



BI Norwegian Business School - campus Oslo

GRA 19502

Master Thesis

Component of continuous assessment: Thesis Master of Science

What are the characteristics of repatriation knowledge sharing practices?

Exploring the barriers and opportunities for sharing knowledge

Start: 02.03.2017 09.00

Finish: 01.09.2017 12.00

Jan Peter Stensholt

Dag Anders Ingebo

BI Norwegian Business School

What are the characteristics of repatriation knowledge sharing practices?

Exploring the barriers and opportunities for sharing knowledge

Hand-in date:
31.08.2017

Campus:
BI Oslo

Supervisor:
Cathrine Filstad

Examination code and name:
GRA 19502 Master Thesis

Programme:
Master of Science in Leadership and Organizational Psychology

“This thesis is a part of the MSc programme at BI Norwegian Business School. The school takes no responsibility for the methods used, results found and conclusions drawn.”

Acknowledgements:

The thesis is written by Dag Anders Ingebo and Jan Peter Stensholt as the final dissertation for the Master of Science in Leadership and Organizational Psychology at BI Norwegian Business School.

We want to express gratitude to all the people who helped us complete this thesis. First, we would like to thank our supervisor Professor Cathrine Filstad for all her guidance, constructive feedback and help along the way.

Secondly, we would like to thank our contacts within Kongsberg Protech Systems that gave us access to the organization and helping us out with booking all the interviews. We would also like to extend a huge thanks to all our informants, the thesis would not have been a reality without your valuable contributions. And thank you for taking the time to share your personal stories and experiences with us.

Finally, on a personal note, we both want to thank our families and friends for the continued support and encouragement during this process.

| | |
|---|------------|
| Abstract | iii |
| 1.0 Introduction | 1 |
| 1.1 Research questions and objectives of the thesis | 2 |
| 2.0 Theoretical framework | 3 |
| 2.1 Defining knowledge | 3 |
| Tacit knowledge vs. explicit knowledge..... | 3 |
| 2.2 Defining knowledge sharing | 4 |
| The value of knowledge sharing: | 4 |
| 2.3 Factors that influence knowledge sharing | 5 |
| Nature of knowledge | 5 |
| Motivation to share | 6 |
| Opportunities to share..... | 6 |
| Culture of the work environment | 6 |
| Trust and knowledge sharing..... | 7 |
| 2.4 Expatriate knowledge | 7 |
| The potential role of repatriates..... | 8 |
| 2.5 Research on repatriation knowledge sharing | 9 |
| 3. Research context: | 10 |
| 3.1 Description of the case organization | 10 |
| 3.2 Description of the case organization’s expatriation policy | 11 |
| 4.0 Methodological approach and data collection | 11 |
| 4.1 Choice of method: qualitative research | 11 |
| 4.2 Data collection | 12 |
| Sample..... | 12 |
| Planning and conducting the interviews..... | 12 |
| 5. Data analysis | 14 |
| 5.1 Analyzing the interviews: a description of the process | 14 |
| Familiarization with the data | 14 |
| Initial codes and themes | 14 |
| Reviewing the themes..... | 15 |
| 5.2 Assessing the quality of research | 15 |
| Credibility..... | 16 |
| Reliability..... | 16 |
| Analytic generalizability | 16 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| 5.3 Ethical considerations | 17 |
| 6. Findings and discussion | 18 |
| 6.1 New Knowledge obtained | 18 |
| Cultural knowledge and understanding:..... | 19 |
| Building networks and relationships..... | 21 |
| Knowledge of industry and professional competency..... | 22 |
| General reflections: New knowledge obtained | 23 |
| 6.2 Individual perception of knowledge sharing | 24 |
| Perception of knowledge sharing | 25 |
| Passive knowledge sharing | 26 |
| Proactive knowledge sharing | 27 |
| General reflections: Individual perception of knowledge sharing..... | 28 |
| 6.3 Knowledge sharing practices | 29 |
| Formal knowledge sharing practices | 29 |
| Informal knowledge sharing | 31 |
| General reflections: Knowledge sharing practices | 32 |
| 6.4 Personal experiences | 33 |
| Career frustrations | 34 |
| Expectation management frustrations | 36 |
| Knowledge utilization frustrations..... | 37 |
| General reflections: Personal experiences | 37 |
| 6.5 Barriers for knowledge sharing | 39 |
| Time, structure and relevancy | 39 |
| Lack of managerial and colleague interest | 41 |
| Individual ability and willingness to share | 42 |
| 6.6 Opportunities for knowledge sharing | 44 |
| 7. Implications for practice | 46 |
| 8. Conclusion | 47 |
| References | 51 |
| Appendices | 55 |
| Appendix 1: Interview guide KPS | 55 |
| Appendix 2: Coding of data | 56 |

Abstract

This thesis explores the characteristics of repatriation knowledge sharing, focusing on identifying the barriers and opportunities for sharing knowledge in a repatriation context. The findings presented is based on qualitative interviews of eight former expatriates in a Norwegian company within the defense industry operating in more than 25 different countries. Our study identifies no deliberate, but some seemingly unconscious knowledge sharing practices. Moreover, it highlights what can be seen as a clear underutilization of repatriates' knowledge. On the organizational level, we found lack of interest among colleagues and leaders, as well as lack of deliberate efforts for facilitating knowledge sharing to be the most apparent barriers for knowledge sharing. The individual barriers were largely related to low awareness and lack of realization of the value and benefit of their possessed knowledge. In addition, we found underutilization of, and lack of interest in repatriates' knowledge to be a major source of frustration among repatriates. Further we discuss the implications of our findings for organizational and managerial practice.

1.0 Introduction

In today's globalized economy, business is no longer limited by national boundaries. Companies of various sizes are now performing a significant portion of their activities outside of their home countries (Bender & Fish, 2000). With an increasing extent of internationalization in organizations, the number of expatriates is increasing consequentially (Vidal, Valle, & Aragón, 2007). Along with the geographical scope of organizational concerns, the source of competitive advantage for organizations has shifted as well, from physical assets towards intellectual resources (Stewart, 1997).

Following this development, it becomes invaluable for organizations to manage knowledge and transfer existing skills and expertise within their organization, if they are to be successful (Bender & Fish, 2000). In today's world, organizational success is dependent on their ability to effectively and efficiently create and share knowledge (Wang & Noe, 2010). Developing, utilizing, and transferring knowledge across organizational units becomes critical for the success of multinational companies in worldwide markets (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000). International assignments can therefore provide the means for substantial personal and professional development. Through expatriation, organizations are offered the opportunity to acquire knowledge abroad. And the repatriation process provides a unique opportunity to transfer and apply this knowledge within the organization upon return (Kamoche, 1997).

Expatriates are costly, multinational companies invest a lot in the success of these international assignments (Shaffer, Harrison, & Gilley, 1999). Because of this, a large amount of resources is wasted if this knowledge is not effectively and efficiently transferred back into the organization. Repatriation represent a key moment of the international assignment process. But contrary to its importance, repatriate knowledge is often ignored (Oddou, Osland, & Blakeney, 2009) and many companies do not have sufficient policies and procedures to help with the integration of returning employees (Nery-Kjerfve & Mclean, 2012).

Several problems and challenges can occur during the expatriation and repatriation process (Shaffer et al., 1999). Three main problems are presented: Expatriates return from their assignment prematurely, organizations experience low retention rates for repatriates, and finally organizations struggle with utilizing the different types of knowledge that repatriates have acquired abroad. These

problems represent wasted resources, and will likely have negative consequences in terms of knowledge creation and organizational learning. It is estimated that between 20 to 50 percent of expatriates abort their assignment or return prematurely, resulting in significant costs for the organization (Mendenhall, Dunbar, & Oddou, 1987). Many companies also have low retention rates of repatriates, characterizing repatriation as a major human resource challenge (Black, Gregersen, & Mendenhall, 1992). The utilization and sharing of repatriate knowledge has also shown to be a major issue with companies lacking sufficient policies and measures to transfer this person-bound knowledge and expertise back into the organization (Bender & Fish, 2000). In addition to capturing the repatriation knowledge and experience, it is also the question knowing how to incorporate it back into the organization. The under- utilization of repatriates' knowledge also represents a wasted opportunity for gaining knowledge, which in addition can cause frustrations and higher turnover-intentions (Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2001).

1.1 Research questions and objectives of the thesis

While there has been a significant amount of research on knowledge processes within expatriation (e.g. Bonache & Brewster, 2001; Bender & Fish, 2000; Bird, Mendenhall, Stevens, & Oddou, 2009; Bonache & Brewster, 2001; Welch & Steen, 2013), repatriation has received much less attention (Huang, Chiu, & Lu, 2013). There seems to be less focus not only the repatriation period, but especially the different aspects of repatriation knowledge sharing, which is the field of contribution for this thesis. Previous repatriation research has examined knowledge transfer to some extent (Lazarova & Tarique, 2005; Crowne, 2009, Nery-Kjerfve & McLean, 2012; Burmeister & Deller, 2016). Focusing on either type of knowledge gained, or variables that hinder or facilitate successful knowledge. While knowledge sharing among repatriates is only addressed by Mäkelä & Brewster (2009), and they mostly focus on interaction contexts and the role of social capital.

Burmeister et al. (2015) reviews the existing research on repatriation knowledge sharing/transfer and found that almost all of them focused on the different variables that could potentially hinder or facilitate repatriation knowledge transfer success. They argue that previous studies are not able to fully explain the complexity of the repatriation knowledge transfer process and how the

process unfolds (Burmeister et al, 2015). And goes on to address the role of repatriates during the different stages of the repatriation knowledge transfer process. Arguing that the different processes during repatriation knowledge transfer were contingent upon the ability and motivation of actors as well as their opportunity to interact (Burmeister et al., 2015). Which also coincided with previous research done by Oddou et al (2013) and Reiche (2012). We seek to build on this previous research by further delving into the different characteristics of repatriation knowledge sharing and exploring the potential barriers and opportunities for sharing repatriate knowledge. Through exploring these factors, we seek out to answer the following research question:

“What are the characteristics of repatriation knowledge sharing practices?”
 - *Exploring the barriers and opportunities for sharing repatriate knowledge*

2.0 Theoretical framework

2.1 Defining knowledge

Davenport and Prusak’s (2000) define knowledge as “a fluid mix of framed experience, values and contextual informant that provides a framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information” (Davenport and Prusak, 2000). Knowledge can also be described as a dynamic human process where a flow of messages interacts with others’ beliefs and ideas (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). While Tsoukas and Vladimirou (2001) define knowledge as the practice of making distinctions, implying that knowledge is something ambiguous, dynamic and context-dependent.

Tacit knowledge vs. explicit knowledge

The dominant classification of knowledge divides it into two types, namely explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge (Nonaka, 1994). The idea of understanding knowledge as either explicit or tacit goes all the way back to the work of Michael Polanyi. He argued that explicit knowledge represents the forms of knowledge that we are able to easily express, capture, store and reuse (Polanyi, 1966). It is something systematic and universal (Polanyi, 1966) and can be codified, stored and transferred across both time and space independent of any individuals (Lam, 2000).

Tacit knowledge on the other hand is grounded in personal experience and cannot be articulated or easily codified (Polanyi, 1966). Tacit knowledge is difficult to express, because we know more than we can tell and, some of our knowledge are not formally taught to us (Polanyi, 1966). Tacit knowledge is both non-linguistic and non-numerical (Nonaka, 1991), and very context dependent and rooted in individual experience, ideas, values and emotions (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). This also means that certain elements of tacit knowledge are never possible to communicate in practice (Filstad, 2010). This argument builds on the work of Tsoukas (2003) who argues that tacit knowledge cannot be captured, translated or converted, but only displayed in what we do (Tsoukas, 2003). Tsoukas argue that there is no difference between tacit and explicit knowledge because they are two sides of the same coin (Tsoukas 2003). Believing that knowledge development takes place through social interaction, arguing against Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) who claim that knowledge development takes place through making tacit knowledge explicit (Tsoukas, 2003)

2.2 Defining knowledge sharing

Knowledge sharing can be defined as the act of making knowledge available to others within an organization (Ipe, 2003, p.341). It refers to the process where knowledge held by an individual is converted into a form so that others can understand and voluntarily shared by the individuals holding the knowledge (Davenport, 1997; Ipe, 2003). And it involves the sharing of individuals knowledge and experience (Lin, 2007), aiming to help others and collaborate to create new knowledge or implement procedures (Christensen, 2007; Cummings, 2004). Knowledge transfer refers to the process through which one unit in an organization is affected by the experience of another (Argote & Ingram, 2000), entailing the translation of tacit- into explicit knowledge, while knowledge sharing implies the exchange of tacit- to tacit knowledge (Christensen, 2007).

The value of knowledge sharing:

Wang and Noe (2010) state that the degree of success of any knowledge management initiative is dependent on the level of knowledge sharing. Most researchers argue that knowledge sharing have the potential to contribute to both individual and organizational learning (Andrews & Delahaye, 2000), giving employees an opportunity to contribute to the overall knowledge application and

innovation of an organization (Jackson, Chuang, Harden, Jiang, & Joseph, 2006). Organizations are dependent on the ability to properly create and share knowledge effectively (Abrams, Cross, Lesser, & Levin, 2003), and knowledge sharing therefore represents a tool for gaining a competitive advantage (Jackson et al., 2006). Knowledge is arguably the most important strategic resource of any organization, but this knowledge cannot be fully capitalized if we don't understand how the knowledge is created, shared and used within organization (Ipe, 2003). Knowledge sharing is therefore still regarded as critical to organizational success in today's world (Grant, 1996).

2.3 Factors that influence knowledge sharing

Ipe (2003) argues that an organization's ability to leverage its knowledge is highly dependent on its people and is only possible when people can and are willing to share their knowledge. Knowledge sharing provides the irreplaceable link between individual and organization, moving the knowledge from the individual to the organizational level (Hendriks, 1999). And the ability to successfully manage the knowledge sharing process is seen by many as one of the most challenging parts of any knowledge management implementation (Lee & Ahn, 2005). Knowledge sharing both a demanding and time-consuming process (Hinds & Pfeffer, 2003) and Ipe (2003) identifies four major factors influencing the level of knowledge sharing in organizations.

Nature of knowledge

Ipe (2003) argues that the very nature of the knowledge (tacit vs. explicit) and the value attributed to the knowledge will likely have a major impact on the level of knowledge sharing. As previously mentioned, tacit knowledge is not easily codifiable, not easily communicated and sticky in nature (Hippel, 1994). The tacitness of knowledge can therefore be seen as a natural obstacle for successful knowledge sharing in organizations (Ipe, 2003). Explicit knowledge on the other hand, can be codified and transferred across time, which means that it has an advantage over tacit knowledge, in terms of share ability (Lam 2000). However, that does not mean that all explicit knowledge can be easily shared. Weiss (1999) distinguish between rationalized knowledge (general, context independent, public) and embedded knowledge (context dependent, personalized). Arguing that

embedded knowledge that is context dependent and narrowly applicable is not that easy to share, despite being explicit in nature (Weiss, 1999).

Motivation to share

People are not likely to share their knowledge if they don't have strong motivation to do so (Stenmark, 2001). Ipe (2003) divides these motivational factors into internal and external factors. The internal factors include perceived power attached and the reciprocity of sharing. Knowledge is in many ways power, making the individual holding knowledge more powerful. Power politics can therefore be regarded as an important aspect of knowledge sharing (Weis, 1999). Reciprocity relates to the mutual give-and-take of knowledge. Reciprocity as a motivator, implies that individuals share their knowledge with others if they can anticipate that the act will be worthwhile (Schultz, 2001). The external factors include relationship with recipient and rewards for sharing. The relationship between the sender and recipient will likely influence the overall motivation to share knowledge. And this relationship includes both level of trust, and the power and status of the individual receiving the knowledge (Ipe, 2003). Ipe (2003) also argue that real or perceived rewards and penalties for individuals sharing or not sharing their knowledge is also influencing the knowledge sharing process.

Opportunities to share

The opportunities to share knowledge within an organization can be both formal and informal. Formal opportunities will in this case refer to what Bartol and Srivastava (2002) calls formal interactions. This includes training programs, technology-based systems and structured work teams (Ipe, 2003). All designed to give individuals a structured environment to share, further facilitating knowledge sharing. Informal opportunities on the other hand, are more unstructured, but just as, if not even more important than formal opportunities. As Ipe (2003) states, most research indicates that the majority of knowledge is shared in informal settings, through what Truran (1998) calls relation channels. These channels facilitate personal communication, which allows for trust building, which again is critical for successful knowledge sharing (Truran, 1998).

Culture of the work environment

All of the previous factors are influenced by the culture of the work environment and the culture of the organization (Ipe, 2003). This is because the organizational

culture impacts the degree of the importance, shaping the context of interaction (De long & Fahey, 2000). And organizational culture is now recognized among researchers as a potential barrier for successful and effective knowledge creation and sharing (De long & Fahey, 2000; Pan & Scarbrough, 1999).

Trust and knowledge sharing

The concept of trust has been identified as a vital element of knowledge sharing (Wang & Noe, 2010). Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995) define trust as “the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor”. As we know, sharing knowledge is an uncertain process and showing vulnerability is arguably one of the most central parts of having a trusting relationship with others. . Trust is also considered to be the part of knowledge sharing that is most difficult thing to accomplish (Filstad & Hepsø, 2009).

2.4 Expatriate knowledge

The creation and utilization of knowledge continues to play an important role for the competitive advantage of organizations (Argote, 2013). In today’s world, the transfer of inter-organizational knowledge spanning national borders has become increasingly important (Argote, 2013). And one of the primary approaches for organizations to secure this flow of knowledge is through dispatching employees on international assignments (Crowne, 2009). Expatriates obtain a variety of different knowledge during their international assignments and this also includes a series of tacit elements such as network knowledge, improvement of personal competencies and shifts of perspective (Stahl, Chua, Caligiuri, Cerdin & Taniguchi, 2009). Fink & Meierwert (2005) defines what they believe to be the four main types of expatriate knowledge; *market-specific knowledge*, *personal skills*, *job-related skills*, and *network-related skills*

When you work in a different environment, you learn and figure out all the intricacies of that environment. Expatriates learn about the social, political and economic elements of the local system. They improve their language skills, getting a better grasp of the local language. And they learn different ways of handling and conducting business (Fink & Meierwert, 2005). The *market-specific* knowledge should be rather easy to codify and relatively transferable to colleagues.

Fink and Meierwert (2005) found that expatriates improve a wide range their *personal soft skills* during their time abroad. Improving their intercultural skills, more open, flexibility, tolerance and self-confidence (Fink & Meierwert, 2005). This form of knowledge however cannot be easily transferred to others and is strongly rooted in personal experiences.

All expatriates must develop or improve their *job-related* management skills when working abroad in order to successfully adapt to their new environment (Fink & Meierwert, 2005). Within this form of knowledge, Fink and Meierwert (2005) argue that they mostly improve job-related skills such as communication and project management skills. This form of knowledge is also rooted in personal experiences, and therefore not easily transferred to others.

The majority of expatriates meet a lot of new people when they work abroad, creating a new network within their host country (Fink & Meierwert, 2005). They get to know both clients and suppliers and even new people within the subsidiary. Expatriates can also work as link between parent and subsidiary company. Fink and Meierwert argue that *network-related* skills are partly transferable, since repatriates can to a certain extent introduce others to their networks.

The potential role of repatriates

International assignment provides a unique opportunity for personal, professional and organizational growth, and repatriation is an instrumental part of this process (Lazarova & Cerdin, 2007; Oddou, Osland & Blakeney, 2009). Lazarova and Cerdin (2007) argue that repatriates can be viewed as tools of both knowledge sharing and knowledge transfer. They understand both the operations of both corporate headquarters and overseas operations (Stroh, Gregersen, & Black, 2000). And have the potential of transferring technology and information from the foreign subsidiaries back to the home country (Gupta and Govindarajan, 1991) The repatriates' new knowledge can enable companies and organizations to learn from their globalization efforts, enhancing their intellectual capital (Lazarova & Cerdin, 2007). The utilization of this knowledge however, is far from an automatic process. Not only is the repatriation knowledge difficult to fully capture, the individuals and organizations are also not necessarily on the same page in regard to how to transfer/share and utilize this new knowledge (Lazarova & Tarique, 2005; Lazarova & Cerdin, 2007). Organizations therefore need to

consider a number of issues when they design the process for capturing, retaining, sharing and transferring the knowledge gained by their repatriates (Lazarova & Tarique, 2005).

2.5 Research on repatriation knowledge sharing

While there has been a significant amount of research on the various aspects of expatriation during the last decades, the repatriation process has received much less attention (Huang, Chiu, & Lu, 2013). Earlier repatriation research focused primarily on the dismal retention rates, the different issues associated with the repatriation process, such as the role HR practices (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001) and repatriate expectations (Stroh, Gregersen, & Black, 2000). One of the things that these earlier studies had in common, was the fact that they seemed to consider the repatriation process as a success as long as the repatriates remained in the organization. Thereby ignoring the potential positive outcomes for both individual and organizations. They also fail to address how these benefits could be best achieved (Lazarova and Cerdin, 2007; Reiche, 2012). However, we are starting to see a growing number of research examining the different dimensions of international assignment success (Chen, Kirkman, Kim, Farh, & Tangirala, 2010; Kraimer and Wayne, 2004; Takeuchi, 2010). With more research acknowledging the importance of including the repatriation phase when discussing international assignments success (Yan, Zhu, & Hall, 2002). The same cannot be said for repatriation knowledge sharing. Even though MNCs and researchers are paying more attention to the role of international assignees as knowledge agents, (Reiche, Harzing & Kraimer, 2009; Hocking, Brown & Harzing, 2007) the continuous knowledge sharing process upon repatriation has not received the same research and organizational attention (Reiche, 2012).

Researchers are however, starting to acknowledge the potential of repatriate's knowledge sharing and repatriate knowledge. As previously mentioned, repatriates play what is in many ways an irreplaceable part in organizational learning, given their ability to accelerate the process of sharing knowledge between host countries and headquarters (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001). Not only does the repatriate possess valuable first-hand knowledge, they also understand how the company is perceived in other parts of the world (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001). This is also reflected in the literature where researchers suggest that the knowledge that international assignees acquire while being abroad is

highly relevant for the organization (Antal, 2000; Oddou et al., 2013; Bender and Fish, 2000; Fink and Meierwert, 2005). And we have in recent years seen more research addressing the different aspects of repatriation knowledge transfer/sharing. The majority seems to mostly examine on the aspects of knowledge transfer, focusing on variables that hinder/facilitate knowledge transfer or different types of knowledge gained (Lazorava & Tarique, 2005; Crowne, 2009, Nery-Kjerfve & McLean, 2012; Burmeister & Deller, 2016). While knowledge sharing among repatriates, with a few exceptions (Mäkelä & Brewster, 2009), have received less research attention. It is therefore still much we don't know about the different variables affecting the sharing of repatriation knowledge (Oddou et al. 2009). Meaning that we still have ways to go, before researchers are fully able to explain the complexity of the repatriation knowledge sharing process and how the process unfolds.

3. Research context:

3.1 Description of the case organization

The study is conducted at Kongsberg Protech Systems (KPS), which are one out of four business areas of the multinational, Norway-based technology company Kongsberg Gruppen (KONGSBERG). KONGSBERG is an international, knowledge-based group that supplies high-technology systems and solutions to customers in the oil and gas industry, the merchant marine, and the defense and aerospace industries. KONGSBERG started as a weapons factory in Kongsberg, Norway in 1814. Now they have close to 8000 employees spread across more than 25 different countries, and with their main office still in Kongsberg, Norway. KPS is one of the two business areas within the legal unit "Kongsberg Defence & Aerospace" which has approximately 2000 employees.

Kongsberg Protech Systems (KPS) is delivering high level weapon control systems, and KPS is the world's leading supplier of remote weapon stations with more than 17000 different systems sold worldwide. The United States is their biggest customer, after KPS became the main supplier of weapon stations to the US Army in 2007. It is therefore necessary to have a close presence in the United States, granting KPS the opportunity to follow up operations, holding ongoing negotiations and discussions and maintaining a strong and close relationship with their main customer. Also resulting in KPS establishing several offices and their

main production site in the United States, increasing their local presence, local workforce, lowering production and logistic costs and reducing overall currency risk. KPS has also taken similar steps in Canada on a lesser scale, exploring market opportunities and establishing a local presence through a local office and production site.

3.2 Description of the case organization's expatriation policy

Kongsberg Protech Systems (KPS) has since 2005 sent close to 20 expatriates to offices in London, in Ontario Canada, Long Island US, Mount Arlington New Jersey, Alexandria/Washington DC, Johnstown Pennsylvania and Melbourne Australia. The prime objective is sending people abroad to perform a specific task for the company. The international assignments are primarily related to general management, establishing new business, marketing and program/project related work. In addition, the coordination of the different sites with the main office in Norway has been a very important task. KPS' expatriation policy is arguably a reflection of this, a strong focus on task performance, coordination and a presence of Norwegian leadership.

4.0 Methodological approach and data collection

4.1 Choice of method: qualitative research

This study followed an exploratory qualitative research design, meaning we went in with an open approach, rather than a fixed pre-planned structure (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). This study was intended to explore the topic of repatriates' knowledge sharing, rather than testing a hypothesis. We saw this as the most convenient and suitable approach because such large fields of this research topic remain unexplored. This framework allowed us to go into the research with a broad outline, revising and narrowing it down during the course of data collection (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The aim for this study was to identify expatriates' knowledge obtained and knowledge sharing behavior during repatriation. We wanted to understand the informants' attitudes, thoughts and experiences, and this was why the closeness provided by a qualitative approach (Silverman, 2013) was desired.

4.2 Data collection

We used individual semi-structured interviews as a method for collecting data for this study. In addition to this we used an internal document describing the company's expatriation policy in order to aid us in outlining the interview guide. We also obtained some preparation data through an hour-long conversation with two HR-representatives during the presentation of thesis topic. We only used this as background information for the interview guide with the reason being that we were looking for the informants' experiences rather than company policies.

Sample

The sample was chosen by our contact within KPS and consisted of eight (out of 11) former expats currently working in KPS at their main office in Kongsberg, Norway. Having the informants chosen for us limited any opportunities for purposeful sampling, and may have limited the range of experiences reported. However, we were granted access to all former expats and limited the number for practical reasons. Hence, we do not have any reasons to believe any former expat-experiences were purposely withheld from us. All the informants were former expats for KPS, and had been working abroad for one year or more. Most of them had been stationed at KPS' sites in Johnstown, New Jersey or Long Island, USA. Many of them had additional expat-assignments in KPS' sites in Ontario and London. Some of them also mention other expat-experiences from many years back and from other locations. We focused mostly on the most recent, and most common expat-experience, which was from USA, and Canada. The informants were all Norwegian, and all male. All of them had many years of experience working in KPS, and many held manager or director positions. All of them held degrees from higher education, many of them on master level either within technology or economics. In other words, the sample can be considered as relatively homogeneous. This could further have influenced our findings in terms of variety.

Planning and conducting the interviews

We approached the interview process using the seven stages of an interview inquiry (*thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, verifying, and reporting*) from Kvale & Brinkmann (2009, p.102) as a basis. Topics and questions were developed based on the literature review on repatriation and

knowledge sharing. To some extent the internal document for expatriation and the initial conversation with HR-personnel aided in deciding the focus for the interview guide. We found a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix 1) to be best suited for our exploratory research design. This enabled us to go in-depth with the goal of expanding our understanding the informants' experiences and perspectives (Bryman & Bell, 2011), while maintaining control over the topics to cover. The interviews was conducted in Norwegian, as all of the informants was Norwegians. We attempted to create interview questions that could contribute both *thematically* in the sense that they produce knowledge, and *dynamically*, meaning they promote a good interview interaction (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 131.). As a semi-structured approach was used, the interview guide served as a template, while the structure of the conversation was largely dependent on the informants' focus. The interview guide provided broad categories, which was used as checkpoints to ensure the main topics, was covered.

Coordination and scheduling the interviews was done through our main contact person within KPS. The informants received a simplified interview-guide covering the main topics for the interview, in order to be well prepared. This was sent out approximately two weeks prior to the first interviews.

We carried out the interviews during a period of three weeks in February 2017 with one informant and two researchers present during each interview. The interviews was scheduled to last for approximately 45 minutes each, with a planned 15 minute buffer, which was extensively used as many informants kept providing valuable information.

All the interviews were held in large conference rooms in KPS' headquarter in Kongsberg. We considered seating of the researchers and informants carefully as it was important to create a comfortable atmosphere for the informants, and a natural placement for conversation. We always attempted to seat the three of us in a triangular shape, placing one researcher directly across the informant, and the other one to the side. Utilizing the advantage of being two researchers present was another important aspect. With the goal of providing comfort and closeness to the informant, we carefully planned and practiced the dynamics of our roles in advance. Rather than having a lead- and supportive interviewer, we took turns asking questions and maintaining eye-contact with the informant as the researcher not asking the question was able to track the process and the topics covered. This provided a productive dynamic where both

researchers were able to bounce between tracking and asking follow-up questions. As a result, we were able to expand on both the planned, and the emerging topics, while maintaining control of the overall process. The interviews were recorded on a digital recorder, with the informant's consent. This enabled us to keep the focus on the informant and the topics to cover without the distraction of taking notes. The interviews followed an outline of introductory questions, transitioning into setting the stage, and leading to key questions with follow-up questions in order to fully cover the topics. All interviews were ended by giving the informants' the opportunity to add anything they felt was not fully covered.

5. Data analysis

5.1 Analyzing the interviews: a description of the process

We started our analysis using a method for identifying and analyzing patterns in qualitative data called *thematic analysis* (Clark & Braun, 2013). Thematic analysis consists of six phases; 1) familiarization with the data, 2) coding, 3) searching for themes, 4) reviewing themes, 5) defining and naming themes, and 6) writing up.

Familiarization with the data

Familiarization with the data is common to all qualitative analysis (Clark & Braun, 2013). We approached this process by listening to the audio-recordings, and manually transcribing interviews into text using Microsoft Word. We read through the transcripts several times before we began to make any deliberate interpretations of the data. With that said, the process of conducting the interviews inevitably provided some prior familiarity with the data, and have possibly influenced our initial thoughts and analytic interests (Clark & Braun, 2006). After carefully reading through the transcripts, we extracted the meaning-statements as raw, untranslated quotes into a separate document.

Initial codes and themes

After the first step of familiarizing our self with the data, we created 130 initial codes from the extracted meaning-quotes. A common pitfall of creating codes is using the data collection questions as the "themes" that are reported, meaning no effort has been made to make sense of the data (Clark & Braun, 2006). At this

point we primarily created data-driven codes. We created the codes with a confirmatory angle, or as one particular meaning or point of view, e.g. “new professional competence obtained” or “knowledge utilization frustrations”. This allowed us to put all codes into a table and list every participant sharing this particular meaning. After creating the 130 codes, we categorized them into a combination of theory- and data driven themes. This resulted in 17 themes, whereas 15 was developed from theory, and topics from the interview guide, while two of them emerged from topics brought up by the informants.

Reviewing the themes

We reviewed the codes and themes and reduced them into a smaller number of categories in order to focus our analysis. During this phase, the researcher often discovers that some candidate themes are not really themes, while others collapse into each other (Clarke & Braun, 2006). After we started reviewing the initial codes and themes, this became apparent in our case as well. We started out by reviewing the 130 codes, identifying which ones would collide into each other, and which ones to eliminate on the basis of lacking support from the data. We later reviewed the combination of codes and themes in relation to the theory in order to make valid categories. This led to further merging and elimination of codes, which we further reduced based on data-support and research interest. We had to make careful considerations in this phase, as it was important to avoid creating too much overlap, resulting in inconsistent themes. As a result we depended on a thorough crosscheck with the theory, along with relentless eliminations of themes and codes. Finally we ended up with 12 categories in which we decided to pursue in our analysis. These categories were defined in terms of the underlying theme such as for instance “Barriers and opportunities for knowledge sharing”, and labeled to cover the coalition of codes used e.g. “Organizational receptivity: Time, autonomy, structure, relevancy”.

5.2 Assessing the quality of research

The 6th stage of an interview inquiry in which formed the basis of our approach to the interview process involves ascertaining the validity, reliability, and generalizability of the interview findings. However, as Bryman & Bell (2011) points out, several researchers argue that the criteria of validity, reliability, and generalizability for quantitative research hardly fit qualitative research very well.

Instead, Guba & Lincoln (1994, in Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 400) proposes the concept of “trustworthiness” consisting of four criteria with equivalents found in quantitative research: *Credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability*, and *confirmability* (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 400). We will attempt to incorporate, and combine these with the common language used in research, in a way that provides a meaningful assessment of the research quality.

Credibility

Credibility parallels internal validity. In order to ensure *credibility*, we achieved immediate respondent validation through follow-up questions seeking to get confirmation for the informant’s statements. This was particularly emphasized in the emergent themes. We asked the later respondents directly for their views on the themes who emerged from previous interviews, seeking confirmation or disconfirmation for whether they were applicable to several informants.

Reliability

Reliability concerns the consistency and trustworthiness of our findings (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), or in other words; the *dependability*. We adopted an “auditing” approach to ensure dependability (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 403), meaning we kept complete records of the research process. Objective knowledge, or knowledge that are undistorted by personal bias and prejudice can be seen as reliable knowledge (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). We recognize that complete objectivity is impossible. *Confirmability* rather refers to the degree we as researchers can be shown to have acted in good faith (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 403). The description of the research process, and the records kept should be able to confirm that we have not overtly allowed personal values or theoretical inclinations manifestly to sway the research, and findings derived from it.

Analytic generalizability

Transferability parallels external validity, which is directly related to analytic generalizability, meaning that results from a particular case can be generalized to a broader context (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 262). As we conducted a research project on a small group, sharing certain characteristics (as described in the sample section), we cannot automatically assume transferability of our findings; this rests upon our ability to provide thick descriptions (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 402). However, our data can largely be considered transferable to other

multinational businesses. Their repatriation challenges as well as their challenges for knowledge sharing appears to be consistent with the most prominent themes found in the literature. Still there are some distinctive traits of KPS concerning confidentiality, in which we argue that they may have higher demand compared to most multinational companies; 1) the nature of operating in the defense industry implies a certain amount of confidentiality, and 2) their products are designed using highly protected technology. This was evident during the course of data collection as we were required to follow clear security measures and sign a confidentiality agreement. We were also not allowed access to any data regarding their technology, and had to clarify that our research interest was solely organizational in order to gain access to the organization. Confidentiality was also mentioned as a barrier for knowledge sharing. An important reflection to this is how this strong protection of technical knowledge can have affected the culture for knowledge sharing in the organization, and how this might differ from other multinational businesses.

5.3 Ethical considerations

The defense industry operates at the intersection between public and private, routinely interacting with foreign legal systems and diverse cultures. The nature of the industry is very secretive. High levels of research, development and business agreements increase the inherent value and importance of confidentiality. We understood that everything couldn't be talked about; we understood that we needed take some ethical considerations when conducting this case study. We had preliminary discussions with representatives at Kongsberg Protech Systems about confidentiality and nature of our study. And despite the nature of the industry and the high level of confidentiality, we argue that this proved to be no hindrance for our research. At the same time, one could further reflect on the inherent complexion of the case industry. The type of industry, high level of confidentiality makes Kongsberg Protech Systems a rather special case, especially when examining the issue of knowledge sharing. Therefore, it is important to consider the nature of the industry and the inherent level of confidentiality when evaluating this case study.

The master thesis project was submitted to the Norwegian Social Sciences Data Services (NSD) and approved. The participation in the study was voluntary and the anonymity of the informants were guaranteed. The informants of the study

were asked and selected by our contact representatives at Kongsberg Protech Systems (KPS). All the participants were emailed additional information about the purpose of the study one to two weeks before the interviewing process. The purpose of the study was repeated before each interview, before all participants were asked whether they agreed to allow us to tape-record the interview, which all informants agreed to. Furthermore, the recorded audio files were uploaded on a password-protected computer, before the files were deleted from the originally used tape-recorder device.

6. Findings and discussion

The present study was designed to explore the characteristics of repatriation knowledge sharing practices and the potential barriers and opportunities for sharing knowledge in a repatriation setting. Six major characteristics of repatriation knowledge sharing was explored and discussed. (1) New knowledge obtained, (2) Individual perception of knowledge sharing, (3) Knowledge sharing practices, (4) Personal experiences, (5) Barriers for knowledge sharing and (6) Opportunities for knowledge sharing.

The first theme: *New knowledge obtained* addresses the different forms of knowledge and skills that the informants obtained during their international assignments. The second theme: *Individual perception of knowledge sharing* addresses the informants' perception of knowledge sharing and their individual willingness to share their knowledge. The third theme *Knowledge sharing practices* discusses the opportunities for knowledge sharing during repatriation and the presence of formal and informal knowledge sharing practices. The fourth theme *Personal experiences* addresses participant experiences related to the repatriation process. The fifth theme *Barriers for knowledge sharing* discusses the potential barriers and hindrances for knowledge sharing during the repatriation process. While the sixth theme *Opportunities for knowledge sharing* summarizes the potential opportunities that increases the chance for knowledge sharing during repatriation.

6.1 New Knowledge obtained

First we discuss what the repatriates learned during their international assignments and the different types of knowledge they obtained during their stay abroad. The

section is structured into three subsections; cultural knowledge & understanding, networks & relationships and professional competency & knowledge of industry. Obtaining new knowledge is a vital part of the expatriate experience. It is commonly agreed that expatriates engage in extensive learning while on their international assignments (Bird, 2001; Osland, Bird, Mendenhall & Osland, 2006) and that expatriates acquire a wide range of different knowledge and skills while living and working abroad (Antal, 2001). The nature of the knowledge is also likely to influence the level of knowledge sharing during repatriation. It is therefore necessary to evaluate the knowledge that the informants obtained during their international assignments and the nature of the knowledge itself.

Cultural knowledge and understanding:

We found that cultural knowledge and understanding was a big part of the knowledge the repatriates obtained during their stay abroad. The repatriates increased their intercultural skills and reached a deeper understanding of the American culture.

“Increasing my social and cultural understanding of the United States and Americans is something I have learned. (...) Experiencing how the American working life works, both formally and socially” (Informant 2)

“Understanding American culture and business practices (...) Norwegians and Americans are not that different, but we are different enough that we manage to misunderstand each other” (Informant 5)

The statements above illustrate the presence of cultural learning and improved cultural understanding. We find that all informants mentioned some form of cultural knowledge and understanding when discussing what they learned abroad. Not only did they learn more about the American culture and social life. They also experienced firsthand the American working life and all its components. These findings are consistent with previous theory, arguing that repatriates can improve a wide range of different personal soft skills during their international assignment (Fink & Meierwert, 2005). Furthermore, we argue that this form of knowledge is tacit due to it being both context dependent and strongly rooted in individual's experiences.

The expatriation period grants people a unique opportunity of getting an inside perspective, illustrating the value of cultural perspective. Our findings indicate that the informants broadened their perspective during their stay abroad.

One informant explained the value of being part of the culture and how it led to a deeper understanding.

“Being inside the culture, at least part of part, means that you get a very different perspective, of what the real values bases are, among the people, and not just the people you meet at work or in other professional contexts” (Informant 1)

By working in a different environment, you learn more about all the social, political and economic elements of that system. Leading to a deeper understanding that could prove useful in a variety of different ways. The informants also talked about certain market-specific knowledge such as different ways of handling and conducting business. This is a form of knowledge that should be rather easy to codify and share (Fink & Meierwert, 2005). One of the informants went on to specifically mention how this cultural knowledge/market knowledge had helped during negotiations.

“I feel now during negotiations (...) that being over there, have given me a better understanding of how they think and how that helps me during negotiations” (Informant 8)

Another element that the informants highlighted was the differences between the hierarchical structures in Norway and the US. This seemed to be one of the major differences and was mentioned by most of our informants. Our findings further illustrate how the informants experienced these hierarchical differences.

“Here in Norway, the (hierarchical) structure is very flat, employees often skip over a couple of leaders, talking to everyone, but in the US, people are very faithful to their leader” - (Informant 7)

“There is very little difference between top and bottom in Norway, compared to the US, which is much more of a hierarchical system (...) with people being more afraid to take responsibility due to the potential consequences (...)” (Informant 8)

These statements illustrate what the informants described as rather big differences between the Norwegian system and the more traditional American system.

Adapting to these differences and the new environment was therefore naturally highlighted by many of the informants. One informant explained how they had to change their way of conducting business.

“You quickly learn that you need to have a greater respect and understanding that cultures are different, and that we therefore need to adapt our methods and working methodology to where you are” (Informant 8)

The informants learned that recognizing the cultural differences is not enough; you also must recognize the need for adaptation. Another informant backs up by addressing why it is so important to adapt accordingly to a new environment.

“I believe everyone has a duty, because if you are going to succeed, you have to adapt to the new working environment and all its laws and regulations, (...) or else you will hit a lot of branches and struggle unnecessary” (Informant 8)

It was evident from our findings that learning how to adapt to different contexts was important for the informants. This is consistent with previous research that states that expatriates must develop and improve their management skills to successfully adapt to their new environment (Fink & Meierwert, 2005). We found that the informants not only learned new ways to do business, they also learned how to better adapt their methods for the American environment.

Building networks and relationships

Another form of knowledge that the informants brought up was relations and network related skills. Expatriates meet a lot of new people during their international assignments and our informants were no different. Our findings are consistent with previous research as all informants seemed to have created a new network or strengthening an existing one within their host country. The informants also emphasized the importance of building relationships, and the role that personal relationship plays in the United States. One of the informants emphasized the value of personal relationships and relations in his statements.

“Relationships and relations are very important. In my opinion, all activities in the US run on personal relations.” (Informant 5)

“There is a lot that is not specific/defined (knowledge), (...) it is business and relations.” (Informant 5)

These statements also highlight the inherent value of network building and illustrate how expatriates expand their personal networks within their host country. We also found that a stronger personal network also grants more access and time with the customer/supplier. Several of the informants talked specifically about how the international assignment gave them more time and personal contact with the customer. One informant highlighted why this is so valuable.

“It gives you more time with the customer (...), it also means that I know the customer better, thinking their models, that was valuable.” (Informant 1)

The expatriation period gives expatriates a unique opportunity to build new networks, spend more time with the customer and learn more about them. This knowledge and improved personal connections could also potentially improve the relationship and understanding between parent and subsidiary company (Fink & Meierwert, 2005). And it would seem based on our findings that a lot of the knowledge that the informants learned, could be defined as network-related skills. Which is arguably partly transferable since repatriates can to a certain extent introduce others to their networks. At the same time, it is important to note that all networks and relations are very context dependent, and often a result of a strong personal connection, which is not easily replaced.

Knowledge of industry and professional competency

Previous research states that expatriates are likely to improve their job-related management skills when working abroad. Our findings show that most of the informants gained more knowledge about the industry and strengthen their professional competency during expatation. As one of the informants highlighted, you not only learn more about the business, you also increase your general knowledge of the market.

“I learned a lot about the business, especially the market, since I was responsible for the whole business market, so I learned I about that to.” (Informant 7)

Many of the informants further mentioned how they improved or developed certain general management skills as a result of working abroad. One informant went on to talk about specific learning outcomes, and how it strengthened his professional competency.

“Learning about acquisitions, start-ups. How to start a business in a way, learning more about the business and economy in general.” (Informant 7)

“We hired around 60 people at the time, and selecting the right candidates was very valuable experience, especially for me as a leader, without any previous leadership experience before moving to the US.” (Informant 7)

Because of new task and responsibilities or a general need to adapt, the informants seemed to gain valuable knowledge that improved their general management skills. This form of knowledge can be defined as job-related skills, and usually rooted in personal experience, therefore not easy to share with others (Fink & Meierwert, 2005).

Improved language skills were another form of knowledge that most of the informants emphasized as a valuable learning outcome. We found that all informants improved their English by working within an American environment. Getting a better grasp of the English language allowed the informants to better communicate with their surroundings, both informally and professionally. Many of the informants reported this as highly beneficial for multiple reasons, which was further explained by two of the informants.

“Purely professional, you do learn a language on a different level, you feel much more secure about the language.” - (Informant 1)

“English, both written and spoken is maybe the biggest thing, the ability to express yourself better linguistically, as a result of speaking English every day.” (Informant 6)

Another informant backs this up and further elaborates on the importance of getting a better grasp of the English language.

“Every Norwegian can make himself understood in English, but that is not the same as being able to speak it, and specifically the company benefits from having people able to master the nuances in the English language better” (Informant 5)

There is a big difference between making yourself understood and mastering all the nuances of a language. Our findings suggest that expatriates could drastically improve their language skills by working abroad. And it also illustrates why mastering a language is so valuable, resulting in better communication in both formal and informal settings.

General reflections: New knowledge obtained

Our findings show that informants engaged in extensive learning during their international assignments and obtained a wide range of different knowledge and understanding while working abroad. Cultural knowledge and understanding was emphasized as the biggest learning outcome and all informants highlighted various form of cultural knowledge when discussing knowledge obtained. The repatriates increased their intercultural skills and improved their cultural understanding. The time abroad also allowed the repatriates to experience the American work life first hand, allowing for a new perspective. The informants also talked about getting a deeper understanding of the different elements of the American system. While also experiencing the differences between the American and Norwegian culture/system. Expressing the importance of developing and

improving their skills to successfully adapt to a new environment. Many of the informants also consider cultural knowledge as useful in performing their jobs.

Relations and network related skills was another major form of knowledge that the informants brought up during our interviews. Most informants reported building stronger networks and relationships while abroad. Talking about the value network building and the importance of personal relationships in the US. Some of the informants specially mentioned network as a skill, while others saw it as more undefinable knowledge. The value of spending more time with customer was also highlighted by several informants.

Learning more about the industry and strengthening their professional competency was also mentioned as a valuable learning outcome. Several informants seemed to improve their general management skills because of new tasks and responsibilities during expatriation. Improved language skills were also mentioned, with several informants highlighting the importance of getting a better grasp of the English language. Improving the expatriate's ability to express themselves, increasing overall level of communication.

Overall, most of the knowledge that the repatriates obtained seemed to be tacit rather than explicit. Cultural knowledge and understanding is largely tacit, strongly rooted in the repatriates' own experience and participation, making this knowledge quite difficult to share with others. Some of the market-specific knowledge that was mentioned should in theory be rather easy to codify and share, but could also mostly be relatable and relevant for those dealing with the American market. Network-related skills and relationships could to a certain extent be shared by introducing others to their networks. At the same time, many of these networks are a result of strong personal connections which could complicate this process. Knowledge of industry (as can be considered largely explicit) is mostly seen as valuable for themselves and mostly useful for specific projects towards that industry or region. The context dependent and narrowly applicable nature of this knowledge makes it rather difficult to share.

6.2 Individual perception of knowledge sharing

The following section discusses the repatriates' perception and attitude towards sharing knowledge. How do they perceive knowledge sharing and what is their threshold for sharing knowledge and experience with others? The section is structured into three subsections; perception knowledge sharing, passive

knowledge sharing and proactive knowledge sharing. It is the individuals who holds the knowledge and are thereby responsible for converting that knowledge into a form, so others can understand and learn from it (Ipe, 2003). And people are not likely to share knowledge without strong personal motivation (Stenmark, 2001) which mean that repatriation knowledge sharing is partly dependent on the actor's' personal motivation and individual's perception of knowledge sharing (Lazarova and Tarique, 2005; Oddou et al., 2009). It is therefore necessary to evaluate the informant's perception of knowledge sharing, and their overall willingness to share their knowledge and experience with others.

Perception of knowledge sharing

Our findings show that the overall perception of knowledge sharing among the informants was positive. The data clearly suggest that most of our informants valued knowledge sharing rather highly, expressing the importance of sharing knowledge and experience in some capacity. One informant accentuates this feeling;

“If we don't share, then we fail” (Informant 3)

Expressing the notion that if we don't share our knowledge, then we fail as an organization. Another informant backs up this statement further expressing why knowledge sharing is so essential for any organization.

“I think it (sharing knowledge) is essential, not only to connecting the different divisions, but also that we don't do the unnecessary, and avoid repeating previous mistakes” (Informant 6)

These statements illustrate what we found to be the majority opinion among the informants, that knowledge sharing is something crucial. The informants also highlighted the value of sharing knowledge and experiences to avoid repeating previous mistakes. Earlier research has extensively highlighted the importance of knowledge sharing (Wang & Noe, 2010; Andrews & Delahaye, 2000; Abrams et al. 2003) and it would seem based on our findings that knowledge sharing was held to similarly high regard among our informants.

Some of the informants went on to further reflect on the inherent value of sharing knowledge. Highlighting why knowledge sharing is so essential for any organization that wants to succeed.

“I think it (knowledge sharing) is important, working in teams, everyone participating with what they know, is an absolutely prerequisite, in order to be a competent and profitable organization” (Informant 4)

“So, I think it absolutely crucial for a knowledge firm to be able to continue to grow, that we actually keep the knowledge and learn from it, because if we don’t learn from previous mistakes, we will just keep repeating them and never move forward” (Informant 3)

Most researchers would argue that knowledge sharing is a critical part of organizational success (Grant, 1996), and our findings show a similar perception of knowledge sharing among the informants. Highlighting that knowledge sharing is a fundamental part of any organization. Not only is knowledge sharing likely to play an important role when people are working together towards a common goal. Our findings also show the potential role of knowledge sharing for keeping the knowledge within the organization, with several informants addressing the importance of sharing, and utilizing the knowledge to continue to grow.

Passive knowledge sharing

Even though most of the informants perceived knowledge sharing as something positive and important, there is still the question of personal willingness to share. As Ipe (2003) argues, people’s willingness and motivation to share their knowledge is an important factor for overall knowledge sharing. We found when addressing the informant’s willingness to share, that half of the informants showed a more passive attitude to sharing knowledge. Meaning that they took a more passive approach towards sharing their knowledge and experiences with the people around them.

“If I’m asked, then I try to help as much as I can (...), sharing my knowledge and experience with others, I think that is totally natural” (Informant 6)

The statement reflects what could be described as passive knowledge sharing. We see that even though they express an overall willingness to share, some of the informants did not actively seek out opportunities to share their knowledge. They would mostly share when specifically asked or told to do so.

Another informant expressed a need for certain structures to be put in place to share knowledge effectively. Which again illustrates a more passive approach to sharing. Expressing the needed for systems and regulations in order to be able to successfully share their knowledge. Even though, like before, the overall statements reflect a strong will to share.

“I gladly share knowledge, if it is within a certain system, and it is obvious how it should be done (...)” (Informant 7)

Our findings suggest that half of the informants took a more passive approach when sharing knowledge despite showing an overall willingness to share. Some felt that they needed to be asked in order to take the step of sharing their knowledge. While others felt that certain structures or system needed to be in place for them to effectively share their personal knowledge.

Proactive knowledge sharing

The other half of the informants however, showed tendencies of a much more proactive form of knowledge sharing. We refer to proactive knowledge sharing in this case as a process where people attempt to share their knowledge and experience, regardless of being asked or having a formal system in place. Our findings suggest that these informants were more proactive in their attempts. Sharing their knowledge and experiences as much as possible with the people around them. As one informant stated:

“My ambition has always been to share the knowledge I have, and if I can share that knowledge, either voluntarily (spontaneous) or at request, then I do that” - (Informant 1)

As we can see, these informants share their knowledge not only when asked, but also on their own volition. Actively seeking out opportunities to share and help others. Another informant expressed similar attitudes towards knowledge sharing, highlighting the importance of sharing as much as possible.

“I always share the knowledge and information I have” (Informant 8)

“My mindset has always been to share knowledge and information as much as possible (...)” (Informant 8)

In general, our findings indicate that half of the informants took much more of an active role, sharing their knowledge proactively every chance they got. Building on their strong willingness to share, some of the informants seemed to view knowledge sharing as part of their overall responsibility. Others may share proactively because it is a natural part of their behavior or overall character.

General reflections: Individual perception of knowledge sharing

Our findings show that the overall perception of knowledge sharing was positive. The informants expressed an overall motivation to share their knowledge and experience. Most of them also considered knowledge sharing to be important and did not report any risks with sharing their knowledge. Nonetheless, some of the informants seemed rather unconscious about sharing as a concept, which could indicate that knowledge sharing was not something that they had reflected and thought much about. While some of the repatriates were not only able to reflect on the deeper value of sharing knowledge. They were also able to illustrate why knowledge sharing is so essential for organizations. These individuals saw knowledge sharing as something natural. Knowledge sharing is highly connecting to individual perception and personal motivation. How each repatriate perceive knowledge sharing are more than likely going to affect the overall level of repatriation knowledge sharing. Arguing that knowledge sharing is important and expressing motivation to share is one thing, consciously reflecting on its importance and the concept of sharing is another.

We saw similar contrast between the repatriates when addressing their willingness to share their knowledge with others. We found that half of the informants showed a more passive attitude towards sharing knowledge, even though most of the informants seemed to value knowledge sharing rather highly. These individuals took a more passive approach to sharing their knowledge and experiences with others and did not actively seek out opportunities for sharing. But rather rely on special circumstances, formal structures or being specifically asked by others. It seems that the threshold for sharing knowledge was higher among these informants and we argue that this passive approach could potentially affect these individuals' ability to share their valuable knowledge and experience.

The other half of the informants however seemed to take a much more proactive approach to sharing. Sharing their knowledge and experiences as much as possible. We found that these individuals seemed to share their knowledge not only when asked, but also on their own volition. Proactively trying to share their knowledge and experience as much as possible. Not only is knowledge sharing something natural for these informants, it would also seem that they see it as part of their overall responsibility. The threshold for sharing knowledge is therefore arguably lower among these informants. We believe that this proactive approach would increase these individuals' ability and level of knowledge sharing.

6.3 Knowledge sharing practices

The following section discusses the different knowledge sharing practices during repatriation at KPS. Addressing the presence of both formal and informal knowledge sharing during the repatriation period. The section is structured into two subsections; formal knowledge sharing practices and informal knowledge sharing. As we know, the sharing of both tacit and explicit knowledge can potentially lead to both individual and organizational learning (Andrews & Delahaye, 2000). And this learning and the learning arenas where the knowledge are shared is affected by the structures and practices of the organization (Filstad, 2010). And the opportunities to share knowledge in organizations (both formal and informal) are likely influenced by the presence of certain knowledge sharing practices and organizational culture. It is therefore necessary to take a closer look at the knowledge sharing practices at Kongsberg Protech Systems, and see to what extent there are any forms of formal or informal forms of knowledge sharing during repatriation.

Formal knowledge sharing practices

Taminiau, Smit and De Lange (2007) argue that formal knowledge sharing comprises all the forms of knowledge sharing that are institutionalized by management, such as policy, practice and activities. We found that there was no formal knowledge sharing, or planned knowledge sharing during repatriation. All informants highlighted the lack of formal knowledge sharing practices during their repatriation period.

“No forms of formal knowledge sharing, or any meeting or things like that” - (Informant 2)

“Nothing was done, at least that’s how I see it” (Informant 6)

“Speaking from my own experience, I don’t think that it (formal knowledge sharing) has happened” (Informant 8)

“The expatriates have not been brought back in order to be drained for information and knowledge that has never happened” (Informant 3)

The majority of the informants did not have any sort of meeting or formal event where they were given the opportunity to share their knowledge and experience. They generally expressed that there were no organized efforts to harvest what the repatriates had learned during expatriation. It would seem based on our findings

that there were almost no formal opportunities for the informants to share their knowledge during repatriation. We found that only a couple of the informants were given the opportunity to give some sort of feedback in a debriefing session.

“I had a debriefing session where I had the opportunity to give feedback, but there was no follow up or additional sessions about my international assignment after that” (Informant 7)

Although as the statement reflect, they did not feel that this session was part of a bigger formal practice. There was also no additional follow up after the session, once again indicating that the lack of formal knowledge sharing practices. As Ipe (2003) states, formal knowledge sharing opportunities/practices should be there to give the individuals a structured environment to share. However, this seemed to not be the case in KPS. Some of the informants went on to address why this could be the case, mentioning lack of formal policies and comprehensive planning as potential reasons.

“I don’t think we have any policy on it (knowledge sharing), here the policy is to send people abroad to do a specific job over a distinct period of time, that is it” (Informant 4)

“There is no comprehensive plan, other than solving a certain mission then and there (...)” (Informant 3)

The focus at KPS seemed to be on the task at hand (doing a specific job), rather than the potential knowledge and learning outcomes of expatriation. Several informants mentioned the lack of a comprehensive plan, where knowledge sharing was not part of the equation. Others felt that there was no systematic effort from the company towards the sharing, utilization and transfer of expatriation knowledge. One of the informants stated that:

“There was no systematic effort” (Informant 7)

Another informant backed up this statement by saying that there was no structured effort to store and utilize repatriate knowledge. And that the few measures that had been taken was both unstructured and almost non-existent.

“Very unconscious, no structured way to store/utilize the knowledge, in order to really be able to share it” (Informant 1)

“I think it was very modest in terms of specific measures to see what we could learn, and ways to save that knowledge, I think it is very unstructured”
(Informant 1)

In general, we found that expatriates were largely sent out to solve a specific task or fill a specific role during their time abroad. It appeared to not be any considerations made regarding expatriate/repatriate learning outcomes, and the potential benefits this could provide for the organization. As a result, there seemed to be no deliberate process of extracting this knowledge from the repatriates or further facilitating knowledge sharing during repatriation.

Informal knowledge sharing

Informal knowledge sharing relates to the resources and activities, which are used to facilitate knowledge sharing, but not necessarily designed for that specific purpose (Taminiau et al., 2007). Most of the informants talked about some sort of informal and unstructured knowledge sharing when asked about repatriation knowledge sharing. As one of the informant stated:

“I think the informal (knowledge sharing) has been more important than the formal” (Informant 6)

This is consistent with previous research stating that most of knowledge is shared in informal settings, through what Truran (1998) defines as relation channels. The unstructured nature of informal knowledge sharing means that it can happen within a variety of different arenas. And our findings seem to tell a similar story. One informant highlighted that knowledge sharing can happen at random events where people are given their opportunity to use and share their experiences. Despite these events not being part of any structured or formal knowledge sharing. The informants brought up informal meetings and social interaction as some examples of informal arenas where people share their knowledge.

“It happens during random meetings or random events where you can use your experience and expertise, and not part of a structured form of experience (knowledge) transfer” (Informant 1)

“Mostly informal meetings” (Informant 3)

“Nor do I think that what happens around the coffee machine etc. is insignificant, meeting people you don’t normally circumvent (...), talking to them, listening to their ideas and what they are working one, things you don’t necessarily have anything to do with” (Informant 7)

Furthermore, we also found that there was always some form of informal knowledge sharing going on. People seem to share knowledge unconsciously just by working with others and cooperating. As one informant stated, you will naturally share some form of knowledge just by being around other people:

“I think we, myself included is not that conscious about it (knowledge sharing), I think it happens more unconsciously, being around other, meeting, working together, then you find out that you are sharing your knowledge with others, slowly transferring it to the people you are working with” (Informant 2)

“You have your skills (competency), which is naturally shared when you work with other people (...)” (Informant 2)

Another informant backs up this statement arguing that knowledge is naturally shared through teamwork and cooperation. And it does not need to be structured team work effort designed for facilitating knowledge sharing. It could also be team work in general which naturally provide setting where everyone contributes with their knowledge and expertise to the greater good

“The learning and knowledge that is shared by working together, working in teams where everyone contributes with their expertise and experience” (Informant 4)

Consistent with previous research, our findings illustrate the importance and presence of informal knowledge sharing. We found that most of the knowledge sharing took most part took place during informal meetings, or unconsciously through working with others. Informants also seemed to value the importance working together, highlighting team work as an informal arena that could further facilitate knowledge sharing, also during repatriation.

General reflections: Knowledge sharing practices

Our findings show that there were no formal knowledge practices during repatriation. All informants answered that they had not experienced any form of formal knowledge sharing. There seemed to be no organized efforts to harvest what the repatriates had learned during their international assignments. Only a few of the informants had any sort of formal meeting, where they were given the opportunity to give some sort of feedback in a formal debriefing session. It seemed however that there was no additional follow-up after these sessions. The informants also felt that this session was not part of any bigger practice or policy. Our findings seem to suggest that there were no formal organized opportunities for the repatriates to share their knowledge during repatriation. The lack of any

formal knowledge sharing policy was mentioned as a potential reason. The focus seemed to be to send people abroad, to do a specific job. Knowledge sharing was not part of this equation and the potential knowledge and experience outcomes of these international assignments seemed to mostly be ignored by the organization. Overall, we found that the informants were largely sent out to solve a specific task or fill a specific role. Which is also reflected by the lack of any formal knowledge sharing or sufficient formal opportunities for the repatriates to share their knowledge. We believe that the lack of formal knowledge sharing opportunities/practices during repatriation will damage overall knowledge sharing. Reflecting an organizational culture where formal knowledge sharing is not a point of emphasis, which could prove to a potential barrier for sharing.

We also found that informal knowledge sharing can play an important role during repatriation with most of the informants mentioning some form of informal knowledge sharing. Our findings also illustrate the big variety of different informal arenas and situations. The informants highlighted a multitude of informal arenas where people could share their knowledge and experience, such as informal meetings and social interaction. Knowledge shared through collaboration in teams seemed to be the main contributor. Our study illustrates both the presence and importance of informal knowledge sharing. We found that much of repatriation knowledge sharing took place during informal events/arenas, or as a direct result of teamwork and collaboration. The informants seemed to value the importance of teamwork, acknowledge the positive effect it could have on overall knowledge sharing. And informal opportunities and arenas seemed to provide a strong opportunity for knowledge sharing during repatriation, regardless of the lack of any formal structure or policy.

6.4 Personal experiences

The following section discusses the personal experiences of the informants and what they experienced during repatriation. The section is structured into three subsections; career frustrations, expectation management frustration and knowledge utilization frustrations. The personal experiences of the repatriates are a vital part of understanding repatriation and are also likely to affect the total knowledge sharing outcome. It is therefore necessary to explore what the informants experienced, and how they would summarize the repatriation period.

Career frustrations

An international assignment is not just a single episode in these managers' careers, but one segment in a pattern of involvement between these individuals and the organizations that employ them. As a result, international assignments are often intertwined with certain individual expectations of career advancement (Stroh, Gregersen & Black, 2000). These expectations that individuals have concerning their careers, are often not met, leading to certain levels of frustrations.

We found that most of the informants had experienced some form of career frustrations during repatriation. Several informants mentioned uncertainty around their future role and position. Highlighting what they felt to be a lack of a planning and resulting frustrations of not knowing what they were going to do.

“There was no clear role for me when I came back, I worked half a year in transition before as a coincidence a position opened” (Informant 7)

“When I came back, I experienced that there was no plan for what I was supposed to” (Informant 7)

“When I returned it was actually a big surprise, oh wow, you are here, okay than we need to figure something out, it was actually like that. I guess I did not expect anything other than that I would have an equivalent job when I got back home, and they had forgot to think about that” (Informant 6)

Our findings suggest that some of the informants experienced a sort of limbo after returning home. Experiencing various career related frustrations such as high levels of uncertainty, not knowing what they could expect, and the lack of clarity about future role and opportunities.

While others talked about disappointments related to taking a step or two down on the career ladder when they got back. Several of the informants had more responsibilities and a higher status position when they were abroad and expressed frustration relating to what they saw as career regression upon return.

“Yes, it was a disappointment, I must say (...) From sitting in the management team and VP to work as a project manager again, down to the weeds in a way” - (Informant 8)

“You experienced being on top of things, being part of leading the direction and influencing in a way, you become more of a working bee again, you are more a cog in the machine” - (Informant 8)

Going from higher status, more responsibilities and more freedom back to what you had before could feel like regression. Also expecting a certain level of career advancement after returning home, leading to frustration when career frustrations

does not materialize. This is consistent with previous research stating that many expatriates believe that completing an international assignment usually leads to advancement, which is often not the case (Black et al. 1999). One informant further reflected on the issue. Talking about having different position abroad, and how that may lead to unrealistic career expectations.

“Often, at least in KPS, you get a different position when they send you out, often more of a leader position” (Informant 6)

“You need to be prepared that the company does not create leadership positions (...) The Company must have a need, and I think we have to drill that into the heads of those who are sent out” (Informant 6)

“You might expect to climb the corporate ladder, but in reality, I don’t think it is like that for most people, that even though you climb a step or two when you leave, you don’t climb two steps when you return home, you are more likely to descend” (Informant 6)

This highlights the intricacy of this process. Organizations cannot just create position out of thin air, especially high-end leadership position. We also see the trend of expatriates having more responsibility, and more of a leadership role when abroad, which correlates with previous research (Stroh, Gregersen & Black, 2000), creating unsustainable career expectations in the process.

However, it is also important to note that career frustrations were not an issue for everyone. Some informants were satisfied with their new role, or content with continuing with their previous responsibilities. Our findings show that some of the informants experienced career advancement after returning from their international assignments, taking a step or two up the career ladder compared to where they were before expatriation. As these statements highlight:

“Well you know, I have come of such age, so I did not really have that many expectations about what was going to happen when I returned. I saw this as performing a specific task” - (Informant 4)

“I have gradually climbed the corporate ladder since the beginning, and have continued to do so after I returned (...) So in a way I have taken an additional step career wise after I came home” - (Informant 1)

“I stepped up one level or two from before I went abroad, so career wise it did have an impact, but I guess I will never really know if that was as a result of, or if it was a coincidence” (Informant 3)

Expectation management frustrations

Expatriates are likely to develop a wide range of work/work related expectations during their international assignments. (Black & Gregersen, 1991). Most expatriates have more than ten years of tenure with the companies that send them abroad (Adler 1996; Tung, 1988). Meaning that these individuals are often at a stage of their career where they have significant expectations of how their skills and experience should be utilized upon return. (Black & Gregersen 1991; Peltonen 1998). A lot of the frustration and disappointments could be related to general expectations of what to expect after expatriation, which is consistent with our findings. Most of the informants mentioned having certain expectations upon repatriation. As one informant stated.

“You are obviously curious when you have been gone for several years and developed that kind of competencies (...) You have some thoughts other than just business as usual. I thought a lot about that before returning home” (Informant 2)

These expectations are often developed after years overseas and most likely unmet (Black & Gregersen, 1991). And this was also the case for some of our informants. Some of the informants talked about having certain expectations that they felt was not met after returning home

“I had different expectations. Those expectations, with the exception of some projects I have been involved in, was definitely not met” (Informant 5)

Another informant expressed similar frustrations, related to having relatively high expectations that did not materialize. The frustrating feeling and experience of suddenly being back to where you were before,

“I had higher expectations that I would do different things when I came back (...) but it was more like you come back and this is how it is (...) this is the assignments we have right now. I think the awareness fades away, and suddenly you are just back where you were” (Informant 2)

Some of the informants seemed to be more prepared for the eventual disappointment, actively trying to realistically adjust their overall level of expectation. Which seemed to reduce the chance of expectation frustration.

“For me, returning home was more back to basic, continuing with the things I had done before (...) If I was 20 years younger, I probably would have had higher expectations of career advancement” (Informant 4)

“I didn’t have high expectations, I think that in a way saved me” (Informant 2)

“I left with the mindset that you cannot be guaranteed a new role or career advancement when you get back” (Informant 8)

However, this was not the case for everyone. Some informants experienced certain levels of frustrations, despite being prepared for what they believed to be an eventual disappointment. As one of the informants highlighted, the disappointment and frustration still hits hard, even when you are prepared for it.

“Even though the responsibility is quite comprehensive, it was a disappointment. I was actually prepared for that, but still, it hits you a little bit harder than you anticipate” (Informant 8)

Knowledge utilization frustrations

Lazarova & Cerdin (2007) argues that repatriates’ primary concern and frustration can be related to what they see as a clear under-utilization of the knowledge and skills they obtained abroad. Frustrations in the form of bafflement with general underutilization of new knowledge and competencies were also something that brought up during our discussions, although not as the primary source of frustration. Several informants mentioned being disappointed with what they saw as a lack of interest and recognition of in their new knowledge and experience. Combined with what they believed to be an underutilization of their newly acquired knowledge and competency.

“In the US, you have much more of a system around training and learning (...) I have at least tried to bring some of these ideas back, arguing that we need more systematic training and development, but it has been very difficult to get any sort of traction” (Informant 2)

“I think we should be much more aware of what types of task and responsibilities people get when they return, it's not knowledge transfer, but properly utilizing the knowledge and competency, there is a lot of untapped potential” (Informant 2)

“I did not experience any systematic interest in my (new) knowledge” (Informant 5)

These findings are consistent with previous stated research and illustrate certain levels of knowledge utilization frustrations among some of the informants. Experiencing a lack of recognition, interest and proper utilization of their newly acquired knowledge, increasing the level of overall frustration.

General reflections: Personal experiences

Recognizing the personal experiences of the repatriates is in our opinion a vital part of understanding repatriation and its potential outcomes. Individual feelings,

frustrations and overall satisfaction have the potential of acting as either a barrier or catalysts for knowledge sharing during repatriation. Our findings show that many of the informants experienced some form of frustration during repatriation. International assignments are often intertwined with individual expectations of career advancement, and could lead to high levels of frustrations if these expectations are not met. Around half of the informants seemed to have a positive career development after returning home. Experiencing some career advancement and more responsibilities after expatriation. While others expressed frustrations related to career expectations and lack of career advancement. Uncertainty about future role and position seemed to be a big issue, with some informants feeling that there was no plan for what they should do after expatriation. These informants experienced what could be described as a sort of limbo. Lack of career advancement was also mentioned as a frustration by several informants. Combined with the fact that many had higher status and more responsibilities during expatriation which seem to lead to more unrealistic expectations.

We also found a lot of frustration and disappointments related to general expectations of what the repatriates could expect upon return. Expatriates are likely to develop certain work/ work related expectations during their international assignments and our informants were no different as most informants talked about having certain expectations. For some of the informants, these expectations seemed to not be met, at least not at a satisfying level. Some even tried to reduce their level of expectation level, preparing for what they described as eventual disappointment. Frustrations related to the utilization of knowledge and skills were also highlighted, but it did not seem to be the primary reason for frustrations. Expressing what they believed to be underutilization of their newly acquired knowledge, feeling frustrated with the general lack of interest and recognition.

Expatriates will most likely develop certain expectations of career advancement or new opportunities during expatriation, which often results in frustration and disappointment. We argue that these frustrations could act as a barrier, potentially diminishing the overall level of knowledge sharing. It is therefore important for any organization to actively manage these expectations to reduce future repatriate frustrations. We believe that certain frustrations could have been avoided or reduced with better expectation management. Where an organization actively goes out and reducing expatriate/repatriate expectations to a more realistic level. We questioned, to what degree the repatriates' career

expectations were managed by the organization before expatriation. Are these frustrations a result of unrealistic expectations by the individuals. Or could lack of communication from the organization be blamed for not reducing/creating realistic expectations.

6.5 Barriers for knowledge sharing

The following section discusses the potential barriers for knowledge sharing, addressing various challenges that could diminish repatriation knowledge sharing. Inspired by the proposed framework of Lazorava & Tarique (2005) we have mainly separated our discussion into two main factors; organizational receptivity and individual readiness. Organizational receptivity is divided into structural factors (time, structure, and relevancy), and personal factors (managerial and collegial interest). Individual readiness addresses repatriates ability and willingness to share. And finally, we address the nature of the repatriation knowledge as a potential barrier of knowledge sharing, based on the knowledge obtained by our informants during their international assignments.

Time, structure and relevancy

Lazorava & Tarique (2005) argues that organizations need to have the right tools to capture knowledge, and create the right incentives for repatriates to share their knowledge. Highly explicit knowledge can be captured relatively easily, and with low intensity tools like for instance reports or presentations (Lazorava & Tarique, 2005). Regardless, similar to the findings in previous research (e.g. Antal, 2002), we found no deliberate process of extracting knowledge from returned expatriates.

“There were no systematic attempts of collecting knowledge and experiences (informant 5)

“I guess nobody really thought about it (knowledge sharing)” - (informant 6)

“I think it happens pretty fast, it’s back to the salt mines, and the people around you notice you are back, but then you just keep working as before, normal day in a way” (informant 1)

Lazorava & Tarique (2005) suggests more high intensity tools that provides more frequent interaction between the sender and receiver are needed for capturing highly tacit knowledge. This form of tools is largely present in the organization, as KPS largely operates in teams. Sharing through collaboration in teams was for most of the informants the only way they reported engaging in any knowledge

sharing behavior. Our data suggests that the organization fails to utilize the knowledge and expertise of returned expatriates' due to lack of awareness and deliberate processes for doing so. Perhaps the immediate utility of their knowledge is not recognized, and with the absence of deliberate processes it becomes more of a burden to start engaging in any learning efforts.

“It requires some hours, and you don't have the time because you are in the middle of a project and you have to deliver something. Your closest coworkers don't have time for that” - (informant 2)

“It becomes more like a fly in the ointment when you start doing it (sharing knowledge) rather than an opportunity” - (informant 2)

Repatriates who made proactive attempts to share or apply task specific knowledge gained abroad, experienced lack of receptivity to their knowledge as active reluctance to receive.

“To begin with, not very receptive to suggestions and comments, and I may have been asking for trouble when I said there are some things they do better over there than here in Kongsberg, no that can't be right” - (informant 8)

“We have a supplier with 30 years of experience, and who we consider qualified according to our standards, and then it might be reasonable to pay some attention to their suggestions (...) no we know how this should be done, it's in the SCD (...) I had a few battles regarding that” - (informant 8)

Some of the issues regarding organizational receptivity can be related simply to lack of time, ability or lack of perceived utility of prioritizing any learning efforts. Colleagues in the home office are busy with their own projects, and may not view repatriates learning outcomes and something useful or transferable to the specific situations.

“A combination of people being busy, and seeing that what you bring to the table is not directly applicable to the specific situation, that we cannot do it exactly like that” (informant 2)

Organizations do not necessarily view expatriation assignments as a learning opportunity. It can be seen solely as a task to be performed, and therefore not consider any deliberate processes for extracting the knowledge former expats have obtained.

“I am not sure to what degree KPS consciously seeks to gain that kind of experience (...) I think the goal is to have a Norwegian stationed there to coordinate with the home office, rather than that they are supposed to learn something and bring it back” (Informant 4)

“There has not been a comprehensive plan for it, other than that we have an assignment to solve there and then, there has not been a strategy to have people on expat-assignments in order to get leaders with that kind of experience (...) that is my assertion” (Informant 3)

Lack of managerial and colleague interest

Antal et al. (2000) found lack of interest to be one of the biggest barriers for knowledge sharing. Further many of the informants were disappointed by the lack of initiatives to draw on their knowledge. Our findings are consistent with this, as most of our informants perceived the interest both among managers and colleagues as absent, causing disappointment and frustrations.

“I was quite disappointed and frustrated, because I established some best practices. I created a binder to take home, with what we should learn, and when I got back nobody was interested in looking at it.” (Informant 2)

“From my experience, there was no systematic interest for that knowledge” (Informant 5)

Furthermore, when we asked the informants what some of the reasons for this could be. It became evident that several informants felt that there was a lack of interest in their new knowledge, both from coworkers and leadership. And when they tried to communicate and present this knowledge, then it was seen as more of a distraction than a potential trigger for new activities.

“I think a combination of lacking interest from coworkers and managers (...) we could actually have used that to improve our systems, but it was never requested, and when I attempted to communicate it, it was seen as disturbing, because this is how we do it here and now” (Informant 2)

“I think it is because of a lack of interest. People are busy with their own daily tasks” (Informant 2)

“The interest from superiors has been absent” (Informant 7)

Some also expressed that they felt that the people around them don't realize the importance of repatriation and knowledge sharing in general. Pointing to a lack of understanding both at a managerial and collegial level.

“I don't think the company realize how important it (knowledge sharing) really is” (Informant 2)

“No you were on your own, I think almost no one has asked for my opinion as a result of me being there, either they don't understand the importance, or they don't care, I think perhaps they don't understand” (Informant 8)

Individual ability and willingness to share

Individual factors appeared to be a barrier for most of our informants as well. Most informants expressed willingness to share, and appeared not to experience significant risks of sharing knowledge. However, as we partially covered in 6.2, most informants appeared to take a passive approach to knowledge sharing e.g. sharing when asked. Similar to the findings of Riege (2005), the individual barriers were largely related to low awareness and lack of realization of the value and benefit of their possessed knowledge for others. Many informants had simply not thought about knowledge sharing.

“I gladly share knowledge if it is put into a system, and obvious how to do it, but I don’t see how the company are supposed to receive and utilize that knowledge, I have not really reflected upon that” (Informant 7)

While most informants previously reported experiencing significant learning and personal growth during their assignments abroad, not everyone considered their newfound knowledge as useful for others. Some of the informants struggled to see how others could use or learn from the knowledge they obtained.

“I think it is important for the company to keep track of the customers and the relations you obtain out there, other than that I don’t see what kind of use others here would have” (Informant 7)

During the interviews, it also became evident that some of the informants did not know how to share their knowledge. As it appeared neither the informants nor their managers had actively considered the utility of sharing knowledge gained abroad. Many informants did not seem to have the knowledge of arenas and methods for sharing, or properly reflected on how to share their knowledge with others.

“I think it is more about consciously using the people with that knowledge (...) I think a lot of these things you need to experience, I think so, and of course you can make sure to tell people not to make specific mistakes, but it is on that level” (Informant 4)

“I think they would have to use me when a situation arise, work together in a way. I don’t really know any other ways to share it” (Informant 6)

Many was however unaware of their knowledge sharing behavior. This was typically the type of knowledge sharing that occurs through collaboration in teams, which in many cases the informants did not realize until asked during the

interviews. Some of the informants even appeared to consider the sharing and utilization of their knowledge as a managerial responsibility.

“Should I send someone and oversee it, I would at least make sure that we tap that person for information as much as we can when they return, after all we would have spent a lot of money on them” (informant 8)

Nature of knowledge:

The very nature of the repatriation knowledge (tacit or explicit) will likely have a strong impact on the level of knowledge sharing during repatriation. Not all repatriation knowledge is easy to share, define and communicate. A lot of the knowledge that repatriates obtain during their international assignments is of tacit nature and are arguably context dependent and highly personalized. As we covered in 6.1, most of the knowledge that the informants obtained could be defined as tacit knowledge, making it much more difficult to properly share. Knowledge such as cultural knowledge and networks and relationships are not only context dependent, but also rooted in the informant’s own experiences. Which means that the barrier for sharing this type of knowledge is much higher, which again could hurt the overall level of knowledge sharing.

General reflections: Barriers for knowledge sharing

Organizational receptivity at KPS emerged as major hindrance for knowledge sharing. Both the structural factors (time, structure, relevancy) and personal factors (managerial and collegial interest) of organizational receptivity seemed to act as barriers for knowledge sharing during repatriation. There were no formal knowledge sharing structures, and no process of extracting knowledge from returned expatriates. Which means that there was no structured environment to share, further facilitating knowledge sharing. Our data also suggests that the organization fails to utilize the knowledge and expertise of returned expatriates. Which could illustrate a general lack of interest, not recognizing the importance of repatriate knowledge. The informants that actively tried to share their knowledge, experienced a general lack of receptivity and interest in their knowledge. We also argue that some the issues regarding organizational receptivity can be related to lack of time, ability or lack of perceived utility of prioritizing any learning efforts. Our findings seemed to suggest that the organization did not necessarily view expatriation assignments as a learning opportunity, but more as a job that needed

to be performed. Overall, the lack of structure, organizational interest, recognition and receptivity were in our opinion all issues contributing to diminished levels of repatriation knowledge sharing.

We also argue that the lack of managerial and colleague interest was another big barrier for knowledge sharing. Extending on the previous issues, many of the informants were disappointed with what they described as a lack of interest in their knowledge. Further highlighting that the interest in their knowledge and experience among both among managers and colleagues was absent. Leading to personal frustrations with the lack of initiatives and interest in the knowledge they obtained during expatriation. The repatriates themselves highlighted lack of interest as a major problem, arguing that repatriation knowledge was seen as more of a distraction, rather than a potential catalyst for new activities and ideas. Which again could be related to a lack of recognition, where the people around the repatriates don't realize the importance of repatriation and knowledge sharing in general.

Our findings also illustrate that individual ability and willingness to share could act as a barrier for some of the informants. The individual barriers were largely related to low awareness and lack of realization of the value and benefit of their possessed knowledge. Many informants had simply not thought about knowledge sharing. And not everyone considered their newfound knowledge as useful for others, while some struggled to see how others could use or learn from the knowledge they obtained. Individual understanding also seemed to be an issue, with some repatriates struggling with the concept of how to share their knowledge.

The nature of the knowledge could also potentially act as a barrier for knowledge sharing. Not all repatriation knowledge is easy to share, define and communicate. And our findings show that most the knowledge that repatriates obtain during their international assignments is of tacit nature (both context dependent and highly personalized). Which means that the barrier for sharing this type of knowledge is much higher. Decreasing the repatriates' ability to share this knowledge, which again could hurt the overall level of knowledge sharing.

6.6 Opportunities for knowledge sharing

The last section discusses the potential opportunities for knowledge sharing. Where we summarize based on our findings the different ways and arenas that

could grant opportunities for knowledge sharing during the repatriation period. As we know, opportunities to share knowledge in organization can be both formal and informal. Ranging from training programs and structured work teams to more informal and unstructured means of sharing knowledge such as social events. We also argue based on our findings that personal factors such as motivation, perception of knowledge sharing and willingness to share could increase the chance of successful repatriation knowledge sharing.

Informal opportunities for sharing

We found, similar to previous research that informal opportunities to share knowledge can be just as important as formal practice and policies. Our findings illustrate the value of these informal settings. We found that most of the knowledge sharing during the repatriation phase was both informal, unstructured and partly unconscious. We argue that informal knowledge sharing could provide unique opportunities for improved overall knowledge sharing. Not only is informal means of sharing just as important as formal. The unstructured nature of informal knowledge sharing also opens the door for a variety of different arenas. As our informants highlighted, knowledge sharing can happen at random events, and does not necessarily need to part of a bigger policy or practice. Social interactions or other channels that facilitate personal communication can provide opportunities for knowledge sharing, allowing people to use their expertise and share their knowledge and wisdom with the people around them.

Informal meetings and working together in teams was two of the arenas for informal knowledge sharing that was most highlighted by our informants. And our findings suggest that these are informal arenas that gives repatriates an opportunity to share their knowledge with colleagues or in part, the organization. As one informant stated, you will naturally share some form of knowledge just by being around other people. And this form of knowledge sharing is accelerated through teamwork and cooperation, where everyone contributes with their own expertise and experience. Highlighting once again, the value of informal stages of knowledge sharing, where people can share their knowledge sharing and experience, even in the absence of any formal knowledge sharing policy or practice.

Individual factors: Motivation, perception, and willingness to share

Our findings indicate, consistent with previous research that the level of knowledge sharing is highly dependent on a set of individual factors. Motivation and willingness to share is in fact considered by many to be a major determining factor for overall level of knowledge sharing. What is people's overall motivation to share, how do they perceive knowledge sharing and how willing are people to really share their knowledge and experience with the people around them are important questions to ask. The individual aspect matters, it is the individuals that hold the knowledge and therefore often one of the deciding factors. We found that most of our informants expressed a strong motivation to share, valued knowledge sharing highly and displayed a willingness to share their knowledge and experience with their colleague. We argue that this combination of individual factors could provide a unique opportunity for knowledge sharing during repatriation. Which is consistent with previous research arguing that repatriates can be viewed as tools of both knowledge sharing and knowledge transfer (Lazarova & Tarique, 2007).

Our findings suggest that repatriates share their knowledge, despite the lack of formal opportunities and formal knowledge sharing policies. We believe that is in part a result of characteristics of the informants. Knowledge sharing was valued among the informants, highlighted during our interviews. Most of the informants also showed a strong motivation and willingness to share knowledge with others. And we found that this could lead to certain levels of knowledge sharing, independent of any formal and explicit knowledge sharing system and policy. This was especially the case among the informants who showed more proactive knowledge sharing tendencies. These people always shared their knowledge and experience with others, regardless of being asked or specially told to do so.

7. Implications for practice

For the study to have practical use, we find it important to propose some suggestions to organizations that should be taken into consideration when evaluating their repatriation knowledge sharing processes and policies.

1) *Expectation management.* Making a decisive organizational effort for managing expatriate expectations and reducing them to a more realistic level. The importance of clear and frequent communication between organization and future

expatriates. Defining a pragmatic set of expectations of what responsibilities, jobs, roles the expatriates could expect when returning home. By doing so, the organization could potentially reduce the level of repatriate frustration and uncertainty. As well as diminishing the chance of repatriates leaving shortly after completion of international assignment.

2) Create a formal strategy for the utilization and sharing of repatriation knowledge. Organizations needs to recognize the value and importance of repatriation knowledge. Creating a conscious strategy for the collection and the proper utilization of the knowledge and experience that the expatriates brings back to the organization. Make knowledge and learning a part of the equation. Highlight it and make people aware of the value of expatriate/repatriate knowledge. Some form of formal knowledge sharing practices or policies should also be a part of this strategy to provide a structured environment for people to share their knowledge during repatriation.

3) Further facilitate informal knowledge sharing. Organizations needs to recognize the value and potential of informal forms of knowledge sharing. Further facilitate informal knowledge sharing during repatriation by putting people in a situation where they could utilize their knowledge and experience as much as possible. Combined with a more conscious use of teams, constructing these teams with the goal of further facilitate the sharing of knowledge. Also promote informal events and arenas by recognizing the importance of informal opportunities for learning and knowledge sharing.

8. Conclusion

In this thesis, the aim has been to analyze the characteristics of repatriation knowledge sharing and explore the potential barriers and opportunities for sharing knowledge in a repatriation setting. The study of these topics was done through semi-structured qualitative interviews with 8 former expatriates working at Kongsberg Protech Systems (KPS).

Our study illustrates some of the complexity of repatriation knowledge sharing and why it is so complicated. The utilization and sharing of repatriate knowledge has been a major issue for a long time, with companies lacking the sufficient methods and policies for sharing, transferring and utilizing repatriate

knowledge. The ability to successfully manage the knowledge sharing process is seen by many as one of the most challenging parts of any knowledge management implementation and we argue that the complexity of the repatriation process further complicates this process. As we know, knowledge sharing is still regarded as critical to organizational success. Which means that the sharing and utilization of knowledge should in theory be at the top of every organizational agenda. But repatriation knowledge sharing is far from a straight forward process as this study thoroughly illustrates. With numerous different influencing the overall level of knowledge sharing during repatriation, either in a positive (opportunities) or negative (barriers) fashion.

Our study highlights multiple barriers for repatriation knowledge sharing. Personal frustrations, organizational receptivity & interest, lack of formal structures, individual perception & motivation, passive knowledge sharing and tacit knowledge were all themes that emerged as barriers to repatriation knowledge sharing during our research. All with the potential of diminishing the overall level of knowledge sharing

Our findings show that many of the informants experienced some form of frustration during repatriation. Expressed frustrations related to career expectation, general expectations and frustrations with knowledge utilization. We argue that these personal frustrations could act as a barrier, potentially diminishing the overall level of knowledge sharing. We believe that certain frustrations could have been avoided or reduced with better expectation management Organizational receptivity at KPS also emerged as major hindrance for knowledge sharing. Both the structural factors (time, structure, and relevancy) and personal factors (managerial and collegial interest) of organizational receptivity seemed to act as barriers for knowledge sharing during repatriation. We also argue that the lack of managerial and colleague interest was another big barrier for knowledge sharing. Our data suggests that the organization fails to utilize the knowledge and expertise of returned expatriates. Extending on the previous issues, many of the informants were disappointed with what they described as a lack of interest in their knowledge. Which again could illustrate a general lack of interest, not recognizing the importance and potential of repatriate knowledge.

There were no formal knowledge practices during repatriation, no organized efforts to harvest what the repatriates had learned during their international assignments. And no formal opportunities for the repatriates to share their knowledge, which all could drastically reduce their possibility to share their knowledge and experiences. Our findings also illustrate that individual ability and willingness to share could act as a barrier for some of the informants. The individual barriers were largely related to low awareness and lack of realization of the value and benefit of their possessed knowledge. Similar issues emerged among the individuals who showed a more passive attitude towards sharing knowledge. And we argue that this passive approach could potentially affect these individuals' ability to share their valuable knowledge and experience. Lastly, the nature of the knowledge could also act as a barrier for knowledge sharing. Our findings show that most of the knowledge that the repatriates obtained seemed to be tacit rather than explicit. Meaning high levels of tacitness, context dependent, narrowly applicable, rooted in the repatriates' own experience and participation, all making the knowledge much more difficult to share. Which means that the barrier for sharing this type of knowledge is much higher.

Our study also highlights multiple opportunities for repatriation knowledge sharing. Individual motivation & willingness to share, proactive knowledge sharing, informal knowledge sharing and the value teamwork were all themes that emerged as opportunities to repatriation knowledge sharing during our research. All with the potential of providing increased opportunities for repatriation knowledge sharing.

We consider motivation and willingness to share as a major determining factor for overall level of knowledge sharing. We found that that most of our informants seemed to value knowledge sharing highly, displaying a strong motivation and willingness to share their knowledge and experience with their colleagues and organization. Most of the repatriates tried to share their knowledge, despite the lack of formal opportunities and policy. This was especially the case among the informants who showed more proactive knowledge sharing tendencies. Actively sharing their knowledge and experience with others, regardless of being asked or specially told to do so. And we argue that this proactive approach would increase these individuals' ability and level of knowledge sharing

Our study also shows that informal opportunities to share knowledge can be just as important as formal practice and policies. Further illustrating the value of informal knowledge sharing and its importance during repatriation. The informants highlighted a multitude of informal arenas where people could share their knowledge and experience, such as informal meetings and social interaction. And these informal arenas seemed to provide an opportunity for knowledge sharing also during repatriation. Social interactions or other channels that facilitate personal communication was also mentioned as a provider of opportunity. Knowledge shared through collaboration in teams however seemed to be the main contributor to informal knowledge sharing. With most of the informants highly valuing the importance of teamwork. Highlighting the positive effect, it could have on overall knowledge sharing. Granting the repatriates an informal arena where they are given the unique opportunity to share their knowledge and experience through teamwork and cooperation with their colleagues.

References

- Abrams, L. C., Cross, C., Lesser, E & Levin, D. Z. (2003). Nurturing interpersonal trust in knowledge-sharing networks. *Academy of Management Executive*, 17(4), 64-77.
- Andrews, K. M., & Delahaye, B. L. (2000). Influences on knowledge processes in organizational learning: The psychosocial filter. *Journal of management studies*, 37(6), 797-810.
- Argote, L. (2013), *Organizational learning: creating, retaining and transferring knowledge*, 2nd ed., New York: Springer.
- Argote, L., & Ingram, P. (2000). Knowledge transfer: A basis for competitive advantage in firms. *Organizational behavior and human decision processes*, 82(1), 150-169.
- Bender, S., & Fish, A. (2000). The transfer of knowledge and the retention of expertise: The continuing need for global assignments. *Journal of knowledge management*, 4(2), 125-137.
- Adler, N. (1996). *International Dimensions of Organizational Behavior*, 3rd edn. Boston, MA: Kent.
- Antal, A. B. (2001). Expatriates' Contributions to Organizational Learning1. *Journal of General Management*, 26(4), 62-84.
- Antal, A. B. (2000). Types of knowledge gained by expatriate managers. *Journal of General Management*, 26(2), 32-51.
- Bartol, K. M., & Srivastava, A. (2002). Encouraging knowledge sharing: The role of organizational reward systems. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 9(1), 64-77.
- Bird, A., Mendenhall, M., Stevens, M. J., & Oddou, G. (2009). Defining the content domain of intercultural competence for global leaders. *Journal of managerial psychology*, 25(8), 810-828.
- Black, J.S., & Gregersen, H. B. (1991). When Yankee Comes Home: Factors Related to Expatriate and Partner Repatriation Adjustment. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 22, 671-94.
- Black, J. S., Gregersen, H. B., & Mendenhall, M. E. (1992). *Global assignments: Successfully expatriating and repatriating international managers*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
- Black, J. S., Mendenhall, M., & Oddou, G. (1991). Toward a comprehensive model of international adjustment: An integration of multiple theoretical perspectives. *Academy of management review*, 16(2), 291-317.
- Black, J. S., Gregersen, H.B., Mendenhall, M.E. & Stroh, L.K. (1999). *Globalizing People through International Assignments*, Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Bonache, J., & Brewster, C. (2001). Knowledge transfer and the management of expatriation. *Thunderbird international business review*, 43(1), 145-168.
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77-101.
- Bryman, A., & Bell, E. (2011). *Business research methods*. London: Oxford university press
- Burmeister, A., & Deller, J. (2016). A practical view on repatriate knowledge transfer: The influence of organizational support practices. *Journal of global mobility*, 4(1), 68-87.
- Burmeister, A., Deller, J., Osland, J., Szkudlarek, B., Oddou, G., & Blakeney, R. (2015). The micro-processes during repatriate knowledge transfer: The repatriates' perspective. *Journal of knowledge management*, 19(4), 735-755.

- Caligiuri, P., & Lazarova, M. (2001). Strategic repatriation policies to enhance global leadership development. In M. Mendenhall, T. Kuehlmann, & G. Stahl (Eds.) *Developing global business leaders: Policies, processes, and innovations* (pp. 243-256). Westport: Quorum books.
- Chen, G., Kirkman, B. L., Kim, K., Farh, C. I. C. & Tangirala, S. (2010). When does cross-cultural motivation enhance expatriate effectiveness? A multilevel investigation of the moderating roles of subsidiary support and cultural distance. *Academy of Management Journal*, 53, 1110–30.
- Christensen, P. H. (2007). Knowledge sharing: moving away from the obsession with best practices. *Journal of Knowledge Management* Vol. 11(1), 36-47.
- Crowne, K. A. (2009). Enhancing knowledge transfer during and after international assignments. *Journal of knowledge management*, 13(4), 134-147.
- Cummings, J. N. (2004). Work groups, structural diversity, and knowledge sharing in a global organization. *Management science*, 50(3), 352-364.
- Davenport, T. H. (1997). *Information ecology: Mastering the information and knowledge environment*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fink, G., & Meierwert, S. (2005). The use of repatriate knowledge in organizations. *Human resource planning*, 28(4), 30-36.
- Filstad, C., & Hepsø, V. (2009). Knowing Through Integrated Operations in Cross-Disciplinary Virtual Teams-Collaboration and Self-Synchronization. *Organizational Learning Conference (OLC)* 1-16
- Filstad, C. (2010). *Organisasjonslæring - fra kunnskap til kompetanse*. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.
- Grant, R. M. (1996). Toward a knowledge-based theory of the firm. *Strategic management journal*, 17(7), 109–122.
- Gupta, A., & Govindarajan, V. (1991). Knowledge Flows and the Structure of Control within Multinational Companies. *Academy of Management Review*, 16, 768-792.
- Gupta, A., & Govindarajan, V. (2000). Knowledge flows within multinational corporations. *Strategic management journal*, 21(4), 473-496.
- Hendriks, P. (1999). Why share knowledge? The influence of ICT on the motivation for knowledge sharing. *Knowledge and Process Management*, 6(2), 91-100.
- Hinds, P. J., & Pfeffer, J. (2003). Why organizations “don’t know what they know,” Cognitive and motivational factors affecting the transfer of expertise. In *Beyond knowledge management: Sharing expertise*, ed. M. Ackerman, V. Pipek and V. Wulf, 3-26. Cambridge, MA:MIT Press.
- Hocking, J. B., Brown, M. E. & Harzing, A.W. (2007). Balancing global and local strategic contexts: Expatriate knowledge transfer, applications and learning within a transnational organization. *Human Resource Management*, 46, 513–33
- Huang, M., Chiu, Y., & Lu, T. (2013). Knowledge governance mechanisms and repatriate’s knowledge sharing: The mediating roles of motivation and opportunity. *Journal of knowledge management*, 17(5), 677-694.
- Ipe, M. (2003). Knowledge sharing in organizations: A conceptual framework. *Human resource development review*, 2(4), 337-359.
- Jackson, S. E., Chuang, C. -H., Harden, E. E., Jiang, Y., & Joseph, J. M. (2006). Toward developing human resource management systems for knowledge intensive teamwork. In J. M. Joseph (Ed.), *Research in personnel and human resources management*, Vol. 25. (pp. 27–70). Amsterdam: JAI.
- Kamoche, K. (1997). Knowledge creation and learning in international HRM. *The international journal of human resource management*, 8(2), 213-225.
- Kraimer, M. L., Shaffer, M. A. & Bolino, M. C. (2009). The influence of expatriate and repatriate experiences on career advancement and repatriation retention. *Human Resource Management*, 48, 27–47.

- Kraimer, M. L. & Wayne, S. J. (2004). An examination of perceived organizational support as a multidimensional construct in the context of an expatriate assignment. *Journal of Management*, 30, 209–37.
- Kvale, S. & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *Interviews - learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Lam, A. (2000). Tacit knowledge, organizational learning and societal institutions: An integrated framework. *Organization Studies*, 21(3), 487-513.
- Lazarova, M. & Caligiuri, P. (2001). Retaining repatriates: The role of organizational support practices. *Journal of World Business*, 36, 389–401.
- Lazarova, M., & Cerdin, J. L. (2007). Revisiting repatriation concerns: Organizational support versus career and contextual influences. *Journal of international business*, 38(3), 404-429.
- Lazarova, M., & Tarique, I. (2005). Knowledge transfer upon repatriation. *Journal of world business*, 40, 361-373.
- Lee, D. J., & Ahn, J. H. (2005). Rewarding knowledge sharing measurement inaccuracy. *Knowledge Management Research & Practice* Vol. 3, 229-243.
- Lin, H. F. (2007). Knowledge sharing and firm innovation capability: An empirical study. *International Journal of Manpower* Vol. 28(3,4), 315-332
- Mäkelä, K., & Brewster, C. (2009). Interunit interaction contexts, interpersonal social capital, and the differing levels of knowledge sharing. *Human resource management*, 48(4), 591-613.
- Mayer, R. C., J. H. Davis and F. D. Schoorman. 1995, “An integrative Model of Organizational trust”. *Academy of Management Review* 20 (3), 709-734
- Mendenhall, M. E., Dunbar, E., & Oddou, G. R. (1987). Expatriate selection, training and career-pathing: A review and critique. *Human recourse management*, 26(3), 331-345.
- Nery-Kjerfve, T., & Mclean, G. N. (2012). Repatriation of expatriate employees, knowledge transfer, and organizational learning: What do we know? *European journal of training and development*, 36(6), 614-629.
- Nonaka, I. (1991). Knowledge-creating Company. *Harvard Business Review*, 69(6), 96-104.
- Nonaka, I. (1994). A dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation. *Organizational Science*, 5(1) 14–37.
- Nonaka, I. & Takeuchi, H. (1995). *The Knowledge-creating Company*. Oxford University Press
- Nonaka, I., & von Krogh, G. (2009). Perspective- tacit knowledge and knowledge conversion: Controversy and advancement in organizational knowledge creation theory. *Organization science*, 20(3), 635-652
- Oddou, G., Osland, J. S., & Blakeney, R. N. (2009). Repatriating knowledge: Variables influencing the “transfer” process. *Journal of international business studies*, 40(2), 181-199.
- Oddou, G., Szkudlarek, B., Osland, J.S., Deller, J., Blakeney, R. & Furuya, N. (2013), Repatriates as a source of competitive advantage, *Organizational Dynamics*, 42(4), 257-266.
- Peltonen, T. (1998). Narrative Construction of Expatriate Experience and Career Cycle: Discursive Patterns in Finnish Stories of International Career. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 9(5), 875-892.
- Polanyi, M. (1966). *The Tacit dimension*. New York, NY: Doubleday
- Reiche, B. S., Harzing, A. W. & Kraimer, M. L. (2009). The role of international assignees’ social capital in creating inter-unit intellectual capital: A cross-level model. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 40, 509–26.

- Reiche, B. S. (2012). Knowledge benefits of social capital upon repatriation: A longitudinal study of international assignees. *Journal of management studies*, 49(6), 1052-1077.
- Riege, A. (2005). Three-dozen knowledge-sharing barriers managers must consider. *Journal of knowledge management*, 9(3), 18-35.
- Schultz, M. (2001). The uncertain relevance of newness: Organizational learning and knowledge flows. *Academy of Management Journal*, 44(4), 661-681.
- Shaffer, M. A., Harrison, D. A., & Gilley, K. M. (1999). Dimensions, determinants, and differences in the expatriate adjustment process. *Journal of international business studies*, 30, 557-581.
- Silverman, D. (2013). *Doing qualitative research*. London: Sage publications Ltd.
- Stahl, G.K., Chua, C.H., Caligiuri, P., Cerdin, J.-L. & Taniguchi, M. (2009), Predictors of turnover intentions in learning-driven international assignments: The role of repatriation concerns, satisfaction with company support, and perceived career advancement opportunities. *Human Resource Management*, 48(1), 89-109.
- Stenmark, D. (2001). Leveraging tacit organizational knowledge. *Journal of Management Information Systems*, 17(3), 9-24.
- Stewart, T. (1997). *Intellectual capital: The new wealth of organizations*. London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.
- Stroh, L. K., Gregersen, H. B. & Black, J. S. (2000). Triumphs and tragedies: Expectations and commitments upon repatriation. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 11, 681-97.
- Takeuchi, R. (2010). A critical review of expatriate adjustment research through a multiple stakeholder view: Progress, emerging trends, and prospects. *Journal of Management*, 36, 1040-64.
- Truran, W. R. (1998). Pathways for knowledge: How companies learn through people. *Engineering Management Journal*, 10(4), 15-20
- Tsoukas, H. & Vladimirov, E. (2001). What is Organizational Knowledge. *Journal of Management Studies* 38 (7), 973-993
- Tung, R. (1988). *The New Expatriates: Managing Human Resources Abroad*. Cambridge, MA: Ballinger.
- Vidal, E. S., Valle, R. S., & Aragón, I. B. (2007). Antecedents of repatriates' job satisfaction and its influence on turnover intentions: Evidence from Spanish repatriated managers. *Journal of business research*, 60, 1272-1281.
- Wang, S., & Noe, R. A. (2010). Knowledge sharing: A review and directions for future research. *Human resource management review*, 20, 115-131.
- Weiss, L. (1999). Collection and connection: The anatomy of knowledge sharing in professional service. *Organization Development Journal*, 17(4), 61-72.
- Welch, D. (2003). Globalization of staff movements: Beyond cultural adjustment. *Management international review*, 43, 149-162.
- Welch, D., & Steen, A. (2013). Repositioning global staff transfers: A learning perspective. *Human resource management*, 52(5), 793-807.
- Yan, A., Zhu, G. & Hall, D. T. (2002). International assignments for career building: A model of agency relationships and psychological contracts. *Academy of Management Review*, 27, 373-91.

Appendicies

Appendix 1: Interview guide KPS

Intervjuguide “The characteristics of repatriate knowledge sharing practices”

Fase 1 – Introduksjon:

- Presentere oss selv
- Formål med studiet
- Informert samtykke og konfidensialitet
- Be om samtykke til opptak
- Hvor lenge har du jobbet i selskapet?
- Når var du på utenlandsoppdrag, og hvor lenge?

Fase 2 - Repatriation

- Hvordan var det å komme tilbake?
- Hvordan opplevde du debriefingen med HR?
- Beskriv støtten og oppfølgingen du mottok etter og ha returnert hjem?
- Hvordan samsvarte prosessen med dine forventninger?
- Hvordan har arbeidsoppgavene/ansvarsområdene dine eventuelt endret seg?
 - Hvordan føler du dine nye erfaringer har blitt verdsatt?

Fase 3 - Kunnskap:

- Hva lærte du under utenlandsoppdraget?
 - Personlig utvikling, profesjonell kunnskap
 - Taus og eksplisitt kunnskap
- I hvilken grad var det å tilegne seg ny kunnskap viktig for beslutningen din om å påta deg utenlandsoppdrag?
- Hvordan føler du kunnskapen du tilegnet deg under utenlandsoppholdet har bidratt til å styrke din kompetanse?
- Hvor viktig er din nye kunnskap for bedriften?

Fase 4 - Kunnskapsdeling:

- Hvordan oppfatter du kunnskapsdeling og deling av kunnskap generelt?
- Hva slags ny kunnskap er spesielt interessant å dele?
- Hvordan ser du på det å dele kunnskapen du tilegnet deg under utenlandsoppdraget?
- Hvordan føler du dine nye erfaringer har blitt verdsatt?
- Hvordan har kunnskapen din blitt anvendt og utnyttet i organisasjonen?
- Hvilken rolle spilte kunnskapsdeling under repatriasjonsprosessen?
- I hvilken grad opplevde du at ledelsen la til rette for kunnskapsdeling da du kom tilbake?
- I hvilken grad opplevde du at ledelsen og medarbeiderne dine var interessert i kunnskapen du tilegnet deg under utenlandsoppdraget?

- Hvordan ble kunnskapen du har tilegnet deg under utenlandsoppdraget delt ved hjemkomst?
- Hvordan opplevde du kunnskapsdelingen under repatriasjonsprosessen? Kunne noe vært gjort annerledes, eventuelt hvordan?
- Hvem deler du kunnskap med, og i hvilke situasjoner?

Appendix 2: Coding of data

Lage en forbedring av denne tabellen Themes → Subthemes → Coded examples / examples of quotes

| Category | Mentioned by |
|---|--|
| Cultural knowledge and relational skills | (informant 5), (informant 7), (informant 6), (informant 1), (informant 8), (informant 2), (informant 3), (informant 4) |
| New professional competence and knowledge of industry | (informant 5), (informant 8), (informant 2), (informant 4), (informant 7), (informant 6), (informant 3) |
| Informal/unconscious knowledge sharing during repatriation and after | (informant 7), (informant 2), (informant 3), (informant 6), (informant 5), (informant 1), (informant 8), (informant 4) |
| Knowledge utilization frustrations | (informant 7), (informant 2), (informant 8), (informant 1), (informant 3) |
| Career frustrations | (informant 7), (informant 6), (informant 5), (informant 2), (informant 8), (informant 1) |
| Expectation management (disappointment) | (informant 7), (informant 6), (informant 5), (informant 2) |
| Knowledge sharing is important | (informant 5), (informant 2), (informant 8), (informant 3), (informant 4), (informant 1) |
| Knowledge sharing during and after repatriation (not happening) | (informant 7), (informant 2), (informant 3), (informant 6), (informant 5), (informant 1), (informant 8), (informant 4) |

| | |
|--|--|
| Time, structure and autonomy as barriers (Organizational receptivity) | (informant 4), (informant 1), (informant 2), (informant 8), (informant 3) |
| Lack of interest as barrier (Organizational receptivity) | (informant 5), (informant 2), (informant 6), (informant 3), (informant 7), (informant 8), (informant 3), (informant 4) |
| Individual readiness as barrier | (informant 2), (informant 8), (informant 3), (informant 6), (informant 4), (informant 5), (informant 7) |
| Proactively shared knowledge | (informant 2), (informant 8), (informant 3), (informant 1) |