

Coaching for career capital development: a study of expatriates' narratives

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Abstract

This study explores, through stories, how coaching supports the development of expatriates' career capital; it is the first empirical investigation in this area. A narrative analysis was conducted to explore semi-structured interviews. Coaching was perceived to support the development of career capital capabilities ('knowing-how', 'knowing-why' and 'knowing-whom'). When coaching expatriates, it is important to review their needs, previous assignment experience and phase of expatriation. As a practical implication, organizations should consider coaching support for expatriates. The career capital model is recommended as a tool for institutions training coaches, and for coaches, when coaching executives in international transition situations.

Key words: Expatriates, career-capital, coaching, narratives

Introduction

In the globalized economy, leaders who are able to cope with the different kinds of tasks and challenges in international business environments are a valued asset for their organizations. Expatriates, employees who leave their home country to work abroad, are an important group of employees, especially for multinational companies (MNCs). The need for internationally competent managers is escalating (Caligiuri & Tarique, 2012) and it has been argued that organizations must be able to create a set of development activities, including career-related support practices, to be able to develop global leaders (Suutari, 2003).

In general, international assignments have been found to be very developmental for the expatriate, but at the same time also very challenging (Caligiuri & Di Santo, 2001; Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007). For example, expatriates are often reported to work with more challenging and broader tasks abroad than in their home country (Suutari & Brewster, 2000), and the international assignment can be seen as a mutually beneficial episode, which fulfills both the organizational need to gain competitive advantage by generating social and intellectual capital for their employees, and also the need for individual development by building the expatriate's career capital (Larsen, 2004; Haslberger & Brewster, 2009).

Career capital is a concept covering a broad set of competencies that employees need to be successful in their employment paths (Suutari, Brewster & Tornikoski, 2013). Career capital (Inkson & Arthur, 2001) consists of three elements: 'knowing-how' (e.g., technical skills), 'knowing-whom' (e.g., social networks), and 'knowing-why' (e.g., motivation).

Generally, little research exists on the development of career capital during an international assignment, but earlier studies have shown that career capital develops during an expatriation assignment and is, at least to some extent, transferable from the first assignment to a second one (Jokinen, 2010). Moreover, it is suggested that the development of career capital is the sort of process that can be facilitated with external support, such as coaching or mentoring (Dickmann & Harris, 2005).

Earlier literature has recommended coaching as suitable support and development intervention for expatriates and international managers at a general level (Booyesen, 2015; Mendenhall, 2006) but so far only four empirical studies (Abbott, 2006; Herbolzheimer, 2009; MacGill, 2010; Salomaa, 2015) focusing on coaching of expatriates have been found. However, those studies have provided evidence that coaching appears to be beneficial for expatriates. Although coaching is widely used, there is no consensus on its definitions or contents (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2015). For the purpose of this study, expatriate coaching is defined here as ‘a human development process of the assignee that involves structured, focused interaction and the use of appropriate strategies, tools and techniques in an international context. It is aimed to promote desirable and sustainable change for the benefit of the assignee and potentially for other stakeholders’ (modified from Bachkirova et al., 2010, 1). This definition has guided this research project from the search for and selection of interview participants to the data analysis and discussion of our findings. Further, coaching is understood here as a one-to-one, action-oriented and goal-driven process, facilitated by an external, professional coach.

However, even though the rapid change in the global business environment accelerates the use of coaching (Tompson et al., 2008), coaching research in the international context lags behind the practice (Abbott et al., 2013). In addition, coaching has been addressed only sparsely in the career development literature in general (Ciutiene, Neverauskas & Meilene, 2010). In the light of the above it is obvious that more empirical research is needed about coaching as a potential development method for expatriates’ career capital development. Therefore, the aim of this study is to explore expatriates’ narratives of how coaching has supported the development of their career capital, in particular their capabilities of ‘knowing-how’, ‘knowing-why’, and ‘knowing-whom’. This study is important, because it is the first study to focus on the development of career capital capabilities of expatriates through coaching. Next, we will review the relevant literature on career capital and executive coaching in an international context.

International careers and career capital

The nature of careers in the age of globalization has undergone major changes (Thomas et al., 2005). Contemporary career patterns are described as flexible, non-linear and self-driven. Also, current organizations are less rigid, but not totally fluid in their career management systems, as individuals tend to take more control of their own careers, which have shifted towards being more boundaryless and protean (Baruch, 2006; DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996). Career actors are viewed as individuals who consciously gain portable capabilities, actively construct social networks, and enhance their careers. They identify their own drives and motivations, and apply these in their work context (Inkson & Arthur, 2001; Suutari et al., 2013).

The concept of career capital is closely linked to the idea of these contemporary careers and the importance of the different kinds of capabilities that people develop and need to build and maintain their chosen career. Career capital consists of the following sub-dimensions: First, '*knowing-how*' is an integrative term that combines explicit knowledge, implicit experiences, soft skills and technical expertise into a specific form of career capital. Second, the '*knowing-why*' career capital dimension consists of the motivation, confidence, and self-assurance to pursue a certain career path. Third, '*knowing-whom*' involves a person's work relationships and includes occupational and internal company connections that can support an individual's career; it also incorporates broader contacts with family, friends, fellow-alumni, and professional and social acquaintances (Inkson & Arthur, 2001). The model of career capital offers a broad framework for studying the developmental perspective of an employee, and it has been found to be also relevant in the international career context and among expatriates. (Inkson & Arthur, 2001; Cappellen & Janssens, 2005; Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007). Further, when individuals work in challenging international environments, they need flexibility and related competencies that can be transferred to various contexts, and therefore the understanding of the development of career capital, and the transferability of the acquired competencies are of importance, both to individuals and to the organizations employing them (Jokinen, 2010).

'Knowing-how' capital competencies have been found to develop during expatriation through the development of cross-cultural and general management skills, listening, negotiation, teamwork and delegation skills, and through the capacity to learn (Antal, 2000; Dickmann & Doherty, 2008). International assignments have also been found to develop 'knowing-why' capital by improving expatriates' sense of their potential, their self-awareness, and by increasing their self-confidence. Expatriation is an experience that challenges one's beliefs, and influences an individual's identity and future career aspirations. Further, it also impacts on one's values and interests (Kohonen, 2004; Dickmann & Harris, 2005; Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007; Dickmann & Doherty, 2008; Jokinen et al., 2008). In addition, 'knowing-whom' career capital is found to be strengthened because assignees expand their professional networks while on an assignment (Antal, 2000; Mäkelä, 2007). However, findings are contradictory: there is also evidence that 'knowing-whom' career capital suffers as a result of working abroad (Dickmann & Harris, 2005). In addition, it has also been shown that contextual features may reduce an individual's opportunities to gain career capital during their expatriation (Rodrigues & Scurry, 2014). A very recent study indicates (Dickmann et al., in press) that none of the three career capital areas becomes obsolete, even if individuals spend a long time in their home country after being on an international assignment.

While Dickmann & Harris (2005) have suggested that career capital development can be encouraged with development interventions, such as coaching or mentoring, so far, expatriates' career capital development and its accumulation facilitated by coaching have not been studied. Coaching has been recommended as a suitable development intervention for expatriates (Booyesen, 2015; Mendenhall, 2006). However, empirical research focusing on expatriate coaching is very limited and in the next section current literature focusing on international and expatriate coaching is reviewed.

International and Expatriate Coaching

An international perspective on executive coaching has gained growing attention among coaching practitioners and scholars (Abbott et al., 2013; Booysen 2015), and it has been argued that executive coaching is now entering a period of globalization (Barosa-Pereira, 2014). Coaching is commonly seen as a collaborative and non-directive relationship between the coach and the coachee for the purpose of attaining professional or personal development outcomes. As coaching research has grown beyond its infancy, there is more evidence that coaching has many positive effects on, for instance, employees' skills, well-being and performance (Theeboom et al., 2014). However, many coaching scholars posit that the profession still lacks an evidence-base (Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Peterson, 2011), and this is especially true for the evolving field of international coaching research.

Over the past decade, coaching scholars have started to study coaching from an international perspective. Terms such as international, cross-cultural and global coaching are often used interchangeably, and the coaching approaches have been influenced by cross-cultural and international management theories. Rosinski pioneered the field by combining coaching with intercultural theories in 2003, and by introducing the Cultural Orientations Framework (COF), which has also been utilized empirically (e.g. Carr & Seto, 2013; Rojon & McDowall, 2010). Currently, a holistic approach to integrating culture into mainstream coaching is emerging (Abbott, Stening, Atkins & Grant, 2006; Abbott, 2010; Abbott et al., 2013). So far, most of the literature concerning international coaching has been theoretical. The literature has covered topics such as multinational teams, gender and diversity issues, culture, and different coaching frameworks and approaches suitable for international contexts (e.g. Booysen 2015; Rosinski 2010; Peterson, 2007; Passmore, 2009; Moral & Abbott, 2009; Coultas et al., 2011; Plaister-Ten, 2013). Since we focus here on expatriate coaching as a potential development intervention to support the career capital development of assignees, we next review the existing expatriate coaching literature in more detail.

Earlier literature has suggested that expatriate coaching is likely to be efficient because, like the expatriate experience itself, coaching is a connected process that impacts interactively across the individual's affective, behavioral and cognitive domains (Abbott et al., 2006). Some studies have presented theoretical models (Abbott & Stening, 2009) for how coaching may support expatriates in different phases of the assignment cycle, or how expatriate coaching may support couples' adjustment (Miser & Miser, 2009). Specific needs for coaching of female expatriates (Burrus, 2009a) and global nomads (Burrus, 2009b), individuals who have lived in different countries since their childhood and have global careers, have also been discussed.

Based on our literature review only a few empirical studies on expatriate coaching exist; these studies have shown that executive coaching is an intervention that facilitates expatriates' acculturation and helps them to deal with intercultural differences and pre-departure uncertainty, as well as supporting the repatriation process (Abbott, 2006; Herboltzheimer, 2009). It has also been reported that coaching increases expatriates' emotional intelligence capabilities of self-awareness, emotional control, communication strategies, self-reflection and empathy (McGill, 2010). Moreover, coaching has been found to increase expatriates' effectiveness and performance (Abbott, 2006; Herboltzheimer, 2009; McGill, 2010), and enhance their leadership development (McGill, 2010). Executive coaching is reported as

boosting the levels of happiness, personal satisfaction and confidence of expatriates and decreasing their stress (McGill, 2010). Furthermore, it has been found that coaching is perceived as beneficial because it provides a professional dialogue partner (Herbolzheimer, 2009) and is tailored to expatriates' individual needs (McGill, 2010; Salomaa, 2015). International experience, the behaviour of the coach and organizational support are also found to be essential factors for the success of coaching. A clear contract with objectives and evaluation of coaching appear to be important in regard to coaching success (Salomaa, 2015).

In summary, it can be concluded that both international coaching and the development of career capital during an international assignment are developing areas of research. Existing theoretical and empirical studies of expatriate coaching show that coaching could be beneficial for career capital development. This study differs from earlier ones by utilizing the narrative approach. Further, the earlier studies (Abbott, 2006; Herbolzheimer, 2009; McGill, 2010) were conducted in Central-American and Chinese contexts, and none of them focused on the development of career capital. Research focusing on coaching as a support intervention for career capital development for expatriates is lacking; this study aims to remedy this. Having reviewed the relevant earlier literature on the career capital of expatriates, coaching, and expatriate coaching, we will next describe the empirical data and methodological approach adopted for our study.

Methodology

A narrative analysis was chosen to explore the stories of coached expatriates because: 1) A narrative approach has been found suitable as a research method for management and organizational research (Czarniawska, 1997; Boje, 2001), and has also been adopted in international business research (e.g. Gertsen & Söderberg, 2011); 2) A narrative approach has been already applied to expatriate research, providing in-depth understanding of change processes in international career transitions, for instance, focusing on expatriates' cultural learning processes and cultural encounters (Gertsen & Söderberg, 2010), and expatriates' identity and career aspirations (Kohonen, 2007); 3) Stories that people tell about their lives are also of importance in coaching (Drake, 2010; Stelter, 2013), and because there is an intimate connection between the ways in which people see themselves, the ways they narrate their daily life, and the ways in which they behave. Further, stories are suggested to be the perfect avenue for exploring these connections because the images they bring to the surface provide material that is indicative of opportunities for inner development and a resource for changing external behavior (Drake, 2010:121); 4) Stories are highly relevant for the study of careers (Cohen & Mallon, 2001; Savickas, 2001; Bujold, 2004).

A narrative can be a description of a specific event or process (Flick, 2002), such as an expatriation or a coaching process. As narrative research offers no automatic analyzing steps, we recognize that there is considerable diversity in the definition of personal narrative and a large methodological variation within narrative theory (Riessman, 2000). Therefore, we next define some central concepts of this study. We position this study in the social-constructivist paradigm, and adopt an experience-centered approach to narratives (Squire, 2008). We build on Patterson's (2008 cited in Squire 2008:19) definition of experience-centered narratives, and understand a narrative or a story to be 'texts which bring stories of personal experience into

being by means of the first person oral narration of past, present, future or imaginary experience'. We use 'narrative' or 'story' interchangeably. According to Squire (2008), the experience-centered approach assumes that narratives are: 1) sequential and meaningful; 2) definitely human; 3) represent experience, in the sense of reconstructing it as well as mirroring it; and 4) display transformation or change, and therefore it is well suited for exploring the development of career capital through coaching. Sequence is embedded in dialogue, and meaningfulness is located in interviewer-interviewee interaction. Narratives are the means of human sense-making, and are jointly told between writer and reader, speaker and hearer (Ricoeur, 1991). The assumption is that experience can, through stories, become a part of consciousness and that the context of a narrative plays an important role (Squire, 2008).

We assume here that the personal stories of expatriates are just one of the many truths, since storytellers choose to connect events and make them meaningful for others. A story is an interpretation of the past rather than a historically exact reproduction of it (Czarniawska, 2004; Riessman, 2005; Polkinghorne, 2007). The experience-centered approach aims at full interpretation and understanding rather than structural analysis. Narrative analysis takes seriously both the content and the context of storytelling and the notion of 'story' always entails 'audience' as well as 'storyteller' (Squire, 2008). In this study, the interviewees told their story to the researcher, and they knew that the data would be used for analyzing purposes and that the research results would be written down and published for a wider audience.

Data collection

The data of this study consists of narratives told by coached expatriates during six semi-structured interviews because most experience-centered narrative interviewing is semi-structured (Squire, 2008). These interviews were gathered in 2012 by the first author. Participants were recruited by publishing announcements in the web pages of two coaching journals, through LinkedIn, and by using a snowballing system and direct contacts to Human Resource (HR) departments of Multinational Companies (MNCs). The only criterion for participation was experience of coaching by an external professional coach during expatriation. During the data collection and analysis strict ethical guidelines, as required in good scientific practice, were followed (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). For example, before interviews participants were informed that the researcher was interested in their expatriate coaching process and that the interviewer had studied and practiced coaching. At the outset of the interview participants were given the opportunity to ask questions about the research process, and the interviewer asked permission to record the interview. The participation was voluntary, and the interview participants gave permission for the data to be analyzed and used for scientific publications. The interviewer assured participants that the collected data would be treated anonymously and confidentially. No ethical issues arose during the research process.

The interviews were conducted in English or Finnish using a variety of media (Skype, conference equipment, mobile phone) and in a face-to-face meeting. The average duration of interviews was 45-60 minutes. The first author carried out loosely structured interviews. Open-ended questions were used in order to gather rich narratives of the coaching experiences; for example, the interviewer asked 'how did you experience your coaching?' or 'Anything else?' aiming to give the interviewee space to think and speak further. In order to avoid misunderstandings and bias, a native English speaker transcribed the interviews verbatim. The

transcribed texts were sent back to the interviewees for checking (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006), and the final texts were analyzed. When Finnish was used, we have translated the text excerpts into English. For confidentiality reasons, we use pseudonyms. The demographics of our interviewees are shown in Table 1 below.

Pseudonym	Age-group	Home-country	Host-countries in narratives	Industry	Position	International experience when coached	Timing of coaching
Peter	40-55	USA	Japan/ Korea	Pharmaceutical	Managing Director	1st and 2 nd international assignment	Onboarding
Michael	40-55	Germany	Finland	Telecommunication	Senior Manager	Several assignments in many countries	Later during an assignment
Anni	40-55	Finland	Switzerland	Pharmaceutical	Director	2 nd international assignment	Onboarding
David	40-55	Finland	Italy	Mechanical engineering	Director R & D	1 st international assignment	Several times during a long-term assignment
George	40-55	Canadian	Japan	Semiconductors	Vice President	Several assignments	Onboarding
Nicholas	40-55	French	Japan	Banking	Head of Audit	Several assignments	Later during an assignment

Table 1: Demographics of the interviewees

Data analysis

Given that in this study it is assumed that the reality is socially constructed (Burr 2015), the analysis had already started during the interview, in which the interviewer and the interview participants co-created the stories in a confidential interview situation, and it continued when the two researchers wrote an interpretation of the analyzed stories together. In addition, the analysis also continued during the review process. The data collection, analysis and writing processes were closely interwoven with each other, and the researchers wrote several drafts, which helped to clarify the analysis. The data analysis included five main stages. First, the first author listened to the recorded stories, read the transcriptions several times, and marked the emerging themes on the margins of the paper version of the transcriptions. Second, the first author coded the texts by using the framework of career capital ('knowing-why', -whom and -how capital) among other themes and by utilizing the NVivo QSR software. For example, text excerpts that revealed motivational aspects were coded under the 'knowing-why' dimension. Third, the first author created short narratives of the interviews. Fourth, the second author repeated the coding process independently, after which the findings were compared and discussed. Fifth, the researchers constructed a final new narrative of the analyzed stories (Makkonen et al., 2012). While constructing the interpretation the researchers tried to stay as close as possible to interview participants' own expressions and utilize excerpts from the

interviews in order to give a voice to the interview participants. However, since we consider reality as a socially constructed phenomenon, we also acknowledge that the findings we present here are interpreted again by the reader of this study. Thus his/ her own background is likely to create new nuances to the evaluation of the narratives represented here. This supports our belief that there is no ‘one single truth’ about how the stories told by the study participants are represented as research findings. However, as described above, we have followed a structured and organized method of conducting our research in order to ensure that our study findings are as reasonable and convincing as possible (Riessman, 1993).

Findings

This narrative is the interpretation of the stories told in the interviews by coached expatriates who work in senior managerial positions and are located in different countries. The narrative sheds light on how expatriates constructed the supportive role of coaching for the development of their career capital dimensions, in particular, ‘knowing-how’, ‘knowing-why’ and ‘knowing-whom’ capabilities.

Narration of coaching supporting the development of knowing-how

‘Knowing-how’ development played a major role in our participants’ stories when they referred to how coaching has supported their career capital development. There was also a difference between the stories told by participants who have been engaged in coaching during the transition process (relocation and/ or new job) and those who have engaged in coaching due to other reasons.

Our study participants, George, Peter and Anni, said that they received coaching in order to get support for transition to a new country and/ or new job. This kind of transition process appeared to be a situation when coaching had a high potential to support development of ‘knowing-how’ capabilities, both in terms of how these participants narrated their original motivation and need for coaching, and also when they talked about what they gained from their coaching process. The need to develop ‘knowing-how’ capabilities became clear in Peter’s story as he described his international assignment (from US to Japan) as a *challenge* and said that his motivation to start coaching was strongly related to the need to learn about a culture and habits that were very different from Peter’s home-country. Anni moved from Finland to Switzerland, and she had previously worked in Sweden. Development of cross-cultural skills with the help of coaching represented an essential role, both in Anni’s and Peter’s stories. As an example, Peter said that coaching ‘*was to introduce a kind of cultural pitfalls and traps that I might fall into and also give me tools I needed to get the most out of my team.*’ Peter mentioned that coaching included discussions about Japanese metaphors that helped him to understand local culture and be more effective in the Japanese business context.

Further, Anni said that the coaching process helped her to gain different kind of cross-cultural skills such as how to succeed in cooperation with the US headquarters, and lead branches located in sixteen European countries. However, country-specific cultural knowledge was highlighted more often in Peter’s story compared to Anni’s, probably because there was not such a drastic difference of cultures between the countries Anni was relocating between. In addition, in Anni’s story coaching represented a means of support, especially in onboarding to

a new, higher level position; this was also the case in George's story. The following excerpt from George shows clearly that cultural issues were not his priority in coaching, because he was experienced in Japanese culture:

'I was not looking to my coach to help me on cultural basis. I felt that was one of my strengths, my most, my greatest strength, but I felt that there were many other things that I was lacking that we were focusing on and addressing.'

This indicates that coaching should not concentrate only on culture, because there might be other contextual factors impacting the coaching engagement. Both Anni and George strongly related the coaching process to the development of: their explicit knowledge, for instance, the construction and implementation of a business plan (George); and soft skills, e.g., how to work together with her multicultural team (Anni) - these being capabilities related to 'knowing-how'.

Moreover, Peter's story revealed a change in his development and learning needs during his assignment. In particular, after describing how coaching supported the transition process to a new country and a new job, the discussion moved from culture-related issues towards much more general topics. Narration in Peter's story was also very positive in nature when he described how his coaching process adjusting well to his changing needs. The following quotation from Peter's story illustrates this change:

'in the very beginning we set ground rules and the kind of overall things we wanted to achieve and over time the overall coaching shifted from peer culture to more cultural/leadership coaching. So in the end those [original] goals and objectives went out the window.'

Peter's description of change is in line with the stories told by three other participants (David, Michael and Nicholas) who had been involved in coaching later on during their expatriation (not during the transition process to new location and/ or job). The development of managerial and leadership skills, capabilities closely linked to 'knowing-how' dimension of career capital, were the most often presented as reasons for starting coaching. These 'later-phase' expatriates described coaching as: supporting their managerial skills, especially by providing them with different tools or process models to do their job; and also as challenging their current ways of thinking and teaching them how they could be more 'creative' or 'step out of their comfort zone'. David, who had been working in Italy for a long time and used the services of his coach several times, spoke about his coaching experiences:

'It has worked very well for me. It was tailored to meet my needs, it supported me, helped to navigate into a certain direction, and pushed me out of my comfort zone...I am sure that I would not be in this position without the help of my coach.'

Common for all our participants' stories was that the coaching process was strongly related to development of the ability to adopt a new way of doing business and leading people. It can also be said that the more diverse the international experience that expatriates had, the less they spoke about development of country- or culture-specific knowledge due to coaching. For example, Peter described that, with the help of his coach, he learned many 'knowing-how' related skills, such as new techniques to focus his mind and clarify his thinking processes. Moreover, coaching helped Michael and Nicholas to develop their own coaching skills to the

extent that they were able to coach their subordinates and peers. George highlighted that coaching helped him to implement previously learned skills into practice:

‘Critical thinking, my previous employer (X) has given me a lot of tools and experience in thinking critically, but coaching helped me to use these skills not just for a specific role but for guiding a business. Those were all areas that I lack.’

Moreover, several of our participants also reported positive ‘secondary’ consequences for ‘knowing-how’ development, which did not occur immediately, but happened later on during the coaching process. For example, Michael stated that coaching introduced him to the idea of stronger co-operation across different departments in his own organization, and because of that he was able to learn a lot about tasks and processes that were beyond his own expertise area, and he also gained a much wider understanding of the different ways the business could be built and supported by different departments in the organization.

‘...I volunteered to work on two projects in our sustainability department, although it is not part of my job description. [...] This helped me understand what they are trying to achieve. They asked me to bring their social initiative into the business context and it gave me suddenly this aspect that there is much more that I can learn beyond my traditional area. And it is not about forgetting what I have done and learning something new, it is about enriching and cross-fertilizing the two areas...’

Participants’ representations of these ‘secondary consequences’ of coaching can be interpreted as being a testimonial of satisfaction and of finding that the coaching is useful for ‘knowing-how’ capability development.

To summarize, the ‘knowing-how’ related discussion was the most dominant in our participants’ stories - especially when they talked about their motivation for starting coaching. However, reference to ‘knowing-why’ related capabilities also had a strong role in our participants’ stories and we therefore next turn our focus to that dimension of career capital development and its support by coaching.

Narration of coaching supporting the development of ‘knowing-why’

‘Knowing-why’ relates to individuals’ motivation, confidence, and self-assurance in pursuing a certain career path (Inkson & Arthur, 2001). These issues were especially present when participants were talking about the benefits gained from coaching, though they were hardly ever mentioned in connection with the original motivation to start coaching. This finding may indicate that it is much easier and more socially acceptable to justify the need for coaching by listing the skills that can be seen as beneficial for business life and the employer (c.f. ‘knowing-how’), compared to skills that can be seen as more beneficial for the individual as a person (cf. ‘knowing-why’).

In the stories told by the three transition phase expatriates, culture-related issues were again more frequently present, compared to in the other three stories. For instance, Peter’s story (first time assignee in Japan) illustrates very well the challenges that a culturally distant working environment may create, especially for the less experienced expatriate, and how coaching was presented as a helpful process in developing ‘knowing-why’ related issues during

the transition. Peter described very openly how the Japanese working environment and his inability to understand the language sapped his strength and how he, for example, had to use a translating device to be able to follow and lead in meetings. Peter described his normal working day to be *'like sitting in front of a very loud television with a very loud earphones playing something different in his ear'*. Even though coaching did not help Peter's language skills ('knowing-how' capability), it did help him to put things into the right perspective. Through coaching, he gained a better sense of balance, so that he was able to solve problems in this new cultural context.

Culture specific issues were more often mentioned by our three 'transition phase' participants than by the ones who engaged in coaching later during their expatriation. Otherwise, all six stories contained very similar kinds of elements and coaching was highlighted as a satisfying and helpful process for 'knowing-why' development. These parts of the stories were at a very personal level and participants shared very sensitive thoughts with the interviewer. Most of our participants worked with their coaches, focusing on questions such as *who I am as a leader and what is my role in this organization* and also *who am I as a person living in a foreign country* –all these questions can be seen as a part of identity construction and development of 'knowing-why' capabilities.

Other, very similar, patterns were also identified from the stories: most of our participants said that, with the help of coaching, they have processed their career aspirations and recognized their own strengths, weaknesses and values. This, in turn, has helped develop their self-awareness and self-confidence. The following quotation from Anni illustrates this well: *'Coaching's role was to help me acknowledge my strengths, to see that my capabilities, knowledge and experience were enough'*. Further, as Nicholas, a French expatriate in Japan with a wide international experience stated:

'Thanks to coaching I developed a strong appetite to push my development into new areas and I have done that not only in my career but also in my personal life. It has been so powerful, it is normal for me to do that now'.

Moreover, all of the stories involved mentioning how motivation and energy were boosted by coaching, bringing joy and new perspectives to the coachees. For example, through the development of 'knowing-why', Michael started to enjoy his life in a new way:

'Most shocking part for me was really the aspect of values and bringing sort of the emotional side of the brain into play, not just the analytical data driven decision making part, but you know, if you are not happy, you would not – perform- well- kind- of- thing was a real revolution for me and gave me a lot additional ammunition to my work.'

Coaching was described as helpful, especially in a challenging environment or situation. This can be seen, for example, from an excerpt from George's story: *'... my coach helped me to find internal motivation, which I sometimes struggle with...'*

All in all, coaching was very strongly linked to personal level development, that is, 'knowing-why' capabilities, in the stories told by our participants. Even though 'knowing-why' related issues were not mentioned so often as 'knowing-how' capability development, it can

be said that the tone in their description can be interpreted as being thankful and that the participants valued the support gained from coaching for these personal level issues very highly. Next, we will show how our participants narrated the role of coaching linked to their ‘knowing-whom’ development.

‘Knowing-whom’

Even though ‘knowing-how’ and ‘knowing-why’ career capital development appeared to be very successfully helped by coaching, ‘knowing-whom’ career capital, referring to a person’s work and private relationships and networks, seemed not to play as an important role as the ‘knowing-how’ and -why dimensions in our expatriates’ stories. Some expatriates said that coaching supported their ‘knowing-whom’ career capital development because their coaches provided them with some business contacts; for instance, Peter’s coach introduced him to some Western contacts in Japan. Also, Michael and Anni highlighted the development of ‘knowing-whom’ career capital due to coaching and in both of their stories coaching was described as something that ‘woke them up’ and helped them to understand and acknowledge the importance of the relationships they were surrounded by, both in their work and personal life spheres. This is illustrated by the following quotation from Anni:

‘I feel that my ability to capitalize information from human networks grew exponentially. ...in that my coach helped me to notice that I could utilize my team members to gain information or my coach asked if there were other colleagues nearby who could help me, this was something that I had never thought about before.’

Further, as discussed earlier, coaching introduced Michael to the idea that he could work across the different departments within his company, and by starting to do that, Michael’s social networks within the company extended and, therefore, in addition to developing his job-related knowledge (cf. ‘knowing-how’) he was also able to develop his ‘knowing-whom’ career capital.

Again, as a ‘secondary’ consequence of coaching, we can see that, for instance in Michael’s and Nicholas’s stories, acting as coaches themselves (‘knowing-how’ capabilities developed by coaching) expanded their social networks. As Nicholas described: *‘So I decided to make use of my new skills as a coach around me. The first available environment was my company so I built a lot of relationships from the coaching internally.’* Moreover, Michael said that he also wanted to make use of his coaching skills and business expertise outside his own organization. Therefore, he started, as a volunteer, to contact young entrepreneurs and offer them his help. Michael’s ‘knowing-whom’ career capital developed because he felt that he was able to create a much wider social circle and new relationships. He saw that this activity formed a beneficial bridge between his company and these entrepreneurs who were full of fresh ideas. *‘... not just internal [our company] relationships, but also external relationships. I extend my network to outside this company, and it included young entrepreneurs.’*

Altogether, ‘knowing-whom’ capability development did not have a very strong role in these six stories, compared to how the other two types of capabilities, ‘knowing-how’ and ‘knowing-why’, were narrated. Moreover, we could not find any difference between the stories told by participants who have engaged in coaching in their ‘transition phase’ or later during

their expatriation, as was the case with the two other career capital capabilities. Next, we continue to our discussion and conclusions.

Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore expatriates' narratives about how coaching has supported development of their career capital - in particular, capabilities of 'knowing-how', 'knowing-why', and 'knowing-whom'. Our study, being the first investigation of this area, contributes to our understanding of coaching, as well as of career capital knowledge and current understanding of interventions, which may be useful in the context of expatriation. We discuss each of these areas below.

First, our study findings contribute to coaching literature by showing that the coaching processes were mostly seen as helpful development interventions in this kind of challenging international context, enhancing the development of career capital. Our study supports previous studies by showing evidence that coaching is beneficial for expatriates (Abbott, 2006; Herboltzheimer, 2009; McGill, 2010; Salomaa, 2015). Further, in some of the analyzed stories, it became evident that career capital development also happened in areas that were not originally prioritized or even expected when coaching was started. It is also important to notice that the effect of coaching was sometimes narrated as being 'secondary', that is, something important for career capital development was said to have happened due to issues the expatriate has learned with the help of coaching. Therefore, coaching appears to be a very suitable development method for expatriates, as it flexible and can be tailored for the changing needs in different phases of expatriation, or for the expatriates with different amounts of international experience.

Second, our study findings advance career capital literature by confirming that coaching appears to be a suitable Human Resource Development (HRD) method to support the development of career capital (Dickmann & Harris, 2005). As we can see from the stories told by our coached expatriates, many of them shared experiences in regard to their 'knowing-how' career capital through, for instance, development of cross-cultural and leadership skills. They also highlighted development, boosted by coaching, in identity construction, enhanced awareness of the self and motivation levels – indicators of 'knowing-why' career capital development.

In addition, our study findings strengthen the view that 'knowing-whom' career capital development during the international assignment is not always self-evident (Dickmann & Harris, 2005) and development interventions, such as coaching, may encounter some limitations, especially in 'knowing-whom' development. As the importance of 'knowing-whom' career capital has been shown to be very important for successful long-term global careers (Mäkelä & Suutari, 2009), and based on our findings, we suggest that it would be beneficial if coaches were to work on 'knowing-whom' aspects in the expatriate context. Accumulation of career capitals from several international assignments may also advance the development to the level that expatriates would be more willing to put effort intentionally into developing their 'knowing-whom' if involved in the coaching process.

There are also limitations, which should be acknowledged. Firstly, these personal stories do not provide a complete, or even a definitive, picture of the issues occurring in expatriate coaching. Fundamentally, the narrative of the personal stories interpreted and represented in this study is, first and foremost, about evocations and perceptions from the participants' perspectives, and thus gives only a partial view of the coaching process and career capital development. Secondly, the narrative is the researchers' interpretation of these stories as told during interviews. Third, some may find the number of interviewees as a limitation. However, narratives told during the interviews were very rich and the aim of the narrative studies is not to provide one truth, but instead, reveal novel perspectives on the studied phenomena. Fourth, the scope of this study was limited to exploration of the development of career capital through coaching in the expatriate context. Therefore, future studies focusing especially on intercultural questions would be beneficial. For example, utilizing the GLOBE study's (see e.g. Dorfman et al. 2012) societal cultures and global leadership scales or other intercultural frameworks would enrich our understanding of the development of career capital, and reveal if there are differences, for example, in the 'knowing-whom' dimension between collectivist cultures compared with individualistic cultures. Despite the limitations of this study, relating to its sample, scope or method, the findings challenge the traditional ways of studying interventions and their effectiveness, and highlight the personal perception of the experience of coaching and its effects on career capital development in the international context. Future studies should also apply different study designs, for instance, diary studies or longitudinal quantitative surveys, to provide evidence concerning the causal relations between career capital development and the role of coaching. In addition, studies using broader samples and different methods might better illustrate how transferable (cf. Jokinen, 2010), and to whom and to what purposes, coaching can be most beneficial in the expatriate context.

The practical implication of this study is the need to apply a multifaceted understanding of coaching as a development intervention. For instance, by increasing understanding and knowledge of the career capital concept through training and development among coaches and coach training institutions in future, coaches might be able to adopt the career capital framework as one practical tool for coaching processes. Furthermore, based on our findings, organizations employing expatriates could benefit from using coaching, as our findings indicate that career capital development enhances expatriates' ability to perform better in their challenging jobs. Therefore, the people responsible for HRD, in particular, should see coaching as one possible method to develop their organization's international assignees. The present study supports the view that coaching should not only focus on culture in an international context, because there might be other factors impacting the coaching engagement (Abbott, 2010:326). Particular coaching needs may include other topics than cultural issues, for example, due to the fact that the coachee is experienced in a certain cultural context. Therefore, careful evaluation of the current skills, the acquired career capital of the expatriate and the assignment phase should be done in order to better understand the coaching needs.

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