

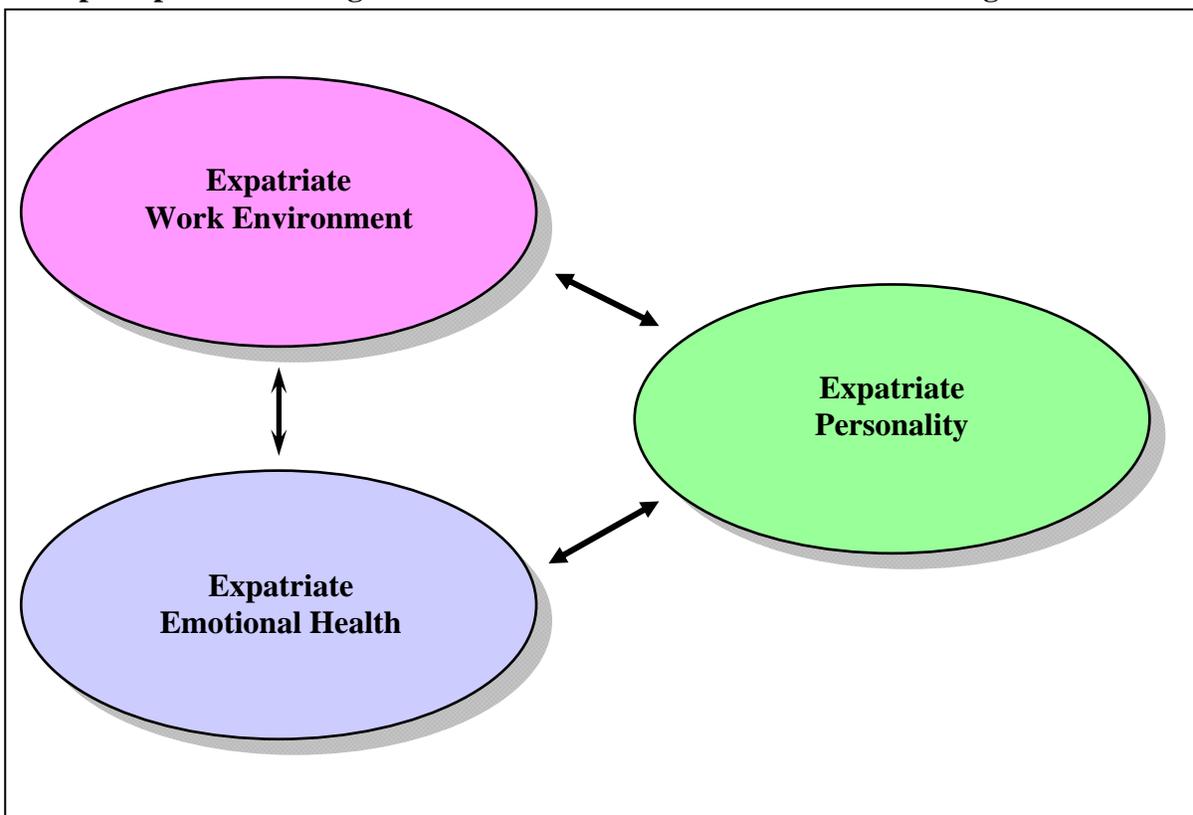
## Section 2

### Individual adjustment to the expatriate international career cycle

#### Overview

The aim of the study is to determine whether relationships exist between the expatriates' levels of emotional health, personality, and their perception of the organisational climate while on international assignment, and to present the outcomes of the study as a model. A graphical layout of a potential model that displays the interaction among the three factors is presented below:

**Figure 4.1: Possible relationships among expatriate emotional health, personality, and perception of the organisational climate while on international assignment**





The specific research objectives set during this study are the following:

- Objective 1: To establish the impact of the expatriation process on the individual's emotional health;
- Objective 2: To establish the interaction that exists between the expatriate personality and the individual's emotional adjustment during the various phases of the expatriation process;
- Objective 3: To establish the impact of organisational climate factors on the emotional adjustment of the individual prior to departure on the international assignment, and while on contract;
- Objective 4: To establish the nature of the interaction that exists between the expatriate personality and the individual's perception of the organisational climate.
- Objective 5: To investigate the main personality and organizational climate predictors of the expatriate's levels of emotional health while on an international assignment in a foreign country.

In order to achieve the above mentioned aim and its accompanying objectives, it is of critical importance to conduct a detailed investigation into the three variables that may potentially be included in the proposed model as displayed in Figure 4.1.

In Section 2 the theoretical and academic foundations of expatriation are discussed, with specific reference to the organisational climate dynamics involved with the expatriate international career cycle, emotional health, and personality.



Chapters 4 to 7 are included in Section 2. The contents of these chapters are as follows:

Chapter 4 concentrates on the first phase of the expatriation process, namely the period before departing on international, which includes selection and preparation of the expatriate.

The complexities and difficulties experienced by the expatriate while on the international assignment (the second phase) are explored in Chapter 5.

Chapter 6 entails the last phase of the expatriation process, namely the expatriate's repatriation back in the home country and parent company on completion of the international assignment.

Specific attention is given in all three chapters to the impact of the work environment on the expatriate during the various phases of the international assignment.

Chapter 7 focuses primarily on the applicable academic research that provides the underlying foundation for expatriate psychological health and personality as investigated in this study. The chapter provides the theoretical basis for the research methodology that will be applied. The emphasis shifts to the individual expatriate and his adjustment to the expatriate environment from a psychological health perspective. This is done within the framework of the salutogenic model of psychological health as established by Dr Aaron Antonovsky, with specific reference to the concepts of sense of coherence and hardiness as "internal or personal protective factors" utilised by the expatriate in coping and remaining healthy in the stressful and constantly changing expatriate environment.

The qualitative literature research discussed in Section 2 of this study forms the conceptual framework for the quantitative statistical analyses and investigations that are conducted in Section 3.



## Chapter 4

### Pre-departure preparation prior to international assignment

#### 4.1. Introduction

Postulate 1 set in this study was that the emotional health of the individual expatriate is significantly and negatively influenced during the three phases of the international career cycle. The international career cycle consists of three phases, namely pre-departure on international assignment, the actual period abroad, and repatriation back to the home country. Chapter 4 provides a detailed investigation into the various phases of the expatriation process (jointly referred to as the international career cycle), with specific reference to the first phase of the cycle: the effective identification, selection, and preparation of suitable individuals prior to their departure on international assignments to foreign countries.

#### 4.2. Expatriate international career cycle

Expatriates progress through a predictable sequence of phases in relocating from a domestic position in the parent company to an international assignment, and back home again on completion of assignment. Three phases can be identified in the international career cycle (Brotchi & Engvig, 2006):

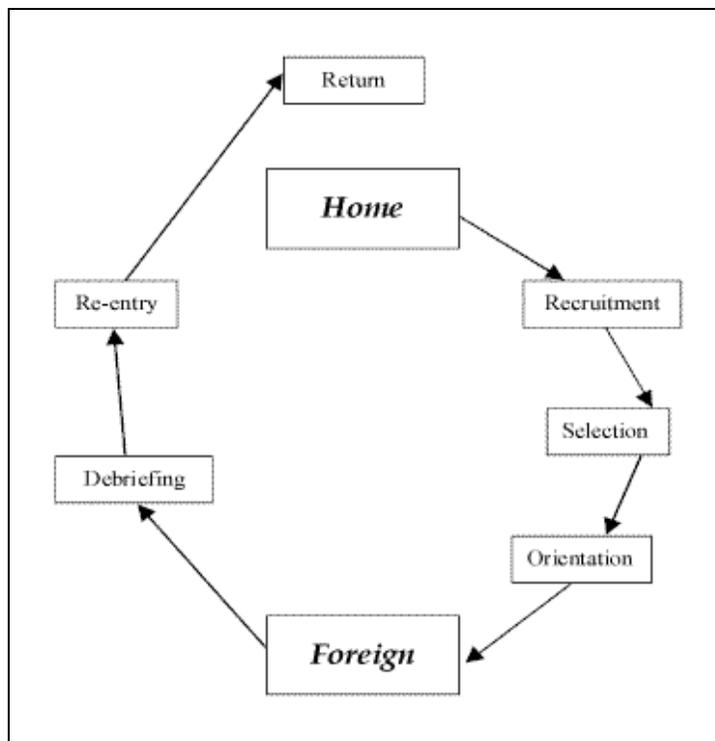
- Pre-departure preparation prior to international assignment
- the actual period abroad, and
- repatriation or transfer

A full expatriate career cycle consists of two key international transitions: cross-cultural entry into the host country, and re-entry into the home country on completion of assignment (Chan, 1999). Each of these transitions has a significant impact on the expatriate. Locals in certain African countries refer to expatriates sent on two-year assignments as “two-year wonderers”:

*“For the first six months they are full of wonder at their new environment and think everything is great and exciting. Then follows one productive year during which they may provide modest value to the organisation and the business. For the last six months of their stay they are wondering where they will go next” (Shelley, 2004: 42).*

In order to ensure maximum benefit of the international assignment in achieving the organisation’s strategic goals, Frandberg and Kjellman (2005) assert that the expatriate career cycle should be treated as an overall process. The cycle progresses through certain predictable phases. It starts with the selection of a suitable candidate for an international assignment, and then the preparation of the expatriate and the family for the assignment. It then progresses through the full period of assignment at the foreign operations, and ends with the reintegration of the returning expatriate into a new position in the parent company on repatriation. The full expatriate international career cycle can be viewed in Figure 4.1.

**Figure 4.2.: Expatriate international career cycle**



(Antal, 2001)



A detailed review follows on each of the above mentioned phases in the expatriate international career cycle.

### **4.3. Pre-departure preparation prior to international assignment**

The process of pre-departure preparation prior to international assignment can be divided into two interrelated phases, namely anticipatory adjustment, and selection and preparation (Frandsberg & Kjellman, 2005; Dowling et al, 1999).

- **Pre-departure anticipatory adjustment** entails the expatriate's psychological adjustment of his mental maps and rules in line with the expected conditions in the foreign country.
- **Selection and preparation** entails the identification, selection, and preparation of the expatriate prior to his expatriation on international assignment. It also includes the planning ahead for the future and conducting investigations to obtain relevant information on the international assignment at the foreign operations.

#### **4.3.1. Pre-departure anticipatory adjustment**

The pre-departure anticipatory adjustment phase is often the most important, but also the least understood and most poorly managed phase in the repatriation process. Future expatriates do not always realise the extent and impact their perceptions and expectations of the conditions at the foreign operations could have on their future adjustment to the work and living conditions in the host country Hodgetts and Luthans (2003).

Hodgetts and Luthans (2003) identify two pre-departure processes that are of critical importance in the future success of the expatriate in the foreign country, namely anticipatory adjustment and anticipatory expectations.



According to Hodgetts and Luthans (2003), people make anticipatory adjustments in advance of actually going on the international assignment. They emphasise that, in order to be successful, the expatriates should really want to go on the international assignment, which means that they may even have unrealistic expectations and ideals. Only individuals who display high levels of enthusiasm and personal commitment would be willing to make the level of sacrifice required to obtain an in-depth understanding and acceptance of the conditions in the host country.

Hodgetts and Luthans (2003) assert that the expatriate needs to have a desire to go on a foreign assignment in order to make the necessary anticipatory adjustments in advance of the assignment. According to Suutari and Brewster (1997), the process of anticipatory adjustment is primarily psychological in the sense that people begin to adjust their mental maps and rules in line with the expected conditions in the foreign country. These mental maps and rules are also referred to as anticipatory expectations.

Hodgetts and Luthans (2003) identify three aspects of anticipatory adjustment that are of value during the expatriate's adjustment on arrival in the foreign country:

- The person is allowed to make a large number of mental adjustments in advance;
- The process of anticipatory adjustment is focused on important aspects of the new culture, and;
- The future adjustments are refined so that they are accurate and reflective of the actual conditions in the foreign country.

Two factors are identified that lead to the formation of accurate anticipatory expectations and mental adjustments prior to the expatriate's departure to the foreign country, namely individual factors and organisational factors (Hodgetts & Luthans, 2003).



#### **4.3.1.1. Individual factors**

As elements of anticipatory adjustment, two specific individual factors are identified that facilitate the formation of accurate expectations and mental adjustments, namely: cross-cultural training, and previous overseas experience (Hodgetts & Luthans, 2003; Chan, 1999; Suutari & Brewster, 1997).

##### **i. Cross-cultural training**

The first individual factor identified by Hodgetts and Luthans (2003) as being of value in assisting the expatriate develop accurate expectations is pre-departure training prior to the expatriate's departure to the foreign country. In order to avoid unnecessary confusion in the categorisation of pre-departure training, Hodgetts and Luthans assert that individuals can provide pre-departure training for themselves or can receive it from their companies. Therefore, pre-departure training needs to be categorised as either an individual or an organisational factor having an impact on the formation of accurate anticipatory expectations and mental adjustments.

Pre-departure training provides the prospective expatriate with specific information on the international assignment, as well as the culture within which the person will be required to live and work. It can therefore reduce the levels of concern about the assignment and the general environment in the foreign country. Cross-cultural training can also assist the future expatriate in forming accurate expectations of the new position and work environment (Cascio & Aguinis, 2005: 447; Morley et al, 1997: 58).



## ii. Previous overseas experience

Previous international experience has been identified as a factor that is potentially of value in assisting the expatriates to develop accurate expectations prior to their departure to the foreign country (Black et al, 1999; Adler, 1997). However, conflicting results are observable in literature regarding the actual value of previous international experience in enhancing the future expatriate's adjustment.

Adler (1997) argues that expatriates who go through a cross-cultural experience in a foreign country move from a low to a high level of self-knowledge and cultural awareness. This cross-cultural adjustment implies that an expatriate who has successfully completed one international assignment should be able to adjust quicker and more effectively on any further assignments. Black and Gregersen (1999) agree with Adler in this regard, arguing that an expatriate who has been on an international assignment before can apply learning experiences gained from the previous assignment to reduce the confusion and turmoil associated with the new assignment.

In contrast to the above mentioned findings, Suutari and Brewster (1997) indicate that the assumption is often made that having lived in a foreign country has a positive impact on the formation of accurate expectations about another foreign experience. However, their research indicates that, although previous international experience can be positively related to successful expatriate adjustment, it would be overly simplistic to make the assumption that because a person has lived in one country he will automatically adjust to another country.

Research conducted by Van Weerdenburg (2006) concurs with the findings of Suutari and Brewster, indicating that previous overseas experience can have a positive impact on anticipatory adjustment. However, due to the fact that various aspects of living and working in one foreign country are not always directly applicable to another, the positive impact is moderate at best.



Van Weerdenburg (2006) found a positive correlation between previous expatriate experience and adjustment to the work environment. However, this positive relationship could not be extended to the general adjustment to the foreign environment. Mitrovica (2001) also indicates that the impact of previous international experience is the strongest when the last international assignment was relatively recent and when the degree of interaction with host-country nationals and involvement in the foreign culture was relatively high.

### **4.3.2. Expatriate selection and preparation**

#### **4.3.2.1. Background**

The selection and training of suitable individuals for international assignments forms a very important part of the preparation phase prior to the expatriate's departure on international assignment (Brotchi & Engvig, 2006; Van Weerdenburg, 2006). One of the main reasons identified for the high expatriate failure rates experienced by multinational companies is their use of inadequate and/or inappropriate procedures and criteria during their selection of candidates for international assignments (Cascio & Aguinis, 2005).

Despite the convincing statistics available on the value of pre-assignment assessment and preparation, as well as the proven importance of all the other criteria correlated to overseas success, Cascio and Aguinis (2005: 443) conclude that multinational companies seem to prefer focusing their selection efforts on one single criterion, namely technical competence. Antal (2001) agrees with this argument, indicating that most companies that make use of international assignments, select individuals for such assignments primarily on the basis of the operational needs of a given position at a specific moment, and their inability to fill it with a host country employee. According to Antal (2001), international assignments are most often utilised as a "fire fighting approach" in dealing with operational crises in the foreign operations.



Beaverstock (2000) asserts that one of the most common approaches of identifying potential expatriates for overseas assignments is the so-called "coffee machine system". A typical scenario described by Beaverstock would be of a senior line manager standing next to the coffee machine when he is joined by a colleague:

*'How's it going?' 'Oh, you know, overworked and underpaid.' 'Tell me about it. As well as all the usual stuff, Jimmy in Mumbai has just fallen ill and is being flown home. I've got no idea who we can get over there to pick up the pieces at short notice. It's driving me crazy.' 'Have you met that Simon on the fifth floor? He's in the same line of work. Very bright and looks like going a long way. He was telling me that he and his wife had a great holiday in Goa a couple of years ago. He seems to like India. Could be worth a chat.' 'Hey, thanks. I'll check him out.' 'No problem. They don't seem to improve the coffee though, do they?'*

Suutari (2003) quotes a similar example: *"One day my boss came to me and asked whether I would be interested in going to Poland. I just agreed by saying: All right, why not, I have never been there, and I was incidentally present when the company started to make foreign acquisitions and as nobody else knew any more than I did about such things, I was selected"*.

Commenting on the above mentioned scenarios, Cascio and Aguinis (2005) state quite categorically: *"Technical competence has nothing to do with one's ability to achieve a task in a foreign cultural environment, adapt to a new environment, deal effectively with foreign co-workers, or perceive and, if necessary imitate the foreign behavioural norms. In fact, traits that may make a person a good performer in the domestic environment may be liabilities overseas"*.

In their criticism towards the "coffee machine system" of expatriate selection utilised by many multinational companies, Cascio and Aguinis (2005) assert that it is important to bear in mind that the fundamental purpose of the expatriate selection process is two-fold:



- to identify individuals who will remain for the duration of the international assignment;
- to achieve the strategic and the tactical objectives of their assignments.

In order to ensure the most effective and accurate identification and appointment of individuals for international assignments, Black et al (1999) argue that a more strategic approach needs to be taken in establishing an expatriate selection process. They propose a two-stage process for how multinational companies should strategically approach the selection process for international assignments.

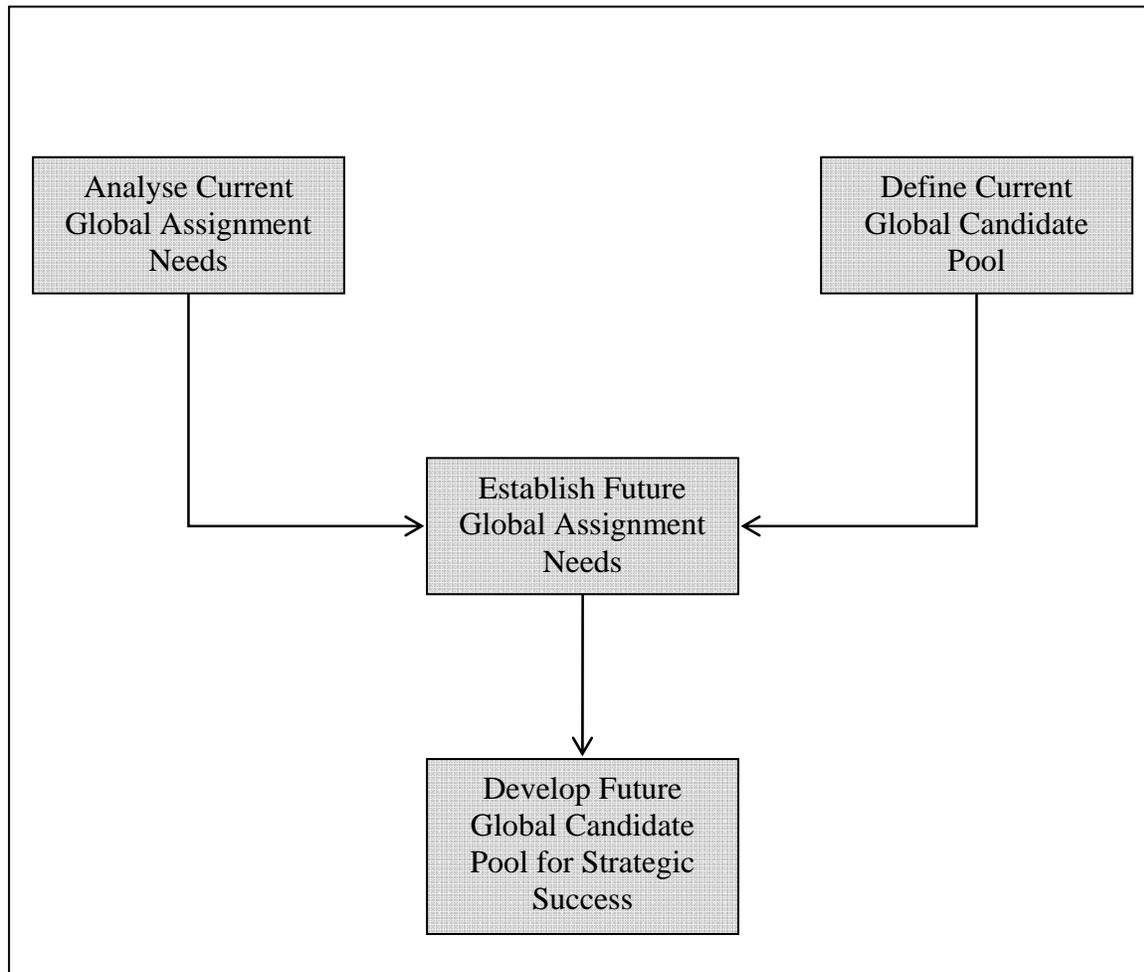
#### **4.3.2.2. Comprehensive approach to ensure selection of suitable expatriates**

Black et al (1999) recommend the following two stages in the expatriate selection process. The first stage is to carry out a strategic analysis of the company's international assignment needs. On completion of the strategic analysis, the second stage is the implementation of a selection process to ensure the most suitable individuals are appointed in specific global positions. Herewith, a more detailed discussion on these two stages.

##### **i. Stage 1: Strategic analysis of international assignments**

In order to make international assignments truly strategic, Black et al (1999) state that a careful analysis needs to be conducted of the company's current international assignment needs. It is also critical to define the company's current global candidate pool, and to assess whether the pool of candidates will be large enough to meet future demands for effective global managers. A graphical display of the first phase of their recommended process is provided in Figure 4.2.

**Figure 4.3.: Strategic analysis of international assignments**



(Black et al, 1999: 77)

**a. Analyse current international assignment needs**

Several factors need to be considered during the analysis of the company's current international assignment needs. An analysis of these factors can help the company determine its international assignment needs from a strategic perspective (Black et al, 1999).



A critical factor to be taken into account in the establishment of the company's international assignment needs would be the organisation's current stage of globalisation. An expatriate position in an export company may have significantly fewer demands compared to a company in the multinational stage (Adler, 2003; Black et al, 1999).

A further consideration to be taken into account during the assessment of the current international assignment needs is the strategic functions the assignment should play. The company may for example need to decide whether it wants to make use of international assignments to ensure better coordination and control of foreign subsidiaries, or to develop future executives by giving them international assignments as development experiences (Suutari, 2003; Black et al, 1999). Auon et al (2006) emphasise that companies should strongly consider the business rationale underlying each international assignment. A further question that needs to be answered is whether it would not make more business sense to appoint a local national employee in the position.

#### **b. Define the candidate pool**

Multinational companies need to know the composition of their current candidate pool of global managers. In order to keep up-to-date with the available pool of candidates, Black et al (1999) recommend that companies make use of comprehensive databases to obtain information on for example a manager's current assignment, technical qualifications, previous global experience, cross-cultural skills, and management potential within the company. The establishment and maintenance of such a database may require an initial investment of time and resources. However, a well-maintained database can be very useful in searching for the candidates with the best technical and cross-cultural skills to appoint in a specific global position.



**c. Determine future requirements**

In order to establish a strategic and appropriate expatriate selection approach, multinational companies also need to take into account their future international assignment requirements (Frandsberg & Kjellman, 2005; Black et al, 1999). These future needs will also be a function of the company's future globalisation stage and of the necessary strategic functions for maintaining a global competitive advantage.

In order to assess future needs accurately, the company also needs to consider the future key strategic functions required. If the company intends to make several key strategic acquisitions in various countries to develop additional technological synergies, it will be necessary to move technology and information from operation to operation and from overseas to headquarters. The effective flow of information may require an increased number of international assignments (Black et al, 1999).

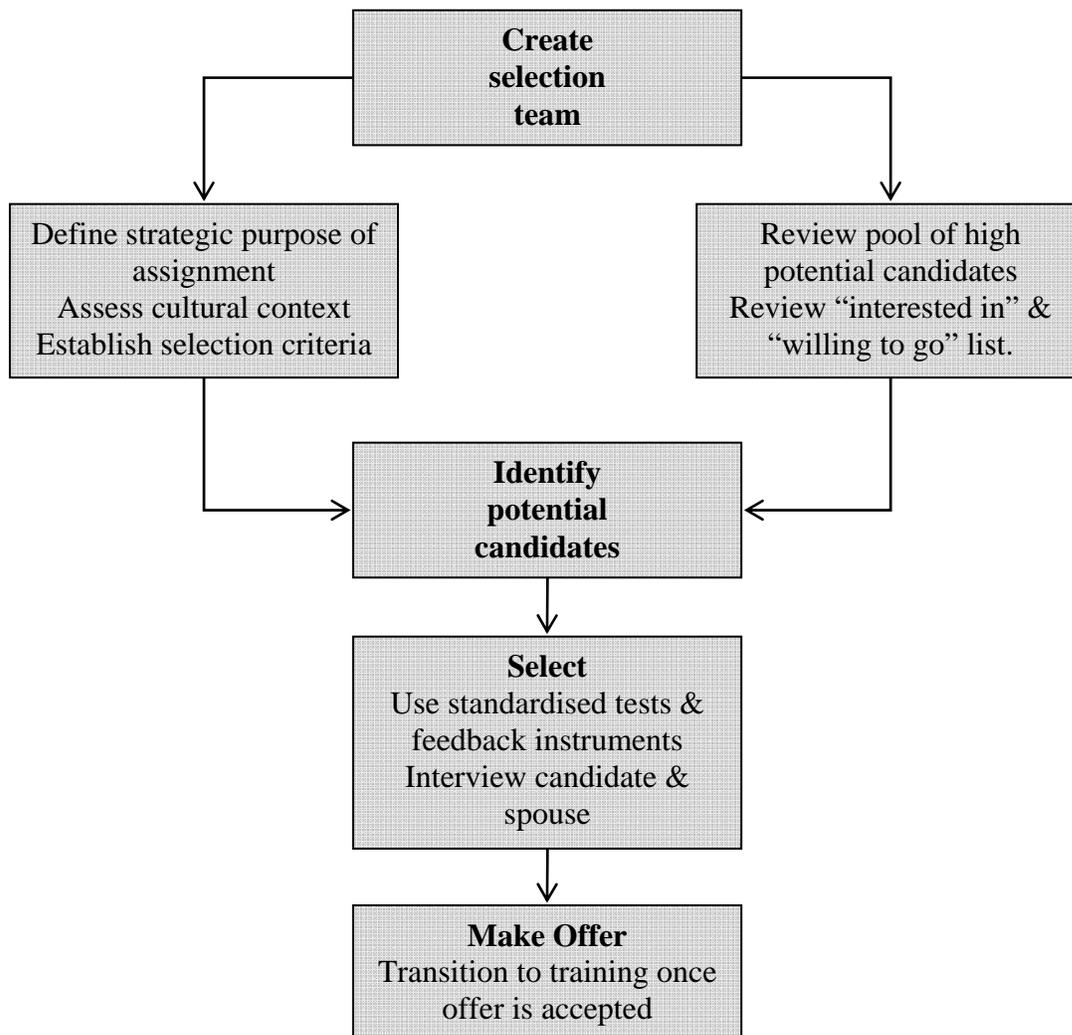
**d. Establish expatriate candidate pool for strategic success**

According to Black et al (1999), the final strategic step in preparing for the company's future international assignment needs is the development of its international assignment candidate pool. In order to develop a sufficient pool of qualified candidates for international assignments, the company should ensure regular assessments of employees' managerial and cross-cultural skills. As part of the normal management potential advancement (which typically includes traditional assessment centre processes and management development programmes), the company also needs to include the assessment and development of the critical skills and personal characteristics required for successful international assignments.

## ii. Stage 2: Selection and preparation process for specific assignments

After completing the strategic analysis of the international assignments within the company, the next stage in the establishment of an expatriate selection process is to ensure the most appropriate and suitable individuals are appointed in expatriate positions. Black et al (1999) propose the following key activities that should lead to more successful and accurate expatriate selection decisions.

**Figure 4.4.: Strategic international assignment selection process**



(Black et al, 1999: 80)



**a. Appoint a selection panel**

The first step in the selection process is to appoint a selection panel. This panel should consist of at least three members: a parent-country manager, a host-country manager, and a Human Resource Department representative (Treven, 2001; Black et al, 1999). The inclusion of the parent- and host-country managers helps to ensure the requirements of both the company headquarters and the subsidiaries are met.

The host-country manager might also be elected to act in the capacity of mentor for the expatriate during the assignment. The role of the Human Resources representative should be to coordinate the selection process, ensure that the appropriate selection criteria are utilised, and to assist in identifying an appropriate number of candidates to select from for the position.

**b. Define strategic purpose of international assignment**

The next step in the process should be for the selection team to determine the strategic purpose of the international assignment (Jagatsingh, 2000). Swaak (1995) distinguishes the following seven categories of expatriates by purpose of assignment:

- Assignments to develop specific skills and talents;
- Short- and long-term assignments where specialists are utilised to carry out specific duties , and then to transfer such skills and knowledge to the local nationals;
- Project assignments, where specialists are sent on short-term assignments in order to develop and implement specific plans and projects, and then to return to the parent company or be sent on other expatriate assignments;
- Long term or permanent assignments, where interested individuals are sent on assignments for periods of two years and longer. These expatriates may then elect to remain in the host country as local employees on completion of their assignments;



- Management assignments, where senior executives oversee and control an overseas subsidiary in order to provide stability in an operation;
- Regional coordination assignments, where specialists who excel in managing local operations oversee and integrate various countries in a region;
- Worldwide management assignments, where global career executives oversee and integrate the activities of different regions.

Taking into account the various reasons why international companies can make use of expatriates, both Jagatsingh (2000) and Black et al (1999) deem it critically important to determine the purpose of each international assignment before any candidates are identified for the particular position.

### **c. Assess cultural context**

It is important to determine the cultural context within which the international assignment will be functioning (Treven, 2001; Black et al, 1999). Trompenaars and Hampton-Turner (2004) found that the bigger the difference between the expatriate's current culture and the culture in the host-country where the international assignment will be positioned, the bigger the cultural adjustment and subsequent cross-cultural communication and language skills required. These factors may have a significant impact on the selection criteria utilised and the final decision on the most suitable candidate.

Shin et al (2003) suggest that relationship dimensions such as cultural empathy and interpersonal skills become important when dealing with cultural differences. Their meta-analytic review indicated that better interpersonal skills were associated with greater adjustment to the general environment, particularly in cultures that place great importance on the social and interpersonal elements of the workplace.



#### **d. Establish selection criteria**

One of the most difficult and confusing issues in selecting an employee for an international assignment is determining the qualities that the candidate should possess in order to be successful (Gelfand et al, 2006; Nyfield et al, 1995).

On the one hand, Cascio and Aguinis (2005) assert that most international companies focus their efforts during their selection of candidates for expatriation solely on two criteria, namely technical competence and job knowledge. This finding is confirmed by literature indicating that technical competence is viewed as a crucial criterion for expatriate success by multinational companies, by host country-nationals, as well as by expatriates themselves (Suutari, 2003).

On the other hand, Harvey and Novicevic (2001) indicate that researchers have developed relatively long and confusing lists of critical factors to consider when selecting candidates for international assignments. An example in this regard would be the expatriate selection model proposed by Harris and Moran (as cited in Jordan & Cartwright, 1998), which includes 68 dimensions of overseas success, of which 21 dimensions are viewed “the most desirable”.

A definite concern in this regard would be that very few sufficiently comprehensive approaches could be identified during this literature study that incorporate all the various models. No agreement also seems to exist among researchers on the most important criteria to be utilised during the selection of candidates for expatriation. In his commentary to the confusion existing on the selection criteria to be used, Van Weerdenburg (2006) asserts: “...*taking into account the amount of criteria available, it is not surprising that companies only focus on technical competence during their selection processes*”.

An example of the sometimes unrealistic selection criteria proposed by researchers would be the Jordan and Cartwright's (1998) reference to Heller (1980) who is of the opinion that the successful expatriate should have "*a flexible personality, with broad intellectual horizons, attitudinal values of cultural empathy, general friendliness, patience and prudence, impeccable educational and professional (or technical) credentials – all topped up with immaculate health, creative resourcefulness, and respect for peers. If the family is equally well endowed, all the better*".

In order to create a level of organisation and structure to this confusing situation, Beaverstock (2000) established a short list of selection criteria utilised most often by companies in the United States of America, Europe and Scandinavia. These selection criteria are shown in Table 4.1 below.

**Table 4.1.: Expatriate selection criteria in America, Europe and Scandinavia**

<b>United States</b>	<b>Europe</b>	<b>Scandinavia</b>
1. Performance in similar job	1. Technical expertise	1. Technical/professional qualities
2. Knowledge of position	2. Language	2. Previous achievements
3. Competitiveness	3. Family support	3. Motivation
4. Leadership skills	4. Managerial potential	4. Managerial talents
5. Administrative skills	5. Knowing company systems	5. Independence
6. Willingness to accept assignment	6. Experience	6. Communication talents
7. Knowledge of the company	7. Marital status	7. Language skills
8. Reputation	8. Medical status	8. Ambition and commitment
9. Willingness to accept more responsibility	9. Independence	9. Flexibility
10. Past expatriate performance	10. Motivation	10. Adaptability of the family
11. Potential for senior position		
12. Spouse's attitude to assignment		
13. Ability to work with foreign employees		

(Factors ranked in order of importance 1=highest)

(Beaverstock: 2000)



An interesting trend observable from the table above would be that companies in all three regions utilise technical expertise and ability to do the job as the most important criterion during their selection of expatriates. In his analysis of the criteria utilised by companies in the various regions, Beaverstock (2000) also identifies no significant differences in the criteria used by the multinational companies in the three regions. Other common competencies applied by companies in all three regions are experience, leadership and management skills, motivation, ambition, and family situation.

Shin et al (2003) view expatriate acculturation as a multi-dimensional process rather than a one-dimensional phenomenon. Therefore, the selection procedures utilised by multinational companies should be changed from a one-dimensional focus on technical competence as the decisive factor to a more multidimensional focus. They propose a four-dimensional model that associates specific general behaviours to success while on international assignment. They recommend that the expatriate selection process focus on evaluating the candidate's strengths and weaknesses in the following four dimensions: the self-oriented dimension, the others-oriented dimension, the perceptual dimension, and the cultural-toughness dimension.

As indicated in these examples, the number of important dimensions identified by researchers for the selection of candidates for expatriation is basically unlimited and is to a large extent dependent on the person who conducted the research.

#### **e. Identify candidates from expatriate candidate pool**

As mentioned earlier, one of the commonly used methods used by companies in identifying potential expatriates for overseas assignments is the so-called "coffee machine system", where expatriates get selected on an ad hoc basis without any formal process involved (Beaverstock, 2000). A consequence of this practice is that only those managers that a particular person happens to know are considered for international assignments. The consequences of making use of such a haphazard and "fire fighting approach" in selecting expatriates can be severe and very often lead to expatriate failure.



To avoid the use of the “coffee machine system” in selecting individuals for international assignments, Black et al (1999) recommend the establishment of a pool of high-potential candidates, as well as the continued updating of a database containing details of the identified candidates. This database can then be utilised to identify the highest number of potential candidates to select from for a particular assignment. Beaverstock (2000) also recommends that the employees in the pool need to be reviewed on a regular basis to identify who is interested in and willing to go on an international assignment. This will allow the company to avoid reviewing candidates or making offers to candidates who are not available or not interested.

**f. Utilise standardised assessment instruments and feedback instruments**

After an appropriate number of candidates have been identified for a particular international assignment, the next step in the selection process is to conduct properly standardised assessment methods on the candidates in order to determine their suitability for the assignment (Cascio & Aguinis, 2005; Black et al, 1999). Taking into account the costs and risks involved with an international assignment, Melles (2005) is of the opinion that the expense of utilising valid and standardised assessment and feedback instruments during the selection process should be viewed as an investment in the future, rather than just an unnecessary short-term expense.

However, a criticism expressed by multinational organisations against the use of selection instruments in their identification of expatriates is the validity and reliability of the available assessment instruments that are utilised to evaluate the specific criteria (Van Weerdenburg, 2006). Grove and Hallowell (2006) even go so far as to assert that there is no reliable way to determine in advance whether an individual will be successful as an expatriate. According to them, there are too many factors having an impact on the individual’s success, many having nothing to do with the individual. For this reason, Grove and Hallowell indicate that the assessment of prospective expatriate suitability can have only one realistic aim: to identify those candidates who are the most likely to fail on international assignment in a foreign country due to obvious concerns or low readiness.



As a result of the controversy surrounding the validity and reliability of selection instruments, Cascio and Aguinis (2005) indicate that international businesses tend not to use any significant selection tools during their identification of suitable candidates for international assignments. In this regard, a study conducted by Tung (as cited in Dowling et al, 1999) indicates that only 3 percent of companies included in the study reported formally assessing technical competence. A possible reason mentioned by Tung for this low rate would be the fact that most candidates for international assignments tend to be internal recruits.

According to Suutari and Brewster (1997), the assessment tools most often used by international businesses for expatriate selection are the gathering of biographical data, standardised tests, work samples, and assessment centres. They indicate that selection interviews and personal references are also widely applied, but are less effective.

#### **g. Interview candidate and spouse**

Both Grove and Hallowell (2006) and Treven (2001) assert that interviews also need to be held with the expatriate spouse. The purpose of these sessions is to provide the spouse with a realistic perspective on the living conditions in the foreign country, and to identify specific family needs. The interviews held with the expatriate and the spouse should be conducted in a context where both the company representative and the future expatriate and spouse can share perspectives on all aspects of the position and the foreign country.

A further reason for interviewing the expatriate spouse is to investigate the level of motivation he has for the assignment. Punnett (2002) states that the extent to which the spouse is able and willing to adjust to the international assignment is positively related to the expatriate's adjustment, as well as the expatriate's intentions to complete the international assignment. Punnett also found that the better the emotional preparation of expatriates and their spouses before their departure on the assignment, the better the chances are of them successfully adjusting to the conditions in the foreign environment.



#### **h. Make offer to candidate**

Stahl et al (2002) are of the strong opinion that the decision to appoint a person in an international assignment position is a two-way process. On the one hand, the company selects the individual or couple as the most suitable to be sent on the international assignment. On the other hand, the expatriate and the spouse elect to accept the benefits and responsibilities associated with the international assignment in a particular foreign country. Within the framework of this psychological contract, it is critically important that all the processes be conducted in a correct and appropriate way.

#### **i. Make transition from selection to training and preparation**

After the prospective expatriate has accepted the offer to go on an international assignment, the final step in the process is to prepare the person for the work and living conditions in the foreign country. Black et al (1999) assert that sufficient time should be provided prior to the person's departure on the international assignment for the appropriate training and preparation to be initiated.

Of significant importance during this stage would be the training of the expatriate on cross-cultural empathy and awareness (Gelfand et al, 2006; Cascio & Aguinis, 2005; Luthans & Farner, 2002). The purpose of cross-cultural training is to prepare the prospective expatriate to understand and effectively interact with persons from different cultures. According to Eckert (2006), the following principles form the basis for cross-cultural training:

- Self-understanding: knowing that every human behaviour is influenced by basic cultural assumptions, values and beliefs; an acknowledgement that all people are culturally bound;



- Understanding others: knowing that inter-cultural miscommunication happens as a result of people's different styles; understanding that different does not necessarily mean inferior;
- Different styles of interaction: learning to check and accept assumptions about behaviour that are different from what the expatriate might expect in a situation; learning different listening and responding styles; preparing a range of options and choices to deal with different situations.

One of the reasons mentioned by Luthans and Farner (2002) for providing cultural training is to assist in containing the failure rate of expatriates. The vast majority of these failures can be linked to the inability of the expatriate and/or spouse's to adjust to the culture in the foreign country. Meta-analyses conducted by Deshpande and Viswesvaran (as cited in Cascio & Anguinis, 2005: 449) indicate that cross-cultural training positively impacted on the following areas: self-development, relationships with local nationals, adjustment to culture shock, and job performance. Similarly, Lievens (as cited in Cascio & Anguinis, 2005: 449) also found a correlation of 0.38 between cross-cultural training and supervisory ratings, and 0.45 with language proficiency.

#### **4.4. Summary**

In Chapter 4 the focus was placed on the anticipatory adjustment processes utilised by the expatriates in their preparation for the international assignment. Attention was also given to the importance of making use of a strategic selection approach in identifying the most suitable candidates, and the impact this strategic approach could have in the enhancement of the company's global competitiveness and the success of the individual. The above mentioned discussions are in line with Postulate 3 established in this study, which states that the organisational climate prior to (and during) the international assignment has a significant influence on the levels of emotional health of the expatriate.

In Chapter 5, the dynamics involved with the expatriate's adjustment to the unfamiliar conditions in the foreign country are discussed.



## Chapter 5

### On international assignment

#### 5.1. Introduction

The overall postulate set in this study is that a relationship exists between the expatriates' levels of emotional health, personality, and their perception of the organisational climate while on international assignment in a foreign country, and that this relationship can be incorporated into a model. In order to prove this postulate, an investigation needs to be conducted on the dynamics having an impact on the expatriate while on assignment.

The expatriate's integration into the foreign environment is the most important phase in the international career cycle (Beaverstock, 2000; Adler, 1997). In Chapter 5, the dynamics involved with the expatriate adjusting to the foreign environment are discussed – from a personal, work, and a social or cultural perspective.

#### 5.2. Expatriate adjustment

Marx (1999: 4) asserts that all individuals who arrive on an international assignment in a foreign country for the first time are confronted with the same basic challenge: adjusting to the new culture in the foreign country, and becoming effective in managing the unique demands placed on them as expatriates. The term 'adjustment' is defined as "*a subjective or psychological state, and refers to the changes which the individual actively brings about or passively accepts in order to achieve or maintain satisfactory states of emotional balance within him or herself*" (Yavas, 2001).

Numerous definitions have been proposed for expatriate adjustment. Yavas (2001) defines expatriate adjustment as "*the degree of psychological adjustment experienced by the individual, or the degree of comfort, familiarity, and ease that the individual feels towards the new environment*". According to Yavas, expatriate adjustment is a type of cross-cultural adjustment.



Morley et al (1997: 55) describe expatriate adjustment as a process whereby expatriates re-establish those routines that provide valued outcomes and predictable feelings of control. Punnett (2002) points out that the adjustment process is not only applicable to the expatriate, but will also have a direct influence on family members who have also been transferred into the foreign environment.

A distinction needs to be made between the expatriates' personal adjustment and their socio-cultural adjustment to the foreign environment (Gelfand et al, 2006; Van Oudenhoven, 2002). Personal adjustment provides an indication of internal psychological outcomes, for example personal satisfaction and emotional health. Socio-cultural adjustment refers to external psychological effects that link the expatriates to their new social environment, for example the ability to cope with day-to-day obstacles. According to Van Oudenhoven (2002), socio-cultural adjustment can be translated further into two distinct areas, namely professional adjustment (referring to the amount of satisfaction with the new work environment in the host country), and social adjustment (referring to satisfying social relationships in the host country).

Trompenaars and Hampton-Turner (2004: 331) also refer to this process of expatriate adjustment as "culture shock". The term 'culture shock' was originally established by the anthropologist Oberg (as cited in Marx, 1999: 5), who explained both the symptoms and the process an individual goes through in adjusting to a new culture. According to Oberg, having to adjust to the new culture is viewed as a shock or as an unpleasant disruption. This shock takes place when the person's expectations are not in line with the practical reality.

Adler (1997) defines culture shock as "*the expatriate's reaction to a new, unpredictable, and therefore uncertain environment*". According to Adler, expatriate culture shock is the result of a breakdown in the global manager's "*selective perception and effective interpretation systems*". In the foreign environment, the global manager asks the questions: "To what should I pay attention?" and "What does it mean?"



An overload of stimuli in the form of objects, sounds, smells, tastes, and feelings bombard the senses of the global manager. The person finds it difficult to distinguish between those stimuli that are meaningful, and those that are unimportant and therefore need to be ignored. When arriving in a new culture, the expatriate has no framework within which he can interpret the local culture. The person then acts inappropriately and ineffectively, because the home culture's interpretive system does not fit the foreign culture.

Similarly, Eckert (2006) describes culture shock as the disorientation and frustration newly arriving expatriates experience when they encounter different cultures and norms. *“Because our own culture is often invisible, taken for granted, emotionally charged, and taught to represent moral high ground, we have a tendency to assume that something is wrong with others, not with us, and to define our own culture as ‘more natural, more rational, or more civilised’. In doing so, we undervalue the other culture by defining it as ‘immoral, irrational, or uncivilised.’”*

Mitrovica (2001) states categorically that experiencing culture shock is not a weakness or a negative indication of future international success. According to Mitrovica, culture shock forms part of the normal adjustment process that successful expatriates go through in adjusting to the culture in a foreign country. Gelfand et al (2006) agree with Mitrovica in this regard, indicating that severe culture shock is often indicative of an expatriate becoming deeply involved and learning the new culture, as opposed to isolating him or herself in an “expatriate ghetto”. The expatriate experiencing the culture shock should therefore view the adjustment process as a sign that they are doing something right, and not wrong. For them, the important question therefore becomes how best to manage the stress caused by culture shock, not how to avoid the culture shock itself. These assertions are in line with Postulate 1 set in this study, which stipulated that the emotional health of the individual expatriate is significantly and negatively influenced during the three phases of the international career cycle.



A study conducted by Hawes and Kealey (as cited in Marx 1999) on Canadian expatriates in Africa confirms the above mentioned assertion. In their study, Hawes and Kealey found that those expatriates who experienced culture shock were ultimately the most effective. Expatriates who were most aware of themselves and their emotions experienced the most intense culture shock, but it was exactly because of this intense awareness of differences that they were also able to adapt more effectively later on. In contrast, expatriates who were not affected by culture shock and generalised their own views to the other culture, did not adapt very well. According to Marx (1999), culture shock is therefore a positive indication in the process of international adjustment.

Black and Gregersen (2003) go so far as to assert that it is impossible for the expatriate to inoculate him or herself to avoid culture shock. Even if it was possible to avoid the culture shock experience, it would not be advisable. According to them, the expatriate learns the most valuable lessons by directly experiencing the anxiety and frustration of trying to understand the country and its culture, and by adjusting the existing ways of doing things to the local customs in the host country. However, Black and Gregersen also caution that severe culture shock can also lead to significant problems from a business perspective (in the form of lost business opportunities, dissatisfied clients, mistakes during negotiations, impaired relationships with business associates), as well as from a personal point of view (for example depression, divorce, substance abuse, and child abuse).

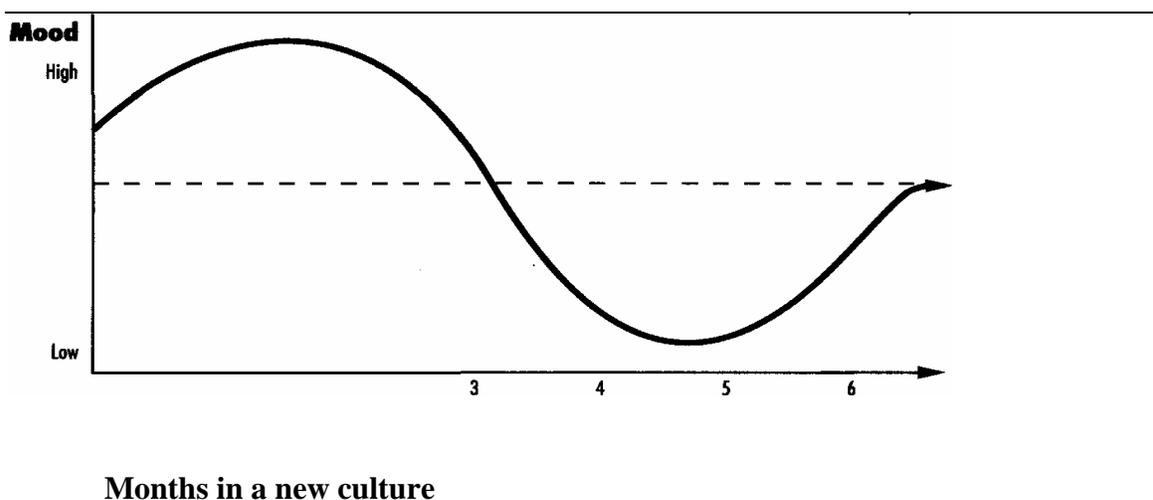
### **5.3. Culture shock cycle**

According to the culture shock adjustment model developed by Oberg (as cited in Marx, 1999: 7), an expatriate's adjustment to a new environment progresses through a cycle of clearly defined phases on the way to final adjustment. Oberg highlights six symptoms typically experienced by expatriates when they are subjected to culture shock:

- Stress caused by the effort to adjust to the new environment;
- Emotions of deprivation due to loss of family, friends, status, career, and personal belongings;
- Experiencing rejection from local nationals in the host country, or isolating self from them;
- Disorientation in function, values and self-identity;
- Apprehension and antagonism towards local practices in foreign culture;
- Emotions of helplessness due to an inability to adjust to the foreign conditions.

Torbiorn (as cited in Beaverstock, 2000) made certain adjustments to Oberg's culture shock model in order to incorporate the various phases of the expatriate adjustment process. According to Torbiorn, newly arriving expatriates typically experience an initial 'honeymoon' phase, followed by 'culture shock', and then progress through a difficult but necessary adjustment phase towards recovery and integration into the foreign culture. The expatriate's cross-cultural adjustment to the environment in a foreign country can be described as a U-shaped curve and is referred to as the cultural shock cycle (Hodgetts & Luthans, 2003; Chan, 1999).

**Figure 5.1.: Culture shock cycle**

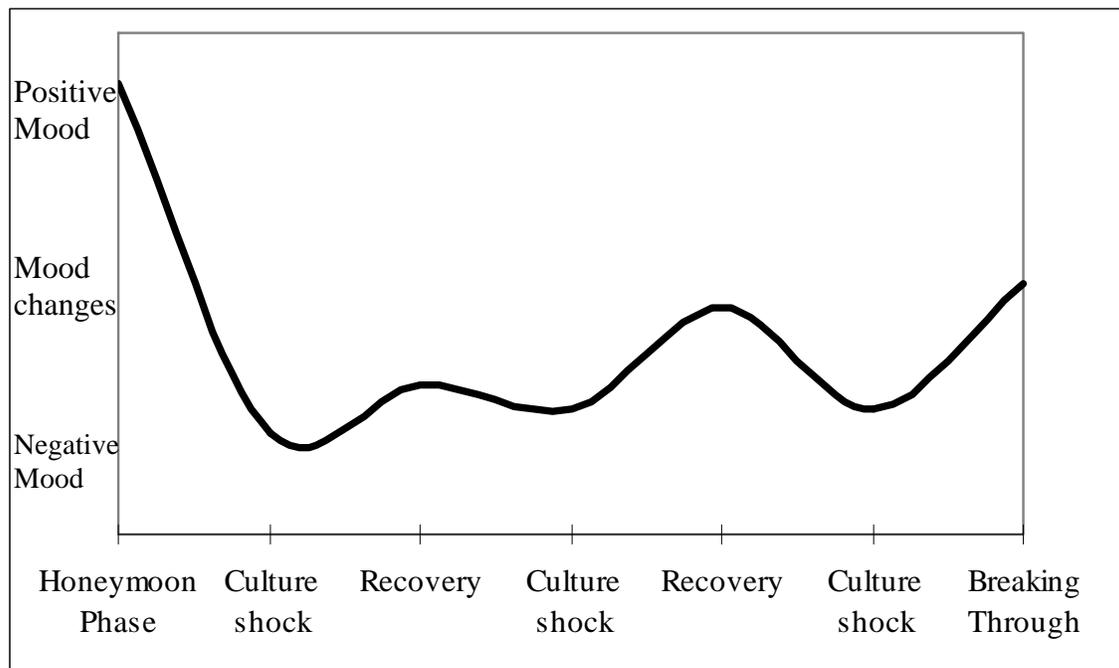


(Hodgetts & Luthans, 2003)

A number of attempts have been made to specify the timing of the various phases involved in the culture shock cycle, and to define what is ‘normal’ in adapting to a foreign culture. Trompenaars and Hampton-Turner (2004) argue that no hard-and-fast rule exists in this regard, and that it is not possible to give an exact indication of the “typical time” it takes the expatriate to adjust to the foreign culture. The timing of culture shock will depend on the ‘foreignness’ of the culture (how different it is to the person’s own culture), the social context (whether the person has support through an expatriate network or through host-country nationals), and the personality of the international manager involved.

The phases of culture shock may not always progress through such a logical and planned sequence. According to Marx (1999: 10), culture shock should not be regarded as a strictly linear process. It should rather be viewed as a repetitive and dynamic series of positive and negative phases until the expatriate breaks through the culture shock, as can be seen in Figure 5.2.

**Figure 5.2.: Alternative culture shock cycle**



(Marx, 1999)



A study conducted by the United Kingdom Centre for International Briefing (as cited in Marx: 1999) found that expatriates included in the study experienced symptoms of culture shock for approximately seven weeks: 70 percent of expatriates indicated that the symptoms lasted up to five weeks, and 30 percent experienced some levels of culture shock for up to ten weeks into their assignments. Research conducted by Tung (as cited in Beaverstock, 2000) on 409 expatriates in 51 countries indicated that approximately 30 percent of them took between six and twelve months to adjust to the environment in the foreign country. A discussion on the phases included in the culture shock cycle follows:

### **5.3.1. Phase 1: Honeymoon**

During the initial honeymoon phase, the expatriates enjoy a great deal of excitement as they discover the new culture (Marx, 1999). Everything they come into contact with is viewed as new and stimulating. The new environment is seen as presenting unlimited opportunities. The expatriates often experience intense emotions of happiness and curiosity, and shows great eagerness to face whatever challenges coming their way.

The newly arrived expatriate tends to reserve his judgment of the new culture at this stage, and may even tend to suppress minor irritations in favour of focusing on the pleasant things surrounding the new position, colleagues, the company, social environment, and the country in general. During the person's initial arrival in the host country, local nationals and fellow expatriates may also feel obliged to welcome the person, or may be naturally curious to meet the new arrivals. This initial honeymoon phase could last between two weeks to the first few months, and is typically followed by the culture shock or disillusionment phase (Black & Gregersen, 2003; Punnett, 2002).



### **5.3.2. Phase 2: Culture shock**

The second phase, culture shock, is generally characterised by the expatriate experiencing a general discomfort and foreignness towards the new situation. This discomfort often starts with the person feeling confused about developments in the foreign environment. In severe cases the expatriate can potentially go so far as to start hating everything that is foreign. The person may also suffer abnormal symptoms such as becoming highly stressed and irritable, experiencing difficulty doing 'normal' things such as eat or sleep, and developing an overly negative perspective towards the position, colleagues, and the country (Trompenaars & Hampton-Turner, 2004; Punnett, 2002).

The main reason for the above mentioned symptoms of culture shock is the uncertainty experienced by the expatriate about him or herself, the foreign surroundings and the future. The usual signs of orientation and belonging that used to be in place in the home country do not apply anymore, and the person does not quite know who he is without the familiar social context. During culture shock, expatriates often find it difficult to make sense of other people's behaviour. Their own behaviour also seems out of place and does not produce the expected results. They find an inability to develop new, culturally appropriate responses towards a foreign environment making demands that they do not understand (Trompenaars & Hampton-Turner, 2004; Punnett, 2002; Marx, 1999).

The initial phase of confusion is often followed by a period of intense emotional turmoil and disillusionment. This period of disillusionment forms the bottom of the U-shaped curve and is characterised by culture shock - the frustration and confusion associated with being faced with too many unknown and confusing stimuli (Brotchi & Engvig, 2006; Punnett, 2002).



Marx (1999: 5) identifies the following symptoms as the ones most often experienced by the expatriate during culture shock: feeling isolated, anxiety and worry, confusion about what to do, reduction in work performance, an inability to get close to business partners, inappropriate social behaviour, an inability to concentrate, feelings of depression and helplessness. Trompenaars and Hampton-Turner (2004) add to the above mentioned list, indicating that the symptoms of culture shock are similar to those of mild neurosis: skin rashes, appetite-loss, depression, sleeplessness, swellings, palpitations, and so forth.

Marx (1999) asserts that the way in which expatriates deal with the emotions and symptoms associated with the culture shock phase is essential for their general adjustment in the long term. She indicates that the most inappropriate approach in dealing with the symptoms of culture shock would be to disregard the symptoms, to make use of quick-fix solutions (including the long-term use of tranquilisers), or to become rigid in believing that only one's own methods are correct, and forcing these methods on the local nationals in the foreign country.

A further mistake typically made by expatriates is to blame others for the problems and frustrations they experience in adjusting to the foreign environment. Parties who get blamed for such frustrations would typically be host-country nationals, the company, and the expatriate spouse. Adler (1997) also cautions against expatriates falling for the temptation to blame others of causing their problems. Adler identifies blame as a generally unproductive stress management technique that does not lead to effective dealing with the problems faced by the expatriate.

According to Marx (1999), the ideal approach in dealing with the culture shock is for expatriates to use the symptoms and confusion as facilitators that drive the transformation from the 'old' approach towards an active engagement in personal development - both in managing their own emotions, and in developing a better understanding of themselves and others. Trompenaars and Hampton-Turner (2004) agree with Marx in this regard, indicating that the culture shock experienced will persist unless the individual makes a conscious decision to confront and break through it.



### 5.3.3. Phase 3: Adjustment

The adjustment stage is the period where expatriates gradually become more familiar and receptive towards the foreign culture. They become increasingly competent at functioning effectively in the new environment. After approximately three to six months, the expatriates outgrow their culture shock "low" and begin living a more normal life in the foreign country. They start feeling more positive, working more effectively, and living a more satisfying lifestyle. In small steps, they learn what is important and what is meaningful in the foreign culture. They learn when "yes" means "yes," when it means "maybe," and when it means "no." They learn which behavioural signals to focus on and which ones to ignore. They also learn to differentiate individual behaviour from behaviour that reflects a cultural pattern (Punnett, 2002; Adler, 1997).

A key aspect identified by Punnett (2002) to escaping the culture shock "low", is effective problem solving. Successful expatriates recognise that the foreign environment makes many demands for which they must find or create solutions. They recognise that they may not fully understand the situation and must find ways to get reliable information and expertise.

Critical skills required by expatriates during their initial adjustment to the foreign country would be the ability (a) to be patient, and (b) to be creative in finding unique solutions to unfamiliar problems. Effective global managers "know that they do not know." They realise that they are faced with unfamiliar challenges, and that they will not act as effectively in the new environment in the foreign country compared to their home country, especially during the initial phases of the expatriation process. They recognise the importance of developing appropriate stress management techniques, such as making use of so-called "stability zones" that will not have a negative impact on their relations with colleagues, clients, or family.

Effective global managers also recognise that all members of the family experience culture shock during their adjustment to a foreign country, and that the relocation often has a more significant impact on the spouse than on themselves. Successful expatriates therefore view cross-cultural adjustment from a strategic systems perspective, and not as an individual problem (Eckert, 2006; Marx, 1999; Adler, 1997).

Research conducted by Tung (as cited in Beaverstock, 2000) indicates that expatriates and their families develop specific ‘coping mechanisms’ to minimise the occurrence of adjustment problems due to culture shock. The survey conducted by Tung identified eight fundamental coping mechanisms actively utilised by these expatriates to alleviate the impact of culture shock during their adjustment in the foreign environment.

**Table 5.1.: Expatriate coping mechanisms**

<b>Coping Mechanisms</b>	<b>Mean</b>
1. Learning more about host country, including language	4.16
2. Socialising with host nationals	3.67
3. Spending more time with family	3.47
4. Remaining in contact with family and friends in the home country	3.37
5. Socialising with other expatriates	3.35
6. Keeping occupied with sports and athletics	3.16
7. Keeping busy with work all the time	3.14
8. Making use of stress relieving activities, such as consuming alcohol	1.90

Mean scores are based on 5-point scale, 5=strongly agree

(Beaverstock, 2000)

As can be seen in Table 5.1, the most constructive and widely used approaches applied by expatriates were to learn as much as possible about the host-country, and to socialise with local nationals. Of interest in this regard would be the eighth coping mechanism highlighted by Tung, namely the consumption of alcohol. This finding is in line with a commonly observed tendency by the researcher among expatriates to spend much of their free time in local restaurants or pubs with their colleagues. This tendency is particularly prevalent among single people or expatriates who go on assignment and who leave their families behind in the home country.

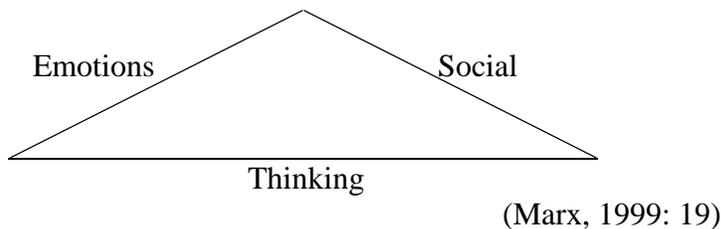
#### 5.4. Dimensions of culture shock

Expatriates have to cope with three dimensions of culture shock (Marx, 1999):

- Thinking - person has to change his perspective and interpretation of events and behaviour in order to understand and adjust to the local culture in the foreign country;
- Social identity - person needs effective social or interactive skills to develop a social and professional network and establish new business relationships;
- Emotions - person has to cope with the stress and emotional turmoil associated with the transition in order to be successful in his management of the foreign operations.

Shin et al (2003) also refer to the above mentioned dimensions as the perceptual dimension, the relationship dimension, and the self-dimension. These three levels of culture shock can be incorporated into a triangular culture shock model (Marx, 1999).

**Figure 5.3.: Expatriate adjustment triangle**



Although the three components incorporated into the triangular culture shock model are dealt with as separate elements, they are interconnected and influence each other. According to Marx (1999), the only managers who can be called truly international are those who sufficiently understand themselves, and who develop as thinking, emotional, and social beings. Marx asserts that expatriates need to have a significant amount of self-understanding in these areas before they can have a clear understanding of their foreign counterparts. Taking into account the importance of thinking skills, emotions, and social skills on the expatriate's adjustment, it would therefore be appropriate to conduct a more detailed discussion on these areas.



### 5.4.1. Thinking

Marx (1999) states that for a person living in a well-known, organised, and predictable environment to understand life and developments in his life is relatively uncomplicated. The person has grown up understanding and having exposure to the meaning of words, non-verbal behaviours, and cultural norms commonly used in his living and work environment.

When the person moves to a foreign country, he is required to make a drastic paradigm change (Trompenaars & Hampton-Turner, 2004; Nelson-Jones, 2002; Marx, 1999). The person needs to learn new things and expand his thinking. The “normal way of doing things” does not exist anymore. The person is suddenly required to make a concerted effort to understand what is going on in the new environment.

According to Marx (1999: 14), newly arrived expatriates can deal with foreign and unfamiliar situations in one of four ways:

- Consciously disregard the unfamiliar situations;
- Choose to deal with them as familiar situations, as if they are still in the home country;
- Attempt to abandon their own culture and identify themselves with the new ways of thinking;
- Admit that they cannot make sense of the unfamiliar situations, make the appropriate adjustments, and then modify their perceptions and stereotypes.

In line with the above mentioned approaches in dealing with the unknown environment in the foreign country, expatriates need to make a decision on how to deal with the unknown culture. They can assume one of the following roles in their reaction to the local culture (Trompenaars & Hampton-Turner, 2004: 328; Marx 1999: 15):



- A native - overreacting and fully integrating into the culture in the foreign country;
- A colonialist - not even reacting to the foreign country;
- An imperialist – rigidly imposing their own value system and cultural paradigms on the local culture, without identifying the importance of adjusting their perceptions and attitude;
- An internationalist (also referred to as an interculturalist) - a person who is sensitive towards the complexity and ambiguity of social interactions in foreign cultures, and who makes an effort to adjust by modifying their own cultural paradigms and by trying to obtain a compromise between cultures.

Similarly, Morley et al (1997: 56) refer to the approach taken by the newly arrived expatriate in relating to the host culture as the person's "acculturation strategy". They identify four basic acculturation strategies that expatriates can use, dependent on their perspective towards two issues, namely the extent to which they prefer to preserve their own cultural identity, and the degree to which they seek day-to-day interaction with host country nationals:

- Assimilation takes place when expatriates make the decision not to maintain their own culture, and attempts to integrate themselves into the dominant society in the host country;
- Integration takes place when expatriates show an interest to adjust by maintaining a balance between their own cultural identity, and interacting with host country nationals on a day-to-day basis;
- Separation is referred to when expatriate places a high value on maintaining their own culture, and does not make any effort to interact with host country nationals;
- Marginalisation occurs when expatriates withdraw themselves and show little interest in developing relationships with either other members of their own culture, or with host country nationals (Morley et al, 1997: 56).



Morley et al (1997: 56) also add that it is possible for an expatriate's acculturating strategy to change over time. They note that the individual may adopt a number of acculturation strategies his adjustment to the foreign culture. A typical sequence of approaches utilised by the newly arrived expatriate is to initially make use of a separation strategy, to find it ineffective, and then to focus his efforts towards a more integrated approach.

#### **5.4.2. Social identity**

When the person is required to work and live in an unfamiliar environment in the foreign country, his secure sense of self is disturbed (Eckert, 2006; Punnett, 2002; Marx 1999). The familiar context within which the person's behaviour makes sense is absent. Behaviour that is acceptable and encouraged in the home country may also be frowned upon in the foreign culture.

The unfamiliar influences in the foreign country can pose a risk to the person's self-identity: the person is not as sure of his own identity as before, and experiences feelings of insecurity as a result. The person learns that there is more than one way of living, working and building relations with others. These factors threaten the previously well-formed thinking processes on how to act. He does not even always understand his own behaviour or the emotional ups and downs associated with the adjustment process. The self-identity is disturbed and the person may be required to redefine a 'new self' by incorporating newly acquired learning experiences into the 'old self' (Eckert, 2006; Punnett, 2002; Marx 1999).

As soon as the person interacts more closely with a foreign culture, he experiences friction between his own values and those of the new culture. As the person becomes more involved, he normally develops alternative behavioural patterns. These new patterns also influence his view of himself. The adjustment processes all form part of the personal development experienced by most expatriates while on international assignment (Eckert, 2006; Trompenaars & Hampton-Turner, 2004).



### 5.4.3. Emotions

Being expatriated to a foreign country has a direct impact on the levels of stress experienced by the individual (Trompenaars & Hampton-Turner, 2004; Nelson-Jones, 2002; Marx 1999). The expatriate is exposed to high levels of psychosocial stress during his relocation into the foreign country, which could potentially lead to him experiencing symptoms of emotional fatigue. According to Kaplan and Sadock (1991), international assignments fall into the category of “severely stressful life events”. The impact of expatriation on the individual’s emotional wellbeing is rated similar to the stress caused by divorce, poverty, and chronic life threatening illness in parents. These are major life changing events that increase the possibility of the expatriate experiencing significant psychological difficulties, for example alcohol and drug abuse, anxiety, depression. In extreme cases the individual may even show symptoms of a condition commonly referred to as ‘nervous breakdown’.

Research conducted by Dowrenwend and Dowrenwend (as cited in Marx, 1999) indicates that a direct correlation exists between the number of life changing events experienced (for example being retrenched, death of a close family member, moving to a new home) and psychological disorders. International managers moving abroad experience several of these stressful life changing events simultaneously: adjusting to new country, a new job, a new home, a new school, etcetera. Consequently, their psychological well-being is placed at risk, which could have a directly detrimental impact on their work performance - and ultimately, the performance of the company. Typical emotions experienced by the expatriate in his adjustment to the new culture in the foreign environment would be mixed feelings, stress, obsession, and depression.



## 5.5. Factors influencing cross-cultural adjustment

Hodgetts and Luthans (2003) identify four major categories of variables that impact on the adjustment process after the expatriate's arrival in the foreign country:

- Individual factors;
- Job-specific aspects;
- Organisational dynamics and support, and
- Non-work issues.

Black et al (1999) also refer to the above mentioned factors as post-arrival or in-country factors. In this section a discussion will be conducted on each of these categories.

### 5.5.1. Individual factors

Individual factors are identified as the first important variable that directly influences the expatriate's adjustment after his arrival in the host-country (Hodgetts & Luthans, 2003; Black et al, 1999: 117; Morley et al, 1997: 56). Individual factors that influence cross-cultural adjustment can be summarised in terms of three broad categories:

- **Self-oriented factors:** Self-oriented characteristics refer to the expatriates' levels of self-confidence and their belief in their own ability to interact effectively with the local nationals and the new surroundings in the foreign country (Cascio & Aguinis, 2005; Guthrie & Ash, 2003). Mendenhall and Oddou (as cited in Chan, 1999) also refer to these factors as the "self-dimension", which includes the expatriate's ability to maintain high levels of emotional health and psychological well-being.



Black et al (1999: 117) assert that people who believe in themselves tend to persevere even in the face of mistakes. When they do make mistakes, the person is then able to ask questions about the mistakes they make, they learn from their mistakes, and do not make the same mistakes repeatedly. Therefore, individuals with a strong and healthy self-image tend to persist in adjusting their behaviours, even when these circumstances are less than perfect and may produce negative consequences. The more they try to master new behaviour, the more they have the opportunity to receive both positive and negative feedback about how they are doing and to refine their behaviour until it is effective. The above mentioned assertions are in line with Postulate 2 set in this study, which specifies that a direct correlation exists between the individual's personality traits and the individual's emotional adjustment during the assignment.

- **Relational factors:** According to Hodgetts and Luthans (2003), the second category of individual factors is referred to as relational or other-orientated factors. These characteristics are associated with the individual's ability to meet, interact, and empathise with foreign people. Mendenhall and Oddou (Chan, 1999) define the relationship dimensions as those skills utilised for developing meaningful relationships with host country nationals. They assert that this orientation towards developing relationships with others is very powerful, because host-country nationals are the best source for teaching foreigners how to successfully find their way in their country.
- **Perceptual-orientated factors:** Perceptual-oriented factors refer to the expatriate's ability to observe and appreciate a foreign culture's underlying maps and invisible rules (Black et al, 1999). Mendenhall and Oddou (as cited in Chan, 1999) elaborate on this definition, indicating that perceptual-oriented factors involve the intellectual properties that enable the expatriate to observe and evaluate the host environment and the people living in the country, and to make the appropriate adjustments in order to integrate into the culture in the host-country.



### 5.5.2. Job-specific factors

Hodgetts and Luthans (2003) identify job factors as the second important post-arrival variable that influences the expatriate's adjustment after arrival in the host-country.

From a domestic work perspective, Brett (as cited in Morley et al, 1997: 55) argues that a person's identity and sense of self are functions of the roles he plays in the work situation and in general society. These roles consist of a series of learned behaviours or routines. The moment the expatriate arrives on an international assignment in a foreign country, his routines and behaviours are directly disrupted and can potentially lead to the individual experiencing emotions confusion, lack of control, and loss of valued outcomes. Brett categorises international assignments as a major life changing event that can potentially have a detrimental impact on the person's emotional well-being.

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2004: 327) state that this adjustment to the new work environment in the host country is a normal and healthy process that needs to be experienced by the individual in order to successfully integrate into the foreign environment. According to Morley et al (1997: 55), the expatriate is successfully adjusted to the foreign work environment when he has established the appropriate behaviours to replace those lost during the expatriation process. These newly acquired behaviours need to produce similar outcomes to those behaviours the expatriate made use of prior to his departure on assignment.

Five job variables can be identified that have an effect on the amount of certainty experienced by the expatriate towards the job, as well as his adjustment to the foreign environment (Black et al, 1999; Morley et al, 1997; Suutari & Brewster, 1997):

- Role clarity
- Role discretion
- Role novelty
- Role conflict
- Role overload



Herewith, a discussion on each of the variables:

#### **5.5.2.1. Role clarity**

Role clarity was found the job factor that has the strongest impact on the work adjustment of the expatriate (Harvey & Novicevic, 2001; Black et al, 1999; Grobler & Hiemstra, 1998; Morley et al, 1997; Suutari & Brewster, 1997). Kossuth (1998) defines Role clarity as “*the extent to which what is expected of the individual is clear and unambiguous*”. The opposite of role clarity is referred to as role ambiguity. The degree to which the role expectations are clearly defined has a direct impact on the expatriate’s ability to predict how to behave, which in turn reduces the uncertainty associated with the work situation.

Harvey and Novicevic (2001) suggest that expatriates are confronted with various distinct challenges relating to the clarity of their work roles while on an international assignment. They are of the opinion that expatriates may find it difficult to gain entrance to the ‘inclusionary boundary’ - the informal influence and communication channels in place in the organisation. According to them, all foreign cultures apply different rules towards the extent to which they would trust and show a willingness to trust outsiders from other countries. Consequently, the information required by the newly arrived expatriate on the specific role expectations may be the information which is least likely to be shared by host country nationals with foreigners.

An additional task attribute highlighted by Harvey and Novicevic (2001) that has an impact on role clarity is the complexity of the task that needs to be resolved by the expatriate manager. Three dimensions of the task need to be considered in determining the complexity of the expatriate’s assignment:



- The complexity of the task composition – the range of solutions available, the availability of information sources in relation to the task, the extent of interaction between these sources and the measurements in place to determine successful task completion, and the number of steps or phases required to complete the task;
- Ambiguity of the task content – the availability of the organising principles associated with the task, the expatriate's previous experience in dealing with the particular task, the likelihood that the task will fail, and the clarity of the cues available in order to organise the information required to solve the task;
- Forms of task presentation – the levels of complexity of the task and amount of time available for the manager to evaluate the available sources of information in making decisions. The higher the overall difficulty of the task, the higher the levels of competence and experience required by the expatriate manager in order to address the cognitive demands associated with the task.

Expatriates appointed in managerial positions also indicated a stronger likelihood to experience higher levels of ambiguity compared to other positions (Harvey & Novicevic, 2001). Due to a lack of sufficient information regarding the sometimes conflicting expectations of the various stakeholders in the organisation, expatriates in more senior positions may be more exposed to role ambiguity. Employees in technical or engineering positions may not experience the same amount of role ambiguity, as their work is not dependent on the context within which it is completed. They also may not need to be in regular contact with host country nationals or other stakeholders in the organisation.

In order to minimise the effect of role ambiguity on the expatriate's adjustment to the work environment, Frandberg and Kjellman (2005) recommend the use of a more formal job description as an approach in ensuring clearer role clarity during international assignments, and to assist in reducing the levels of ambiguity and confusion related to the relocation process. Frandberg and Kjellman (2005) also suggest that companies should make use of a handover period, where an overlap is established between the contracts of the leaving expatriate and the incoming expatriate in order to ensure a transfer of knowledge and skills.



### **5.5.2.2. Role or job discretion**

A further aspect of the job that assists in improving the expatriate's work adjustment is role or job discretion. Role or job discretion refers to the degree of freedom the expatriates are allowed to have in their positions (Harvey & Novicevic, 2001; Black et al, 1999; Morley et al, 1997; Suutari & Brewster, 1997). Morley et al (1997: 57) indicate that the more the role discretion experienced by the expatriates, the more they will be able to organise their work so they can use past successful behaviours and approaches more easily, which in turn facilitates job adjustment and performance.

Suutari (2003) highlights the prospect of having extended work opportunities and greater job discretion as one of the underlying motives for employees to consider going on international assignments. Black et al (1999) concur with Suutari in this regard, indicating that the majority of expatriates on international assignments do actually experience considerably more discretion in their international assignments compared to the job discretion they occupied in their previous domestic position. They also found that the more senior the expatriate position, the more likely the person is to have discretion in his job.

### **5.5.2.3. Role novelty**

Morley et al (1997: 57) identify role novelty as a significant factor having an impact on the expatriates' work adjustment. Role novelty refers to the differences that exist between the expatriate's previous role in the parent company, and the new role he is required to fulfil on arrival at the foreign operation (Black et al, 1999; Morley et al, 1997; Suutari & Brewster, 1997). Morley et al also indicate that most expatriates experience a considerable amount of role novelty on their arrival at the subsidiaries in the foreign country.



According to Harvey and Novicevic (2001), the cultural context has a direct influence on the way a job is performed. They argue that the entire work environment is impacted by the larger cultural context. The economic and legal institutions of the host country within which the expatriate is required to function are a product of the country's cultural values. The larger the cultural novelty between the home- and host-countries, the more the likelihood for expatriates appointed in approximately similar positions in those countries to experience role novelty.

#### **5.5.2.4. Role conflict**

A further aspect identified by Black et al (1999) that could have an impact on work adjustment is the extent to which contradictory expectations or demands are placed on the expatriate. They caution that role conflict should not be confused with role ambiguity. In the case of role ambiguity, what is expected of the expatriate is unclear. In the case of role conflict, what is expected of the expatriate is clear, but different people and interest groups have conflicting expectations of the individual.

In a study conducted by Suutari (2003) among expatriates on assignment, the respondents believed that there were significant levels of role conflict in their work environment. A commonly raised concern was that local superiors and colleagues were insufficiently informed on the role of the expatriate. Local colleagues were also perceived as being suspicious towards the role of the expatriate in the organisation, and were “reporting on them” to head office. In the case of expatriates in managerial positions, the organisational structure in place was often the underlying cause of role conflict, rather than any specific aspects of their job. The reason identified for this tendency was that expatriate managers felt a stronger need to maintain a balance between the needs of the parent company and the foreign operations in their capacity as an intermediary between the two organisations. Expatriates in technical positions showed a stronger tendency to experience role conflict as a result of having to report to more than one superior providing them with contradictory instructions (Suutari, 2003).



#### 5.5.2.5. Role overload

Role overload occurs when too many demands are placed on the expatriate (Morley et al, 1997: 57). In the case where role overload develops, the expatriate will be less able to effectively manage the demands placed on him or her, which in turn could have a detrimental effect on successful role transition. Two typical symptoms associated with role overload is the expatriate experiencing an overload of contradictory demands from colleagues and supervisors, and experiencing difficulty in maintaining a balance in the relationship between the subsidiary and the head office. In turn, these factors could potentially lead to a significant increase in the levels of role conflict and overload experienced by the expatriate. In the study conducted by Morley et al (1997: 61), the majority of expatriates were of the opinion that they did not have enough time to complete the tasks delegated to them, and that they were placed under extreme pressure during the conduct of their work.

#### 5.5.3. Organisational factors

Kubes and Loh (2006) identify organisational climate as a very important variable that influences the expatriate's adjustment after arrival in the host-country. This confirms Postulate 3 made in this study that the organisational climate during the international assignment has a significant influence on the levels of emotional health of the expatriate. Kubes and Loh (2006) identify five organisational factors having an impact on the expatriate's adjustment to an international assignment:

- **Post-arrival cross-cultural training:** The first factor identified by Kubes and Loh (2006) impacting on expatriate adjustment is post-arrival cross-cultural training. Training can help individuals gain the necessary mental maps and understand the rules of a culture; it can also help them practise and develop the behaviours and skills necessary to operate effectively in a foreign culture.



According to Kubes and Loh (2006), training is one of the most important organisational factors that can assist prospective expatriates form realistic expectations before going on international assignment. However, they also note that basic logistical issues occupy the minds of most managers before their international departure. In addition, most of them will not have had recent previous experience in the countries to which they will be sent. As a result, their level of motivation and general capacity to relate to deep cultural information are often not ideal just before transfer.

Therefore, although research indicates that pre-departure cross-cultural training can make a positive contribution to the expatriates' cross-cultural competence, adjustment, and work performance, specific cross-cultural training tends to be more effective when provided in the host country after the expatriate has been in the country for approximately one month.

- **Difference between parent-company and foreign operational culture:** The second organisational factor identified by Kubes and Loh (2006) that affects work adjustment is the extent to which there are differences in the organisational cultures of the foreign subsidiary versus the parent company. The greater the difference between the two organisational cultures, the more difficult the adjustment, and the longer it takes to adjust to the new work environment (Kubes & Loh, 2006; Harvey & Novicevic, 2001).

The external environment at the foreign subsidiary is usually more dynamic compared to the environment at the parent-company in the home country, which makes a flexible, autonomous and decentralised organisational culture more appropriate. However, the company also needs to maintain a balance - between the head office and the foreign operation, as well as between the foreign subsidiary and its external environment.



Where the market in the foreign country changes, the expatriates need to be flexible in their ability to adjust to the changing external environment in order to be successful. A decentralised organisational structure that allows for flexibility would facilitate this. Where the foreign operation is too dependent on the parent company, the effectiveness and flexibility of the expatriates may be negatively affected (Kubes & Loh, 2006; Harvey & Novicevic, 2001).

- **Logistical support provided by organisation:** A further organisational factor that affects the expatriate's adjustment is the extent to which the organisation provides logistical support to the expatriate and the family during their typically frustrating and logistically challenging move from one country to another (Kubes & Loh, 2006). Black et al (1999) agree with Kubes and Loh, indicating that the level of support provided by the company during the expatriation period has a considerable influence on the satisfaction and adjustment of the expatriate. According to Black et al, companies need to give specific attention to the logistical support provided in the areas of accommodation, education and travel, as these issues play a significant role in the extent to which the expatriate adjusts to the foreign environment.

On the other hand, failure by the company to provide such support can lead to the expatriate experiencing unnecessary anxiety, as the person is then required to deal with these issues him or herself. In turn, these stresses relating to issues outside the expatriate's work environment have been shown to have a spill-over effect on the person's work life and performance (Kubes & Loh, 2006). Morley et al (1997: 63) found a strong correlation between the expatriate's satisfaction with the perceived support provided by the company, and his satisfaction with the overseas assignment.



- **Support provided to newly arrived expatriate by foreign operation:** The fourth organisational factor identified by Kubes and Loh (2006) influencing expatriate adjustment relates to the extent to which members of the foreign operation provide social support to the newly arrived expatriate and family. Supportive co-workers can provide information about how to get along in the organisation, as well as provide emotional support while the newcomer gets to know the new environment. Expatriates who receive higher levels of social support from their co-workers, experience lower levels of role ambiguity and role conflict, and higher levels of work adjustment compared to those expatriates who do not have such support available.
- **Communication:** Communication is highlighted by Kubes and Loh (2006) as a fifth organisational factor that influences the adjustment of the expatriate in the foreign environment. They refer to the term “information gap” originally identified by Chorafas in 1967, which refers to the extent to which expatriates are likely to feel “professionally unproductive and personally dissatisfied” due to the distance and the lack of meaningful interaction between the foreign operation and the parent company.

However, Suutari and Brewster (1997) also emphasise the fact that the problems experienced by expatriates in the area of communication are not only related to the “information gap” that may exist between the parent company and the foreign subsidiary. They also identify the expatriate’s ability and willingness to communicate in the local language as a major factor having an influence on communication in general as a factor influencing the adjustment of the expatriate in the foreign environment.



Cascio and Aguinis (2005) suggest that, although the ability to speak the local language in the host country does not automatically lead to successful interaction and communication with local nationals, it does have a positive impact on the expatriate's ability to identify and understand the subtle undertones of the host country culture and norms. Marx (1999) adds to this argument, indicating that the more exposure the expatriate has to host nationals the easier it will be for him to learn the behaviours required to function effectively in the host society. Marx found that expatriates who were willing to learn the local host country language were able to develop a 'conversational currency', a basic literacy in the local language that allowed them to relate more easily to host-country nationals. These expatriates were perceived less as foreigners by the host-country nationals, and were more readily involved into the local business environment.

#### **5.5.4. Non-work variables**

Three factors are identifiable that have a direct influence on the expatriate's adjustment to the non-work environment (Punnett, 2002; Black et al, 1999, Chan, 1999; Suutari & Brewster, 1997):

- Spouse and family adjustment;
- Culture novelty;
- The social support from other expatriates and host-country nationals.

##### **5.5.4.1. Spouse and family adjustment**

Various studies indicate that the spouse and family's ability to adjust to the foreign environment impacts substantially on the expatriate's adjustment in the new work and social environment (Brotchi & Engvig, 2006; Punnett, 2002; Webb, 1996). One of the earliest studies conducted by Tung (1987) found that family-related issues are the most commonly mentioned causes for expatriate failure, with specific reference to the spouse's or family's inability or unwillingness to adapt to the foreign physical and social environment.



Brotchi and Engvig (2006) confirm this finding, indicating that poor spouse adjustment is still found to be the single biggest cause for expatriates terminating their foreign assignments early. Brotchi and Engvig (2006) found that nearly half of 300 companies included in their survey have had to repatriate expatriate families before completion of their contracts as a result of the spouses' inability or unwillingness to adjust to the foreign environment.

Quite dramatic statistics relating to the influence of the spouse on expatriate failure were found in a study conducted by General Motors Acceptance Corporation Global Relocation Services (as cited in Cheng, 2002), which indicated that 92 percent of expatriates cited spousal dissatisfaction as a key reason for assignment failures, and 90 percent referred to family concerns as the underlying factor.

Studies indicate a consistent relationship between the adjustment of the expatriate and his spouse (Brotchi & Engvig, 2006; Cheng, 2002, Punnett, 2002; Beaverstock, 2000). However, Brotchi and Engvig (2006) emphasise that it is impossible to ascertain the exact cause-and effect interaction between the adjustment of the expatriate and that of the spouse. They view the relationship as being reciprocal - the adjustment of the employee and the spouse mutually influence each other.

Punnett (2002) argues that the spouse has the most difficult role of any family member during an international move. Prospective expatriates are often excited about the career development potential of an international assignment. Their spouses may not be as enthusiastic about the prospects of being sent to a foreign country. For the expatriate, the organisation and role structure extends from the parent company to the foreign operation, and school provides the children with continuity and routine. On the other hand, the spouses are often required to give up some of the closest and most important parts of their lives, including their careers, their friends and social support networks – with specific reference to family and relatives.



Unlike the support provided to the expatriate from a job and organisational point of view, the spouse is generally provided very limited support in determining how to survive and succeed in the new environment and culture (Suutari, 2003). The spouse is also required to face the issues of establishing a home environment and creating an infrastructure for the family in the new country. Beaverstock (2000) indicates that addressing challenges such as buying groceries, organising transport, making new friends, and managing the children's education causes a significant amount of stress among expatriate spouses.

Another concern of the expatriate spouse would be the children's well-being and schooling (Punnett, 2002). The children are influenced as much by the turmoil associated with culture shock by moving away from home as their parents. They have concerns over their integration into the new school environment, their own identity in a new social environment, and their need to make new friends. A point mentioned by Suutari (2003) that needs to be taken into account when considering family issues would be the age of the children. Suutari quotes one of the expatriates included in his study who indicated: *"From my experience I would not recommend taking teenagers abroad. It is very tough to get torn away from your friends at that age. We wanted to broaden our child's mind but negative school experiences led to a very negative attitude to international issues"*.

The impression may be created from the above mentioned discussions that only difficulties and negative consequences can be associated with the expatriation of the expatriate spouse and her family on assignment to a foreign country. In this regard, Suutari (2003) cautions that any discussion on the difficulties related to expatriate family adjustment needs to be balanced by an analysis of the benefits and personal growth opportunities involved with exposing expatriates and their families to such international experiences. Suutari highlights a number of positive family implications: *"Multiculturalism is richness. There, the children learn languages and become familiar with different cultures. Through minor difficulties one gets enormous opportunities. There are many more positive effects than negative ones. Although the international environment is seen to differ from the home country settings, the difference may also be an enrichment in one's life"*.



Other areas identified by Suutari (2003) where personal development typically takes place among expatriate spouses and families would be emotional resilience, ability to cope with ambiguity and confusion, open-mindedness, self-confidence, and patience.

As can be seen from the above mentioned observations, the extent to which the expatriate spouse and family are able to successfully adjust to the living conditions in the foreign country will have a direct impact on the expatriate's own ability and willingness to remain focused and committed to the completion of the international assignment.

#### **5.5.4.2. Culture novelty**

According to Trompenaars and Hampton-Turner (2004), general differences between the cultures in the host country and the expatriate's home country increase the expatriates' uncertainty about how to behave appropriately, leading to adjustment difficulties. These differences hinder interaction and non-work adjustment more than they hinder job adjustment. Van Weerdenburg (2006) also refers to these differences as culture toughness, or culture distance.

Culture novelty has a negative impact on interaction and general non-work adjustment for two reasons (Trompenaars & Hampton-Turner, 2004). The first reason is that the greater the number and degree of differences between two cultures, the more mistakes people make as they try to live and work in the new culture. The more depressed people become about making these mistakes, the more defensive and angry they turn out to be towards host-country nationals, who are often seen as the cause of their troubles.

The second reason why culture novelty has a negative impact on adjustment is that the ways in which differences are discovered or learned, the way mistakes are recognised, or how apologies for mistakes are made, may also be different.



According to Trompenaars and Hampton-Turner (2004), substantial differences exist in the cultures of different countries. The bigger the difference between the host culture and the individual's own culture, the more the expatriate may experience confusion as to what behaviours are appropriate in the host culture. Eckert (2006) argues that expatriates can adapt successfully by studying the actions and behaviour displayed by host country nationals they have contact with in their work and social environment. However, in order for the expatriates to learn from these behavioural models, they need to become aware of them and view them as agreeable people whose behaviours are worthwhile duplicating. Eckert (2006) also argues that the greater the difference between the cultures, the smaller the probability that the acculturating expatriate will consider host country nationals as appropriate behavioural role models. Consequently, the expatriates would show a decreased willingness to learn from these individuals. In the process, their adjustment to the local culture is also inhibited.

An effective way for companies to assist their international assignees in overcoming the obstacles of adjusting to the cultures of the particular host countries is to make use of cross-cultural training (Cascio & Aguinis, 2005). Cross-cultural training has already been discussed on a number of occasions in this research document. Paragraph 4.3.2.2 in Chapter 4 provides a more detailed discussion on cross-cultural training.

#### **5.5.4.3. Social support from expatriates and host-country nationals**

A third non-work factor having an important relationship to cross-cultural adjustment is the social support received from other expatriates and host-country nationals outside the work place (Punnett, 2002; Suutari & Brewster, 1997). Such support can provide newly arrived expatriates with information about how to get along in the culture, as well as emotional support while they find their feet. In this regard, a study conducted by Black et al (1999) found that expatriates who had received higher levels of support had significantly higher levels of interaction and general non-work adjustment.



## 5.6. Summary

As was mentioned during the introduction to this chapter, Adler (1999) highlights the expatriate's integration into the foreign environment as the most important phase in the international career cycle. In Chapter 5 an attempt was made to highlight the various phases and challenges the expatriate and his family are required to adjust to during their integration into the foreign environment. Attention was also given to the influence of culture shock on the individual and the impact it has on the person's adjustment from a personal, work, and social or cultural perspective. Lastly, a discussion was also conducted on the various factors, both from a work and a non-work perspective that impact on the expatriate's successful integration and achievement of his international assignment objectives.

It becomes evident from the discussions in this chapter that the integration process of the expatriate and his family into the local work and living environment in the foreign country is a complex one that needs to be managed very carefully - particularly taking into account the high failure rates among employees being sent on international assignments, as was discussed in Chapter 3. The discussions form the basis for Postulate 3 set in this study, which specifies that the work and social climate during the international assignment has a significant influence on the levels of emotional health of the expatriate.

In Chapter 6, the final phase in the expatriate's international career cycle is discussed namely the repatriation of the expatriation back into the home country on completion of his international assignment.



## Chapter 6

### Repatriation

#### 6.1. Introduction

Expatriates typically undergo a sequence of predictable stages in relocating from a domestic position in their home country, to an international assignment at a foreign subsidiary and back home again. This process is also referred to as the expatriate international career cycle. The first two phases in this career cycle are the pre-assignment selection and preparation phase, and the actual period on the international assignment in the foreign country. These two phases were investigated in Chapters 4 and 5. The third and final phase in the expatriate international career cycle is the repatriation of the expatriate back to the host-country and company headquarters on completion of his international assignment (Frandsberg & Kjellman, 2005). This final phase will be discussed in Chapter 6.

An important observation made by Black et al (1999) is that not all international assignments end with the expatriate being repatriated back to the home country. The person may also be transferred to another overseas position on completion of his international assignment, especially if the company makes use of international assignments to build an international team of managers for a geocentric staffing policy (the staffing approach where the best people are utilised for the key positions throughout the organisation, regardless of their nationality).

It is often believed that returning to the home country after completing an international assignment in a foreign country should be an “easy and straightforward process”. However, ‘coming home’ is unfortunately not that simple for many returning expatriates (Cascio & Aguinis, 2005). Adler (1997) agrees with Cascio and Aguinis in this regard, quoting a study conducted by the Business International Corporation, which states:



*“Repatriating executives from global assignments is a top management challenge that goes far beyond the superficial problems and costs of physical relocation. The assumption is that since these individuals are returning home they should have no trouble adapting. However, experience has shown that repatriation is anything but simple”.*

A joint survey conducted by the National Foreign Trade Council and Windham International in the United States involving 264 companies employing a total of 75 000 expatriates worldwide indicated the following repatriation figures (Stanoch, 2006):

- 40 percent of repatriates leave the company within two years after their return;
- 68 percent of companies do not provide employment security on assignment completion;
- 75 percent of returning expatriates indicated being appointed into lower level positions than they had while on foreign assignment;
- 40 percent of the repatriates expressed dissatisfaction with the extent to which companies effectively utilised the valuable experience and skills they had gained while on assignment after their return to the home country.

A study conducted by Suutari (2003) on expatriates in European multi-national companies concurs with the above mentioned findings, indicating that the majority of expatriates in the survey were willing to consider leaving the employment of their company for another position in another company after returning from international assignment, and that a significant majority of them have seriously contemplated such change after their repatriation.

Cascio and Aguinis (2005) even go so far as to state that as high as 50 percent of returning expatriates leave their employers within two years after their return. These statistics are confirmed by Stahl et al (2002), who found that some European and U.S. companies have lost between 40 percent and 55 percent of their repatriates within three years after repatriation through voluntary turnover.



These observations support a statement made by the Wall Street Journal (Adler, 1997) after completing a survey on thirty-four global companies, "*Bosses might quickly become sensitive if they added up the cost to the company of unhappy returning employees.*"

Taking into account the statistics on the number of returning expatriates leaving the employment of their companies after returning to the home country, it would be wise for multi-national organisations to obtain a well-founded understanding of the difficulties experienced by the expatriate and his family on their return to the home country from an international assignment. In Chapter 6 an investigation will be conducted on the repatriation process expatriates typically go through during their reintegration back into the home country on completion of their international assignments. This will be done with specific reference to Hypotheses 1b and 1d established in this study, which stipulate that the expatriate's levels of emotional health (sense of meaning and hardiness) decreases from six months into the assignment to after completion of assignment.

## 6.2. The repatriation process

The process of repatriation can be divided into four interrelated phases, namely preparation, physical relocation, transition, and readjustment (Frandsberg & Kjellman, 2005; Dowling et al, 1999).

- **Preparation** entails planning ahead for the future and conducting investigations to obtain relevant information on the new position in the parent company. The company may consider providing the expatriate with a checklist of aspects that need to be taken into account before being repatriated back to the home country. This can be done as part of a more comprehensive preparation process for the expatriate and their families prior to their repatriation to the home country.



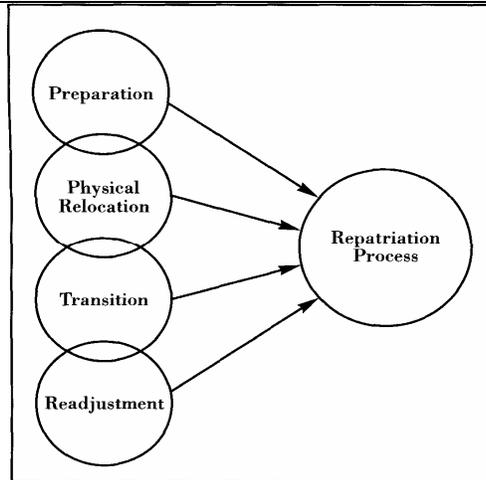
- **Physical relocation** refers to removing personal belongings, saying goodbye to colleagues and friends in the host country, and travelling to the next position (which is usually at the headquarters in the parent country). During this stage, the company can offer comprehensive and personalised relocation assistance in order to reduce the amount of anxiety experienced by the expatriate. Most international companies use removal firms or relocation consultants to handle the physical relocation process.
- **Transition** entails moving into provisional housing in the home country, arranging for more permanent accommodation and education, and dealing with other administrative issues.
- **Readjustment** entails facing previously familiar surroundings after living and working in a foreign country for a significant period of time. The process can be defined as the expatriate's move from the foreign country back into his home country. It involves readapting to the work and living conditions in the home country. It also involves the person's reintegration and interaction with people in the home culture (Frandsberg & Kjellman, 2005; Dowling et al, 1999).

The readjustment phase is often the most traumatic, but also the least understood and most poorly managed phase in the repatriation process. The returning expatriates do not always realise that during their expatriation, their own country has changed, their organisation has changed, their friends and family may have changed and, most importantly, they themselves have changed. In addition, companies cannot always guarantee the repatriate any job on his return (Stanoch, 2006; Frandsberg & Kjellman, 2005; Dowling et al, 1999).

The above mentioned factors could lead to the expatriate experiencing the repatriation process (both from a professional and a personal perspective) as the most challenging aspect of the entire international assignment, even more severe than their initial adjustment to the foreign country on their arrival as expatriates. This readjustment is often referred to as "reverse culture shock" (Stanoch, 2006; Beaverstock, 2000).

A graphical display of the phases can be seen in Figure 6.1.

**Figure 6.1.: The repatriation process**



(Dowling et al, 1999)

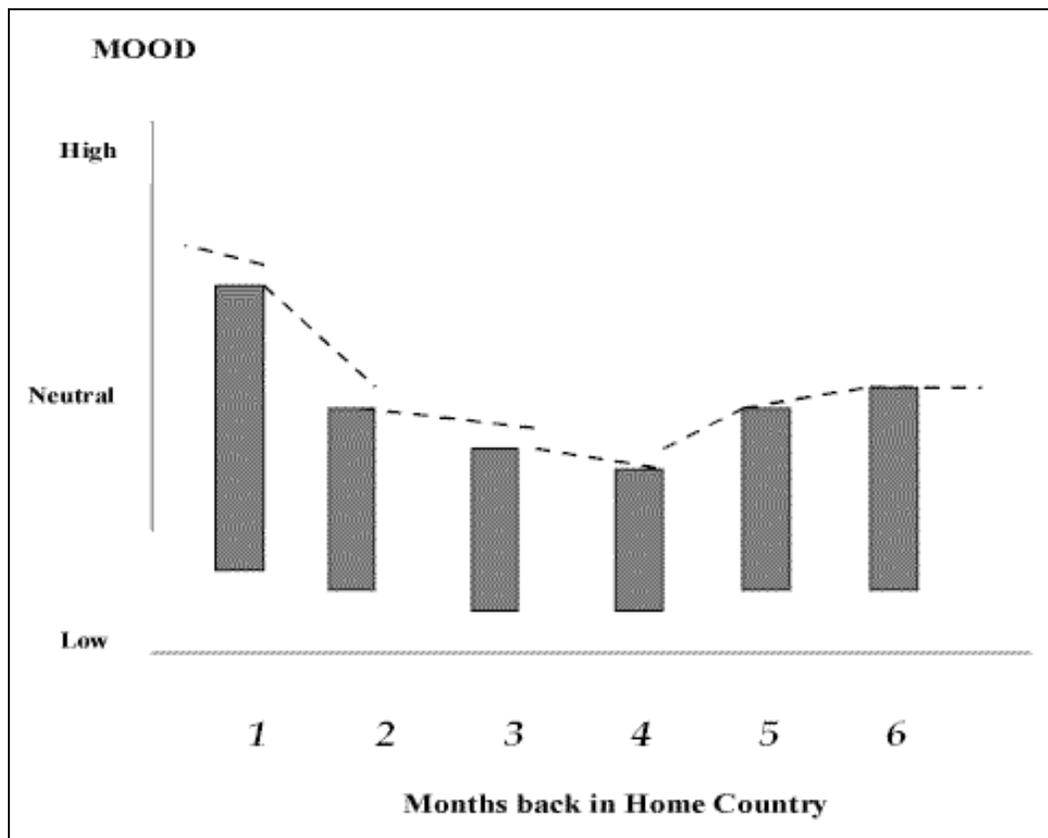
### 6.3. Reverse culture shock

During the repatriation process, returning expatriates experience adjustment phases similar to the culture shock they experienced during their initial arrival on assignment in the foreign country. This adjustment process back in the home country is referred to as reverse culture shock. Bampton (2003) defines reverse culture shock as “*the psychological process of readapting to one’s home culture on return after being away from the home country for a longer period of time*”.

In this adjustment process back in the home country, returning expatriates experience high spirits and enthusiasm on their initial arrival home. However, this positive mood disappears quickly and is replaced by a very low and depressive mood, before returning slowly to a normal level of emotional well-being. For most returnees the initial high mood lasts less than a month and many report it lasting only a few hours. The low period therefore begins earlier in re-entry than in the entry transition. Repatriates' lowest times usually occur during the second and third months after their return (Stanoch, 2006; Frandberg & Kjellman, 2005; Marx, 1999).

Chan (1999) graphically describes the re-entry adjustment curve as follows:

**Figure 6.2.: Re-entry adjustment curve**



(Chan, 1999)

During the transition from the country of assignment back into the home country, expatriates and their families face previously familiar surroundings after living abroad for a significant period. When initially leaving on the international assignment in the foreign country, expatriates generally expect new and unfamiliar situations. On their return to their home country, the expatriates do not expect anything unfamiliar (Chan, 1999).



Most returnees expect to move back easily into their previous organisation, job, and lifestyle. However, they return neither to the world they left originally, nor to the world they are expecting. While on assignment in the foreign country, the expatriate develops and changes, the organisation changes, and the country changes. In addition, during the culture shock phase of adjusting to another country, the expatriate often idealises the home country, remembering only the positive side of being home. When returning home, the person faces the real changes; the divide between the way things were and the way they are now, and the divide between their idealised memories and reality (Stanoch, 2006).

As a result of the above mentioned changes, returning expatriates often describe re-entry into the home country as an even more difficult transition than their initial entry into the new country (Frandsberg & Kjellman, 2005). A study conducted by Black et al (1999: 203) indicated that 60 percent of American, 80 percent of Japanese, and 71 percent of Finnish expatriates experienced repatriation adjustment more difficult than the original adjustment in the foreign country.

### **6.3.1. Factors influencing reverse culture shock**

Several factors contribute to the reverse culture shock experienced by the expatriate. A study conducted by Forster (as cited in Beaverstock, 2000) indicated the following factors as the principal concerns identified by expatriates returning to their home country on completion of their international assignments:

**Table 6.1.: Principle concerns of expatriates returning to their home countries**

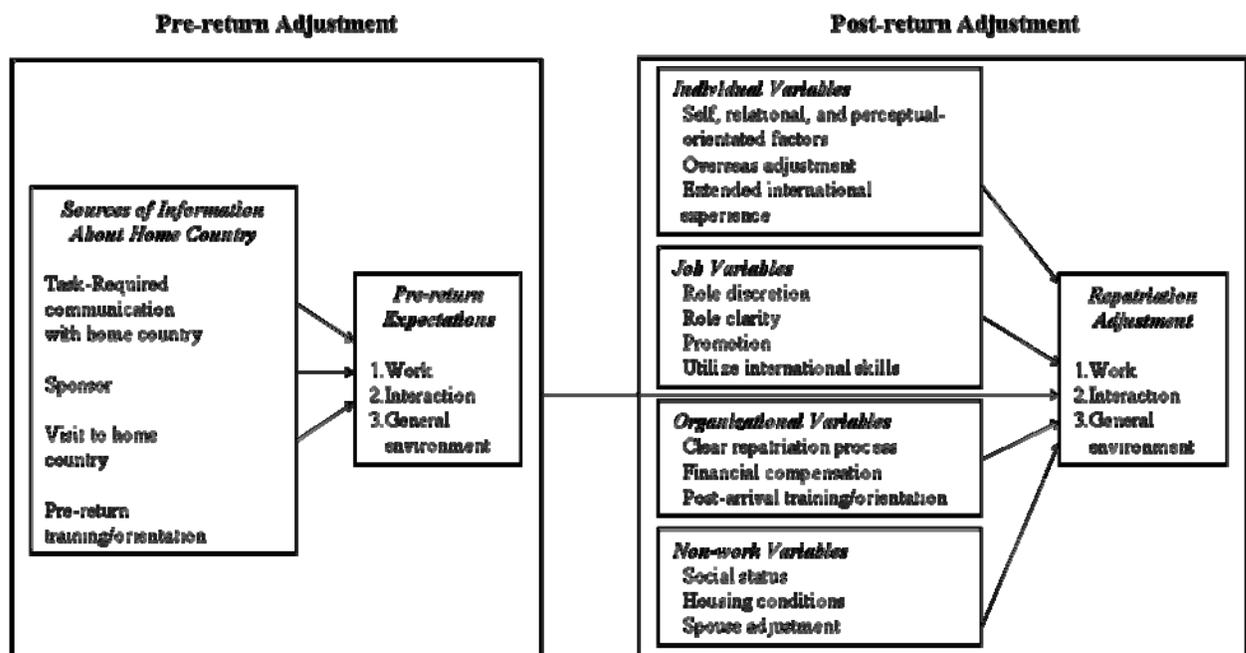
Concerns	Percentage being 'Extremely' or 'Very' concerned
1. Problems of career or employment	63%
2. Changes in standard of living	59%
3. Performance in current position	58%
4. Relationships with colleagues	55%
5. Evaluation of work by superiors	49%
6. Adapting to life back in the home country	48%
7. Support from the company after repatriation	47%
8. Disruption to home and family life	26%
9. Buying or selling houses	18%
10. Relationship with superiors	17%

(Forster as cited in Beaverstock, 2000)

Commenting on the above mentioned figures, Beaverstock (2000) indicates that approximately 60 percent of the factors mentioned by returning expatriates are job-related issues and 40 percent are other factors in the personal and social environment. These figures are in line with the findings of Frandberg and Kjellman (2005), who indicate that returning expatriates and their families are required to adjust to three basic areas when they are repatriated to the home country on completion of the international assignment. The expatriates firstly need to adjust to a new job and work environment. Secondly, the expatriates and their families need to adjust to communicating with home-country co-workers and friends. Thirdly, the expatriates and their families face the problem of readjusting to the general living environment in the home country.

The expatriate's repatriation adjustment can be divided into two distinct phases, namely anticipatory or pre-return adjustment before transferring home from an international assignment, and adjustment after the expatriate and his family have arrived back in the home country and at the parent company – also referred to as post-return adjustment (Frandsberg & Kjellman, 2005; Meier, 2005; Black et al; 1999). Black et al (1999) make use of a model to graphically illustrate the factors that affect repatriation adjustment before the expatriate returns home, and those factors that influence adjustment after arrival in the home country. The expatriate repatriation adjustment process can be seen in Figure 6.3 below:

**Figure 6.3.: Expatriate repatriation adjustment process**



(Black et al, 1999: 211)



As depicted in Figure 6.3, the factors that affect repatriation adjustment can be categorised into five groups, namely:

- Sources of information about changes in the parent company and in the home country;
- Individual factors applicable to the expatriates prior to their repatriation to the home country;
- Job variables;
- Organisational factors;
- Non-work variables that affect cross-cultural adjustment after returning home.

A discussion on each of the above mentioned factors having an influence on the returning expatriate's adjustment follows:

#### **6.3.1.1. Factors influencing pre-return repatriation adjustment**

Certain mental changes start taking place within expatriates even before they return to the home country (Frandsberg & Kjellman, 2005; Stahl et al, 2002; Black et al, 1999). The expatriates start making anticipatory changes in their mental maps of what they expect work and life will be like in their home country. These anticipatory adjustments are similar to the ones made by the expatriate prior to his initial departure on the international assignment to the foreign country.

A number of potential sources of information are available that can be utilised by the expatriates and their families in order to assist them in modifying their mental maps on the home country before they actually return (Frandsberg & Kjellman, 2005; Stanoch, 2005; Black et al, 1999). These include information exchange between the parent company and the expatriate, mentors at the parent company, regular visits by the expatriate to the home country while on international assignment, as well as pre-return training and orientation by the company.



### **6.3.1.2. Factors influencing post-return repatriation adjustment**

After expatriates return to the home country on completion of their international assignments, several factors can facilitate or inhibit their re-adjustment to the work, social, and general culture in the home country. These factors can be grouped into four categories, namely: individual, job, organisational, and non-work categories (Frandsberg and Kjellman, 2005; Black et al, 1999).

#### **i. Individual factors**

Several of the individual factors relevant to the re-adjustment of the expatriate back in the home country are similar to those applicable to the expatriate's initial cross-cultural adjustment to the foreign environment in the host-host country (Stanoch, 2006; Beaverstock, 2000; Black et al, 1999).

Ironically, Trompenaars and Hampton-Turner (2004) indicate that the more expatriates are successful in integrating themselves into the foreign country, the bigger the possibility that they may experience significant adjustment challenges during their repatriation back to the home country. Stahl et al (2002) agree with Trompenaars in this regard, indicating that expatriates and their families who have successfully completed assignments in countries very different from the home country and who have stayed overseas for extended periods tend to be more prone towards experiencing adjustment problems on their return to the home country. The more the expatriate acquires the mental maps and rules of a foreign culture, the more difficulty the person will experience in reverting back to the maps and rules relevant to the home country.



## ii. Job-related factors

A common mistake made by many expatriates is to expect a hero's welcome at the parent company after returning from a successful international assignment. Expatriates also often agree going on the international assignment with the expectation of being promoted after successfully working overseas. However, the reality of the situation is that these returning expatriates may be having unrealistic expectations of the reception they will get back in the parent company on their return (Cascio & Aguinis, 2005).

From an employment perspective, research indicates that returning managers often experience major difficulty re-integrating back into the parent company work environment. Antal (2001) asserts that the returning expatriate's professional re-entry into the work environment has often been found to be more difficult than his personal re-integration, particularly for people returning to multi-domestic companies where international experience is not viewed important in achieving success in the corporate environment.

According to Caligiuri and Lazarova (2001 as cited in Suutari, 2003), the difficulty of identifying suitable positions for returning expatriates is of key importance in their successful repatriation. They found that up to 86 percent of the repatriates' overall level of satisfaction with their repatriation could be attributed to one factor: the impact of the international assignment on their career. They also found that 78 per cent of expected repatriation problems involved job and career issues after repatriation. This situation is compounded by the fact that only 4.3 percent of North American multinational firms provide their international assignees with more than six months' notice of their return home, 30 percent of expatriates receive approximately three months' notice, and 64 percent were informed of their repatriation at short notice (up to one month) (Black et al, 1999). These statistics indicate that companies tend to spend very little time and energy in effectively planning the reintegration of the expatriate back into the parent company work environment.



The following job-related factors play a key role in the expatriate's reintegration into the parent company during repatriation (Frandsberg & Kjellman, 2005; Adler, 1997):

- **Out-of-sight, out of mind syndrome:** Jassawalla et al (2004) assert that more than fifty percent of expatriates experience the "out of sight, out of mind" syndrome on their return from their international assignments back into the parent organisation. The occurrence of the syndrome seems to increase significantly in multi-domestic companies, where more than two-thirds of the returnees complain of suffering from the "out-of-sight, out-of-mind" syndrome.
- **Poorly planned return job or limited career opportunities:** As a result of the haphazard approach utilised by companies in meaningfully incorporating the repatriate back into the parent company, the returning expatriates themselves experience difficulty integrating the skills and experience that they have gained while on international assignment into the corporate environment at the parent company (Frandsberg & Kjellman, 2005; Stoltz-Loike, 2002; Antal, 2001).
- **Promotion disappointments:** The majority of people who accept international assignments believe that the assignment will lead to increased career opportunities and growth on their return to the home country (Stahl et al, 2002). However, research indicates that no significant statistical correlation exists between expatriation and career progression (Cascio & Aguinis, 2005; Jassawalla et al, 2004). The majority of returning expatriates do not get promoted on their return from international assignments, and maintain a similar or lower level position to that which they had before leaving for their international assignments (Black et al, 1999).
- **Poor utilisation of international management skills:** International skills gained by the expatriates during their assignments are very often under-utilised on their return to the parent company (Cascio & Aguinis, 2005: 452; Jagatsingh, 2000). The returning expatriates often find that both the organisation and their colleagues may not be very interested in the skills and experience that they have gained while on assignment.



- **Reduced autonomy and role clarity:** Returning expatriates often complain of the “fish pond syndrome”, which refers to the loss of autonomy and authority that they experience on their return to a position in the parent organisation (Stanoch, 2005). As a result, returning expatriates experience significant levels of frustration, which leads to a significant number of repatriates leaving the employment of the company a few months after their return to the parent company (Antal, 2001; Jagatsingh, 2000).

### iii. Organisational factors

The returning expatriate’s transition from the organisational culture, assumptions, and behaviours in the foreign subsidiary to the cultural dynamics in the parent organisation can be difficult and stressful. According to Antal (2001), this transition causes returnees to experience organisational culture shock at the same time as they are experiencing personal and societal culture shock.

The parent company’s overall approach to the repatriation process can have a significant impact on the expatriates’ work adjustment after their return home (Antal, 2001; Black et al, 1999). However, Meier (2005) also emphasises that the home company has to deal with certain practical situations that will have an impact on its ability to effectively integrate the returning expatriates effectively into its management structures. Meier (2005) identifies five major problems that can have a direct impact on the company’s effectiveness in re-establishing the returning expatriates into meaningful positions in the parent company:

- During the expatriate’s assignment in the foreign country, the parent organisation may have gone through restructuring that lead to his position becoming redundant;
- The organisation may have been required to embark on a rationalisation or retrenchment exercise, and may be considering ways to reduce the number of more mature employees;



- The expatriate's original position or role in the parent company may have changed substantially or may have been removed altogether while he has been working abroad;
- The expatriate may not have been informed adequately on the above mentioned changes, or may not have received sufficient pre-repatriation training prior to his return to the parent company;
- The expatriate may have unrealistic expectations about his career prospects after his return to the parent company.

On a more informal level, the returning expatriate may encounter changes in the internal information channels and the way business gets done in the parent company (Beaverstock, 2000). Technological advancements in the company's systems and processes may also lead to the repatriate's technical skills and knowledge being outdated. Unless there was sufficient contact between the parent company and the expatriate during the overseas assignment, the person is typically unprepared for these changes. Coupled with the other job-related problems as discussed earlier, these changes make the repatriate's adjustment to the work environment in the parent organisation a difficult process.

Antal (2001) indicates that the factors having an impact on the repatriate's adjustment to the work environment in the parent company can broadly be placed into three categories, namely:

- **Unclear repatriation process:** The majority of returning expatriates are of the opinion that their companies communicated a very unclear picture of the repatriation process. They typically express concern regarding the information available to them on positions available in the parent company, career progression opportunities, compensation equity, taxation assistance, etcetera (Frandsberg & Kjellman, 2005; Jassawalla et al, 2004). Beaverstock (2000) asserts that the overall ambiguity and confusion of the repatriation process within companies is largely a reflection of a non-strategic approach taken towards international assignments.



- **Loss of status and money:** Expatriates receive many additional expatriate benefits such as overseas allowances, company-sponsored accommodation and transport (often more exclusive than their own houses and cars in the home country), tax benefits, etcetera (McCallum, 2004; Van Heerden & Wentzel, 2002). When these expatriates return to the parent company on completion of their international assignments, these benefits associated with expatriation fall away, and they are required to resume their lives at a level that may be considerably less comfortable than what they had grown used to while on assignment (Cascio & Aguinis, 2005; Antal, 2001; Black et al, 1999). This sudden reduction in income available to the repatriate, as well as the increased cost of living in the home country compared to when the expatriate originally went on assignment, place serious pressure on the repatriates and their families in their attempts to reintegrate back into the home country. In addition, the family is also required to build a new home with increased costs for accommodation, education, transport, accommodation, furniture etcetera.
- **Lack of repatriation training:** Black et al (1999) assert that training and orientation after an international assignment can enhance the returning expatriate's adjustment into the parent company. However, they also indicate that multi-national companies do not give systematic attention to the repatriation process. Therefore, very little training and orientation is provided to expatriates after their return home. This lack of company-provided training and orientation leads to the returning expatriates taking much longer to obtain the relevant information that will enable them to find their feet, both in the parent company, and in their interaction with home-country people in the changed living environment.

#### **iv. Non-work factors**

Three primary non-work factors influence the returning expatriates' adjustment in the home country on their repatriation (Black et al, 1999). A discussion on the above mentioned factors follows:



### **a. Social factors**

On their return to their home environment, expatriates and their families may feel alienated in their own country, especially if they have been out of contact with their family, friends, and local events. During their international assignments, the expatriates and their families may have enjoyed interaction with the social and economic elite in the host country. In addition, they may have developed a broader cultural perspective, which enables them to compare home country conditions with other living environments and ways of life (Bampton, 2003).

On their return, the expatriates lose the formal status of being foreigners. Black et al (2003) indicate that approximately 43 percent of returning expatriates and their families experience a significant drop in social status on their arrival back in the home country, while fewer than 4 percent of them experience an increase in social status relative to their status during the international assignment. These statistics indicate that repatriated expatriates and their spouses are less likely to be treated as guests of honour at social and recreational functions, with family members and friends showing little interest in their experiences while on assignment. In direct contrast to their expectations, they are much more likely to be faced with family, old friends, and colleagues who are not really interested in hearing about their expatriate experiences (Dowling et al, 1997). In the process, it often occurs that the person experiences increased levels of disappointment, loneliness and emotional isolation. In severe cases, this drop in social status and miscommunication during the repatriation process could lead to expatriates and members of their families withdrawing themselves from others in the home country on both a social and a psychological level.



Additional aspects that the returning expatriates are required to deal with are the changes that have taken place in all parts of the social environment in the home country while they were on assignment. These changes may include new political dispensations, increase in traffic, new educational systems, changes in social groups, etcetera. The changes that have taken place in the home country can sometimes be so significant that the returning expatriates may feel like they are entering a whole new and foreign environment – as if they are newly arrived expatriates again in a foreign country (Bampton, 2003).

#### **b. Accommodation issues**

Harvey (as cited in Chan, 1999) indicates that changes in the accommodation conditions experienced by the returning expatriates and their families can significantly influence their repatriation adjustment. Harvey identifies three major issues that influence the expatriates' perceptions towards accommodation on their return.

The first factor emerges in the case where the expatriate had rented out their home-country house during the international assignment. On their return, the expatriates and their families are often required to live in temporary accommodation during the first few weeks to repair the damage caused to their house by the people who rented the property from them. The financial implications involved with renovating their properties on their return can also be significant, and relatively few companies are willing to compensate repatriates for these expenses and losses.

Secondly, repatriates often sell their homes before leaving on the longer term international assignments. On their return, company policies and the challenges of living in hotels or with relatives often drive them to find suitable accommodation as soon as possible after repatriation. In the process, the inconvenience and stress associated with the entire family staying in hotel accommodation or with relatives often lead to returning expatriates making the wrong decisions when buying new homes.



A third factor to be taken into account would be when the expatriates had sold their homes before the assignment, and where house prices have increased in their home country during their absence. The returning expatriates are then required to buy a house similar to the one they used to live in, but at a much higher price.

### **c. Adjustment of the spouse and family**

Chan (1999) indicates that many of the pre-departure and post-return factors applicable to the repatriation process are equally relevant to the expatriates and their spouses/families. However, Punnett (2002) also cautions that certain important and unique factors such as schooling that influence the adjustment of the family in the home country do not necessarily have such a significant impact on the expatriate him/herself. As a result, these factors are often overlooked by expatriates and international organisations, or are not viewed as being very important.

Senior managers in the company are also sometimes of the opinion that the organisation should not intrude into the personal lives of employees. Punnett (2002) clearly cautions against companies making use of this reactive approach towards the expatriate families, indicating that the company by default intruded into the expatriates' family lives by asking the expatriates and their families to go on the international assignments.

A significant problem experienced by expatriate spouses on their return would be their re-establishment of social networks with old friends, particularly where the family has been repatriated to a different city or town in the home country. Those spouses who return to their pre-assignment homes may find that old friends have moved away, or have developed other interests and friends. Spouses may also find that they experience difficulty connecting with the old friends, with the friends not understanding and showing little interest in their accounts of experiences they may have had as expatriates (Jassawalla et al, 2004; Punnett, 2002).



A second serious problem experienced by expatriate spouses on their return is their reintegration into the workforce in the home country. In this regard, a study conducted by Black et al (1999) indicate that on average 63 percent of expatriate spouses included in their study were actively working before going with the expatriates on the international assignments, 16 percent worked during the assignment, and 42 percent of the spouses worked again on their return to the home country. These statistics suggest that spouses make significant career sacrifices to go on international assignments, but many still wish to continue with their careers on their return.

Commenting on the above mentioned statistics, Frandberg and Kjellman (2005) state that expatriate spouses in many cases experience difficulty finding work immediately after international assignments. Often these challenges are related to the loss of professional skills (due to work permit restrictions spouses are often not allowed to work in the host countries) or the lack of business contacts in the home country (due to their extended absence).

Expatriate spouses also experience difficulty in finding suitable positions when potential employers have doubts on how long they will remain in their employment before they go on other international assignments in the near future. An additional challenge faced by spouses would be the difficulties associated with establishing a home and helping children to adjust, which leaves limited time to search for a job as well.

Taking into account the potential difficulty of finding appropriate work after expatriation, Frandberg and Kjellman (2005) comment that it is unfortunate that very few multinational organisations offer any job-finding assistance to spouses after the spouses have made significant career sacrifices to enable their husbands to go on and successfully complete their international assignments. From a South African perspective, a survey conducted by Van Heerden and Wentzel (2002) indicates that approximately 10 percent of South African companies provide some kind of assistance to the expatriate spouses in finding jobs on their return. These statistics compare favourably with 15 percent of companies in Finland and 2 percent of companies in the United States (Black et al, 1999).



A further important factor having an impact on the family's adjustment would be the difficulties experienced by children in re-integrating themselves into schools in the home country, and becoming accepted in peer groups (Chan, 1999). As a result of these difficulties, the returning children frequently experience academic problems. Chan identifies teenage children in particular as high potential candidates to experience difficulty in re-integrating back into the home-country schooling environment.

Suutari (2003) highlights a number of occasions where the children had actually adjusted very well to the foreign country, but experienced major difficulties readjusting in their home countries on their repatriation. Suutari uses the example of a child whose parents moved abroad on an international assignment while he was still at a very young age. In this particular case, the child started his socialisation process in the host culture and as a result experienced major problems in adjusting to his parents' original home culture.

A particular problem experienced by the children of South African expatriates who are sent on international assignments in the northern hemisphere, is the fact that they are normally placed in international schools in the host country. These international schools function according to the northern hemisphere school calendar which commences during August or September each year. On their repatriation to South Africa, these children are often required to either move up a school grade or repeat a grade due to the fact that the South African educational system functions according to the southern hemisphere school calendar that commences in January and ends in December (Van Aswegen & Coates, 2006; Van Heerden & Wentzel, 2002).

As becomes evident from the above mentioned discussions, the extent to which the spouse and family are able to re-integrate themselves back into the home country has a significant influence on the ability and willingness to adjust to the work environment in the home company. This is confirmed by research conducted by Frandberg and Kjellman (2005) on repatriates and their families, which indicates a strong correlation between the expatriate family's successful repatriation adjustment and the employee's repatriation at work, which in turn, has a positive impact on the person's overall work performance.



## **6.4. Repatriate integration into parent company**

### **6.4.1. Repatriate transition strategies**

Adler (1997) identifies three types of repatriates based on the transition strategies or coping modes they typically utilise to fit back into their formerly familiar home country and parent company: re-socialised repatriates, alienated repatriates, and proactive repatriates. Adler emphasises that the behaviours associated with each of these transition strategies vary distinctly. Herewith, a discussion on each of the three types of expatriates as described by Adler.

#### **6.4.1.1. Re-socialised repatriates**

Re-socialised repatriates typically do not recognise or utilise the skills and experience they had gained while on international assignment. These repatriates try to fit back into the domestic corporate structure in the parent company as quickly as possible. They tend to act as if they have not been away on an international assignment (Adler, 1997).

According to Black et al (1999), the re-socialisation transition strategy is most commonly utilised among corporate expatriates who work for organisations that lack a global orientation. Companies in the multi-domestic phase of globalisation are particularly prone towards negating the skills and experience gained by expatriates on their return to the parent companies.

Bender and Fish (2002) also warn against repatriates making use of the re-socialisation approach. Re-socialised repatriates deny themselves and the parent company the opportunity to grow and learn from the expatriate's experience - both from a multicultural and a global competitiveness point of view - by not utilising and transferring the knowledge and experience they had gained during their international assignments.



#### **6.4.1.2. Alienated repatriates**

While employed on their international assignments, alienated expatriates tend to "go native" (Trompenaars & Hampton-Turner, 2004: 328; Marx 1999: 15). They integrate themselves into the lifestyle and values of the foreign culture in the host country. On their return to the home country, the alienated repatriates continue to hang onto the foreign culture. They view the foreign culture as better than their own culture, and refuse to accept the home culture. In the process, the alienated expatriates often experience personal and social isolation from others in their home environment. As a result of their belief that they cannot fit back into the home environment or use the knowledge and skills they have gained while on assignment, alienated repatriates often feel professionally unproductive and personally unsatisfied (Adler, 1997).

Stahl et al (2002) indicate that alienation is often more clearly observable among returnees who have been on a number of international assignments, compared to those who have had a single assignment. They also found that the spouses of returning expatriates often tend to be even more prone towards alienation than the repatriates themselves.

Adler (1997) is not in favour of returning expatriates making use of the alienation approach of transition, as alienated individuals tend to contribute little to the parent company from their international experience. Superiors and colleagues in the parent company also generally recognise the alienated returnees' reduced productivity. As a result, these returnees are typically evaluated as being ineffective, and tend to leave the employment of the company a few months after their repatriation – often to take on an assignment with another company in the same host country.



#### **6.4.1.3. Proactive repatriates**

Proactive returnees show an acceptance towards both their own culture and the culture in the foreign country. Their preferred approach is to rather incorporate dimensions of both cultures in establishing a new paradigm towards work and life in general. Proactive repatriates recognise and apply the knowledge and skills they have acquired while on assignment to actively make a positive contribution within the work environment and to adjust their perspective towards life. They also tend to have a more positive perspective towards their own effectiveness and satisfaction in their new positions, compared to repatriates making use of the re-socialisation and alienation transition approaches (Adler, 1997).

Black et al (1999) indicate that proactive repatriates have been able to develop the skill of objectively evaluating the environments in both the host country and their home country. They are able and willing to describe situations, as opposed to simply comparing them. They are also able to identify similarities and differences between the two cultures, without needing to classify one as good and the other as bad. Proactive returnees therefore are able to create new, synergistic ways of perceiving and working within the parent company, based on both their home country experience and their experience in the foreign country.

Adler (1997) emphasises the benefits of repatriates utilising the proactive approach in integrating into the parent company work environment. By making use of this more synergistic approach in integrating the positive aspects of both cultures, the returnees are able to work more effectively with their colleagues and clients, to make decisions based on a wider range of alternatives, and to act as leaders in coming up with innovative ideas and solutions to complex problems in their work environment. However, both Trompenaars et al (2004) and Antal (2001) caution that the extent to which the proactive repatriate's potential is utilised, is strongly dependent on the organisation's willingness to actively make the most of the returnees' potential contributions, as opposed to simply going through the motions to fit them back into the organisational hierarchy.



#### **6.4.2. Typical company responses towards repatriation**

In the previous discussions, the focus fell primarily on the significant challenges faced by returning expatriates and their families on their return to the home country and organisation on completion of the international assignments. According to Jassawalla et al (2004), these challenges often leave the repatriates and their families with the feeling that the company does not care about the success they were able to achieve while on assignment, or about their well-being in re-integrating into the home environment.

Unfortunately, most executives seem to have little sympathy for repatriation problems. The executive perceives the expatriate to be coming home: “*So what is the problem with coming home?*” (Frandsberg & Kjellman, 2005). This perception of the executive is directly in conflict with the needs of the returning expatriates, as was discussed in the previous paragraphs. Black and Gregersen (2003) also report that human resource professionals may be unaware of the challenges facing repatriated managers. They therefore often get overly involved in the administrative details of the returning expatriates’ repatriation, instead of identifying strategic opportunities where the expatriates can apply their acquired international skills and experience in growing the company’s knowledge of the global business environment.

A study conducted by Stanoch (2006) found that approximately a third of the expatriates included in the study were still acting in temporary positions three months after returning from their assignments. Approximately 75 percent of the respondents were of the opinion that the permanent positions they were appointed into on their return to the parent company constituted a demotion compared to the positions they filled while on assignment, and 61 percent expressed concern that they were not able to utilise the experience they had gained while on assignment. Stanoch (2006) therefore expressed no surprise towards the finding that 40 percent of the returning expatriates in the survey left their companies within a year after their repatriation.



Stanoch (2006) identifies one of the companies included in the survey where all the expatriates sent on international assignments over a period of two years, left the company within a year after their repatriation - 25 people in total: *“The Company might just as well have written a check for \$50 million and tossed it to the winds!”*

In defence of the international companies, Jassawalla et al (2004) assert that it is very difficult for multi-national organisations to guarantee returnees a right job when they return: *“Frankly speaking, returnees and researchers cannot blame the multi-national corporations, as the changes in a company's structure, business practice, and market trends and needs are hardly avoidable while the expatriate is overseas. Therefore, even though the company promised a particular job for returnees, it is very ideal but still difficult in practice”.*

Frandsberg and Kjellman (2005) emphasise the importance of companies having a structured repatriation programme in place to ensure the successful integration of their returning expatriates, and to overcome the significant obstacles faced by both the company and the individual during the reintegration process. They recommend that the repatriation process should not be viewed as a single event. Instead, it should be viewed as a full cycle of steps that starts during the initial planning phases even before the expatriate is sent on the international assignment in the first place. They also recommend that the repatriation process should be viewed holistically as an integral part of the total internal career cycle that incorporates the three phases of selection and preparation, the time spent while on the assignment, and the final reintegration of the returning expatriate back in the home environment.



## 6.5. Conclusion

In Chapter 6 a detailed discussion was conducted on the various phases of the repatriation process as a last step in the expatriate's international career cycle. Attention was given to the impact of the repatriation process on the returning expatriate and his family. From the discussion it became evident that multi-national companies need to be careful in implementing the appropriate management process and interventions to ensure the successful re-integration of the returnee and his family into the parent company, as well as into the general environment in the home country. A final comment made in this regard comes from Black et al (1999): *"the bottom-line is that inattention to the difficulties of repatriation hurts employees' performance and corporate performance. By contrast, small and often relatively inexpensive steps can lead to significant returns on investment and enhanced competitive position in the global market place"*.

The discussions in Chapter 6 provide the basis for Hypotheses 1b and 1d established in this study (as can be seen in Chapter 8), which state that the expatriate's emotional health (sense of meaning and hardiness) decreases from six months into the assignment to after completion of assignment.

In Chapters 4, 5 and 6 the focus was placed on the three phases of the expatriate international career cycle. In Chapter 4, the selection and preparation phase prior to the expatriate's departure on the international assignment was discussed. The complexities and difficulties experienced by the expatriates and their families during their completion of the international assignment were discussed in Chapter 5. A study was also conducted on the sometimes most difficult but often forgotten part of the international assignment, namely the expatriate's repatriation and reintegration back in the home country and company on completion of the international assignment. Specific attention was given in all three chapters to the impact of the work environment on the expatriate during the various phases of the international assignment.



Following on Chapter 6, a detailed investigation is conducted in Chapter 7 on the emotional well-being processes experienced by the expatriate during the various phases of his international career cycle. In this regard, an effective way to measure and to manage the emotional well-being of the individual during the expatriation process is to make use of an organised and structured approach in providing the required support during critical phases of the expatriation process. In order to make this process more scientific, the expatriate's emotional well-being can be measured and compared to other expatriates in similar conditions to ensure continued emotional well-being. In Chapter 7, the approaches and instruments to be used during the measurement of the individual in his adjustment to the foreign environment are examined.

The salutogenic model of health as developed by Dr Aaron Antonovsky will be utilised as scientific basis within which the emotional health of the expatriate during specific periods of adjustment in the international career cycle will be measured.



## Chapter 7

### Expatriate emotional adjustment

#### 7.1. Introduction

Research Objective 5 set in this study is to investigate the main personality and organisational climate predictors of the expatriate's levels of emotional health while on an international assignment in a foreign country. In order to achieve this objective, Chapter 7 investigates the applicable academic research that forms the underlying foundation for expatriate psychological health as investigated in this study. Attention is given to the individual's adjustment to the expatriate environment within the framework of the salutogenic model of psychological health as established by Dr Aaron Antonovsky.

Expatriates progress through three predictable phases in relocating from a position in the parent company to an international assignment in a foreign country and back home again. The three phases in the expatriate's international transfer cycle are pre-departure selection and preparation, the actual period abroad, and repatriation or transfer (Brotchi & Engvig, 2006; Frandberg & Kjellman, 2005). During each of the adjustment phases in the expatriate career cycle, the individual is required to deal with substantial levels of stress and emotional turmoil. In the process, a major task of the individual is to remain emotionally healthy despite being faced with a multitude of external pressures and demands exerted on him from the external environment in the foreign country - both at a professional and a personal level.

In order to obtain an appreciation of the emotional pressures experienced by the expatriate, it is important to obtain a clear understanding of the concept "emotional health". Chapter 7 focuses specifically on the concepts of sense of coherence and hardiness as "internal or personal protective factors" utilised by the expatriate in remaining emotionally healthy and adjusting to the constantly changing expatriate environment. Both these factors form an integral part of the salutogenic model of psychological health as developed by Dr Aaron Antonovsky (1993) that will be used to discuss the expatriate's health.



Also in Chapter 7, the influence of the expatriate's own personality traits on his ability to remain healthy despite being placed under very high levels of emotional stress will be discussed according to the global five personality factors model as developed by Cattell (Cattell et al, 1988) in his research on the Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire (16PF).

## **7.2. Emotional health in an expatriate context**

Kaplan and Sadock (1991: 546) indicate that, where an individual is exposed to rapid cultural changes it could lead to an increase in the person's vulnerability to life strain. Kaplan and Sadock (1991: 224) refer to the Diagnostic Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III-R) which provides a six point "Severity of Psychosocial Stressors Scale" for categorising the psychosocial stressors that significantly contribute to the development of psychological and physical illness.

The DSM-III-R defines stressors as "*predominantly acute events (with a duration of less than six months), or predominantly enduring circumstances (with a duration greater than six months)*". A score of six represents catastrophic stress (for example multiple family deaths), and a score of one represents no apparent stress. On the six-point scale, expatriation and reallocating to a foreign country or culture is allocated a rating of four, which represents severe stress. As illustrated in Table 7.1 below, the impact of expatriation on the individual's emotional wellbeing is rated similar to the stress caused by divorce, poverty, and chronic life threatening illness in parents.

**Table 7.1.: Severity of psychosocial stressors scale (Kaplan & Sadock, 1991)**

Examples of Stressors			
Rank	Category	Acute events	Enduring events
1	None	No acute events of relevance	No enduring circumstances of relevance
2	Mild	Completion of studies; child left home; break-up with partner	Overcrowded living quarters; job dissatisfaction; family arguments
3	Moderate	Marriage; job loss; marital separation; retirement, etc.	Marital discord; serious financial problems; trouble with boss, etc.
4	Severe	Divorce; arrest; birth of first child; unwanted pregnancy	Life threatening illness of parent; unemployment; poverty; move to new country (expatriation)
5	Extreme	Death of spouse/parent; serious physical illness; victim of rape	Serious chronic illness in self or child; ongoing physical or sexual abuse
6	Catastrophic	Death of child; suicide of spouse; devastating natural disaster	Captivity as hostage; concentration camp experience

It becomes evident from the categorisation of stressors provided by the DSM-III-R that the individual expatriate is exposed to severe levels of psychosocial stress during his relocation into the foreign country, which could potentially lead to the person experiencing symptoms of emotional fatigue. In extreme cases, this cultural transition could lead to severe levels of distress to the individual. Kaplan and Sadock (1991) also refer to this problem as culture shock, which occurs when an individual is suddenly forced into an alien culture. According to Kaplan and Sadock (1991: 130), individuals respond to culture change either by actively moving and integrating themselves into the culture, or by remaining stagnant while the culture changes around them. When the change takes place too quickly and overwhelmingly, the adaptive mechanisms of individuals and of their social support structures may be overwhelmed.



Culture shock is typically characterised by feelings of anxiety or depression, a sense of isolation, and depersonalisation. Anderzen and Arnetz (1999) found that six out of ten international assignments involve sufficiently high levels of stress and strain on the expatriate to cause either an early return or at least a significant drop in effectiveness and professional performance. This finding is confirmed by Beaverstock (2000), who indicates that the proportion of expatriates who fail in their international assignments and return prematurely ranges from 10 percent to 45 percent, with the higher rates associated with assignments in underdeveloped or developing countries.

Expatriates themselves also have an active role to play in their adjustment to the demands placed on them while on international assignment. The core purpose why companies make use of expatriates is to achieve certain very specific work-related objectives. In order to achieve these objectives, it is imperative for the person to possess and utilise the appropriate coping mechanisms and personality traits that will enable him to remain productive and emotionally healthy during the various phases of the international assignment.

Kaplan and Sadock (1991: 224) assert that individuals who present a “high level of functioning” before being exposed to excessive levels of strain as a result of severe psychosocial stressors (for example expatriation), generally have a better prognosis for recovery than those who have a “low level of functioning”. Kaplan and Sadock (1999) conceptualise “functioning” as a composite of three major areas: social relations, occupational functioning, and psychological or emotional health. They indicate that people who have high levels of psychological or emotional health (which includes possessing mature defence mechanisms such as flexibility, having a full and satisfying life, and possessing a “capacity for sublimation”), typically demonstrate a high level of resilience to deal and adjust to these life changes.



### 7.3. Emotional health defined

According to Kent (2005), “*health is not a clearly defined construct, but rather one that is difficult to comprehend and to describe*”. Researchers (Kent, 2005; Pott, 1998; Kossuth, 1998; Antonovsky, 1991) seem to agree that health must be viewed as a multi-dimensional concept. Included in the definition of health is not only physical well-being (for example feeling healthy, no symptoms of illnesses or disease) and psychological well-being (for example joyfulness, happiness, and feeling good about oneself). The concept also incorporates personal accomplishment, self-actualisation, and a sense of purpose.

According to Pott (1998), health “*depends on the existence, on the perception, and on the means of dealing with stress and strain, on risks and hazards in the social and ecological environment, on the existence, on the perception, on the tapping and on the use of resources*”. From the above mentioned discussions it becomes evident that the phenomenon of health is complex and needs to be investigated in sufficient depth to avoid any inappropriate generalisations or restrictions on the concept.

At first glance, the concepts of “health” and its perceived opposite “disease” appear to be clearly defined (Kent, 2005). Simplistically, “health” can be characterised by well-being and the nonexistence of symptoms and complaints. Alternatively, “disease” is directly related to the individual complaining and experiencing pain. However, Kent also asserts that the concepts of health and disease become significantly more complex if viewed from a personal and a social perspective.



On the one hand, “health” can indicate towards well-being and happiness. It can also be viewed as merely the absence of symptoms. A third point of view might be that health incorporates the individual’s ability to deal with stress and tension. Kent (2005) indicates that these subjective perceptions towards health develop as part of each individual’s development and socialisation within the context of a specific personal and social environment. The person’s perspective towards physical complaints is influenced by his assessment of the way in which things are done within their specific culture. This assessment can be influenced by the severity of the symptoms. However, the individual’s perception towards the complaints from a cultural perspective has a substantial impact on his response and health-related behaviour towards the specific condition.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) (1948) defines health as *“a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”*. This definition provided by the WHO provides an ideal standard of health that represents a condition of complete psychological and physical well-being. However, such a “perfect” definition may also be viewed as being unrealistic, taking into account the fact that such absolute states of health are not practically achievable (Pott, 1998).

The traditional biomedical model of health/disease was developed during the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to this model, the human body can be compared to a machine (Pott, 1998). The way in which the human body functions and is exposed to functional disorders can best be understood when a precise analysis is conducted on physiological systems, structures, and processes at work in the body. Therefore, symptoms of disease (incorporating both physical complaints and psychological problems) need to be investigated by focusing on the body’s “mechanical” organic deficiencies. The extent to which a person could be categorised as ill or not is dependent on whether anatomical or physiological changes can be identified. The involvement of a logically thinking individual in this process is to a large extent excluded. The person is viewed as a passive and reactive object that has no psychological or social influence over any of his physiological processes (Pott, 1998).



A significant amount of criticism developed towards the biomedical model of disease. The major concern towards the model was that it was too simplistic, and that it degraded the human individual to a senseless victim of his circumstances. Engel (as cited in Pott, 1998) expanded on the biomedical model. According to Engel, both somatic and psychosocial factors should be incorporated to provide a better understanding of the underlying foundations and the development of disease. He referred to this new approach as the biopsychosocial model of disease. According to Engel, research indicates that psychological and social factors play a significant role in the appearance and development of disease. These factors have an impact on the way in which disease is diagnosed and treated. They also influence the way in which the individual perceives symptoms, experiences pain, and even the decision to undertake medical treatment and to adhere to medical procedures as prescribed by the doctor.

Based on Engel's research (as cited in Pott, 1998), the statistical norm of health developed which states that health is determined by the number of times a particular characteristic occurs in the individual organism. The extent to which a person is considered healthy is therefore determined by the degree to which the characteristic is prevalent in the majority of people. Alternatively, disease is indicated by variations from these average values. Consequently, in order for an individual to be classified as being either healthy or ill, a reference group needs to be available that specifies factors such as age and gender.

#### **7.4. Salutogenesis as an alternative approach towards emotional health**

In reaction to the relatively rigid and inflexible paradigm utilised by the traditional statistical norm approach towards health, a number of influential psychological concepts were developed which attempted to explain how the development and change in health is affected by individual characteristics (Pott, 1998). A prominent approach that was developed as an alternative paradigm to the traditional pathogenic approach towards health was the so-called salutogenic orientation towards health (Kent, 2005; Pott, 1998).



According to Kossuth (1998: 90), the salutogenic paradigm can be viewed as a combination of concepts that have developed independently. More specifically, the underlying theories and principles of the salutogenic approach towards health were first described by Dr Aaron Antonovsky in 1979 (Antonovsky, 1979). Antonovsky questioned the fundamental hypotheses of western medical research and practice, and compared them with the fundamentals of his salutogenic paradigm. However, he also viewed salutogenesis and the pathogenic approach as being complementary in their purpose and objectives.

In his development of the salutogenic paradigm, Antonovsky (1991) conducted research on the impact of the adverse conditions in concentration camps on individuals. His research was specifically focused on women who survived concentration camps during the Second World War. Antonovsky found that the group of women who survived the concentration camps displayed considerably more symptoms of ill health compared to the women in the control group. However, nearly 30 percent of the concentration camp survivors indicated that they still viewed themselves as maintaining relatively high levels of emotional health, despite the intensely traumatic experiences they had been exposed to (Antonovsky, 1991). Antonovsky wondered how these women were able to still maintain such high levels of health, notwithstanding the extreme pressure that was placed on them.

Based on his research on these former concentration camp survivors, Antonovsky used the following three questions as the foundation for the Salutogenic theory:

- *“Why do people stay healthy despite being exposed to so many detrimental influences?”*
- *How do they manage to recover from illnesses?*
- *What is special about people who do not get ill despite the most extreme strain?”*  
(Antonovsky, 1990).



Antonovsky used these three questions as the central point of departure for the research he conducted on health. Within the framework of this research, these questions are also viewed as being of significant importance in the expatriate's ability and willingness to cope with the pressures exerted on him during the various phases of the international career cycle. The salutogenic model is based on the following assumptions (Antonovsky, 1990):

- The emphasis is placed on the origins of health or well-being;
- The primary concern is with the maintenance and enhancement of well-being;
- The assumptions that stressors are inherently bad are rejected in favour of the possibility that stressors may have salutary or beneficial consequences.

Antonovsky criticised the common healthy/sick approach upon which the traditional pathogenic model of health is based. Within the framework of the pathogenic model, the conditions of health and disease are usually assumed to be mutually exclusive. Accordingly, an individual is either healthy or ill. Only one of the two conditions can be present at any given moment. Whether the person is classified as healthy or ill is determined by a health provider's diagnosis of a particular disease, or alternatively by the patient self (Antonovsky, 1990).

In his criticism towards the traditional western pathogenic approach, Antonovsky compared this approach with a scale he called the "*health ease/dis-ease continuum*". On this continuum, he identified two poles, namely: ease (health) and dis-ease (illness). It is not possible for a living organism to achieve either of the extreme poles on the continuum, namely perfect health or complete disease. Every individual will have unhealthy parts, even though he may perceive himself or herself as being healthy. Alternatively, certain components of the person must be healthy if he is still alive: "*We are all terminal cases. But as long as there is a breath of life in us, we are all in some measure healthy*" (Antonovsky, 1990). According to Antonovsky, the emphasis should not fall on whether a person is healthy or ill, but rather on where he is placed on the continuum between perfect health ease and complete dis-ease.



Antonovsky (1990) asserts that a mechanistic model is used by the pathogenic medical approach to define, diagnose, and treat disease. Deficiencies and illnesses need to be diagnosed and treated by means of focused medical treatment. Specific pathological processes form the framework within which disease is treated. Each illness can be clearly defined in terms of identifiable pathogenic conditions and agents, as well as stressors and risk factors. During the treatment of the illness, the emphasis falls on protecting the individual against these conditions and agents.

Antonovsky (1990) proposed the salutogenic approach as an alternative to the traditional pathogenic approach towards health. The objective of the salutogenic approach is to build up the resistance of the organism against threats by strengthening the available resources, as opposed to merely defending the organism against pathogenic agents. This resource-oriented thinking requires that the person be viewed from a holistic system-perspective that incorporates all of his life experience, as well as the external environment within which the person is required to function (Antonovsky, 1990).

Antonovsky (1991) makes use of a metaphor to compare the pathogenic perspective towards health with the salutogenic perspective: *“The pathogenic approach is aimed at rescuing people at great expense from a raging river, without taking into consideration how they got in there and why they are not better swimmers. In contrast, viewed from the perspective of health education, people sometimes willingly jump into the river, while at the same time they refuse to learn to swim”*.

Antonovsky (1990) expands on the above mentioned metaphor to describe salutogenesis: *“... my fundamental philosophical assumption is that the river is the stream of life. None walks the shore safely. Moreover, it is clear to me that much of the river is polluted, literally and figuratively. There are forks in the river that lead to gentle streams or to dangerous rapids and whirlpools. My work has been devoted to confronting the question: ‘Wherever one is in the stream – whose nature is determined by historical, social-cultural, and physical environmental conditions – what shapes one’s ability to swim well?’*”.



The term “*salutogenesis*” is a Latin word that incorporates “*salus*” (Latin for “invincibility”, “well-being”, or “happiness”), and “*genese*” (Greek for “genesis” or “origin”). The term stands in contrast to “*pathogenesis*” (*pathos*, Latin for “pain” or “suffering”; and *genese*, Greek for “genesis”, “origin”) (Antonovsky, 1991).

Based on the conceptual framework of the salutogenic model, a number of influential psychological concepts were developed to explain how the development and change in health is influenced by individual characteristics. Pott (1998: 49) refers to these characteristics as “*internal or personal protective factors*”. Internal protective factors are referred to as “*dispositional, though changeable personal characteristics, as well as cognitive or behavioural styles that are situational and instrumental in the individual’s ability to cope with life’s stressors*” (Pott, 1998: 150). According to Kossuth (1998: 93), two of the most well-known approaches developed in defining these personal protective factors are the concept of sense of coherence developed by Antonovsky, and the concept of hardiness developed by Kobasa.

Antonovsky (as cited in Pott, 1998) himself makes a strong case for using his own sense of coherence factor and Kobasa’s concept of hardiness as important constructs in the salutogenic orientation: “*Instead of asking about pathogens and failures in coping which lead to disease, what is common to these approaches (Sense of Coherence and Hardiness) is their focus on explanations of successful resolution of stressors and maintenance of return to health. The focus on successful coping is the first and major criterion for selection of the constructs or salutogenic strengths*”.

Other dimensions also considered by Antonovsky as suitable to be considered for inclusion as part of the salutogenic model would be Bandura’s self-efficacy and Rotter’s locus of control (Pott, 1998: 55).



Taking into account the above mentioned observations, it was viewed appropriate to include the sense of coherence and hardiness as the main salutogenic concepts in this research. From an expatriate adjustment perspective, it is viewed of critical importance to conduct a careful investigation into these two concepts, as they play a very important role in their capacity as “internal or personal protective factors” in the individual’s ability to cope with the pressures associated with expatriation. A discussion on each of these two concepts will now be conducted.

### **7.5. Sense of coherence**

A key aspect included by Antonovsky (1991) in his salutogenic model is a concept which he refers to as Sense of Coherence. Antonovsky asserts that an individual’s state of health/disease and the extent to which the person is able to cope with stress is to a large extent determined by one specific individual psychological factor, namely his general perspective towards life. He refers to this basic outlook towards life as the person’s Sense of Coherence.

Antonovsky (1991) views sense of coherence as being critical to explain the human ability to maintain and promote health. According to Antonovsky, the term “Coherence” refers to stability, balance, and harmony. The higher the individual’s sense of coherence, the more effective he will be to obtain and maintain health. Antonovsky (1991) defines the sense of coherence as: *“The sense of coherence is a global orientation that expresses the extent to which one has a pervasive, enduring though dynamic feeling of confidence that (1) the stimuli deriving from one’s internal and external environments in the course of living are structured, predictable, and explicable; (2) the resources are available to one to meet the demands posed by these stimuli; and (3) these demands are challenges worthy of investment and engagement”*.



According to Antonovsky (1991), the descriptive term “dynamic” describes this orientation towards life as it is constantly faced and influenced by new life experiences. On the other hand, the nature of life experiences is also influenced by the level of sense of coherence. Consequently, the basic orientation towards life reaches a level of consistent stability and endurance, and is supported by life experiences. External circumstances and social roles do not have any significant impact on the strength of the sense of coherence. For this reason, Antonovsky refers to this outlook on life as a “*dispositional orientation*”, which he describes as a relatively constant personal attribute. However, he also cautions that this concept does not indicate towards any specific personality trait.

Antonovsky (Antonovsky & Sagy, 2001; Antonovsky, 1991) continually debated the issue of the stage in life when one develops one’s sense of coherence, at which stage it stabilises, and whether or not the sense of coherence can change during the course of one’s life. He contended that the sense of coherence develops during a person’s childhood. Experiences gathered during the process of growing up directly influence its development. Significant changes and adjustments can still take place during adolescence. Various areas of the adolescent’s life have not yet been fully established, and a multitude of options and opportunities are available. Antonovsky indicates that the sense of coherence reaches maturity by the age of 30. During the adult phase it remains relatively stable, and will only experience small and temporal changes.

Antonovsky (1993) highlights the following characteristics of the sense of coherence:

- Various systems of the human organism are directly influenced by the sense of coherence such as the immune system, the central nervous system, and the hormone system. Thinking processes (also referred to as cognitions) utilised to evaluate whether a situation is dangerous, safe or welcome are also directly impacted. Consequently, a strong relationship exists between the sense of coherence and the production of complex reactions in the brain;



- The sense of coherence stimulates already existing resources. The successful activation of these resources results in a reduction in the levels of stress experienced by the individual, and therefore has an indirect impact on the physiological systems involved in the management of tension. According to Antonovsky, short-term physiological stress actions (tension) do not need to be detrimental, provided sufficient opportunity is allowed for a subsequent recovery phase. Imbalances and subsequent damage only arise where these self-regulating processes are disrupted;
- Individuals with a high sense of coherence should be better capable to select positive behaviours that specifically advance health (for example regular physical exercise, timely medical examinations, etcetera), and avoid acting in negative ways that could have a detrimental impact on their health. The sense of coherence therefore indirectly influences the state of health by affecting health-promoting behaviour.

#### **7.5.1. Dimensions of sense of coherence**

Antonovsky (1993) asserts that the sense of coherence pre-emptly the individual's expectation that things will work out well. A person with a high sense of coherence is able to react flexibly to challenges and difficulties, and can mobilise the appropriate resources for specific situations. Conversely, an individual with a poorly developed sense of coherence would be rigid and inflexible in his reaction to demands, as he perceives himself as having fewer coping resources.

Antonovsky (1993) emphasises that the sense of coherence is not a specific coping style, but should rather be viewed as a more central function utilised to guide and regulate the organism. This basic disposition of perceiving life as meaningful consists of three components: sense of comprehensibility, sense of manageability, and sense of meaningfulness. A discussion on each of these components follows:



#### **7.5.1.1. Sense of comprehensibility**

Sense of comprehensibility refers to the individual's "*expectation or ability to process both familiar and unfamiliar stimuli as ordered, consistent, structured information and not to be confronted with stimuli that are chaotic, random, accidental and incomprehensible*" (Antonovsky, 1993). Antonovsky defines the term "comprehensibility" as a so-called "cognitive processing pattern". A person who scores high on comprehensibility will expect the stimuli that he will encounter in the future to be predictable and explicable. The person believes that things will work out well, that events can be coped with, and challenges will be met.

#### **7.5.1.2. Sense of manageability**

Sense of manageability represents the individual's belief that solutions exist to problems and difficulties. Antonovsky also refers to this conviction as "instrumental confidence" and defines it as "*...the extent to which one perceives that the resources at one's disposal are adequate to meet the demands posed by the stimuli that bombard one*". The degree to which the person experiences a high sense of manageability is not necessarily dependent on his own resources and competencies. It also includes the conviction that guidance and support in dealing with problems will be available from a higher power or other people. Antonovsky considers the sense of manageability as a "*cognitive-emotional processing pattern*" (Antonovsky, 1993).

#### **7.5.1.3. Sense of meaningfulness**

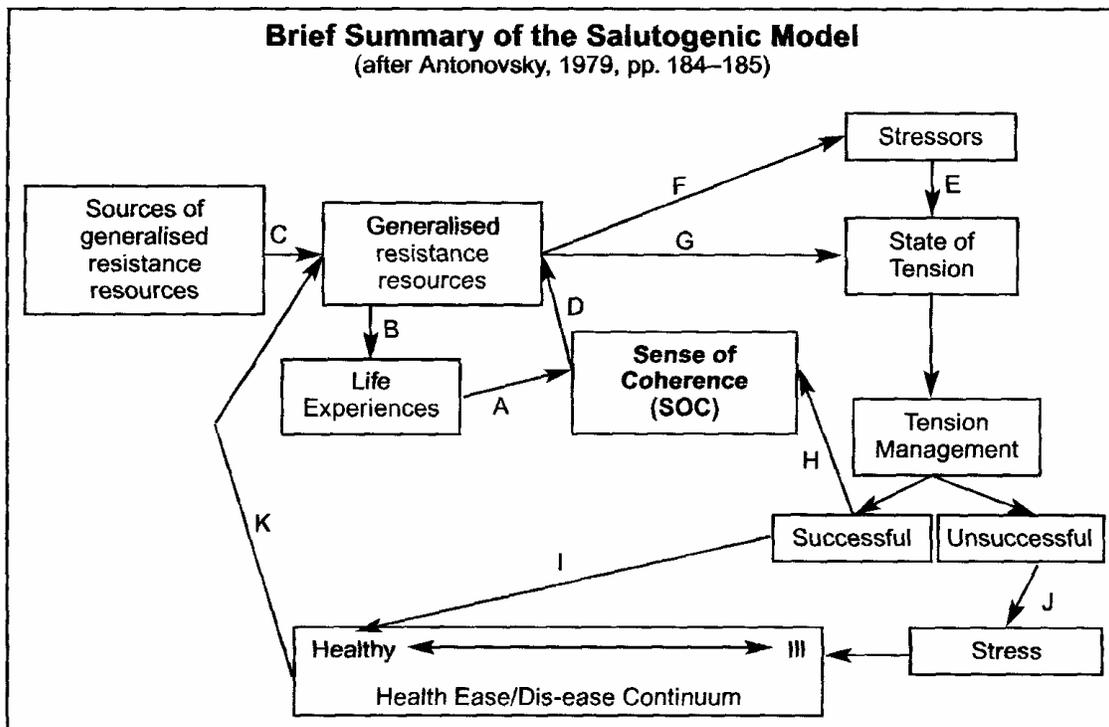
The term sense of meaningfulness represents "*...the extent to which one feels that life makes sense emotionally, that at least some of the problems and demands posed by living are worth investing energy in, are worthy of commitment and engagement, are challenges that are 'welcome' rather than burdens that one would much rather do without*".

Antonovsky considers the sense of meaningfulness to be the most important of the three factors included in the sense of coherence factor. If the person does not experience meaningfulness and does not have any positive expectations towards life, his sense of coherence score will be low, irrespective how pronounced the other two components are. A person who lacks meaningfulness will also tend to be anxious towards life, and will view any additional challenges as a mere continuation of the already experienced suffering (Antonovsky, 1993).

### 7.5.2. Application of sense of coherence

A graphical layout of the principles included in Antonovsky's Salutogenic Model of Health is provided in Figure 7.1 below (Pott, 1998; Antonovsky, 1979). The principles indicated in the model will now be discussed.

Figure 7.1.: Principles of the salutogenic model of health



(Pott, 1998: 33)



According to Antonovsky (1979), the individual's experiences in life create and form his sense of coherence (Pointer A). In order to achieve a high sense of coherence, the life experiences need to be as consistent as possible and should not lead to the person experiencing feelings of overload or underload. The individual must also be able to effectively influence these life experiences. Antonovsky indicates that such positive life experiences are activated by "generalised resistance resources".

Examples of these resistance resources would be physiological features, intellect, social support, coping strategies, financial power, and societal factors (Pointer B). The development of the resistance resources is directly influenced by the cultural and historical context, the environment and behavioural framework within which the person is brought up, as well as the person's social roles. Finally, the individual's own attitudes, as well as other random events can also influence the development and presence of specific resistance resources.

The strength of the sense of coherence determines the degree to which the pre-existing generalised resistance resources can be activated (Pointer D). In a negative scenario, the interaction among the three factors creates a repetition that can potentially develop into a vicious circle. The development of the sense of coherence will be negatively impacted where resistance resources are restricted. Conversely, a weak sense of coherence hinders the optimal development and activation of the available resistance resources.

Increased states of tension and emotional strain develop where the individual is faced with stressors for which he does not have an automatic response (Pointer E). The mobilised generalised resistance resources influence the extent to which the stressors are effectively managed (Pointer F), as well as the intensity of tension experienced by the individual (Pointer G). This process also repeats itself. The success achieved by the individual to reduce the levels of experienced tension leads to a strengthening of his sense of coherence (Pointer H).



The successful tension reduction ensures the individual's ability to maintain or re-establish his experienced state of health (also referred to by Antonovsky as the position on the ease/dis-ease continuum) (Pointer I). A healthy position on the ease/dis-ease continuum also promotes the development of new resistance resources (Pointer K).

On the other hand, ineffective tension management results in an elevated state of tension (Pointer J). This state of tension experienced by the individual interacts with existing pathogenic influences (diseases) and individual physical or emotional weaknesses, and therefore has a detrimental impact on the individual's position on the ease/disease continuum (Antonovsky, 1979).

### **7.5.3. Relationship between sense of coherence and expatriation**

Antonovsky (Antonovsky & Sagy, 2001; Antonovsky, 1991) considered the possibility that health can be negatively influenced by external elements such as natural disasters, political unrest, hunger, or unstable social conditions. His hypothesis in this regard was that the individual's state of health under such unfavourable circumstances will be dependent on the extent to which his cognitive and affective-motivational perspective towards life is developed. In turn, this perspective will influence the degree to which the person is able to activate the available resources in order to maintain his health and well-being.

However, Antonovsky (1993) also indicated that a radical change in one's structural external situation can lead to a significant modification in one's sense of coherence. He specifically highlights emigration to a foreign country (which includes expatriation) as an example of a radical change in the individual's cultural or social living environment that can result in a considerable variation in the sense of coherence. In line with the findings of Kaplan and Sadock (1991), other examples mentioned by Antonovsky that could have an impact on sense of coherence would be relocating to a new neighbourhood, getting married, or being unemployed for an extended period of time (Antonovsky as cited in Pott, 1998: 28).



Also of interest in this regard would be Antonovsky's utilisation of the severe difficulties experienced by the concentration camp survivors as objects for his research on his salutogenic model and sense of coherence. Based on his research on these concentration camp survivors, Antonovsky (Antonovsky & Sagy, 2001; Pott, 1998) came to the conclusion that adverse living conditions can obstruct the optimal development of the sense of coherence. According to Antonovsky, children growing up in unfavourable life situations do not have the same opportunity to develop their sense of coherence compared to children who are exposed to a supportive and conducive social environment.

Consistent with Antonovsky's utilisation of concentration camp experiences as the most severely unfavourable life circumstances in establishing his salutogenic model, Kaplan and Sadock (1991) also classify captivity as a hostage or a concentration camp experience as a level six stressor (labelled as Catastrophic) on the "Severity of Psychosocial Stressors Scale".

From an expatriate perspective, Antonovsky's assertions on the effectiveness of sense of coherence in facilitating the individual's ability to cope with highly stressful situations are confirmed by research conducted by Anderzen and Arnetz (1999) on relocating employees from Sweden to foreign countries over a period of two years. In their study, Anderzen and Arnetz (1999) found that a strong sense of coherence in life decreased the stress response and facilitated the adaptation process of the expatriates. Sense of coherence was found to be negatively correlated to the level of psycho-physiological stress experienced by the expatriates, as well as to negative mental adjustment during the study. According to the study, individuals who have a high level of sense of meaning have a stronger ability to control and minimise the impact of the external environment on specific stress-related chemical reactions taking place in the human body during periods of extensive travel and pressure.



Conversely, Anderzen and Arnetz (1999) also found that a low sense of coherence increased the risk of maladjustment by the expatriate to the foreign environment by four to five times, and that individuals who perceive themselves as having low sense of coherence and control over their environment, are more likely to experience psycho-physiological stress and symptoms of depression.

The above mentioned example confirms the observations made earlier in this study, which indicated that the expatriate is exposed to severe levels of stress during his relocation into the foreign country. Taking into account Antonovsky's views on the impact of sense of coherence on the individual's ability to cope with stress, the inference can therefore be made that the individual expatriate who has a high sense of coherence should be able to cope better with the pressures associated with the various phases of the international career cycle, compared to the individual with a weak sense of coherence, who may tend to become overwhelmed and paralysed by the pressures associated with adjusting to the new and constantly changing environment in the foreign country.

## **7.6. Hardiness**

The 'hardiness' construct was developed by Kobasa during the late 1970's (Pott, 1998). Kobasa was also interested in the impact that individual characteristics have on the development and variation of health and disease (Bissonnette, 1998; Gironi et al, 1997). Kobasa initially utilised the hardiness concept to investigate the interaction between health and stress from a medical perspective. Her findings revealed that individuals who are exposed to high levels of stress but remained healthy had a different personality structure compared to individuals who were exposed to highly stressful situations and became ill. The core of this personality structure, referred to by Kobasa as hardiness, was subsequently defined as "*the use of ego resources necessary to appraise, interpret, and respond to health stressors*" (Bissonnette, 1998).



Kobasa (1982) conceptualises hardiness as *“a general health promoting factor which enables individuals to remain both psychologically and physically healthy despite confrontations with stressful situations or experiences”*.

Although Kobasa never made use of the term, Pott (1998) asserts that she was an active supporter of the salutogenic approach. Kobasa (1982) is of the opinion that hardiness as a personality trait has a determining effect on the contrasting ways in which people react to objectively identical stressors and stressful situations. In her research, Kobasa administered personality tests on various groups of executives who worked in stressful situations. The groups were typically divided into two fairly equal groups. The first group included executives who showed many symptoms of illness, and in the other group were included individuals who showed few of these symptoms, despite the fact that both groups had been exposed to equally stressful external circumstances.

Based on her research on these executives, Kobasa (1982) conceptualised the specific cognitive style called the “hardy personality”. According to Kobasa, the characteristics of the hardy personality reflect an individual’s ability to successfully cope in stressful situations by means of a careful and logical assessment of the particular problem in the context of his social environment and existing social support system.

Kosaka (1996) defines hardiness as *“the measure of one’s tendency to make relationships to oneself and one’s external world. It is not a mere rigidity or stress ‘endurance’, but a power to cultivate one’s way under difficult circumstance and go through stressful events. It is not like a reckless attack, but an ability to understand conditions around oneself, an ability to self-decision”*.



According to Kobasa (1982), the hardiness concept underlies the individual's ability and willingness to effectively deal with change. In this regard, Maddi and Koshaba (2006) indicate that hardy employees tend to take the lead in changing and ambiguous situations because they exhibit a key attitude towards life that activates creative and results-orientated problem solving. Employees with high levels of hardiness also tend to display higher performance, enthusiasm, self-confidence, leadership, and health.

People who exhibit pronounced levels of hardiness are interested and actively involved in all aspects of their lives (Kobasa, 1982). This ability demands of the person to have confidence in his own value, behaviours, and sound judgment. It also involves social interaction and commitment. Research conducted by Maddi and Kobasa (as cited in Harrison et al, 2002) found that hardy individuals tend to make a positive appraisal of their situation when faced with a stressful life event. The stressor therefore becomes an interesting and important stimulus on which it is possible to act. The stressor also has an inherent potential to play a role in personal growth and development. Hardy individuals have also developed the skill to use social support in order to reinforce their ability to manage situations.

Kobasa (as cited in Pott, 1998) identifies two different health influencing mechanisms for the hardiness variable. Firstly, hardiness can provide a protective shield that leads to people dealing with stress differently, and making use of effective coping mechanisms in resolving the difficulties facing them. Within this scenario, hardiness impacts on health in an indirect way. Hardiness also has an effect on the person's cognition and assessment of a stressful incident, and results in him dealing with perceived unpleasant situations in an effective and enthusiastic way. The second contributing aspect associated with Kobasa's hardiness is that the concept is viewed as actively reducing the tension experienced by the individual.



Kobasa (1982) theorises that hardiness develops in early childhood. It grows as the result of rich, diverse, and rewarding life experiences. However, in contrast to Antonovsky, Kobasa (as cited in Pott, 1998: 52) does not view hardiness as a static personality characteristic that completes its development during childhood and then remains fixed during adulthood. According to Kobasa, personality characteristics are personal styles that continuously develop during the person's interaction with the external environment. In her commentary towards the two approaches, Pott (1998) comes to the conclusion that Kobasa's hardiness model is different from Antonovsky's Sense of Coherence to the extent that it allows for individual change and growth to take place. In this sense, she views Kobasa's approach not to be as pessimistic and inflexible as that of Antonovsky.

Integral to the hardiness concept, Kobasa (1982) identifies three components or elements of hardiness that are critical in people who are able to function optimally under confusing and stressful circumstances, namely commitment, control, and challenge. According to Pott (1998: 52), these three elements are closely related and overlap with each other. They also correspond closely with the three components included in Antonovsky's sense of coherence concept. The three dimensions will now be discussed.

### **7.6.1. Dimensions of hardiness**

#### **7.6.1.1. Commitment**

Kobasa (1982) defines Commitment as the ability to interact and to feel actively involved with others and to believe in the value and importance of oneself and one's experience. According to Maddi and Koshaba (2006), the concept of commitment leads people to sufficiently value their own worth and importance. This enables them to fully interact in the achievement of tasks and objectives, despite being faced with stressful changes. Commitment also represents a fundamental sense of one's worth, purpose, and accountability, which protects the individual against weakness while faced with difficult circumstances (Bissonnette, 1998). The person is therefore able to adjust his perceptions of adverse situations to make them meaningful and interesting.



Research by Skirka et al (2000) found that people with a high sense of commitment are more inclined to be self-reliant in identifying appropriate avenues to transform a stressful situation into an experience that is valuable and important. They also noticed that individuals who indicate higher levels of commitment are more committed to various aspects of their life including interpersonal relationships, family, and themselves.

According to Bissonette (1998), the term commitment utilised by Kobasa is conceptually similar to Antonovsky's meaningfulness (the third dimension included in the sense of coherence factor). Antonovsky (as cited in Pott, 1998) himself is slightly more vocal in his commentary, indicating that Kobasa's sense of commitment means "*exactly the same thing*" as his term meaningfulness.

#### **7.6.1.2. Control**

Control describes the individual's conviction that he is able to control or influence occurrences in his life, that his personal efforts can modify stressors in order to reduce them into a more manageable state, and that there is a direct correlation between one's actions and external events (Maddi & Koshaba, 2006). In her research, Kobasa (1982) found that the concept of control motivates individuals to identify alternative approaches that will modify the expected results of stressful changes, as opposed to becoming reactive and despondent.

Kobasa (1982) makes a distinction between external and internal control. External control refers to a position where the source of control lies outside the person. Internal control applies where the person believes the control lies within him or herself. Within this paradigm, an individual with a high level of hardiness has a strong belief that he can effectively cope and manage developments in his external environment. Such an individual takes responsibility for his own actions, and is self-determined in coming up with solutions in dealing with difficult life situations. The person with a strong sense of control believes that he can change the way things are in his life, as opposed to viewing him as a victim of his circumstances.



On the other hand, people with lower levels of control (also referred to by Kobasa as external locus of control) tend to experience an inconsistency between their perceptions of developments in their external environment, and the emotions of powerlessness they experience in their attempts to take control over the impact these developments have over their lives (Kobasa, 1982).

Seligman (as cited in Bissonnette 1998) suggests that a sense of control is cultivated early in life as infants learn that intentions are correlated with voluntary movements. Gradually, a general expectation is developed in the child that his actions have a significant impact on situational outcomes.

Antonovsky's response (as cited in Pott, 1998) to the Control dimension as developed by Kobasa is that the Internal-External Locus of Control scale differs drastically from his approach in the sense that it only provides for two alternatives: either the individual controls developments in his external environment or they do not. Antonovsky's model also makes provision for the individual to have the opportunity to place his trust in the hands of another person who possesses more control over developments in the external environment.

### **7.6.1.3. Challenge**

The third dimension, challenge, reflects the individual's belief that change is not a threat to personal security, but an opportunity for personal development and growth (Maddi & Koshaba, 2006; Kobasa, 1982). McCranie (as cited in Harrison et al, 2002) adds to this definition, indicating that challenge is the positive anticipation of change, where change is perceived as stimulating and contributing to personal growth.

Kobasa (1982) asserts that individuals with high hardiness experience changes in their lives as a challenge rather than a threat. They view these changes as stimulating and as an opportunity for personal development. They enthusiastically search for new experiences, and display adaptability when faced with unforeseen circumstances.



Where an individual indicates a low level of challenge, the fears associated with potential mistakes present an obstacle to overcoming challenges. It therefore also has a potentially adverse impact on personal growth (Kobasa, 1982). These fears frequently lead to avoidance behaviour which intensifies the fear, and prevents the individual from confronting and overcoming the challenge.

According to Pott (1998), the major difference between challenge as conceptualised by Kobasa and Antonovsky's Sense of Coherence, is that change is viewed as healthy and the norm in Challenge, while stability (the opposite of change) is considered to be the normative and ideal lifestyle in sense of coherence.

### **7.6.2. Application of hardiness**

A number of studies confirm the relevance of hardiness in facilitating people's ability to deal effectively with stressful situations. Research conducted by Maddi and Koshaba (2006) indicated that almost two thirds of the people who were involved in a restructuring process of a major organisation showed significant wellness breakdown. These individuals also indicated lower levels of hardiness. However, the remaining third of the employees managed to maintain high levels of health and performance, despite being faced with exactly the same stressful circumstances. These individuals also indicated higher levels of hardiness. The employees with high levels of hardiness displayed a clearly definable pattern of providing and obtaining support and reassurance to and from others in their work environment.



A study conducted by Harrisson et al (2002) revealed that a high level of hardiness is related to lower psychological distress and a more positive appraisal of the work environment. In their study of nurses, they found that those individuals who view themselves as able to influence everyday life events by perceiving them as challenging rather than threatening, also reported fewer symptoms of depression, anxiety, and anger. Their research also indicated that nurses who indicated higher levels of hardiness were more able to make a positive appraisal towards support offered to them by staff or family. The nurses also displayed a better ability to utilize the available social support to decrease the strain caused by stressors.

Based on the results obtained from the research, Harrisson et al (2002) conclude that hardiness can be seen as a personal resource that enables individuals to make use of contextual factors such as work support to decrease their psychological distress or to improve their psychological/emotional well-being.

Rhodevault and Agustodttir (as cited in Gonella, 1999) also found that hardy individuals report more positive self-evaluations compared to people indicating low levels of hardiness. They found that, from a physiological perspective, individuals with higher levels of hardiness displayed higher levels of systolic blood pressure. This indicated that they were more successful in utilising active strategies in coping with stress.

Similarly, Moran (2002) asserts that hardy people are not only able to deal with stressors more effectively. They are also less prone to stress related illness and other insidious effects of stress. According to Moran, hardy people may deal with stress better by decreasing negative feelings, or by taking direct action in actively modifying the source of stress. A study by Bartone (as cited in Moran, 2002) on the relationship between hardiness and illness in bus drivers and army assistance workers also found that those individuals who had a high amount of illness scored lower on the hardiness scale than those who had little illness. Based on the results obtained from his study, Bartone concludes that hardiness plays a protective role that helps people cope with extreme stressor situations.



The results obtained from the above mentioned studies confirm that direct interaction takes place between an individual's levels of hardiness and the extent to which he manages to process and cope with stressful events. The results also verify that a positive relationship exists between hardiness and the levels of mental and physical health experienced by an individual. The intention of this present study will be to determine whether the positive results obtained from research studies in a general work environment can be extended to the ability of expatriates to cope with the pressures exerted on them while on international assignment.

### **7.6.3. Relationship between hardiness and expatriation**

As an expatriate, the person is required to remain positive towards constant changes in his work, social, and personal environment, and to find innovative solutions to the problems facing him or her. The person is also required to view these constant changes as being stimulating and conducive to personal growth. In this regard, Kobasa (as cited in Pott, 1998: 53) asserts that one of the critical functions of hardiness is to serve as a buffer that leads the individual to experience stress differently, and facilitates his ability to activate effective coping mechanisms in dealing with the problems facing them.

No directly relevant research studies could be found that evaluate any relationships between Kobasa's hardiness and expatriates' ability to successfully adjust to the pressures of being on international assignment in a foreign country. However, it is deemed appropriate to take note of the observations made by Black et al (1999), who refer to the fact that expatriates' ability to cope effectively provides them with a significant "buffer" against the stress that accompanies their integration into the foreign environment. Black et al make mention of well-adjusted expatriates who are able to develop "*stability zones that function like harbours in a storm*". These zones may include the expatriates spending time expressing their thoughts in diaries, exercising hobbies or other meaningful activities, or engaging in religious worship. By making use of these activities, expatriates are able to withdraw from the constant pressure of having to solve complex business problems in an environment which they do not understand.



Adler (1997) also refers to “*stability zones*” utilised by effective expatriates for coping with the stresses of expatriation. Adler specifically indicates that the best method of coping utilised by the successful expatriate would depend on the particular individual and situation involved. Examples of such effective coping mechanisms mentioned by Adler would be participation in regular physical exercise, practicing meditation and relaxation techniques, keeping a journal, playing a musical instrument, listening to records, or watching video movies in one's native language.

In adjusting to the work environment in the host country, Adler (1997) indicates that the successful expatriate is able to reduce the stress by recognising the underlying causes, and by modifying their expectations and behaviour accordingly. The person is also able to prioritise and concentrate his energy on only the most critical tasks, such as to clearly define their responsibilities, and educate their seniors in the parent company on the cultural and business differences that exist between headquarters and the off-shore operations. A very important point made in this regard by Adler (1997), is that the exact nature of the stability zone and coping mechanisms utilised by the expatriates is less important than their recognition of the highly stressful nature of moving into a new culture, and their development of the appropriate stress reduction technique that works for them.

Neither Black et al (1999) nor Adler (1997) refer directly to the concept of hardiness as a facilitator in dealing with stress. However, it becomes evident from their description of the person's ability to cope by making use of “buffers” and “stability zones” that they are referring to a construct similar to the hardiness concept as discussed by Kobasa (1982). Taking into account these similarities, Kobasa's concept of hardiness seems to have a direct impact on the person's ability to cope with the conditions in the constantly changing expatriate environment, and was consequently included in the study.



In summary, Kobasa's theory hypothesises that a person indicating higher levels of hardiness prefers to rely on active, cognitive, transformational coping strategies which act to cognitively transform a potentially negative event into a growth producing experience. These two mechanisms, in turn, lead to a reduction in the amount of psychological distress experienced by the individual. They also contribute to the long-term psychological well-being of the individual (Harrison et al, 2002; Gonella, 1999). On the other hand, the individual who indicates lower levels of hardiness is more likely to make use of distancing, avoidance, and emotionally focused coping strategies, which lead to the person being more prone towards stress-related illnesses and other negative effects of stress (Harrison et al, 2002; Bissonnette, 1998).

From a general life and work perspective, the research studies included in this study confirm Kobasa's hypothesis that a strong correlation exists between hardiness and the ability to cope with pressure. From an expatriate adjustment perspective, the observations made by both Black et al (1999) and Adler (1997) clearly indicate that the "buffers" and coping mechanisms incorporated into Kobasa's concept of hardiness are of critical importance in facilitating the expatriate's successful adjustment and performance while on assignment. As mentioned earlier, one of the objectives of this present study is to confirm the relevance of hardiness as a facilitator of the expatriate's ability to cope with the stress associated with being on international assignment in a foreign country.

### **7.7. Expatriate personality**

An aspect playing a role in explaining expatriates' successful adjustment while on assignment would be individual personality (Cascio & Aguinis, 2005; Shin et al, 2003; Van der Bank & Rothman, 2002; Guthrie & Ash, 2001). In order to understand the impact of personality on expatriates' adjustment while on international assignment, it is viewed important to obtain a clear view on the concept of personality, as well as its components and characteristics. In this section, individual personality will be discussed within the framework of the "global five factor" model of personality as derived from the Sixteen Factor Personality Questionnaire (Cattell et al, 1988).



Kaplan and Sadock (1991: 128) define personality as “*the totality of emotional and behavioural traits that characterise the person in day-to-day living under ordinary conditions; it is relatively stable and predictable*”. Similarly, Guthrie and Ronald (2001) indicate that a person’s “*personality is a relatively stable precursor of behaviour; it underlies an enduring style of thinking, feeling and acting*”. Moran (2002) adds that personality is not an isolated variable, and that it affects the individual’s involvement with his social environment.

A more comprehensive definition of personality is provided by Piedmont (1998: 2), who defines personality as “*the intrinsic organisation of an individual’s mental world that is stable over time and consistent over situations*”. Piedmont views personality as a dynamic structure that is constantly responding to needs that arise from within and without the individual. Personality as an entity commences in a basic uncomplicated form as a newborn baby, and becomes more sophisticated over time as the person matures. These changes also follow a lawful and orderly path. Piedmont highlights four important aspects included in his definition of personality:

Firstly, personality represents a structured system by which individuals organise themselves and orient the world around them. The system is clearly located *within* the person and is not imposed by the environment. Piedmont (1998: 2) warns that the role of environmental forces such as culture, context, and situations in shaping personality should not be excluded. However, he also indicates that within each personality there is a specific ‘core’ that provides the basis for the person’s needs, the way in which the person perceives and interpret the external world, and the goals he ultimately pursues in life.

Secondly, personality remains constant irrespective of changes taking place in the surrounding environment. Although specific behaviours may change from one context to the next, who the person is and how he perceives the world remains the same. Although the individuals’ behaviours may change, the personal goals pursued by the person remain very much the same (Piedmont, 1998: 2).



Thirdly, personality remains stable over time. This means that the inherent constructs and preferences included in the individual personality remain consistent throughout his life (Piedmont, 1998: 2).

Fourthly, personality consists of a number of relatively stable traits that, although not directly observable, have a direct impact on the behaviours displayed by the individual (Piedmont, 1998: 2).

Meyer et al (1990: 5) define a personality trait as a constellation of covariant functional behavioural patterns that are invoked by equivalent stimulation-situations. Personality traits are not directly observable, and are inferred by means of deductive reasoning. According to Meyer et al (1990: 5), the human being and its various components is a highly complex phenomenon. As a result, they indicate that more than 30 different definitions, models, and theories of personality exist that attempt to classify personality and its various traits (also referred to as characteristics).

For the purposes of this study, it was decided to make use of the five global factors of personality as derived from the Sixteen Factor Personality Questionnaire developed by Dr Raymond Cattell (Cattell et al, 1988). In the following paragraphs, the global five factor model of personality and its various sub-components will be discussed in more detail.

### **7.7.1. Five factor model of personality**

One of the most well-known models in identifying the inherent characteristics included in the individual personality is referred to as the five factor model of personality (Institute for Personality and Ability Testing, 2007). According to Taylor and De Bruin (2006: 3), the five-factor model is widely considered as being the preferred measurement paradigm for personality in a numerical context, both on an applied and on a clinical basis.



Taylor and De Bruin (2006) assert that the five-factor model of personality is the result of research that was conducted making use of the so-called lexical approach to personality description. The lexical hypothesis assumes that most socially relevant and prominent individual differences will become classified as single words in natural language. Therefore, the terms used in describing personality in the lexical model are also the terms that people would use in everyday language to describe themselves and others.

According to Taylor and De Bruin (2006), the big five model of personality is not based on only one specific theory of personality. The model is the result of numerous factor analyses of existing personality inventories which indicated very similar structures when factor analysed. Straker (2007) differs from Taylor and De Bruin in this regard, asserting that Dr. Raymond Cattell was “the father of the big five”. According to Straker (2007), Cattell was the first person to derive five global factors of personality during the 1960s during his investigations on the sixteen primary scales included in the Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire (16PF).

The five global factors identified by Cattell (Cattell et al, 1988) are the following: Extraversion, Anxiety proneness, Openness, Independence, and Self-control. Cattell was of the strong opinion that each of these factors is related to one another, and that some of the 16PF primary scales appear in more than only one of the five factors. Cattell’s approach in this regard included an important theoretical difference with more recent researchers of the big five model of personality such as Goldberg, and Costa and McCrae, who view each of the factors to be largely independent of the others (Institute for Personality and Ability Testing, 2007). Despite this, Karson et al (1997) indicates that a strong similarity exists among Cattell’s five global factor model and the other two most commonly accepted five-factor models, notwithstanding differences in the names of the factors. A summary of the three most well-known versions of the five factor model of personality can be seen in Table 7.2 below:

**Table 7.2.: Three most commonly accepted five-factor personality models**

<b>Cattell</b>	<b>Goldberg</b>	<b>Costa and McCrae</b>
1. Extraversion	1. Surgency	1. Extraversion
2. Anxiety	2. Emotional stability	2. Neuroticism
3. Openness	3. Intellect	3. Openness
4. Independence	4. Agreeableness	4. Agreeableness
5. Self-control	5. Conscientiousness	5. Conscientiousness

(Institute for Personality and Ability Testing, 2007)

A study conducted by Conn and Rieke (as cited in Lord, 2000: 119) concludes that the definitions of the 16PF global factors as developed by Cattell show strong correlations with the interpretations of the five robust factors which make up the Five-Factor model developed by Costa and McCrae.

Based on the above mentioned discussions, it was decided to make use of the global five factor model of personality during this study as derived by Cattell from the 16PF to obtain an indication of the personality traits of the individuals that were sent on international assignments.

The main advantage of utilising the global scores during the analysis of individual personality as opposed to utilising all the primary scores of the 16PF is that the global scores are based on significantly more items than are the primary factor scores. As a result, they are therefore also more reliable (Karson et al, 1997: 70). The primary scores of the 16PF are typically based on 10 to 11 items each. By contrast, each of the global scores is based on from 40 items to 51 items (Karson et al, 1997: 70). Therefore, no single item can have much effect on a global score, and the global scores are more robust than the primary scale scores. As a result, more confidence can be placed in global scores than in primary scale scores during the analysis process.



According to Karson et al (1997), the major disadvantage of using the global scores of the 16PF in analysing individual personality is that they can conceal important elements in an individual's personality. To illustrate this point, Karson et al (1997) use the example of three individuals whose Extraversion global scores are exactly the same. Despite the similarities of the three individuals' scores on the Extraversion global factor, further investigations may indicate that they have significantly different scores on the component factors underlying Extraversion, and therefore would have equally different personality traits. The first individual may demonstrate low levels of sociability (Outgoing), but may also display a compulsive need to be near others. The second individual may tend to cling to others in order to cope with an intense fear of rejection. The third person's results may be indicative of somebody who is warm, outgoing, engaging, and socially effective.

As can be seen from the above mentioned example, a person's score on a global factor does not provide as much information compared to the scores on its component factors. In this regard, Karson et al (1997: 77) assert that it would be important to conduct a more detailed diagnostic investigation on the available individual components when assessing individuals, as opposed to only utilising a mechanistic approach by focusing only on the person's results on the five global factors.

The Institute for Personality and Ability Testing (2007) also cautions that the more specific primary factors of the 16PF should be incorporated when personality assessment is conducted for the purposes of detailed feedback or the prediction of future individual behaviour. According to the Institute, research has shown that more specific factors such as the primary scales of the 16PF tend to predict actual behaviour better than the five global factors.



### **7.7.2. Primary personality factors included in global five personality factor model**

In order to obtain a clearer understanding of the primary personality factors that constitute the global five personality factors, these primary factors will now be discussed:

#### **7.7.2.1. Extraversion**

The first global factor included by Cattell (Cattell et al, 1988: 117) into the five global personality factors is referred to as Extraversion (also referred to by Cattell as *Exvia*). Cattell defines Extraversion as a broad temperament trait that indicates the degree to which an individual enjoys being around other people, likes excitement and stimulation, and is cheerful by nature. Harvey and Novicevic (2001) define extraversion as “*the ability to successfully assert oneself and gain acceptance in the social environment through social relationships*”. Typical dimensions included in the Extraversion dimension would be being sociable, gregarious, assertive, etcetera. In addition to liking people and preferring large groups and gatherings, extraverts also tend to be more assertive, active, and talkative (Straker, 2007).

The alternative to Extraversion is referred to as Introversion (also referred to by Cattell as *Invia*). According to Piedmont (1998), it is more difficult to portray the characteristics associated with the introvert compared to an extraverted personality. It is important to note that introversion should be regarded as the absence of extraversion, and not necessarily in the negative sense as its opposite. Within this framework, introverts should be viewed as being reserved as opposed to aloof, independent as opposed to weak, and steady as opposed to slow. Introverts may sometimes refer to shyness as a preference to be alone. It can therefore not be automatically assumed that introverts necessarily suffer from social anxiety (Piedmont, 1998).



Although introverts would not typically display the high levels of enthusiasm associated with extraverts, Costa and McCrae (1992) assert that introverts should therefore not automatically be viewed as being unhappy or pessimistic. Piedmont (1998) agrees with Costa and McCrae in this regard. He is of the view that the clear distinctions made on the definition of introversion form one of the most important conceptual advances of research on the big five-factor model and personality in general.

A summary of each of the primary 16PF factors incorporated by Cattell (2006; 1988; 1970) into the Extraversion global score is herewith provided:

**i. Factor A (Extravert)**

Factor A measures the individual's emotional perspective towards others – the extent to which the person seeks interaction with others and gains fulfilment out of the contact with them. Cattell (2006) also refers to this as the person's "*affiliative tendency*".

According to Cattell (Cattell et al, 1988: 81), individuals who rate themselves high on Factor A (sten score of 8 to 10) are inclined to be friendly, adaptable, accommodating, cooperative, caring, and sensitive towards others. They prefer occupations where they are allowed to deal with people, and where they can function in a social group context. They are cheerful in their interactions with others, more open towards criticism, and more effective in remembering people's names.

Individuals who rate low on Factor A (sten score of 1 to 3) tend to be more concerned about facts or concepts than in interactions with people. They may care about other people, but are not keen on engaging in "small talk" or casual interactions with others. They may also tend to prefer individual activities where they can spend time on their own (Cattell et al, 1988: 81).



## **ii. Factor F (Enthusiastic)**

Factor F provides an indication of an individual's natural enthusiasm or energy levels (Cattell et al, 1988: 87). According to Cattell, individuals who rate themselves higher on Enthusiasm (sten score of 8 to 10) tend to be more uninhibited, playful, and adventurous in nature. They may tend to lose interest quickly in activities, and prefer moving rapidly from one area of interest to another. Consequently, they are more suited towards occupations where they are allowed to be involved in a number of activities, without becoming intensely involved with any specific one.

Individuals who score low on Enthusiasm (sten score of 1 to 3) tend to be more deliberate, cautious, careful, focused, and serious-minded individuals. They usually prefer concentrating on specific areas that interest them, and tend to be more suitable towards technical specialist positions where they are allowed to specialise in a selected area of expertise (Cattell et al, 1988: 88).

## **iii. Factor H (Adventurous)**

Cattell (Cattell et al, 1988: 91) contends that Factor H measures the extent to which the individual takes risks in a social context. Included in the definition is the person's general orientation towards risk taking of any nature.

High scorers (sten score of 8 to 10) are comfortable to take the initiative during social activities where they are required to interact, network, and engage in small talk with others. They may also tend to be more daring on a social and an adventure-seeking level. In the extreme, they would display a strong preference towards taking risks and "living on the edge" (Cattell et al, 1988: 91).



Low scorers (sten scores of 1 to 3) are normally more reserved and may tend to avoid interacting with others in an informal social level. They prefer having close relationships with a small number of friends, as opposed to informally chatting with people in a larger social context. They also tend to avoid taking risks in general and would typically prefer pursuing less risky opportunities (Cattell et al, 1988: 91).

#### **iv. Factor N (Shrewd)**

Factor N refers to openness and the extent to which the individual is willing to allow others to get to know him or herself. It also refers to the ability to refrain from sharing with others information communicated in confidence (Cattell, 1988: 99).

High scorers (sten score of 8 to 1) tend to be cautious and conscious about opening up towards others. They take longer to disclose information on themselves towards others, and may therefore be more difficult to get to know (Cattell et al, 1988: 99).

Low scorers (sten score of 1 to 3) tend to be much quicker at disclosing information, and are not very concerned about sometimes sharing personal information with anybody who is willing to listen. Others may view them as being more open and forthright. However, in the process they may at times tend to share confidential information with others without always taking into account the consequences (Cattell et al, 1988: 99).

#### **v. Factor Q2 (Self-sufficient)**

Factor Q2 refers to the propensity of the individual to seek group support or function on his own. According to Cattell (Cattell et al, 1988: 105), individuals scoring high on Self-sufficiency (sten score of 8 to 10) prefer solving problems on their own. They prefer acting autonomously and would typically show a preference towards establishing and running their own businesses. They may experience difficulty delegating tasks to subordinates, and may need to be careful not to isolate themselves from others.



Low scorers (sten scores of 1 to 3) tend to prefer functioning within a group context. They place a high emphasis on teamwork and cooperation, and may experience difficulty functioning autonomously and on their own. They typically prefer working in a corporate environment where they can provide and receive high levels of social support, and where the emphasis falls on the achievement of team objectives rather than individual objectives (Cattell et al, 1988: 105).

### **7.7.2.2. Anxiety**

Anxiety refers to the extent to which the individual is prone to experience anxiety, depression, vulnerability, and other negative emotions in response to his external environment (Cattell et al, 1988: 118). Within the context of the big five personality model, Anxiety is also referred to as the opposite of Emotional Stability.

The following personality factors are included in the Anxiety factor (Cattell et al, 1988):

#### **i. Factor C (Stable)**

Cattell et al (1988: 118) contend that Factor C measures the extent to which an individual is prone towards mood swings in his emotional life.

High scorers on Stability (sten scores of 8 to 10) are usually stable in their experience of emotions, and would typically not be prone towards displaying significant mood swings. Consequently, they would tend to be more emotionally mature in remaining focused and rational when placed in stressful circumstances (Cattell et al, 1988: 83).

Low scorers on Factor C (sten score of 1 to 3) tend to experience a wider range of emotional fluctuations in their adjustment to normal life pressures. According to (Cattell et al, 1988: 83), low scorers also typically experience more difficulty coping with pressurised circumstances.



## **ii. Factor O (Apprehensive)**

Cattell et al (1988: 102) indicate that Factor O refers to apprehension within two dimensions. The first dimension refers to a general tendency to become anxious and stressed. The second dimension concerns a tendency to be overly harsh and critical towards oneself, which can also be associated with low self-esteem.

Individuals who score themselves high on apprehension (sten scores of 8 to 10) tend to be highly critical towards themselves. They may also show a tendency to experience higher levels of worry and self-reproach (Cattell et al, 1988: 101).

Low scorers (sten scores of 1 to 3) have a strong belief in their own abilities, and do not spend much time and effort on self-evaluation and introspection. They show high levels of self-confidence. However, Cattell et al (1988: 101) also warn that a person with a very low score on Apprehension may need to be careful not to become complacent, arrogant, and blind towards his own weaknesses and development areas.

## **iii. Factor L (Suspicious)**

Factor L provides an indication of the extent to which the individual is sceptical and suspicious towards others (Cattell et al, 1988: 97).

High scorers (sten score of 8 to 10) tend to be more cautious towards trusting others, and would prefer testing the trustworthiness of others first before showing a willingness to trust them. They tend to be sceptical towards the motives of others, and will not easily allow themselves to be manipulated by parties with ulterior motives. However, they also need to be careful not to become neurotic, imagining a hidden agenda when nothing actually exists (Cattell et al, 1988: 97).



Individuals with low scores on Suspicion (sten scores of 1 to 3) show a stronger tendency to trust others and take them at face value. The positive side of a low score on Suspicion is an intuitive propensity to connect with others, and to inherently trust their motives during one's interactions with them. The negative side to extremely low scores would be the person's tendency to become naïve in dealing with others, and a proneness to attract those who are not as trustworthy (Cattell et al, 1988: 97).

#### **iv. Factor Q4 (Tense)**

Factor Q4 refers to the individual's levels of patience in dealing with obstructions, problems and difficulties hampering progress and achievement of plans, pursuits, or objectives (Cattell, 1988: 107).

A high score on Tension (sten score of 8 to 10) indicates towards an individual who is always busy, results-orientated, and focused on achieving progress. The person easily becomes frustrated with perceived delays. In the process, he may tend to display signs of impatience, tension, and irritability (Cattell et al, 1988: 109).

Low scorers (sten score of 1 to 3) tend to be relaxed and patient. They deal with the issues facing them in a calm and relaxed way, without becoming overly upset or stressed. Unfortunately, this could also lead to a loss of internal urgency and action (Cattell et al, 1988: 108).

#### **7.7.2.3. Openness**

Cattell et al (1988) refer to Openness as the individual's willingness to experience new or different things and is curious about him- or herself and the world. Typical dimensions included in the Openness dimension would be being imaginative, curious, original, broadminded, etc. The Big Five Personality factor equivalent to Openness is referred to as Receptivity (Lord, 2000).



On the 16PF, a combination of the following factors provides an overall score on Openness (Lord, 2000: 77). As can be seen in the previous paragraphs, Factor A was also included as a contributing factor in the Extraversion global factor.

**i. Factor A (Extrovert)**

Factor A has already been defined in the discussion on Extraversion as a dimension included in the global five factor personality model.

**ii. Factor M (Imaginative)**

Factor M refers to the individual's inclination towards practicality versus creativity. Imaginative also incorporates a strictly hands-on operational approach towards life, versus an inventive strategic perspective (Cattell, 2006).

Individuals who score themselves highly on Imaginative (sten score of 8 to 10) are typically viewed as being innovative, original, and perceptive. They often prefer coming up with new concepts and ideas, but may not necessarily be interested in the practical implementation of such ideas and concepts. They prefer making use of a strategic approach in dealing with problems. In the process, they may tend to overlook the practical details involved with the problems. When placed under extreme pressure, they may tend to become obsessive about small details that they would not give any attention to under normal circumstances (Cattell et al, 1988: 98).

Low scorers (indicating a sten score of 1 to 3) prefer making use of a strongly factual and hands-on approach when making decisions. They place a high emphasis on the achievement of immediate operational objectives and deadlines. Their focus is generally tactical and short term. However, in the process they may at times overlook wider meanings and implications, and can be overly critical about details. When placed under extreme pressure they may show a propensity to catastrophise over potentially severe consequences (Cattell et al, 1988: 98).



### **iii. Factor I (Sensitive)**

According to Cattell (2006), Factor I is a relatively complex factor. It measures two characteristics: factual objectivity versus intuitive subjectivity, and tough mindedness versus tender mindedness.

Individuals scoring high on Sensitivity (sten score 8 to 10) tend to be considerate, tactful, perceptive. They would show a stronger propensity to make decisions based on the more subjective evaluation of the personal values or the interests of others. These characteristics make them more suitable towards roles that require high levels of interpersonal sensitivity. However, they may also at times lack objectivity, and may at times tend to overlook the facts on specific issues (Cattell et al, 1988: 93).

Low scorers (sten score 1 to 3) tend to be logical, rational and objective, and prefer basing their decisions on facts and potential consequences. Consequently, they tend to be more suitable towards roles that require objective and factual analysis of facts and ideas, as opposed to taking care of people's personal needs and interests. However, in the extreme they may lack sensitivity and diplomacy. They may also be out of touch with their own emotions and needs, as well as those of others (Cattell et al, 1988: 93).

### **iv. Factor Q1 (Liberal)**

Cattell et al (1988) assert that Factor Q1 concerns the individual's orientation to change, novelty, and innovation. High scorers (sten score of 8 to 10) are viewed as free thinkers who prefer functioning in a constantly changing, flexible and dynamic environment. They tend to become bored and lose interest quickly in situations that do not provide sufficient change and variety. In the extreme, they may tend to go overboard by initiating change solely for the sake of change, or by becoming overly intolerant towards tradition, convention, and stability (Cattell et al, 1988: 103).



A low score on Liberal (sten score 1 to 3) suggests a more conservative individual who prefers the traditional, established, and tried and time-tested approach. The person prefers maintaining the existing status quo, and may tend to become suspicious and resistant towards situations that require constant adjustment to change. In the extreme, they may tend to obstruct change and may be viewed by others as being reactive (Cattell et al, 1988).

#### **7.7.2.4. Independence**

Independence refers to the extent to which a person is able to get along with other people, and has compassion for others (Institute for Personality and Ability Testing, 2007). Typical dimensions included in the Independence dimension would be being persuasive, straightforward, wilful, etcetera. Cattell et al (1988) incorporate the following primary 16PF factors into the Independence factor:

##### **i. Factor E (Assertiveness)**

Factor E provides an indication of the extent to which an individual is dominant versus submissive during his interactions with others (Cattell et al, 1988: 85).

People scoring high on Assertiveness enjoy taking charge of others. They prefer being in positions of power, and often possess well-developed natural leadership qualities. They enjoy functioning in a competitive environment where they are required to beat other opposing parties (Cattell et al, 1988: 86).

Low scorers tend to be more submissive, and prefer meeting the needs and interests of others – often to their own detriment. They do not like dealing with conflict, and place a high emphasis on ensuring harmony and cooperation with people they come in contact with. They typically do not prefer being placed in leadership positions (Cattell et al, 1988: 86).



## **ii. Factor H (Adventurous)**

Factor H evaluates the individual's ability and willingness to take initiative within a social setting (Cattell et al, 1988). Cattell (2006) later adds that an orientation towards risk taking in general is also included to some extent in the Adventurous factor.

Individuals scoring high on Factor H prefer taking the initiative during social interactions, and enjoy participating in activities such as networking, sales, and general conversation. They also tend to display more boldness and self-assurance in social and physical danger situations. In the extreme, they may display a very strong preference towards adventure or "living on the edge" (Cattell, 1988: 92).

Low scorers tend to be more introverted and may experience difficulty taking the initiative during interpersonal situations. They prefer having more intimate relations with a smaller number of close friends, as opposed to having to interact with many strangers in an unstructured group context. They may also tend to avoid situations that are viewed as being overly risky and uncertain (Cattell et al, 1988: 91).

## **iii. Factor L: Suspicious**

Suspicion reflects to the balance between trust and scepticism. Suspicion has already been discussed in Paragraph 7.7.2.2 of this chapter.

## **iv. Factor Q1: Liberal**

Factor Q1 refers to an individual's perspective towards change and unfamiliarity. The factor has already been described in earlier paragraphs.



#### **7.7.2.5. Self-control**

Self-control is defined by Cattell (2006) as the extent to which the person effectively and efficiently plans, organises, and carries out tasks. The big five personality factor equivalent to Self-control is referred to as Conscientiousness (Straker, 2007). Typical dimensions included in the Self-control dimension would be being dependable, reliable, careful, thorough, etcetera.

##### **i. Factor F (Enthusiastic)**

Factor F provides an indication of an individual's natural levels of enthusiasm or excitement. The factor has already been described in earlier paragraphs of this chapter.

##### **ii. Factor G (Conscientious)**

Factor G assesses an individual's perspective towards moral concerns, regulations, and social expectations. According to Cattell et al (1988: 89), conscientiousness is a "*measure of ethical and moral responsibility and dutifulness*".

Individuals scoring high on conscientiousness (indicating a sten score of 8 to 10) are usually highly ethically driven and responsible. They also tend to be driven by clearly defined rules and principles.

Low scorers (indicating a sten score of 1 to 3) tend to be more "undependable". They show a stronger propensity to view rules as mere guidelines that can be broken or ignored depending on the circumstances at hand. Although this does not necessarily mean that the person is unethical in his actions, it does indicate a different perspective towards life where the achievement of desired results is viewed as more important than the adherence to rules and social standards (Cattell et al, 1988: 88).



### **iii. Factor M (Imaginative)**

Factor M refers to practical realism versus creativity. This factor has already been discussed in more detail earlier in this chapter.

### **iv. Factor Q3 (Control)**

Factor Q3 is related to the individual's tendency towards perfectionism (Institute for Personality and Ability Testing, 2007).

Cattell et al (1988: 106) state that a person scoring high on Control (sten score of 8 to 10) typically displays socially accepted responses, self-control, persistence, a consideration towards others, as well as a high regard for etiquette and social reputation. Cattell et al (1988: 107) also associate a high score on Factor Q3 with occupations that require high levels of objectivity, balance, and decisiveness. In extreme cases, these characteristics could lead to an individual becoming rigid, inflexible, and unable to adjust to quickly changing conditions. According to the Institute of Personality and Ability Testing (2007), individuals scoring high on Control tend to lose efficiency as the amount of structure provided in their external environment decreases.

A low score on Control (sten score of 1 to 3) is associated by Cattell (2006) with an individual who tends to be more flexible, adaptable, and spontaneous. In the extreme, this individual may show signs of procrastination, perceived laziness, and an inability to hold him or herself accountable.

### **7.7.3. Relationship between global five personality factors and expatriation**

Van der Bank and Rothman (2002) assert that personality characteristics play a central role in predicting whether individuals will succeed in their expatriate assignments. Research conducted by Caligiuri (2000) also confirms the role of personality in expatriate adjustment and success.



However, Guthrie and Ash (2003) assert that there is a lack of definite research confirming the strong relationship between individual personality and expatriate success. One of the possible reasons highlighted by Grove and Hallowell (2006) for this lack of scientific support would be the fact that paper-and-pencil personality assessments were not found very successful in predicting future success as an expatriate. Grove and Hallowell (2006) also assert that it is not possible to reliably predict in advance whether an individual will be successful as an expatriate. According to them, there are too many factors having an impact on the individual's success, many having no relation to the individual. For this reason, Grove and Hallowell go so far as to indicate that expatriate candidate assessment can have only one attainable objective: *“to identify candidates who are most at risk of failure in an unfamiliar culture due to obvious concerns or low readiness”*.

Despite the criticism towards using personality assessment instruments during the selection of expatriates, the results obtained from such assessments can provide very useful information on the adjustment processes used by individuals during their adjustment to the unknown environment in the foreign country (Cascio & Aguinis, 2005; Guthrie & Ash, 2003).

Of interest in this regard would be the findings of a study conducted by Adler (1997), which provided a ranking of key characteristics of the successful expatriate as identified by multinational companies:

**Table 7.3.: Key characteristics of the international manager**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Percentage*</b>
Strategic awareness	71%
Adaptability in new situations	67%
Sensitivity to different cultures	60%
Ability to work in international teams	56%
Language skills	46%
Understanding international marketing	46%
Relationship skills	40%
International negotiation skills	38%
Self-reliance	27%
High task-orientation	19%
Open, non-judgmental personality	19%
Understanding international finance	13%
Awareness of own cultural background	2%

\* Percentage of respondents ranking a characteristic as among the five most important

(Adler, 1997)

As illustrated by the results displayed in Table 7.3, the dimensions included in the global five model of personality (Extraversion, Anxiety, Openness, Independence, and Self-control) can at face value be associated quite easily with almost all of the essential characteristics required by successful expatriates. Three potential exceptions in this regard would be “Understanding international marketing”, “Understanding international finance”, and “Awareness of own cultural background”, which can be associated with the knowledge and experience base of the individual.



An example of the possible relations existing between the big five factors and the key international manager characteristics would be Extraversion, which can be associated with the following potential key expatriate characteristics included in Table 7.3: Sensitivity to different cultures, ability to work in international teams, language skills, relationship skills, and international negotiation skills.

A more detailed discussion will now be conducted on the relationships found in research between the global five personality factors and successful expatriation. During the literature study conducted for this study, limited research references could be identified indicating any significant relationships between the global five personality factors as identified by Cattell, and successful expatriation. However, a number of other researchers have published positive results confirming the relationship between personality and expatriation, by making use of the other two most commonly accepted five-factor personality models presented by Goldberg, and Costa and McCrae. These research findings will also be incorporated into the study. In order for a meaningful discussion to be conducted in this regard, it would be important to keep in mind the findings of Conn and Rieke (as cited in Lord, 2000: 119) and Karson et al (1997) that strong similarities exist among Cattell's five global factor model and the five-factor personality models of Goldberg, and Costa and McCrae, despite the differences in the names of the factors included in the respective models (a more detailed discussion in this regard can be seen in Paragraph 7.7.1 in this chapter).

### **7.7.3.1. Extraversion**

From an expatriate perspective, Cascio and Aguinis (2005) indicate that a positive correlation exists between Extraversion and the interpersonal aspects associated with expatriate performance. They also found that higher scores on Extraversion are related to more effective teamwork – especially in positions where working in a team comprises an important component of the work.



Research conducted by Caligiuri (2000) indicates that extraversion is negatively correlated with expatriates' desire to end their assignments prematurely. On the other hand, Caligiuri also found that low Extraversion is a significant predictor of the expatriates' propensity to prematurely end assignments. Further studies conducted by Mount (as cited in Van der Bank & Rothmann, 2002) suggest that Extraversion is related to the job performance of expatriates, specifically related to their levels of motivation, commitment and interpersonal relationships with others.

From a more practical perspective, both Guthrie et al (2003) and Black et al (1999: 60) agree with the above mentioned research findings, indicating that the ability and willingness of the expatriate to engage in meaningful relationships with others has a positive impact on his adjustment to the external environment. According to them, the expatriate's willingness to develop relationships will to a large extent assist him to develop meaningful relationships with local nationals. In the process, the person will also have access to very valuable information relating to the work and the social environment.

Taking into account the above mentioned research findings and observations, indications are that Extraversion as an individual component of the global five personality factor model can potentially make a positive contribution in explaining some of the results of the study. It was therefore decided to include Extraversion in the study.

#### **7.7.3.2. Anxiety (Emotional Stability)**

The big five personality factor equivalent to Anxiety is referred to as Emotional Stability (Lord, 2000). From a general work perspective, research indicates that Emotional Stability (the opposite of Anxiety) is positively correlated with job performance in almost all work environments (Cascio & Aguinis, 2005; Van der Bank & Rothmann, 2002).



Within an expatriate perspective, emotional stability is considered a critical personal characteristic that enables the individual to cope with the pressures related to the unstructured and disorganised expatriate work and living environment (Cascio & Aguinis, 2005; Melles, 2005).

According to Van Oudenhoven et al (2002), emotional stability should be considered as a necessary characteristic of the successful expatriate. In their review of critical success factors for expatriates, they indicate that emotional stability emerges as the strongest predictor of expatriate performance across all the various expatriate manager job types, varying from executive to operator.

Van Oudenhoven et al (2002) specifically include the emotional stability factor as a facilitative factor in the person's ability to manage the stresses associated with the various phases of the international career cycle. They define emotional stability as *"one's ability to manage difficult and challenging situations without suffering from apprehension or a lapse into insecurity"*. Jordan and Cartwright (1998) agree with Van Oudenhoven et al (2002) in this regard, indicating that emotional stability plays a critical role in coping with the culture shock and other pressures associated with the individual cross-cultural experience.

Further research conducted by Caligiuri (2000) found that emotional stability correlates positively with expatriates' commitment to remain on assignment. However, when it was entered in a regression analyses with other personality characteristics, emotional stability did not emerge as being of high importance. In this regard, Van der Bank and Rothmann (2002) indicate that other factors such as family adjustment also impact considerably on the emotional health of expatriates, and that personality forms only one small part of an expatriate's stress-coping mechanism.



The purpose of including Anxiety (Emotional Stability) in this research is specifically to determine its importance in promoting the expatriate's adjustment to the environment in the host country, as well as to determine the interaction that may exist between this factor and sense of coherence and hardiness as internal health protective factors. In this regard, Van der Bank and Rothman (2002) are of the opinion that "psychological strengths" such as the sense of coherence could be included to support the emotional stability dimension in facilitating the expatriate's effective work performance, and in acting as a buffer against the expatriate's desire to prematurely terminate the assignment.

### **7.7.3.3. Openness**

The big five personality factor equivalent to Openness is referred to as Receptivity (Lord, 2000). Harvey and Novicevic (2001) provide a more expatriate-specific definition for the Openness/Receptivity factor, describing it as the expatriates' "*ability to maintain an awareness of the environment to allow for adaptation of their behaviour to changing circumstances in that environment*".

Van der Bank and Rothmann (2002) indicate that individuals scoring higher on Openness have more positive attitudes toward learning, experiencing new things, and perceiving challenges as opportunities for growth. Therefore, they hypothesise that individuals high in receptivity are likely to perceive greater personal accomplishment in their interactive adjustment to the host country and job performance.

Consistent with the above mentioned opinions, Caligiuri (2000) suggests that successful expatriates must possess "*cognitive complexity and intuitive perceptual acuity*". These attributes enable them to accurately observe and interpret the local culture, and perform in an unknown and ambiguous work environment. Caligiuri also indicates that greater openness is positively related to expatriate adjustment, because individuals who indicate higher scores on this personality characteristic tend to be more flexible in accepting the host culture. They are also less judgemental in their evaluation of what is right and wrong, and what is appropriate and inappropriate.



From a practical perspective, Black et al (1999) refer to the concept of Openness as “flexibility”, which they define as the expatriate’s readiness to try new things. According to them, expatriates who are sufficiently adventurous and willing to expose themselves to new ways of doing things are much more likely to adjust effectively to the foreign environment in the host country.

In line with the opinion expressed by Black et al, Van Oudenhoven et al (2002) refer to Openness as open mindedness, indicating the extent to which the expatriate “*has an open and unprejudiced attitude towards different cultural norms and values*”. According to them, expatriates who are more open minded tend to be less judgmental and more tolerant towards the way people from other cultures live.

Taking into account the above mentioned observations, the inference can therefore be made that expatriates who are able to accurately interpret the social environment, and who possess the perceptual ability to correctly observe and translate the local culture, should be able to perform successfully in the more complex and ambiguous work environment in the host country. Within the framework of these discussions, it was decided to include Openness as a factor in this study.

#### **7.7.3.4. Independence (Accommodation)**

According to Lord (2000), the big five personality factor equivalent to Independence is referred to as Accommodation. From an expatriate point of view, Harvey and Novicevic (2001) refer to the accommodating expatriate (scoring low on Independence) as a team player who possesses the ability to form meaningful social relationships, alliances, and to establish valuable alliances in the work and business environment.



Van Weerdenburg (2006) refers to Accommodation as the ability to build rapport, which he views as a critical requirement for interacting successfully with people from other cultures, as it promotes trusting relationships and a constructive work environment. Skills associated with building rapport would be the ability to match body language, build areas of common interest, and to manage areas of conflict. Black et al (1997) also assert that a person's ability to develop significant relationships with others has a positive impact on his adjustment to the expatriate environment.

Van der Bank and Rothman (2002) indicate that accommodating expatriates (scoring low on Independence) have a stronger ability to establish and sustain meaningful relationships within the work environment and in the general social environment. They also tend to be more adaptive, which also leads to them being more successful in completing their assignments. On the other hand, expatriates who score low on the Accommodation dimension (high on Independence) tend to be more argumentative, inflexible, uncooperative, uncaring, intolerant and disagreeable. As a result, they also tend to receive lower ratings on the quality of their relations with others at work, which in turn have a negative impact on their ability to integrate themselves into the social environment in the foreign country. Jordan and Cartwright (1998) are of the opinion that the Accommodation dimension may have more relevance to expatriate positions that require considerable interpersonal interaction with others.

From a practical research perspective, Van der Bank and Rothman (2002) found that Accommodation indicated an inverse correlation with expatriates' desire to end their assignments prematurely. Black and Gregersen (1999) report similar results, indicating that expatriates who are more accommodating tend to report higher levels of cross-cultural adjustment.



The above mentioned observations indicate that the expatriate's ability and willingness to be accommodating during his interactions with others in the expatriate environment is not only applicable to the person's ability to maintain positive relations with others in the work and personal environment. It also has direct relevance to the individual's expected willingness to successfully complete the international assignment. Based on these observations, it was decided to include Accommodation (and Independence as its inverse) as a dimension in this study.

#### **7.7.3.5. Self-control**

From a general work perspective, Lord (2002: 119) found Self-control to be the strongest and most consistent predictor of job performance. Cascio and Aguinis (2005) agree with Lord in this regard, indicating validity coefficients of between 0.23 and 0.31 across a variety of criterion types and occupational groups. These strong validities emphasise the importance of the Self-control factor as a variable to be taken into account as a predictor of overall job performance.

Within the framework of the expatriate environment, Harvey and Novicevic (2001) indicate that the predictive power of self-control towards domestic work performance can be extended to the expatriate arena. They quote Barrick and Mount, who identified Self-control as the most accurate single predictor of expatriate performance. Research conducted by Caligiuri (2000) confirms these results, indicating that self-control was positively associated with supervisor-rated performance for all expatriate occupational groups, as well as success in completing the international assignment. Commenting on these results, Van der Bank and Rothman (2002) come to the conclusion that an elevated level of self-control is positively related to expatriate work performance, as well as the successful completion of the expatriate assignment.



However, both Van der Bank and Rothman (2002) and the Institute of Personality and Ability Testing (2007) also caution against a person indicating too high levels of self-control. If the person tends to be overly controlled, the possibility exists that he may tend to place too much emphasis on the opinions of others towards him or herself. The individual may also tend to set himself unrealistically high and unattainable goals out of fear of disapproval by his peers or superiors.

According to Van der Bank and Rothman (2002), the danger of this situation is that the person may try too hard to meet the perceived expectations of others in order to hide his own underlying insecurity and lack of self-esteem (therefore over-reliance on the esteem of others). As the person is required to deal with the increased levels of responsibility as an expatriate in a more unstructured and ambiguous foreign environment, the possibility exists that he may not be able to cope with the significantly elevated levels of pressure. In the process, significant damage can be done to the person's self-esteem and belief in his own competence as a person and as an expatriate manager.

From the above mentioned discussions it becomes evident that the big five personality factors (incorporating Cattell's global five personality factors) have direct relevance to the expatriate's ability to succeed. In this regard, Kozloff (1996) indicates that the expatriate's actual job performance and his adjustment to the host country environment are two independent expatriate success factors that are dependent on specific underlying personality traits.

Within the framework of Cattell's five global personality factors, Guthrie and Ash (2003) come to the conclusion that expatriates who are more extroverted, open, accommodating (low on Independence) are more likely to successfully integrate themselves into the foreign environment, and less likely to indicate an inclination to end their assignment prematurely. Those individuals who are more emotionally stable and who display relatively high levels of self-control are more probable to have their work performance evaluated positively by their superiors.



From the above mentioned discussions, it is evident that the global five personality factors have direct relevance on the ability of the expatriate to effectively perform while on international assignment. It was therefore decided to include the five factors in this research project.

### **7.8. Summary**

In Chapter 7 a detailed investigation was conducted on the personal attributes and personality traits that facilitate the expatriate's ability to remain emotionally healthy and deal with the pressures related to being placed on an international assignment. This discussion forms the final part of Section 2 of this research, where the interaction between the expatriate and his external environment during the various phases of the international assignment was discussed. This discussion provides the theoretical background to the actual purpose of the present research, which is to determine whether relationships exist between the expatriate's levels of emotional health, personality, and his perception of the organisational climate while on international assignment, and to present the outcomes of the study as a model.

In Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7 of this study a detailed conceptual analysis was conducted on the dynamics involved with an expatriate being sent on an international assignment. Specific attention was given to the dynamic relationship that exists between the external expatriate environment, the ability of the person to cope with this environment, as well as the impact of the person's personality in successfully adjusting and performing as an expatriate. This investigation provides the theoretical basis for the practical research conducted in this study, which will be discussed in detail in Chapters 8, 9, and 10.