

**Developing Career Capital for Global Careers: The Role of International  
Assignments**

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# **Developing Career Capital for Global Careers: The Role of International Assignments**

## **ABSTRACT**

Creating organizational processes which nurture global careers is a key task for global companies. International assignments are normally viewed as positive by both individuals and organizations for the development of global career competencies. This paper reports a qualitative study into the effects of international assignments on global careers. Adding to the literature, the research takes account of the dual dependency within global careers by contrasting individual and organizational perspectives. It highlights the importance of informal norms and develops a more nuanced picture of the impact of an international assignment on the career capital of individuals within one global organization.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Developing leaders who can manage the increasing complexity of running global organizations is a high human resource priority for many organizational leaders. Managing global talent and career paths is therefore a critical challenge in many multinational organizations (Gregersen, 1998). While organizations will externally recruit for high levels, creating a pipeline of internal talent ensures consistency and in-depth understanding of the business (Reichlin 2004).

An integral part of a majority of organizations' global management development approach is the international assignment (IA) In this paper we define an IA in the same way as a traditional expatriate assignment, i.e. individuals (and their family if appropriate) being sent to live and work in a foreign country for a normal period of 2-3 years. The literature identifies increasing problems surrounding IAs including, for the organization, high costs, inability to guarantee career progression on return and a substantial risk of valuable employees leaving (Stahl et al, 2002; Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2004). The individual may also experience many challenges, including reluctance to take up a posting due to dual-career or family constraints, issues of personal investment into cultural and work adaptation, reverse culture shock and applicability of the capabilities gained during and after an IA (Haslberger, 1999; Suutari & Brewster, 2004).

Despite these problems, many organizations and individuals continue to believe that the experience gained on an IA will increase the global competence of the manager (Harris et al, 2003). There is an extensive and long standing literature

on expatriate selection, preparation, adjustment, performance and repatriation (Tung, 1981; Black et al 1991; Fenwick 2004; Lazarova & Caligiuri 2004, Sparrow et al 2004; Takeuchi et al 2005). With respect to the contribution of IAs to individuals' global careers there are two issues relatively neglected.

First, researchers have noted the difficulty of identifying how and what expatriates learn during their assignments (Bonache et al, 2001; Shim & Paprock, 2002). Although there are some findings on what general competencies organizations are hoping to develop for global career progression (Gregersen et al, 1998) or what career management strategies organizations could employ (Feldman & Thomas, 1992) we gain insufficient insights into what the assignees learn. Going beyond the mainstream of the expatriation literature, Caligiuri and Di Santo (2001) outline eight developmental goals of global competence defined by focus groups of HR managers and proceed to assess the impact of an IA on gaining these competencies. However, the study does not cover the individuals' views on what they may have gained beyond the eight tightly defined goals nor does it link their experiences to their career progression. Kohonen (2005) notes that more empirical research is needed on linking IAs with managers' careers.

Second, career management was traditionally seen predominantly as the employer's responsibility (Orpen, 1994) which points to the importance of understanding the interaction between formal and informal organizational norms concerning career progression and individual perceptions of what is required to progress. Expatriates are more likely than other employees to have a

relational rather than a transactional contract with their employers (Baruch & Altman, 2002). However, a majority of expatriation studies are either cross-sectional or focus on company systems (Bonache et al, 2001). Thus, they do not take both the individual and organizational context into account. It is particularly important to redress this imbalance in evaluating the role of an IA in global career progression due to the dual dependency between organizations and individuals (Larsen, 2004).

This paper addresses these two issues and contributes to the literature by reporting a qualitative study of career capital development approaches in a global company. It uses the conceptual framework of the resource-based view of career capital which identifies three types of career capital (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994). A comparison with formal organizational career development approaches, including IAs, highlights the importance of informal norms regarding career development in the global company. Comparative perceptions of the value of an IA to global career progression from both an individual and organizational perspective are reported. The paper will first review the literature on career capital and the link with IAs for global career progression in order to frame the research question. The methodology and findings are then outlined, followed by a discussion and conclusions.

## **INDIVIDUAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL CAREER CAPITAL**

The resource-based view of the career holds that individual career capital consists of three ways of knowing. *Knowing-how* career capabilities provide an

individual with career-relevant skills and work-related knowledge and understanding that is needed for performance (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994). They consist of explicit knowledge, implicit experiences, soft skills and technical expertise. *Knowing-whom* career capabilities consist of a range of intra-firm, inter-firm, professional and social relations combined in a network (ibid). This social capital (Raider & Burt, 1996) may be created by targeting those persons who may be helpful to one's own career development (Jones & DeFillippi, 1996). *Knowing-why* career capabilities are seen to provide the owner with energy, sense of purpose, motivation and identification with the world of work and are linked to confidence, motivational energy and self-assurance to pursue a desired career path (Inkson & Arthur, 2001). *Knowing-why* capabilities are seen to lead to commitment that augments performance and learning.

From an organizational perspective, these competencies are actively developed in order to increase overall HR capability. Organizations use a range of approaches – including competency frameworks (Boyatzis, 1982; Selmer & Chiu, 2003, for HR executives, Khandwalla 2004) – to build *knowing-how* capabilities. Organizational activities to encourage knowing how accumulation include the foundation of specialized communities of interest, planned job rotations or involvement in project teams as well as IAs. *Knowing-whom* capabilities are encouraged through the use of mentoring programs, customer and in-company networking to support social capital accumulation (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1994). Attempts to influence the identification (and commitment) of employees through socialization into the organizational culture (Martin,

1995), team-building (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994), reward policies and career management processes (Schein, 1985) are all approaches to developing *knowing-why* capabilities.

However, individual career and organizational human capital approaches do not cover exactly the same domains. Arthur and his colleagues (1995) outline that the career capital of individuals is also influenced by outside influences such as family, dual career and other non-work circumstances (knowing why) or that certain skills may be acquired and/or used outside the organization. In the same vein, human capital goes beyond the sum of individual skills, abilities, motivations, efforts and social contacts to include group aspects such as team capabilities (Mills, 2000). Because human capital is ‘measured’ and assessed in many different ways there is a lack of agreement of what exactly the concept and practices entail (Elias & Scarbrough, 2004). Thus, while there is a large overlap where the improvement of individual career capital will increase organizational human capital, the concepts are not the same. Due to this non-alignment of domains the authors prefer to use expressions such as individual and organizational career capital perspectives.

Many graduates still hold a view that they can gain enough career capital within a traditional career to be employable elsewhere (King, 2003). In today’s dynamic business environment, in which companies cannot offer individuals jobs and careers for life the responsibility to manage careers no longer rests with the organization (Sturges, 2003). Hall and Mirvis (1996) suggest a new ‘Protean’ career reality. Careers are seen to be managed by the person and not

the organization, consist of lifelong series of experiences, skills, learning, transitions and identity changes, and development is self-directed, relational and based on continuous learning. The role of the organization is to provide challenging assignments, developmental relationships and resources.

### **International Assignments and career capital**

The link between an IA and the development of individual career capital in a global setting is not a certainty. International work is generally seen to develop the global competencies of the individual (Gregersen, 1998). However, any global competencies gained may not always be of direct use to the individual (Harris et al, 2003). First, international work may enhance the *knowing how* of assignees – but it may also result in skills that are not transferable to the home context by the individual either through a lack of applicability of the skill in the home organization context, or through the inability of the individual to translate this learning into practice. Bonache et al (2001:14) remark that there is a dearth of studies assessing the usefulness of internationally acquired skills in domestic positions. Second, a traditional IA is likely to have an impact on an expatriate's identity (Kohonen 2005). It may result in a confirmation of purpose and higher motivation (*knowing why*) – but it may also encourage individuals to reflect less on their purpose (e.g. because they have been chosen as fast track candidates) or foreign influences and the potential high stress level on an assignment may throw personal motivations into doubt. Third, a foreign posting may enhance the quality of an individual's social network (*knowing whom*) by giving her or him access to higher hierarchical levels on a day to day basis and by gaining

more contacts outside the organization in the new location – but it may also lead to the loss of home contacts and the diminishing of social relationships.

Likewise, the link between an IA and the organization's benefits in career capital augmentation is also tenuous. Few organizations are able to identify clearly the international competencies (*knowing how*) they expect their expatriates to gain as a result of the assignment (Schiuma et al, 2003). In addition, using assignments as a way of increasing the commitment (*knowing why*) of the manager to the organization is questionable on a number of fronts. Firstly, the changing nature of organizations means that a vertical career move after an assignment can normally no longer be offered as a certainty (Stahl et al, 2002; Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2004). Secondly, the need to cut the costs of expatriation results in much less generous terms and conditions for expatriate postings (ORC, 2003). Thirdly, family issues, particularly dual-career couple issues, have made many managers reluctant to take up offers of IAs (Harvey, 1995; 1997; Harris 2004; Sparrow et al, 2004). Sending managers on IAs to develop social networks which can help internationalization efforts may also be problematic in a context in which managers are aware of the need to develop relationships (*knowing whom*) with the powerful people in the organization, who are often concentrated in the home country head office. Organizations may find that weakening the link of the individual assignee to the corporate center is dysfunctional.

The interplay between organizational attempts to manage individual global careers with an IA as a critical component of this approach, and the actions and

perceptions of individuals within a specific organizational culture as to how to progress their global careers, forms the basis of the research question for the study:

*How do individuals perceive the contribution of an IA to the development of their global career capital in an international organization?*

## **METHODOLOGY**

A qualitative research methodology was adopted in order to understand more clearly the interaction between the individual actors' interpretations of their career actions and the organizational context in which they were constituted (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2003). The interview questions were based on the life history template developed by Schein (1990). In order to gain more information about *knowing whom* and *knowing how* issues, a number of questions were added<sup>i</sup>. The interviews were transcribed in full and we used NVivo software to facilitate the identification of individual phrases, sentences or paragraphs relating to the a priori themes of *knowing how*, *why* and *whom*. Both researchers read the transcripts in order to corroborate emerging themes and to ensure reliability. The coding frame was refined during the process of reading and re-reading the interviews. Next, we asked an independent researcher to go through the original, non-coded transcripts and to identify sections relating to the different forms of career capital and the link to IAs<sup>ii</sup>. While there was a high degree of commonality in the two analyses a few categorizations of comments diverged. This was especially the case where a paragraph would cover two or

even three types of career capital. These differences were discussed in order to refine the analysis.

Given the refined coding frame we selected statements from their original context and mapped the statements on large 'brown paper' in order to gain a better overview for interpreting and explaining the range and nature of the responses. At this stage information about the formal (and informal) organizational career system and instruments that emerged from company interviews and written documents were introduced to facilitate comparisons, the identification of linkages and general interpretation.

The organization selected was regularly included among the top 10 in the UK's 'Management Today's Most Admired Companies' report, with a large expatriate population (150 managers in 2003). The Annual Review and Summary Financial Statement (2003) stated that "Our people often mention our values and culture as reasons for their loyalty and commitment", the organization had extensive investment into the competency development of its staff and an active process to monitor career progress and to create social capital via mentoring and coaching initiatives.

The organization employed close to 56,000 people in over 60 countries and generated sales of more than \$10 bn in almost 200 countries in 2003 (ibid). One of its strategic objectives was to increase international activity, often through acquisitions. Worldwide, it was amongst the top five companies in both the confectionary and soft drink areas in terms of sales (Company Fact File

2003/4). The company's five key strategic goals included to 'ensure our capabilities are best in class' and to 'reinforce reputation with employees and society'. The strategic objectives resulted in ten priorities, the most HR centered were 'motivate, develop and reward people' and 'hone people and systems capabilities'.

The study involved an examination of the career capital behaviors and attitudes of managers at senior, middle and junior high potential levels, together with an analysis of formal organizational HR processes addressing knowing how, why and whom. In 2003 - 04, a series of in-depth, qualitative interviews were carried out with a total of 14 individuals from the Finance and Sales and Marketing divisions in the UK based headquarters. Nine managers had worked as international assignees for the company. Table 1 gives details of the interviewees and their backgrounds. The Finance and Sales and Marketing functions were chosen as they were the two main avenues for career progression in the organization. In addition, the majority of expatriate postings were filled from people in these functional areas. 11 interviews were carried out face to face and three by phone. Each interview lasted approximately one and a half hours with some running to two hours.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

To gain an understanding of the organizational context and career strategies, structures and processes a further three in-depth interviews with senior HR executives were carried out. Moreover, we analyzed internal company

documentation relating to the firm's career management system as well as its IA policies and practices.

## **FINDINGS**

The data from the case study are presented under the three main career competency categories *knowing-how*, *knowing-whom* and *knowing-why*. In each section, we present the organizational processes, the individual experiences and the role of IAs from both an organizational and individual perspective.

### **Career Competencies (Knowing how)**

#### ***Organisation***

From an organizational perspective, the development of *knowing-how* competencies was highly formalized. Recruitment and selection was based on a competency framework. Career progression was seen in terms of four career stages: early career; early mid career; late mid career; peak career. The number of roles available at each stage was specified. Each stage involved different work reflecting the skill and experience of the person at that stage (Internal Document: 'International Career Path Tool'). Specific career paths were identified for each function which detail the experience needed at each stage.

The organization also provided many developmental programs, including coaching (Internal Document: 'Developing Talent at Company X'). These were especially prevalent in early and early-mid career stages. Interviews with HR

executives showed that on-the-job learning and job rotation were seen to be critical components of organizational activities to build *knowing how* capabilities.

### ***Individuals***

More than half of the interviewees (8) indicated that the formal career system was often disregarded and not perceived as helpful:

*I thought I was very much left to sink.... there is no career, no progression planning. ... I don't see the next step and I don't see anyone investing any time in the next step. (Middle Manager, F)*

The most frequently mentioned *knowing-how* career capital related to people skills (12 respondents). Overall, seven individuals noted that most of their learning in terms of *knowing-how* capabilities had come through on-the-job experience rather than from a formal organizational intervention.

### ***Role of International Assignment in “Knowing-How”***

The **organization** used IAs to build *knowing how* competencies as part of its career progression system. The company planned the movement of people into key roles. The competencies gained as part of an IA fed into the global Performance Management process and the Potential Review process which identified those with potential to do more and those with leadership potential (Internal Document: ‘Role Map’).

From an **individual** perspective, the exact nature of the individual career capital capabilities gained in terms of *knowing-how* whilst on IAs was sometimes hard to define. Five of the international assignees identified a broader perspective, more intercultural competence and increased levels of self-confidence as a result of working abroad.

*You are thrown into the deep end, then you struggle...managing through this really improves your confidence. Yes, possibly the biggest benefit was increased self-confidence. (Middle Manager, F).*

For two thirds, the IA was a way of gaining increased commercial experience, often through having a broader brief or larger and more complex operation to run

*[I]t gave me general management experience (Senior Manager, M)*

In summary, in the *knowing-how* field the organization offered a range of initiatives with group work, job rotations and coaching being singled out as most important by two HR executives. The individual interviews showed, however, that the formal system was largely ignored in favour of informal learning on the job. Managers who had been on an IA stressed broad competencies and experiences – such as general business understanding or higher levels of self-confidence –as adding to their career capital. All three interviews with HR executives showed that the organization focused its efforts on augmenting the knowing how of its managers through IAs. In contrast, individuals concentrated more on the building of their social capital.

## **Career Competencies (Knowing Whom)**

### *Organization*

From an **organizational** perspective, the development of internal social networks was actively encouraged for the individual's benefit during early career and for the organization's benefit from late-mid to peak career (HR Interview Notes). During early career, it was predominantly high potential GMP participants who were the recipients of one-to-one networking initiatives.

*I had a central HR person who if you like owned me, who helped me find the next role and move me into the next role.... (Middle Manager, F)*

Once managers had reached a late-mid career stage and had significant people responsibilities they were encouraged to network in order to enable the 'cream to rise to the top' (HR interview). With the exception of two interviewees, however, the managers did not attempt to network to pursue organizational goals but used it for their personal aims.

### *Individuals*

Twelve **individuals** outlined the core importance of social capital, making it the key career capital field as perceived by the managers in the organization. They argued that organizational career progression was largely predicated by the quality of the internal networks individuals had established. 10 respondents saw networking as beneficial to future careers. Even when HR intervention was available, the majority of interviewees (8) mentioned that it was their personal

relationships with superiors and/or their proactivity which were most influential in obtaining new roles and promotions.

*Networking here is all about exposure. There is nothing formal, try and get yourself onto important projects and get yourself seen on important projects. (Middle Manager, M)*

The majority of interviewees perceived that there were few organizational networking mechanisms that would really pay off. They made it clear that it is the responsibility of the individual to take action.

### ***Role of IAs in Knowing Whom***

It emerged in the HR executive interviews that the **organization** did not have any special processes or initiatives designed to further the social networks of their international assignees or to tie them more intensely to the company. *Knowing-whom* capital was basically up to the expatriate to develop.

Three **individuals** distinguished between local and international networks. They felt that it was hard to build a local network due to the added pressure to perform in order to ‘justify’ high costs, insufficient local language skills or issues of trust.

*I think they (local employees, authors’ comment) don’t know anything about your background really, all they know is that you have come in from London which to them sounds quite scary.... so it is a very different kind of relationship building because I think people are more on guard and more testing of you...(Middle Manager, F)*

More than two thirds of international assignees found it an additional pressure on their networking skills to work abroad.

*I find it important to keep reminding people back in the UK of what you are doing, because when you are out of mind, it is easy for people to underestimate you. (Middle Manager, F)*

Overall, the majority of the managers gave the impression that their *knowing whom* capital had suffered as a result of an IA.

In summary, knowing whom capital was regarded as the most important type of capital by individuals and was actively pursued. Whilst the company used some of the networking mechanisms outlined by DeFillippi and Arthur (1994), it strove to employ networking for organizational means. Individuals, in contrast, often did not perceive organizational networking mechanisms as key and predominantly pursued their own interests (c.f. Pfeffer, 1989). The managers reacted to the perceived absence of ‘tight’ career management by proactively using networking to secure their current jobs and to increase future promotion opportunities. A key finding was that most expatriate interviewees realized that their social capital had suffered as a result of working abroad. Within this informal culture, an IA caused strains in the social networks for the majority of managers, resulting in a higher perceived effort to keep contacts alive and sometimes a differential approach to local and home colleagues.

### **Career Competencies: Knowing Why**

### ***Organization***

The HR executives described the culture as ‘informal’; ‘goal oriented’ and ‘above all flexible’. The organization’s focus within *knowing-why* was through the provision of informal career conversations and coaching. The powerful, informal organizational culture had an impact on managers’ behaviors.

*[T]hey don't like taking difficult decisions. People call it paralysis by analysis, where people spend the whole time trying to get consensus and, in fact, you get nowhere. You want a horse, you get a camel. So I think that's what I would describe as the key basis of the X culture...(Middle Manager, F)*

This consensus-driven culture may have had the effect that managers preferred to keep operational flexibility in relation to career decisions. This may, in turn, have facilitated the disregard for the formal system and the proactive pursuit of individual career interests. It is interesting to note that the majority of interviewees recognized the need to be proactive in order to get ahead. Again, this may explain the perceived paramount value of networking inside the organization.

### ***Individual***

Six interviewees indicated that commitment to the organization depended on how well the individual fitted the organizational culture

*But also something about the organization as well in terms of the character of that organization and knowing that I worked well in that culture.... So I felt that I could see a career path for myself. (Middle manager, F)*

The interviews showed that for most managers a sense of belonging, purpose and goal clarity emerged over time which was not the result of a managed process by the organization. The *knowing-why* was, however, influenced by what the interviewees termed 'culture' and the interviewees' insights had a profound effect on their commitment, motivation and willingness to stay or return to the case study organization. Overall, *knowing why* in this case clearly had an influence on the values and interests of individuals and influenced their career development (Jones & Lichtenstein, 2000).

### **Role of IAs in Knowing Why**

The **organization** had a large number of expatriates. It was perceived as important to give them a thorough pre-departure preparation and to enable their return in order to reduce repatriation turnover. Two personnel executives also indicated that the organization attempted to confer the message that IAs were beneficial for career progression.

The key reasons for **individuals** to want to go on an IA were found either in their desire to work internationally (three managers) or in the seeking of challenging roles (four managers), but not explicitly as a means for global career progression.

A small majority of the international assignees experienced a fundamental rethink of their individual relationship to the firm and/or a questioning of personal norms and values while they worked abroad.

*One thing it did actually teach me was that if I believed in things that I fundamentally believed the opposite, so it did make you question your own beliefs and values ....(Middle Manager, F)*

In this sense IAs had the potential to create deeper individual insights and actually represented a threat for the employing firm (c.f. Suutari & Brewster, 2004). In line with Stahl et al's (2002) findings of many expatriates being at risk of leaving the organization during their assignments, two managers indicated in the interviews that they were already thinking about 'staying out there' while abroad. Combined with the perception by the majority of former expatriates that they had to proactively look for an adequate job to return to, repatriation represented a risk to continued employment. The organization did not offer a clear career path after the IA and a small majority of the former expatriates stated that an IA is not a key success factor for career advancement.

In summary, *knowing-why* capital was influenced through the informal organizational culture, which was characterized by flexibility and goal-orientation. The organization's key processes in terms of coaching and career conversation had only limited success in forming clear perspectives. More important were proactivity and the experiences that staff had on the job. People who 'fitted' the culture were likely to feel committed to their immediate organizational context and the company – and may have felt a strong need to

network to pursue their own goals and career ambitions. With respect to IAs, these had the potential to radically change the *knowing why* of individuals. This process triggered some risks for the organization.

Overall, all three HR executive stated that IAs were good for the career progression of individual managers both for domestic and global positions. In marked contrast, however, was that a two-thirds majority of individuals perceived that IAs were not a key to fast track careers within the organization. While these individuals saw the benefits of an IA on a personal level (knowing why) and as being more attractive for other employers six indicated that they had difficulties using their acquired skills and insights in their new jobs. All but one in director positions, however, evaluated their foreign experience as important for gaining and conducting their current, international roles. It seemed as if a more nuanced picture of the effects of IAs on global careers was needed in this organization. Below, we will discuss the results and outline some practical implications.

## **DISCUSSION**

Global careers do generally not happen just because a manager went on an IA. Individuals and organizations assess a set of abilities, drivers and social capital that have been accumulated in domestic and international settings over time. The discussion below takes account of the basis of a global career being grounded in both domestic and global experiences and reflects the dual dependency relation of organizations and individuals (Larsen, 2004).

### ***Formal and Informal Career Capital Activities***

One major finding from the interviews was that the formal system had little real impact on the ways in which career progression was achieved, at least in the eyes of the individuals affected. The key approaches used by the organization to build knowing whom, why and how and by individuals to augment their career capital differed as both parties used different patterns and had diverse goals. Table 2 summarizes what individuals and organizational respondents outlined as key career capital areas as well as methods for achieving them.

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

Whilst on a meta-level there is some complementarity of individual and organizational career capital approaches, a mismatch became apparent when the specific career and HR activities were evaluated more closely. The existing literature often concentrates on the complementarities (Inkson & Arthur, 2001; Larsen, 2004) while these findings present interesting exploratory insights for practitioners and academics.

The key area of divergent career management approaches was *knowing whom*. It was the least managed area by the organization and, yet, within the informal context individuals saw it at the most critical career capital. Moreover, the career capital building patterns were radically different. The organization concentrated exclusively on internal networking activities and provided encouragement for people at superior hierarchical levels to ‘help’ junior

managers. Individuals, in turn, proactively augmented their social capital, preferred to network upwards or laterally and pursued their own benefits for their current job or their future career. Further, with more experience and higher hierarchical levels they were more likely to value external contacts and would spend more effort on gaining these. The importance of social capital in an organization where formal processes and norms were often non-existing or disregarded is clearly shown in expatriation.

### ***Role of International Assignments in Developing Career Capital***

The interviewees attempted to build a global network, largely on the back of their new position and responsibilities. Caligiuri and Di Santo (2001) outline increasing professional contacts as a key developmental goal in IAs. The research resulted in a more nuanced picture of how expatriates attempted to build and *preserve* their social capital and where they perceived difficulties. Many individuals felt that they had to work harder to keep their social capital. Where international assignees perceived a ‘them and us’ atmosphere in the host operations they used different social networking approaches with their local contacts, often to balance tensions and to establish trust. This is one of the global competencies outlined by Gregersen et al (1998). The crux, as the interviewees saw it, was to preserve the home network through persistently using contacts in the head office and through telling powerful people about their own personal and business development – a finding that has important implications for the expatriate literature and organizational policies and practices. Despite the major efforts that interviewees had exerted, a majority acknowledged that their *knowing-whom* capital suffered as a result of the IA.

The evaluation of the respondents with regards to the impact of an IA on their *knowing how* capital was more positive with all expatriates pointing out meta-level competencies that they had gained from their foreign work (c.f. Table 2). They broadly reconfirm those competencies that are outlined by the literature into organizational goals in expatriation (e.g. Caligiuri & Di Santo, 2001; Sparrow et al 2004).

The research also looked at the *knowing-why* changes that had an impact on the career capital of individuals – a dimension that is often not covered by other researchers (e.g. Caligiuri & Di Santo, 2001). The results again highlighted the equivocal nature of an IA. Some of the interviewees' experiences challenged previous certainties and made them question their continued motivation to stay with the organization. The lack of management and support for international assignees on return reinforced a potential to look elsewhere for career opportunities.

In contrast, the three HR executives interviewed claimed that the general management skills and the global network of assignees was useful for their further career progression. Crucially, while the organization saw IAs as good for a global career, most individuals did not concur. One of the key reasons was for the interviewees that they could not use their skills in the position they returned to (c.f. Bonache et al, 2001) – which confirmed that they saw the career capital they gained from an IA not as distinct but as embedded in their general set of abilities, contacts, insights and drives to be used in positions that

offered a variety of domestic and global challenges. International assignments were not seen as a critical success factor for either career advancement or the acquisition of career capital by the individual managers. Instead, a role at the corporate center could have yielded better capabilities and may have resulted in superior social capital. Put simply, the way to the top in the case organization was seen to be most likely through a good social network. This reflected the strong informal mechanisms at work rather than an effective formal career system. In comparison, long-term international assignments had uncertain benefits and strong potential drawbacks.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study focused on the contribution of IAs to the development of international career capital of individuals in a global corporation. It contributes to the literature in that it goes beyond the traditional themes of the expatriate cycle (Harris et al, 2003). The academic writing predominantly deals either with organizational perspectives of what beneficial effects IAs *should* have to create a global career or concentrates on individuals irrespective of their organizational context. This research has used a dual dependency perspective that allowed to mirror the individuals' embeddedness in their organizational context. The findings revealed the usefulness of using the theoretical framework of career capital as a method of assessing development of global competencies – it delivered additional insights to the literature especially in the areas of knowing whom and knowing why. In response to our research

question, a more refined picture of the career capital impact of IAs emerged. In contrast to most of the literature on global careers it showed equivocal benefits of international work perceived by individuals although the organization insisted that IAs were important for global careers.

The limitations of this study are related to the sample size and the analysis of one major MNC. Providing detailed qualitative analysis of one organization has the principal drawback of non-generalizability. The interpretations of the results, therefore, have to be careful and context-sensitive. However, the emerging rich data of the perceived reality of individual careers was the basis for a number of consistent themes that may help other researchers to formulate topics and research areas to explore.

Our insights point to the importance of understanding both individual and organizational career capital approaches in order to gain a fuller and more realistic picture of the realities of global careers. This may help individuals to shape more realistic expectations and organizations to understand these and to develop flexible, context-sensitive approaches

*Hils, I wrote this for the conclusions – to cut??*

*The categorization of the impact that IAs had into the three types of career capital allowed for a clearer understanding of the benefits and drawbacks of international work on global careers. First, it enabled a view of the dynamics of individual drivers and how they were affected by the international experience. This long-term impact – which applies to both careers insight and outside of the organization – is often overlooked in the expatriation literature and rarely related to global careers. Second, the findings on differential approaches to network preservation (home) and improvement (local, global) add important nuances to the understanding of the impact of IAs on global careers. Third, contrasting the perspectives of individuals and the organization showed that they were not aligned. Identifying the career perspectives of individuals within an organization is essential to design systems and communication processes that motivate staff to take up international assignments. This may, for instance, entail working consciously on activities that enable individual expatriates to gain more from their assignments in career capital terms – most notably in relation to knowing whom.*

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**Table 1: An Overview of Individual Interviewees and their Backgrounds**

<i>Management Level (Career Stage)</i>	<i>Gender / Age</i>	<i>Function &amp; Position</i>	<i>Years with Company X</i>	<i>IA Experience/ys</i>
Senior (Peak Career)	M / 48	Global Marketing Director	12	5
Senior (Peak Career)	F / 40	Investor Relations Director	5	No
Senior (Peak Career)	M / 60	Chief Finance Officer	38	4
Senior (Peak Career)	M / 38	Finance Director	15	3
Senior (Peak Career)	F / 40	Strategy Director (Marketing)	10	3
Middle (Late-Mid Career)	F / 37	Senior Marketing Manager	15	2.5
Middle (Late-Mid Career)	F / 42	Senior Marketing Manager	12	3
Middle (Late-Mid Career)	M / 40	Marketing Manager	4	2
Middle (Late-Mid Career)	M / 32	Finance Manager	3	1.5 (on-going)
Middle (Late-Mid Career)	M / 31	Finance Manager	2	No
Junior HiPo (Early-Mid Career)	M / 30	Marketing Manager	3	1.5 (on-going)
Junior HiPo (Early-Mid Career)	F / 30	Finance Analyst	2	No
Junior HiPo (Early-Mid Career)	M / 28	Activity Manager Marketing	2	No
Junior HiPo (Early Career)	M / 23	Brand Manager	1	No

**Table 2: Key Individual & Organizational Career Capital Activities**

<i>Career Capital Area</i>	<i>Key Individual Career Capital Activities</i>	<i>Key Organizational Career and HR Management Activities</i>
<p><b>Know How</b></p> <p><i>Tacit and Explicit Knowledge, Skills and Abilities</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General Know How seen as basis</li> <li>• <b>Methods:</b> On-the-job learning; correct work behaviors, international assignments</li> <li>• <b>Nature:</b> mostly informal development</li> <li>• <b>IAs</b> give general business understanding and raise self-confidence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Know How activities most important.</li> <li>• <b>Methods:</b> On-the-job learning (primarily through project work; and job rotations)</li> <li>• <b>Nature:</b> mostly informal development, competency framework, training imp. role</li> <li>• <b>IAs</b> expose assignees to broader management issues</li> </ul>
<p><b>Know Why</b></p> <p><i>Identity, Values and Interests</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Know Why gaining in importance with tenure</li> <li>• <b>Methods:</b> perceived orgl. culture and reputation, opportunities and challenges</li> <li>• <b>Nature:</b> informal, emerging, experience-based factors shape knowing why</li> <li>• <b>IAs</b> challenge own beliefs, create more awareness and encourage self-reflection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Know Why activities substantial</li> <li>• <b>Methods:</b> Career conversations and Coaching</li> <li>• <b>Nature:</b> formal career system, feedback and coaching important</li> <li>• <b>IAs</b> create a global mindset and a local awareness in expatriates</li> </ul>
<p><b>Know Whom</b></p> <p><i>Intra-firm, inter-firm, professional and social relations</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Know Whom activities most important</li> <li>• <b>Methods:</b> Internal and external networking; assigned mentors / self-found sponsors</li> <li>• <b>Nature:</b> proactive, own benefits for current job and future career paramount</li> <li>• <b>IAs</b> need differential approaches to parent, local and global networking from expatriates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Know Whom activities least managed</li> <li>• <b>Methods:</b> Internal networking activities, HR ‘owners’ during early career</li> <li>• <b>Nature:</b> hierarchical superior as initiator</li> <li>• <b>IAs</b> include more business travel and expatriates have increased opportunities to build their networks</li> </ul>

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- <sup>i</sup> The questionnaire can be obtained from the first author.
  - <sup>ii</sup> We are very grateful for the contribution of Dr. Noeleen Doherty at this stage of the research.