

Retaining Repatriates – The Role of Career Derailment upon Repatriation and How It Can Be Mitigated

Abstract

This study draws on relative deprivation theory to investigate the effect of career derailment upon return from an international assignment on repatriate retention, thereby also considering factors which can mitigate this relationship. The results from a hierarchical linear regression analysis of data from 292 repatriates indicate that career derailment upon repatriation decreases the former expatriates' intent to stay. However, this effect is weaker when individuals perceived that they had promotion, autonomy, and compensation advantages relative to colleagues who lack international assignment experience and when they were provided organizational repatriation support by their assigning organization. With these findings, this work lays the ground for strategies to improve the retention of former expatriates despite restricted career opportunities in the home organization. Thereby, it helps firms to realize the long-term benefits of international assignments.

Keywords: Repatriation; retention; career derailment; relative career advantage; organizational repatriation support; relative deprivation theory

Introduction

International assignments (IAs) have long become a common means for multinational corporations (MNCs) to manage their worldwide operations (Brookfield Relocation Services, 2016). However, in light of a globalized business environment that today is more complex than ever, the focus of the MNCs' IA management is changing. While traditionally, the attention was primarily devoted to the employees' contribution in the host country (e.g., Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991), nowadays there is increased interest in the long-term benefits which can arise upon their return to the home country (e.g., Brookfield Relocation Services, 2015; Collings, 2014). As a result of their exposure to foreign business practices, networks, and cultures, former expatriates possess knowledge, skills, and competencies that can provide a source of competitive advantage to globally operating organizations (Breitenmoser & Bader, 2016). Thus, at the repatriation stage of the IA process, retaining and efficiently integrating their repatriates' human capital is critical to the future success of MNCs (Oddou et al., 2013). However, 'a basic premise of human capital [...] is that firms do not own it; individuals do' (Wright, 2001, p. 705). Thus, for MNCs to be able to capitalize on their repatriates' knowledge, skills, and competencies, successfully maintaining these individuals in the organization is necessary.

The focus of repatriation research has long been on cultural readjustment and how it can be facilitated (e.g., Black, 1992; Black, Gregersen, & Mendenhall, 1992; Gregersen & Stroh, 1997). Only in the past decade have scholars begun to also systematically analyze the crucial role of career development upon repatriation in repatriate retention (e.g., Kraimer, Shaffer, & Bolino, 2009; Ren, Bolino, Shaffer, & Kraimer., 2013). Most employees consider their participation in an IA a major contribution to the MNC. Therefore, as a reward for their efforts overseas, former expatriates commonly expect career development upon repatriation (Bader, 2017). However, many repatriates take over positions upon return that can be referred to as

career derailment, because they have less hierarchical value and responsibility than before (Suutari & Brewster, 2003) or during the IA (Kraimer et al., 2009, Jassawalla & Sashittal, 2009).

Career derailment can be considered from two distinct yet closely related perspectives: subjective and objective career outcomes (Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman et al., 2005). Subjective career outcomes reflect an employee's individual career satisfaction (Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990), whereas objective career outcomes include more tangible aspects such as rank in the organization (Hall, 1976; Ng et al., 2005) or the level of compensation and responsibility (Abele & Spurk, 2009; Ng et al., 2005).

From an objective perspective, career derailment in the repatriation context has been measured in terms of hierarchical position (Kraimer et al., 2009). However, Shaffer et al. (2012) outline the need to measure career outcomes upon repatriation based on multiple indicators. In this regard, while compensation (Abele & Spurk, 2009) does not qualify as a comparable measure since expatriate salaries vary substantially depending on factors such as compensation policy, type and location of an IA (Suutari & Tornikoski, 2001; Wentland, 2003), research indicates that changes in responsibility are important for repatriates (Jassawalla & Sashittal, 2009).

While expatriates embark on their IA with their last job in the home country in mind, in the host country they often take over positions with much higher levels of hierarchy and responsibility. Upon repatriation, these positions are likely to be the point of reference for evaluations of career development (Jassawalla & Sashittal, 2009; Kraimer et al., 2009). Accordingly, in this study, we consider career derailment from an objective perspective and define it as losses in hierarchical position (Kraimer et al., 2009) and responsibility (Abele & Spurk, 2009; Ng et al., 2005) compared to the last position during the IA. Prior research indicated that in this case, the risk of disappointment, and eventually turnover is high (Aldossari &

Robertson, in press; Reiche, Kraimer, & Harzing, 2011). Nevertheless, as the number of IAs continues to grow, keeping up the career level of every former expatriate is simply not feasible for MNCs (Breitenmoser & Berg, 2017). Therefore, this study aims to identify factors which can improve repatriate retention despite restricted career opportunities in the home organization.

To achieve this goal, we build our model on relative deprivation theory (Crosby, 1976). Relative deprivation describes a subjective negative feeling which derives when actual and desired situations diverge (Crosby, 1976; Martin, 1981; Smith, Pettigrew, Pippin, & Bialosiewicz, 2012). A central prerequisite of this feeling is a social comparison either with the self in the past or with others in the present (Crosby, 1976). From this angle, career derailment upon repatriation is the negative result of a comparison with the self in the past. We associate it with a decreased intent to stay in the assigning organization as the first step of our study (Kraimer et al., 2009).

Second, we illuminate the moderating role of social comparisons with others (Crosby, 1976). A feeling of advantage compared to others is associated with increased satisfaction (Festinger, 1954). Therefore, we test if, upon repatriation, perceived career advantages compared to colleagues who lack IA experience can mitigate the effect of career derailment on intent to stay.

Eventually, we investigate the buffering effect of organizational repatriation support. By organizational repatriation support, we refer to practices offered by the MNC before or after repatriation which aim at smoothening the former expatriates' return home (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001; Lazarova & Cerdin, 2007). Organizational support is beneficial as employees receive assistance that is practically helpful, whereas at the same time it increases a feeling of being valued and taken care of by the employer (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, &

Sowa, 1986). Organizational support might therefore be able to weaken other negative experiences (Cohen & Wills, 1985) such as the effect of career derailment on intent to stay.

With these considerations, this study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, by transferring arguments from the relative deprivation literature to the repatriation context, our study provides clarification on the role of career derailment upon repatriation, thereby adding to the little empirical work on this topic (Kraimer et al., 2009; Ren et al., 2013). Second, building on relative deprivation theory, we investigate the moderating role of promotion, autonomy, and compensation advantages compared to colleagues in the repatriates' work environment who lack IA experience. By doing so, we shed further light on the role of social comparisons (Crosby, 1976, Festinger, 1954) in the IA context (e.g., Toh & DeNisi, 2003; Kraimer et al., 2012). Third, by considering the moderating effect of organizational repatriation support perceived by individuals before and during repatriation, we identify repatriation support practices helping MNCs to retain their repatriates. By doing so, we meet a need that was recently identified by repatriation research (Aldossari & Robertson, in press).

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses Development

Relative deprivation theory (Crosby, 1976) is a well-established theory in organizational justice research (Greenberg, 1987; Rupp et al., 2017). The concept of relative deprivation was first uncovered when examining differences in soldiers' work satisfaction (Stouffer et al., 1949). Stouffer and colleagues highlighted the meaning of subjective evaluations rather than objective environmental conditions for job satisfaction. Similar studies followed which stated that employee satisfaction is not only a function of how positive working conditions are perceived, but also how workers would want them to be. Relative deprivation is defined as a state of tension that derives from a discrepancy between the way things are and the way they ought to be. Originally, Crosby (1976) proposed that relative deprivation only occurs when individuals '(...) 1) see that someone else possesses X, 2) want X, 3) feel entitled to X, 4) think it feasible

to obtain X, and 5) lack responsibility for not having X' (p. 85). However, more recent research indicates that not all conditions need to be met to experience feelings of deprivation (Olson, Roese, Meen, & Roberson, 1995). More precisely, like equity theory, relative deprivation theory highlights that such feelings are triggered particularly by social comparisons, either with own experiences in the past or with other people in the present (Adams, 1965; Crosby, 1976). If individuals evaluate their relative position as negative, dissatisfaction occurs. One typical example is compensation. When individuals, even in privileged positions, compare their salary to that of others and find that they earn less, a feeling of resentment and dissatisfaction evolves (Crosby, 1982; Sweeney, McFarlin, & Inderrieden, 1990). In turn, when they feel advanced, their satisfaction increases.

Drawing on these notions, in the following, we first examine the effects of repatriates' comparisons with own experiences in the past, i.e., the effect of career derailment upon repatriation compared to the last job during the IA, on intentions to stay in the organization. Subsequently, we investigate factors that mitigate this relationship, i.e., the effect of social comparisons with colleagues who lack IA experience and the role of organizational repatriation support.

Career Derailment upon Repatriation and Intent to Stay

Recent empirical evidence suggests that expatriates increasingly regard IAs from a long-term career perspective (Bader, 2017). In other words, the individuals consider career success upon return to the home organization as one of the major benefits they can gain from their IA (McNulty, de Cieri, & Hutchings, 2013). Likewise, many expatriates think that the fact that their employer chose them for an IA means that he considers them a high potential candidate (Jassawalla & Sashittal, 2009). Presumably, these strong assumptions do not only derive from

the explicit and implicit management practices which employees experience along the IA process (Sherman & Morley, 2016), but also from factors beyond the MNC's control, e.g., the public debate on the value of international experience to globally operating organizations (Conboye, 2013). As a consequence, expatriates often believe that the contributions they make and competencies they acquire in the host country entitle them to a promotion in the home country. Thus, they expect career development upon repatriation (McNulty et al., 2013).

However, extant research suggest that upon return from an IA, the career of former expatriates rarely evolves in the way they expect it to. Suutari and Brewster (2003) report that 20% of the repatriates in their sample who still worked for the assigning MNC perceived that they did not experience an increase in status in the organizational hierarchy. Even worse, 12% suffered from losses of status in hierarchy compared to before the IA. However, this is not a surprising finding, as from an organizational perspective IAs do not always have a managerial development or career purpose. For instance, Lazarova and Caligiuri (2001) differentiate between three purposes of assignments beyond managerial development, i.e. functional, technical, and strategic assignments. Thus, in many cases career development is not part of the MNC's repatriation agenda (Breitenmoser & Berg, 2017). Accordingly, at the repatriation stage of the IA process, former expatriates are often assigned to positions that are similar or even lower compared to the one they held before their IA (Aldossari & Robertson, in press). Even worse, these positions often do not reflect the status and responsibilities of the positions abroad and therefore, constitute career derailment in the repatriates' eyes (Kraimer et al., 2009). Particularly in the case of expatriates from the headquarters, their ties to the organization's 'center of power' are valued in the foreign subsidiary. Hence, onsite they have considerable control over budgets, people, and decision-making (Aldossari & Robertson, in press; Jassawalla & Sashittal, 2009) which in this case, they lose upon repatriation. Relative deprivation predicts that if individuals want and feel entitled to something, but do not get it, they will

experience negative feelings (Crosby, 1976; Olson et al., 1995). Consequentially, because repatriates expect career development (Bader, 2017) and due to their experience and knowledge acquisition are likely to feel entitled to it (McNulty et al., 2013), they will experience negative feelings when career derailment occurs.

Extant research provides support for this notion, arguing that if in comparison to their own self in the past individuals experience career derailment, feelings of deprivation and underemployment evolve (Feldman, Leana, & Bolino, 2002) which eventually translate into turnover intentions (Kraimer et al., 2009). For instance, Ren et al. (2013) used relative deprivation theory to examine the effect of psychological contract breach regarding pay, career derailment, and underemployment on career satisfaction of repatriates. The authors found that a psychological contract breach in terms of pay as well as career derailment was associated with decreased career satisfaction. If the career derails, former expatriates may take it as a signal that their assigning MNC does not value the knowledge, skills, and competencies they gained during their IA (Bossard & Pererson, 2005; Gregersen & Stroh, 1997) and therefore, denies them the benefits they think they deserve. In consequence, Sanchez, Spector, and Cooper (2000) provided examples of repatriates who changed their employer due to more favorable career prospects. Consequentially, we argue that career derailment upon repatriation compared to the last position during the IA will decrease repatriates` intent to stay with the assigning organization. We hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1: Career derailment negatively affects repatriate intent to stay.

The Moderating Role of Relative Advantages upon Repatriation

Beyond comparisons with the self in the past, relative deprivation theory highlights the importance of social comparison with others in the present (Crosby, 1974). In fact, Festinger (1954) proposed that if individuals feel advantaged or disadvantaged compared to others, their

evaluation of their present situation will be altered. Extant literature in the expatriation and repatriation context has investigated different effects of social comparison, mostly from a negative angle. Toh and DeNisi (2003) argued that pay inequalities between host country nationals and expatriates lead to perceptions of deprivation and eventually withdrawal of the host country nationals. Several more studies with a similar focus on pay injustice between expatriates and HCNs followed (Bonache, Sanchez, & Zárraga-Oberty, 2009; Oltra, Bonache, & Brewster, 2013).

Kraimer et al. (2012) highlighted the importance of social comparisons to colleagues who lack IA experience in the repatriation context. The authors argued that perceptions of job deprivation, i.e., “expatriates’ belief that their organization does not provide them with appreciable benefits relative to their colleagues who did not complete international assignments” (p. 403), can lead to identity strain and turnover upon return. The current study also considers colleagues who lack IA experience as reference persons upon repatriation; however, it is thereby the first to investigate potential positive outcomes of this social comparison. More precisely, instead of focusing on perceived job deprivation, we investigate the role of a perceived career advantage, which we accordingly define as perceived career benefits compared to colleagues who lack IA experience.

As IAs are often challenging both from a professional and a private perspective (Bader, Froese, & Kraeh, in press; McEnvoy & Parker, 1995; Black et al, 1991), expatriates invest a lot by working overseas. Further, expatriates fulfill various tasks for their organization during their IA (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001). In light of these substantial contributions, we have argued before that former expatriates will expect career development per se. In addition to that, relative deprivation theory proposes that they will perceive that colleagues who lack IA experience have contributed less to the organization than they have. Consequently, they are likely to think that they deserve career advantages compared to these colleagues. In particular, in

this study, we refer to three types of career advantages: promotion, autonomy, and compensation advantages.

First, we propose that the expectation of increased promotion opportunities are of importance, as career motives are among the main drivers of accepting IAs (Bader, 2017; Jassawalla & Sashittal, 2009; McNulty et al., 2013). Accordingly, it will also be of importance in terms of social comparisons. If former expatriates perceive that they have better promotion opportunities than their colleagues who lack IA experience, career derailment upon repatriation might be less severe. More specifically, perceiving a promotion advantage allows them to reason that at the time of their repatriation, no better positions were available and if promotion opportunities will open at a later point of time, they will be chosen over their colleagues without IA experience. Relative deprivation theory suggests that the positive result of this social comparison will leave them more satisfied with their situation and thus, less affected by their current career derailment.

Extant studies highlight that autonomy is another important job characteristic for expatriates (Birdseye & Hill, 1995; Takeuchi, Shay, & Li, 2008) and repatriates (Kraimer et al., 2012; Vidal, Valle, & Aragón, 2007). As expatriates often enjoy great autonomy during their IA (Bossard & Peterson, 2005), many of them expect to continue that path upon repatriation. In particular, because they have managed jobs with more autonomy than their domestic colleagues who lack IA experience, they will expect this experience to pay out in comparison when they return to the home organization. Accordingly, former expatriates will feel more satisfied and suffer less from career derailment if they perceive a relative autonomy advantage.

As compensation is another key component that shapes satisfaction (e.g. Harvey, 1989; Martocchio, 2009), we argue that it is also of importance when repatriates evaluate their career outcomes. During their IA, expatriates regularly receive compensation premiums (Black

& Gregersen, 1999). Drawing on relative deprivation theory, we propose that although these compensation premiums are usually cut upon repatriation (Reynolds, 1997), former expatriates will want their personal investment paid off by at least receiving higher compensation than their colleagues without IA experience receive. Supporting these arguments, research based on relative deprivation theory highlighted that not only actual compensation but compensation relative to others is important (Sweeney et al., 1990). In consequence, we propose that the effect of career derailment upon repatriation is weakened when repatriates' evaluation of their relative compensation advantage is positive compared to those without IA experience. We hypothesize:

Hypothesis 2: The negative relationship between career derailment and repatriate intent to stay will be weaker with higher levels of (a) perceived promotion advantage, (b) perceived autonomy advantage, and (c) perceived compensation advantage relative to colleagues who lack IA experience.

The Moderating Role of Organizational Repatriation Support

The results of several studies indicate that the level of organizational support provided might play a vital role for repatriates (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001; Lazarova & Cerdin, 2007; Stahl et al., 2009). One form of organizational support for repatriates are repatriation support practices, e.g., pre-departure briefings or career planning sessions (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001). Offering repatriation support signals that the MNC cares for its former expatriates in exchange for their contribution overseas, whereas at the same time facilitating their repatriation.

From the perspective of relative deprivation, we propose a buffering effect (Cohen & Wills, 1985) in a way that if the organization seems to care for and provides support to the repatriate, he or she is likely to be less affected by career derailment. More precisely, we argue that even if repatriates perceive that their position and responsibilities have decreased, their

feeling of deprivation can be compensated, if they receive the attention and support they feel they deserve from their organization. In a similar vein, Ren et al. (2013) found that the negative relationship of psychological contract breach and career derailment is mitigated when former expatriates perceive that the MNC acknowledges their IA experience. This may hold true for organizational repatriation support as well. Accordingly, when trying to interpret and process the experience of derailment, repatriates are likely to also consult information on other benefits they were provided by the organization before and during repatriation, above and beyond the objective career outcomes they expected. This will have an impact on how they interpret their career development. Organizational repatriation support may be considered a form of acknowledgement and thus, a substitute for other rewards such as career development which repatriates perceive they were denied by their employer (Turnley & Feldman, 1999). As a result, they will reconsider their situation and might conclude that the MNC gave its best effort to make their repatriation successful and thus, is not fully to blame for the derailment of their career. This study hypothesizes:

Hypothesis 3: The negative relationship between career derailment and repatriate intent to stay will be weaker with higher levels of organizational repatriation support.

Figure 1 depicts the research model proposed in this study.

[Figure 1 near here]

Method

Procedure and Sample

Data was collected from employees of publicly listed German MNCs who have been repatriated for up to 48 months (see e.g., Benson & Pattie, 2008; Jassawalla & Sashittal, 2009, for a

similar approach). Germany provides an adequate country context for this research as it is the largest economy in Europe and the world's third largest export country (World Trade Organization, 2016). Thus, German MNCs are engaged in complex global business activities and IAs serve as a common means for managing this challenge.

To identify potential respondents, we applied a two-way strategy. We conducted an extensive selection process which involved manually screening repatriate profiles in professional social networks and researching their email addresses. Additionally, we contacted human resource managers of selected German MNCs who provided access to several additional candidates. Overall, 1,127 repatriates were contacted via email along with an invitation to participate in an anonymous online survey. 295 surveys were returned, three of which had to be deleted for this study as they included outliers and/or missing data. Therefore, this research draws on a sample of $n=292$. The corresponding response rate of 26% is slightly below that of similar work in the field (e.g., Lazarova & Cerdin, 2007); however, it must be acknowledged that employees are highly sensitive about issues like objective career success and intent to stay, which aggravates data collection on this topic. Nevertheless, as Table 1 illustrates, the sample's demographic characteristics are in line with previous repatriation research (e.g., Kraimer et al., 2009; Ren et al., 2013).

[Table 1 near here]

Measures

To measure the variables included in the research model, standard scales from the literature were used and extended or adapted if necessary. Except for two variables (organizational repatriation support, career motive), the respondents were asked to base their answers on a five-point Likert scale.

We measured intent to stay by using the well-established turnover intention scale by Wayne, Shore, and Liden (1997) and reverse-coded the items (one item already was reverse-coded). A sample item is ‘I think I will be working at my company five years from now’.

To measure career derailment upon repatriation, we reverse-coded the objective repatriate career success measure from Kraimer et al. (2009). More precisely, we asked the respondents on a five point Likert-Scale: “Compared to your job position during your last expatriate job, is your current position a (1) promotion... (5) demotion” Following the suggestions of Shaffer et al. (2012), we then extended this scale by including an additional question on the respondents` level of project responsibility: “Compared to your project responsibility during your last expatriate job, are the projects you are currently responsible for an (1) increase of responsibility... (5) decrease of responsibility.” . We then averaged both items to achieve an overall value rendering the respondents` level of career derailment compared to their last job during the IA for the analysis.

To measure relative promotion, autonomy, and compensation advantages, we adapted and shortened the 12-item job deprivation scale developed by Kraimer et al. (2012) (for an overview of the items, see Appendix 1) and developed three sub-dimensions with three items each. The three sub-dimensions represented promotion, autonomy, and compensation advantages. As the remaining three items did not reflect the focus constructs of our study, they were removed from further analysis. This procedure was also supported statistically as exploratory factor analysis (EFA) showed a three-factor structure and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) established discriminant validity of this three-factor structure (for results, see preliminary analysis).

Organizational repatriation support was operationalized using a list of eleven support practices which Lazarova and Caligiuri (2001) developed to measure the role of organizational repatriation support for repatriation (see Table 4 for an overview of the support prac-

tices). In the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to indicate whether the support practices were made available to them by their MNC before or after their return from the IA. Like previous studies (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001; Lazarova & Cerdin, 2007), we assigned a support practice a score of 1 if it was available and 0 if was not available. The scores were added up to create an overall organizational repatriation support score.

Moreover, two control variables were included in the research model. Because extant research suggests that most expatriates expect objective career success to derive from their IA (e.g., McNulty et al., 2013), we controlled for “anticipated positive career consequences” as a motive to accept the IA. In the questionnaire, the respondents were presented a list of twelve motives for going abroad taken from Stahl, Miller, and Tung (2002), one of which was “anticipated positive career consequences”. We then asked them to rank order their five most important motives out of all presented motives in their decision to accept their last IA. To assess the importance of the motive “anticipated positive career consequences”, we assigned scores reflecting the individual rank order of this motive on a scale from 1 to 6 (6= career consequences was rated as number 1; 5 = career consequences was rated as number 2; 4= career consequences was rated as number 3; 3 = career consequences was rated as number 2; 2 = career consequences was rated as number 5; 1 = career consequences was not relevant).

To make sure that repatriates themselves believe they deserve to keep their level of objective career success upon return to the home organization, we further controlled for their perceived performance in the host country. IA performance was operationalized with four items from a scale by Kraimer and Wayne (2004). An exemplary item is ‘meeting job objectives’. Black and Porter (1991) suggest that when self-reported performance measures are applied, the respondents should be encouraged to recall their most recent actual performance evaluation. Thus, in the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to rely on their last performance evaluation as an expatriate when rating their IA performance.

Analysis

Preliminary Analysis

Before the main analysis, we conducted EFA and CFA. Based on theoretical and statistical considerations, during EFA and CFA, three of the original items of the relative career advantage scale by Kraimer et al. (2012) as well as one item from the intent to stay scale were excluded from further analysis, as these showed high cross-loadings and/or low factor loadings in CFA. After removing the items, CFA yielded good fit indices for our data ($\chi^2/df=1.45$, CFI=.98, RMSEA=.04). To establish discriminant validity, we then compared our model to several lower factor models. All alternative models fitted considerably worse to our data than the hypothesized measurement model, thus providing support for the discriminant validity of our measures.

Common method variance (CMV) is a potential source of biasing variability when all data is collected from one participant at one point in time. Hence, while the questionnaire design applied for this study was in line with CMV-reducing design recommendations in the literature (Chang, van Witteloostuijn, & Eden, 2010), we also statistically controlled for CMV after the data collection. First, we conducted the Harman single-factor test using SPSS, applying an exploratory factor analysis and examining the unrotated factor solution. The single factor explained 32% of the total variance in the data, which is well below the suggested threshold of 50%. We further conducted a common latent factor test (CLF) in AMOS, double-loading all latent construct items in the model on their respective construct and an unmeasured CLF (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). The model fit showed little improvement from introducing the CLF (without CLF: $\chi^2/df=1.45$, CFI=.98, RMSEA=.04; with CLF: $\chi^2/df=1.30$, CFI=.99, RMSEA=.03) and all variable loadings remained significant. Hence, the results of the statistical tests performed indicate that CMV is not an issue in the dataset.

Hierarchical Linear Regression Analysis

Using SPSS, hierarchical linear regression analysis was applied to test the hypothesized relationships. Means, standard deviations, reliability estimates, and correlations of the variables are presented in Table 2. Overall, seven models were calculated. While the base model (Model 0) contains the control variables only, career derailment was entered into the regression equation in Model 1a to test Hypothesis 1. To test the moderating effects predicted by Hypothesis 2a-3, the four moderators were entered into the regression equation in Model 1b. Then we separately entered the interaction terms into the regression equation in the Models 2a-3. This procedure was chosen as this work focuses on the effects of each of the interactions separately. It was not expected that one of the interaction terms would explain the variance in repatriate intent to stay beyond the other interaction terms (see Ren et al., 2013, for a similar approach).

The maximum variance in repatriate intent to stay is explained in Model 2c (R^2 adjusted=.21). Nevertheless, all models but the base model are statistically significant ($9.49 < F < 18.82$; $p < .001$). To ensure that multicollinearity was not an issue in the dataset, a diagnostic test for the variance inflation factor (VIF) was performed which yielded values of 2.19 and lower and thus, distinctly below the suggested threshold of 10. Table 3 provides an overview of the regression results for all models.

[Table 2 near here]

[Table 3 near here]

Considering the control variables only, Model 0 indicates that neither the repatriates' motive to accept the IA, nor their IA performance affected their intent to stay in a statistically significant way. The explanatory power of Model 0 therefore is low (R^2 adj.=.01). However, when career derailment was entered as the independent variable into the regression equation (Model 1a), the value of R^2 (adj.) increased to .16. Career derailment upon repatriation has a

negative and significant effect on repatriates' intent to stay with their assigning MNC ($\beta = -.39$; $p < .001$). Support for Hypothesis 1 was thus provided.

Model 1b considers the direct effect of the moderator variables on repatriate intent to stay. Only organizational repatriation support significantly affected the dependent variable in this study ($\beta = .13$; $p < .05$). The interactions between relative promotion advantage, relative autonomy advantage and relative compensation advantage and career derailment were entered into the regression equation in Model 2a, 2b and 2c respectively. Each of the interaction terms significantly increased intent to stay in the current sample ($\beta = .14$; $p < .05$ for relative promotion advantage, $\beta = .14$; $p < .01$ for relative autonomy advantage, $\beta = .18$; $p < .001$ for relative compensation advantage). Hence, the results provide support for Hypotheses 2a, 2b, and 2c. However, it must be acknowledged that while all of the interaction terms explained extra variance in the dependent variable ($R^2 \text{ adj.} = .20$; $p < .05$ in Model 2a, $R^2 \text{ adj.} = .20$; $p < .01$ in Model 2b, $R^2 \text{ adj.} = .21$; $p < .001$ in Model 2c), the interaction between relative compensation advantage and career derailment made the greatest contribution to R^2 in this study ($\Delta R^2 = 3\%$).

The interaction between organizational repatriation support and career derailment was analyzed in Model 3. Results show that the interaction ($\beta = .10$; $p < .1$) and additional variance explained ($\Delta R^2 = .01$; $p < .1$) were only marginally significant. Accordingly, H3 only received marginal support.

To better comprehend the findings presented, the significant two-way interactions in Model 2a to 3 were further investigated based on a simple slope analysis (Aiken & West, 1991). As displayed in Figure 2-5, each interaction was plotted one standard deviation above and below the mean of the moderator. In this regard, Figure 2 and 3 illustrate that the slope of the line representing the relationship between career derailment and intent to stay is steeper at low levels of relative promotion advantage ($b = -.45$; $p < .001$)/relative autonomy advantage

($b=-.45$; $p<.001$) than at high levels of relative promotion advantage ($b=-.17$; $p<.1$)/relative autonomy advantage ($b=-.16$; $p<.1$). This means that if repatriates in the sample believed that they had better promotion opportunities and/or more autonomy than their colleagues without IA experience, their intent to stay remained relatively stable in light of career derailment upon repatriation; however, their intent to stay was low when no such advantages were perceived. Figure 4 displays similar results for low levels of a relative compensation advantage ($b=-.49$; $p<.001$), whereas the slope of the line representing the relationship between career derailment and intent to stay was not significant at high levels of a relative compensation advantage ($b=-.10$; $p>.1$). Figure 5 shows that when former expatriates experience career derailment, their intent to stay with the assigning MNC is significantly higher when they perceive they were supported by the organization ($b=-.20$; $p<.05$) during the repatriation process than when they perceive that organizational repatriation support was missing ($b=-.41$; $p<.001$).

[Figures 2-5 near here]

As a post-hoc test, to provide further clarification, we considered the interaction effect of each of the eleven repatriation support practices provided by Lazarova and Caligiuri (2001) with career derailment separately. As displayed in Table 4, the results reveal that mentoring programs while on assignment, career planning sessions, and repatriation position agreement explained additional variance in the former expatriates' intent to stay when considered as individual moderators. However, as only the latter two are significant ($p <.01$), it can be concluded that career planning sessions and the agreement on a repatriation position are the most powerful support practices in mitigating the effect of career derailment on repatriate intent to stay.

[Table 4 near here]

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between career derailment upon repatriation and repatriates' intent to stay, thereby also considering factors which can mitigate this relationship. As predicted by relative deprivation theory (Crosby, 1976) the current findings support the notion that former expatriates indeed are less willing to stay with their assigning organization if they perceive that the level and responsibility of their job have decreased compared to their last job during the IA. If they compare their current job level and responsibility with that during the IA and perceive a derailment, this comparison evokes feelings of deprivation and therefore decreases intentions to stay with the employing organization.

However, further drawing on the notion of social comparison in relative deprivation theory (Crosby, 1976), we expected that the effect of career derailment on the repatriates' intent to stay is weaker when former expatriates believe that they are better off compared to others who have not invested in an IA in terms of promotion opportunities, autonomy, and compensation. We interpret that these relative advantages contribute to their perception of whether the organization values their investments. We found support for these relationships as well. It is interesting to note that while all types of relative advantage (promotion, autonomy, compensation) significantly contributed to explaining variance in the repatriates' intent to stay, inserting perceived compensation relative to colleagues who lack IA experience as a moderator into the regression equation led to the greatest increase in variance explained. This may be because of all three dimensions of relative career advantage, compensation is the most tangible (Turnley & Feldman, 1999). Furthermore, compared to an employee's promotion opportunities or level of autonomy, compensation can be rather easily adjusted. Even if no promotion opportunities can be offered, repatriates may expect their supervisors to at least grant them a better salary than their colleagues to acknowledge the contribution they made to the organization through their IA experience. Further, given that the slope of the line representing the rela-

relationship between career derailment and intent to stay was not significant at high levels of relative compensation advantage, but significant at low levels, it may be that repatriates consider having a relative compensation advantage a kind of hygiene factor as introduced by Herzberg (1966). This would mean that the presence of a relative compensation advantage has little positive impact, whereas the absence of it is hard to forgive for former expatriates, considering the contributions they made to the MNC.

The current results also provide an indication that the negative relationship between career derailment and repatriate intent to stay can be mitigated by organizational repatriation support. However, this effect was only marginally significant. Further, it must be noted that in this study, the interaction between organizational repatriation support and career derailment explained the smallest amount of variance in the dependent variable. One explanation is that similar to other studies we found a significant direct effect on repatriation retention (Birur & Muthiah, 2013; Stroh, 1995). Accordingly, repatriation support increases intent to stay per se. Additional post-hoc tests revealed differences in the meaning of support practices, because only two organizational repatriation practices significantly moderated the effect of career derailment upon return on repatriate intent to stay: career planning sessions, and repatriation position agreements/ guarantees. An explanation for this finding may be that these practices often have already taken place prior to repatriation. This gives (former) expatriates the time to adjust to the idea that they will return to a job that is not comparable to the one they had in the host country, and might provide more realistic expectations (Black, 1992; Stroh, Gregersen, & Black, 1998). As a result, their feelings of deprivation are likely to be less intense when they are confronted with career derailment upon repatriation.

Theoretical Contribution

This study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, it provides empirical insights into the role of career derailment in repatriates' intent to stay with the assigning MNC. It extends the little systematic research on this topic (e.g. Kraimer et al., 2009; Ren et al., 2013) by transferring arguments from relative deprivation theory (Crosby, 1976) to the repatriation context, thereby also outlining boundary conditions of the relationship. In fact, our results highlight the meaning of comparisons both to oneself in the past, as well as to others in the present in repatriate retention.

Second, the current study answers a recent call of scholars who reason that individual experiences at the repatriation stage need to be further analyzed in light of how to improve the repatriation process (Aldossari & Robertson, in press). Extending the results of prior repatriation research, this work thereby provides clarification on how MNCs can mitigate the negative results of a perceived career derailment even if career opportunities in the home organization are restricted. We contemplate the individuals' perception of advantages compared to reference persons in their work environment (Ho, 2005; Sweeney et al., 1990) by addressing individual comparisons to colleagues without IA experience. In this regard, this study extends existent work in the repatriation context that considers the role of a career advantage relative to these reference persons (Kraimer et al., 2012) by differentiating the kind of career advantages former expatriates perceive, i.e., promotion, autonomy, and compensation advantages. As the findings suggest that compensation advantage plays a relatively vital role, they outline the importance of monetary acknowledgement upon return from an IA, despite the fact that such measures are argued to lose importance in light of protean careers that are increasingly value-driven (Baruch, 2014; Hall, 2004).

Third, this study casts new light on the role of organizational support in the repatriation context. Thus far, repatriation research primarily regards organizational repatriation support as a predictor of objective career success upon return from an IA (e.g., Bolino, 2007; Kraimer

et al., 2009), or as a factor immediately contributing to the former expatriates' retention (e.g., Birur & Muthiah, 2013; Stroh, 1995). Our study somewhat supports this, because we too found a significant direct effect. However, additionally, this work indicates that while both objective career success and organizational repatriation support may be benefits which repatriates expect in exchange for their contributions overseas (Aldossari & Robertson, in press), there also exists a compensatory relationship between the two variables, at least for some of the support practices. If former expatriates were provided with these practices, the negative effect of career derailment on intentions to stay was less intense as a buffering effect occurred (Cohen & Wills, 1985).

Practical Implications

This study offers important practical implications for globally operating organizations. The results presented in this work emphasize the need for MNCs to acknowledge that due to their experiences overseas, former expatriates return home often with high career expectations. If organizations are not planning to fulfill these expectations – because they do not have capacity and/or because it is not part of their strategy – this should be explicitly communicated at the beginning of the IA process to avoid dissatisfaction at the repatriation stage. Research has highlighted the meaning of met expectations for expatriation and repatriation (Black, 1992; Caligiuri et al., 2001; Stroh et al. 1998), accordingly, expectation management and communication in advance is of crucial importance.

However, as expectation management is sometimes difficult, and career opportunities might change during the time of expatriation, this study moreover points at further mechanisms which can help MNCs retain their former expatriates even if career opportunities are limited. First, our findings suggest that if expatriates feel better off compared to their colleagues without IA experience in terms of promotion, autonomy, and compensation, they are

less affected by career derailment upon repatriation. Accordingly, organizations should ensure that this social comparison will turn out in the repatriates' favor so they themselves perceive the organizational practices as just. Based on our study, we recommend compensation as an important instrument in this regard. Through higher compensation, acknowledgement of their contributions can be expressed without having to create new job opportunities. Second, MNCs should extend their organizational repatriation support. In particular, the results of this study highlight the importance of career planning sessions prior to and during the repatriation. Of course, as career and job opportunities might vary during the time of expatriation it probably will not be possible to define a definite job offer for the repatriate before departing for the IA. However, continuous communication might help to decrease insecurities and lead to a definite agreement on the position before the expatriate returns. By following these suggestions, MNCs may be able to retain their repatriates despite restricted career opportunities in the home organization, thereby improving the integration of their international human capital.

Limitations and Avenues for Future Research

Like all scholarly research, the current study has limitations. First, like most empirical work in the repatriation context this study draws on cross-sectional data. The research model is based on relative deprivation theory (Crosby, 1976) and thus, the use of self-reported questionnaires was inevitable. Also, the hypothesized relationships all draw on a thorough review of the extant literature and therefore provide a theoretically based explanation for the relations observed. However, by conducting longitudinal research and/or addressing multiple data sources, scholars in the future may be able to collect data not only on the individuals' intent to stay, but also on actual retention. This way, they could add to the very few studies which systematically investigate this variable (i.e., Stroh, 1995; Kraimer et al., 2012). The use of intent to stay – or intent to leave – as a proxy for retention and turnover is common practice in the

literature. Still, the model analyzed in this study could be further supported by longitudinal research which conveys whether the repatriates' intent to stay with the assigning MNC eventually resulted in actual retention. Also, longitudinal research should take account of the meaning of time for our model. The effects of career derailment may be time dependent and future research could test whether the effects of career derailment become more detrimental over time, because feelings of frustration might increase when the career stagnates or derails for a longer time.

Second, while this study draws on quite a large data set (see e.g., Ren et al., 2013, for a comparison), more than 80% of the sample is male. Expatriation is still dominated by men and thus, predominantly male samples are common in this research field. Nevertheless, as female expatriates are on the rise (Brookfield Relocation Services, 2015, 2016), conducting studies which focus on women is a worthy future research avenue. Recent empirical insights show that female expatriates' experiences abroad (Bader, Stoermer, Bader, & Schuster, 2018) as well as the factors which influence their retention during an IA differ from those of men (Lee, Chua, Miska, & Stahl, 2017). The same may be the case at the repatriation stage of the IA process. Studies suggest that organizational repatriation support may be more important for the retention of female repatriates, whereas career issues in general may play a less vital role (Lee et al., 2017). Future research should examine these differences to be able to enhance the integration of all former expatriates.

Third, this study focuses on former expatriates who were assigned from the headquarters' home country to a foreign subsidiary. This sample was targeted as the literature indicates that the risk of career derailment is especially high for this group of employees, since they often hold positions of responsibility in the host country (Aldossari & Robertson, in press; Jassawalla & Sashittal, 2009). However, repatriates who were assigned from a foreign subsidiary to the headquarters, or from a subsidiary to a subsidiary, should be considered by studies in

the future. More precisely, scholars should investigate whether these employees expect different benefits from the assigning MNC. For instance, career expectations might be higher if employees were assigned to the headquarters, but lower if the IA took place in between subsidiaries. This knowledge is vital for MNCs to design efficient repatriation strategies organization-wide; thus, future research should target a more diverse group of repatriates.

Fourth, we only surveyed repatriates who were still employed with the same organization. Therefore, our results might differ when those who have left their employer are included. To generalize our results, future studies should address a broader sample and also include repatriates who switched employers.

Lastly, we addressed relative deprivation theory by including comparisons to the own past as well as comparisons to others who have not been on an IA. As a future avenue, it would be interesting to include other points of reference, e.g. other expatriates/ repatriates, to draw a more complete picture of how different points of reference affect turnover intention after repatriation.

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Tables

Table 1. Sample demographics.

Average age	40 years
Gender	81% male
Nationality	86% German
Top three of the highest education levels	Master's degree/diploma (65%); bachelor's degree (15%); doctorate degree (8%)
Average number of IAs	1.7*
Average length of last IA	32 months
Top three of the last IA destinations	China (27%), US (17%), India (7%)

Notes: *In the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to only consider their most recent IA with their current employer.

Table 2. Correlation matrix.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Career motive	1.37	1.58								
IA performance	4.22	.53	-.07	(.85)						
Career derailment	2.72	1.16	-.07	.01	(.82)					
Rel. promotion advantage	3.08	1.03	.12*	.03	-.50***	(.92)				
Rel. autonomy advantage	2.88	1.02	-.04	.04	-.30***	.55***	(.94)			
Rel. compensation advantage	2.44	1.00	-.02	.01	-.33***	.57***	.58***	(.88)		
Org. repatriation support	5.42	2.27	.07	.03	-.30***	.44***	.23***	.26***		
Intent to stay	3.58	1.13	-.10 [†]	.08	-.38***	.32***	.22***	.22***	.26***	(.88)

Notes: Levels of significance: [†] < .1; * < .05; ** < .01; *** < .001. Scale reliabilities (Cronbach's alphas) are in parentheses.

Table 3. Regression results for hypothesized relationships.

Predictors	Intent to stay						
	Model 0	Model 1a	Model 1b	Model 2a	Model 2b	Model 2c	Model 3
<i>Control variables</i>							
Career motive	-.09	-.12*	-.13*	-.14**	-.14**	-.14**	-.13*
IA performance	.07	.07	.06	.05	.05	.05	.06
<i>Independent variable</i>							
Career derailment		-.39***	-.28***	-.28***	-.27***	-.26***	-.27***
<i>Moderators</i>							
Rel. promotion advantage			.12	.12	.10	.11	.11
Rel. autonomy advantage			.03	.00	.02	.00	.02
Rel. compensation advantage			.01	.01	.00	.02	.02
Org. repatriation support			.13*	.13*	.14*	.15*	.14*
<i>Interactions</i>							
Career derail. x rel. promotion advantage				.14*			
Career derail. x rel. autonomy advantage					.14**		
Career derail. x rel. compensation advantage						.18***	
Career derail. x org. repatriation support							.10 [†]
R ²	.02	.16	.20	.22	.22	.23	.21
R ² adjusted	.01	.16	.18	.20	.20	.21	.19
Δ R ²	.02	.15***	.04**	.02*	.02**	.03***	.01 [†]
F value	2.12	18.82***	10.32***	9.98***	10.05***	10.78***	9.49***

Notes: Levels of significance: [†] < .1; * < .05; ** < .01; *** < .001.

Table 4. Regression results for interaction between organizational repatriation support practices and career derailment.

Organizational repatriation support practice (multiplied with career derailment)	<i>M</i>	β	R ²	R ² (adj.)	ΔR^2	F value
Continuous communication with the home office	.91	.17	.22	.20	.00	9.98***
Communications with the home office about the details of the repatriation process	.87	.09	.20	.18	.00	8.79***
Career planning sessions	.39	.15*	.21	.19	.01*	9.39***
Guarantee/agreement outlining the type of position you will be placed in upon return	.51	.15*	.20	.18	.01*	8.95***
Mentoring programs while on assignment	.40	.11	.20	.18	.01	8.70***
Lifestyle assistance and counseling on changes likely to occur in your lifestyle upon return	.27	-.07	.19	.17	.00	8.46***
Pre-departure briefings on what to expect during repatriation	.50	-.01	.20	.17	.00	8.53***
Visible signs that the company values international experience	.48	-.01	.23	.20	.00	10.20***
Financial counseling and financial/tax assistance	.88	-.10	.20	.17	.00	8.54***
Reorientation program about the changes in the company	.14	.03	.19	.17	.00	8.36***
Repatriation training seminars on the emotional response following the return home	.10	.03	.19	.17	.00	8.32***

Notes: Levels of significance: † < .1; * < .05; ** < .01; *** < .001.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework

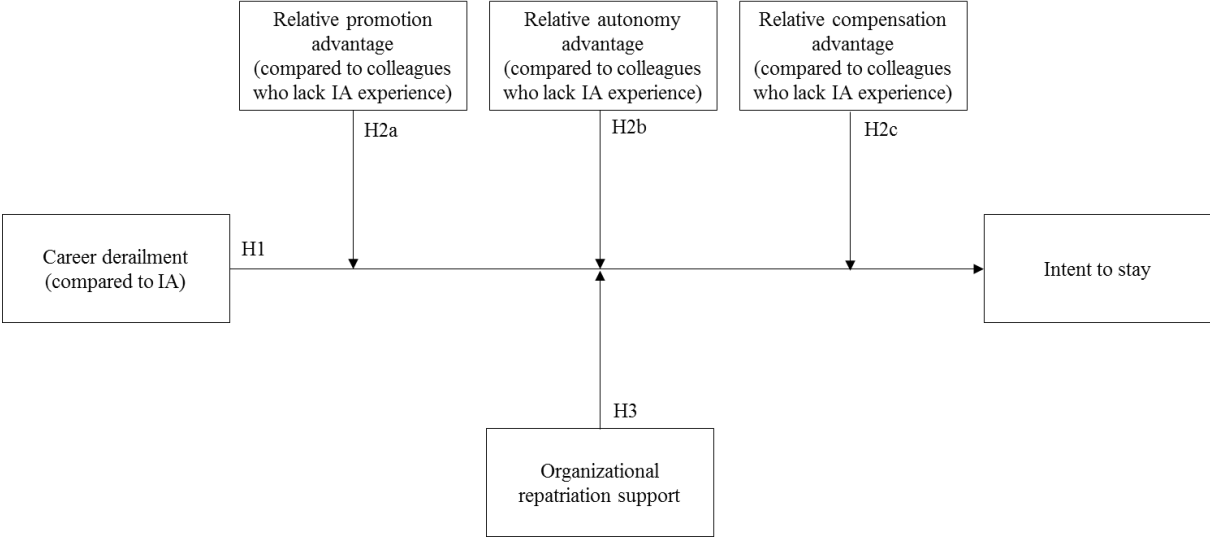


Figure 2. Interaction between relative promotion advantage and career derailment.

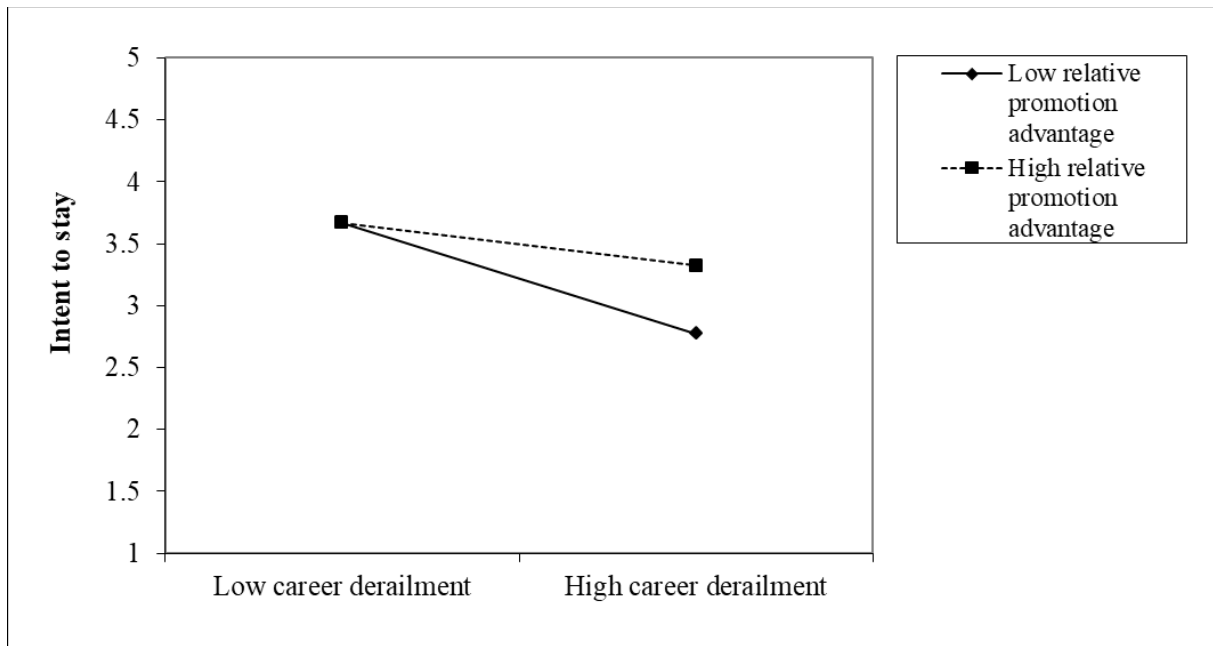


Figure 3. Interaction between relative autonomy advantage and career derailment.

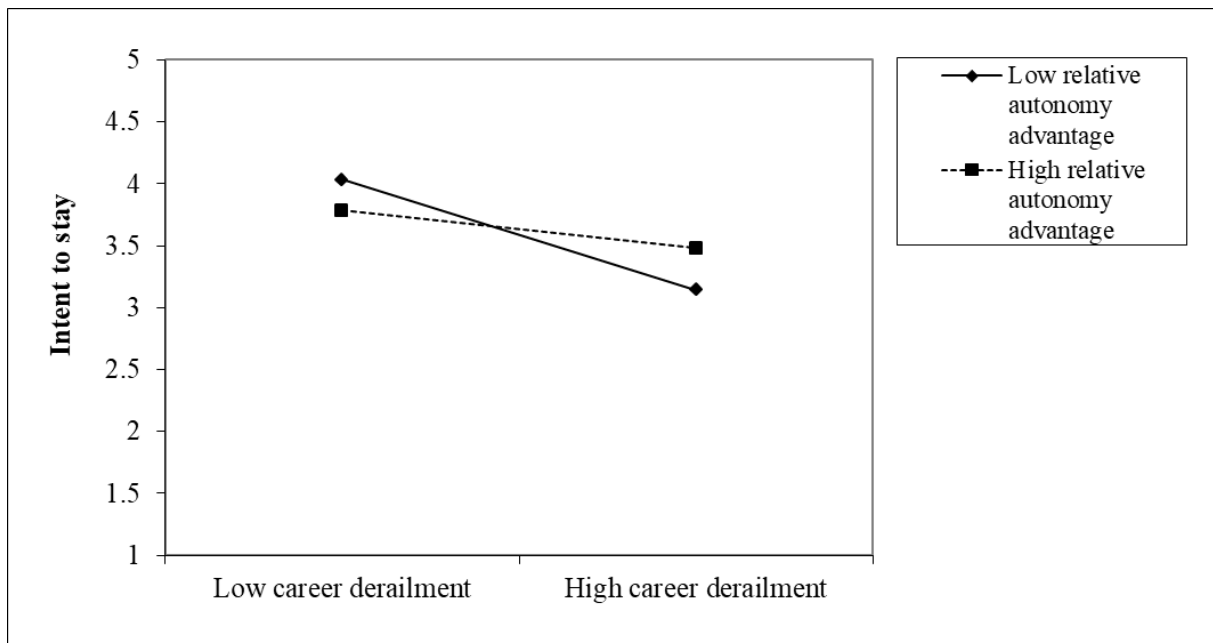


Figure 4. Interaction between relative compensation advantage and career derailment.

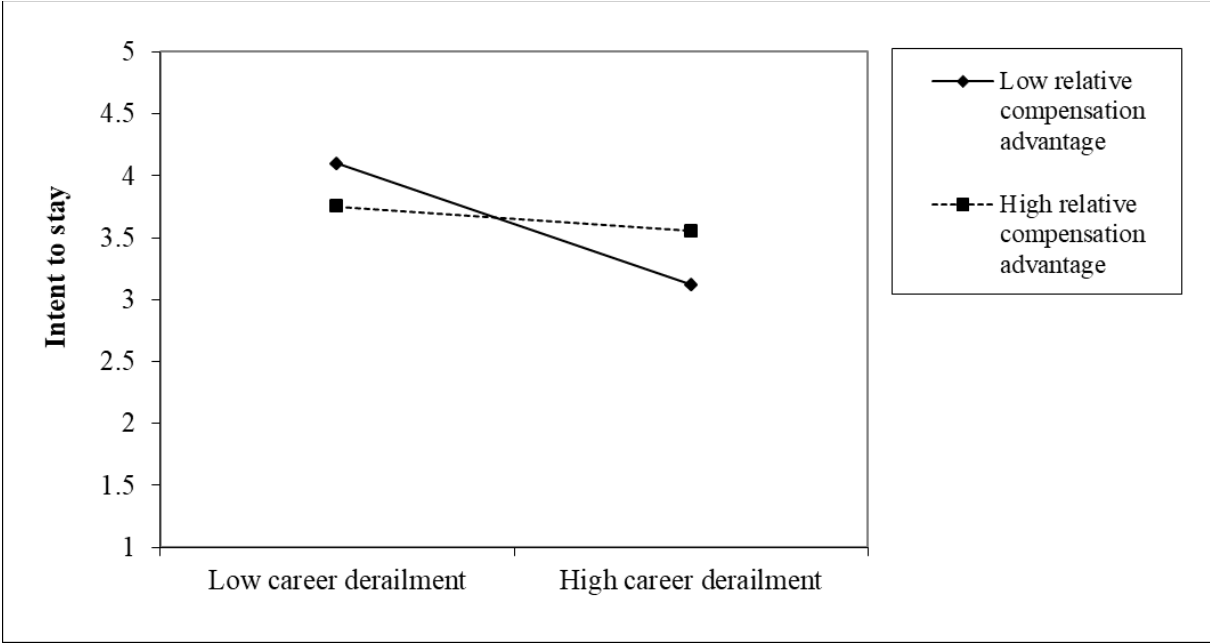
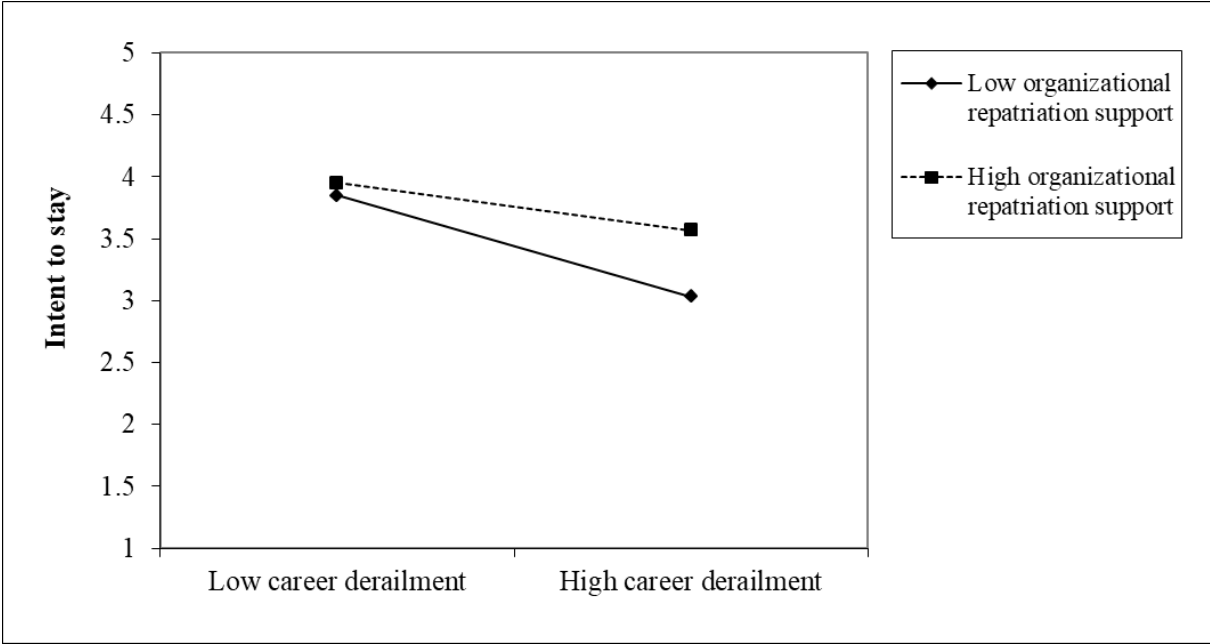


Figure 5. Interaction between organizational repatriation support and career derailment.



Appendix 1

Results of EFA of the relative career advantage scale based on Kraimer et al. (2012).

Indicators	Factor (Cronbach's alpha)	Loading
<i>Compare yourself with other people who have job titles or positions similar to yours, but who have not completed an international assignment. Compared to these colleagues..."</i>		
My promotional opportunities are better.		.89
I am on a faster track toward advancement/elevation in the company.	Relative promotion advantage (.92)	.90
I am seen as having greater potential for an upper-level position.		.88
(I get more respect from other people in the organization.)		(excluded from the analysis)
(My status/reputation in the company is higher.)		(excluded from the analysis)
I have more autonomy to set my own work objectives.		.92
I have more freedom to act independently of my boss/supervisor.	Relative autonomy advantage (.94)	.93
I can take more responsibility for my own decisions.		.89
(I have more responsibilities related to international issues.)		(excluded from the analysis)
My overall compensation is higher.	Relative compensation advantage (.88)	.88
I get a better set of perks and benefits.		.85
My pay is above what others get.		.80

Notes: Based on theoretical considerations and the results from an exploratory as well as confirmatory factor analysis, indicators in parentheses were excluded from the analysis.