CHAPTER 3:

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the inductive qualitative approach used in this study. Firstly, the method through which the study was carried out will be discussed. This is followed by discussions on how data was collected and the recruitment of participants. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the design of the interview questions and how propositions were tested.

3.1 METHOD

Predominantly there are two types of research methods, a qualitative and a quantitative approach. The former approach uses methods to collect descriptive and contextually situated data to seek an understanding of human experiences (Mann and Stewart 2000). The latter approach presents data as numerical relationships and typically has a formalized form and style (Glesne and Peshkin 1992). This study was undertaken using qualitative research methods, which Maxwell (1996) identifies its strength to be their inductive approach. The qualitative approach was ideal for this research project for two main reasons: (1) theories and results are derived that are understandable and experientially credible to the sample group and others and (2) conducting formative evaluations will help to improve existing literature rather than simply assessing the value of it. Therefore a quantitative approach was believed to be insufficient, as presenting data in numerical terms would not have captured the human element of the responses or provide in-depth explanations that were sought after (Van Maanen, Dabbs and Faulkner 1982).

3.2 DATA COLLECTION

The relevant data to the study were obtained from both secondary and primary data search.

3.2.1 Collection of Secondary Data

Extensive desk-research was conducted and proved highly valuable for this study for the following reasons:

i. It solved some aspects of the study without having to engage in expensive primary research, and reduced the overall time frame.

ii. Obtaining secondary research helped plan collection of primary data where the secondary sources were inadequate

iii. The literature used gave a broad understanding of the basic theory of expatriate.

The major types of information that were secured from secondary sources included, but were not limited to, such items as: staff policies, international transfer cycle, expatriate training, international adjustment, and repatriation, etc.

3.2.2 Collection of Primary Data

The availability and usefulness of particular types of information in secondary sources helped dictate the necessary data to be collected by this means. With the intention of discovering the opinions on range of issues, data was collected in two ways: personal interviews and emailed responses. Firstly, personal interviews were conducted in the form of semi-structured interviews. This format allowed the researcher to encourage conversations from participants, and gave participants the flexibility to contribute additional information that they thought were relevant to the research topic (Mann and Stewart 2000). Interviews took place at a mutually agreed place and time, and all personal interviews were recorded on audiotape and subsequently transcribed. The tape recording helped maximize accuracy and enabled the researcher to concentrate on the quality of the responses rather than on writing down the responses.

After the initial greeting of the participant, participants were shown a copy of the Plain Language Statement. After this, they were asked whether they had any questions that they wished to clarify before the start of the interview. Participants were then asked if they wished to view the full transcript of the interview before their responses were incorporated into the results. All interview questions followed a common order but additional questions were asked to some participants when further expansion was favored. On average, interviews took about forty minutes.

The second means of data collection was via emailed responses to identical interview questions. All documentation was emailed to potential participants in advance so that they were aware of what types of questions would be asked. Twenty-eight people were contacted by email and nineteen choose to participate. Those who agreed emailed responses back within two to three weeks. The researcher chose this second mode of data collection, as it presented many advantages (Mann and Stewart 2000). Firstly, it has the ability to obtain a larger sample group. This helped to increase the relevance of generalizing the findings because it applied to more people. Secondly there was significant time and cost savings, especially when all personal interviews needed to be transcribed. Lastly, emailed responses allowed the respondents to answer the questions in their own time and at their own pace, which helped facilitate in-depth and well thought-out responses.

3.3 RESPONDENTS

Three initial respondents were found by suggestion from the researcher's supervisor. From this point forward, all participants were asked whether they knew of any other expatriates or repatriates who may be interested in being involved with the research project. Participants helped by contacting other friends or colleagues who might be interested. However it was relatively difficult to find participants who were willing to take part in personal interviews. Overall, it was relatively easier to gain commitment from participants if there was an opportunity to communicate with them initially over the telephone to answer any questions. From this point, arrangements were made for a personal interview at a mutually agreed upon place. In all four cases where the researcher was able to talk to the potential participant over the telephone, he/she agreed to be interviewed personally.

Recruiting participants for emailed responses was much easier than finding participants for personal interviews. This was because emailed responses overcame the issue of the physical location of the respondent. The researcher contacted interested participants directly via email or telephone. Regular contact with all these participants was maintained over a period from end of January to February.

All respondents found the interview questions clear and relevant. Participants responded well to the questions and were more than happy to share their experiences. Overall, the responses were of a good quality and depth, confirming the appropriateness of a qualitative approach to this research as opposed to a quantitative approach. The break down of respondents is as follows;

Table 3.1
Summary of Participants

	Repatriates	Expatriates
Personal Interviews	3	1
Emailed Responses	15	4
Total by Category	18	5
Total	**23**	

3.4 QUESTIONS DESIGN

Interview questions were formulated after a review of the existing literature on expatriate management to ensure sharper and more insightful interview questions about the topic (Yin 1994). As the current literature on expatriate management lacks standardized questions, questions needed to be developed. The interview questions were designed to be able to test the eight propositions. For example, the first proposition is 'expatriate failure is predominantly defined on the basis of premature return'. Therefore, an appropriate interview questions was 'what does expatriate success or failure mean to you?' The questions were deliberately designed to be open-ended and to avoid leading questions. The interview questions for the expatriates and repatriates (termed (re) expatriates) centred primarily on exploring the definition of expatriate failure and its factors. For the email response, the interview questions then are design in close-ended questions except on the demographic part for easier reference and understanding.

A pilot test was first conducted with two participants, an expatriate and repatriate to determine whether the interview questions were understandable and applicable in addressing the research propositions. After the pilot test, question in the Section 3 were added to the (re) expatriates interview questions/ questionnaire, as this would help derive more direct responses to the research topic.

In the analysis of the data collected, responses from expatriates and repatriates were presented together. In instances where expatriates were yet to be repatriated, repatriation questions were slightly altered and their responses referred to their knowledge of how their company in general handles such situations. It was assumed that if the company responded to repatriation in a particular manner in the past, then they are likely to continue this response in the near future. The data collected were tabulated in an Excel spreadsheet according to the interview question and whether they were an expatriate or repatriate. The frequency of responses was reported under these categories. Respondents were able to record multiple answers to any particular question. Patterns and trends were then identified and presented.

3.5 HOW PROPOSITIONS WERE TESTED

Propositions in the study were tested by a series of questions tabulated below in Table 3. These interview questions correlated directly with the propositions and were designed for the purpose of testing the propositions. Although these questions provided a direct measure to the propositions, and ultimately the research questions, additional comments were also taken into consideration.

Table 3.2

Questions Used To Test Propositions

Research Questions		
	Proposition	Questions Used to Test the Propositions
1	1&2	• Respondents are required to indicate whether they are agreed or not with the statements of the definition of expatriate failure using Five Points Likert Scale.
	3	• Was your repatriation process discussed prior to your departure? • Do you think discussions about your repatriation will help minimise reverse culture shock?
	4	• Did you feel that the skills and knowledge that you acquired was valued and utilized?
2	5	• What method of selection being used to appoint you for the international assignment? • What criteria that you think being used to select you for the international assignment?
	6	• Did you receive any form of pre-departure training? • What form did it take? • Did you find the preparation given was adequate?
	7 & 8	• What are the main issues that you felt were difficult in the adjustment process?
		• How did you overcome these?
		• Who help you overcome these difficulties?
		• Respondents are required to indicate whether they are agreed or not on the statement factors that can contribute to the expatriate failure using Five Point Likert Scale.

The following chapter will now present the results of the study and whether the eight propositions were supported or not.