

**BRITISH ACADEMY  
OF MANAGEMENT**

---

**BAM**  
CONFERENCE

---

**3RD-5TH SEPTEMBER**

**ASTON UNIVERSITY BIRMINGHAM UNITED KINGDOM**

This paper is from the BAM2019 Conference Proceedings

**About BAM**

The British Academy of Management (BAM) is the leading authority on the academic field of management in the UK, supporting and representing the community of scholars and engaging with international peers.

<http://www.bam.ac.uk/>

# **Spanish expatriates' identity work processes during an international assignment: a longitudinal study**

Rosalía Cascón-Pereira<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> **Corresponding author.** Senior Lecturer at Faculty of Economy and Management, University Rovira i Virgili, Reus, Spain. PA: Av. de la Universitat, 1, 43204 Reus, Spain. Email : [rosalia.cascon@urv.cat](mailto:rosalia.cascon@urv.cat) Tel. 0034 977 758932 ; Fax. 0034 977 759814.

## **Abstract**

Identities as people's understandings of who they were and desire to become, and identity work processes, have been recently identified in the expatriate literature as important pieces to understand expatriates experiences and adjustment. This study aims to explore the process of identity work of 17 Spanish expatriates from a longitudinal perspective, and an interpretivist and interdisciplinary approach that contribute in a novel way to the literature. Specifically, it focuses on the processes of personal and cultural identity change (identity work) through meanings, as a consequence of their international assignment (IA). Also, it explores how these patterns of identity change impact on their adjustment to the host country and decisions to return. I adopted a social constructivist framework in which meanings play a central role in the analysis of expatriate identities and identity work. I collected these meanings through in-depth interviews and the Repertory Grid Technique (RGT), a constructivist technique (Kelly, 1955) specially designed to capture meanings. Data collection was conducted just before expatriates initiate the international assignment and immediately after they return from it. A total of 33 interviews were conducted and 33 grids collected. A mixed methodological design was used for the analysis, with inductive predominance and explanatory nature that combined qualitative analysis from in-depth interviews and

qualitative data from RGT, with quantitative analysis of the RGT. Personal Construct Theory was used to interpret data from the RGT. Different patterns of cross-cultural identity work emerged from the data that can be related with adjustment, early departure and their decision to return. Several theoretical contributions and practical implications derive from these findings.

**KEYWORDS:** Expatriates, Meanings, Identity, Identity Work, Repertory Grid Technique, Longitudinal approach, Personal Construct Theory.

## **1. Introduction**

In the current globalised labour market, global mobility is increasing, whether company-sponsored or self-initiated assignment. That is, the expatriate experience is affecting to an increasing number of people, be it in the form of organizational expatriates (OEs), who are considered the employees of business organizations sent to another country on a temporary basis to complete a time-based task or accomplish an organizational goal (Baruch et al., 2013), or in the form of self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) as the individuals who take the initiative, independent of an employer, to move to a foreign location for employment, career and/or travel or lifestyle reasons (Jokinen et al., 2008). In fact, in the Spanish context the migratory balance is negative and increasing, with more people leaving the country than entering the country. In the first semester of 2018, this balance was of -10.186 (INE).

These global assignments are deemed as a particular form of transition between organizational and cultural domains. It is assumed that when one's role in the social environment radically changes or this social context changes, it activates a process of identity construction. Then, international assignments are likely to require demanding

identity work for individual OEs and SIEs as they try to adjust to their new organizational and cultural context. Hence, the concept of identity work defined as “the range of activities individuals engage to create, present, and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of the self-concept” (Snow and Anderson, 1987:1348) is deemed as totally necessary and inevitable in the case of expatriates, whether the initiative for the move has been own (SIEs) or the company’s (OEs).

In fact, identity has been recognised to be sensitive to changing environments such as work role transitions (Ibarra, 1999; Nicholson, 1984) or cross-cultural encounters (Hermans, 2001), being mobility transitions even more demanding of identity work than the usual professional role transitions (Ibarra, 1999), since they prompt feelings and a strong need of adjustment and change that require a review of the self to be accepted by the other culture (Osland, 2000). Hence, multiple personal and social identities such as cultural, ethnic, gender, etc identities might be at a stake during these mobility transitions. In this sense, Collins (2012) defined global mobility as a spatial rupture that had implications for the way individuals articulated narratives of self.

Paying notice to the potential importance of identity and identity processes in understanding expatriate adjustment behaviours and expatriate failure, Andresen et al. (2015) and Tung (2016) claimed for studies on SIEs’ and OEs’ identities, respectively. More recently but in the same line, Harrison et al. (2019) in their *Journal of Management* editorial commentary, highlight identity as a key piece to understand individual immigrant employees experiences of their destination country workplaces. In response to these claims or previous to them, the expatriate literature has started to explore the important role of identity and identity processes to understand expatriates experiences and adjustment (Bonache et al., 2016; Fan et al., 2018, Kraimer et al, 2012,

Kohonen, 2004, 2005 and 2008, Scurry et al. 2013). However, there is yet much to be done in this vast and unexplored terrain.

In particular, these studies call for more research on the role of expatriate identity in the relationship with locals (Fan et al., 2018; Bonache et al., 2016; Bonache et al., 2001), since the unit of analysis so far has been HCNs rather than expatriates themselves. Indeed, how expatriates view local employees (Fan et al., 2018) and how they construct their self-identities throughout their global assignments by comparing themselves with HCNs seem a crucial element to understand expatriate experiences that has been insufficiently explored so far. Also, these studies agree on the importance of taking a more “full circle” view of international assignments, to better explain how global assignments affect expatriates both personally and professionally, and suggest the longitudinal perspective to achieve this “full circle” view identifying this research gap either for OEs (Kraimer et al., 2012; Kohonen, 2004, 2005, 2008; Bonache et al., 2016; Nadeem and Mumtaz, 2018) or for SIEs (Scurry et al., 2013). Indeed, these studies have used retrospective narratives or other self-reported measures of repatriates after re-entry to their home country in a cross-sectional manner rather than a longitudinal approach to explore identity change in expatriates, with the usual limitations of this approach. Indeed, a processual and longitudinal approach to expatriates’ full circle experience is required to allow research develop in this area.

And finally, and from a focus on identity and identity research, notwithstanding the initial progress in this novel line of research in the expatriate literature, it needs further development. In particular, the extant research has just focused on expatriate-local/host country nationals (HCN) employee interactions and relationship rather than on the individual level of analysis of expatriates’ identities, with the exceptions of Kohonen (2004, 2005 and 2008), Nadeem and Mumtaz (2018) and Scurry et al. (2013) whose

steps this study follows. This individual level of analysis is much needed to add to our current knowledge of expatriate experiences. Also, the extant studies on international assignments from an identity perspective have only been approached from a few of the multiple theoretical lenses to the study of identity. In particular, they have been approached from a functionalist orientation (Corlett et al., 2017) and a static approach (Miscenko and Day, 2016) adopting either Identity Theory (Stryker and Burke, 2000) to set their hypotheses and interpret their results (Kraimer et al., 2012) or the Social Identity Approach (Haslam, 2004), including the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1981) and the Social Categorization Theory (Turner, 1982), to explore the social identity processes in the expatriate-host country national relationship (HCNs) and the HCNs stereotyping of expatriates, as key processes to understand expatriate adjustment (Fan et al., 2018; Bonache et al., 2015; Olsen and Martins, 2009). Last, but not least, in the mentioned studies, identity has been approached quantitatively. This functionalist and more “objective” approach to identity has been considered as a limited approach to capture the subtleties and complexities of identity and identity work processes (Brown, 2001 and 2015). Hence, notwithstanding the value of this research in recognizing the important role of identity and identity processes to understand expatriate experiences, there is still a long way to go through to incorporate other silenced approaches to the study of identity into the expatriate research. In particular, more interpretivists, processual and dynamic theoretical approaches to identity which can potentially add richer understanding to expatriates’ subjective experiences and identity work at a time of significant transition are needed.

There are only a few attempts which have explicitly focused on expatriate identity and identity work (Kohonen, 2004, 2005 and 2008; Scurry et al., 2013) from a dynamic and interpretivist approach which is the narrative approach. This study inspires in them and

follows their steps to overcome their highlighted limitations. In particular, these are the longitudinal approach to fully understand the content and processes of identity change in expatriates and also linked to the former the processual view. Since these studies have focused on expatriates narratives and life stories as a suitable device with which to study identity in a retrospective way (Gergen and Gergen, 1983) but they haven't explored in detail the processes and patterns of change of these meanings which are constitutive of their identity work (Bruner, 1990).

Hence, on the basis of the identified research gaps, this paper seeks to redress them by focusing on the identity change process of 7 Spanish SIEs and 9 OEs from a longitudinal approach. Specifically, it focuses on how both groups of expatriates change their personal and cultural identities and the cultural images of the HCNs during their international assignment (IA) through meanings. Therefore, it aims to respond to the following two exploratory research questions:

**RQ1:** How do organizational expatriates (OEs) and self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) change their identities throughout the international experience?

**RQ2:** How do OEs and SIEs change the images of HCNs?

On the basis of the Spanish OEs and SIEs' identity work patterns identified according to their meanings and distances captured by the RGT, and by highlighting these processes of identity meaning-making during their international assignment through their narratives, this article offers a theoretical framework identifying different patterns of expatriates' identity work and their relationship with adjustment. In doing so, the theoretical contribution is threefold: First, it contributes to extend the analysis of identity and identity work processes to the realm of international assignments, from a longitudinal and processual view new to this literature. Second, it also brings to the fore the central role of perceived distance to HCNs and to home nationals in terms of

meanings, in explaining different patterns of identity work. And finally, in adopting an novel interdisciplinary approach to study identity, using Personal Construct Theory from Clinical Psychology discipline to explore expatriate identity work processes, it contributes to identity literature, offering new possibilities to study identity from a dynamic and interpretivist approach. Methodologically, this study has two important contributions: the longitudinal approach and the innovating use of the RGT to explore meanings and identities in expatriates. Beyond the theoretical and methodological contributions, this study also aims to practically contribute to the international human resource management by pointing out some patterns of identity work related to better possibilities of adjustment to the host country. It also aims to suggest some empirically based initiatives that companies might adopt to improve expatriates adjustment to the host country.

The article begins highlighting the missing gaps in the expatriate literature to understand expatriate identity and identity work, together with a justification to explore this gap adopting a particular approach to identity. Following, the methodology and the sample are detailed. The analysis procedure is also explained in this section. The findings of the study are then presented as emerging identity work patterns responding to the posed research questions. Finally, the theoretical contributions and practical implications of this study are outlined. Also, the limitations of the study are noted and some suggestions for further research are pointed out accordingly.

## **2. Understanding identities and identity work in expatriate research: Lights and Shadows**

To date, much of the literature on expatriation has focused on expatriate adjustment, as the “degree of comfort or absence of stress associated with being an expatriate”



(Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). This seems logical given the high costs that an international assignment (IA) implies (Peltokorpi and Froese, 2008), and the economic losses it generates if the IA fails because of the premature return of expatriates (Harzing, 1995) or the lack of adjustment to the host country causing poor performance (Black and Gregersen, 1991; Shaffer et al, 2006; Dowling et al. 2008) and low job satisfaction (Reiche, 2007). Hence, there has been a stream of research focusing on identifying factors that might increase the likelihood of success for expatriates facilitating their adjustment to the host country, such as demographic characteristics (Olsen y Martins, 2009), psychological factors (Takeuchi, 2010, Gong and Fan, 2006; Caligiuri, 2000; Shaffer et al., 2006; Ward and Ravlin, 2017; Haslberger et al., 2013), Role Theory factors such as role ambiguity and role novelty (Kawai and Mohr, 2015) and relational factors (Farh et al., 2010; Toh and Denisi, 2005 and 2007; Mahajan and Toh, 2014; Fan et al., 2018). Despite the developments of this research in identifying the factors that influence on expatriates' cross-cultural adjustment, the named "journey inward" by Osland (2000) has been yet insufficiently explored. That is, the subjective and internal experiences of expatriates, to understand their process of adjustment.

Identity and identity work processes are considered an important part of this "journey inward" (Osland, 2000) and hence a key piece to understand adjustment in these global transitions. Notwithstanding their importance and the seminal work of Eeva Kohonen (2004) to bring to the fore identity to the expatriation scene in order to understand what kind of "inward" journey expatriates make, they have been mostly neglected in the expatriate literature. Only recently, the importance of identity and identity processes seem to have been rediscovered (Bonache et al., 2015; Fan et al., 2018; Kraimer et al., 2012) and called for more research (Harrison et al., 2019, Nadeem and Mumtaz, 2018 and Tung, 2016).

Indeed, global mobility affects identity and entails a triple challenge for identity work, because expatriates have to adjust to a new culture, a new organization and a new work role simultaneously. These challenges requires the willingness to revise one's identity (Peltonen, 1998; Sanchez et al, 2000) and activate identity work processes to maintain a coherent identity and to protect the self-concept (Giddens, 1991) in the struggle to reconcile their origin versus destination country identities in terms of "who I am becoming", "who I was" and "who I will always be" (Shaffer and Harrison, 2001). Notwithstanding the extant consensus on the impact of international assignments on identity, on the requirement of identity work to face this challenge and on the impact of identity work processes in expatriate adjustment, our understanding about identity work processes in expatriates and how these processes affect their adjustment is still limited.

Some extant research has focused on the social identity processes in the expatriate-host country national relationship (HCNs) and the HCNs stereotyping of expatriates, as key processes to understand expatriate adjustment (Fan et al., 2018; Bonache et al., 2015; Olsen and Martins, 2009). Notwithstanding the importance of this research in understanding the key role of the relationship with HCNs on expatriate adjustment, and in opening a new line of research, the criticism is that identity in these studies has been approached from a unique theoretical perspective, which is Social Identity Theory (1981) and Social Categorization Theory (1982), from a quantitative methodology and from a cross-sectional perspective, thus lacking the richness that other theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of identity can offer. This is perfectly understandable since the Social Identity Approach (SIA) (Haslam, 2004) is the most suitable approach to the study of identity at the interpersonal level (Miscenko and Day, 2016) and these studies have particularly focused on this level, that is on the relationship of expatriates with HCNs. However, in focusing on this level of analysis,

they have disregarded the individual level of analysis of identity, which it is also important to understand their “journey inward” and hence their identity work process. In particular, how expatriates view or construct the image of HCNs as part of their identity work process might be important to understand their experiences and adjustment.

Like the mentioned stream of research on the social identity processes in the expatriate-host country national relationship (HCNs) and the HCNs stereotyping of expatriates, other research on expatriates identity (Vijakumar, 2019 and Kraimer et al., 2012) has also adopted a functionalist and static approach to the study of identity (Corlett et al., 2017), which is Identity Theory (Stryker, 1980; Burke, 1991). These studies have focused on the effects of different role identities salience on repatriate turnover (Kraimer et al., 2012) or work-nonwork conflict. In particular, the study of Kraimer et al., (2012) shed light on why repatriates so often leave their firms after coming home with a sample of 112 repatriated employees. They found that those who reported being highly embedded in their prior expatriates communities were more likely to carry an international identity home with them. This international identity interacted with how they compared themselves to their colleagues without international experience and in consequence contributed to their psychological strain and turnover decisions. Regardless the important contribution of this study in bringing into the fore the international identity as a variable to understand the repatriate turnover, the identity work or identity construction processes of expatriates along their international role transitions are neglected in these type of quantitative studies and approaches to identity. For instance, it might be other identity processes different than international identity that explain the identity strain previous to turnover. In fact, in this study the international identity only explains identity strain when job deprivation perceptions are high.

In turn, the study of Vijakumar and Cunnigham (2019) explains how work and nonwork identity salience might influence perception of work stressors and the experience of work-nonwork conflict. Despite its contribution to the expatriate literature, its static and functionalist approach to identity linked to the quantitative and cross-sectional retrospective measures of identity, prevents from capturing the processual nature of identity work in expatriates.

There are only a few studies which have focused on expatriates' identity change or on the role of identity in adjustment to the host country. These are the studies by Eeva Kohonen (2004, 2005 and 2008) and by Nadeem and Mumtaz (2018) on expatriates and the study by Scurry et al. (2013) on SIEs. We describe them in inverse order to the degree of relation with our study, from the less related to what we have done to the more related, also highlighting their main deficiencies which this study tries to overcome.

The study of Scurry et al. (2013) focuses on how SIEs articulate narratives to expand, restrict or adapt their identities in the new environments. The 20 participants of this study were SIEs with a common destination, Qatar, and different countries of origin. The central focus of the study was not identity or identity change but the patterns of adaptation of expatriates to the structural constraints. And self-identity emerged as a tool to adapt to these constraints. Hence, although self-identity is treated as an emerging theme from the analysed narratives, it is considered in a tangential way, so the role of identity or identity work process in expatriates adaptation to the new environment is not really understood.

The recent study of Nadeem and Mumtaz (2018) investigate the process of Chinese expatriates' adjustment in Pakistan. They interviewed 30 Chinese working as directors in Pakistan with at least one-year work experience in Pakistan. Despite their focus on

identity change and their processual view on this, the underlying mechanisms of identity work in the analysed cases remain unexplored. Also, although they report that expatriates' identities somewhat changed in terms of their behaviors and work habits, while fewer changes were observed in their belief and value system, these reported changes were based on expatriates' cross-sectional accounts and subjective perceptions of change. Nonetheless, there might be some expatriates who changed their identities but not perceived this change, and the other way round, that is expatriates who did not change but reported change might also be true. Thus, as themselves recognise as a limitation, given the unobserved nature of changes in the belief system, "future researches may examine expatriates' social identity change through changes in their belief systems using different qualitative research designs like ethnography" (p.662). Although, we won't follow their methodological recommendation in this study, we'll use an alternative methodological approach better suited to capture changes in the expatriates' belief system, as it will be described in next section.

Finally, Eeva Kohonen explored the consequences of an international assignment on expatriate managers' identities (2004) and the impact of their identity construction on their career aspirations and re-entry experiences (2008) from a narrative approach. She found three patterns of identity change to classify 21 Finnish OEs who had recently returned from long-term IA in a distant country (destination countries were not specified) (2008): (1) Identity shifters who were considered expatriates with a profound experience of cultural identity change; (2) expatriates with balanced identities in whom the host and the home country's culture were integrated in their identities; and (3) non-shifters to refer to those expatriates who didn't change their identities as a consequence of the IA. Although her research is illuminating for this article, like Nadeem and Mumtaz (2018) it has not explored the particular processes or mechanisms of identity

work and identity change in expatriates, but just categorise the resulting identities. Also, she explored the impact of international assignments on expatriate identities but not the impact of certain identity work processes on their adjustment to the host country or adjustment to the home country after return, or on certain decisions like returning home or not. Hence, my study draws on this interesting line of research but tries to go a bit further by bringing a processual view to the study of expatriates' identities to explore the processes of identity work, or in other words HOW expatriates change their identities and their images of HCNs throughout the international assignment. This processual view is difficult to attain by approaching expatriates experiences in a cross-sectional and retrospective manner like the mentioned studies on expatriates' identity change have done. In consequence, and in response to the multiple calls in the expatriate literature for more longitudinal studies (Kohonen, 2004, 2008, Scurry et al., 2013, Harrison et al. 2019, Nadeem and Mumtaz, 2019, Bonache et al., 2001 and 2016) our study adopts a longitudinal perspective that allows capture the identity change dynamics in order to obtain a more nuanced understanding of identity work and identity change among expatriates to cover the limitations of cross-sectional retrospective accounts.

After having highlighted the scarcity of studies focusing on identity and identity work processes in expatriate research and in particular, the lack of a processual and longitudinal approach to these studies and the lack of a suited identity and methodological approach to capture and comprehend these processes, this study aims to fulfil these gaps by exploring from a longitudinal, interdisciplinary and processual approach, the identities and identity work processes of 17 Spanish expatriates in order to have a more complete picture of "their journey inward" (Osland, 2000) in terms of identity work processes and of how the different patterns of identity work may affect

expatriate adjustment and or their decision to return. Next section describes the most suited identity approach to attain this aim.

### **3. Personal Construct Theory (PCT) to study expatriates' identity and identity work: an interpretivist and interdisciplinary approach**

In the present study, I conceived identity as “the meanings that individuals attach reflexively to themselves” (Gecas, 1982:3) as they seek to answer the question “Who I am?” (Brown, 2015:21). Moreover, I considered identity as fluid, dynamic (Brown, 2015) and constantly under construction (Ybema et al., 2009) during expatriates' international experiences. In accord to this conception and to respond to the two posed research questions, I adopted a social constructivist framework in which meanings play a central role in the analysis of expatriate identities and identity change, assuming that expatriates' “journey inward” and identity work depended on the meanings they attached to their experiences. In fact, sensemaking, considered as giving sense through meanings, has been recognized as a key process of identity work (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). And identity work as “the active processes through which a sense of identity is being constructed” (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003:1165) or as “the range of activities individuals engage in to create, present and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of the self-concept” (Snow and Anderson, 1987, p.1348), also imply the central role of meanings. Thus, making meaning of their personal and professional experiences while being out on assignment, was considered expatriates' identity work. In fact, as Weick (1995:18) highlights “sensemaking and identity construction are simultaneous processes, because making sense of the external context is always self-referential”. Given the transformational nature of the expatriate experience, identity work was recognized as an essential process in expatriates'

transitions not only to maintain and protect their self-concept but also to adjust to the new context.

Drawing on these conceptions of identity and identity work, and having in mind the research questions which focus on identity work processes, the most appropriate approach to identity for this research is the interpretivist approach which has a meaning-centred focus (Corlett et al., 2017). Thus, I dismissed static and functionalist approaches like Identity Theory and the Social Identity Approach because they were not so suited to explore identity work in a dynamic and longitudinal way as this study did. Within this selected approach, the narrative methodological approach was the most suited approach to explore expatriates' identities as Eeva Kohonen (2004 and 2008) and Tracy Scurry et al. (2013) already did, because identity can be conceived as a narrative construction. However, some identity work issues and identity changes are invisible to be captured through explicit and retrospective narratives of expatriates. For instance, expatriates might report that they have not changed, despite having changed only because they are not aware of these changes. So, a more psychological approach was needed to capture of the tacit nature identity change and identity work processes. Hence, within a social constructivist paradigm, I adopted Personal Construct Theory (PCT) (Kelly, 1955) to explore expatriates' identities and identity work through meanings.

From Personal Construct Theory (Kelly, 1955), meanings are conceived as the primary source of any human expression, including emotions, attitudes, values and behaviors and therefore in the composition of expatriates identities. PCT presents the individual as an inquiring person (Bannister & Fransella, 1977) who is continuously striving to make sense of the world and his/her place within it. Accordingly, he/she develops theories or constructions of himself/herself and the world composed by constructs. Bipolar constructs represent distinctions drawn from the perceptions of similarities and



differences in their experience. That is to say, the individual gives meaning by assigning information to one pole of the construct or the other. All of these constructs are organised into an interdependent and hierarchical network of meanings, so that the constructs of a lower hierarchical level can be directly related to other superordinate constructs which form personal identity. The repertory grid technique (RGT) as it will be described in next section is used to capture these meanings. This theory took its roots in social constructivism and it shares the view of identity compatible with the chosen interpretivist and symbolic approach. In this adopted approach, the recognition of the individual agency in constructing a coherent, integrated and meaningful identity is essential (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002).

In summary, this article assumed that expatriates identity work is crafted through meanings. Since meanings are the very substance with which expatriates make sense of their experience, cope with a different culture or adjust to it, it seemed appropriate to focus on them and consider them as the primary unit of analysis. In the following section, I explain how I captured these meanings. The most suited approach to this conception and the research aims was an interpretivist and symbolic approach to identity.

#### **4. Research Methodology**

Because of the dynamic, internal, processual, symbolic and intangible nature of the object of study, identity work process, and its unit of analysis, meanings, I used a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods drawing on the eclectic combination of a narrative approach with a PCT approach under the constructivist paradigm to better capture the identity work process of expatriates. The main reason for using both quantitative and qualitative and thus adopting a mixed methods strategy was to compare and triangulate different data sources on identity

change. In particular I aimed to contrast expatriates' qualitative and conscious accounts of change provided through their retrospective narratives with the identified changes in unconscious personal meanings and identity by comparing PRE and POST measures of the RGT. Hence, I adopted a concurrent triangulation design (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007) in which I collected both quantitative (from the RGT) and qualitative (from in-depth interviews) data concurrently and then compared the two data sources to determine if there was convergence or differences, in the analysis, and to illuminate with the qualitative data from narratives what was behind the quantitative results of statistical distances provided by the computerized grid scoring programme (see figure 1). The analysis was at an individual level, comparing the quantitative data from their grids with their narratives, and then comparing the found pattern with the rest of participants. Following, I detail how I did it.

#### **4.1. Sample**

I sought out individuals prior to the start of their assignments. Access to OEs was negotiated with HR departments from the MNCs they worked in. Four MNCs participated in the study, three from the chemical sector and one from the food and agriculture sector. These firms provided to me the names and e-mail addresses once new expatriates assignments were confirmed. Then, I contacted them before they embarked into their international experience. The access to SIEs was opportunistic and was obtained through online groups of Spanish expatriates in facebook (Españoles en China, Españoles por el mundo, etc.) or through online specific platforms such as "expats.com" and was also based on personal contacts and snowballing sampling. As with the case of OEs, I tried to select only engineers and mostly men to make the sample homogeneous and comparable to the sample of OEs but I made two exceptions in order to incorporate two women into the sample of SIEs (see Table 1).

The inclusion criteria were: not having started yet their international assignment and being Spanish. With regards to the latter criterion I include an exception of a Brazilian OE whose parents were both Spanish and had been working in Spain during 3 years before embarking on his second assignment. The first assignment had been from Brazil to Spain. The exclusion criteria was a minimum length of stay of 6 months, given that it was a longitudinal study focusing on identity change and its relation with adjustment and the expatriate literature suggests that it typically takes expatriates 2 to 6 months to feel adjusted (Firth et al., 2014; Ashforth, 2012).

I adopted a purposive sampling strategy (Patton, 2002) aiming for heterogeneity in these criteria: country of destination (psychologically close like Germany or Chile and distant destinations like India and China), previous international experience (having or not having previous international experience), family status (being single and going alone, being married and going alone, being married and with children and going with all the family) and length of the international experience (IE) (from 6 months to 6 years).

Initially I contacted 21 expatriates: 13 OEs and 8 SIEs. From them, 2 OEs and 1 SIE were excluded from the study because they did not complete numerically their PRE-departure grids and 1 OE was excluded because he finally did not go on assignment because he did not obtain the visa to go to EUA. Hence, our sample of convenience was made up of 17 expatriates: 7 SIEs and 10 OEs. I collected PRE and POST data (grids and interviews) from 16 out of the total 17. I could not obtain the post data of 1 OE because he did not respond to my emails. Then I contacted his organisation and they informed me that he had returned before the expected and he had abandoned the organisation. He was expected to be in China 6 years and returned after 9 months. Although he can be considered a experimental death of the longitudinal study (5.8%), I decided to include them for the purposes of this research. The main reason is the

information these negative cases provide to enrich the developing theory. When I analysed his PRE grid, I found a common issue with the other case of failure (P17) that was different from the rest of cases analysed, so I decided to include him to build theory.

Hence, the final cases analysed were of 17 expatriates, 7 SIEs and 10 OES. Out of these 17, I collected PRE of the 17 and POST measures only of 16.

The sample of OEs was homogeneous in terms of professional background and gender, with 9 out of 10 participants being engineers and 9 out of 10 being males. The male predominance in samples of studies on international assignments has been criticised (Selmer and Leung, 2002) and I recognise it as a limitation of this study. However, given the difficulties of access to participants, I was not able to choose. With regards to the professional background, I looked for this variable to be homogeneous on purpose as a “*ceteris paribus*” professional identity. See Table 1 for a detailed description of this sample. The sample of SIEs was also homogeneous in gender and professional background terms with 5 out of 7 being male engineers.

All of them were Spanish except one Brazilian OE who had been working in Spain during three years before embarking in his second IA. The destination countries for both groups of expatriates were varied: Germany, EUA, UK, China and India. The variability of these destinations despite sharing a common Spanish home country origin, allows comparing the effect of perceived cultural distance on their identity work processes. Also, it responds to Harrison et al. (2019) recommendation of sampling broadly, that is of taking into consideration expatriates working in many different destination countries in the same study.

Another characteristic in which I tried the sample to be heterogeneous was the length of the international experience, in order to explore the effects of time on the patterns of

identity change. However, and given that I assumed that identity change takes time, I only included expatriates with a planned international experience of more than 6 months. There are only five cases whose length of IE was less than 1 year, and two of them were considered a failure and returned before they expected (one SIE (P17) and one OE (P16)). The remaining were more than 2 years, and one (P2) is still there thinking of returning or not.

Despite the inherent difficulties of collecting data in a longitudinal design, the long duration of this study (6 years) and the long wait to analyse data in a longitudinal way comparing PRE measures with POST measures, the effort has been worthwhile and the experimental death rate of 11.11% can be considered low.

### **Data collection and analysis methods**

To capture “conscious” and “sub-conscious” identity work (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002), I combined two data collection methods: in-depth interviews and the repertory grid technique (RGT). As part of the longitudinal design, both were used prior to the start of expatriates’ assignments (PRE-phase) and immediately after returning from them or approaching their return within the 3 months before it (POST-phase). Thus, I took a picture at two moments of expatriates “journey inward” to offer a longitudinal view of their “full-circle” experiences. Another point of data collection in the middle of their assignments was initially planned, but then it was abandoned given its impracticability and the low degree of participation. Instead, expatriates were asked to report me by email important incidents that gave sense to their experience or questioned it. Four of them emailed me during the first 6 months of their international experience to report me problems of adjustment (see attached example). Also, I included the Black

and Stephens (1989) Work Adjustment Scale to assess expatriates adjustment in the POST phase.

*In-depth interviews.* I collected expatriates narratives through in-depth interviews as retrospective accounts in which expatriates constructed their reality and gave meaning to their experiences (Polkinghorne, 1988). I presented myself as a psychologist and offered a final psychological report on their changes which helped in obtaining a good rapport and in preventing “experimental deaths”, that is the abandonment of participants in this longitudinal design. Also, the shared Spanish cultural background and the common language (Catalan or Spanish) between me and the participants helped this rapport. A sign of this good rapport is the low rate of abandonment of the longitudinal study and that they currently invite me to social get-togethers or ask me for psychological advice even now that the study has finished and I did not know them before starting this study. The first interview (see the attached guideline in Figure 2) was to explore the initial motives to embrace the international experience, previous international experiences, how the IA was conceived, how success in a IA was defined, personal and organizational resources to face it, previous concerns and what changes in self were expected. The collected information set the basis line with which to compare the POST interview. Despite these areas were explored in all participants, expatriates were left free to speak about their international experiences, so improvised additional questions were asked to encourage their storytelling in each case. The final interview covered the following areas (see the attached guideline): personal and professional assessment and description of the IA, problems and difficulties raised during the experience, perceived changes in self as a consequence of the IA, learnings, social relations during the IA, what had represented the IA in the lifes, and future expectations. Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, were conducted in Catalan or Spanish and

were transcribed verbatim. The direct quotations used in this article have been then translated into English. A total of 34 interviews were conducted with the 18 expatriates from this study (2 of them were only interviewed before starting the assignments and were experimental deaths).

*Repertory Grid Technique (RGT)*. Also, I collected expatriate personal meanings to define themselves and HCNs through the Repertory Grid Technique (RGT), a constructivist technique specially designed to explore personal meanings or constructs and how they apply to aspects of the world, termed “elements” (Kelly, 1955). In it, the person evaluates significant others on a set of personal meanings or constructs that have been previously elicited with the aid of the researcher. The RGT has been conceived as an appropriate method to elucidate individuals’ sense-making activities (Bannister & Fransella, 1977) and in giving access to an individual’s self or identity by means of different self-constructions as elements (Bannister, 1983). It is not until the mid-1960s that this technique begins to be used in management studies (Harrison, 1966). Before then, its use was restricted to the clinical domain where it has been broadly used to study the construct system and sense of identity of individuals (see Walker and Winter, 2007 for a review). And although its use in organisational psychology and HRM has increased in the last 30 years (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Holman, 1996; Cascón-Pereira, 2017), its use is still unknown in certain domains like expatriate research. Hence, its use to explore expatriates’ identities and identity change is a novel contribution to the expatriate literature. I administered the RGT in the traditional way (Fransella et al., 2004) in the context of a structured interview after conducting the in-depth interview. Hence, I administered twice: before expatriates embark on their assignments (PRE-phase) and immediately after returning from them or approaching their return within the 3 months before it (POST-phase). A total of 34 grids were

administered and analysed corresponding to the 18 participants of this study (2 of them were only interviewed before starting the assignments and were experimental deaths). I specially designed the RGT to respond to the initial research questions. Accordingly, in addition to the traditional elements as significant others (mother, father, siblings, father, partner and friend), I purposely introduced the following elements in all grids and used them to elicit personal meanings. They were: Self before the International Experience, Self after the International Experience, Good employees, Good Boss, Home Country Nationals (HmN), Host Country Nationals (HCN), Non-grata person (“someone whom you know but don’t like”) and Ideal Self (“How I would like to be”). These same elements were used for each participant in both longitudinal phases. Also I introduced the meaning “happy” and I asked participants for the opposite meaning in order to explore if the international experience has make them happier or not.

For construct/meanings elicitation I used the dyadic method (Fransella, Bell and Bannister, 2004) so that a dyad of elements was selected and expatriates had to compare them in terms of their similarities and differences according to their views. For instance, German and Spanish people can be seen as responsible at work and then the participant is asked to provide the opposite meaning for responsible. This elicitation process is repeated in consecutive pairs until all elements appear once in the comparisons, and until no new meanings/constructs arise. By this means, I obtained a series of personal meanings/constructs that represented the idiosyncratic expatriate’s construct system. After this, I asked each participant to rate each pair of bipolar constructs (files) in terms of all elements (files) employing a 7-point Likert-type scale, where points 1,2 and 3 applied to the left construct and 5, 6 and 7 to the right construct (see Figure 3 as an example grid).



*Work Adjustment Scale (Black and Stephens, 1989)*. I used this instrument to assess the resulting level of adjustment after their international experiences at the POST moment. So, I only collected 16 questionnaires. Expatriates were asked to rate the extent to which they felt comfortable with different aspects of their work in the host country on a 7-point scale.

*Analysis.* A mixed methodological design was used for the analysis, with inductive predominance and exploratory nature that combined qualitative analysis from in-depth interviews and the qualitative data of the RGT (content of meanings, congruent meanings, discrepant meanings, etc.), with quantitative analysis from the RGT data. The narratives collected through the interviews were treated as representations of identity and their experiences and were carefully read and re-read to identify key themes. These key themes were used to interpret and illustrate the quantitative results from the RGT, so that the analysis of interview transcripts support and give sense to the emerging patterns of identity change in terms of statistical distances between elements that emerged from the quantitative analysis of RGT data, in a concurrent triangulation strategy (Creswell and Plano Clark 2007). Thus, the mixing of the two data sources was at the interpretation stage, with qualitative accounts of expatriates experiences illustrating what was behind each pattern of identity change identified according to the measures explained below originating from their grids. So, despite using quantitative data to identify different patterns of identity change, the predominant logics of the analysis was qualitative recognising the idiosyncratic nature of identity work processes. Hence, I analysed each grid data matrix quantitatively with RECORD 6.0 (Garcia-Gutierrez and Feixas, 2018) computer program. From all the quantitative measures and indices the program provides, I specifically selected the following because they have special significance to respond to the research questions posed and because after

analysing each of them individually they allow discriminate different patterns of identity change among expatriates. All of them are extracted from the matrixes of distances among elements generated by the program. The illustrative value to interpret discrepancies is the following: Very high discrepancy ( $d > 0.74$ ); High discrepancy ( $0.75 > d > 0.49$ ); High similarity ( $0.50 > d > 0.24$ ) and Very high similarity ( $0.25 > d > 0$ ). All measures were analysed before the international experience (PRE moment) and after (POST moment). These were the selected measures:

- *Self before the International Experience-Ideal (PRE) and Self after the International Experience-Ideal (POST)*. These two measures report the statistical distance between the scores given to the elements Self and Ideal in the PRE and POST moments. A lower distance is associated with higher self-esteem. The first measure is traditionally used in all the grids analysis (Fransella et al., 2004).
- *Self before- Host Country Nationals (HCN)(PRE) and Self After- Host Country Nationals (HCN) (POST)*. These two measures report the statistical distance between the scores given to the elements Self and Host Country Nationals (HCN) before and after the international experience. A lower distance is interpreted as perceived closeness to the HCNs. These measures were specifically designed and analysed for this study.
- *Ideal-HCN (PRE) and Ideal-HCN (POST)*. These two measures report the statistical distance between the scores given to the elements Ideal and Host Country Nationals (HCN) before and after the international experience. Hence, they show the positive or negative image that expatriates have of HCN before and after the experience. These measures were specifically designed and analysed for this study.
- *Self-Home Country Nationals (HmN) (PRE) and Self After-HmN (POST)*. These two measures report the statistical distance between the scores given to the elements Self

and Home Country Nationals (HmN) before and after the international experience. A lower distance is interpreted as perceived closeness to the HmNs. These measures were specifically designed and analysed for this study.

- *Ideal-HmN (PRE) and Ideal-HmN (POST)*. These two measures report the statistical distance between the scores given to the elements Ideal and Home Country Nationals (HmN) before and after the international experience. Hence, they show the positive or negative image that expatriates have of HmN before and after the experience. These measures were specifically designed and analysed for this study.
- *Self-Self After (PRE and POST)*. These two measures report the statistical distance between the scores given to the elements Self and Self after the IE. They respectively are interpreted as the expected change before embarking in the international experience and the perceived change after returning from it. These measures were specifically designed and analysed for this study.

I also incorporated the following measures from the quantitative analysis of their grids:

- *Percentage of self-definition constructs*. It represents the number of constructs that scores the elements Self Before (PRE) and Self After (POST) with 1,2 or 6,7 out of the total number of constructs.
- *Percentage of constructs to define HCNs*. It represents the number of constructs that scores the elements HCNs (PRE) and HCNs (POST) with 1,2 or 6,7 out of the total number of constructs.

I triangulated the different patterns of identity work identified according to these measures with the qualitative data from their narratives. The level of analysis was the individual, so I analysed each of the quantitative data for each individual case and then compare the patterns found. In the following section, the analysis performed will be clearly developed and illustrated. Note that despite using quantitative data, the logics

behind the analysis is constructivist, idiosyncratic, qualitative and inductive, so that the purpose is not generalise statistically but to understand in depth the patterns of identity change in expatriates.

## **5. Results (Undone and unfinished section: it will be finished by the conference. I'm still refining the analysis)**

(Here I present a preliminary and provisional framework of the results for reviewers to make an idea of what it will be. However, there is still much work to be done to present them in a legible and clear manner, since I had to manage and make sense of a big amount of quantitative and qualitative data from the grids and I still need to finish the analysis from their narratives)

By triangulating the quantitative measures obtained from their grids with the qualitative data from their narratives, 6 patterns of cross-cultural identity work were identified in the analyzed sample leading to different outcomes in terms of adjustment, resulting cultural identity, early departure and decision to return. Tables II and III presents the results of the 17 expatriates on the key quantitative measures that allow differentiate the cross-cultural identity work patterns that emerged from data: self-esteem PRE and POST, percentage of construct for self-definition, percentage of constructs to define HCNs, distance Self Before-Ideal PRE, distance Self After-Ideal POST, distance Self Before-HCNs PRE, distance Self After-HCNs POST, distance Ideal-HCNs PRE, distance Ideal-HCNs POST, distance Self Before-HmNs PRE, distance Self After-HmNs POST, distance Ideal-HmNs PRE, distance Ideal-HmNs POST, distance Self Before-Self After PRE and distance Self Before-Self After POST. For illustrative purpose and for responding to the research questions posed initially, I present only these measures, but more quantitative and qualitative measures from their grids were

collected and analyzed. Accordingly, I propose the following framework to explain the patterns of cross-cultural identity work found (see Figure 3) and I explain them further. These patterns are based on two dimensions: expatriates' changes or lack of changes in their distances to HCNs and HmNs, which represent changes in their cultural identities, and their level of self-esteem before embarking in the IE. These two dimensions allow explain different patterns of cross-cultural identity work resulting in different adjustment to the destination country, early departure and decision to return. Below, I explain each of these identified patterns in turn, and illustrate them with excerpts from expatriates' narratives.

*5.1. Feeling bad with myself and...flying away for a solution! Self-esteem as a necessary but not sufficient condition for adjustment.*

#### **Narratives from P16 and P17.**

The two extreme cases that aborted their international experiences and return before it was planned (P16 and P17) were analysed in comparison with the rest of the participants. The most notable difference among them was the low-self esteem they have in comparison with the ones that finish their IE as initially planned. Together with this characteristic their motives to expatriate were also different (explain).

Characterised by having a high distance to HmNs and a high distance to HCNs, they are trapped in a liminal space just before embarking in the experience. Another characteristic is the high number of constructs used to define the HCNs and themselves. This characteristic is also shared with expatriates with an Estrangement process of identity work. And another characteristic that share with expatriates with a estrangement process, is that they do not relate with other expatriates in the destination country.

The resulting identity is an a-cultural identity.

Despite not experiencing change in their cultural identities (cross-cultural identity work) they experienced change in their personal identities as a consequence of the IE.

From the analysis of these extreme cases, high self-esteem is proposed as a necessary condition to adjust. But after having satisfied this condition, there is no a unique process of cross-cultural adjustment but different processes according to the changes or lack of them in their cultural distances to HCNs and HmNs, and not all of them conduct to adjustment.

### *5.2. Being Cosmopolitan: being from nowhere!*

Narratives from P1, P3, P4, P5, P7, P8, P10 and P12 .

There is no change in their cultural identities although there is change in personal identity. Multicultural Identity. Adjustment.

Social relations with groups of expatriates.

### *5.3. Becoming cosmopolitan*

Narratives from P2, P11, P16.

There is a change in their cultural identities. Or by reducing distance with HCNs (through a process of integration) or by reducing distance with HmNs (through a process of reconciliation with the home country). Multicultural identity and Adjustment as a result of this process.

### *5.4. Getting closer to the other, going native.*

Narrative from P9

High distance with HmNs. The distance with HCNs reduces. Adjustment.

### *5.5. Estrangement*

Narratives from P13 and P14.

Related with lack of adjustment. But high self-esteem prevent them from abandoning.

Ethnocentric identity as a result. Home country identity.

The distance with HCNs increases.

#### *5.6. Being a stranger and missing my people*

There is no cross-cultural identity work. No change. High distance with HCNs. No adjustment but high self-esteem prevent from abandoning.

Closeness to HmNs, nostalgia.

### **6. Discussion and Conclusion (Undone. It will be finished by the conference)**

This longitudinal study allows understanding the identity work processes of 17 Spanish expatriates throughout their international experiences (IE) and how these processes influence on adjustment and early departure. In particular, it shows the important role of self-esteem and psychological distances with HCNs and HmNs, in cross-cultural identity work processes. Six different patterns of cross-cultural identity work were identified, with different resulting identities and adjustment.

Below I indicate briefly the contributions that derive from these findings:

#### Theoretical Contributions

- I hope to have contributed to the important challenge posed by Hermans and Dimaggio (2007) to the current social scientists of understanding the impact of globalization on self and identity as a crucial task. In particular, with this research I aim to accomplish the full potential of identity highlighted by Harrison et al. (2019) to understand expatriate adjustment as the most often-studied variable at individual level in international management research. It has been recognized that expatriates' change in identity is a major part of the process of adjustment (Nadeem and Mumtaz, 2018). However, this process has not yet being examined in depth. Hence, this study has

contributed to illuminate this process and in doing so it has contributed theoretically to the expatriate literature.

- In particular, this study proposes the mechanisms by which cross-cultural identity work as a process of adjustment works. Self-esteem and the constructed psychological distances to HCNs and HmNs are proposed as the key ingredients of this identity work. In so doing, it aims to respond to the call by Ibarra (1999, p.765) “the process by which identity evolves remains under explained” and also by Brown (2015, 9.13) “there is much that still needs to be done to understand how sense-making connects to identities and the role of identity work in processes of meaning making” in the expatriate domain. The notion of psychological distances among the meanings that represent significant others, captured by the RGT, seem to be the missed link between sense-making and identities.

- Finally, this study shows that there is no one-way to “adjustment”. The different identity work patterns conducting to adjustment or the lack of it, show there are different ways to adjust.

#### Methodological contributions

- The RGT as a novel way and an alternative way to narratives to explore identity work from an interpretivist approach to the study of identity. It contributes to the literature on identity.
- Longitudinal and processual view as a contribution to expatriate research in which there is a lack of longitudinal studies. It responds to the systematic call for longitudinal studies in the expatriate literature. Longitudinal approach as the best one to satisfy the continuous need for identity dynamics to be better understood (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002)



- Interdisciplinary and mixed method approach for the study of identity work: the combination of PCT and narrative approach to approach identity work responds to Corlett et al. (2017) and Brown (2015) call for more dialogic engagements between registers of identity to stimulate insight on identity work dynamics. Also, novel approach by bringing a clinical theory into the management domain (Beech, 2017).

## References

- Alvesson, M. and Willmott, H. (2002) Identity regulation as organizational control: producing the appropriate individual. *Journal of Management Studies*, 39:619-644.
- Andresen, M.; Al Ariss, A. and Walther, M. (eds.) (2015) *Self-initiated expatriation: Individual, Organizational and National Perspectives*. New York: Routledge.
- Ashforth, B.E. (2012) The role of time in socialization dynamics. In C.R. Wanberg (Ed.) *The Oxford handbook of organization socialization* (pp.8-26). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Bannister, D. & Fransella, F. (1977). *A manual for repertory grid technique*. London, England: Academic Press.
- Bannister, D. (1983). Self in personal construct theory. In J. R. Adams-Weber & J. C., Mancuso (Eds.), *Applications of personal construct theory* (pp. 379–386). Toronto: Academic.
- Baruch, Y., Dickmann, M., Altman, Y., and Bournois, F. (2013) Exploring international work: types and dimensions of global careers. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*. 24:2369-2393.
- Bhaskar-Shrinivas, P., Harrison, D.A., Shaffer, M.A. and Luk, D.M. (2005) Input-based and time-based models of international adjustment: Meta-analytic evidence and theoretical extensions. *Academy of Management Journal*, 48:257-281.

- Black, J.S. and Stephens, G.K. (1989) The influence of the spouse on American expatriate adjustment and intent to stay in Pacific Rim overseas assignments. *Journal of Management*, 15:529-544.
- Black, J.S. and Gregersen, H.B. (1991) Antecedents to cross-cultural adjustment for expatriates in Pacific Rim assignments. *Human Relations*, 44:497-515.
- Black, J.S., Mendenhall, M. and Oddou, G. (1991) Toward a comprehensive model of international adjustment: An integration of multiple theoretical perspectives. *Academy of Management Review*, 16:291-317.
- Bonache, J., Langinier, H. and Zárraga-Oberty, C. (2016) Antecedents and effects of host country nationals negative stereotyping of corporate expatriates. A social identity analysis. *Human Resource Management Review*, 26:59-68.
- Bonache, J., Brewster, C.; and Suutari, V. (2001) Expatriation: A developing research agenda. *Thunderbird International Business Review*, 43 (1): 3-20 (Special Edition).
- Brown, A.D. (2001) Organization Studies and Identity: Towards a Research Agenda. *Human Relations*, 54:113-121.
- Brown, A.D. (2015) Identities and Identity Work in Organizations. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 17:20-40.
- Brown, A.D. (2017) Identity Work and organizational identification. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 19:296-317.
- Caligiuri, P.M. (2000) Selecting expatriates for personality characteristics: A moderating effect of personality on the relationship between host national contact and cross-cultural adjustment. *Management International Review*, 40:61-80.

- Cascón-Pereira, R. (2017) Repertory Grid Technique as a useful tool for assessing Identity and Identity Change in HRD. In K. Black, R. Warhurst and S. Corlett (Eds) *Identity as a foundation for Human Resource Development*. Chapter 9. Routledge: p.129-144.
- Conway, J.M. (2004) *Identity, Place, Knowledge: Social Movements contesting globalization*. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing.
- Collins, F.L. (2012) Transnational mobilities and urban spatialities: notes from the Asia-Pacific. *Progress in Human Geography*, 36:316-335.
- Corlett, S., McInnes, P., Coupland, C. and Sheep, M. (2017) Exploring the registers of identity research. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 19: 261-272.
- Creswell, J.W. and Plano Clark, V.L. (2007) *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Dowling, P., Festing, M. and Engle, A. (2008) *International Human Resource Management: Managing people in a multinational context*. Melbourne: Tomsons.
- Easterby-Smith, M., Thorpe, R. & Holman, D. (1996). Using repertory grids in management. *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 20: 3–30.
- Fan, S.X., Cregan, C., Harzing, A-W., and Köhler, T. (2018) The benefits of being understood: The role of ethnic identity confirmation in knowledge acquisition by expatriates. *Human Resource Management*, 57:327-339.
- Farh, C.I.C.; Bartol, K.M.; Shapiro, D.L. and Shin, J. (2010). Networking abroad: A process model of how expatriates form support ties to facilitate adjustment. *Academy of Management Review*, 35 (3):434-54.
- Firth, B.M., Chen, G., Kirkman, B.L. and Kim, K. (2014) Newcomers abroad: Expatriate adaptation during early phases of international assignments. *Academy of Management Journal*, 57:280-300.

- Fransella, F., Bell, R., & Bannister, D. (2004). *A manual for repertory grid technique* (2nd ed.). Chichester, UK: Wiley.
- Garcia-Gutierrez, A. & Feixas, G. (2018). *GRIDCOR: A Repertory Grid Analysis Tool* (Version 6.0) [Web application]. Retrieved from <http://www.repertorygrid.net/en>
- Gecas, V. (1982) The self-concept. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 8:1-33.
- Gergen, K. and Gergen, M.M. (1983) Narratives of the self. In T.R. Sarbin and K.E. Scheibe (Eds.) *Studies of Social Identity*. New York: Praeger. Pp.254-273.
- Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in the late modern age*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Gong, Y. and Fan, J. (2006) Longitudinal examination of the role of goal orientation in cross-cultural adjustment. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 91:176-184.
- Harzing, A-W. (1995) The persistent myth of high expatriate failure rates. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 6:457-475.
- Harrison, D.A., Harrison, T. and Shaffer, M.A. (2019) Strangers in strained lands: learning from workplace experiences of immigrant employees. *Journal of Management*, 45:600-619.
- Harrison, R. (1966). Cognitive change and participation in a sensitivity-training laboratory. *Journal of Consulting Psychology* , 30 , 517–520.
- Haslam, S. A. (2004). *Psychology in Organizations: The Social Identity Approach*. London: Sage.
- Hermans, H.J.M. (2001) The dialogical self: toward a theory of personal and cultural positioning. *Culture and Psychology*, 7:243-281.
- Hermans, H.J.M. and Dimaggio, G. (2007) Self, Identity and Globalization in times of uncertainty: A dialogical analysis. *Review of General Psychology*, 11:31-61.

- Ibarra, H. (1999) Provisional selves: experimenting with image and identity in professional adaptation. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44:764-791.
- Ibarra, H. and Barbulescu, R. (2010) Identity as narrative; prevalence, effectiveness and consequences of narrative identity work in macro work role transitions. *Academy of Management Review*, 35:135-154.
- INE. Instituto Nacional de Estadística. <http://www.ine.es/>
- Jokinen, T., Brewster, C. and Suutari, V. (2008) Career capital during international work experiences: contrasting self-initiated expatriate experiences and assignees expatriation. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 19:979-998.
- Kelly, G.A. 1955 (1991) *The Psychology of Personal Constructs*, New York: Routledge.
- Kohonen, E. (2004) Learning through narratives about the impact of international assignments on identity. *International Studies of Management and Organization*, 34:27-45.
- Kohonen, E. (2005) Developing global leaders through international assignments. An identity construction perspective. *Personnel Review*, 34:22-36.
- Kohonen, E. (2008) The impact of international assignments on expatriates' identity and career aspirations: Reflections upon re-entry. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 24: 320-329.
- Kraimer, M.L., Shaffer, M.A., Harrison, D.A. and Ren, H. (2012) No place like home? An identity strain perspective on repatriate turnover. *Academy of Management Journal*, 55(2):399-420.
- Mahajan, A. and Toh, S.M. (2014) Facilitating expatriate adjustment: the role of advice seeking from host country nationals. *Journal of World Business*, 49:476-487.
- Miscenko, D. and Day, D.V. (2016) Identity and identificacion at work. *Organizational Psychology Review*, 6:215-247.

- Nadeem, S. and Mumtaz, S. (2018) Expatriates adjustment through transformation of social identity of Chinese expatriates working in Pakistan. *Cross Cultural & Strategic Management*, 25 (4): 642-669.
- Nicholson, N. (1984) A theory of work role transitions. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 29: 172-191.
- Olsen, J.E. and Martins, L.L. (2009). The effects of expatriate demographic characteristics on adjustment: A social identity approach. *Human Resource Management*, 48 (2):311-28.
- Osland, J.S. (2000) The journey inward: expatriate hero tales and paradoxes. *Human Resource Management*, 39:227-238.
- Peltokorpi, V. and Froese, F.J. (2009) Organizational expatriates and self-initiated expatriates: who adjust better to work and life in Japan? *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 20:1096-112.
- Polkinghorne, D.E. (1988) *Narrative knowing and the human sciences*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Reiche, B.S. (2007) The effect of international staffing practices on subsidiary staff retention in multinational corporations. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 18:523-536.
- Sanchez, J.I., Spector, P.E. and Cooper, C.L. (2000) Adapting to a boundaryless world : A developmental expatriate model. *Academy of Management Executive*, 14:96-106.
- Selmer, J., & Leung, A.S.M. (2002). Career management issues of female business expatriates. *Career Development International*, 7: 348-358.
- Scurry, T., Rodriguez, J.K. and Bailouni, S. (2013) Narratives of identity of self-initiated expatriates in Qatar. *Career Development International*, 18:12-33.

- Shaffer, M.A. and Harrison, D.A. (2001) Forgotten patterns of international assignments: development and test of a model of spouse adjustment. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86: 238-254.
- Shaffer, M.A., Harrison, D.A., Gregersen, H., Black, J.S. and Ferzandi, L.A. (2006) You can take it with you: Individual differences and expatriate effectiveness. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 91:109-125.
- Snow, D.A. and Anderson, L. (1987) Identity work among the homeless: the verbal construction and avowal of personal identities. *American Journal of Sociology*, 92:1336-1371.
- Stryker, S. (1980). *Symbolic Interactionism: A Social Structural Version*. Menlo Park, CA: Benjamin/Cummings.
- Sveningsson, S. and Alvesson, M. (2003) Managing managerial identities: organizational fragmentation, discourse and identity struggle. *Human Relations*, 56:1163-1193.
- Tajfel, H. (1981). *Human groups and social categories*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Takeuchi, R. (2010) A critical review of expatriate adjustment research through a multiple stakeholder view: Progress, emerging trends and prospects. *Journal of Management*, 36:1040-1064.
- Toh, S.M. and DeNisi, A.S. (2005) A local perspective to expatriate success. *Academy of Management Executive*, 19: 132-146.
- Toh, S.M. and DeNisis, A.S. (2007) Host country nationals as socializing agents: a social identity approach. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 28:281-301.
- Tung, R. (2016) New perspectives on human resource management in a global context. *Journal of World Business*, 51:142-152.

- Turner, J.C. (1982) Towards a cognitive redefinition of the social group. *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations*, 1:15-40.
- Vijayakumar, P.B. and Cunningham, C.J.L. (2019) Expatriates' identity salience, work stressors, and work-nonwork conflict: Moderating role of gender and marital status. *Thunderbird International Business Review*, 61:375-386.
- Walker, B. M., & Winter, D. A. (2007). The elaboration of personal construct psychology. *Annual Review Psychology*, 58, 453–477.
- Weick, K.E. (1995) *Sensemaking in Organizations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Ybema, S., Keenoy, T., Oswick, C., Beverungen, A., Ellis, N. and Sabelis, I. (2009) Articulating identities. *Human Relations*, 62:299-322.



Initials	OE/SIE	Country of destination	Age before IE	Gender	Profession	Family Status before IE	Previous International Experience	Length of IE
P1	OE	Germany	40	Male	Industrial Engineer	Single	4 moths in Germany as part of training in a previous company.	2 years
P2	OE	Germany	34	Male	Industrial Engineer	Married without children.	6 months Erasmus in Copenhagen.	6 (3 years extended with 3 additional years). Still there.
P3	OE	Germany	38	Male	Industrial Engineer	Married with two children. His wife works in the same company. Family expatriation.	15 months Erasmus in Germany. He met his wife there.	4 (2 years extended with 2 additional years)
P4	OE	Germany	39	Female	Industrial Engineer	Married with two children. Her husband works in the same company and expatriates with her.	8 months internship in a company in Germany	4 years (2 years extended with 2 additional years).
P5	OE	Germany	28	Male	Industrial Engineer	Single	3 years in Spain. He is Brazilian.	3 years
P6	OE	India	29	Male	Industrial Engineer	Single	Yes.	6 months
P7	OE	Chile	39	Male	Industrial Engineer	Single	Yes. 10 months France, 8 months Norway, 6 months Mozambique, 5 months Scotland, 18 months Holland.	5 years
P8	OE	EUA	36	Male	Telecommunication Engineer	Married with a child.	6 months Erasmus in Germany.	6 months
P9	SIE	EUA	33	Male	Computing Engineer	Married with a child	No.	1 year
P10	SIE	EUA	25	Male	Computing Engineer	Single	No	2 years
P11	SIE	Germany	25	Male	Computing Engineer	Single	6 months work experience in EUA.	4 years
P12	SIE	UK	29	Male	Industrial Engineer	Single	3 months Erasmus in Ireland and 1 year in Italy	Initially undefined. He returned after 2 years and 3 months.
P13	SIE	EUA	34	Male	Computing Engineer	Single.	Yes.	4 years (2 years extended with 2 additional years).
P14	SIE	Germany	36	Female	Film Director	Married with children.	Yes, 6 months in Germany.	2 years.
P15	OE	Germany	24	Male	Technician	Single	No	2 years
P16	OE	China	48	Male	Industrial Engineer	He married in order to go with his partner to China	4 months in Austria	6 years (but he returns after 9 months)
P17	SIE	India	40	Female	Teacher of English	Single	No.	Initially undefined but returns before than expected in 8 months.

Table I: Participants descriptive data

Code	Country Destination	Self Before-Ideal_PRE	Self After-Ideal_POST	Self Before-HCN_PRE	Self After-HCN_POST	Ideal-HCN_PRE	Ideal-HCN_POST	Self Before-HmN_PRE	Self After-HmN_POST	Ideal-HmN_PRE	Ideal-HmN_POST	Self Before-Self After_PRE	Self Before-Self After_POST	CROSS-CULTURAL IDENTITY WORK PROCESS
P1	GERMANY	0,28	0,28	0,24	0,32	0,21	0,36	0,29	0,49	0,26	0,38	0,22	0,27	BEING COSMOPOLITAN
P2	GERMANY	0,24	0,28	0,57	0,35	0,19	0,43	0,42	0,25	0,45	0,33	0,18	0,23	BECOMING COSMOPOLITAN
P3	GERMANY	0,1	0,05	0,14	0,28	0,15	0,34	0,29	0,32	0,25	0,36	0,05	0,12	FALLING INTO A LIMINAL SPACE
P4	GERMANY	0,11	0,07	0,28	0,43	0,27	0,52	0,24	0,42	0,26	0,31	0,1	0,12	FALLING INTO A LIMINAL SPACE
P5	GERMANY	0,31	0,25	0,38	0,42	0,34	0,37	0,23	0,31	0,26	0,28	0,24	0,47	BEING COSMOPOLITAN
P6	INDIA	0,18	0,19	0,64	0,56	0,67	0,63	0,46	0,33	0,42	0,34	0,07	0,07	BEING A STRANGER
P7	CHILE	0,41	0,27	0,28	0,31	0,39	0,43	0,24	0,26	0,32	0,38	0,62	0,38	BEING COSMOPOLITAN
P8	EUA	0,34	0,29	0,44	0,38	0,42	0,39	0,37	0,32	0,44	0,37	0,23	0,16	BEING COSMOPOLITAN
P9	EUA	0,42	0,22	0,49	0,35	0,47	0,33	0,59	0,52	0,57	0,41	0,25	0,27	GOING NATIVE
P10	EUA	0,23	0,56	0,33	0,31	0,36	0,19	0,37	0,44	0,42	0,66	0,22	0,27	BEING COSMOPOLITAN
P11	EUA	0,28	0,19	0,44	0,25	0,48	0,32	0,24	0,34	0,35	0,33	0,28	0,14	BECOMING COSMOPOLITAN
P12	UK	0,35	0,21	0,36	0,37	0,31	0,39	0,27	0,21	0,29	0,27	0,21	0,06	BEING COSMOPOLITAN
P13	EUA	0,34	0,36	0,47	0,56	0,63	0,62	0,38	0,39	0,51	0,46	0,6	0,04	ESTRANGEMENT FROM HCNS
P14	GERMANY	0,15	0,14	0,64	0,74	0,65	0,73	0,25	0,3	0,27	0,27	0	0	ESTRANGEMENT FROM HCNS
P15	GERMANY	0,44	0,17	0,41	0,37	0,32	0,28	0,53	0,45	0,69	0,49	0,34	0,29	BECOMING COSMOPOLITAN
P16	CHINA	0,52		0,51		0,51		0,49		0,25		0,4		BEING IN A LIMINAL SPACE
P17	INDIA	0,51	0,46	0,53	0,58	0,47	0,66	0,49	0,48	0,53	0,34	0,47	0,54	BEING IN A LIMINAL SPACE

Table II. Results from the matrix of statistical distances among elements

Code	% C. defining HCNs_PRE	%C. defining HCNs_POST	% C. Self-definition_PRE	% C. Self-definition_POST	CROSS-CULTURAL IDENTITY WORK PROCESS
P1	47,36%	63,15%	47,36%	63,15%	BEING COSMOPOLITAN
P2	80,00%	44,00%	68,00%	60,00%	BECOMING COSMOPOLITAN
P3	50,00%	57,00%	75,00%	78,00%	BEING COSMOPOLITAN
P4	57,89%	62,00%	52,63%	52,63%	BEING COSMOPOLITAN
P5	40,00%	73,68%	60,00%	55,00%	BEING COSMOPOLITAN
P6	72,22%	88,88%	66,66%	66,66%	BEING A STRANGER
P7	0%	0%	21%	63,15%	BEING COSMOPOLITAN
P8	37,50%	37,50%	31%	43,75%	BEING COSMOPOLITAN
P9	46,66%	26,67%	73,33%	66,67%	GOING NATIVE
P10	64,70%	82,35%	64,70%	70,50%	BEING COSMOPOLITAN
P11	66,66%	53,33%	66,67%	80,00%	BECOMING COSMOPOLITAN
P12	40,00%	45,00%	75,00%	70,00%	BEING COSMOPOLITAN
P13	19,04%	61,90%	9,52%	4,76%	ESTRANGEMENT FROM HCNs
P14	6,67%	26,67%	80,00%	86,66%	ESTRANGEMENT FROM HCNs
P15	40%	60,00%	47%	66,67%	BECOMING COSMOPOLITAN
P16	61,11%		83,33%		BEING IN A LIMINAL SPACE
P17	70,58%	76,47%	76,47%	76,47%	BEING IN A LIMINAL SPACE

Table III. Percentages of self-definition constructs and constructs to define the other

### Concurrent Triangulation Design

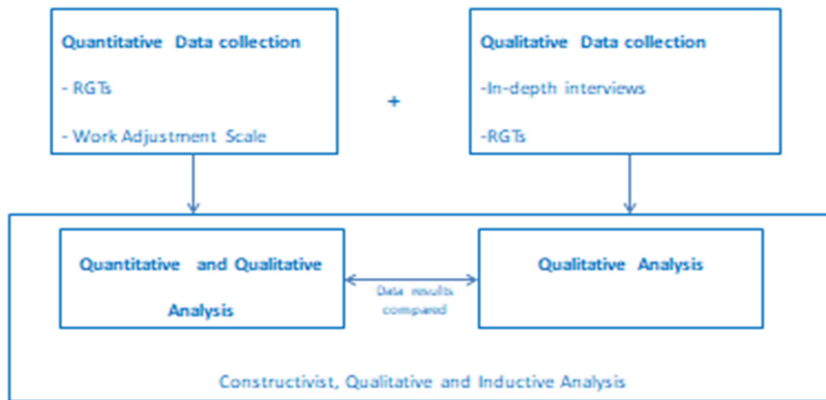


Figure 1. Adapted from Creswell(2009)

Date: 05/07/2015 - CB_PRE		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	
1. Very	5. A bit	Self Before IE	Self After IE	Good Boss	Bad Boss	Competent Workers	Incompetent Workers	Spanish people	English People	Father (Mauro)	Mother (M <sup>l</sup> Carmen)	Ex-partner (Edith)	Brother (Oscar)	Non grata	Self Ideal	
2. Quite	4. Middle															6. Quite
3. A bit	7. Very															
1. Outgoing	1. Reserved	2	2	1	6	3	4	2	5	3	1	4	1	2	2	
2. Traditional	2. Daring	3	4	4	4	4	4	2	2	1	1	6	4	4	4	
3. Natural	3. Complicated	2	2	2	7	2	7	3	3	1	1	2	4	7	2	
4. Direct	4. Beat around the bush	6	4	2	7	2	7	5	3	1	5	1	1	1	2	
5. Friendly	5. Unsociable	1	2	3	6	1	6	2	4	4	1	3	1	3	2	
6. Honest	6. False	2	1	1	5	2	4	4	3	1	1	1	2	7	2	
7. Faithful	7. Unloyal	1	2	2	6	4	4	4	4	2	2	2	1	4	1	
8. Reflective	8. Impulsive	2	2	2	6	2	6	4	4	4	4	5	2	1	2	
9. Politically correct	9. Politically incorrect	2	2	4	6	2	5	3	1	6	1	4	2	1	3	
10. Good	10. Selfish	2	2	2	6	2	6	2	2	1	1	1	2	7	1	
11. Leader	11. Squire	6	5	1	4	4	4	5	2	1	6	5	1	1	2	
12. Courteous	12. Careless	5	4	2	7	1	7	4	4	5	1	2	5	4	2	
13. Heartfelt	13. Carefree	2	2	3	5	4	5	2	4	3	1	2	1	6	2	
14. Basic	14. Deep	2	5	4	4	4	4	5	2	4	4	6	5	2	5	
15. Lazy	15. Hard-worker	6	6	6	3	6	4	6	6	7	7	6	7	5	6	
16. Irresponsible	16. Responsible	3	5	5	1	5	1	6	6	7	7	6	4	1	6	
17. Supportive	17. Unsupportive	3	3	3	7	3	6	2	4	3	2	2	4	6	2	
18. Happy	18. Unhappy	2	2	2	5	2	6	2	3	2	2	3	2	2	1	
19. Creative	19. Unoriginal	5	5	2	7	4	6	2	4	5	5	3	2	5	2	
20. Innovative	20. Conservative	6	3	1	4	4	7	6	2	5	5	3	2	4	2	
21.	21.															
22.	22.															
23.	23.															
24.	24.															
25.	25.															

Figure 2. Example of a expatriate grid.

Figure 3. Cross-cultural Identity Work Processes

