

## CHAPTER 4

### RESEARCH RESULTS

This chapter will present the results of the research. A total of 28 questionnaires have been distributed to the selected re (expatriates). However, only 19 questionnaires were returned. Seven (re) expatriates have been approached for the interview and only four (4) willing to be interviewed. The demographic profile of the respondent can be summarised into Table 4.1 as follows:

Table 4.1  
Demographic Profile of the Respondents

		Expatriate	Repatriates	Total
<b>Sex</b>	Male	5	18	23
	Female	Nil	Nil	
<b>Marital Status</b>	Single	Nil	2	2
	Married	5	16	21
<b>Duration Assignment</b>	0-2 years	2	7	9
	3-4 years	2	8	10
	More than 4 years	1	Nil	1
<b>Company Industry</b>	A: Service Industry	3	5	8
	B: Power Provider		3	3
	C: Telecommunications	1	2	3
	D: Oil and Gas	1	8	9
<b>Countries Assigned</b>	Singapore	1	1	2
	Indonesia	1	1	2
	Brunei	1	1	2
	Philippine	1	4	5
	Vietnam		3	3
	Sudan	1	4	5
	South Africa	1	3	4

All propositions were tested using specific interview questions, identified in Table 3 (section 3.5), as well as general comments provided by participants. Each of the eight propositions will be presented individually. Additional information gathered about the (re) expatriates' experiences will be discussed first.

On average the (re) expatriates have been on only one international assignment and likewise, the trailing spouses have accompanied the expatriate on one assignment. Communication between the (re) expatriates and the home company was maintained as a kind of support from home country.

When the (re) expatriates were asked how satisfied they were with how their assignment was handled, most (16) respondents noted that they were very satisfied. The other respondents commented that they were either less satisfied (5) or not satisfied (2). During the interview, one participant commented that: *"we got no help at all for anything. We were left on our own to do the removal, settle in and find our feet. In hindsight it was very tough, but at the time we just thought that's how everyone did an international relocation"*. Another participant felt the same and noted that: *"the international assignment was not 'managed'...ignored more like it...or mismanaged at best"*.

When the (re) expatriates were asked what they thought should be done differently or how should the program be modified, there was a wide range of

responses. Some thought that there should be improved pre departure training (11); more support in all aspects of the program (9) and; more respect, attention and time for family issues (3). In contrast, when the (re) expatriates were asked what they think should remain in the program, many had difficulty answering this question. However the most common responses were the pre-departure training program (5) and the business preparation (2). Nonetheless, all (re) expatriates responded positively when asked whether they would agree to commit to another international posting.

The results from the study are presented below. Each proposition is presented individually and whether they are supported or not supported will be discussed. A summary of the results is presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2  
Results Summary

Proposition	Results
<b>Proposition 1:</b> <i>Expatriate failure is predominantly defined on the basis of premature return</i>	Not supported
<b>Proposition 2:</b> <i>Expatriates who do not achieve the performance objectives of their international assignments should also be regarded as expatriate failures</i>	Partially supported
<b>Proposition 3:</b> <i>A successful repatriation process has a positive influence on the readjustment of the repatriate into their home environment</i>	Supported
<b>Proposition 4:</b> <i>Companies that fail to utilize or value the skills and knowledge gained by the repatriates from their overseas posting will run a higher risk of those repatriates leaving the organization.</i>	Supported
<b>Proposition 5:</b> <i>Selecting expatriates primarily on their technical competence increases the probability of expatriate failure</i>	Not supported

Table 4.2 continued  
Results Summary

<p><b>Proposition 6:</b> <i>Expatriates that have received some form of pre departure training will experience an easier adjustment into the new environment and hence increase the probability of a successful international assignment</i></p>	Supported
<p><b>Proposition 7:</b> <i>The expatriate inability to adapt or socialize with the new environment will increase the probability of failure in the international assignment.</i></p>	Partially Supported
<p><b>Proposition 8:</b> <i>Expatriate who are lacking of management skill, immaturity of personality and character and also lacking of language and communications skill are the personal factors that contribute to the expatriate failure.</i></p>	Supported

#### 4.1 Definition of Expatriate Failure

In general, all the twenty-three (re) expatriates regarded their current or previous expatriate assignments to be a success. This is a significant finding because expatriate failure is believed to be relatively high (see e.g. Gray 1991; Stone 1991). Furthermore, when asked about the reasons for choosing to accept the assignment, most respondents reported that it was for their career benefit (17) and opportunities to bring new experiences (6). This may be one possible reason for the high levels of success because the expatriates accepted the assignment for self-fulfilment as well as for work-related factors such as seeing it as a promotion (13) and the financial benefits (5).

Having the right attitude also is important in trying to maximize expatriate success. This was evident in some of the expectations that the (re) expatriates had about their international assignment, which may have played

a significant role in their perceived level of success. When asked about their expectations of their international posting, prior to leaving the home country, the most common responses were that the culture was going to be different (8) and that the work would be very interesting (6). The least common expectations were that they would receive increased money (1) and develop shallow relationships and friends (1).

***Proposition 1: Expatriate failure is predominantly defined on the basis of premature return***

Only four out of twenty-three (re) expatriates agreed that coming home prematurely meant expatriate failure to them. More realistically, the respondents found that, issues such as the inability to learn new things (9) and the inability to adapt (5), to be a more appropriate measurement of expatriate failure. Similarly, when asked about how their company measured the degree of success of their international postings, a majority of them (12) reported that it was whether or not project objectives were met.

***Proposition 2: Expatriates who do not achieve the performance objectives of their international assignments should also be regarded as expatriate failures***

A minority of (re) expatriates agreed that not achieving performance objectives should also be regarded as expatriate failure as only four respondents answered positively. They believed other factors such as 'the

inability to adjust' to be more appropriate. This contrasts significantly with how the expatriate's company defined expatriate failure. (Re) expatriates reported that most of their companies measure the degree of success of their assignments based on whether they achieved the performance objectives (12). Therefore, this proposition is only partially supported.

***Proposition 3: A successful repatriation process has a positive influence on the readjustment of the repatriate into their home environment***

Unfortunately, nine out of fifteen respondents answered that their companies did not discuss the repatriation process with them prior to their departure for their international assignment. However eleven (re) expatriates did report that discussions about their repatriation process would have helped minimize reverse culture shock and subsequently, helped with their readjustment into their home environment. Given this, this proposition is supported.

***Proposition 4: Companies that fail to utilize or value the skills and knowledge gained by the repatriates from their overseas posting will run a higher risk of those repatriates leaving the organization***

Over half of the (re) expatriates believed that their newly acquired skills and knowledge were valued by the home corporation (14). One respondent noted that: *"the repatriate is better at what they do but the benefit to the organization is indirect as there is no attempt at knowledge transfer, for example, there is*

*no training of other people*". When asked whether they thought that company recognition for these unique capabilities would assist in reducing repatriate turnover, a majority of participants answered positively (15). One repatriated noted that: *"you come back with all these new experiences and knowledge and it can be disheartening when the company does not give recognition"*. Therefore, the fourth proposition is supported.

#### 4.2 Factors Contributing to Expatriate Failure

When the (re) expatriates were asked what they thought were the predominant factors contribute to expatriate failure, their top six responses were as follows;

Table 4.3:  
Main Factors Contribute To Expatriate Failure

<b>Main Factors Contribute To Expatriate Failure</b>
1) Personality and character, emotional maturity
2) Management skill
3) Language and communication skill
4) Poor compensation
5) Inadequate cost projection
6) No repatriation planning

***Proposition 5: Selecting expatriates primarily on their technical competence increases the probability of expatriate failure***

When (re) expatriates were asked what they thought were the main reasons for expatriate failure, only one participant reported that it was due to technical incompetence. Over half of all (re) expatriates noted that they were sent on an

overseas assignment purely because of superior performance in the home company (8). Their ability to display exceptional technical competencies at home was therefore the main basis for the company choosing to send them abroad. However, none of the participant's international assignments were considered to be a failure. Therefore, this proposition is not supported.

***Proposition 6: Expatriates that have received some form of pre departure preparation will experience an easier adjustment into the new environment and hence increase the probability of a successful international assignment***

Eleven (re) expatriates reported to have received some form of pre departure preparation whilst the remaining four received nothing in this form at all. The most common forms of pre departure preparation were business discussions (5) and look-and-see visits (4), while the least common was CCT (2) and the provision of documents and brochures regarding the assignment destination (1). When asked about its potential or actual usefulness and relevance in helping them adjust to the new environment, a majority of participants responded positively (11). Therefore, the sixth proposition is supported.

**Proposition 7: The expatriate inability to adapt or socialize with the new environment will increase the probability of failure in the international assignment.**



Most of the expatriates, thirteen (13) expatriates disagree that the inability to adapt to the local culture can be the factors of the expatriate failure and even five of expatriates are strongly disagree on the local culture factors. However nine expatriates believe that the most difficulty part in the adjustment process is because of the physiological changes such as temperature and food. Generally, eighteen out of the twenty-three expatriates found that the adjustment process will overcome once they are found new companion and they get involved with their specially favored activities and experiences. In fact, six of them relate that the new environment will become familiar to them once they are settled down during the expatriate period. Therefore this proposition is partially supported.

**Proposition 8: Expatriate who are lacking of management skill, language and communications skill and immaturity of personality and character are the personal factors that contribute to the expatriate failure.**

Over sixty percent of the expatriate believed that the management skill, language and communication skill are factors that can effect the successful of the international assignment. (14). Whereas nineteen (19) of expatriate agreed that the expatriate personality and character immaturity can increase the chances of the expatriate failure. It means that the expatriate personal factors can contribute to the success or failure to the international assignment. Three of the expatriate even mentioned that they spend some of their time mixing around with the host country colleagues to learn and understand the

host country language for better communication and companionship.  
Therefore, this proposition is supported.

The following chapter will now discuss the study's findings in relation to the research questions.