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The future of expatriation and which factors influence the decision between on-site, hybrid and remote assignment

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Master's in Human Resources Management and Organizational Consulting

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Department of Human Resources and Organizational Behavior

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Preface

This dissertation was submitted for the Master of Human Resources and Organizational Consulting at Iscte – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa.

The research described here was developed from October 2021 to October 2022, under the supervision of Dr. Atieh Mirfakhar, Integrated Researcher at ISCTE-IUL Department of Human Resources and Organizational Behavior.

Abstract

This work aimed to understand how the evolution of technology has influenced remote work and expatriations. To understand this, ten interviews were conducted with professionals, divided into three groups: Ex Expatriates, Expatriates, and Human Resources Professionals. These interviews helped to understand the personal experience of the interviewees and what they consider to be the future of expatriation. By analyzing the results, was concluded that several factors influence the decision of companies and expatriates when it comes to on-site, remote, or hybrid expatriations.

Looking at multinational companies, the type of industry in which these companies operate has an influence on the type of expatriation chosen. It was found that some industries do allow remote or hybrid expatriation, such as Information Technology, Marketing, or Consulting. On the other hand, some industries do not allow such options, requiring on-site expatriation, such as Medical Industries or Retail.

Focusing on the expatriate side, was found that some aspects influence their choice. Such as salary, perspectives of personal and professional growth, the possibility to work in international teams, the distance from the home country.

Companies are increasingly offering remote or hybrid expatriation. However, this study shows that even with the evolution of technology and remote expatriation, companies and expatriates still choose on-site expatriation because of the 360-degree experience that they would not enjoy with a remote or hybrid experience.

Keywords: Expatriation; Remote; On-site; Hybrid

Classification JEL: O33 - Technological Change: Choices and Consequences, Diffusion Processes; O15 - Human Resources, Human Development, Income Distribution, Migration.

Resumo

Este trabalho teve como objetivo compreender como a evolução da tecnologia tem influenciado o trabalho remoto e as expatriações. Para compreender isto, foram realizadas dez entrevistas com profissionais, divididos em três grupos: Ex Expatriados, Expatriados e Profissionais de Recursos Humanos.

Estas entrevistas serviram para compreender a experiência pessoal dos entrevistados e o que consideram ser o futuro da expatriação. Após análise dos resultados, concluiu-se que vários fatores influenciam a decisão das empresas e expatriados, quando se trata de expatriações no local, remotas ou híbridas.

Olhando para as empresas multinacionais, o tipo de indústria em que estas empresas operam tem influência no tipo de expatriação escolhido. Verificou-se que existem indústrias que permitem uma expatriação remota ou híbrida, como, Tecnologias da Informação, Marketing ou Consultoria. Por outro lado, algumas indústrias não permitem tais opções, exigindo uma expatriação no local, como as Indústrias Médicas ou Retalhistas.

Focando nos expatriados, descobriu-se que alguns aspetos influenciam a sua escolha. Tais como salário, perspectivas de crescimento pessoal e profissional, possibilidade de trabalhar em equipas internacionais e a distância do país de origem.

As empresas oferecem, cada vez mais, uma expatriação remota ou híbrida. Contudo, este estudo mostra que, mesmo com a evolução da tecnologia e da expatriação remota, as empresas e expatriados continuam a escolher uma expatriação no local, devido à experiência 360°, que não desfrutariam numa experiência remota ou híbrida.

Keywords: Expatriação; Remoto; Presencial; Híbrido

Classificação JEL: O33 - Technological Change: Choices and Consequences, Diffusion Processes; O15 - Human Resources, Human Development, Income Distribution, Migration.

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Acronym Glossary

MNCs - Multinational Companies

ICTs - Information and Communications Technologies

HR Professionals – Human Resources Professionals

IT – Information Technology

1. Introduction

The increase in international businesses and strategic alliances has resulted in the increase in number of companies and people working abroad (Gregersen et al., 1998), which help each company implement operational standards and global strategies, transmit organizational culture and values, and develop the knowledge, skills, and abilities of employees in chosen host countries (Lee et al., 2019).

Multinational companies (MNCs) and those who operate internationally have placed their strategic goals associated with global mobility in a substantial position. Over the past couple of years and with the COVID-19 impact, several organizations have recalled some or all their expatriate workers and have dramatically limited international business travel (Bader et al., 2020).

Moreover, the transition from the industrial era to a digitalized business environment led to a shift from a mechanistic to a more organic perspective, where organizations embrace flexible structures (Pulley & Sessa, 2001). There have been changes in transport systems, in public access to information, and in communications (Bonache et al., 2018). Companies had to accelerate something they knew that was imminent in the future, but not immediate and extremely humongous: remote working or teleworking (Contreras et al., 2020). Modern and competitive businesses need to know and be able to adapt business needs to the challenges of the modern market, and the ability to transform business to the digital needs of the market (Kozina, 2021). Therefore, MNCs are picturing major changes to their global mobility strategies, policies, numbers, and individuals potentially re-evaluating the costs and benefits of working abroad may lead to meaningful changes (Cooke et al., 2020), consequently, these changes will influence or affect not only the traditional expatriates but also those expatriates who have a less-traditional form of working abroad.

It is known that some of the MNCs are already benefiting from these new adjustments. A study developed by PWC (2020) with a population group composed of senior leaders, presented that 54% of MNCs have or are developing plans to make remote work a permanent option for the employees and make sure that they have the right equipment which will posteriorly make them more satisfied and productive in the remote environment. Meanwhile, 44% pretend to accelerate the automation and new working models, once back in the office (Mello & Tomei, 2021).

In companies that rely on a remote work environment, it is implicit that managers must adjust the companies' structure, making them less hierarchical, and developing new abilities to establish a strong and trustworthy relationship with their employees (Contreras et al., 2020). This constant connectivity enabled by modern devices allows work to be performed at any time and from almost anywhere (Messenger, 2017).

What used to involve taking off on a long and challenging journey, became a mundane travel to parts well known. Instead of being restricted to scarce and lengthy communications via letter, expatriates can reach their home with the click of a button.

When talking about the future of expatriation and expatriates, it is understandable that this is still a question, not only for the companies but also for employees and scholars (Cooke et al., 2020). Therefore, it is important to study the past and current situations to explore the trends that may shape the future of expatriation and expatriates. This leads us to the following research question: *“How does the evolution of remote work influence expatriation and which factors lead to a decision between on-site, remote or hybrid experience?”*.

In this regard, using a comparative case study, this thesis aims to explore (1) how MNCs are facing expatriation with the constant technology evolution and (2) how these assignments are expected to be in the following years, taking into consideration the costs they may have for organizations.

To address these research questions, in this master thesis a qualitative approach was used by conducting interviews with multiple groups of participants: Former Expatriates, Expatriates and Human Resources Professionals (HR Professionals) from MNCs. Each group of participants is considered as a case. Lastly, findings of this study, relevant aspects and theoretical contributions, practical implications, possible limitations of the study, and ideas for future research are presented.

2. Theoretical background

The focus in this master thesis is to answer the question “*How does the evolution of remote work influence expatriation and which factors lead to a decision between on-site, remote or hybrid experience?*”. Therefore, there is a need to understand what has been discussed in the existent literature on expatriation, expatriates, and technologies.

2.1 Technology in the labor world

The world is changing very fast thanks to the technological revolution that influences our way of living and the behavior of both individuals and organizations (Morrar et al., 2017).

Moreover, internationalization and globalization of markets in almost all industries also lead to research into new technologies and identify benefits and advantages for companies (Kozina, 2021). These innovative solutions can help in different aspects, such as: reduction of energy consumption, help companies to sustain their business with existing and new business models, and use new technologies to produce all over the world (even at high-cost locations) close to the markets utilizing the domestic workforce skills (Morrar et al., 2017).

Globalization of business affects the expansion and easier access to markets, whereby the management of the companies must find new ways and methods of doing business, where the digital transformation of business and the new digital and information-communication technologies influence growth and competitive advantage (Kozina, 2021). The ability of an organization to transform its business towards digitalization and application of new digital technologies essentially depends on the management of the company and a clear digital strategy as an integral part of the corporate business strategy.

Taking into consideration the different business policies of the companies, the beliefs and attitudes of the management depend on the acceptance and use of new digital technologies (Kozina, 2021). Precisely because of market trends and dynamics, management must be flexible and prone to change and acceptance of novelties and innovations.

The appearance of New Information and Communications Technologies (New ICTs), such as smartphones and tablet computers, have revolutionized daily work and life in the 21st century (Messenger, 2017). Modern offices work is often supported by internet connections, and thus can be done from basically anywhere and at any time. This new independence of work from place changes the role of technology in the work environment dramatically.

A lot of changes have been felt over the past years. The first change is related to the personal computers and fixed telephones replaced long commuting hours between home and the office; the second change, was noticed when laptop computers and mobile phones enabled wireless, portable work “on the move” from locations other than home or the office, accompanied by a fast-growing dispersion of the Internet and the World Wide Web. Finally, online connections via radio links and the shrinking of transistors triggered the development of

New ICTs (Messenger, 2017). It is with this evolution that the concept of remote work or teleworking emerges, which is defined as a flexible working method unlimited by time, location, type of communication technology, and the use of information (Contreras et al., 2020).

The benefits of remote work remain controversial (Shimura et al., 2021) On one hand, remote work enables, at individual level, a better work life balance, flexibility and autonomy, reduction in commuting time, and higher morale and job satisfaction (Tavares, 2017). At organizational level, there are also positive associations between remote work and organizational outcomes, such as increased productivity, employee retention, and organizational commitment (Martin & MacDonnell, 2012). On the other hand, remote work can result in social isolation and marginalization, which increases the stress of workers (Di Martino & Wirth, 1990).

This digital transformation of business affects all companies and all industries involved in the global market, significantly facilitating business, and helping business being done more efficiently, better, and faster (Kozina, 2021).

2.2 Expatriation and Expatriates

2.2.1 Expatriation and Expatriates: The concepts

International human resource experts agree that it is imperative for MNCs to attract, select, develop, and retain employees who can live and work effectively outside of their own national borders (Caligiuri, 2000). The number of expatriates is constantly continuing to grow over the years (Haslberger & Brewster, 2008).

With the globalization appears the term expatriation, which is related to the action where employees and managers, later called expatriates, are sent by their organizations to work abroad on expatriation for a contracted period, generally more than one year (Collings et al., 2017) leaving their families at home (Shortland, 2018).

This action has two categories: (1) Long-term assignments which are usually defined as being over a year and immediate family usually go along; and (2) Short-term assignments typically last between 3 to 12 months, are usually unaccompanied and assignment lengths may reflect taxation implications (Shortland, 2018).

International mobility was positioned as providing an opportunity for cultural exposure, facilitating an enhancing life experience, and enabling individuals to gain deeper understanding of organizational contexts outside their home country (Doherty & Dickmann, 2012).

Nowadays expatriates may be sent anywhere in the world where there is a sufficiently large market to implement their business, whether it can be countries that are growing much

faster than the home country or they may have very weak institutions which can be easily manipulated (Doh et al., 2017)

2.2.2 The costs related to Expatriation

Sending expatriates on expatriation is a costly effort, and the benefits of assignments are often difficult to assess (Nowak & Linder, 2016). A significant money investment is made by the companies on expatriates and expatriation, which helps them acquire a high level of personal and professional development, with skills and expertise of great value to the company that consequently will help them during the international assignment (Bonache et al., 2018)

Then, expatriation produces direct and indirect costs from the start to the end of the assignment process. Therefore, it is important to have in mind that expected additional costs may arise during the assignment process and potential costs related to unexpected events, such as early repatriation, which need to be considered (Nowak & Linder, 2016).

There are different high-cost locations, some sectoral and geographically specific, which may account for spikes in expatriate premiums due to high salary levels or costs relating to security issues; however, the assessment of the costs of all expatriates in the companies provides an inclusive picture (Doherty & Dickmann, 2012). It suggested that the costs of an expatriate can be between 3 and up to 10 times as much as a domestic employee for a company (Harris et al., 2003). International relocation policies adopt a balance method of determining compensation, where the individual is paid on the basis that their net compensation should leave them in a position where they are no better or no worse off than had they stayed at home (Doherty & Dickmann, 2012).

2.2.3 The Effectiveness of expatriates and expatriation

For the international assignment to be effective and have positive outcome, the selection of the employee or manager responsible for the expatriation must be done in a rigorous way to ensure that the person is competent and ready to do such assignment (Malie & Akir, 2012).

There is a set of necessary competencies that an expatriate should have, to ensure the international assignment's success and effectiveness (Malie & Akir, 2012). When looking for these competencies it is possible to divide them into two main groups: expatriates' stable competencies and dynamic competencies. Both competencies are identified as important to facilitate acculturation and identification with the host culture, which can subsequently improve their adjustment and effectiveness on the international assignment (Lee & Nguyen, 2019).

The first competencies group, stable competencies, is related to the capacity of having a certain cultural empathy, social initiative, being open minded, and present emotional stability (Lee & Nguyen, 2019). Also, expatriates who present relational skills are more likely to have a

good relationship with their colleagues in the host country and can more easily perform their assignments as well as gather knowledge from others (Spiegelaere et al., 2012).

When looking for the second competencies group, dynamic competencies, it is more related to the individuals' rational skills, cultural adaptability, non-ethnocentrism, and general self-efficacy. Expatriates who can easily adjust themselves in the host country, have a good knowledge about the mainstream culture and understand their hosts' attitudes toward them and thus are better able to perform well (Lee & Nguyen, 2019). The ability to work in international teams, is the most important factor in determining the effectiveness of expatriation followed by language proficiency, adaptability to the international assignment, and expatriate sensitivity to cultural elements (Malie & Akir, 2012).

Besides these factors, expatriate intelligence, perceived assignment value, and organizational support are very important to solidify expatriates' competencies and helping them work more effectively (Lee & Nguyen, 2019).

Therefore, several critical dimensions are analyzed and taken into consideration for the successful international assignment which should not be ignored but given special attention and treatment to lead the company to achieve the highest level of performance (Malie & Akir, 2012).

Focusing on the possibilities for the failure of international assignment and aspects that can inhibit expatriates' acculturation, adjustment, and effectiveness, work-role demands was identified as one of such constraints. Specially role novelty, role ambiguity, role conflict, and role overload, are some of the work demands that can increase the uncertainty, unfamiliarity, unpredictability, and uncontrollability of the work assignment (Lee & Nguyen, 2019). When expatriates experience this work-role overload, they are less capable of effectively responding to demands which can also decrease their capacity to maintain good relationships with others in the host country.

Until today, MNCs are still facing problems with expatriation failures, turnover, and ineffective performance due to a bad adjustment, which results in direct and indirect costs for organizations (Takeuchi et al., 2002) Therefore, it is expected that the company provides relevant training program, before and during the assignment, and exposure to make sure that expatriates can represent the company in the best possible way and meet the business requirements effectively (Malie & Akir, 2012).

It is expected that approximately 30% to 50% of expatriates are ineffective or merely slightly effective (Wu & Bodigerel-Koehler, 2013). When talking about the direct costs from expatriate adjustment failure, they have been estimated at US\$ 150,000, approximately 133,072€, per employee. Adding the expenses for training, relocation, and compensation, these costs go up to an estimation of US\$ 80,000, approximately 70,971€, per employee (Shaffer et al., 2006).

2.3 The influence of technology in expatriation

It is expected that the use of modern technologies such as digital chains, smart systems, and the industrial Internet will speed up innovations as new business models can be implemented faster (Morrar et al., 2017). Some international companies are using advanced communication and information technology to manage assignments remotely rather than sending a traditional expatriate into the foreign location (Welch et al., 2003), which means that the use of remote and other forms of non-standard expatriation start to increase among the MNCs.

Therefore, different solutions have been developed over the past years, such as, (1) commuter assignments, where the expatriate commutes from the home country on a weekly or bi-weekly basis to the host-country; (2) rotational assignments, which refer to when the expatriate commute from the home country to a place to work in host-country for a short set period (Welch et al., 2003); (3) short-term assignments, which have a duration between three months and a year, but probably less than 6 months, aiming to avoid tax issues (Collings et al., 2017); one last solution is added which is (4) remote assignments, and they refer to when an employee does not relocate to the host-country but has international responsibilities for a part of the organization in a host country, in which they manage from their home country .

With the appearance of remote assignments, it removes or reduces some of the barriers related to traditional assignments, more particularly, staff immobility and cost containment, on an organizational level. On an individual level, there are identified benefits, such as, the fact that there is no need for reallocation, nor the disruption to the partners' career and children's education (Welch et al., 2003).

There are several compensation costs related to traditional expatriation, that can be reasonably estimated by the company, such as salaries, bonuses, and housing costs (PWC, 2020). It is important to consider that for new assignments solutions, support packages should be included for the assignees that have to cope with the challenges of frequent travels to the host country (for example, monthly visits), disturbed work-life balance, such as early morning and evening intercontinental calls and with remote work, creating the risk of cross-cultural misunderstandings and conflicts (Bücker et al., 2020)

Remote assignments may become an important component of the non-standard options available to MNCs, yet it is unlikely to completely replace the traditional expatriates' assignments. This is because few research exists on this methodology and, regarding the nature of the task or work involved, that may not be advised to be done remotely (Welch et al., 2003). However, nonmobile remote international work could not be considered as expatriation, and international business travelers may not be considered as international assignee (Bücker et al., 2020). Doing international work and projects appears not always to be a reason for

classification as an international assignee, since many managers consider expatriation to require mobility for a month over a large period (Bücker et al., 2020).

Based on what was previously cited, it is needed to explore what will be the future of expatriation. Therefore, this master thesis tries to understand and fulfill this gap, through a qualitative study, by exploring the following research question: *“How does the evolution of remote work influence expatriation and which factors lead to a decision between on-site, remote or hybrid experience?”*.

3. Methodology

To address the research question, and considering its complex nature, an inductive approach is taken (Graebner et al., 2012) In this qualitative research, more specifically, a comparative case study methodology is used as this thesis, adopting an exploratory approach, intends to explain an underexplored phenomenon (Yin, 2009).

This type of research was chosen because: 1) a qualitative research seeks to provide insights into problems or issues from the real world (Moser & Korstjens, 2017), in this specific case, the changes that expatriation may undergo; and 2) this type of research helps explain processes and patterns of human behavior that can be difficult to explain through quantitative research (Foley & Timonen, 2015). Thus, it was concluded that qualitative research would be the best option to answer our main question.

3.1 Sample

Different aspects were identified that would be crucial for the interviewees to hold. As there were three groups to be interviewed, namely: HR professional, former expatriates, and current expatriates, different interview protocols were developed for each; and to have a better understanding of what is happening in each MNC, multiple people with different backgrounds were interviewed from each MNC.

Looking at the first group, Human Resources Professionals, the interviewee was required to be a human resource professional from a MNC that offers employees the possibility to do an international work. Then, the second group, Former Expatriates, refers to professionals, who had already participated in an international assignment in the last 10 years. This factor was chosen to have the view of a person who had done an international job before the evolution of technology, which increased with the appearance of COVID-19. Finally, the third group aimed at Current Expatriates. This encompasses professionals, who are currently working internationally, abroad from their home country. This group was chosen to have the vision of a professional who is currently working internationally and who follows the development of technology.

In this way, it is possible to make comparisons between the company and the expatriate, and within the last one it is possible to make a comparison between the current and the former expatriate.

3.2 Data Collection

For this study, it is important to have a direct contact with the MNC representative expatriates to have the opportunity to ask all the aspects that are relevant to reach our aims and go deeper in this regard. Nevertheless, it is important to take into consideration that the representatives' answers or opinions will differ depending on their company experience.

As it is presented in the appendices, the interview protocols were designed in a semi-structured format and for three different groups of interviewees previously stated. The questions were also divided into, past, present, and future status of expatriation in each organization. Before conducting the interviews, consent letter was given to each interviewee and after their agreement, the interview was conducted, and audio recorded. In the consent letter, it was assured that any information that can trace back the identity of the interviewee will be removed. For the development of the questions for the interviews, the literature reviewed in the previous chapters was used as a basis.

Overall, 10 interviews were conducted with 2 people from the Human Resources Professionals group, 4 people from the Former Expatriate group and, finally, 4 people from the Current Expatriate group (Table 1).

All these interviews fulfilled the characteristics previously stated, with no excluding criteria concerning the type of market where they develop their main activity.

Table 1 - Professional characteristics of the interviewees

Group	Gender	Type of Industry	Home Country	Host Country	Designation
HR Professional	F	Consulting	Portugal	-	HR1
HR Professional	F	Consulting	Italy	-	HR2
Former-Expatriate	M	Technological Solutions	Portugal	United Kingdom	FE1
Former-Expatriate	M	Telecom Solutions	Portugal	Timor	FE2
Former-Expatriate	F	Consulting	Portugal	Angola	FE3
Former-Expatriate	M	Consulting	Portugal	United States of America	FE4
Expatriate	F	Airline	Portugal	Angola	E1
Expatriate	M	Retail Company	Colombia - PT	Portugal	E2
Expatriate	M	Consulting	Portugal	Spain	E3
Expatriate	M	Athletic and Sports	Portugal	The Netherlands	E4

The interviews were conducted over the last few months, some in Portuguese and others in English. The duration of interviews was between 30 and 50 minutes (with an average of 41 minutes). Due to the pandemic of COVID-19 and its evolution in Portugal, and since some interviewees were abroad, the interviewees were not comfortable to have presential meetings, therefore, interviews were conducted via telephone or via teams/zoom and were audio recorded. This was done to make sure the interviewees were in a comfortable situation when being interviewed.

Looking at the first group, HR Professionals, they were asked about the volume of international projects that the company currently offers and what it offered before COVID19 and the evolution of technology, and how the choice and support to expatriates was and is made. Looking at the second and third groups, Former Expatriates, and current Expatriates respectively, the questions for these were directed to their experience in the host country. It was intended to understand the reasons for their decision, whether it met the expectations initially established, the support from their organization, and the challenges and benefits of this experience.

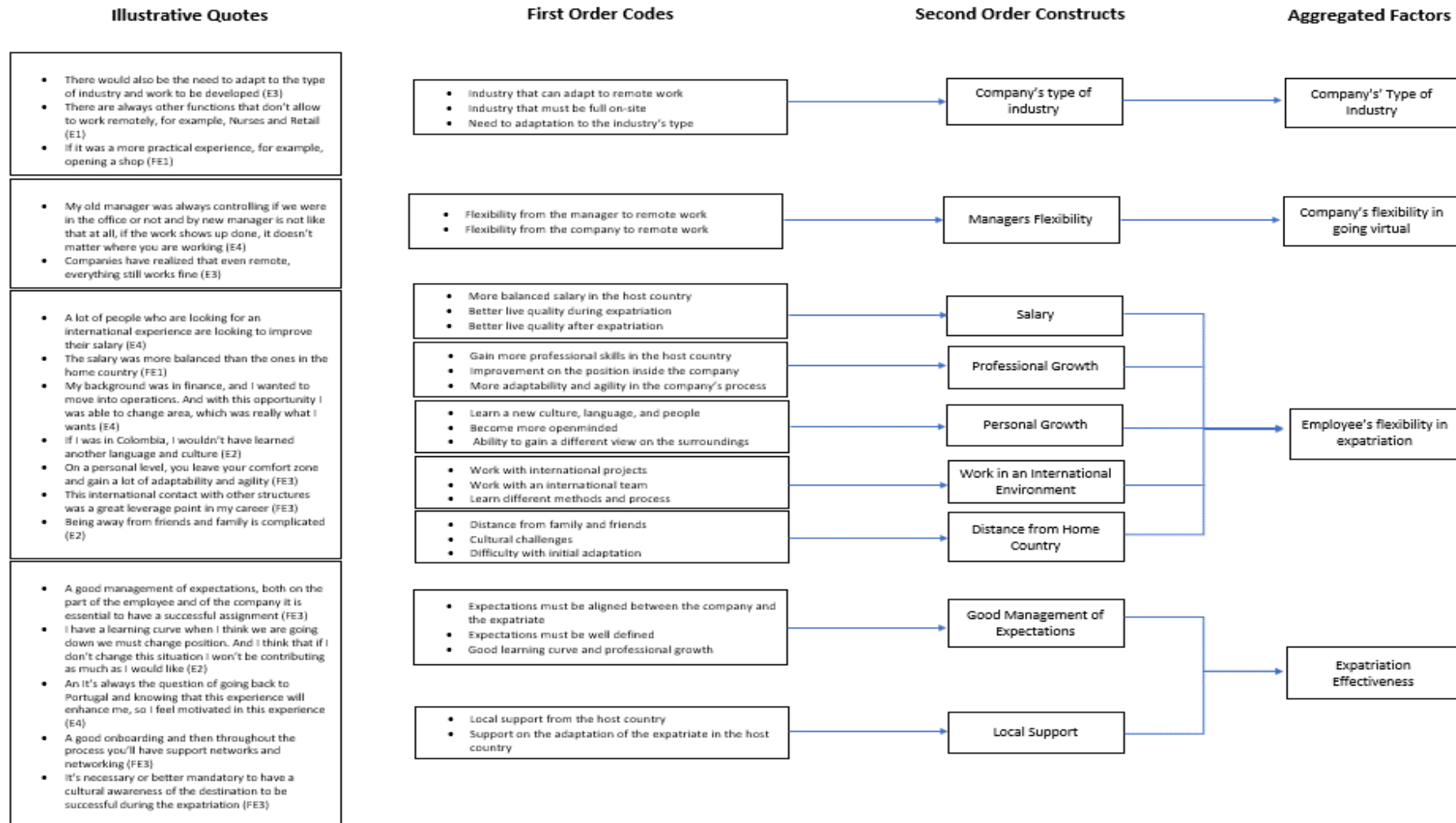
In addition to the more specific questions, all the interviewees were asked to share their point of view on how effective international work is, how they foresee it in the coming years, and in what way the changes may impact positively and negatively, not only on the expatriates, but also on everything related to it.

3.3 Data Analysis

For data analysis, the approach by Miles et al. (2014) was used to inductively analyze the data. An analytical coding process is provided in Figure 1. MAXQDA was used to analyze the collected data. Through this process, a complete and detailed analysis of the interviews conducted was developed, having the opportunity to group and make a comparison between the answers obtained.

For this coding process, different steps were performed. First, the interviews were transcribed. Later, after a detailed analysis of each interview, the emergent themes for this study were highlighted.

Figure 1- Analytical Coding Process



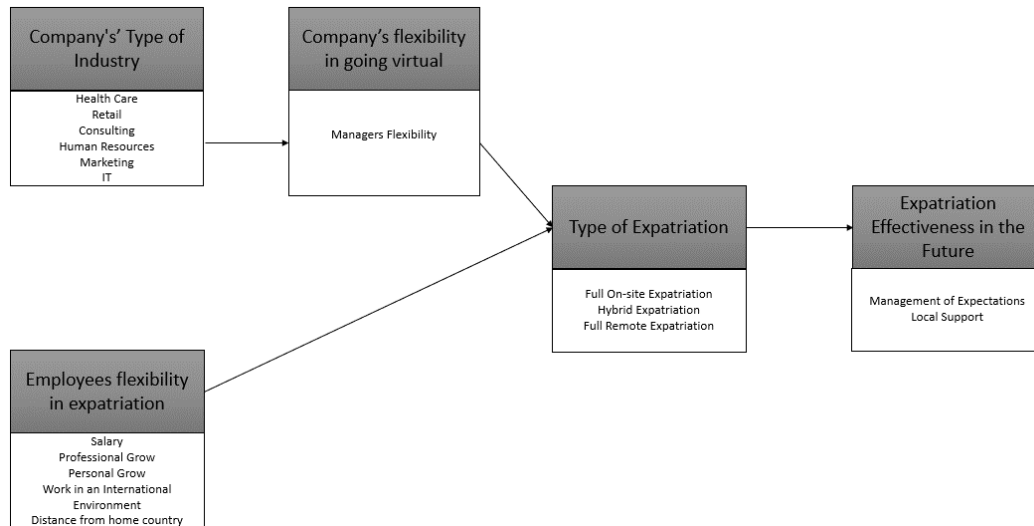
After identifying the relevant aspects referred by the interviews, the first order codes were done. Here the codes were grouped into emergent themes, which consequentially lead to the second order constructs. In this third step, the first order codes were grouped and identified as aspects that influence the type of expatriation to be developed (on-site, remote or hybrid). Finally, these aspects were aggregated in final factors. Here the aspects previously identified, were group in three main factors, Company's Type of Industry and Employees Flexibility in Expatriation that, in fact, influences the type of expatriation to be done by the expatriate.

4. Findings

Through the interviews conducted with former and current expatriates and HR professionals from different companies that offer expatriation, it was understandable that several factors can influence expatriation and its concept that has been changing over the last years.

After analyzing the interviews, Figure 2 was developed on factors that may influence the companies' and employees' decisions when facing a possible expatriation.

Figure 2- Factors that influence companies' and employees' choice



Through the graph, it is possible to understand that two main groups can affect or influence the choice of the type of expatriation that will be carried out: (1) the type of the industry and the flexibility of the company, and (2) the flexibility of the employees when facing the expatriation.

After considering these factors, the company, taking the employees situation into account, will conclude which will be the best type of expatriation to be applied, which can be (a) Full On-site Expatriation, (b) Hybrid Expatriation, or (c) Full Remote Expatriation.

4.1 Factors that influence companies' choice

4.1.1 Company's Type of Industry

The first factor that was mentioned in the interviews was the need to take into consideration the type of industry in which the organization operates. As mentioned, several times throughout the interviews by the different interviewees, the type of industry of the company influences its flexibility in remote work, on-site, or a hybrid work system:

"...there would also be the need to adapt to the type of industry and work to be developed...". (By E3)

During the interviews, it was shown that if the type of industry allows remote functions to be developed, the expatriation should be remote, otherwise it will require traveling to the host country. For example, if the organization is oriented to Health Care or Shops, there will be no possibility to work remotely, these professional activities require the employees to be 100% present at the workplace.

“...There are always other functions that don't allow to work remotely, for example, Nurses and Shops...”. (By E1)

“...Nothing physical is totally necessary. If it was a more practical experience, for example opening a shop or something like that it would make sense to go to the host country...”. (By FE1)

In turn, different industries allow fully remote or hybrid working, such as consulting, human resources, marketing, and Information Technology (IT).

“Looking for a consultancy project, it could be done remotely, and then the employees could get together [go to the host country] 2 or 3 times a month to review some of the more important or outstanding aspects...”. (By FE1)

“...Using the office or other space as a collective work, but everything else could be remotely, such as we do in my department [Human Resources] ...”. (By FE3)

“...it is enough to have one local person and the rest of the team remotely from Portugal, in the Marketing area.” (By FE2)

“...It depends on the functions, in my area of IT, I think the future is remote. Clients have realized that they can have the same quality of work and they can reduce costs while maintaining quality. ...”. (By E1)

4.1.2 Company's Flexibility on going virtual

Another aspect to take into consideration when organizations offer the flexibility to work remotely refer to Managers Flexibility.

Looking at this aspect refers to the flexibility that the manager himself makes available to his team when it comes to remote or hybrid work.

“...my old manager was always controlling if we were going to the office or not and my new manager is not like that at all, if the work shows up done, it doesn't matter where you are working...”. (By E4)

Here, the interviewee faced different types of managers, the first one did not allow a remote or hybrid expatriation, since it was mandatory to be present in the Host Country office.

However, when in the new manager's domain, greater flexibility is offered, thus offering the interviewee the possibility to work in a remote or hybrid system, even from his home country.

It is possible to understand that there is a positive influence on a remote or hybrid expatriation. When asked about the advantages that these aspects offer to companies, the interviewees identified that companies are beginning to understand that even remotely or in a hybrid system the desired results can still be achieved:

"...Companies have realized that even remote, everything still works fine...". (By E3)

With this, the interviewees also mentioned the economic benefits for companies, since there is no longer the need to use offices and transportation, among others:

"Many companies keep the remote aspect, but even for the reduction of costs, for example, offices and transportation.". (By FE1)

With the concept of flexibility increasing in recent times, organizations understand that it is a crucial point. Throughout the interviews there were several benefits that an organization "gains" by offering the flexibility of a remote expatriation. Looking at a basic requirement of a company, recruitment, it becomes easier and more accessible, since there is a greater supply in the market:

"For the company, it [remote expatriation] will reduce employee rotation. More and more, employees are looking for international experiences...". (By E3)

"Well, for benefits, it will be the larger talent pool, cultural differences can help to have a positive impact, with different points of view. Access to new cultures helps employees to learn new aspects. "(FE1).

It is possible to understand, through the interviews, that more and more employees are looking for opportunities that offer the remote aspect and when this does not exist it leads to a loss of competitiveness in the market:

"Companies, after COVID and the lockdown, kept remote work because, if they wouldn't, they will lose competitiveness for companies that offer this aspect...". (By FE1)

On the other hand, with the increase of international remote opportunities it emerges some disadvantages. One of the main factors mentioned by the interviewees was the lack of social contact between the organization/team or the difficulty of holding team building events:

"Having employees in different countries can make it difficult to arrange social events. This aspect can be suppressed and managed, by arranging social trips, but will be less common due to the high costs...". (By FE1)

Another disadvantage of being distant may be the lack of local awareness. That is, when an expatriate does an expatriation totally remote, s/he may not know some relevant characteristics of the host country, and this may compromise the outcome of the project:

“If I don’t have a local awareness of the field, it might not go so well...”.

(By FE2)

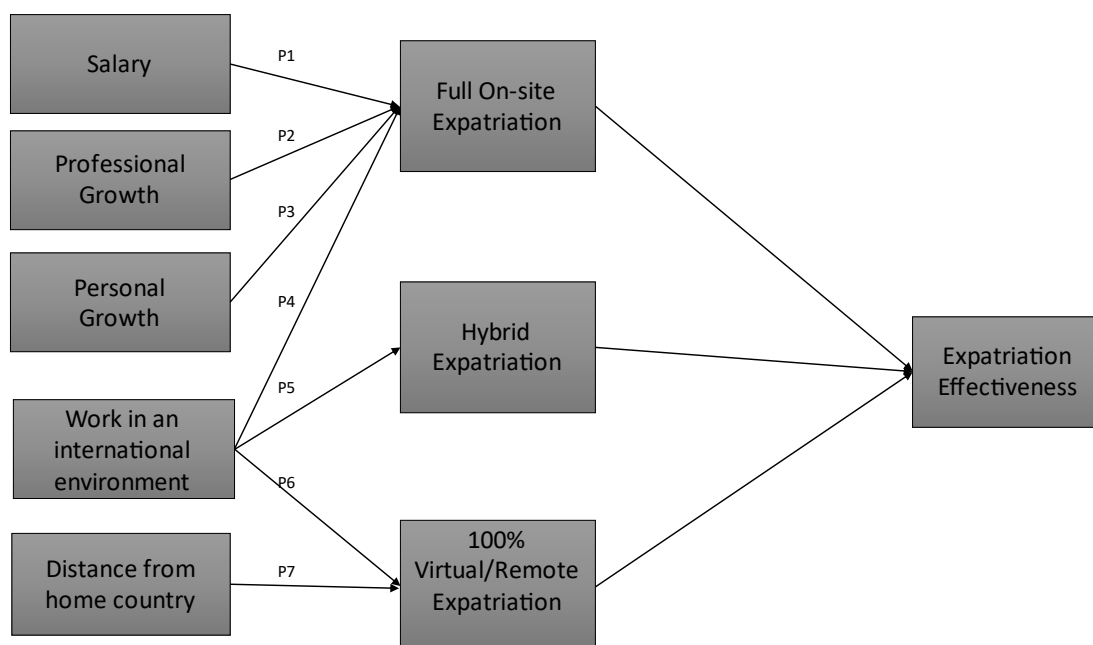
This ideology was reinforced with a practical example that the same interviewer witnessed and that led to the need to readapt and reformulate the project:

“...For example, when I was there, the company launched a campaign with 3 or 4 blonde ladies with blue eyes promoting a phone, but what happens is that, when transposing this to the Timorese reality, people will not feel connected to the advertisement. At one point we had to get Timorese models and make ads with Timorese people. The Challenge is to have the notion that, although the group is international, it is necessary to have a local adaptation, otherwise things will not work...”. (By FE2)

4.2 Factors that influence the employee choice

Looking at the employee side there are different factors that may lead them to choose to do an international assignment. However, nowadays we also see other issues that arise for these employees, such as on-site vs. remote. Always taking into consideration if your organization and its type of industry allows to have this comparison between these two forms of work. As mentioned before, there are some companies and industries where the remote aspect is not a possibility.

Figure 3 - Factors that influence employees' choice



Looking at Figure 3, it is possible to see in the first column the main factors mentioned by the interviewees when asked about the benefits and challenges of expatriation and what they trigger when analyzing on-site vs. remote expatriation.

Throughout the interviews it was easy to understand that one of the main choices for performing expatriation is the Salary offered by the organizations:

“...I think a lot of people who are looking for an international experience are looking to improve their salary”. (By E4)

*“...the salary was more balanced than the ones in the home country...”.
(By FE1)*

Looking at Figure 3 and the arrow P1 you can see that this will potentially lead the employee to choose the on-site expatriation over the remote one.

Focusing on the Professional Growth aspect, when asked about the motivations for embarking on an expatriation, interviewees mentioned professional growth that the opportunity offers to be an important aspect:

“...my background was in finance, and I wanted to move into operations. And with this opportunity I was able to change area, which was really what I wanted”. (By E4)

Here the employee with the expatriation had the opportunity to change his field to his desired area, which was not a possibility in his home country, and as such, he felt that being in the host country helped him grow as a professional.

In turn, the interviewee FE2, mentions that the expatriation gave him the opportunity to move up within his company:

“I started as a marketing assistant, and after a while I took over the responsibility for the marketing of the Company.” (By FE2)

Just like FE4 who was promoted when he returned from his expatriation and arrived in his home country:

“I was as ITTS [International Tax and Transactions Services] manager, and when I came back, I was a Senior Manager...”. (By FE4).

Looking at the figure 3 and at the arrow P2 it is possible to see that the offer of a possible evolution or professional growth led the employee to decide for the on-site experience in comparison to the remote one.

Addressing the topic of professional growth, the interviewees automatically addressed Personal Growth, which they feel during the expatriation. Here it was possible to find different benefits such as learning a new language and culture:

“...If I was in Colombia, I wouldn't have learned another language and culture...”. (By E2)

Also benefits such as increased ability to adapt to an entirely new environment:

"...On a personal level, you leave your comfort zone and gain a lot of adaptability and agility...". (By FE3)

Looking at Figure 3 and at the arrow P3 it is possible to see that the exposure to a new reality that only exists if there is effectively a displacement of their home country leads the employee to opt for the on-site version in comparison to the remote one.

Another aspect frequently mentioned by the interviewees is the Possibility of Working in an International environment. Most of them mentioned that the opportunity to work in an international environment, with different methods and ideologies was crucial for their future as professionals:

"So, me working for an international team gives more opportunities for the future...". (FE4)

This was also reinforced by FE3 who states that:

"...this international contact with other structures was a great leverage point in my career...". (By FE3)

In addition to the possibility of growth for the future, E3 says:

"he/she will have international experiences and can get to know new methodologies and be more global, without "leaving the place...". (By E3)

However, some interviewees concluded that the in-person aspect would be more beneficial compared to the remote aspect:

"...from the point of view of that cultural and social experience, it's [remote expatriation] a disadvantage because it's a project. It's not in the host, it's just exclusive international teams..." (By HR1)

Which was reinforced by FE4:

"Of course, nowadays, there's the possibility of having a person working from Portugal working for a company in the US is always good, even if it's from a remuneration point of view. But in terms of experience, it must be the physical side. There are good and not so good things in both models, but if you want to grow professionally and as a person, presential is more beneficial" (FE4)

Looking at Figure 3 and the arrows P4, P5, and P6, it is possible to understand that this is a factor that is provided to the employee whether they choose on-site, hybrid or remote expatriation.

In the remote aspect, although the employee is part of an international team, he/she will not have the opportunity to be in the host country's office, at social events, thus losing the more personal aspect that builds the connection or acculturation of the ideologies of the team/company:

“... the process of acculturation of a company can be a big challenge, how do you create the feeling of engagement and teamwork in this concept...” (By FE3)

This can subsequently lead to employee demotivation.

Finally, the last aspect mentioned by the interviewees was the Distance from Home Country. This was considered the least positive aspect when doing an expatriation, the fact of being far from home country creates a feeling of homesickness during the distant period:

“...Being away from everything is complicated, friends, family...” (By E2)

This potentially leads employees to opt for the remote aspect, as identified in Figure 3 by the arrow P7, thus not having the need to be far from their usual environment and everything related to it. In addition to the comfortability of the usual environment, the employee does not need to make constant trips between the countries in question:

“One of the biggest benefits of remote work is being able to work effectively remotely, avoiding travel all the time”. (By FE2)

Although it is possible to understand that the increase in remote expatriation opportunities offered by companies may lead to this being impacted positively, after analyzing the interviews carried out, it was identified that the preference of former expatriates and current expatriates is for a fully on-site expatriation:

“...in on-site terms, employees will have a different and unique experience...”. (By E3)

This is due to the personal and professional growth felt once directly exposed to different cultures and ways of working:

“...There are good and not so good things in both models, but if you want to grow professionally and as a person, on-site is more beneficial...”. (By FE4)

“People are much more interested in having physical settlement because you will have 100% free 360 degrees experience. So, a professional experience in a host country and appears as experience the personal bond which you will be missing if you would keep on staying in your home country”. (By HR2)

Having this deeper view of an MNC that provides many international jobs, it is possible to realize that a large part of the employees when they want to embark on an international experience keep the preference for the on-site aspect. This is since everything that this aspect provides to the expatriate, from knowledge of a new language, culture, professional environment, growth, and professional development, are the factors most valued by employees, as indicated during this chapter.

4.3 Expatriation Effectiveness

Finally, looking at the Expatriation Effectiveness in the Future of expatriation, during the interviews, it was clear that there are factors that help to increase the success of these assignments. Based on the analyses, two main factors were indicted as important: Good Management of Expectation and Local Support. It is important to highlight that these factors are related to the effectiveness of remote, hybrid and on-site expatriation.

Looking at the first factor, Good Management of Expectation, it is related to the expectations from both the company and the expatriate. It is stated by the interviewees that it is important to have an alignment of expectations and when this happens the probability of the expatriation to be successful is higher. This will help the expatriate to feel more comfortable in the host country and, consequently, develop himself in other aspects:

“I went there, and when the expectations of both sides (personal and organizational) were met, it had everything to go well. In my view I have grown professionally, personally and I feel I have also given to the organization. I exceeded the goals I set for myself.” (By FE4)

“First, a good management of expectations, both on the part of the employee and of the company, is essential for having a successful assignment” (By FE3)

When looking at this factor, it is easily related to the learning curve and the professional evolution. When doing an international assignment, the expatriates are expected to increase their professional skills and, therefore, improve their position inside the company, both on the home country and host country. When the learning curve and the working position do not go according to what was expected, the effectiveness of the expatriation may decrease. This may happen since the expatriate will feel demotivated and, consequently, would not meet the expectations:

“I have a learning curve when I think we are going down we must change position. And I think that if I don't change this situation I won't be contributing as much as I would like.” (By E2)

But when the learning curve and improvement of the position inside the company meet the expectations, the expatriates will feel more motivated and help the company on the best possible way:

“And it's always the question of going back to Portugal and knowing that this experience will enhance me, so I feel motivated in this experience.” (By E4)

Focusing on the second factor, Support, is related to the support provided during the expatriation. Inside this factor, two types of support were identified: a) Training Support and b) Local Support.

The first type of support, Training Support, is directed to the training provided to the expatriate in the host country. It was stated by the interviewees that it is essential to have an initial training to understand the company's process. Not having this initial support may lead to an unsuccessful international assignment:

"But there should be a lot of initial support, to teach the platforms and trainings for more specific things." (By FE1)

"A good onboarding and then throughout the process you'll have support networks and networking." (By FE3)

Focusing on the second type of support, the Local Support, as the name itself says, it is related to the assistance provided by the locals to the expatriates, to help in the adaptation to the new country and, also, to make them understand cultural aspects that may be relevant during the expatriation:

"If there is local support, yes. On the marketing issue, I can design a marketing campaign for Timor, but it will only be successful if I have a local person helping me. Because you need to know and have an idea of what is happening in the country to be able to work." (By FE2)

"It's necessary or better mandatory to have a cultural awareness of the destination to be successful during the expatriation." (By FE3)

The identified factors that were found to be relevant for the effectiveness of the future of expatriations are already being developed or implemented by most companies. Therefore, it is understandable that even if the expatriation is on-site, remote or hybrid it is important to keep the factors presented before in offer to have an effective expatriation.

5. Discussion

5.1 Theoretical contribution

The aim of this paper was to understand how the evolution of remote work influence expatriation and which factors lead to a decision between on-site, remote, or hybrid experience.

After reviewing the existing literature and conducting multiple interviews with different employees of MNCs that are linked to expatriation, it was clear that there is an evolution of technology and that more and more companies are opting for it, not only for the benefits that the company itself can gain but also because of the flexibility that employees gain.

Despite this technological evolution and the fact that MNCs are using advanced information technology to manage assignments remotely rather than sending a traditional expatriate (Welch et al., 2003), there is still a preference for expatriation in an on-site setting. This is because of everything that this experience in a Host Country has to offer.

This study helped to understand that the type of industry is a relevant aspect when talking about on-site, hybrid and remote expatriation. As previously stated, it will only be possible for the MNCs to provide remote or hybrid expatriation if their type of industry allows it. For example, the consulting, marketing, and IT industry may promote remote expatriation, because their daily work can be developed remotely, while the medical or retail industries cannot because they need to be on-site 100%. In these examples, where the type of industry allows remote or hybrid work, it is also relevant to consider the managers' flexibility. It was understandable, during this study, that the type of flexibility that the managers provide will influence the decision. If the expatriate has a manager that does not allow remote work, then an on-site expatriation is mandatory, on the other hand, if it does allow remote work then a hybrid or remote expatriation may happen.

When looking at the reason why companies and expatriates choose on-site expatriation, this study helped to understand which factors influence this type of expatriation, such as salary improvement, the professional and personal growth of the expatriate, and the possibility of working in an international environment. All these factors have a great weight for the expatriates, according to the interviews.

Of course, a remote approach offers some advantages, such as, there is no need for reallocation, nor the disruption to the partners' careers and children's education (Welch et al., 2003), but looking at all the benefits that this on-site experience abroad offers ends up, in a way, compensating for the distance felt.

With the detection of these factors and new forms of expatriation, a relevant aspect arises, the efficiency of expatriation and which factors can help it reach the expected levels. With this study, it was understood that whether it is a remote, hybrid or on-site expatriation, the factors

that influence the expatriation will be the same. Factors such as good expectation management, regarding the growth curve and the position within the company, and local support were identified as essential to the success and efficiency of expatriation.

Although the future of expatriation and expatriates is still an open question (Cooke et al., 2020), this study helped to understand that even with the evolution of technology that is increasingly present in our daily lives and is expected to be more and more evolved and effective, employees will opt for an expatriation on-site to gain as much as possible from it. Of course, some employees will prefer the remote approach, although, on-site challenges will maintain the preference for the following years.

5.2 Practical implications

As mentioned earlier, expatriations are increasingly present in MNCs, as is technology. In the last few years, there has been a combination of these two aspects that can positively influence both the companies and the employees who face the expatriation experience.

Through the sections above, you can see that the research presented helps to understand which factors help both organizations and employees to choose between a remote, on-site or hybrid expatriation.

This study has vast implications for any MNCs seeking a good decision regarding the type of expatriation.

In practical terms, depending on the type of industry and the main objectives of the company, it is recommended that companies conduct an assessment with the employees in question to understand what factors influence or lead them to want to become an expatriate. After analyzing these conditions and considering the type of industry in which they are inserted, they can then decide what type of expatriation to undertake.

It is important to emphasize that it will be important for MNCs to provide certain factors to employees so that the expatriation is efficient. As mentioned in the previous chapters, it will be important to have an alignment of expectations between both parties involved, thus promoting a balance that subsequently leads to greater motivation.

Once on site, it is relevant that MNCs provide local support, to accompany the expatriate during his/her stay in the host country.

An initial analysis of these previously identified factors by both MNCs and employees will lead to greater alignment in the type of expatriation to be carried out, which will subsequently result in a very positive outcome.

5.3 Limitations and Future Perspectives

As the dissertation draws to a close, it is possible to outline some limitations found throughout this study, as well as identify some recommendations and suggestions for the structuring and development of future investigations.

Looking at the limitations encountered, the first was the small number of expatriates identified to participate in the study. During the contact with expatriates and former expatriates it was complicated to get a relevant number of interviewees, as such, our sample was quite small, with about 4 former expatriates and 4 expatriates.

The second limitation identified, was the low participation of HR Professionals in this study. Since during the interview, questions related to the organizations' internal aspects were asked, most of the organizations contacted were unable to participate due to data protection policies. Despite signing a confidentiality document, they chose not to participate.

Finally, the third limitation refers to the existing literature. Since remote expatriation is a "recent" topic, there are not many scientific articles that relate this topic to expatriation and how these two can interact. As such, in the first phase of research for the Theoretical Framework and the development of the questionnaire, it was complicated to have some bases as a guide for the development of this work.

As recommendations for future research on this same topic, I emphasize the need to expand the interviews to a larger number of participants, both former expatriates, expatriates, and HR Professionals, from different countries and cultures. It would be very interesting to have a larger sample to get more specific results and, probably, aspects that may be relevant to this topic.

It would also be relevant to conduct new interviews with the participants of this study, in 2/3 years, to understand their ideology regarding remote work and expatriation if they still prefer on-site expatriation.

Finally, it would be relevant to test the propositions of the models introduced during this study. It would be interesting to understand more aspects and conditions related to expatriation about remote work that was not addressed during this study, since they went beyond the main topic, such as, for example, the support provided by both companies and the state for the return of expatriates and, subsequently, the methods for reintegrating them in the Home Country.

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Attachments

Appendix A. Interview Protocol for HR Professionals

State Purpose

In this study I am interested in understanding the impact of remote work on the expatriation and expatriates' life. To reach this goal, I will be asking you about your point of view regarding the topic. This interview will be kept strictly confidential and will not be used by your organization. All your answers will be used solely and exclusively for this thesis.

Introduction

The interview will last approximately 45 minutes and feel free to use your firm's local terminologies.

Ask for permission to record the interview

START TAPE RECORDER

Interview questions for HR professionals:

Warm-Up (Descriptive Questions)

First, I would like to know more about you, about your position, your organization, and how long you have been involved in matters related to the expatriation.

Questions 1 to 8 (approximately 5 minutes for each question)

Before

Q1. Could you, please, tell me how was the volume of expatriation in the organization before COVID-19?

Q2. How were the expatriation before the pandemic?

- How were people selected for such expatriation?
- How was the allocation done?
- How was the effectiveness of the expatriation measured?
- How effective were the expatriation?

At the time of the emergence of the pandemic

Q3. How were the expatriates/expatriation affected by the pandemic?

- How were the expatriates managed?
- In case they stayed in the host country, how was the situation handled?

Q4. How did the organization support or help the expatriates in the moment when the pandemic started?

- Which solution was implemented to help the expatriates?
- In case the answer was remote work, how the company supported?
- How were the decisions made?
- Was the expatriates' point of view asked?

- In case if you turned to remote working, what were the challenges? And how did you overcome it?

Present

Q5. What is the current situation of the organization on expatriation?

- How is the current volume of expatriates?
- How is the expatriate's allocation? Remote work or host-country?
- In case they are in their home country, how is the effectiveness in the host-country? Or are there some aspects/tasks that are being challenging to develop?

Q6. At this moment, how does the organization look at expatriation?

- How important are the expatriation for the organization?
- Which were the advantages and disadvantages of expatriation before the pandemic?
- Which are the advantages and disadvantages of expatriation currently?

Q7. Is the current volume of possible expatriation like previous years?

- How is the volume of expatriation in comparison to previous years?
- How is the volume of applications for expatriation in comparison to previous years?
- How does the organization plan the expatriation?

Future

Q8. What is your organization's vision for the future of expatriation?

- What is the expected volume of expatriation in the following years?
- How is the vision of the organization regarding the expatriation?

Q9. How do you see the future of remote assignments in your organization?

- Which are the benefits and challenges for this type of assignments?
- How will the expatriates be selected?

Q10. Is there anything you would like to mention that I did not ask before?

Keep in mind: express interest, express cultural ignorance, and restate and incorporate interviewee's terminologies.

STOP TAPE RECORDER

Conclude the Interview Thank you very much for your time and your information. As I mentioned earlier the information collected will be kept confidential and will be combined with the others in the study. I would appreciate if I could have another interview with you in case further information and clarification is needed.

Appendix B. Interview Protocol for Former Expatriates

State Purpose

In this study I am interested in understanding the impact of remote work on the expatriation and expatriates' life. To reach this goal, I will be asking you about your point of view regarding the topic. This interview will be kept strictly confidential and will not be used by your organization. All your answers will be used solely and exclusively for this thesis.

Introduction

The interview will last approximately 40 minutes and feel free to use your firm's local terminologies.

Ask for permission to record the interview

START TAPE RECORDER

Interview questions for former expatriates:

Warm-Up (Descriptive Questions)

First, I would like to know more about you, about your position, your responsibilities, and how long have you been involved in the expatriation' topics.

Questions 1 to 6 (approximately 5 minutes for each question)

Before

Q1. Could you, please, tell me how was your international assignment experience?

- How was the support from your organization during your international assignment? On an economic, social, psychological, family and adaptation level...?
- What were the benefits and challenges that you had in your expatriation?
- How was your expatriation affected by the pandemic or the remote work boom?

Present

Q2. How do you see current expatriation in your organization?

- How do you consider the current approach?
- How different is it from expatriation you had before?
- What are the benefits and challenges of the current approach?

Q3. How would you describe an effective/successful international assignment?

Future

Q4. How do you imagine the future of expatriation in your organization?

- What type of international assignment would you consider to be more suitable for your organization?
- How would you describe your organization's role in this regard? On an economic, social, psychological, family and adaptation level...?

Q5. How do you envision an effective international assignment in the future?

Q6. Which are the benefits and challenges that you can identify for the future of expatriation?

Q7. Is there anything you would like to mention that I did not ask before?

Keep in mind: express interest, express cultural ignorance, and restate and incorporate interviewee's terminologies.

STOP TAPE RECORDER

Conclude the Interview Thank you very much for your time and your information. As I mentioned earlier the information collected will be kept confidential and will be combined with the others in the study. I would appreciate if I could have another interview with you in case further information and clarification is needed.

Appendix C. Interview Protocol for Current Expatriates

State Purpose

In this study I am interested in understanding the impact of remote work on the expatriation and expatriates' life. To reach this goal, I will be asking you about your point of view regarding the topic. This interview will be kept strictly confidential and will not be used by your organization. All your answers will be used solely and exclusively for this thesis.

Introduction

The interview will last approximately 30 minutes and feel free to use your firm's local terminologies.

Ask for permission to record the interview

START TAPE RECORDER

Interview questions for current expatriates:

Warm-Up (Descriptive Questions)

First, I would like to know more about you, about your position, your responsibilities, and how long have you been involved in the expatriation' topics.

Questions 1 to 5 (approximately 5 minutes for each question)

Present:

Q1. Could you, please, tell me how your international assignment experience is going?

- How is your international assignment being affected by the pandemic or the remote work boom?
- How is the support from your organization during your international assignment? On an economic, social, psychological, family and adaptation level...?

Q2. When you applied or asked for an international assignment, how did you imagine that would be?

- Which are the differences that you can identify?
- Which are the advantages and disadvantages from your current experience?

Future

Q3. How do you imagine the future of expatriation in your organization?

- What type of international assignment would you consider to be more suitable for your organization?
- How would you describe your organization's role in this regard? On an economic, social, psychological, family and adaptation level...?

Q4. How do you envision an effective international assignment in the future?

Q5. Which are the benefits and challenges that you can identify for the future of expatriation

Q6. Is there anything you would like to mention that I did not ask before?

Keep in mind: express interest, express cultural ignorance, and restate and incorporate interviewee's terminologies.

STOP TAPE RECORDER

Conclude the Interview Thank you very much for your time and your information. As I mentioned earlier the information collected will be kept confidential and will be combined with the others in the study. I would appreciate if I could have another interview with you in case further information and clarification is needed.