue of workplace reentry. A vast number of training providers focus exclusively on cultural and general readjustment issues while others deal only with work related matters. Although all trainers acknowledge that work-related problems constitute a very important theme in the reentry trajectory, almost a quarter of the interviewees argue that their training responsibilities are limited to cultural aspects of repatriation. Consequently, providing job-related coaching should be left to the home-organizations.

"I think it is definitely important to address the challenges of working back home. Understand what is it going to be like working... on your job again, providing you have a job and providing it's established. That is a very important concern I think. Usually, that is where people would like to know a bit more, spend a bit more time."

(12)

"We typically don't spend much time in a repatriation program about the employees work situation, unless he or she has a bad one."

(8)

These differences can be related to the trainers' various educational and career backgrounds. The interculturalists with managerial education or previous international work experience tend to feel more comfortable discussing work-related topics. Trainers who did not work abroad and have no business education often prefer to focus on cultural readjustment. Another reason for such differentiation comes from the particular preferences of the client organization (the sponsor of the training). According to the trainers, the majority of organizations do not have and do not want to have any impact on training's content. However, a few providers reported very specific training assignments they received from the organizations.

"Sometimes in fact, the company is paying for the program as a small token because they have not provided the employee with a position to return to. In that case, it is an outplacement support you know. [...] I can think of a couple of programs, in which the company did pay for the program as part of the outplacement services."

(8)

Thematic composition of reentry training has more controversial issues. One of them is the tension between functional elements of the reentry transition and emotional

aspects of repatriation. To what extent is the training a reflective experience for repatriating individuals and to what degree is it a practically focused session, where repatriates learn about the functional aspects of reentry?

"I think as far as the purpose of the repatriation training goes, it seems to me that one of the important functions of repatriate training is to provide a safe environment for people to reflect on what they've been through and to plan for the future. Because so many people, the whole process [...] whether its expatriation or repatriation, is a very busy thing. We need to pay attention to a lot of practical details and people are so caught up and all that, that quite often they are not given an opportunity to just sit and think about what they're going through or have gone through or going to go through."

(11)

"If they are moving to a new community [...] if you have a profession we might make some introductions so as an example we had an attorney and his spouse, and both were lawyers. He was [nationality], she was [nationality] but she has spent about 12 years in [country's name] and so we introduced both of them both to the [countries' names] Chamber of Commerce and also to a number of lawyers here in the [country's name]. [...] So we started to build up their network."

(17)

The most common way of providing the trainees with tangible and directly applicable training outcomes is goal-setting. More than half of the interviewed providers assist the returning repatriates and their spouses in personal and/or professional goal setting. In addition, the trainers help the repatriates in designing a detailed action plan to achieve these goals.

"Goal setting is another topic that I think is an important part of a repatriation program. And I try to focus on that as well. One of the common denominators of, I think, any good intercultural training is anything that you can do that gives the people a sense of control because they are going through a situation where many things are out of control."

(11)

As reported by the trainers, reentry interventions are highly personalized. Consequently, the majority of trainers conduct a pre-training needs assessment and tailor the trainings agendas accordingly. This happens both in the case of group training and individual sessions.

“So the most important thing for me is to do the full scale needs assessment beforehand. So really asking people, what have your positive moments been since you’ve come home, what has been challenging for you and what would make a day or two, we are going to talk about repatriation, what would make it well? So anchoring the design in the needs and perspective of the participant.”
(29)

“We customize the program based on the individual's needs [...] we do a needs assessment both with an administrative person and then the trainers get involved speaking to the family prior to and sending out a questionnaire.”
(10)

The respondents could not identify many substantial changes they introduced to their training agendas across the years of their reentry training work. The only modification acknowledged by some respondents was caused by an increasingly open access to mass media. Fewer training providers discuss issues related to the contemporary politics and social affairs of the home-country due to unlimited access of travellers to this information. The trainers who still keep this point on their agendas focus on the consequences of these social, economic and political changes on the societies, their culture and worldview.

Furthermore, timing of the training determines its thematic composition. In pre-reentry sessions much attention is given to expectations setting and preparation for reentry transition. In post-reentry delivery the focus is shifted to discussion on arising challenges of repatriation.

In sum, the reentry trainers report a variety of themes discussed in training sessions. Despite the fact that all providers understand the complexity and importance of thorough and multifaceted support, they do make choices that exclude a number of important topics from their sessions. These exclusions are caused by the trainers’ personal preferences, the client’s priorities, or time constraints.

4.2.6.2 Topics – theory revisited

Three main theoretical streams provide interesting insights on the thematic composition of reentry training. The **Expectations Model** suggests that topics related to anticipatory preparation should play a prominent role on the reentry training agenda. The interviewed trainers are aware of the importance of forming accurate expectations in the reentry transition. Accordingly, expectation management sessions take place in all programs delivered prior to reentry. Similar expectation setting modules are organized

also in trainings taking place shortly after the reentry. In the case of trainings delivered several weeks after repatriation, few trainers discuss the discrepancy between trainees' expectations and their factual experiences on reentry. Not

The majority of training providers use the following best known theories to explain sojourners' adjustment phases: **culture shock** and the **W-curve** model. These two models are very effective in providing a simplified explanation of the intercultural transition process. Consequently, the interviewed trainers apply both of them in pre and post-reentry training delivery. In the pre-reentry stage the models are used to portray the forthcoming repatriation process while in the post-reentry stage they are employed as debriefing schemes. Accordingly, while post-reentry sessions cannot prepare individuals for the transition, they can at least help in understanding the processes which the returnees either went or are going through.

Almost 70% of the trainers include interpersonal changes and identity transformation in their training agendas. This development is consistent with recommendations drawn from the **Cultural Identity Model**. In fact, this theoretical stream has the most profound impact on reentry training agendas. Consequently, it is unfortunate that little empirical research related to identity transformation upon reentry is available. The trainers can, however, attempt to explore the general literature on identity changes and adapt it to a repatriation context. Among readings related to identity transformation, the works of Hall (1992), Nagel (1994) and Sussman (2000) provide interesting insights.

The least explored model in reentry training design is the **Culture Learning Theory**. Very few trainers discuss reusing the adaptive skills developed during expatriation in reentry. While limited empirical evidence gives little information about the applicability of the outbound adjustment skills to repatriation, this notion is certainly worth further investigation.

Two models of **modes of reentry** suggest that the repatriates can shape the way in which they approach the reentry process. Both Adler (1981) and Pusch (1998) elaborate on the importance of proactive behaviours in reentry transition. Consequently, reentry training could cover issues related to different responses to repatriation. An analysis of reentry modes could create incentives for the repatriating individuals to influence their own reentry process. One needs to acknowledge that only the pre-reentry interventions have an anticipatory power in achieving this goal.

Several situational factors can be considered relevant in reentry training agenda setting. First, **gender** will have a relatively big influence on the choices of topics discussed during the training. This will be especially crucial in masculine societies (Hofstede, 1994), where

the division of roles among genders is more pronounced and different social norms and behavioural patterns are expected from men and women. Second, the influence of **marital status** (or the informal commitment of partners) on the training design will be substantial. Third, the **age** of the returning individuals is crucial in the agenda setting process. As stressed in the literature, different age cohorts have different reentry concerns. Consequently, young individuals will have different priorities and reentry concerns than older repatriates.

A relatively unaddressed aspect of repatriation is the role of **religion** in intercultural transitions and its place in reentry support measures. A number of researchers stress the valuable role of faith in times of crisis (Hall, 1986; Stone et al., 2003). Consequently, spirituality of returning individuals can be actively utilized in reentry training programs. Two of the interviewed non-profit trainers acknowledge an important role religious considerations play on their training agendas.

Several trainers noted that the need for updates on home-country changes is of less concern today than it used to be. Nevertheless, especially in cases of **lengthy** international sojourn and considerable **cultural distance** of host and home-country locations, these changes and their impact on the society should be debriefed in a reentry session. One of the trainers noted that individuals' knowledge of recent developments within the home-country does not automatically denote that they understand the impact these occurrences have on the society.

Finally, the topics of corporate reentry, **knowledge transfer** and employee **retention**, as well as the place of these issues within the training agendas should be carefully considered. In order to thoroughly examine these subjects, trainers should receive more support from the client organization. Detailed information about the future work of returning employees, and their potential career paths should be provided to the reentry trainers. Current practices in corporate reentry indicate the organization's lack of involvement in the planning and execution of a comprehensive support program for their employees. Without this support, work-related modules of reentry training will not achieve their full potential¹⁴.

4.2.7 Alternative support measures

The reentry support measures available to returning individuals are not limited to traditional training and/or coaching. Examples of several less conventional approaches to reentry programs emerged from the collected data.

¹⁴ This topic will be discussed in more detail in the second part of this dissertation.

The first alternative to one-day reentry sessions is online reentry workshops. These workshops could be offered as interactive tools (the participants get involved in a series of online activities) or as information packages. Within the interviewed group, one trainer had created an online reentry information database and one was attempting to create an interactive software package. The biggest advantage of online systems is their availability (the online materials can be accessed at any time, from any place in the world) and the possibility of selective examination of available material. Lack of feedback possibilities and direct interaction with the trainer are among the biggest limitations of online materials. The limited explanatory power of one-size-fits-all training material is considered by the trainers as another deficiency.

Another service available to repatriates is the on-going telephone coaching. In this form of reentry support face-to-face meetings are replaced by regular telephone contact between the repatriate and the reentry coach. Only one of the interviewees is actively exploring this support measure. Such continuous assistance can start several months prior to the expatriation and encompass also the outbound help. One of the greatest advantages of such on-going support is the direct possibility of addressing newly emerging issues. The disadvantages of telephone coaching include the lack of face-to-face contact and the resulting danger of a rather superficial connection between the repatriate and the coach. The establishment of an open and trust-based relationship between the trainee and the trainer is a fundamental requirement for a successful intercultural intervention (Ptak et al., 1995).

One of the environments largely neglected in intercultural training literature is the non-profit sector. The interviewed non-profit training providers offer a number of traditional reentry workshops, mostly designed in form of group-interventions. These sessions, content-wise, to a great extent resemble reentry training delivered by commercial trainers. More interestingly, next to traditional training sessions, some of the non-profit providers organize informal meetings for the repatriates, where the returning individuals can network and find support from people with similar experiences. Such meetings could be organized separately for different age-groups or individuals repatriating from different geographical areas. One of the organizers of such informal meetings described the birth of idea in the following way:

"I invited people to my home and every time there were about 20, 30 people around, they didn't know each other before. Different ages from 15 up to 40. And everybody was chatting, and happy and everybody told me the same thing: 'It was a big relief to meet other expatriates because now I could tell my stories and we have fun and it didn't feel it was oh oh oh, what a bad...or big problem for you, you were abroad. No, they had understood the good things and the bad things'.

There was real interaction, there was real understanding [...] Since 4 years we say, ok, we organize one day a year... and just see how many people show up and how many people are...happy to be there...and to keep in touch with each other, because there weren't so many people last year but I know now that most of them exchange addresses, stay in touch, and they are really happy that they were there."

(20)

Finally, non-profit organizations could also be involved in designing more unconventional services. For example, the United States Department of State Foreign Service Institute's Transition Centre works together with one of the local NGOs (the Foreign Service Youth Foundation) to design reentry evenings for teenage repatriates:

"And so the kids would have pizza parties in the basements and every week they would rotate to one person's house or another. And we would send one trainer/facilitator; typically it was a graduate student who had been a Foreign Service kid or a third culture kid herself or himself. And actually these facilitators designed and published a book of the activities that they would run for these pizza nights."

In the European context, organizations such as SALTO-YOUTH Resource Centers, which is supported by the European Commission, list on their websites a number of youth intercultural trainers. Many of these young trainers have an extensive intercultural knowledge and relatively long-standing experience in youth training. While none of the interviewed trainers have explored such possibilities, this is an avenue worth further investigation.

The last two modes of alternative reentry support are inspired by reentry literature. Research indicates that many organizations want to provide reentry services internally. An alternative to employing external providers is to educate own repatriates to become reentry trainers. Mendenhall and Stall (2000) describe the successful utilization of the repatriated employees in the coaching and training of future generations of expatriates. In a similar manner, individuals, who successfully went through the reentry transition, could become trainers to those employees, who are about to repatriate or have repatriated recently. External training providers could support the organization in educating their staff members and could provide ongoing reentry counselling.

Another group of alternative support tools is directed at the managers and other employees, who work with the repatriating individuals. Research indicates that several organizations run trainings for host-country nationals who work with expatriates. Accordingly, it might be valuable to develop training directed at employees, who are direct supervisors or colleagues of the recently repatriated employees (Adler 1981,

1991). Such training could contribute to minimizing the xenophobic responses of home-office managers and should play a role in increasing the transfer of knowledge from the host to home-country organization.

A review of reentry literature reveals a lack of data on reentry adjustment for groups other than middle-class individuals. In reentry training practices, the target group is even more restricted and often limited to managerial elite. Consequently, it is vital to explore alternative, cost-effective support measures which would allow assisting individuals, whose companies do not want to cover the high costs of reentry sessions offered by external training providers¹⁵. The above-mentioned alternatives are inexpensive solutions for reentry assistance and deserve broader attention within reentry theory and practice.

4.3 Conclusions

The empirical data presented in this chapter reveal arbitrary, contingent and sometimes even paradoxical connections between reentry theories and training practices. The design and execution of reentry interventions seem very loosely connected to the dominant theoretical streams. Moreover, many of the choices made by the trainers are highly debatable. It can be hypothesized that the contextual aspects of setting up an intervention have a substantial impact on the final design of the training. At the same time, there is no research exploring the process-related aspects of the training design and the interdependencies of the actors involved. Human factors and strategic decisions concerning the reentry training need to be carefully explored in order to understand the often-contradictory outcomes of reentry theories and training practices. While a majority of the available cross-cultural training research is limited to the above-presented data, this dissertation takes a different course. Consequently, in the second part of this dissertation I shall look more closely at the process of developing and implementing reentry training interventions. Understanding the 'procedure' of setting up a repatriation intervention will allow understanding the particular design choices made.

¹⁵ In the USA the current price of a 1-day family reentry training session is between \$700 and \$3000 (the price range depends, among other factors, on the trainer's qualifications and the reputation of their company).

Part 2

5. Actor-Network Theory – overview of the approach

5.1 Introduction

Literature presented in the first part of this dissertation brings together a detailed analysis of different content-related aspects of reentry training. This analysis, conducted in line with the mainstream approaches within intercultural training literature, focuses on normative aspects of training design, clearly separating the content of the intervention from the stages of its creation. But what about the process? Why does reentry training take a particular form? Why do the content-related choices made by trainers so often seem to contradict both commonsensical knowledge on repatriation and theoretical views exposed in the bulk of reentry literature? In the second part of this dissertation, I will employ Actor-Network Theory in my exploration of reentry training phenomenon.

Complexity, contradictions and paradoxes were revealed in an initial analysis of 31 interviews with reentry trainers, as well as available reentry materials, such as websites, training agendas and other publications. This data has been corroborated with accounts collected during participant observation of eight training for trainers events designed for intercultural trainers to improve their training skills, advance their training materials and/or promote their intercultural services. This data is a point of departure for the second part of this dissertation. However, before proceeding with a reflexive, distal analysis of the collected data, this chapter provides an overview of Actor-Network Theory - its logic and main principles. A historical overview of the theory is presented, together with the method's most important terminology. Finally, the last section explains the motivation for applying ANT to this dissertation in addition to an elaboration on the specificities of the application employed in this research.

5.2 ANT – a departure point

Postmodern organizational theorizing pays special attention to issues such as language, representation, subjectivity and power. Through this critical development, postmodern thought provides a sound foundation to question the basic assumptions of conventional, main stream theoretical approaches. However, what the postmodern approach is missing, in its stress on critical and deconstructive aspects of theory, is a sound and solid base on which further theorizing could be developed. Calas and Smircich (1999) address this problem and give an overview of the post postmodern perspectives on organizational theory. According to the authors, these perspectives provide a solid ground for articulating further theoretical developments that are alternative to the main stream. This is achieved by means of addressing the gap between “the text” and “the world” (Calas & Smircich, 1999: 659) through an evidence-based approach. This bridging of academic activity and analyzed reality is not limited to interpreting or criticising the phenomena. It examines ways in which new theories could engage with ‘the world’ and even lead to social activism.

Calas and Smircich present four conceptual approaches, which according to them represent a theoretical future beyond postmodernism: postcolonial analysis; narrative approaches to knowledge; feminist poststructuralist theorizing; and Actor-Network Theory. While each of these approaches emerged as an answer to different, historically-bounded circumstances of knowledge creation, they all share a number of features already present in postmodern writing. Among these features, most importantly, is the attention paid to the relationship between power and knowledge, with special consideration for the interests of those who ‘produce’ this knowledge. In this way, both streams (postmodern and post postmodern) actively engage in the politics of knowledge creation. However, what distinguishes post-postmodern approaches from their precursors is an active engagement in new theorizing, accompanied by ethical debates, directly addressing questions about interests sustained by the newly created theories.

In the presented post postmodern inventory, the ANT method represents one of the most promising theoretical developments; a successor, which through its relational analysis of empirically gathered material provides an interesting alternative to traditional theorizing. While Actor-Network Theory, similarly to other relational streams, focuses its analysis on the creation of artefacts within complex interactions (Hosking et al., 1995), the method takes one step further in its approach to socially constructed reality. By taking epistemic relativism (Knorr-Cetina, 1982) as a starting point, the relationally-oriented ANT method allows tracing adequacy of the knowledge allegations as situationally constructed (Brown, 1992); doing so, without giving primacy to either psychological or sociological explanations. ANT scholars view actors and networks as inseparable entities co-created in process. Neither the inherent psychological traits of

individuals, nor social structures within societies are taken for granted. By neutralizing the often taken-for-granted contextuality and structure, Actor-Network Theory provides a fresh approach to relational, organizational storytelling. In addition, the ANT method provides a comprehensive analytical vocabulary for tracing the emergence of the relations. Meanwhile, ANT does not neglect to pay attention to the various entities involved, and can be said to employ a decidedly process-oriented, proximal outlook, which is ideally suited to the relational perspective guiding the analysis in the second part of this dissertation.

What distinguishes Actor-Network Theory from other sociological lines of inquiry has been summarized by John Law, in his recent attempt to shed light on the development, application and features of the ANT method. Despite ANT's aversion to self-definition, which will become apparent in consecutive parts of this chapter, Law begins by providing a short explanation of the approach:

“Actor-network theory is a disparate family of material-semiotic tools, sensibilities and methods of analysis that treat everything in the social and natural worlds as a continuously generated effect of the webs of relations within which they are located. It assumes that nothing has reality or form outside the enactment of those relations. Its studies explore and characterize the webs and the practices that carry them.”

(Law, 2007: 2).

In other words, the meaning of an object is always defined in relation to other objects (human and non-human) in a complex constellation of interdependencies. Since those assemblages have a temporary character, the ‘realness’ of an object is dependent on its network's stability and durability.

According to Law (2007), four distinguished qualifications are crucial for elaborating on the abovementioned definition. First of all, the application of ANT is always empirically grounded. While theoretical, abstract considerations of Actor-Network Theory are possible, the method can only be properly understood through empirical case-studies exemplifying the approach in practice. Second, what is called Actor-Network Theory is not a theory per se, if by theory we mean an abstract framework subsequently applied to ‘frame’ empirical data. Instead, ANT should be understood as “a toolkit for telling interesting stories” (Law, 2007: 2) about the assemblages of human and non-human elements. ANT does not provide answers about the shapes of reality; rather, it shows how to methodically approach the process of documenting the shapes we find (Latour, 1999). Third, Law stresses that we cannot talk about one, singular Actor-Network

Theory. Instead, we have to look at this construct in its multiplicity, and in relation to many other theoretical streams, such as semiotics or Foucault's notion of power/knowledge. Finally, this diversity leads to the uniqueness of each ANT account. While early ANT focused on stories about the network assemblages and specificities of scientific practices (Callon, 1986a, Latour, 1987), recent publications are much more diverse and discuss the complexity of multiple realities (Callon & Rabeharisoa, 2004; Mol, 2002). Accordingly, ANT's uniqueness manifests itself both from the empirical standpoint, where ANT's writings are empirically grounded in a wide range of accounts, and from a theoretical perspective, where new Actor-Network stories elaborate on different aspects of the ANT construct and enlarge the theoretical repertoire. Consequently, one cannot claim to possess the final, absolute interpretation of the ANT method, at any particular junction, since it remains a theory in the making.

Law (2007) distinguishes two periods in the development of Actor-Network Theory. The first period, from the birth of the method in the late 70's until the mid-90's, is characterised by a number of features listed by the author. To the distinctive elements of early ANT belong: semiotic relationality (which can be defined as interdependence of the elements within assemblages and their mutual co-definition) and the heterogeneity of actors enrolled in precariously aligned networks. This approach is centred on the notions of the processual character of the assemblage and the fragility of the entity under investigation. Moreover, the early ANT highlights the power effects different constellations produce. All of these elements are combined in a descriptive attempt at defining the process of network creation and its maintenance.

Multiple social topologies (Mol & Law, 1994; Law, 2002; Law & Mol, 2001; Law & Singleton, 2005) form the conceptual core of the so-called late ANT approach. ANT distinctive modes of approaching realities; that of networks, regions and fluids, enable researchers to enact a multiplicity of objects as diverse as anaemia (Mol & Law, 1994) and the bush pump (de Laet & Mol, 2000). This multiplicity is a consequence of what has been described as a turn to performativity (Law, 2007). Performative methods attempt to understand the objects in performance. In Actor-Network Theory, "humans and nonhumans perform together to produce effects" (Law & Singleton, 2000: 771). Callon's (1998, 1999) study of markets is a flag-project of the performative turn within ANT. By showing economic markets as enacted into being, rather than existing independently in economical theories, Callon argues that to comprehend the complexity of the markets, we need to look at their enactment. Similarly, in her investigation of atherosclerosis, Mol (2002) goes a step further and shows, how through different enactments, different material realities of the illness are produced¹⁶. Those different material realities could be veins, which appear under the microscope narrowed and calcified, but they can also

¹⁶ Similar argument has been presented by Law in his analysis of an aircraft (Law, 2002)

be blurry x-ray images induced through the application of a radioactive dye, or even terrible pain in the legs of a patient. All of these enactments yield different outcomes. Moreover, through our participation in diverse performing acts, we become involved in issues of power, politics and morality...

But let's take it step by step and set off from where it all started. Let's look back at the different accounts of Actor-Network Theory and the development of the method. A method, which was born in the field of STS (Social and Technology Studies), and which today's multiple applications reach into areas ranging from medicine through biology to organizational studies. The work of Bruno Latour, John Law and Michel Callon - the three fathers of Actor-Network Theory - will be our main guides throughout this journey.

5.3 Science in the making

The historical account of Actor-Network Theory can be traced back to the late 70's and an exciting report on laboratory practices (Latour & Woolgar, 1979). *Laboratory Life: The Social Construction of Scientific Facts* was the first empirical attempt to look at science in the making within, what would later be classified as the ANT method. The ethnographic case presented in the book is based on the observation of a group of researchers made by Bruno Latour in one of the laboratories at the Salk Institute in San Diego, USA. The authors describe the process linked to the creation of scientific facts and the subsequent production of accounts related to that creation. In this monograph, the authors describe ways in which scientific facts are constructed from a chaos. A chaos, because as we discover in this elaborate account of laboratory practices, what is widely assumed to be highly structured, organised, given and logical is in fact, a very challenging process of putting in place a number of disordered observations. As Law (2007) claims, purifying system is crucial for scientific production. This system enables extracting the "facts" from a pool of disordered elements and takes into consideration the elimination of "irrelevant circumstances" (Latour & Woolgar, 1979). Consequently, scientists need to come up with frameworks and structures which allow for the extraction of order out of chaos. These structures are in turn based on selectively chosen themes, which lead to constructing regularity; a pattern strong enough to convince a potential audience of its 'truthfulness'. This process is followed by a number of rhetorical movements and it ends in the materialization of what is considered to be a pure intellectual process:

"The results of the construction of a fact is that it appears unconstructed by anyone; the result of rhetorical persuasion in the agonistic field is that participants are convinced that they have not been convinced, the result of materialisation is that people can swear that material considerations are only

minor components of the “thought process”; the result of the investments of credibility is that participants can claim that economics and beliefs are in no way related to the solidity of science; as to the circumstances, they simply vanish from accounts, being better left to political analysis than to an appreciation of the hard and solid world of facts!”

(Latour & Woolgar, 1979: 240)

An analysis of laboratory practices brought the authors to the conclusion that artefacts (or what one might call reality), which had been considered as the cause of scientific investigation, are in fact their consequences constructed by the researchers. Accordingly, from the stand point of the development of the ANT method, what had been regarded as the construction of scientific facts by Latour and Woolgar became the first empirical account of the performative turn associated with Actor-Network Theory. It is the term “performativity”, which in later publications replaced the label “social construction” used in the late 70’s.

Latour elaborates on the production of scientific knowledge in what is considered to be ANT’s first textbook, *Science in Action* (Latour, 1987). In this publication, the author outlines the differences between looking at science in the making and looking at already established facts, packaged and labelled for social uses. While criticizing the realist approach (applied to analyze the already existing facts), he offers an alternative in the form of the relativist approach - applied to science in action. Relativity, in opposition to absolutism, is interpreted by Latour (2002) as a rejection of an absolute point of reference. Instead, the approach advocates moving between different orientations and measuring the gaps between varieties of points of view. While the publication focuses on analyzing technoscience, a majority of the introduced concepts are relevant for any ANT investigation one might want to undertake. This universality of methods is a consequence of one of the basic ANT assumptions that any investigation should start empirically, without presumptions about the nature and specificity of the phenomena. The book is summarized in *7 Rules of Method and 6 Principles* (Appendix 2) to be applied while studying science in the making. While the set of principles is an open-to-discussion personal review of the empirical experiences collected throughout the years of the author’s academic life, the rules of method are incontestable laws that need to be applied in order to qualify a piece of work to a family of “science, technology and society” (Latour, 1987). In what is officially considered an ANT textbook (Latour, 2005), Latour elaborates in detail on the challenges and principles of analyzing science in the making. He claims that the academic community too often confuses the matters of fact, which are assumed to be a given once and for always, with the matters of concern, which are undergoing constant transformation and their closure is always only temporarily secured by those, in whose interest this definiteness might be. Consequently, an ANT account should always allow tracing the construction of matters

of fact and the mechanisms, which would allow stabilization of these ‘realities’. Tracing Latour’s publications (Latour & Woolgar, 1979; Latour, 1987 & 2005) and their evolution over the almost three decades of the theory’s existence, one can see how ANT developed from looking at technoscience and specific laboratory practices to looking at sociology and universally applicable scientific procedures.

However, on the way through this process, ANT theorists have had to deal with several challenges which have been operating in scientific research practices for centuries.

5.4 Dichotomies and punctualization

One of the first projects ANT scholars undertook was the issue of commonly operating, but highly fallacious dichotomies. On what basis do we divide reality into micro- and macro-objects, inside and outside, cultural and natural? What are the reasons allowing scientists to believe that there are substantially different scales or kinds of phenomena requiring substantially different research inquiries?

To exemplify how ANT theorists dealt with these false dichotomies, I start with one of the most memorable projects in the history of Actor-Network Theory, an empirical case exemplifying the differences in sovereignty patterns of two groups: people and monkeys. Callon and Latour (1981) describe the crucial differences that distinguish our world from that of baboons. While the baboons’ society can only rely on social relations and direct interactions of bodies, people need to associate in their networks different kinds of materials of diverse durability. While monkey society depends on enlisting bodies, human beings are capable of enlisting a great number of robust ‘phenomena’: “bodies, materials, discourses, techniques, feelings, laws, organizations.” (Callon & Latour, 1981: 284). It is, in particular, the durability of the materials, which makes one’s project appear more consistent and stronger in comparison to others’. Consequently, what are commonly considered to be social relations are in fact networks where both social and material elements constantly interact. While baboons can only rely on social skills, and on enrolling other members of their cohort through forming alliances, human beings have a much bigger repertoire of objects, from which to enrol. In this process of heterogeneous engineering, human and non-human pieces are put together in a creation of complex networks (Law & Mol, 1995).

As the number of enrolled associations grows, some of the networks become seemingly coherent, ‘unproblematic’ wholes – black boxes (Law, 1992). The term “black box” appears in one of the earliest ANT writings (Latour & Woolgar, 1979). This term will have become crucial for ANT scholars and will have accompanied them through various

routes the theory has been taking. Bruno Latour explains the origin of the term in the following way:

*"The word **black box** is used by cyberneticians whenever a piece of machinery or a set of commands is too complex. In its place they draw a little box about which they need to know nothing but its input and output."*

(Latour, 1987: 2)

This process of simplification of many associations into a single object has been named by ANT scholars: punctualization (Law, 1992). In the process of punctualization, a network of relations is replaced by a single black box, and it is taken for granted, without a need for further explanation about what elements, in what manner contributed to its wholeness. Closing a box signifies the closing of many controversies, which might have been surrounding the object in question. Consequently, an actor, who manages to punctualize an entity, can, at least temporarily, incorporate it into his/her repertoire of stable recourses and move the efforts to other fields. The more black boxes an actor is able to associate the bigger (or as some might argue, the more powerful) s/he seemingly becomes. Thus, after refuting the social/material dichotomy¹⁷, ANT scholars attack the micro/macro division. It is the concentration of materials and the creation of a more elaborate network of associations that allows micro-actors to be perceived as macro-actors:

"Macro-actors are micro-actors seated on top of many (leaky) black boxes. They are neither larger, nor more complex than micro-actors; on the contrary, they are of the same size."

(Callon & Latour, 1981: 286)

These actors can also themselves become points; black boxes. Consequently, the punctualization process illustrates that an individual/collective division is just an illusory creation of Western social thought. Callon and Law (1997) show how the single point is in fact a composition of heterogeneous associations, and how a composition of heterogeneous associations - of humans and nonhumans - will be perceived as a single entity at certain points. In this way, the authors argue, the Oriental conception of a continuum rather than an opposition between the collective and the individual is an approach rewarding further attention.

The imaginative story of baboon and human assemblies introduces the issue of structures, systems and organizational arrangements as being taken-for-granted macro-actors. However, size and materiality are not the only dichotomy ANT theorists tried to

¹⁷ The cultural/natural dichotomy is elaborated on in detail in Latour's *We have never been modern* (Latour, 1993).

rebut. The story of Pasteur and his laboratory at the Ecole Normale Supérieure became, for Latour, an exemplary case allowing the author to show how not only the micro/macro division, but also a number of other dichotomies taken for granted in social sciences are just deceptive misconceptions (Latour, 1983; Latour, 1988). Following the developments in the life of a scientist, Latour reveals the illusiveness of the inside/outside dualism. By showing a series of displacements during which at some point the inside of the laboratory becomes the outside world and the outside world is turned into a laboratory, Latour shows how false our a priori divisions can be. Pasteur starts by taking the laboratory into the field and trying to analyze anthrax within its 'natural' environment. In the second step of his endeavour, what is considered to be an outside environment is brought by Pasteur into the laboratory, where the bacillus is bred under a range of conditions. In this stage a big scale problem of discovering the vaccination for anthrax is tackled in a small setting of a research venue. However, the process does not end at this point. Only a successful displacement of the small scale experiment to the natural environment will assure the accomplishment of the project, which could only happen through extending the laboratory practices into the field; a field, modified so to resemble the inside of the laboratory. At moments in time, it cannot be anymore determined where the laboratory is located and where the society can be found. Such localization is also irrelevant. What is at issue is the equivalence of the entities - if such equivalence is achieved (for example, through the extension of laboratory practices or the creation of 'scientific' representations of the social) the inside/outside dichotomy can be regarded as a conventional agreement, rather than an objective reality.

However, how to approach our sociological investigation if all the dichotomies are put aside and all the preconceived conceptions are to be ignored? Law and Urry (2004) argue that if we take this *ontological* point into consideration, we have to acknowledge that different research methods will not portray different perspectives on the issue under investigation. Instead, they will produce different realities - and this, according to the authors, has been always the case. Social sciences have partaken in making up the societies. Public opinion (Osborne & Rose, 1999) or market laws (Callon, 1998) are constructs enacted into being through the performative force of social sciences. Consequently, the responsibility of the researcher is enormous. Callon (1986a) outlines three principles which should guide us through this difficult endeavour. The first one is the principle of *free associations*. As shown above, ANT scholars fought to expose the illusiveness of several dichotomies operating for decades in social thought. Consequently, the first principle relates to the abandonment of any a priori distinctions, such as the social vs. the material world, and the rejection of clear-cut boundaries between these two worlds. The second principle, that of *generalized symmetry*, demands from the researcher that conflicting views be explained in the same terms.

Choosing once for a register to be applied, the researcher needs to remain consistent, as opposed to applying different repertoires to different aspects of an investigation. Finally, the *agnosticism* principle indicates a researcher's impartiality towards the investigated actors and their worldviews. These three principles guided development in the first years of the theory's existence, but became negotiable in ANT's later applications.

5.5 The Sociology of Translation

Law (1997), in his comprehensive overview of the ANT method, addresses the connections and the divergences of Actor-Network Theory in research practices. He summarizes a number of features, which could be seen as representing the identifying factors among varieties of Actor-Network theoretical accounts. Law starts the argument by drawing upon the characteristics of an early ANT approach, focused on the notion of a materially heterogeneous network understood as a process rather than as an end-effect. In this view, a network is seen as an emergent pattern of interactions rather than a settled end-product of the latter. Network's elements are not fixed and stable; they are equally capable of acting upon one another, improvising their new roles on the evolving networked 'stage'. Some functions of these elements could be imagined as a 'script', in which different entities are cast in different, 'prescribed' roles, but improvise and change them as they start acting. The sustainability of these networks requires continuous and far from routine 'maintenance' work (Callon, 1986a). A focus on network¹⁸ tactics was characteristic of early ANT. However, as Law (1997) points out, the Actor-Network approach does not have to deal with the centring and sustainability of assemblies. Theoretical developments reflect scholars' growing concern about flexibility and the ability of objects to re-structure and co-evolve. The mobility of all the participants and the transformability of the objects are at the core of late ANT (these features enable the researchers to talk about the *fluidity* of objects). Moreover, late ANT is a diversified and complex construct, whose followers cannot be approached as authors of a singular and coherent narrative. Attempts to impose a degree of uniformity on this school of thought and its community of practice failed¹⁹.

One of the most substantial contributions to Actor-Network Theory was Callon's paper from 1986 in which he names the newly-born approach: the *Sociology of Translation* (Callon 1986: 196). Despite the fact that this name did not receive sufficient recognition

¹⁸ Related to network is also regional topology, as described by Latour (1990) and Law (1986).

¹⁹ Latour's *Reassembling the social. An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (2005) is one of the most recent trials, where one of ANT's founders strives to create a singular, grand narrative of what ANT is and what the rules of its application should be. In my opinion, this manoeuvre can be seen as nothing more than a desperate attempt by one of the theory's fathers to dominate the field, regain eminence and impose One 'correct' reading on this enormously diverse and multiple area of inquiry.

(instead the highly controversial hyphen Actor-Network Theory overshadowed founders' proposition), sentiment to features of translational approach continue to reoccur in the works of ANT scholars. The term "translation" is rendered here as having not only a linguistic origin, but also a geometric one; providing both, equivalence in meaning and movement²⁰.

"Translating interests means at once offering new interpretations of these interests and channelling people in different directions."

(Latour, 1987: 117)

Callon outlines four phases in the sociology of translation "during which the identity of actors, their possibilities of interaction and the margins of manoeuvre are negotiated and delimited" (Callon 1986: 203). Those four phases are as follows: problematisation, interessement, enrolment and mobilization; each of them involving new resources, engaging new strategies and creating new artefacts. In the *problematisation* phase, an actor attempts to define the problem and, through this definition, make him/herself an indispensable or obligatory passage point to the problem's solution. An actor, or an actant²¹, is understood within the ANT method as "something that acts or to which activity is granted by others" (Latour, 1996: 370). Callon outlines several mechanisms through which an actor can problematise reality; he calls them the "forces of problematisation" (Callon, 1980: 198). To start with, an actor needs to define what is relevant to the problem and what can be put aside. Callon refers to this process as creating private "hunting grounds" (Callon, 1980: 206). At this stage, an actor can limit the issues to be discussed in later stages of the problematisation process. At the same time, this process carefully shapes and selectively singles out those problems (and only those) that the proposed solution can, at least potentially, solve. In the phase of *interessement* an actor tries to impose and stabilize the identity of actants that were defined in the problematisation stage. By doing so, s/he tries to enter between the actants and other entities, who would like to define the actants' identities otherwise. This is crucial, since in principle every entity, every actor is constantly participating in the process of "translation" and tries to enforce his/her own agenda. If the phase of interessement is accomplished successfully, the actants enter the phase of *enrolment* in which they accept the roles assigned to them and accept the existence of the obligatory passage point. In the phase of *mobilisation*, the actor turns into the newly created assemblage's spokesman and talks on its behalf. Consequently, in the sociology of translation, we investigate the process in which we no longer face an actor, who is just

²⁰ In geometry, the term translation is related to a movement of an object which changes its position but has no impact on an object's shape or its rotary motion.

²¹ Latour defines an actant as "whoever and whatever is represented" (Latour, 1987: 84).

“Mr/s Anybody” or “Mr/s Nobody”. We face an actor, who has become “Mr/s Manybodies” (Latour, 1987: 78).

“‘Translation’ is a verb which implies transformation and the possibility of equivalence, the possibility that one thing (for example, an actor) may stand for another (for instance a network).”

(Law, 1992: 386)

As stressed by Law (1997), the process of translation is precarious and requires constant maintenance. Even though the actors are being given certain roles to perform in the script-like networks, there is always a possibility that they will not participate in the final performance. The arrangement and the involvement of the actors in the network are therefore temporary. As argued by Latour (2005), stable arrangements – the networks, should not be the only focus of our investigations. Instead, we should give attention to the work, movements and constant changes of the constellations – the work-nets.

5.6 Powerful theory

While Callon (1986a) originally named the new approach: the *Sociology of Translation* and Latour (2005) attempted to rename it: the *Sociology of Association*, Clegg (1989) claims that the *Sociology of Power* is the name which comes closest to resembling the role of the method. In *Frameworks of Power*, Clegg²² suggests that Michel Callon, and other ANT theorists through their sociology of translation managed to develop an approach to the sociology of power. This approach is closer in its core to Machiavelli and his contingent, strategic, local interpretations rather than to the casual, mechanistic sovereignty, commonly attributed to Hobbes (Clegg, 1989: 6). It is also characterized by an empirical stand towards the interests displayed (ANT analysts look at how the networks of interests are produced and sustained) rather than by a moral stand (imputing interests on different groups a priori). Moreover, intentions are irrelevant, since the outcomes and networks of interdependencies might have come about sometimes even accidentally. In the ANT method, interest is a temporary stabilization of a network, happening in a precarious process of enrolment of different actors.

“Without taking sides, without reducing all action to the manifestation of some agencies’ putative intentions or interests, or making it the outcrop of some structure, the approach provides an empirical sociology of power, rather than a moral philosophy. By attending to politically engaged agents seeking to constitute agencies, to constitute interests, to constitute structures, the method seeks to

²² Clegg’s own framework, the *Circuits of Power*, draws heavily on the work of ANT theorists (Clegg, 1989).

map how agents actually do 'translate' phenomena into resources, and resources into organization networks of control, of alliances, of coalition, of antagonism, of interest and of structure."

(Clegg, 1989: 204)

Latour (1986) elaborates in detail on the translation model of power. In this approach, power is considered to be a performative effect rather than a quality possessed by individuals. Power should be seen as an effect rather than as a cause of actions. Consequently, the diffusion model of power (in which a command's success is attributed to the initial impetus given to it by the central source) is replaced by that of translation (in which a command's success is attributed to what the followers decide to do with it). These decisions (about taking on or ignoring the order) are being made by the followers assembled in a chain of interdependencies in the process of translation. Each of the chain's links translates the command in line with its own interests and agenda. Consequently, in analyzing power relations, one should not look at the inherent qualities of individuals, but at ways in which associations between the links in the chain are created and maintained. Latour brings forward the idea of power "in actu" in the following definition:

"What makes a difference between power 'in potentia' and power 'in actu'? The actions of others. Power over something or someone is a composition made by many people – I will call this the 'primary mechanism' – and attributed to one of them – this will be called the 'secondary mechanism'. The amount of power exercised varies not according to the power someone has but to the number of other people who enter into the composition."

(Latour, 1986: 265)

Latour argues that the spread of 'anything' in space and time does not depend on initial 'force' but on consequent translations of the order by the actors enrolled. Consequently, the initial command will undertake numerous transformations and will be displaced with various impetuses – depending on the vigour with which the people in the chain pass it on. As a result, the power effect is temporary and is contingent on the energy attributed to the order by the links in the chain. Moreover, what needs to be also acknowledged is that an exact translation is very rare. The flexibility and plasticity of the command is therefore crucial for the project. The more translations possible, the bigger the number of links enrolled and as a result the higher the chance of the command's endurance.

Law (1991b, 2001) elaborates further on the stability and continuity of power and its asymmetries. According to the author, the obduracy²³ of power is secured by multiplicity and material delegation (Law, 2001). First of all, one can never rely on one, and only one strategy. It is a variety of overlapping strategies and modes of ordering, which contributes to the sustainability of power. If one mode of ordering fails, only alternative strategies can secure the survival of the project. Secondly, it is material delegation, which contributes to sustaining power inequalities. The baboon society can exist with purely social relations. Human beings however, delegate relations of power into more durable materials (Law, 2001: 3). Through the robustness of these materials, power relations are sustained. This sustainability is assured even without physical proximity. Such long-distance robustness can be achieved in a number of ways. For example, Pasteur's laboratory was for Latour a pretext to introduce the theme of inscription devices; devices, such as tables, models, statistical calculations and other readable simplifications of the world, applied routinely by the researchers (Latour, 1983). These devices are, according to the author, scientists' tools to gain strength and enrol more actors in the network of interdependencies. Building on the notion of inscription devices, Latour introduces the concept of *immutable mobiles*; entities, which while keeping unchanged form, can move to different locations (Latour, 1987). In this way, the network of interdependencies can grow geographically, and the power inequalities can spread beyond the locally established networks.

This chapter has thus far introduced the most important tools developed within the ANT method. These tools enable the tracing of associations and trials of imposing power asymmetries. Having been given such a powerful toolbox, what is the role of the researcher throughout the process? What consequences do our social investigations have? What responsibilities do we take? The following section answers some of the questions on the politics of ANT performances.

5.7 Politics of ANT

A powerful theory inevitably brings on the issues of politics. In this sphere, ANT theorists are fully aware of the consequences of performativity in the research process. Cooper and Law (1995) reflect upon the role of social sciences and their contribution to creating "power" and "truth" (Cooper & Law, 1995: 257). Through documented representations of reality scientists contribute to the shaping and reshaping of the world around us. Drawing on accredited academic reliability²⁴, scholars create the 'truths', define the

²³ Obduracy could be understood in this context as extreme persistence.

²⁴ This reliability is a consequence of 'scientific' work and of decisions of networked professionals, rather than an inherent attribute of the field.

‘realities’ and classify them in line with their hidden agendas²⁵. However, as the late-ANT claims, a researcher needs to be aware that each of his/her representations is more than just an epistemological manifest; it is also, or rather above all, an ontological stand (Mol & Law, 1994). Mol and Mesman (1996) argue that no method is innocent. Each of them gives voice to different groups, ideas and beliefs, while silencing other. Different methods contribute to establishing different realities. Consequently, the question is not how to avoid being political, but how to be political consciously. Mol (1999) introduces the concept of “ontological politics” in her description of the multiple realities of anaemia:

“Ontological politics is a composite term. It talks of ontology – which in standard philosophical parlance defines what belongs to the real, the conditions of possibility we live with. If the term ‘ontology’ is combined with that of politics then this suggests that the conditions of possibility are not given. That reality does not precede the mundane practices in which we interact with it, but is rather shaped within these practices.”

(Mol, 1999: 74)

Accordingly, a researcher should look at the political effects different research methods produce. Each story performs work and contributes to making the world (Law & Singleton, 2000: 770). With every book written, every article published, every presentation made and every dissertation defended, we contribute to making some realities more or less real (Law & Urry, 2004). Consequently, while early ANT argued that by closely following the actors, a scientist can avoid taking sides; late ANT accepts researcher’s political relevance and engagement

However, it wasn’t until the third decade of the theory’s existence that the question of morality was raised. Through a pictorial story on the treatment of elephants in the Amboseli National Park in Kenya, Thompson (2002) introduces morality into the world of ANT. Morality is being understood in relation to the processual character of the ANT method. While being politically relevant and actively engaged in creating reality, one might inevitably be forced to leave the world of neutrality and detachment and get ethically involved in enacted realities. If scientific research is more than a passive process of collecting data and presenting it in a carefully designed, neutral form, but is also an active working and reshaping of the objects of investigation, then the responsibility on the side of the researcher–creator is enormous. Despite violating the agnosticism principle, Thompson’s story has been accepted into the ANT repertoire. Another translation of Actor-Network Theory has taken place. This dissertation will continue by exploring, bending and translating the ANT self delineation.

²⁵ For more on classifications and standards check Bowker and Star (1996).

5.8 My ANT

Taking into consideration the complexity of ontological labour related to the creation and maintenance of the object of study, Actor-Network Theory seems to offer a promising research route. This route is characterised by a proximal worldview, multiplicity, development and unceasing construction of objects (Cooper & Law, 1995). As Law and Urry (2004) point out - social inquiry needs to revise its repertoire of methods. Accordingly, I believe that applying ANT to the problems of reentry training offers a convenient chance to extend the traditional lines of inquiry *ANT-wards*. In the present research project, I try to follow up the authors' claim that different methodological choices yield different realities. It is not a matter of epistemology only; the performative shift in social inquiry makes us co-responsible for shaping organizational realities as we investigate them. Social research is productive – it contributes to the making of the world we live in, bringing into existence that, which we attempt to investigate (Law & Urry, 2004). Through the performative shift in understanding our research choices, we are entering the world of ontology, together with its political consequences. Law and Singleton (2000) acknowledge ANT's awareness of political agenda setting behind every description of the world. Therefore, I can do nothing but take responsibility for an enactment of a particular version of reentry training reality and, more generally, for an enactment of a distinctive version of broadly understood organizational practices.

I shall examine the work of Callon, Latour, Law and other representatives of Actor-Network Theory in order to explore the ontological possibilities within the given theoretical lines of inquiry (qualitative, proximal, ANT). Is this approach of inquiry relevant and does it contribute to our understanding of organizational processes more than its research competitors? Analyzing ANT's contribution, I should generate a significant by-product, namely a state-of-the-art, wide-ranging, yet pragmatic, application of Actor-Network Theory approach to the area of organization studies. I will try to perform ANT²⁶ (Law, 1997, 2000) in my own application of the method to the problems of reentry trainings in contemporary organizations. Moreover, in my application, I will attempt to remodel, adapt and carry out an ANT approach suitable and sensitive to an analysis of organizational processes. By applying the initially proposed translation model to the reentry training phenomena I will not only describe and co-perform the reentry training network, as described by Callon (1986a), but I will also attempt to explore the Actor-Network method and enrich it with additional elements helpful in enhancing our understanding of organizational processes.

²⁶ I use the verb "to perform" in two meanings, (1) that of enactment, where my research performs certain reality and (2) that of presenting, where others can look at and view my conception of ANT within organization studies.

Law (1997) provides a description of ANT's developments over the first two decades of the theory's existence and highlights the contradiction of meanings behind the word *translation*. The author stresses that the term "translation" evokes both similarity and difference: similarity, which allows the observer to identify similar features and a notion of the sameness of the translated object; and difference, which manifests itself in reworking and altering the object (and its social and material network) to emerging circumstances. Consequently, Law concludes that each of ANT's applications bears some resemblance to the original theoretical 'matrix', as well as partly constitutes a betrayal of the theory²⁷. I do not expect to break free of this dualism. Following Singleton (1998), I will attempt an application of ANT as a mobile, mutable and ambivalent method. Thus, my translation of ANT will definitely be loaded with disloyalty and divergence. In view of the multiplicity of ANT executions the question arises: what actually is ANT, after all? Law gives an evasive answer:

"[I]f you ask me about this thing called 'actor-network theory', would it be better for me to say that we're dealing with a set of diverse practices instead of a single set of principles? (...) I can say yes, or no. But I'm more interested in diverting the question, in turning it aside, rather than answering it. This is because (or so I want to suggest) it is going to be much more interesting to explore differences than similarities. Much more interesting to trace betrayals in the practice of translation than insist there is a general set of actor-network principles. For this is my point: (...) actor-network theory (...) has passed from one place to another. From one network to another. And it has changed, become diverse."
(Law, 1997: 5)

Consequently, I am aware that this particular 'performance' might not even be classified by some as ANT-ful enough to be included in the family. Nevertheless, I am willing to take this risk and stay true to ANT's self-professed philosophy of having to betray ANT and by doing so, contribute to the ontologizing of the object under scrutiny. Ontologizing, because as Law reminds us:

"[W]e are no longer trying to find good ways of narrating and describing something that was already there. Instead, or in addition, we are in the business of ontology. We are in the business of making our objects of study. Of making realities, and the connections between those realities. Of making the realities that we describe."
(Law, 1997: 10)

²⁷ One of the stories brought forward by Law is an account of infertility treatments in California (Cussins, 1998). Law points out that while traditional ANT focuses on centering, Actor-Network Theory narratives might as well describe the process of disconnecting things from each other.

And while Law (1992) laments that it is only when the system collapse, that we start thinking about its construction, features and implications, I want to undertake a preventative journey. I do not want to collude in the project of black-boxing. Instead, I want to prevent the box from being closed. Or to rephrase it, I want to take a few glimpses before its closure, and by doing so contribute to actors' reconsideration of the box's contents, as well as many other punctualised practices within organizational arrangements. Cross-cultural reentry training will serve as an example of an object which can be performed in one of ANT's distinctive topologies, namely the network spatiality. Pursuing an ANT line of research allows for the production of a different object, a distinct HR practice to that forced upon the reader by main-stream research. Only by performing such precarious, finicky inquiry can we try to get closer to understanding organizational complexity. Consequently, while Latour says that deconstruction is not an aim of ANT (Latour, 2005: 11), but rather it is a process of reassembling, I do not have an ambition to offer a new clearly defined product. Instead, before such new reassembling can take place, the black boxes need to be reopened and their contents investigated. In view of that, my interfering will suggest new ways of 'rebuilding' the object, new ways of reassembling the pieces. These alternative shapes will be far from complete, unambiguous and definitive. As noted by Latour (1986), the success of a project is dependent on consecutive translations of the initial venture made by others. As a result, the following chapter opens the issue under investigation (the reentry training) to be reassembled and provides a number of alternatives for this reassembling to take place.

*"One might represent actor network theory by **performing** it rather than **summarising** it"*
(Law, 1997: 1).

It is time for a performance; a performance of reentry training.

6. Reentry training – the ANT-inspired, proximal perspective

6.1 Introduction

As described in the first part of this dissertation, reentry transition, despite being the topic of an increasingly sophisticated and large body of research literature, in practice does not receive much attention within corporate human resource management. It remains an academic niche, failing to cross the threshold into mature consultancy applications. Consequently, reentry training sessions are an intercultural intervention which is rarely employed in the course of international relocation. Accordingly, introducing and maintaining this HR practice requires a substantial amount of effort on the side of trainers. This work is necessary in order to implement and afterward secure reentry training's legitimate existence within a wide spectrum of international HR practices, such as outbound intercultural training. Following Callon's (1986a) sociology of translation, which was proposed to study the relations of power and interdependence within network, one can attempt to outline how reentry training emerges and is sustained in a certain form.

In this chapter, I will take a closer look at the black box of reentry training. In the ANT vocabulary, reentry training would be described as a compound chain of networks and actors, the existence of which is temporarily taken for granted. However, as we will see, this constructed actor-network reality actually emerges as a result of conflicts of interest and often incompatible priorities within complex sequences of interactions and negotiations. Actor-Network Theory can help us with sketching out the network of actors and allows us taking a closer look at the complexity of relations between them. This network spatiality can be understood as a system, where relationships between different elements of the arrangement are constitutive of that system and "objects are an effect of stable arrays or networks of relations" (Law, 2002: 91). In the case of reentry training, we can provisionally outline three elements that constitute the core of the phenomena under investigation: the repatriates (trainees), the human resource

managers responsible for mobility programs within an organization, and the reentry trainers.

Following Callon's framework of the sociology of translation, I will look at the consecutive stages of reentry training's development and its subsequent maintenance. In doing so, I hope not only to present the dynamics of this particular network, but most importantly, I hope to show the political motives and the complexity of the negotiations integrated in setting up of many outsourced knowledge-intensive endeavours.

6.2 Problematization

Despite the fact that the problem of cross-cultural reentry is described in the literature as significant, organizations and repatriates themselves do not always recognize and do not fully acknowledge the potential challenges related to repatriation. More significantly, HR managers responsible for mobility programs and repatriation, even if able to recognise some of the symptoms of post-return stress, very often do not know how to ease repatriates' discomforts. Therefore, in the *problematization* phase of the sociology of translation, the reentry trainers provide the two groups of actors: the repatriates (potential trainees) and the HR managers (acting on behalf of sponsor-organization) with their own definition of the cross-cultural reentry problem and the remedy, a prospective solution to this challenge. In this initial stage of the sociology of translation, the reentry trainers outline the problems of cross-cultural reentry and the importance of providing appropriate support to returning individuals. These initial definitions of the situation and suggestions for appropriate intercultural repatriation support are coloured by trainers' desire to present themselves and their services as indispensable. The process will be successful only in the case the actors accept the implied indispensability. One has to remember that the initial force is not sufficient to make the statement strong. Neither are the inherent qualities of the statement which would make it appear more real (Latour, 1991). "The machine will work when all the relevant people are convinced" (Latour, 1987: 10).

6.2.1 The reentry issue

Callon outlines several mechanisms, so called "forces of problematization" (Callon, 1980: 198), through which an actor can attempt to problematize the subject matter. To start with, an actor needs to define which parts of the issue should be considered as relevant and which could be put aside. Callon refers to this process as creating private "hunting grounds". In the case of reentry training, the question that needs to be answered is which elements (i.e. psychological, social, professional, and

organizational²⁸) comprise the reentry process. This procedure shapes and selectively singles out the reentry problems to those, and only those, the proposed solution (reentry training) can, at least potentially, solve. These selection mechanisms contribute to what one could call the creation of *doable problems* (Star, 1992: 406). The trainers contribute to the identification and materialization of an issue, in a form, which might have not existed beforehand and which can be “solved” only through the actions of the trainers themselves. Such problem-creation is possible due to the novelty of the issue and the proposed solution, as well as the great inequality of knowledge distribution within the network. The repatriates are in most cases coming back from their first international assignments and do not know what such reentry transition will encompass. Similarly, HR managers, while working with relocating individuals, often have very limited personal experience with international transfers. It is the trainers’ work to ‘impute’ the interests to the potential collaborators (Callon, 1980). Depending on the success of that imputation, the two groups can take one of the following actions: a) accept the problem definition of supposedly experienced trainers and their proposed solution, b) accept the problem definition of supposedly experienced trainers but reject the proposed solution or c) reject the problem definition and, as a consequence, the proposed solution.

In order to limit the possibility of rejection of the initial idea and assure “tagging along” (Callon, 1980: 214) of the groups, several different discourses are employed throughout the reentry training problematization stage. In Actor-Network Theory, discourses can be seen as a set of patterns imputed to the network by the actors. They are dynamic in nature, interact with one another, transform, and even face extinction. The repatriates are approached mainly through two rhetorical frames: 1) a psychological discourse related to readjustment difficulties during the phase labelled ‘reentry shock’, as well as 2) through a personal-growth discourse associated with becoming aware and being able to utilize the experiences and knowledge gained during an international assignment. These two discourses are the most prevalent ones, and in some cases, the only ones employed in the problematization stage. HR managers are to some extent approached through the same rhetorical strategies. However, in their case, the prevailing discursive approach is that of return on investments, increase in productivity, and the retention of networks, skills, and knowledge. These arguments imply the protection of the capital invested in expatriating (and now repatriating) workforce²⁹. The financial line of reasoning seems to be especially powerful:

²⁸ A comprehensive outline of variety of reentry concerns is presented in chapter 3.

²⁹ Other arguments appearing occasionally in the problematization stage are: improving (among the employees) the image of the company and that of international assignments.

"I think if an employer is looking for something that protects their investments, if you look at the average three to five year assignments as being a huge investment for their company - maybe a million dollars or more by the time they send the family back and forth and pay for schools and all of that. If they come back and if there is a statistic that 25% or 40%... leave within the two years of returning then I think it is important to look at how can we protect their investments. So I think if a company understands that, and see it as an opportunity to kind of help people maintain their interest in a company, and if they can have a smooth personal transition that usually gets them a smoother return transition to the workplace, so in a sense protects the employer's investment."

(15)

"When I look at the data that the company is losing employees upon repatriation, the number is rather significant. The turnover for repatriating employees by percentage is much higher than their standard turnover of employees. So for that reason we are always looking to assess our client and its co-savings measurement. And we see [an investment in reentry training] as co-savings."

(10)

"So, when I have been trying to talk to companies about reentry here in [country name], it has been: 'let's do some individual work with your employee and with his or her family. You have just invested up to a million dollars to take them overseas and bring them back and let's spend a couple of thousand dollars just to make sure that they stay here, that they are happy and that they are able to perhaps take these skills and go overseas once again successfully.'"

(23)

Law (1991b: 180) labels such a strategic operation of different arguments – “discursive pluralism”. Such pluralism, on the one hand, might weaken the project. However, on the other hand, it might also create more opportunities for the actors to identify with one or more of the available translations. The ambiguity of the employed discourses allows the trainers to invoke multiple rationales at different moments of the translation process. For example, the latter discursive strategy is not unanimously present in problematization efforts. Some trainers choose to focus on psychological and cultural issues, leaving the organizational politics behind. However, many trainers remain unmindful of the fact that behind the HR support practices, which guide companies towards cross-cultural reentry services, strategic and/or financial interests loom much larger than particular care for an individual. The idealistic vision of a training session being nothing more than psychological and cultural support for the repatriating families is especially widespread among newcomers to the intercultural training industry. This is

related to the fact that a great majority of the trainers enter the professional field of intercultural training having been through cross-cultural transitions themselves. Accordingly, they strongly believe in supporting the individuals with intercultural knowledge and first-hand reentry transition experiences. These individuals become trainers because they have struggled through their own international transitions and now believe that their intercultural knowledge could help other international assignees, their spouses and children.

"I was there [abroad] a good amount of time and really struggled with the repatriation process myself and that was prior to knowing really anything about cross-cultural training. So when I came back [...] I was doing a masters program in intercultural relations with the focus on training and development. [...] I actually started to do some training and really liked it because it sounds like it was kind of encompassing a lot of my background in having done international business, in having worked internationally, and travelled extensively internationally. And also, just my own personal experiences [...] and I can kind of share that, sometimes with people as well. About the steps that it took for me and I know I had to relearn so it's almost like you know when I do the relocation training and help people - it's almost like learning to walk again."

(5)

In fact, novice trainers are so passionate about the intercultural aspect of their work and so convinced about its evident significance that they do not think about the marketability of their services within the corporate context. As a remedy to trainers' lack of experience and understanding of the dynamics of international HR, the intercultural community of practice organizes courses and seminars devoted to marketing and selling strategies of intercultural services. In these sessions, the participants learn how to effectively frame the marketing message in line with the potential interests of the client. Ways of evoking new discourses are taught. Such strategizing is crucial for the success of the project since appropriate rhetorical moves can assure the reader's interest and limit potential objections in advance (Latour, 1987: 52). So what are the priorities intercultural trainers should think about while composing messages addressed to corporate clients? Table 6.1 exemplifies a number of principles extracted from the training for trainers sessions.

Learning key points in training design and negotiation
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Get to know your client- Get to know client’s objectives- Understand your client’s priorities. Demonstrate how what you offer will contribute to achieving your client’s objectives – not your objectives- Business goals have to be embedded in the program- Bring in the ‘value’ for the organization- Be client-oriented and speak the language of the client- There needs to be a dialogue between the client and the trainer. The trainer cannot simply tell the manager what s/he believes the problem is- Don’t be afraid to compromise on your ideal design. Create alternative plans in response to your prospective client’s needs

Table 6.1: Learning key points in training design and negotiation (Source: Group Sessions: 2, 6, 7)

The presented extract illustrates several learning points taught to novice trainers about ways in which to tailor their message to the explicit interests of their potential collaborators. More importantly, the apprentices are shown that the most important requirements and needs to be addressed throughout the promotion phase, as well as to be included in the training design, are those of the organization (the sponsor of the training). As a result, the trainers need to reconcile their romantic ideas of helping individuals with meeting the expectations of the company. In cases where they are able to achieve such a balance (through conscious application of different rhetorical strategies), a comprehensive list of goals, covering both issues and addressing the needs of both target groups has been put together in Table 6.2 (goals for the organization) and Table 6.3 (goals for the repatriate)³⁰.

³⁰ The list has been compiled from an analysis of interview materials, web announcements, and internal files employed by the trainers in their promotional activities.

Goals for the organization
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Retention of the returning employees - Retention of employees' knowledge, skills and networks - Reduction of the time needed for work readjustment - Improvement of employees' productivity by making them identify and utilize their newly gained skills, competencies and knowledge - Enhancement of the image of international assignments - Enhancement of the image of an organization as caring about and looking after its employees - Support for the professional integration of the repatriates - General improvement of employee morale

Table 6.2: Reentry training goals (for the organization)

Goals for the repatriate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Debrief the expatriate experience - Understand and successfully manage the process of cross-cultural reentry - Understand the personal growth of returning individuals - Recognize the changes that have taken place within the home-country - Recognize the changes that have taken place within the home organization - Identify and integrate new skills, knowledge, and expertise gained during the overseas assignment - Identify ways in which those new skills, knowledge, and competencies could be utilized in the workplace - Design specific action plans for personal and professional growth - Identify and prepare for family readjustment challenges

Table 6.3: Reentry training goals (for the employee)

It is clear that indeed two discrete discursive strategies operate throughout the process. Each of them offers a distinctive understanding of the reentry phenomenon and a different interpretation of the proposed solution (Gherardi & Nicolini, 2000). It can be said that reentry training possesses a certain degree of “interpretive flexibility” (Law, 1992: 24). For the trainees, training offers psychological guidance and support, while for the organization, it is an investment decision. Interestingly, in the case of reentry training, the success of the problematization stage often depends on keeping these two rhetorical strategies separate. For example, reference to the financial aspects and retention aims are restricted to the organizational spectators. Such a partition masks the potential conflicts of interest between the actors involved. To be more explicit, conflicts of interest could emerge when an employee expects psychological, cultural and family support from the training session while the organization expects that the session will improve retention, post-return productivity, and knowledge sharing. Such tensions may be exacerbated if the repatriate is thinking about finding a new workplace. These conflicting interests put the training providers in a very difficult position. The trainers, even if not paid directly for increasing productivity and retention rates among the returning employees, often feel at least partially responsible for these outcomes. They are also aware that turnover rates are of utmost importance to profit-seeking, market-driven corporations. While the trainers have virtually no responsibility for employees’ career decisions and potential transition to a new workplace, in practice, they often perceive a relationship between participants’ retention and further training contracts with the hiring organization. Taking into consideration these conflicts of interest, maintaining the separation between these two different rhetorical strategies can limit the potential resistance of the actors and prevent the power constellation from shifting against the architect of the network (the trainer). In sum, the practice of being a trainer involves cautious prevarication between two different discourses during all phases of the sociology of translation.

Finally, a lack of evidence for the effectiveness of reentry training as a support tool is mostly suppressed throughout the problematization stage. While the trainers indicate areas in which the training could assist the prospective client, in fact they have no solid empirical or theoretical evidence which could support their claims³¹.

6.2.2 Network

Providing the description of a problem and the proposed solution is the first part of the problematization stage. Another aspect requiring substantial labour on the trainer’s side

³¹ Neither is there evidence refuting their claims. Lack of research in this area makes it difficult to make any assessment of the offered reentry training.

is defining the identities and characteristics of the actors partaking in network creation. Who are they and what is their relation to the newly defined problem?

In this process, the trainees are mostly being imposed an identity of suffering, misunderstood, and alienated repatriates who are struggling with reentry shock, for which the best remedy would be reentry training. This image is constructed on the base of two sources. Firstly, the trainers might have struggled with the reentry transition themselves and consequently, they project their own repatriate identities onto other returnees. Secondly, as described in Chapter 3, the traditional stream of reentry research portrays the repatriating individuals as weak and hopeless in light of the challenges of reentry. In definitions provided by some trainers, individuals will not be able to repatriate successfully without trainers' support. In other classifications, they will eventually readjust, but this process could run much more smoothly were they to go through reentry training.

The trainers present the HR managers with a number of alternative identities, some more desirable than others. Hence, a manager can "choose" between the identity of a responsible and caring supervisor who supports his/her repatriates and their families in their reentry struggles (by providing a training session), or that of a negligent and ignorant boss, who treats his/her employees as yet another resource. This highly expressive definition is accompanied by another rhetorical move; this time related to the strategic growth of the organization. In this characterization, the trainers define the HR managers and the organization in relation to their knowledge management strategies. A good organization is one which appreciates and utilizes the learning and experiences of international assignees. Consequently, reentry training should be one of the steps in the comprehensive management of organizational knowledge, as it "travels" within an organization.

"Organizations are aware of the importance of a good debriefing and a good reentry program, but in practice we have the impression that they are not very consistent in the debriefing programs. It seems like they feel like additional activities, not as their core business. [...] It is a lack of professionalism with the organizations because these organizations are supposed to be learning organizations and we are not sure that they really want to learn. There is lot of theory and there is a lot of awareness, let's say about being a learning organization but its very hard for the organization to learn from experiences gathered by their people in the field and to include that in their deliberations and considerations on defining the new policies and decisions."

(24)

At the same time, the trainers outline their own identity and interests. Since most of the trainers have themselves been through repatriation and have first-hand experience of the reentry process, they declare genuine interest in helping out both the repatriates and the company. Additionally, they assert their own expertise in repatriation problems and claim to be the only source of help for both groups. In this way, the trainers aim at establishing their position within the newly defined network as an “obligatory passage points” (Callon, 1986a: 205). The problem has been defined, the groups in whose interest it is to find the solution are in place, and now the trainers can claim training’s indispensability. The phase of objectification is probably one of the most time-consuming processes and it can be seen as a procedure running through both the problematization and the interessement stage of the sociology of translation.

As described by Callon (1980), the problematization stage is finalized with a relative singularity and simplicity of the presented world. So while the process of translation recognizes the differences in interests, it ultimately stresses the unity of the actors and their problem solution. Reentry training becomes a unifying factor for the trainers, the repatriates, and the organization.

6.2.3 Training design

The problematization stage contributes to defining both the intercultural reentry phenomenon and also the proposed solution - reentry training. Taking into consideration that the proposed solution needs to be compatible with the previously described problems and interests of the collaborators, one can attempt to identify places where such compatibility is creatively produced (often counter intuitively to existing theories and empirical research on reentry adjustment). As such, we could define trainers’ efforts as an “investment in form” (Star, 1992: 406), where a commitment to the most convenient and likely to be accepted by the company modes of training design might overshadow the functionality and the effectiveness of the sessions. The trainers are committed to a design, which potentially unifies the different interests throughout the network, including those of the trainers themselves. A vast amount of literature related to managing reentry transitions is opportunely excluded if it does not support the reasoning behind the proposed problematization. Moreover, this controversial mode of training design is actively promoted among the newcomers to the field during the training for trainers events organised on a semi-regular basis in the community of practice. So what are the issues which cannot be justified by the theoretical developments but seem to be closely connected to trainers’ problem definition?

Probably the most controversial issue in reentry training design is the timing. While a great majority of the literature defines inadequate expectations as one of the biggest causes of reentry distress, the majority of trainers offer their services in the post-reentry stage of the trajectory. Unprepared repatriates, with a romanticized (and often highly fallacious) picture of the home-coming process, need to ‘suffer’ before support is offered. While some of the trainers created plausible, yet theoretically unsupported explanations, many admit that such a design is the result of very straightforward logistical concerns.

“That is just based on the fact that we are in the United States. Most of the companies don’t send us to say, for example, Germany to begin preparing our clients for coming home to the U.S.”

(28)

If the trainers want to win over the clients, the training better take place where they are located³². This location is not necessarily better for the main participant, the returning individual, or for the quality of the trainers’ services. However, it looks better from the point of expediency and costs of the client – the HR manager, responsible for budget allocation. These cost-saving strategies become even more obvious after encountering those training providers, located in a home-country, whose salaries are not directly related to the number of training sessions conducted:

“We do encourage people or the company to ask about it, to do it, during the last time they are back before they go back for the last term. [...] so we encourage them to go to do it in their last - before their last term. In order that, well... Then the emphasis is more on preparation for reentry. [...] Actually the reentry doesn’t start when you are back here. It already starts maybe two years or a year before you come back ideally.”

(21)

“We should start [reentry support] even before people repatriate. And so what we started doing, was putting everything we could on websites that people can access from anywhere in the world.”

(9)

³² The majority of trainers in the sample, and in the population itself, live and work in the USA. Consequently, the majority of their clients are US-based companies. This is related to the fact that the intercultural training industry is still relatively underdeveloped in other parts of the world. One of the trainers identified the US preoccupation with trainings in the following way: *“Because in America they sell everything [laughs], really sell. In [country name] it is coming in. [...] I mean you can try to, you could find somebody but it's not spoken of very much yet I think... I don't think the market is quite ready. I am ready, but the market isn't.”*

Additionally, considering the lack of knowledge of the reentry transition phenomenon and the lack of anticipation for problems related to repatriation on the side of the returning individuals, the perceived impact of the training is much stronger, once the repatriates are back home and are faced with the difficulties and challenges of reentry. Since, in the pre-reentry stage, the defined problems are purely hypothetical, the trainees might not fully appreciate the value of such training sessions until the reentry issues that arise confront them.

This study has challenged the timing-related inconsistency between the reentry training design and reentry transition research. Specifically, the reentry trainers were asked to explain the difference in training design between the expatriation and repatriation training sessions. Perhaps unsurprisingly, timing preferences were strongly allied to the location of the trainer's base. Moreover, the majority of the US-based reentry trainers felt strongly about the outbound training being delivered prior to expatriation, while repatriation training was thought to be more impactful after the return. However, the US trainers residing outside of the US (but working with US companies sending American citizens on international assignments) felt equally strongly about delivering the outbound session in the host-country and running reentry sessions prior to return.

Timing is not the only controversial issue. The design choices are evidently contingent on the interests of the trainers and that of the companies. Other examples relate to the duration and practicalities of the setup of the training. These decisions are often dictated by the financial resources and time made available by the company. Consequently, the trainers adapt the proposed agenda to what they expect will be accepted by the paying client. Pedagogy follows availability.

At the same time, one can witness several ways in which reentry trainers manage to translate issues into the training design which are important for the repatriating individuals but are potentially irrelevant for the company. A good example is the reentry assistance for returning family members. While the repatriating spouse and children are similarly affected by the reentry transition (as is the returning employee), many companies do not see a need to support family members with reentry training sessions. Therefore, the reentry trainers creatively use the existing literature on family transitions to argue for a full-package of family assistance. As argued by the trainers, such family support will positively affect the employees' performance as well as accelerate the readjustment (hence, addressing the employers' priorities).³³ Accordingly, some trainers suggest that not providing family-wide reentry assistance, even if only in the form of a one-day-long intervention, could in fact be a costly negligence.

³³ For related arguments, see Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

"I strongly believe that families that go through a good repatriation program are probably saving themselves three to six months of time of getting into the system, both at work and in the community and when you equate that to dollars or Euros, you know, you're talking about thousands and thousands if not tens of thousands. So, you know, what you could accomplish in one day can significantly expedite the integration. Having said that, you would ask why a company is not doing it [laughs] and I don't know."
(17)

If successful, the problematization stage ends up with a relatively singular script, where the main roles are identified and the turn of events predefined. The trainers sketch out a rather reductionistic "interest map" (Callon & Law, 1982: 617). They not only define the rules of the game, but most importantly, they create the game itself (Callon & Latour, 1981: 286).

6.3 Interessement

After the tentative definition of the situation has been constructed, the trainers enter the next stage of the sociology of translation. They need to convince the companies and the returning individuals to accept their version of events and attract the two groups to join in the project. In the phase of *interessement*, trainers attempt to enforce and stabilize the identity of the actors they outlined in the problematization stage. They try to enter between the two groups and other interested parties, who would like to define the actors' identities or the problematised issue in a different way. While it is a rather challenging process, in the end, "interessement, like everything else, can be constructed" (Latour, 1983: 146). There are numerous possibilities employed by the trainers at this stage. The marketability of the ideas is what counts (Callon & Law, 1982). The more innovative, persistent, and open the trainer, the higher the chances are that at least some actors adopt the situation as problematised by the trainer.

6.3.1 The organization

Drawing companies' attention to reentry training is one of the most challenging parts of the process. In fact, as a majority of trainers discover in the process of interessement, their project's translation is not that strong. As with baboons, whose collective behaviour is described by Callon and Latour (1981), the trainers need to rely much more on social skills than on durable materials. Moreover, the few durable materials, such as the already mentioned research, are often irrelevant from the HR manager's perspective. Consequently, the trainers desperately ask for more durable units that

could serve as intermediaries in this relationship building process. Among other entities, scientific publications are a kind of intermediary, especially appealing and robust:

"We have some PhD types in the room, so start working on that [researching company's financial benefits of intercultural training] because the rest of us sales types, would really like to be able to go in to [a company] and say: the intercultural impact from a productivity loss is 'x'."

(Group Session 2)

The trainers employ a number of strategic moves to interest the HR managers in the reentry-training project. These manoeuvres aim to disseminate a problematised worldview and tactically spread the previously mentioned rhetorical stratagems. The general interestment strategy is executed through a number of tools created by the trainers. The most general tactics are relatively global and addressed to any potential client. As described in Chapter 3, reentry trainers publish numerous articles related to reentry training and its criticality for carefully planned international HR strategy. While the majority of the articles have limited explanatory power and rely on anecdotal data collected by the trainers throughout the years of their professional activity, these publications seem to be the broadest reaching tools available. Such articles tend to bring forward the description of the problematised issues. The publications are supported by limited examples of empirical accounts – mostly in the form of positive training testimonials (whose functioning will be discussed in detail in a later part of this chapter).

Another set of global tools employed by the majority of trainers are websites. As with articles, websites are also predominantly created to attract HR managers. However, because of the conventionally short style of web-based infomercials, a website's message needs to be concise and selectively focussed on the most appealing aspects of the reentry training services offered. Examples of messages constructed for the HR managers and published in this stage are the two following web-announcement of Berlitz, one of the largest intercultural training providers. In the presented messages, organizational benefits appear to overshadow those addressed to the repatriates.

- 1) *"You can always come home again, but sometimes it's not so easy to readjust. Research shows that 40 percent of all repatriates leave their company within two years of returning home, and they do so either to work for the competition or themselves. Companies failing to recognize the challenges of repatriation risk losing million-dollar investments, as well as the asset of an employee who has become expert in their international business. In many cases, "reverse culture shock" of families and individuals returning home is more severe than their experience abroad. Repatriates worry about fitting in at*

work and being appointed to an appropriate position. Personal concerns can arise, such as feeling disconnected from family and friends. Repatriate children can have anxiety about returning to school and adapting to fast-changing 'kid-culture'. Berlitz presents a solution to these issues in the form of the Berlitz Coming Home program, a two-day seminar that fosters a smoother transition at work and at home. Companies are more frequently realizing the long-term benefits of offering this vital program to employees returning home.”³⁴

- 2) *“Repatriate programs are critical for companies who want to improve their ROI³⁵ after posting an executive overseas. According to recent surveys, twenty five percent of repatriates leave their company within two years upon their return. Forty percent of repatriates indicate dissatisfaction with the use made of their skills and insights when returning to their native country. Integrating the newly gained international skills of a repatriate requires strategic planning.”³⁶*

A more work-intensive, but potentially more successful strategy is human resource management seminars offered, mostly free-of-charge, to HR managers. These seminars, while advertised as educational meetings, in practice are a superb opportunity to spread the previously defined problematization of the situation and create grounds for the intersement process. During these informative sessions, the trainers, in addition to presenting different issues of relevance to HR professionals, in fact, attempt to relate the presented topics to their own services. In this way, a ‘purely’ educational meeting is transformed into a concealed promotional campaign. Two forms of such seminars are common. First, they could be face-to-face meetings in a location arranged by the trainer. Alternately, they could take the form of online sessions where the participants join a virtual conference room.

A number of more direct and personalized tactics may also be employed. Several trainers offer in-company presentations of their services or run trial sessions, during which the HR managers can assess the usefulness and attractiveness of the service. These meetings provide an opportunity for adjusting the proposed training to the needs of the particular company. Hence, while in the problematization stage the trainers defined the aspirations and motives of the potential actors as well as the attributes of the proposed solution, in the intersement stage the project is still open for discussion. The maps of interests can still be reworked. In this stage, once the main problematic ground has been demarcated and the objectification processes accomplished, the trainers move to defining which of the issues defined as problematic are given and do not need to be deliberated upon and which of the aspects are subject to further

³⁴ Source: Berlitz Corporate Programs 2005.

³⁵ Return on Investment.

³⁶ Source: Berlitz Corporate Programs 2008.

problematization. What it means in practice is that reentry trainers spend a considerable amount of time discussing with the actors the minor issues related to exact scheduling, duration, location, and form of the training, while being careful not to revisit the primary relevance of this HR intervention. This brings us back to what was outlined in Chapter 4: that very few HR managers are actually interested in the content-part of the intervention. One might say that at this stage, the relevance of the training has been punctualised (Law, 1992). The designer negotiates with the potential user the form the final product needs to take in order to satisfy the needs of the latter (Akrich, 1992). The final form the reentry training takes will be the product of long discussions and compromises on both sides. These concessions are possible because the trainers enter the field with a multiplicity of strategies (Law, 2001: 4). For example, while they might want to deliver a two-day program, they will generally agree to limit it to a one-day event if that is how much the company is willing to pay for. Additionally, while they would like to deliver training to a returning employee and his or her spouse, they will consent to addressing only the worker if the managers deem family reentry support less relevant. In some cases, there are no limits as to what is negotiable:

"I certainly could consider anything if they pay me for it"
(23)

In majority of the cases, however, the trainers know their limits and will not accept a deal which does not seem to be up to the predefined standards. As we will see in the final stage of the process, this tactic is essential for the long-term success of the process.

"If this is my first time to work with this client and they have got a mindset about design that is not going to destroy the programme, I am going to seize it. I am going to design that programme and through that effort I am going to help win them over on where I think is the next level they should go to in the design."
(Group Session 2)

6.3.2 The trainee

One might think that the interessement of the HR managers and the willingness of the company to pay for the training is more than enough to close the deal. In fact, this is just the beginning. Since none of the companies mandate that their employees to follow a reentry session, the trainers need to attract the repatriates to secure the success of the project. There are various strategies that could be employed in this 'recruitment' process. As in the case of companies' interessement, here also one can distinguish general strategies from more personalized approaches.

In the first group of strategies, we can see a similar pattern to that employed in order to involve the HR managers. First, several trainers attempt to present their problematisations through publications addressed to expatriate communities³⁷. The main aim of these publications is firstly, to signal that reentry transition might be a problematic process and secondly, to inform the returning individuals that reentry training could provide certain support in managing the move. Moreover, as with HR managers, repatriates could also be attracted through web-announcements. Nevertheless, such global strategies addressed to returning individuals are much more sporadic and the majority of trainers' efforts focus on a more personalized approach.

Among the personal strategies employed by trainers, the most customary one is to introduce the problems of repatriation, together with the proposed solution (reentry training), during the outbound stage of the transition. The majority of trainers working in the field of corporate assignments deliver both expatriation and reentry services. While reentry training is fairly uncommon, training sessions prior to expatriation are a well-established practice in international HR. Accordingly, it is mostly during outbound training, when the trainers get a chance to interest the largest number of potential trainees in their repatriation project. Taking into consideration the time lag between the expatriation workshop and reentry training, this tactic does not guarantee success. Nevertheless, such staging of the reentry services might be one of the very few opportunities for the trainers to directly target future repatriates.

"At the end of the training that I do, the regular training, we talk about reentry and I tell them that some companies offer it and if they are interested in that, they should mention that to their company."

(30)

Another form of such personal attention is constant counselling, employed by a growing number of intercultural services providers. In such full-cycle support, the trainers deliver outbound training prior to expatriation and sustain telephone coaching throughout the duration of the assignment. That in turn creates opportunities to inform the returning individuals about the possibility of participation in reentry training. Consequently, after several years of ongoing support, the returning families are more inclined to join the project. Several trainers are involved in a non-formal type of constant counselling and maintain additional personal contacts with the expatriates outside of the officially paid sessions. This practice, while being considered labour-intensive, is in fact assessed by the trainers as being highly effective.

³⁷ For example, portals such as Expatica (www.expatica.com) frequently publish articles on reentry problems.

6.3.3 The researcher?

Websites, forums, presentations – these are some of the tools used in the problematization stage. But not all of them. Specifically, most of the trainers adaptively attempted to enlist into their repertoire of intersement tools the author of this dissertation, a researcher and a PhD candidate from the Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University.³⁸

“Anyway this is terrific. I am so glad you're working on this. I think this is an area of research that is woefully underserved and that stuff that does exist is very old.”
(9)

“I hope your work will do well. Will increase even more the number of companies interested in intercultural training.”
(18)

But, is being interested in the issue of reentry training enough to say that the researcher has been *interested* in a “sociology of translation” sense? Since a successfully accomplished intersement validates the (re)defined problematization (Callon, 1986a: 209), it is up to the readers to decide if the trainers succeeded in their endeavour.

6.4 Enrolment

If the phase of intersement is accomplished successfully, the actors enter the phase of **enrolment** in which the repatriates and the HR managers accept the roles assigned to them and regard the proposed problematization as valid and relevant. The repatriate is convinced that s/he ought to take the training and in some cases s/he even actively enquires about it. The HR manager agrees to the session and covers the costs of training's delivery. However, the enrolment process should not be seen as a one-time endeavour. In the short term, the trainers are interested in single individual training sessions. Each session that takes place can be seen as a success of the problematization and intersement process. However, what really counts is a long-term commitment of the organization – a commitment which potentially ensures an ongoing series of training events. This long-term enrolment of an organization depends on associating irreversible links (Callon & Latour, 1981: 293). These irreversible links take the form of long-term contracts between the organization and the HR department. Such intermediary, in form of literary inscriptions, ensures continuity of trainers' project and defines the

³⁸ Such attempts at enrolling researchers for actor's purposes are not uncommon. For another case of such endeavors with regard to an aircraft project, see Law and Singleton (2000).

relationship between the two entities: a trainer and an organization (Callon, 1991: 134). This relationship ideally would be defined as a full cycle support for the sojourning families and would include obligatory outbound and reentry training or a constant counselling arrangement.

“I think it is a weak link not to provide the return program so if you can get people like [company name] and [company name] to buy a full circle then I think it works because then you have got them. It is in their literature that this program is available to [the repatriates] and then if they have someone like me that is willing to take the time and energy to make the follow up calls. So that is how I generate my most income, you know it is a win-win for both of us: I make money, they make money.”

(15)

To get the company to sign such a deal, the trainers recommend full-cycle support packages. Such offers often include a number of discounts that potentially should convince the HR manager that they clearly are facing a win-win situation, as defined by the trainer. Again, while not all of the trainers are familiar with selling principles, the community of practice offer plenty of advice on what setting up a deal could look like. Networking, learning the art of pricing, and counting in the initial losses are discussed in detail at such training for trainers sessions.³⁹

Price negotiations are in fact the least of the problems enrolling actors might come across. While in most of the cases, reentry training takes place after the return and is paid by the home-organisation, the organisation has a very limited influence on the expatriating employee. Consequently, scheduling of a training session becomes another big obstacle in the finalization of the enrolment process. While the willingness of the repatriate is one of the issues, time constraints often also cause problems.

6.4.1 Resistance

The arrangement and the involvement of the actors in the network are temporary. Seemingly enrolled actors, who accepted the definition of the problem proposed by the reentry trainer as well as their own identities as outlined in the process, are easily subject to altering their opinions and previous agreements and may reject the proposed translation. Accordingly, the above-mentioned stages of the sociology of translation can and probably will meet a multiplicity of resistance strategies. These resistance strategies can be defined as antiprograms competing against the original problematization

³⁹ Adapted from Group Sessions 2, 3, 4, 6, 7.

proposed by the actor (Akrich & Latour, 1992). The simplified definitions imposed by the trainers will continue to exist on condition that there are no other, more complex descriptions undermining the previously defined state of events and renegotiating the assumed-to-be-settled issues. In such case, the previously agreed upon agenda will be rejected and a new problematization will gain dominance (Callon, 1986b). Consequently, not only can the rules of the game still change: the game itself might be still rejected.

The biggest concern for reentry trainers is to create a translation strong enough to convince often clueless and sceptical groups to join in the project. While the initial translation proposed is crucial, it does not mean there are no other obstacles on the way to success. The trainers can go through numerous “trials of strengths” (Latour, 1987: 93) in order to assure the dominance of their own translation. The most significant competition comes from other corporate educators, who might want to enrol the same groups initially approached by the trainer. Efforts to establish an official accreditation for the intercultural trainers, attempted by SIETAR (Society for Intercultural Education, Training and Research - the biggest interdisciplinary network of intercultural professionals) have been so far unsuccessful (Landis et al. 2004, Szkudlarek & Magala, 2008). Consequently, at any point, one might expect that new competitors will try to enter the agonistic field (Latour & Woolgar, 1979). As such, trainers try to build up enough credibility to prevent competitors from imposing their own translation and changing the rules of the game. Among credibility building factors, trainers include the importance of their international experience as expatriates, their educational credentials, their business qualifications and their national/citizen background. The latter one, for example, is often used in order to limit foreign competitors:

“You don’t have credibility [as a foreign trainer]. I have a friend of mine, she is a [foreign] trainer, she has been here for twelve years or so and she knows us very well but she is a [foreign national]. People say what you as a [foreigner] could consult about [country name]. Even though I think she can talk about [country name] as well as me, but the fact that she is a [foreigner] takes the credibility you have.”

(19)

Business qualification is the most important advantage over another group of competitors, who could try to formulate an alternative definition of the problem - the non-profit intercultural training providers. Many representatives of this group not only have a sophisticated education, knowledge base and experience with reentry training, but more importantly, they can offer their services for a fraction of the price charged by corporate training providers. Surprisingly enough, what could be seen as their greatest asset (their inexpensiveness), in the corporate world becomes their greatest weakness, undermining their credibility. The non-profit industry does not sell well in a business

context. In the end, the western world follows James Goldsmith in his belief - if you pay peanuts, you get monkeys.

“They [non-profit training providers] have many courses which are very cheap I think, 50 euro for a whole day I think that’s cheap, anybody can pay. So, they have very good courses but if you try to be commercial then you have to be expensive.”

(20)

6.5 Re-cycling?

Once problematization, interessement and enrolment are accomplished, the trainers achieve, what might have been perceived as their ultimate goal. They become the obligatory passage points for the organizations and the repatriating individuals. The organization pays for the training in order to assure the smooth readjustment of their employees. The repatriate attends the training, hoping that this event will ease his/her reentry transition. However, does this situational enrolment assure long-term success of the project? Will the trainer become the spokesman of the endeavour and speak for hordes of international corporations and masses of repatriates? While s/he might want to be a self-designated spokesman of a crowd (Callon & Latour, 1981: 297), in fact, at this stage of the process, only a one-time participation is secured. The relationship, while strong locally, does not guarantee global, long-term success.

In the phase of **mobilisation**, as described by Callon (1986a, b), the actors turn into the groups’ spokespeople and talk on their behalf. And while the trainers might attempt to become self-appointed spokespeople, their voices are not strong enough. The crowds do not need to follow and the long-term existence of the project is endangered. Moreover, it seems as if their voice alone would never be enough. Rather than speaking for the crowds, they want the crowds to speak for them. The strategy of enrolment, rather than enrolling a crowd of silent participants, in the case of reentry training is aimed at granting voices to the crowds. Or I should rather say – *a voice*, because, as a matter of fact, there is only one message to be told; one discursive strategy to be allowed. A message endorsing the reentry training and praising the work of the training provider.

The achievement of a seemingly “natural order” (Callon, 1986b) in this case does not happen through mobilization. What distinguishes the above-mentioned black-boxing of reentry training from punctualisations of other ‘objects’ described by Actor-Network theorists is its circularity. The actors enrolled and mobilized in the translation process become problematization, interessement and enrolment tools for the next ‘generation’

of repatriates. It is the **re-cycling** of the previously enrolled actors, which assures the long-term survival and the renewal of the translation process and its artefact - reentry training. In the re-cycling phase, the actors share (or in extreme cases even take over) the spokesperson's duties of reiterating the process of translation. The actants are transformed from "enrolment targets" into "enrolment tools", ensuring the continuity of the cycle. Such instrumental and selective re-cycling of actors takes two distinctive forms: an explicit (overt) form and a hidden (covert) mode. Both of these approaches will have different dimensions in relation to the two defined target groups.

6.5.1 Overt re-cycling

Overt re-cycling can be defined as the deliberate participation of actors (HR managers and/or repatriates) in the renewed enrolment process. Previously involved actants actively and voluntarily involve themselves in the enrolment of new participants.

HR managers can be employed in numerous ways in the overt re-cycling process. First of all, they can market the reentry services to their repatriating employees. In light of the difficulties in convincing the individuals to join reentry training sessions, this seems to be a very important role HR managers could play. Secondly, they could advertise particular reentry training services - delivered by a particular reentry training provider to other HR professionals working in the international assignment sector. Such personal recommendations seem to be very influential, especially in the case of relatively novel and unknown services like reentry training. Thirdly, in some cases, HR managers move from one company to another, which would also lead to the dissemination of knowledge of reentry services to the new organization. While those cases are very rare, sustaining good personal relationships with the HR managers is seen by many trainers as crucial in assuring a long-term existence of the project.

"Most of the time, I was through this process of sharing information with people who were leaders in managing expatriate employees. I established with them mutual trust. We would talk about problems they have. I would even go by to see them in different parts of [country name] and help them to try to solve some of the problems, where no fee was involved. I was just their friend and so when they had people that they thought needed assistance they would refer them to me. Even in companies that have been open to helping their repatriates, the repatriates only get this training if a company first of all is willing to provide it and then if the family or the individual is willing to receive it."

(6)

In the case of repatriates who went through a reentry session, their training participation could be perceived as a final point of the sociology of translation process. In fact, their presence in the re-cycling stage is the most important element of the endeavour. In the case of reentry training, word of mouth seems to be still one of the most successful promotional strategies.

“What we found was that initially people didn't want to do it, do the repatriation training because they had heard from other people that it wasn't worth the trouble. We weren't doing the training at the time, other companies were. Once we started doing it then the word spread within the expatriate community that it was a very valuable experience and then expatriates recommended it to each other so in the initial period only about 10% of the companies who were offered it accepted it. And by the time we were done, we were up to about 80-85% accepting it, the program.”

(17)

The importance of repatriates' testimonials is also acknowledged in relation to HR managers. After a successful training session, the trainers hope that the individuals will recommend that the HR managers provide reentry services to other returning assignees. These overt re-cycling strategies are closely related to what has been described earlier as trainers' care for high standard of trainings they deliver. Only high quality services will get personal recommendations from the trainees and the HR managers.

6.5.2 Covert re-cycling

Covert re-cycling can be described as the unintentional participation of the actors (HR managers and/or repatriates) in the re-cycling process. Such covert re-cycling occurs when actors' representations are being reprocessed by the trainers into new enrolment tools. Cooper (1992: 203) defines representation as that which “reproduces the events and objects of the world in a curtailed and miniaturized form so that they can be more easily engaged by mind and body”. Representation translates a potentially complex and difficult object into a form that facilitates gaining control. In the re-cycling process, the trainers create two forms of representation, which by simplifying the world, bring (in some cases undeserved) credibility to their work and help in gaining control over the creation and the functioning of the network. These representations are actively manoeuvred into the subsequent promotional strategies set up by the trainers. They are the (im)mutable mobiles (Latour, 1987), which enable network's expansion.

In case of organizations, covert re-cycling relates to including the name of the organization on the trainer's clients testimonial list (published on the website or

incorporated in other promotional materials). The bigger and more eminent the client, the more credible the trainers' work seems. While potentially the trainer might have worked with only one individual within a particular organization, who additionally might have not been pleased with the services provided, the future readers will never find that out. Regardless, the representation of the organization adds credibility to the reentry project and provides credentials to the training provider. Consequently, such a recycling move can become a very powerful enrolment tool, especially in the context of gaining the attention of other organizations struggling with repatriation of international assignees.

When it comes to the training participants, their experiences with the intervention (as reported in evaluation forms) become new first-hand accounts of the quality of the training. These evaluation statements of a few participants are used in subsequent problematization and interestment attempts, and imply benefits 'guaranteed' to all repatriates (potential trainees). In this way, the trainees (embedded through newly created representations) are utilized as new enrolment tools. Not surprisingly, the choice of representations is not accidental. One of the trainers described his promotional strategy in the following way:

"With the evaluation forms you can prove whatever you want. I have a few evaluations with only fives [the maximum score]. Those I always take with me, because I want to sell my product."

(Group Session 1)

In fact, only one of the trainers admitted conducting systematic long-term evaluations of the training sessions. It is obvious then that the impact of the training can be mostly regarded as highly speculative. In fact, it can be hypothesized that situational factors (such as delivering the training in the post-reentry stage) can have a substantial impact on the short-term evaluation of the training event⁴⁰.

"Everyone, almost everyone at the end of the program smiles. Because everybody is happy at the end of the program, but most people at least in their initial reactions find it very valuable. And how they think about it six months later, I don't know. We have never tried to do a long term follow up"

(8)

⁴⁰ As several trainers admitted, the trainees seem to appreciate the training more, when they are already struggling with reentry issues. In those cases the training session provides a number of solutions that the repatriates were already searching for. Further investigation is needed in order to estimate if pre-reentry training delivery could prevent those problems from occurring in the first place, consequently leading to enhanced long-term effects.

The manipulated representations of the repatriates should be regarded as nothing more than:

“Happy sheets at the end of the seminar.”

(25)

Callon (1986a) talks about the precocious maintenance of the network. By bringing in the notion of re-cycling, I show what form the sustainability and maintenance of a network can take. Such an extension of Callon’s framework sheds a new light on the function of enrolled actants in reinforcing organizational ordering. It is not only the spokesperson, who speaks for others groups. There are other groups, who literally speak for the spokesperson. And as presented above, those masses convey a message often controlled by the trainer. Related to that are also ethical consequences linked to (especially in case of unintentional participation) re-cycling processes.

6.6 The politics of reentry training

Among the authors concerned with the politics of our artefacts, Annemarie Mol (1999) raises the vital question of the political choices surrounding us. Taking into consideration the unequal distribution of information throughout the network, many of the choices made can be regarded as highly controversial. The actors, who partake in the creation of a network, do so, as described in this chapter, for various reasons, each of the groups bringing different (often hidden) agendas with them. Potentially, we can assume the possibility of conflicts of interest between different parties involved. What are the ethical aspects occurring at the intersection of these diverse interests? What are the politics behind reentry training? What sort of political ontologizing are we looking at? Which of the new objects and relationships will be naturalized? Naturalized, because we have to remember that many of the choices made by the trainers will impact upon the distribution of responsibilities throughout the network; they will have “political strength” (Akrich, 1992: 222).

6.6.1 The Organization

A responsible, caring organization has very limited choices when faced with the problematization proposed by the trainers. If they do not accept, or at least attempt at negotiating the proposed definition of the situation, they risk being trapped in an image of an uncaring institution, which is not concerned about the wellbeing of its employees (1), and/or a short-sighted, negligent organization which does not care about the long-term strategy and knowledge management of the firm (2). This process of defining and

imposing identities could be perceived as controlled autonomy (Callon & Rabeharisoa, 2004). The organization can make a decision, but this decision will be limited by the choices defined throughout the network and the problematization outlined by the trainers. Consequently, the possibilities of negotiation are limited, since there are no available materials, which would indicate to what extent, if to any at all, the reentry training can be valuable for the organization and helpful for the repatriating individuals. Accordingly, the HR managers instead of asking about the effectiveness of the training should probably first attempt at answering a question posed by Mol (1999): “what are the effects that we should be seeking?”. Taking into consideration this dilemma, this research shows that often, the effects sought, are highly controversial. Is the ultimate goal the repatriate’s well-being or is it rather improved performance, staff retention or covering of often abysmal reentry management? While those two do not need to stand in opposition to one another, in practice, they often will.

“Often the training is booked for the wrong reason almost. So it’s not necessarily always... the thinking behind isn’t always: ‘yes, we are going to help these people [repatriates] and keep them’. It’s often, either we made a huge mess when we send these people out and let’s try and keep them happy now. Or we know that there are very unhappy and lets see if external training can provide a solution or at least delay their anger”
(14)

6.6.2 The Repatriate

Who is a trainee in the sociology of the translation process? In the majority of proposed translations s/he is a lost, vulnerable and helpless individual struggling with the reentry transition. In other recently emerging translations⁴¹, s/he is a proactive job seeker, attracted by competitive job offers and stimulated by professional growth opportunities. In practice however, the trainee will usually be a top-level executive, or so called high-potential, who is thought to be worth the costly investment. With a one-on-one training design only a very selected group of returning individuals get a chance to follow the training. A great majority of repatriating employees and their families are excluded as not “worthy” of such a pricey investment. And while the group sessions were, according to many interviewed trainers, very successful and efficient, the individual coaching seems to dominate the intercultural training industry approach. Reentry training becomes an elite event. The previously defined position of the trainee undergoes a transformation. From being a victim of a reentry transition, the repatriate becomes an out of the ordinary employee worth the financial investment.

⁴¹ This new kind of translation refers to what have been described in chapter 3 as boundaryless/protean careers.

"With executives who are really pressed for time, when you have such a large group you have to spend a lot of time and you have to use lot of PowerPoints and it's simply much less personal. And since you would be charging several thousand dollars per head, they want a much more personalized service."

(23)

"It's really not so much the family that makes the decision. It's actually the company that is providing that service for the family to bring them back. I'm that part of their relocation package, if you will, and I noticed that the higher up they are [laughs] in the company, in other words if they are top executives, the HR people will budget that type of training for them."

(2)

Furthermore, the majority of those repatriates, who get to participate in reentry training, are mostly given such a possibility, when preclusion is not anymore an option – we are looking at diminishing reentry distress, rather than preventing it. The re-entering individuals need to suffer.

"The repatriates are having a hard time...which is for me the most challenging training because you have people that are really having problems and you give them, you know, all the tools to be able to survive and it's really fascinating and they love it."

(19)

This suffering is detectable in different forms; post-reentry training delivery being probably the most straightforward pattern. But not the only one. Some suffering instances take a distinctively different form. For example, even despite relative dissatisfaction with post-return employment, the repatriates are encouraged to restrain from taking any sudden decisions and remain in the organization. The suffering then might have very different dimensions...

"I think it is in your best interest to give it at least a year to a year and a half before you leave. Unless you are totally unhappy. Because I think sometimes, given that sometimes people come back... before a job opens up, that sometimes it takes some over a year to a year and a half before they are in a position that is going to totally leverage their experience."

(15)

Encouraging repatriates to maintain their existing employment arrangements is a result of previously described covert re-cycling when trainings' long-term prospects depend on

post-reentry retention rates. So, while officially few trainers guarantee employee retention, many reentry training providers are implicitly aware that their work will be evaluated on the basis of employee turnover rates.

6.6.3 The Trainer

The trainer, the designer, the master of the process: how does s/he manage to oscillate between the different needs and expectations? In the end, s/he often finds him/herself between conflicting interests.

"Because I am not in a position as a trainer to say too many negative things about my client which is [the repatriate's] company you see [laughs]. So I am kind of in the middle, squeezed in the middle."

(27)

These manoeuvres are not that easy. Ultimately, the trainer can hardly ever assure the full accomplishment of all the negotiated goals of the training session and all the points of interest for the organization and the repatriate. Consequently, the trainer needs to find a way to exist in this complex and unpredictable environment. How should s/he navigate between these conflicting interests? Empirical evidence provides us with an answer. Let's look at one of the most controversial issues in training's delivery. What if the repatriate wants to leave, while the organization desperately wants to keep him or her? How can one ethically tackle such cases of conflict? In fact, there are several options.

Some trainers limit the work-related aspects of a reentry program and consequently try to avoid touching upon conflicting themes:

"We typically don't spend much time in a repatriation program about the employees work situation unless he or she has a bad one. And if that's the case then there is already no loyalty to the company. Sometimes in fact the company is paying for the program as a small token because they have not provided the employee with a position to return to."

(8)

Others go as far as to hide from the repatriate the actual reasons why the reentry session has been paid for by the organization:

"What happens is for these particular cases very often it hides another issue, which is completely different [from cultural readjustment]. Which is: 'we were

very worried about this person, whether we're going to lose his skills. Could you do something so that he stays on?' So officially we say it is to help you to prepare for counter culture shock and in fact it turns out to be personal development and coaching to help this person to figure out where he stands and where he is in the company and in his career etc."

(13)

Still others report to the organization potential signs of employee's disloyalty and willingness to resign:

*"If there is this big problem [of an employee wanting to quit] that we have noticed during the training, we need to report it to the company, and then it is up to them to do whatever they want."*⁴²

(12)

Many however, find their way out, trying to find a compromise between the company's requirements and the trainee's expectations.

"What I try to do is to show people how the organization doesn't know how to use them to make them happy.[...] I think in most companies there is a possibility for you to be happy but the company doesn't know how to make you happy so you have to make yourself happy. And so I talk about how you can... find opportunities to continue to grow professionally and make use of the new skills, knowledge, attitudes you have."

(7)

"Usually what I do is try to get them clear on the essence of that [leave]. So let's not focus on you being somewhere else, let's focus on what are the attributes of the environment you want to be working in. So then leaving is still a possibility but we might also explore what we have to change in your current workplace for you to get there."

(29)

Sometimes we role-play situations where people are actually going to go to their new boss and say: 'look, I want something different. This is not going to work like this. I'd like to stay with the company but what can you offer me?'

(14)

⁴² In a great majority of the cases, the training sessions are fully confidential and the trainers do not report to the organization.

These different moves are possible because the trainers enter this antagonistic field with their own (hidden) agendas. These agendas are concerned with reentry training being delivered by a particular trainer, at a particular time, and in a particular form. Consequently, rhetorical movements and manoeuvring strategies will be in place, in ways presented in this dissertation or in other manners.

7. Reflections

- Reopening the box of reentry training

7.1 Introduction

In the first chapter of this dissertation, I posed a question about the nature of reentry training. What are the features of this HR practice? What does it encompass? As argued by Bijker and Law (1992), we tend to take our artefacts for granted. We do not stop in order to ponder the reasons for various design choices that give shape to objects surrounding us. According to the authors, this lack of curiosity is a strategic move. While we encounter every day a tremendous amount of events, stumble upon masses of objects and come across stacks of everyday challenges, we have little time left to contemplate why things are the way they are. But, in fact, they could have been different...

Part 1 of this dissertation exemplified controversies surrounding the content of reentry training. This analysis highlighted the scarcity of empirical research about reentry training for intercultural sojourners. A comparison between existing reentry training practices and available repatriation writings exemplified the controversial selectivity in theory application. Successful outcomes could have been used to justify trainers' choices. However, no systematic evaluations of these interventions are currently taking place.

The first part of this research project also illuminated another dilemma. This disconcerting matter relates to scholars' preoccupation with their own repertoire of approaches and sources of information, which, in turn, is linked to the limited connection between academic research and the world of practitioners. These issues hinder our understanding of the phenomenon in question. Researchers, with little access to the world of practitioners, produce scientific accounts of limited applied value. As a result, the trainers have few scholarly materials on which to base their practices, and instead are forced to rely on and popularize accounts of their own work. These accounts, due to their unpretentious appeal and wide availability, dominate the field.

Building on these narrow foundations, self-perpetuating system of questionable design gains prominence and the gap between rigorous empirics and practice widens.

In Part 2, I made an attempt to show a way out of this vicious circle. The implicit solution was tackled in a twofold manner. On an empirical, local scale, I looked at the processual aspects of reentry training setup and the design choices resulting from the process itself. This analysis not only shed light on controversies raised in the first part of this dissertation, but more importantly, it revealed several issues which are not traditionally addressed in the extant research, but have a profound impact on training design. Among these were actors' manoeuvres amongst different interdependent, but often conflicting interests and the continuous negotiation and transformation of the research object. Moreover, I showed the political aspects of this particular HR intervention and exposed the 'hidden' side of setting up of HR practices, such as reentry training.

More broadly, Part 2 of this research constituted an attempt to illuminate a promising avenue in management research, one which enriches our understanding of the investigated themes and discloses the mostly covert aspects of management in organizations. By applying Actor-Network Theory to reentry training, I aimed to achieve two goals. First of all, I wanted to show the usefulness of the ANT framework for an analysis of organizational processes and promote this analytical tool within management research. Secondly, using this novel application, I aspired to challenge the dominant line of inquiry within modern management research. By bringing in a more reflexive tool (Actor-Network Theory) to an analysis of an artefact (reentry training) I wanted to show the added value of this greatly neglected and relatively underrated research stream.

The following pages provide the reader with a number of discussion points, thoughts and considerations which arose in the writing of this compound dissertation. Latour (2005) argues that a good description does not need an explanation. Consequently, I will not attempt to explain my research and its findings. While some might call this section 'concluding remarks', I prefer to call the following pages 'a reflection'. Not only does this section review my own reflections on more than three years of research, but more importantly, I hope to provoke reflections from the reader on reentry training, the politics of HRM and the utility of Actor-Network Theory in researching organizations and management practices. After a number of general and theoretical reflections, I will proceed with explicating the managerial relevance of this dissertation and suggest directions for further research.

7.2 Practical reflections

The following paragraphs return to the most important issues raised in this dissertation:

- the complexity and temporality of organizational ordering
- the performativity of a research project
- the ethical and political aspects of our artefacts (whether they are HR interventions or PhD dissertations).

In light of the conclusions reached in Part 1 of this dissertation, one could argue that current design choices are rather controversial and do not have sufficient theoretical support. After Part 2 of this research project, one could reason that these inconsistencies are closely related to the process of setting up this HR intervention and the different configurations between actors involved, which impact upon the final artefact. As argued by Law (1997: 6), “ordering is momentary”. There is no need to assemble things as a coherent whole, since every configuration of actors has a temporary character. Consequently, while trainers’ accounts might be perceived as inconsistent, instead they should be looked at from a momentary-alignment-of-interests perspective (or as an effort to achieve such an alignment). In search for universal truths, management researchers often neglect the situational aspects of the research object. Distal thinking wins over the proximal approach (Cooper and Law, 1995). In this thesis, I argue that the exclusion of precariously mediated, provisional networks leads to heavily incomplete accounts of reality or might result in misrepresentations of the object of study.

The reality of managing organizational interactions in a changing context is complex. Organizational processes are multifaceted, non-sequential and convoluted. It is the aspect of decentring which plays a crucial role in understanding this complexity, because what seems to be controversial and inconsistent could be defined as “ontological choreography” (Law, 1997 - based on the work of Cussins, 1996). The performed realities take a certain shape at a particular point in time and within specific circumstances. And while we search for similar patterns and try to systematise individual occurrences, the ordering is always only temporary. At other points in time and within other circumstances, reality might assume a distinctively different pattern. In my opinion Actor-Network Theory captures the complexity and disorderliness of reentry training. In particular, it highlights the provisional, negotiated agreements about the shape of the reality.

The realities produced are never neutral. Bijker and Law (1992) argue:

"Our technologies mirror our societies. They reproduce and embody the complex interplay of professional, technical, economic and political factors".
(Bijker & Law, 1992: 3)

I want to take this statement and, while placing it in the context of this dissertation, broaden it. Our artefacts and practices reflect our societies. However, they also perform different realities. They contribute to the establishment and naturalization of certain social relations (Akrich, 1992). Accordingly, the reality we are exploring here has several potentially troublesome points that I believe should not be taken for granted.

Firstly, I would like to draw attention to the issue of politics and ethics within the observed network. The investigated HR intervention contributes to establishing certain social relations. Within the researched network, the repatriate does not have much control over the process of resource allocation; it is the company which sponsors the training and often has the final say about its content. Consequently, the priorities of the company might, and as the data analysis shows often will, overpower those of the returning individual. This in turn raises a question about the future developments of the intercultural training industry – for whom is training organized? Sophisticated cross-cultural management toolkits provided by the intercultural trainers have a valuable function - they can contribute to more effective cross-cultural interactions and produce desired outcomes, such as higher productivity or profits (Szkudlarek & Magala, 2008). As Bennett (2005: 13) puts it: they may bring about a higher "return on investment of resources expended on intercultural communication". But who benefits? Perhaps it is time to examine the ethical aspects of such intercultural interactions more closely.

Secondly, we look at the growing disparities in access to knowledge. Which employees have the opportunity to benefit from this fairly expensive reentry support? Do they need reentry support more than other returnees? Do they potentially suffer more reentry distress than other repatriates? Or maybe they are chosen because of their greater importance to the organization. This issue should be of utmost concern to the HR officers in internationally operating businesses and to the intercultural trainers who deliver programs to international sojourners. Hence, I argue that there is a need for developing wide-reaching and easily accessible HR support practices to employees at all levels within the organization. Furthermore, such practices should become a norm in both, Western and non-Western organizations.

The abovementioned issues bring us to a third point, namely the role of trainers within the process. The trainers are placed in a position where their interests and priorities can differ substantially from those of their clients. Consequently, the ethics of training and the moral standing of the trainers acquire new significance in the process; a process, which is multifaceted, non-sequential and often full of conflicting concerns. What kinds

of roles do the trainers take on? Whose priorities should they primarily address⁴³? Should we see the trainers as instrumental professionals, who, in the pursuit of money, bend their moral standards to given circumstances and are even willing to go so far as to manipulate unaware, naïve repatriates⁴⁴? Or maybe we are faced with a group of motivated, passionate and warm-hearted people who are trying to survive in the ruthless, profit-driven world of business? Perhaps we could interpret the work of intercultural trainers within a framework of institutional entrepreneurship. Institutional entrepreneurs leverage existing resources and learn to operate within existing frameworks in order to bring about new ideas and initiatives (such as reentry training), which according to them are lacking within the existing structures (DiMaggio, 1988; Fligstein, 1997; Rao, Morrill, & Zald, 2000). Whichever of the options we tend to be in agreement with, we are looking at a phenomenon which is also intriguing for other reasons. By observing closely the work of trainers, we are witnessing a dynamic in which the servant (the trainer) at points is more ‘powerful’ than the master (the corporate client). We depart from traditionally defined social relationships and witness the emergence of different dynamics. These dynamics are situational in nature and go against the restricted array of sociological categories (Callon, 1986b). Once again we are showing that power is not a matter of a priori distinctions, nor is it merely determined by social structures; rather it is the outcome of a negotiated process of translation and the alignment of interests.

Finally, one more issues needs to be addressed. In this research project, I have tried to perform a detailed content-related and processual deconstruction. Through such an analysis, I point out in what ways, through the process of translation, new orders of causality are generated (Akrich, 1992) and a seemingly “natural” order is achieved (Callon, 1986b). But what kind of reality is projected throughout the process? In Chapter 5 of this dissertation, I introduced the notion of the performative effects of our actions. We are looking back at the ontological politics (Mol, 1999). What is the reentry training event we are producing? What reentry training will this dissertation make more real? My main goal is not to reopen one black box in order to close another. Rather, the aim is the de-composition of existing practises, disclosing their politics and consequences in order to create a space for new (social) artefacts to be created. This project advocates an ANT-driven approach called *processual deconstruction* (Lee & Hassard, 1999: 391). In light of Actor-Network Theory, my work needs to be understood as yet another performance. This performance also helps to enact certain realities and contributes to the reworking of the current status quo. However, while attempting this, I do not claim to posses the absolute and ultimate truth about reentry training. On the contrary, I

⁴³ When confronted with a question: “For whom do you actually run the training: for the company or for a participating individual?” the trainers admitted that this indeed is an important question which should be addressed within the intercultural community of practice.

⁴⁴ For an example of such manipulation, see Chapter 6 of this dissertation.

acknowledge the fact that I might have asked more questions and opened many doors rather than provided straightforward solutions. But, if due to my research work, some forthcoming realities will be designed with a more reflexive outlook, and with a greater attention to issues of power, politics and inequalities, I could not wish for more. As this dissertation shows, there are many issues to consider.

While this dissertation aims to reveal the forces behind a particular HR intervention, the learning points gathered are relevant for a broad array of HR and other organizational practices. Therefore, through this research project, I call for more reflexive, local, inductive investigations, which would help in reopening more black boxes of management practices. Law (2007), following the account of Thompson (2002), argues that Actor-Network Theory is not only about an enactment of any sort of reality. It is also about the “doing of goods” (Law, 2007: 14). Consequently, this dissertation actively involved ethical aspects particular to HR practices and their implications for the actors involved. It was not a passive description of reality; it was also an attempt to actively process and rework this HR intervention (Lee & Hassard, 1999). If this analysis will lead to ‘more considerate’ design choices and consequently to the creation of better informed realities, *goods* enactment with my theoretical intervention will have also been accomplished. Ultimately, as Actor-Network Theory tells us, none of the theoretical contributions should be judged in accordance with predefined, universal, absolute indicators (Bowker & Star, 1996: 17). If Latour (1987: 29) is right that “the fate of what we say and make is in later users’ hands” one will have to wait to judge the impact and value of this dissertation.

7.2.1 What’s in it for a manager?

As shown in this dissertation, there are substantial differences in training design and execution among the variety of intercultural reentry services available. Consequently, the utility of such services for the organization and for the returning employee will vary. This section provides a number of the most important considerations relevant in choosing reentry training services.

7.2.1.1 Training design

The design of reentry training, as described in the first part of this dissertation, is an issue worth further investigation. While no empirical evaluation of different designs has been conducted, I will tentatively suggest a number of issues which merit broader attention in carefully planned and executed reentry training.

First of all, despite countless publications on the importance of preparation, and contrary to most findings from repatriate research on expectation adjustment (Black, 1992; Black et al., 1992a; Martin, 1984; Hammer et al., 1998; Osland, 2000; Stroh et al., 2000), the majority of the existing training sessions are provided in the post-return stage of the reentry cycle and therefore have a limited preparatory power. While the logistical concerns and potential high travel costs related to relocation of the home-country based intercultural trainers cannot be denied, the question arises, why has there been no effort to outsource the reentry training services to the host-country training providers? This research indicates that far too many of the reentry sessions are offered in a form of crisis management coaching rather than as anticipatory programs. Consequently, such interventions cannot prepare the repatriates for return and might be ineffective and long overdue for considering repatriates' post-return careers.

Second, as shown in the first part of this dissertation, above all, the thematic composition of the training deserves the special attention of HR personnel. Reentry writings report the discrepancies between the employer and the employee, who can have somewhat different expectations about the reentry process (Paik et al., 2002) and different definitions of successful repatriation (Kraimer & Shaffer, 2004). As this research indicates, while the company might be only interested in return on investment along with employee retention and their performance, the repatriation transition encompasses challenges in professional and private lives of returning employees. This "instrumentalisation of people" (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000: 13) should not become the customary routine. Consequently, employers should be ready to provide comprehensive support, which addresses both work issues and the general adjustment concerns of returning individuals. Theoretical writings on reentry and repatriates' stories undoubtedly substantiate this claim. This research also indicates that trainers endorse such a dual approach to reentry training. Moreover, as presented in this dissertation, this endorsement is accompanied by a willingness and appropriate preparedness of many training providers to deliver comprehensive reentry assistance. However, this will be possible only if the HR managers understand the dynamics of international transitions. Accordingly, managers' broader knowledge of intercultural themes would allow the trainers to focus on training delivery, rather than having to adjust and translate their own work into the managerial language of profit making.

Third, this research shows that many reentry services are available only to internationally relocating top-managers and so-called "high-potentials" within organizations. While the company might be primarily focused on supporting "the elite", reentry challenges are likely to affect returning employees regardless of their status or position within the organization. Hence, this dissertation calls for more inclusive support measures, reaching to all levels in the organization. Moreover, while the majority of

available reentry services are offered on an individual or a family basis to selected returning employees, group sessions are worthy of further investigation. These sessions could be a first step in re-establishing social links of the repatriate within the organization and home-environment. Most importantly, group settings would allow including a broader number of returning individuals into the reentry support scheme.

This research project briefly outlined a number of alternatives and support measures which could aid or even replace conventional corporate reentry training services. One of the most interesting notions which came to light in this business-focused investigation is the potential value the NGO sector could bring to reentry assistance. Above all, non-formal repatriate support groups could assist the returning individuals with emotional support and network building opportunities. This research points to more than the cost-related benefits of including non-profit providers in reentry support measures. More importantly, initial investigation of non-profit providers suggests that the services they deliver very closely resemble those of corporate trainers. Moreover, the limited sample of non-profit interviewees included in this research indicates their extensive experience with guiding returning individuals as well as their methodological preparation and educational background appropriate to the task of reentry assistance. While this sample cannot be assumed to be representative of the entire population, this dissertation strongly advocates exploring non-profit circles in search of intercultural support.

Paraphrasing the research of Lazarova and Tarique (2005) on knowledge transfer upon repatriation, it is not only the willingness and motivation of a returning individual that matters. Organizational openness and involvement are required to make the process successful. As stressed by Adler and Bartholomew (1992), increasing the number of intercultural trainings offered does not in itself ensure benefit for an individual and a company. It is the effective utilization of available services and the willingness to learn from the perspective of the employee as well as the organization that can contribute to individual and corporate growth.

7.2.1.2 Entrapped in a web of interdependencies

The second part of this dissertation, while built around the reentry training theme, is actually of much broader managerial relevance. The implementation of reentry training within a corporate setting parallels the implementation and functioning of many other types of practices within organizations.

On the one hand, this research shows in what way different actors' interests coexist and undergo constant transformation. In particular, this research illustrates ways in which the interests of the company could be altered or even generated by an external party

(such as a reentry trainer). This happens through a process of translation, when interests are shaped and problematic issues defined. These issues might take a form, which benefits mostly one of the involved parties. This dissertation could be therefore seen as a cautionary tale. The black box of offered services should be reopened and its contents carefully analyzed. This of course requires additional work from the managers, but is of particular importance, especially in light of the fact that the managers themselves could, through a process of re-cycling, become the promoters of questionable projects.

On the other hand, this dissertation advocates an ethically centred approach to HR management. The manager's responsibility is far larger than merely concern for the well-being of the organization. Consequently, through revealing often morally questionable decisions, this research project calls for attention to the wellbeing and protection of employees. Behind the empty promise of HR support, the managers should not hide the opportunistic benefits gained by the company. Return on investment should become a secondary goal in planning supportive measures for employees.

7.3 Methodological reflection

Extensive methodological reflections rarely become the main concern of empirical investigations. Within the researched area, little attention has been given to determining adequate methods of 'reentry training'. The dominance of psychological, literature-driven, deductive investigations is incontestable. Repatriate readjustment processes and, occasionally, limited aspects of organizational interests come back in reentry writings. Consequently, the manuscripts produced oscillate between limited areas of research predefined in earlier writings within the same or closely related domains. The questions we ask predefine the range of answers we get. Thus, a closed loop of empirical inquiry might limit researchers' ability to move beyond the already established 'facts' and ways of looking at the research object.

This research project started with a similar outlook. The questions asked were predefined along the lines of existing reentry theory. Yet, the initial answers gathered did not make sense within the theoretical framework of reentry transition. Consequently, instead of trying to create a forced fit within the existing theoretical structures, this investigation explored unknown avenues, driven by an evolving plot of events. By asking questions about issues which were not considered to be relevant in previous research, this dissertation opens up new avenues for investigating reentry and related areas. This processual orientation, focused on contextual aspects of reentry transition and its dynamics, exposes elements without which an analysis of reentry will

always remain incomplete or perhaps even irrelevant. The taken-for-granted aspects of setting up and executing reentry training have been reopened. Moreover, by addressing these questions to groups other than individuals in transition or HR managers, this study provides insights so far unaddressed within the reentry field.

Does this mean that we need to discard current reentry research practices as inappropriate and obsolete? Definitely not. However, while they are a valuable source of information and inspiration, they should not become restrictive factors in future empirical investigations. An analysis of the micro-practices of reentry goes hand in hand with macro-theories of reentry transition. Asking questions predefined in the reentry literature should not prevent the researcher from performing a micro-analysis of the contextual circumstances in which the training takes place. I want to support Martin's ambition of "breaking up the mono-method monopolies" (Martin, 1990: 30). The author argues that by dogmatically following a one-method approach, a researcher gets locked into the weaknesses related to a particular methodological choice. Consequently, staying loyal to one, and only one approach will result in a number of oversights inherent to a specific method. The bridging of reentry theory with reentry practice is a method this dissertation advocates. Such bridging allows the researcher to benefit from existing accounts, yet it consents to staying open to new, unanticipated turns of events. This research project followed the path outlined by the Actor-Network Theory. There are other avenues that could be explored. However, one important lesson we can learn from this stream of work is to "follow the actors" (Callon, 1986a) and try to understand their world from within, rather than analyze their realities through imposed categories.

These methodological considerations are crucial in relation to the theoretical products of academic labour. Accordingly, the next section of this chapter deals with the theory-related outcomes of this investigation.

7.4 Theoretical reflection

The theoretical reflections stemming from this research are twofold. First of all, each of the parts constitutes a different theoretical contribution; both challenge different, basic assumptions from within their own theoretical streams. Secondly, the two parts together offer an attractive avenue worth exploring within management research.

7.4.1 Part 1 – theory revisited

The first part of this dissertation examines several important issues. First of all, in Chapter 3, I reveal the fragmentary nature of intercultural reentry research and the

relatively limited resources devoted to reentry training. In order to fill in this gap, the analysis in Chapter 4 is a first step to providing a comprehensive view of available reentry training practices and is a first empirical account of this HR intervention within a corporate context. Additionally, Chapter 4 demonstrates the very limited relationship between available reentry theories and executed reentry training practices. Consequently, Part 1 signals a number of theoretical considerations which need to be taken into account in the further development of reentry theory.

Secondly, Part 1 illustrates the ways in which existing reentry practices could guide further theoretical developments. The design of reentry training should be analyzed in light of two functional streams present in repatriation writings. The traditional, dominant line of reentry research emphasizes the frustrations, problems and challenges of the reentry transition and underlines the feelings of powerlessness and vulnerability of the returning individual. The sources of those frustrations are often attributed to the work situation and dissatisfaction with the reentry employment transition at the employee's home organization. This study shows that while many currently available reentry services apply concepts from the traditional framework (focusing on matters such as reverse-culture shock, reviewing the international experience, evaluating the time abroad and providing an 'understanding ear' to validate the returning sojourner's experiences) a growing number of trainers engage successfully other notions in their repatriation practices. This new trend in reentry literature is linked with the notions of protean and boundaryless careers (Lazarova & Cerdin, 2007). These notions are related to individual career activism and a proactive stand in shaping one's employment path. This research indicates that for decades the cross-cultural reentry field focused inadvertently on fragmented aspects of professional reentry transition. The traditional line of repatriation research centred on the notion of the hopeless repatriate depending on home-employer work arrangements and organizational reentry support dominated the writings. Issues such as changes in cross-cultural reentry programs passed almost unnoticed. While the ideas behind boundaryless, protean careers already permeated the training design, they have only timidly entered recent theoretical publications. Consequently, this dissertation advocates a need for more practice-built theory (in line with action research, grounded theory, or ethnographic studies) and for enriching deductive model building with inductive field investigation.

7.4.2 Part 2 – theory revisited

Latour (2005) describes ways in which Actor-Network Theory approaches its object of study:

"It is as if we were saying to the actors: 'We won't try to discipline you, to make you fit into our categories; we will let you deploy your own worlds, and only later will we ask you to explain how you came about setting them.'"

(Latour, 2005: 23)

Consequently, while in this research project I decided to employ Callon's framework of the sociology of translation (1986a), I did not attempt to structure networks rigidly in line with the stages as defined by the founder of the approach. Rather, I followed the actors and allowed myself to be guided by them through their world. Consequently, the main theoretical contribution of the second part of this dissertation is a revised look at the sociology of translation model. I argue that the continuity and sustainability of organizational practices should be investigated by exploring a new component within the framework. Callon sees direct representation of the masses as the ultimate success of network creation. The actors enrol representatives, who represent the masses, and speak on their behalf. In our case, we are looking at the emergence of a different dynamic, namely: re-cycling. While presenting an ANT-inspired analysis of the empirical data, I claim that the virtuous cycle of organizing⁴⁵ can be better understood by exploring the phenomenon of the re-cycling of previously enrolled actors. I argue that the traditional model of the sociology of translation is not sufficient for understanding complex organizational processes. By examining specific cases within the intercultural training industry, I claim that the process of translation can be sustained not only through the central spokesperson (advocated by Callon) but also through the direct and indirect involvement of the previously enrolled actors (the present dissertation). Accordingly, in this project, I translate the established theoretical framework of the sociology of translations and perform an application requiring numerous modifications. Consequently, I side with Law's claim that a process of translation encompasses both similarity and difference, loyalty and betrayal (Law, 1997).

7.4.3 Theoretical fusion

In the present research project, I attempted to follow the claim that different methodological choices yield different realities (Law & Urry, 2004). Accordingly, although both parts of this dissertation deal with and report an empirically grounded reentry training account (supported by a thorough literature review), each part contributes to the creation of a substantially discrete artefact. It is not a matter of epistemology only; the performative shift in social inquiry makes us co-responsible for shaping organizational realities as we investigate them. We are entering the world of ontology, together with its political consequences. As a result, my two methodological

⁴⁵ By virtuous cycle, I refer to the notion of the successful reiteration of organizational practices (Cooper & Law, 1995).

approaches produce a different object, a distinct HR practice. While each of them constitutes a valid contribution to management research, only by performing a double, simultaneous inquiry we can try to get closer to understanding organizational complexity and to influence the broader agenda of many organizational practices.

Several limitations were recognized early in the present research project. The single, distal approach did not allow for a satisfying comprehension of the investigated phenomenon. While it provided many important clues and observations, it was insufficient for understanding the complexity of the research object. It seemed as if the methodological choice was clearly demarcating the limits of what could be known about the researched theme. Moreover, the distal capturing of the object led to an oversimplification of the researched reality. Reentry training understood as a 'noun' was an inflexible, nearly empty category (Haraway, 2004: 334). The existence of the reentry project could be comprehended and adequately captured only in its processual, evolving mode. Accordingly, a punctualization of the investigated object (Law, 1992) seemed to lead to what could only be described as a sweeping generalization. Thus, definitiveness and closure related to a chosen research method were inadequate to the task of investigating the complex reality.

The feeling of uneasiness and discomfort about the research outcomes led to further investigation of sensemaking devices, which could help in capturing the complexity of the phenomenon studied. A multi-method approach seemed to be an apt solution. The empirical and theoretical concerns, rather than methodological obstinacy, gave direction to the development of this research. The proximal ANT method, a more reflexive and process-oriented tool, proved to be a suitable approach.

Haraway (1991, 2004) describes different practices of knowledge creation. According to the author, scientific methodologies should be understood as technologies which contribute to stabilizing and neutralizing different realities. As do the ANT writers, Haraway argues that our research methods are performative and partial. We perceive different worlds through different technological, social and psychical systems. Each 'vision' requires a separate 'instrument of vision' and each instrument produces a different 'picture' (Haraway, 1991). These visual practices, or what Haraway (1991: 195) calls "apparatuses of visual production" all generate partial, localized knowledge. This limited perspective, according to the author, should be embraced rather than neutralized. Consequently, this research argues for "heterogeneous multiplicity" (Haraway, 1991: 193) to be applied in a research setting. One should dare to explore the positioning in diverse and unpredictable ways. This heterogeneous multiplicity could be driven and safeguarded by the "existential approach" to methodological choices advocated by Martin (1990: 42). A researcher should decide which methodological

choices will help in approaching a particular research question, rather than having the methods determining our comprehension and knowledge creation possibilities. This unprejudiced approach rests on the assumption that no method is free of flaws or defects; none is intrinsically superior to the others.

The ANT method, since its birth in the late 70's, has been committed to a careful disassembly of the false dichotomies surrounding us. This dissertation adds to this effort in striving for a careful deconstruction. In this research, I have opposed the wide-spread division between the distal and proximal modes of comprehending the world. This epistemological, mono-methodological determinism and the belief of incompatibility of research methods are assumptions that are strongly entrenched. Yet, this research shows that what is often considered as clashing and irreconcilable can in practical application be harmonious and complimentary. Rather than black-boxing our realities in ethically questionable categories, we should stay open to the transformative nature of social realities.

This breaking up of the methodological divide led to one more deconstruction. As this investigation shows, the content vs. process dichotomy, so often present in research accounts, is also an artificial construct. An analysis of the reentry training phenomenon shows clearly that these two entities are closely related and reciprocally influence each other. The content-related choices are closely allied to the possibilities existing outside of the realm of a purely defined repertoire of design alternatives. They strongly depend on ways in which decisions about training content and its implementation are made. The repertoire of design alternatives in turn influences the negotiated boundaries of ways in which the training event can be constructed. The content and process constantly interact and influence one another. Consequently, it becomes impossible to distinguish where the processual elements end and the content aspects begin.

The breaking of dualities which has been undertaken in this dissertation was not an easy choice. Yet, it was consistent with the idea of passionate deconstruction and construction (Haraway, 1991: 191); an effort to deconstruct the black-boxed research realities and an attempt to construct new approaches. Law and Singleton (2000) acknowledge ANT's awareness of political agenda setting behind every description of the world. Therefore the dual approach enacted in this research notes several issues, aspects and concerns related to social realities as well as to scientific practices and their politics. None of that would be possible through a singular investigation. Hence, this dissertation exemplifies the usefulness of combining the traditional mode of research applied within the international HRM stream with the more reflexive and processual methods offered by postmodern approaches, such as Actor-Network Theory. The academic community needs to be open to such multiple inquiries. The *proximal* mode of thinking can add meaning and depth to often oversimplified *distal* generalizations.

7.5 Looking into the future...

This dissertation comes to its end. However, this ending does not mean that the topic of reentry training and related subjects is resolved once and for all. I undertook my own project of interessement and performed my own translation of the object in question. But this translation might⁴⁶ hold only if no other, stronger translation emerges. But since the aim of any researcher should be to advance the understanding of the world surrounding us, I want to help those, who might want to undertake their own projects in related areas. Hence, in this section, I want to share with the readers my doubts about aspects of this dissertation, which could have been improved and to speculate about further research directions.

The first drawback of this dissertation is the sample group, which is mainly composed of US training providers. While approaching the topic of reentry training and coaching, it was expected that just as cultural outbound training services are among the most commonly provided facilities for international assignees, reentry assistance would also be employed equally often by organizations. The confrontation of these expectations with the reality shows that reentry services are still underutilized and often neglected by organizations. Consequently, reaching intercultural training providers who have conducted reentry training or coaching sessions turned out to be a great challenge.

Second, the linguistic limitations of the researcher restricted the search for reentry training providers to English speaking trainers. While this posed certain difficulties in exploring the international network of reentry services providers, it can be seen as an accomplishment that eight different nationals working across more than ten countries participated in this study. Nevertheless, a more comprehensive study among the non-English-speaking communities should take place in order to more adequately assess the variety of approaches available worldwide.

Moreover, while this dissertation sketches a rather comprehensive and detailed picture of the available reentry services, it needs to be acknowledged that these insights have been possible through four sources of information: in-depth interviews with the trainers; the examination of training materials; participative observations of the training for trainers sessions; and a thorough literature review. Further research has to include the perspectives of the trainees on the course of the training and an assessment of the impact of the reentry services. Also, a bigger number of accounts collected from HR managers could enrich the data. These limitations are closely related to the absence of comprehensive, long-term research on the effectiveness and outcomes of the reentry training and coaching services. Not only are there no studies on the effectiveness of

⁴⁶ There is no certainty that any translation will hold (Latour, 1987).

reentry training, but also reentry trainers themselves often do not perform any systematic evaluation of their services. While almost 90% of the respondents distribute the end-of-the-day questionnaire among participants, only one of the interviewed training providers was required to carry out a long-term evaluation of his workshops.

Last but not least, this research focused on only one of the Actor-Network Theory topologies – the network. Nevertheless, I believe that two more perspectives could be taken on in order to show the complexity of the object and provide guidelines for further exploration of the ANT method within management research.

The first of the avenues is the social topology of a *region* (Mol & Law, 1994). Regions could be in this case understood from two different perspectives. The first one would be a traditional, three-dimensional, Euclidean approach, where geographically remote areas could be investigated and compared. More interestingly however, we could define region as a space “in which objects are clustered together and boundaries are drawn around each particular regional cluster” (Urry, 2000: 191). In the case of cross-cultural reentry training, the regions delineated (in the second meaning of the term) could be those of business/corporate versus non-governmental/non-profit sector. This research indicates that those two regions, despite crossing geographical borders and despite no clearly defined connections within the clusters, show unanticipated within-region homogeneity.

Moreover, further research could explore the *fluid* spatiality. In the fluid topology (Mol & Law, 1994) we do not have firmly defined borders like in regions; neither can we define a well established set of relationships like in networks. Here the boundaries and the connections are blurred or even undistinguishable. An object exists because it is being given the possibility to develop, evolve and change and that mobility, instability and wavering are conditions under which an object constantly retakes its shape. Those changes are smooth and subtle rather than sudden and violent; new elements might join and old pieces might fall off (Law, 2002). Hence, it would be interesting to investigate the transformation and adaptability of training (regardless of the temporary networks connections and across the regional boundaries) and look for the connections between an object’s fluidity and its long-term, global existence.

7.6 Edith’s story – finale?

The story of Edith Coron (Post Scriptum), Beijing, 14.05.2008

This dissertation started with the story of Edith Coron; a journalist returning to France, her home-country, after several year of international sojourn; a woman, who lived

through and accommodated a tremendous amount of intercultural experience; experience, which could not be fully utilized in her writing profession.

I came back to France as a journalist working for a foreign newspaper - being a foreign correspondent in what used to be my own country - which was a good transitional phase; it was a good way to come back to France. But eventually, I very much had a sense... that I had come back but I was not belonging; without belonging. And with all these syndromes, symptoms of a returnee. So I was really looking into ways of resolving this, a bit of an existential dilemma. And somebody mentioned the word 'intercultural'. And I looked into it and shortly after I started looking into that, on the web... I checked SIETAR, etc.... I saw that they had a conference coming up. So I went. And what was fantastic for me is that I found myself in my tribe. I had found my tribe! So I felt very comfortable. There was a lot of common ground with these people, a lot of people, who had had mixed, complex – culturally speaking – lives, stories. And there were a lot of things we didn't have to establish, it was just there. So I decided to look into that much deeper and that's when I really decided to work on it, to train. Little by little I started working in the intercultural field and finding that I really felt so comfortable there. That happened because of two reasons: because of the intellectual aspect. I was fascinated by the intercultural field and I was absolutely thrilled to be learning about it. And at the same time I love the idea of using my own personal history, which gave me a natural credibility, because I could empathise with these people having to work across cultures, in multicultural teams, relocations... Because I have done it so much myself. There was both, intellectual interest and the personal aspect, which was a perfect equation, honestly. A great pleasure to find one's place in this new world. Basically, what it is also about is finding one's Ariane's thread, common thread. Pursuing, developing your life in another direction somewhat, but not breaking from one's past – the other way around – it's building on one's own experience, and interests, and capacities, to do something else which happens also to be in great demand these days.

Today, Edith works as an intercultural trainer and successfully applies her knowledge in a new professional context. She has recently moved to China where she continues her international adventure.

I have done some reentry training as well⁴⁷. I have done it for an English woman who has lived abroad in Egypt, in Tunisia and in India, I think. And I have done

⁴⁷ The reentry training Edith delivered was paid for by the participants themselves. There was no financial or content-wise involvement of any organization.

another one for a German executive, who decided to go back to Germany. These were both very moving experiences because I knew so well what the issues were – particularly because it is so complex, both on the personal level and on the professional level. And honestly, I found that I could relate emotionally and intellectually very well, obviously very well, having gone through it myself. And my level of empathy as a coach was certainly quite high and people felt it.

Edith's adventure started out of passion and a commitment to building intercultural dialogue and understanding. Time will tell if and to what extent Edith's passion for cultural diversity and commitment to helping sojourners in transition are going to be transformed by and adjusted to the market-driven rules of the corporate training industry.

Samenvatting (Summary in Dutch)

Het belangrijkste doel van dit proefschrift is om het fenomeen genaamd *cross-cultural reentry training*, ofwel 'interculturele terugkeertraining' in kaart te brengen. Het gaat hierbij om het ontwerp, de organisatie, mogelijke applicaties alsmede het gebruik van de training als onderdeel van internationale HRM toepassingen. Het is mijn bedoeling om hiermee tot een uitputtend overzicht van de beschikbare organisationele terugkeertrainingen te komen en om een aantal overwegingen met betrekking tot het daaropvolgende gebruik van deze HR toepassing te bespreken. Deze analyse wordt uitgevoerd vanuit een tweetal, over het algemeen als onverenigbaar beschouwde, onderzoeksbenaderingen: de zogenaamde 'distale' (= van het midden verwijderd zijnde) en 'proximale' (= dichtst bij het midden zijnde) methoden van denken (Cooper en Law, 1995).

Deel 1 van dit proefschrift illustreert de bestaande controversen met betrekking tot de inhoud van de training. Deze analyse wordt hoofdzakelijk uitgevoerd om het gebrek aan empirisch onderzoek aangaande deze trainingen voor beroepsmatig migrerende individuen aan de orde te stellen. In hoofdstuk drie voer ik daarom een gedetailleerde literatuur studie uit van de beschikbare publicaties, welke het fenomeen van de terugkeertraining bespreken. Dit hoofdstuk beoogt niet alleen om enige systematiek in de beschikbare literatuur aan te brengen, maar ook om een theoretisch fundament te leveren waarmee de empirische data, welke gedurende dit onderzoek is verzameld, kan worden geanalyseerd. Hoofdstuk 4 bevat de analyse van de data, die verzameld is aan de hand van diepte-interviews met 31 trainers. Een vergelijking van de bestaande toepassingen van deze trainingen met de beschikbare literatuur over terugkeren illustreert de controversiële en willekeurige aard van de toegepaste theorieën; deze kan niet worden gerechtvaardigd op basis van de effectiviteit van de uitgevoerde trainingen, daar er geen gedegen evaluaties van deze interventies worden uitgevoerd.

In deel 2 ga ik op zoek naar een mogelijke verklaring voor de bestaande discrepantie tussen de theorieën over terugkeertrainingen en de daadwerkelijke trainingen zelf. Hiertoe maak ik gebruik van *Actor-Network Theory* (hierna: ANT) om de procesmatige

aspecten van terugkeertrainingen te analyseren. Na de introductie van de aan ANT ten grondslag liggende principes in hoofdstuk 5 maak ik in hoofdstuk 6 gebruik van het model van de zogenaamde ‘Sociologie van Translatie’ om de door mij uitgevoerde 31 diepte-interviews alsmede de 8 verslagen van zogenaamde ‘train de trainers’ sessies te analyseren. Het model van de ‘Sociologie van Translatie’ is afkomstig van Callon (1986a), een van de grondleggers van ANT. Op een *empirisch*, lokaal niveau kijk ik naar de procesmatige aspecten van het opzetten van de trainingen en de wijze, waarop dit van invloed is op het ontwerp van de trainingen zelf. Deze analyse verschaft in de eerste plaats inzicht in de controversen, welke in het eerste deel van deze dissertatie zijn geïntroduceerd. Daarnaast, en dit is van groter belang, legt het een aantal vraagstukken bloot, welke normaal gesproken geen wezenlijke plaats innemen op onderzoeksagenda’s, maar tegelijkertijd een fundamentele invloed hebben op het daadwerkelijke ontwerp van deze trainingen. Het gaat hier onder meer om de wijze, waarop de actoren manoeuvreren tussen verscheidene, onderling afhankelijke en tegelijkertijd botsende belangen en het voortdurend uitonderhandelen en veranderen van het onderzoeksobject. In hoofdstuk 6 laat ik vervolgens de politieke aspecten van deze specifieke HR interventie zien en onthul ik de ‘verborgen’ kant van het opzetten van HR toepassingen zoals terugkeertrainingen.

Deel 2 van dit onderzoek introduceert een theoretisch perspectief, dat kan worden gezien als een veelbelovend alternatief voor onderzoek in en naar management. Door het toepassen van ANT op het fenomeen van de terugkeer training wil ik de volgende twee doelstellingen realiseren: allereerst wil ik de bruikbaarheid van het ANT kader voor het analyseren van organisatieprocessen demonstreren en de waarde ervan als middel voor management onderzoek bevorderen. Daarnaast wens ik met de door mij uitgevoerde toepassing van ANT de dominante vorm van onderzoek in hedendaags management onderzoek ter discussie te stellen. Door gebruik te maken van een meer reflexief instrument (zoals ANT) voor het analyseren van een artefact (zoals een terugkeertraining) hoop ik de toegevoegde waarde van deze grotendeels verwaarloosde en relatief ondergewaardeerde onderzoeksstroom aan te tonen.

De belangrijkste *praktijk gerelateerde* bijdragen van deze dissertatie kunnen als volgt worden samengevat:

Als eerste laat deze analyse zien dat de verschillen tussen het ontwerp van de training en de daadwerkelijke uitvoering ervan, in een veld waar een verscheidenheid aan dergelijke diensten beschikbaar is, aanzienlijk zijn. Dientengevolge zal de bruikbaarheid van deze diensten voor zowel de werknemer als de organisatie in kwestie wisselend zijn. Daarnaast worden slechts enkele ontwerpen van de beschikbare programma’s ondersteund door de beschikbare theorieën over het terugkeren, waardoor zowel de invloed als bruikbaarheid van deze interventies in twijfel kan worden getrokken. Een

sprekend voorbeeld van een problematische ontwerpkeuze is de timing van de terugkeersessie. Het door mij gedane onderzoek toont aan dat veel te veel van deze sessies aan worden geboden als een vorm van crisis management / coaching en niet, zoals wenselijk zou zijn, als een anticiperende, preventieve maatregel. Dientengevolge is het onmogelijk om met deze interventies de terugkerende individuen voor te bereiden op hun daadwerkelijke terugkeer; daarnaast is het heel goed mogelijk, dat deze zowel ineffectief als veel te laat zijn waar het gaat om de verdere, toekomstige carrières van de thuiskomers.

Ten tweede blijken uit dit onderzoek de (potentiële) geschilpunten, welke kunnen optreden tussen de drie belangrijkste actoren die bij het gehele proces zijn betrokken. Waar de organisatie in kwestie wellicht alleen interesse heeft in het realiseren van rendement op de door haar gedane investeringen en het behouden van de teruggekeerde werknemers alsmede het waarborgen van hun functioneren, gaat het bij de daadwerkelijke terugkomst om zowel uitdagingen in het privé als beroepsmatige leven van de terugkerende werknemers. Deze “instrumentalisering van individuen” (Alvesson en Deetz, 2000, p. 13) mag beslist geen gewoonte worden. Daarom moet de werkgever bereid zijn om een omvangrijk ondersteuningsprogramma ter beschikking te stellen, dat ingaat op zowel de werkgerelateerde als persoonlijke uitdagingen waarmee de thuiskomers te maken krijgen. Het beter geïnformeerd zijn van managers over de relevante interculturele thema's zou de trainers de gelegenheid geven om zich te concentreren op het uitvoeren van de training zelf in plaats van het zich steeds weer moeten aanpassen aan en het vertalen van hun eigen werkzaamheden in de management taal van winstbejag.

Dit is, op zijn beurt, gerelateerd aan de exclusiviteit van de terugkeertrainingen. Zoals dit onderzoek laat zien, zijn veel van de terugkeer diensten op dit moment alleen beschikbaar voor de internationaal gedetacheerde top managers en de zogenoemde 'high potentials' binnen organisaties. Terwijl de organisatie slechts aandacht heeft voor het ondersteunen van de eigen 'elite', zullen ook alle andere terugkerende medewerkers niet verschoond blijven van de (potentiële) problemen, die de terugkeer naar het land van herkomst met zich meebrengt. Derhalve pleit deze dissertatie voor het beschikbaar maken van ondersteuningsprogramma's voor alle lagen binnen de organisatie. Een van de meest interessante ideeën die tijdens dit, op het bedrijfsleven gerichte, onderzoek naar voren is gekomen, is de potentiële bijdrage die door de NGO sector kan worden geleverd waar het ondersteunde programma's voor thuiskomers betreft. Met name de informele praatgroepen, gericht op thuiskomers, zouden kunnen helpen door het bieden van emotionele steun en het opbouwen van netwerken. Dergelijke activiteiten zijn tevens effectief vanuit een kostentechnisch oogpunt en kunnen een bijdrage leveren aan het herstellen van de banden met het thuisland.

Tevens pleit deze dissertatie voor een meer ethische benadering van HR management. De verantwoordelijkheid van managers gaat veel verder dan alleen de financiële gezondheid van de organisatie. Door het aan het licht brengen van (vaak) moreel ambigue beslissingen, genomen door HR managers, vraagt deze dissertatie om aandacht voor het welzijn alsmede de bescherming van de medewerkers. Het is ongewenst, dat managers de opportunistische voordelen voor de organisatie zelf verbergen achter de lege belofte van HR ondersteuning.

Tenslotte kan worden gesteld dat, hoewel deze dissertatie zich richt op het blootleggen van de krachten waaraan een bepaald ontwerp van een bepaalde HR toepassing onderhevig is, de opgedane inzichten ook van belang zijn voor een breed scala aan zowel HR als bredere organisationele gebruiken. Daarom wil ik, middels deze dissertatie, een lans breken voor een meer reflexieve, lokaal georiënteerde, inductieve wijze van onderzoek doen, waardoor het mogelijk zal worden om inzicht te verkrijgen in het scala van zwarte dozen die wij als 'management' bestempelen.

De belangrijkste *theoretische* bijdragen van deze dissertatie kunnen als volgt worden samengevat:

Door het aantonen van de discrepantie, welke bestaat tussen de theorie over en daadwerkelijke praktijk van thuiskomen, laat het eerste deel van deze dissertatie zien op welke wijzen de bestaande praktijk bij kan dragen aan verdere theoretische ontwikkelingen. Als zodanig breekt deze dissertatie een lans voor het ontwikkelen van meer, op de praktijk gebaseerde theorie (door, bijvoorbeeld, 'action research', 'grounded theory' of etnografisch onderzoek) en voor het bereiken van deductieve, modelmatige benaderingen met inductief veldwerk.

Het tweede deel van deze dissertatie draagt bij aan een herziening van de eerdergenoemde 'Sociologie van Translatie'. Ik betoog dat de continuïteit en houdbaarheid van organisationele gebruiken moet worden onderzocht door het incorporeren van een nieuw element in het kader, een element dat in dit onderzoek 'recycling' ofwel her-gebruiken wordt genoemd. Op basis van een aantal specifieke casussen, afkomstig uit de interculturele trainingsindustrie, kan men naast Callon's conceptie van de centrale woordvoerder nog een tweede oplossing voor het bestendigen van het proces van translatie identificeren: het zowel direct als indirect betrekken van voorheen gerekruteerde actoren (als beargumenteerd in deze dissertatie).

Op een meer abstract niveau probeer ik in het onderhavige onderzoeksproject vast te houden aan het idee, dat verschillende *methodologische* keuzes leiden tot verschillende *werkelijkheden* (Law en Urry, 2004). Het hieraan ontleende gebruik van twee

verschillende methodologische benaderingen leidt tot de productie van twee verschillende objecten of HRM praktijken. Hoewel elk van deze benaderingen een legitieme bijdrage levert aan onderzoek naar management, betoog ik dat alleen een dubbel, gelijktijdig onderzoek ons dichterbij het begrip van de alledaagse, organisationele complexiteit kan brengen en ons in staat kan stellen om invloed uit te oefenen op de veelheid van organisationele gebruiken. De *proximale* methode van denken heeft het in zich om betekenis en diepte toe te voegen aan de, veelal overgesimplificeerde, *afstandelijke* generalisaties.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1: Reentry Integration training Model for Professional Sojourners (adapted from Martin and Harrell, 2004)

Predeparture (home-country)	International experience (host country)	Pre-reentry (host country)	Post-reentry (home-country)
Setting expectations for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - professional integration orientation - professional reentry -character of expatriate working environment - overseas employer - host culture - host and home culture comparison 	Psychological adjustment issues: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - family presence or absence in host country - cultural, gender, status and age issues - financial considerations -social/ cultural activities - travel 	Setting expectations for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - professional briefings or debriefings - critical evaluation Interview with home-country supervisor	Readjustment issues: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - family readjustment - cultural, gender, status and age issues - social readjustment
Functional fitness: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - identity skills and competencies inventory - language training - host country professional affiliation - mentor identification - Host families - contact corporate sponsor 	Functional fitness: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - professional orientation - professional relationships - professional responsibilities - professional organizations - professional networking - mentors at home and/or abroad - maintain home connections (professional and personal) - language training 	Functional fitness: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - update resume - networking 	Functional fitness: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - resumption of employment - evaluation of experience - organization orientation (formal/ informal) - organizational policies (formal/ informal) - organizational culture - consult with mentor - consult with other returnees - professional affiliation

<p>Psychological anticipatory adjustment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - identify established support system and protocol for professional and personal overseas adjustment and reentry 		<p>Psychological anticipatory adjustment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - repatriation orientation - political/ economic/ social/ cultural readjustment 	
<p>Intercultural identity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - introduction of framework 	<p>Intercultural identity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - diaries or journals 	<p>Intercultural identity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - culture contrast (home or host) - awareness of personal growth - language assessment 	<p>Intercultural identity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - review of diaries or journals - self reflection - discussion of benefits, challenges, and responsibilities

Appendix 2: 7 Rules of Method and 6 Principles (Source: Latour, 1987)**7 Rules of Method**

1. We study science in action and not ready made science or technology; to do so, we either arrive before the facts and machines are blackboxed or we follow the controversies that reopen them.
2. To determine the objectivity or subjectivity of a claim, the efficiency or perfection of a mechanism, we do not look for their intrinsic qualities but at all the transformations they undergo later in the hands of others.
3. Since the settlement of a controversy is the cause of Nature's representation, not its consequence, we can never use this consequence, Nature, to explain how and why a controversy has been settled.
4. Since the settlement of a controversy is the cause of Society's stability, we cannot use Society to explain how and why a controversy has been settled. We should consider symmetrically the efforts to enrol human and non-human resources.
5. We have to be as undecided as the various actors we follow as to what technoscience is made of; every time an inside/outside divide is built, we should study the two sides simultaneously and make the list, no matter how long and heterogeneous, of those who do the work.
6. Confronted with the accusation of irrationality, we look neither at what rule of logic has been broken, nor at what structure of society could explain the distortion, but to the angle and direction of the observer's displacement, and to the length of the network thus being built.
7. Before attributing any special quality to the mind or to the method of people, let us examine first the many ways through which inscriptions are gathered, combined, tied together and sent back. Only if there is something unexplained once the networks have been studied shall we start to speak of cognitive factors.

6 Principles

1. The fate of facts and machines is in later users' hands; their qualities are thus a consequence, not a cause, of a collective action.
2. Scientists and engineers speak in the name of new allies that they have shaped and enrolled; representatives among other representatives, they add these unexpected resources to tip the balance of force in their favour.
3. We are never confronted with science, technology and society, but with a gamut of weaker and stronger associations; thus understanding what facts and machines are is the same task as understanding who the people are.
4. The more science and technology have an esoteric content the further they extend outside; thus, "science and technology" is only a sub set of technoscience.
5. Irrationality is always an accusation made by someone building a network over someone else who stands in the way; thus, there is no Great Divide between minds, but only shorter and longer networks; harder facts are not the rule but the exception, since they are needed only in a very few cases to displace others on a large scale out of their usual ways.
6. History of technoscience is in a large part the history of the resources scattered along networks to accelerate the mobility, faithfulness, combination and cohesion of traces that make action at a distance possible.

Appendix 3: Coding scheme used throughout the project.**Basic Codes**

Alternatives to traditional reentry services

Business location

Children in the training

Company's role

Design of the training

Difficulties encountered by the trainers

Duration of the training

Evaluation of the training

Expatriation training

Goals of the training

Less time (changes in training design if the given time would be half of what the trainers normally offer)

Location of the training

Methods of the training

More time (changes in training design if the given time would be twice as much of what the trainers normally offer)

Participants in the training

Public Relations of the training

Services (full range of intercultural services offered)

Spouse participation in the training

Timing of the training

Topics covered in the training

Trainers' role

Work related aspects covered in the training

Additional Codes (Part 2)

Enrolment

Interessement

Mobilization

Politics

Problematization

Re-cycling

Biography

Betina Szkudlarek was born on June 28, 1979 in Myslowice, Poland. She obtained a Master of Arts in Political Science and Mass Communication from the University of Silesia (Poland) in May 2003. On November 1st, 2004 Betina joined the PhD-programme of the Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University, where she became a member of the Department of Organisation and Personnel Management.



Her main research interests, situated within the broad field of cross-cultural management, are the topics of intercultural training and intercultural communication. In her PhD research, Betina investigated the phenomenon of cross-cultural reentry training for intercultural sojourners. She presented her work at several international conferences, such as the *Academy of Management*, the *Academy of International Business*, the *Standing Conference for Management and Organization Inquiry*, the *International Association of Cross Cultural Competence and Management*, and the *New Network Theory Conference*.

Next to her academic activities, Betina has also been working as an intercultural trainer and project manager, predominantly in the NGO-sector. In 2006, she joined the Erasmus PhD Association Rotterdam (EPAR), where she acted as a representative for PhD Candidates of the Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University; in 2007, she was elected as the President of the Association.

Betina is a member of the following research networks: the *Academy of Management*, the *Academy of International Business*, the *International Academy for Intercultural Research*, and the *Society for Intercultural Education, Training and Research*.

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SPINNING THE WEB OF REENTRY

[Re]connecting reentry training theory and practice

Reentry transition has often been documented as potentially being the most challenging phase of the international transition cycle. Moreover, while the expatriating individuals are thoroughly prepared for their international sojourn, the returning individuals and their organizations rarely expect any adjustment difficulties upon reentry. This trend of underplaying the difficulties of reentry translates directly into the quantity and quality of available repatriation support practices and empirical research addressing them.

This dissertation directly tackles this issue. To begin with, a comprehensive analysis of the field of cross-cultural reentry training is presented by means of two distinctive theoretical streams, after which a number of recommendations related to the training's design and execution are introduced. Furthermore, the issues related to the ethics and politics going on behind the scenes of HRM practices are exposed and directly challenged.

On the theoretical level, the twofold examination undertaken in this study leads to acknowledging two important factors. Firstly, the distal approach to organizations is insufficient for comprehending their complexity. Secondly, only analysing the content-related aspects limits our possibilities for fully understanding of organizational practices. Consequently, this dissertation advocates a *proximal, processual* approach to conducting empirical studies as an alternative for the existing, often oversimplified research accounts.

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