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2007-10-01

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Recommended Citation
Crowley-Henry, M (2007) The Protean Career: Exemplified by First World foreign residents in Western Europe? International Studies of Management & Organization (ISMO), Vol. 37, No. 3, Fall 2007.

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Marian Crowley-Henry

The Protean Career

Exemplified by First World foreign residents in Western Europe?

Abstract: *This article presents findings from a qualitative study exploring the career-related motivations and experiences of a sample of 20 expatriates living and working on a permanent basis in the South of France (Sophia Antipolis) and in Germany (Munich). By virtue of their having established local links in the host country, either in having local working contracts or being installed in the area on a permanent basis (home owners; children born/being schooled in the host country), these expatriates could also be termed foreign residents in the host country. The study's sample of highly educated workers originating from the United States of America or Western Europe (First World or "High Income economies" - Wikipedia contributors, 2006) that have chosen to remain in the host country on an indefinite basis differs from contemporary research samples in international careers. This article argues that this particular sample of the locally hired expatriate also warrants attention in the literature and in career research. The findings highlight the relevance of the subjective career and the life-style anchor to the career direction chosen by this sample within the context of both the traditional and boundaryless career. Indeed a marked inclination toward the protean career concept is underlined in the empirical research.*

International career literature has generally focused on traditional or orthodox career theory, where an organization expatriates an employee to another country for a limited duration and then repatriates that person to the home country (for example, Dowling and Welch 2004), still as an

employee of the organization. While such an intra-organizational international assignment is expected to warrant vertical career advancement for the expatriate, contemporary research portrays the expatriate assignment as often unplanned (Harris and Brewster 1999) and with inadequate long-term career plans for the repatriate within the organization (Scullion 1992; Solomon 1995). This has encouraged contemporary empirical studies to investigate the relevance of the boundaryless career concept (Arthur and Rousseau 1996) for traditional expatriates (for example, Tung 1998; Stahl et al. 2002). Contrary to the traditional intra-organization vertical career path, the boundaryless career espouses following extra-organization career opportunities, with traditional expatriates perceiving improvements in their external employability options post an international assignment (Tung 1998; Stahl et al. 2002). The boundaryless career concept can be seen as having particular relevance in today's insecure job climate where the traditional trust in an organization to look after the individual's career can no longer be taken for granted (Larsen and Ellehave 2004).

This article investigates the careers of locally hired expatriates, where the term "expatriate" is broadly defined as "the process of an individual moving to live in a different country" (Brewster 2002, 84). The sample explored in this study can be differentiated from the traditional expatriate as follows (see also Inkson et al. 1997):

1. The traditional expatriate embarks on an international assignment as an employee of the current organization, that is, following an orthodox intra-organizational career. This is not necessarily the case for the sample of expatriates presented here, who may move to take up a new job with another organization in the host country. That is, he/she may be motivated to move initially to follow a boundaryless career.

It should be noted here that the sample under investigation are not migrant workers in the sense that they have not embarked on an international move for purely economic or asylum reasons (Robinson 2002). Rather they all stem from First World economies (Wikipedia, 2006) and have embarked on the international move in furtherance of their personal development or careers.

2. The traditional expatriate remains an employee of the parent country organization throughout the assignment. The expatriate career explored in this study covers individuals that are hired as locals in the host country (under a local country contract).
3. The traditional expatriate receives support (mainly financial) from the parent organization for the duration of the assignment (such as rent allowance, cars, free annual return flights…). The expatriate sample in this article does not receive (financial) support to this degree.
4. The traditional expatriate is repatriated to the parent country and organization on completion of the assignment. For the locally hired expatriate there is no organization-individual agreed pre-determined repatriation stage. It is a personal choice whether or not to potentially or eventually return to the home country.

The terms locally hired expatriates, locally hired international assignees, and foreign residents are used interchangeably in this article when describing the sample explored in this particular research study, who are also well educated, Western (originating from First World countries, namely from the United States of America or Western European countries), fluent English speakers.

While contemporary researchers have begun to examine different categories of international assignees other than the traditional expatriate (for example Inkson et al. 1997; Harvey et al.

1999; Suutari and Brewster 2000; Suutari 2003; Banai and Harry 2004; Harry and Banai 2004; Mayerhofer et al. 2004;), the expatriate living and working in a host country on a local country contract has not received the same attention. Thus the meta-goal of this study is to describe and analyze the careers of this sub-category of international assignees within the context of contemporary literature and research on international careers; in particular looking at traditional, boundaryless and protean career concepts. Here the findings from qualitative interviews with a sample of 20 international workers based in two locations (Munich, Germany and Sophia Antipolis, France) are presented. Since this was an inductive, qualitative study, there were initially no hypotheses to test or prove (Trochim 2000). Rather this study uses data from in-depth interviews relating to locally hired expatriates' careers.

Two broad research questions were:

- what were the pre-move motivations (was it following a traditional organizational career path, the boundaryless career or the protean career)?
- what are the experiences to date with respect to career development in the host country (perceptions regarding organizational support; relevance of family situation; which career anchor is prioritized)?

The following paragraphs survey the career theories and research of relevance to the study. Then the research methodology deployed is described. Next the findings from the empirical study are presented. Finally conclusions and suggestions for further research are shared.

Career Theory and International Career Research

Concepts

Orthodox career theory relates to the “organizational careers” followed by employees, that is, “careers conceived to unfold in a single employment setting" (Arthur and Rousseau 1996, 5) as employees move vertically up the hierarchy of the organization. For the traditional expatriate, international experience, financial gains and enhanced career opportunities within the organization are the main motivators in embarking on an international assignment (Dowling and Welch 2004). The organizational career is stressed here.

In contrast, the boundaryless career (Arthur and Rousseau 1996) refers to “the objective moves that a person makes as he or she moves across organizational boundaries (e.g., functions within an organization, entry and exit from organizations, movement across industries and sectors)” (Hall and Harrington 2004). The boundaryless career concept has developed from contemporary business realities in which careers are unfolding, where job insecurity and the feeling that “no job is for life” is paramount. That, coupled with increased individualism and decreased loyalty to the organization, often because of a violation in the psychological contract (Yan et al. 2002), has encouraged individuals to move inter-organizationally in furtherance of their career. Recent research on international careers suggests a move toward the boundaryless career (Stahl et al. 2002; Eby 2001; Tung 1998). However given the current economic climate of downsizing and restructuring, the risks of embarking on a boundaryless career are high.

A further concept in career theory, the protean career (Hall and Moss 1998), emerged as most relevant to this study on international careers. Hall and Harrington (2004) and Gratton et al. (2002) situate the protean career within the context of the boundaryless career, where “[t]he protean career … represents the *subjective perspective* of the individual careerist who faces the external career realities of the boundaryless career (Briscoe and Hall 2002)” (Hall and Harrington, 2004). The protean career suggests a more holistic approach to careers: looking at

"work in the context of a person's life as a whole" (Hall and Harrington 2004). Friedman et al. (1997) agree that "[i]t is important to align the issue of balancing work and life with the central vision of a company. Those that do so successfully will reap the benefits of a more committed and productive work force" (ibid, 1997: 282). The protean career "consists of all of the person's varied experiences in education, training, work in several organizations, changes in occupational field, etc. The protean person's own personal career choices and search for self-fulfillment are the unifying or integrative elements in his or her life. The criterion of success is internal (psychological success), not external" (Hall 1976, 201). Baruch (2004) differentiates between the internal and external career as follows: "An internal career is subjective, and thus the definition of internal career success depends on the inner feelings and values of the person, and is relative to the career aims set by the self for the self" (ibid: 43), while "[t]he external career concerns how other people and organizations perceive a person's career" (ibid: 44). Schein's (1978, 1990) lifestyle career anchor where people prioritize lifestyle and take their whole living pattern into consideration also fits in with the protean career concept. The traditional, boundaryless and protean career concepts relevant to the sample under investigation here are discussed further in the findings section of this article.

Research in International Careers

In comparison to the traditional expatriate, the self initiated international assignees portrayed in this article are hired under local, host country contracts, and do not receive the ongoing support and benefits which traditional expatriates enjoy. In addition to organizational support, traditional expatriate literature stresses the influence of family status and whether there is a trailing spouse (De Cieri et al. 1991; Stone 1991) on the success of an international assignment. The inability of the trailing spouse to adjust to the host country has been cited as a major reason for expatriate

failure (Dowling and Welch 2004; Boyaciller 1995: 153; Black and Gregersen 1991; De Cieri et al. 1991; Stone 1991; Tung 1987). This is also relevant for locally hired expatriates, where their personal and social life in the host country plays a big part in their adaptation to that country.

With careers becoming more horizontal, more lateral in nature (Larsen & Ellehave 2004), career management is essential for international organizations that wish to retain their international workforce. Schneider and Barsoux (1997) suggested that "cultural biases may be responsible for the "glass ceilings" experienced by foreigners in many international companies" (Schneider and Barsoux 1997, 142). Indeed, other research has suggested that many companies are still reluctant to promote non-nationals to the top of the corporate ladder (Anon/The Economist, Nov 7 1992). Given such biases to career progression in a foreign country, why do locally hired expatriates persist in following an international career? This question is addressed in the findings section of this article.

Research Methodology

This study takes a qualitative approach in uncovering the international experiences of highly educated workers that embark on an international move of a potentially permanent duration. Qualitative research methods have been termed rich, deep and holistic in their content (Marshall and Rossman 1989, 19), with the aim of qualitative researcher to understand and interpret phenomena (Gummesson 1991, 153).

There is a gap in the literature with regards to qualitative data about international assignees that choose to live and work abroad. This research adds to the limited extant Europe-based qualitative research on international assignees. For the purpose of this article, a sample of 20 locally hired international assignees was interviewed in depth in order to elicit descriptions and patterns in their international experiences. The use of small samples in qualitative research

has been defended (Mason 1996; McCracken 1988). The theoretical sampling approach suggests that the actual number of interviews conducted or cases investigated is somewhat unimportant (Glaser and Strauss 1967, 69), with the most important objective of research being the potential which each interview/case brings to developing a broader and deeper perspective of the research area.

The research tool used for the empirical study was the semi-structured, long interview (McCracken 1988; Easterby-Smith et al. 1991). The interview candidates were asked to tell the researcher about the lead up to their international move and their experiences since that move. It was a very exploratory interview, the researcher using an interview guide, but generally allowing the interview to flow as the interviewee chose. A total of 20 interviews were conducted with non-nationals from First World Western Economies (Europe or the United States) currently living and working outside their home country (as foreign residents) in either Germany or France. This study addresses educated workers (all interviewees in the sample had completed some form of third level education). In the sample the respondents could be categorized as "cadre" meaning they are at the managerial or engineering level within an organization, but not necessarily having people management responsibilities (in the sample for this article a total of four interviewees had people management responsibility). The sample includes representations from private industry and education sectors – from professors to administrators to technicians. The aim of the study is to share international career patterns across an unrestricted sample of well educated locally hired expatriates, with the common linkages among the respondents being their origination from American or Western European countries, their fluency in English, their level of education, and primarily their self initiated decision to be resident in a foreign country. No attempt is made in this article to delineate or differentiate experiences based purely on

profession (academic, or technical or administrative). Rather the aim is to further break-down the broad category of international assignees, with this study representing the work-related experiences of self initiated international assignees that could be termed 'locally hired foreigners' in their respective host countries. A prime concern and finding of the study is the relevance of context to the protean career. That is, how the protean career is affected by the context in which one is situated; in this study an international, foreign geographical/cultural context.

All interviewees were fluent English speakers, the necessity being that their experiences could be shared in their own words and not require translation or further manipulation. Thus there is a bias toward English native speakers in the study. The author believes that this bias can be overcome in subsequent studies across languages. A breakdown of the interviewees is presented in Table 1. A total of five interviews were conducted with international assignees (IAs) currently residing in Germany and fifteen interviews with IAs residing in France. Half of those included in this study were on their second (or more) international assignment, with 50% of those (5) having made (one or all of) the international move(s) with the same organization (that is, following an organizational career path). The international assignments covered here do not include temporary stays in other countries (such as au pair work or seasonal work or teaching in another country for a semester or two on a temporary basis).

[INSERT TABLE 1 HERE]

Findings

Motivations to embark on an international career

The motivation to move and settle internationally is varied from individual to individual, depending on personal circumstances. However, external career-related motivations (such as hierarchical level, financial success) were a major factor influencing the self initiated international assignee's decision to undertake an international move and work under a local host country contract for a permanent, undetermined period of time. From the sample of twenty such international assignees explored in this study, one quarter (N=5) of them embarked on their initial international move following an organizational career path and moving internationally with the same organization (See Note 1). Half the sample (N=10) made the initial international move following a boundaryless career path by joining an organization in the host country which had made them a better job offer than was available in the home country at the time. As one respondent, Rick (British, 43, engaged, 9 years abroad) commented: "I didn't see how I could go further in the job I had… I had got to as far as I could within England, within Britain, within the company." This concurs with existing research advocating the boundaryless career concept as pertinent to international assignees.

Nonetheless it is most significant that those fifteen respondents that decided to embark on an international career for external career reasons also gave internal career-related motivations for embarking on the move. Indeed, every international assignee interviewed for this study (N=20) outlined the satisfaction of his or her subjective, internal or protean career (such as personal development, learning a new language, adapting to a new culture, better work/life balance) as an influencing motivation to move internationally. Of the remaining five international assignees in the sample, four undertook the initial international move as the "trailing spouse" (De Cieri et al. 1991; Stone 1991), but moved with the intention of taking up their career in the host country. Of these four, two followed a fellow national abroad and two

followed a national of the host country "back" to his host country (France in both instances here). The remaining interviewee embarked on the international move purely for personal, subjective or protean reasons – initially to learn the language but remaining for lifestyle reasons (Schein's lifestyle anchor). This highlights the importance of the protean career for proponents of international careers and is well shown in the following comments, which describe the protean career motivations to undertake an international move:

Francis (Irish, 32, engaged, 11 years abroad): "I think it was partly because I liked the idea of being able to speak a foreign language."

Kate (British, 38, married, 2 children aged 6 & 2, 9 years abroad): "I mean it was … a love of France. … [But] it was also such searching … for a bit of adventure, something different."

Motivations to become foreign residents

The international assignees sampled in this study are all hired under local, host country contracts. Nonetheless, the majority of them received initial organizational support - at their employer's discretion – such as financial support for relocation; temporary accommodation paid by the organization for a limited duration, a budget toward language classes for the international assignee and his/her spouse/partner. In addition, the organization generally took care of the paperwork in registering that individual in the host country and setting up bank accounts, medical cards etc. Tax support was also generally offered for the initial year to support the non-national in adjustment. However, after the initial period, the international assignee explored here does not proactively receive any further support from the organization. This is in contrast to the

traditional expatriate that continues to receive financial and social support from the organization for the duration of the assignment. However the sample in this study were satisfied with being treated as host country employees and not receiving additional organizational support beyond the induction period. Indeed they did not want to be treated differently to other employees in that respect.

As seen in the following comments, this study found that the decision to remain indefinitely, of one's own accord in the host country location is mainly due to internal career motivations (such as personal development, self learning) and work/life balance considerations (such as vacation time, the climate). Schein's lifestyle anchor is prioritized here:

Milly (American, 34, married, 2 children aged 2 & 6 months, 4 years abroad): "Sundays, taking vacations… They sound like little things but it's a completely different culture outlook for me, from being American. … I mean even … on vacation … you'd still be expected to carry your mobile and take your [laptop], you know – 'you're not checking your emails everyday?' - kind of thing. And here [France], I mean you're on vacation you know. And that's a big difference."

Kate (British, 38, married, 2 children aged 6 & 2, 9 years abroad): "[T]he fact that you have this sort of weather and you can spend so much more time outdoors. I mean it kind of …doubles your life … because you're outside so much of the time. And psychologically I think it makes you happier when … the sun shine comes out this time of year [April], it's just a wonderful feeling."

Barry (British, 39, married, 2 children aged 6 & 3, 9 years abroad): "[T]he jobs aren't around in Sophia like they used to be. So I think people are now choosing to come down here for life style reasons …rather than [external] career reasons."

The retention of locally hired international assignees in host country organizations is potentially less problematic: if they have chosen to remain in the host country, their allegiance to the organization of employment in that area is strong. Nonetheless, should better career opportunities present themselves elsewhere, they would be considered, but in the context of the full life package (living standards/quality of life) and for all personal stakeholders (partner, children…). These international assignees are motivated to remain overseas or in the host country for the indefinite future, for as long as it has something more to offer to the individual than the home country. Ties or responsibilities are primarily to the self or immediate family and their overall well-being, rather than to the organization. In this regard, given a buoyant job market this sample would give priority to remaining in the host country (for family, lifestyle, quality of life reasons) rather than maintaining the same position with the same organization but having to relocate elsewhere.

The reduction in vertical career opportunities renders career management essential for organizations wishing to keep their international workforce. From the research conducted here, meeting a glass ceiling in the home country was given as one reason for embarking on an international career. Nonetheless many in the sample feel they would have progressed further in their external career had they remained in their home country:

Ingrid (Swedish, 30, single, 11 years abroad): "For me right now I can't say that it helped my career. I would say I would have even done better in Sweden."

Angie (American, 41, married, 2 children aged 10 & 8, 14 years abroad): "Because, yeah, I think in [company name] and in France … they pay us with the sunshine and the beautiful Cote D'Azur and the 6 weeks of vacation, but there's still just [laugh] a money limit on salaries. That

can be very annoying. I think financially [I] would have progressed [had I remained in the States]."

Rick (British, 43, engaged, 9 years abroad): "[U]nless I was completely stupid, I'd be far better off financially and up [had I remained in England]. I think here you're trading location for career advancement and money. If you're not in Paris in France, then you're not in the right place."

With regard to this sample's career development aspirations within the same organization (that is, following an organizational career path), the findings from the qualitative research vary considerably. Some of the interviewees in this study perceived their non-national identity as an obstacle in their career advancement within the same organization. Particularly for those employed in international organizations in France, working in an international office (where English is the spoken business language), but where the top management team is predominately (if not completely) of the host country nationality, it was perceived by some interviewees that their own non-French nationality was an obstacle to their career advancement. These interviewees were of the opinion that the education ethos, which embodies the French managerial hierarchy within all organizational forms in France, continues to prevail, whereby non-attendance of the French "*grandes écoles*" prevents automatic promotion to higher up the hierarchy, even in international organizations. This is described by Francis (Irish, 32, engaged, 11 years abroad):

"The problem with working here is that France is very much geared around their *grande école* system. And it's very hard to have respect here when you come from outside that system. … Unlike the UK, or what I perceive from the UK, which is that they are results-driven, and it's

based on your experience, and the results and what/how you're performing,… [i]n France, you'll still hear of a 60-year old being described as coming from "X" or *Poly* or *Centrale* or whatever. And it's nearly ridiculous ... to talk about what school somebody went to when he's already got 30 years of a career behind him."

It must be noted that though that although such barriers are perceived by some international assignees in this study, the degree of their actual existence within the organization has not been researched. Other international assignees in the sample were certain that their non-national identity actually aided their advancement in the organization since it increased their visibility. One respondent, Brian (Irish, 39, engaged, 17 years abroad), said he was explicitly chosen above his German colleagues to give training to other Germans because he was seen as a novelty, as something different, and his difference was actually promoted and enjoyed throughout the organization:

"I actually find that doing business in Germany … a lot of the Germans wanted to do business with me instead of German colleagues. I don't know why. I think it's just that if …you bring this Irish charm into the business meetings, …the Germans seem to like this… a bit of humor, always goes down very well. … So quite often … my German colleagues …like me to … focus on the German markets, because they saw that I was able to deal with German customers better than they were."

Despite perceptions regarding organizational career progression and development varying among respondents depending on their host country and their host organization's culture, the sample do feel their international status renders them valuable assets for their organizations. For instance, Rick (British, 43, engaged, 9 years abroad) feels that:

"overall my ability to do what I do today has benefited from having worked with different nationalities or being based in different countries. If I was …a US citizen and had been only based in the US, my understanding of how the world in which I currently do my job works would be very limited. I think if you've worked in Europe, unless you're like in a closet, you're much more exposed to different nationalities. But my US colleagues don't understand that everybody doesn't work in English. They don't understand that you can't just have a single 1-800 number for everybody from Boston to California to call into."

All respondents highlighted the learning experience of living and working in a different country. Meeting new people – fellow non-nationals and locals alike, experiencing another culture(s), working through a different country's language, customs and laws are just some of the items mentioned. Flexibility, openness, and perseverance in seeing it through, to making it work, were noted as invaluable personal traits that one needs to possess. Each respondent felt that having experience in working outside their home country was very valuable for their internal career and that it would be regarded positively by other external organizations, as the following quote illustrates.

Kate (British, 38, married, 2 children aged 6 & 2, 9 years abroad): "Well anyone that's worked in an international basis I think is valued because they've got different …experience of different nationalities. And not everybody has that. I mean that's the one thing I was told on several occasions that I should emphasize when I'm selling myself; that I've got that international experience."

In sum, the retention of locally hired international assignees in the host countries is dependent on more than just the organization or job. In keeping with the boundaryless career notion, the entire sample admitted they liked the idea of potentially moving and adapting to life

in another country again in the future, not necessarily with the same organization. However, the reality is that other factors play a role. Given the economic climate in both Munich and Sophia Antipolis at the time of the research, and primarily due to the shortage of alternatives in the external labor job market, it transpired that the international assignees in the sample were currently happier to maintain the status quo and remain within their current organizations rather than risk unemployment in an unstable job market. This is an interesting finding and emphasizes the role of external market factors on the individual's career choices.

While both boundary and traditional career paths feature then in the careers of international assignees, the underlying finding in this study was that the protean career concept is most pertinent for the sample under investigation. In following a protean career, international assignees "morph" their careers over time and geographies depending on the circumstances and opportunities open to them at that particular point in time. It is an ever-changing, unfixed perspective of the international career where a number of factors play a role. At different stages in the individual's career life, elements from the objective career dimension (job type, financial rewards), subjective career dimension (personal development, self fulfillment, love of the job) and externalities (labor market conditions; family situation; age of individual) play a greater or less part in formulating the career decision making. For locally hired international assignees this is most apparent given their need to adapt to a new culture and work environment, which requires the use of personal skills in their professional careers (as well as technical skills) but also in their private lives in order to adapt and survive in the host environment for an indefinite period of time. Those in the sample that were more settled in their respective host countries (with children in schooling, spouses in local employment) were less motivated to be geographically mobile during that phase of their lives, unless circumstances rendered no alternative option open

to them. They choose the career path which offers the best overall alternative at that particular point in time, taking life as well as technical career factors into consideration.

Implications & Recommendations

The study shows that locally hired expatriates have both subjective and objective motivations for embarking on an international move. Similarly, despite some respondents feeling that their objective career advancement may be suffering in the host country, the sample here is still unwilling to return to the home country (at least at that particular point in time). This would imply that factors beyond the objective career are facilitating the retention of locally hired international assignees in the host country. In addition, the protean career, which includes the "outside work" aspects of relevance in shaping an individual's career, is underlined here, emphasizing the requirement of a more holistic approach to career management. This has implications for career development theorists and practitioners in stressing the importance of individual career planning (see Swart and Kinnie 2004). The one-for-all approach that more money or a promotion is what is most important for employees needs to be seriously questioned and a more paternalistic approach in identifying what is important for the individual's career is needed. In today's climate where employer/employee relationships appear to be more transactional, there is a shortcoming in adequately catering for the individual's career needs. This is an issue that human resource practitioners in general (international and domestic) need to address.

Given the protean career concept, there are implications in practice for organizations wishing to retain the cultural diversity in their organization by extending interest in the individual's career to that of encompassing a more holistic approach, including the family

situation. Similar to traditional expatriation literature, the role of the spouse and family in the self initiated international assignee's career decision cannot be over-estimated. It could be assumed that the more organizations take an active interest in their workers' social and personal lives, and aid in their (and their families) settling in process and in their social wellbeing on a consistent and ongoing basis by providing a social outlet, where international assignees can meet other international assignees or local co-workers, the more difficult it is to be able to leave that company, that country. Hence, it would be advisable for organizations wishing to tap and retain this culturally-wise resource pool to include extra-work related support programs for all employees in order to facilitate the cross-/inter-cultural mix of workers, socially and professionally. It is this area of extra-work-related organizational support that is most lacking in organizations.

International (and indeed domestic organizations) are potentially ignoring the untapped value of locally hired international assignees. The cross-cultural know how and "charm" that non-national international assignees can bring both internally and externally (to the organization and its customers) appears generally under-recognized by the employing organizations. However, the individual self initiated international assignee acknowledges the importance of their international acumen and experience in their professional role, and believe this would be highly valued in the external labor market. For the locally hired expatriate, loyalty to a particular organization lasts only as long as that particular organization's ability to offer the individual the best work option at a particular point of time.

Conclusions

This study contributes to the existing research on international careers in including qualitative data pertaining to an under-examined category of international assignee, taking a closer look at the protean, organizational and boundaryless career theories. It shows that the orthodox career theory (vertical organizational career paths) is far from redundant but co-exists for international assignees along with external boundaryless career opportunities. The individual chooses which career path to follow at whichever particular life stage and circumstance taking ever-evolving protean career considerations into account (such as current market conditions, personal details (age, marital/family status, gender), work/life prioritization).

Most research to date on international careers has focused on the traditional expatriate assignment within the context of the orthodox career (for example, developing global mangers through international assignments, Boyacigiller, 1995). While contemporary studies have researched the role of the boundaryless career for repatriates unhappy at their organizational career opportunities (Stahl et al. 2002, Tung 1998), other categories of international assignees have only recently emerged in international career research and have not been rigorously investigated in the context of orthodox and boundaryless career theory.

This article has described a further category of international assignee, which has not received detailed attention in career research, namely the locally hired international assignee. Findings from the empirical study showed that whether individuals in the sample followed an organizational career or a more boundaryless career (depending on the respective psychological contract with the organization and opportunities in the external job market), there was a marked move toward a focus on the whole pattern of living, taking a holistic approach to careers. In other words, the protean career concept underlined the career choices of the international assignees in this study – the locally hired expatriates. Factors such as quality of life, work/life

balance and family stability all play a major role in the decision regarding embarking on an international career, remaining in the host country and future career direction. This underlines the necessity to personalize career planning within organizations, to account for different life stages and priorities for different individuals (Swart and Kinnie 2004). This need to personalize career planning is recommended for all categories of international assignees as indeed for domestic employees.

While traditional expatriates retain their ties to the parent country organization, and it is assumed they will eventually return to the organization's head quarters, the locally hired expatriate must function within the host country organization's culture and career advancement systems. In this regard both the country and the organization culture (Hofstede 1980, 1985, 1991, 1993) play a major role in the career advancement opportunities that are open to non-nationals. The sample researched and presented in this article must play the host country career game that is within their respective host country organizations – some of which may be more country culture focused (ethnocentric) and appear biased against non nationals, while others may have a more transnational or global perspective (Bartlett & Ghoshal 1995) and be more pro-such locally based international assignees.

It is acknowledged that the findings from this sample may not be generalized to locally hired international assignees based in other locations, given the specific lifestyle advantages of the areas investigated. Nonetheless the findings from this empirical study highlight the relevance of Schein (1990)'s lifestyle anchor for the sample under investigation. Quality of life and integrating a balanced work and life style were prioritized.

Suggestions for Further Research

This study focuses on qualitative research in order to give a detailed description of the particular sample of locally hired international assignees investigated in this research undertaking. Suggestions for further research in this area are outlined below.

While the research here has focused on the perspective of the individual and the protean career, to balance this perspective with that from the HR practitioner or line manager would be valuable in managing and analyzing possible career interests seen largely outside organizational control and interests. An examination of the role and value that locally hired international assignees could play/bring in/to international organizations from the experience they bring would be interesting in determining how organizations could tap into this knowledge, which up until now is not being controlled. An organizational survey pertaining to the usage rates of locally hired foreigners (relevance) in international organizations and regarding their perceived value from the organization (at corporate and local level)'s position would yield further insight into international organizational careers for locally hired international assignees.

Positivistic research would be interesting in this field in uncovering trends toward permanent expatriation across age, gender, nationality, host country preference. This would be particularly interesting in a European context, given the free movement of labor between EU member states. Although patterns of labor mobility (see also Sparrow and Hiltrop 1994) are tracked by the European Union, a detailed analysis of the biographical details of those geographically mobile would be useful, for instance in building a profile of locally hired international assignees who could be used by organizations wishing to recruit non-nationals for employment in a host country (that is, potential locally hired international assignees).

Further analyses relating to gender differences, relationship differences (married/single/family; host country spouse, national country partner…), significant life occurrences in the international assignee category of locally hired international assignees would also help uncover patterns relating to the protean career concept in international assignments. This is currently part of the author's own research agenda where she is investigating locally hired international assignees in France using the concept of the protean career and exploring the impact of their experiences on their career and identity.

Notes

1. Four of the complete sample (N=20) made one (or more) subsequent international move (or moves) following a traditional organizational career (i.e. were relocated by the same organization to another country after their initial non-organization-based international move). One further respondent moved twice internationally with the same organization after having worked initially for the organization in his home country. In each of these five cases the international assignees in question accepted a local (host country) employment contract with their respective organizations, relinquishing any organization ties to the parent country or initial host (or home) country (ies).

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Table 1 Study's Sample of International Assignees

Pseudonym	Nationality	Gender	Age Band	Marital Status	Children	Position	Prior Work Location	Current Work Location	Industry Sector
Angie	American	F	40-49	M	2	Lead Program Manager		France	Travel / IT
Milly	American	F	30-39	M	2	Project Manager		France	IT / Telecommunication
John	Belgian	M	30-39	S	0	IT Consultant	Ireland	France	IT
Gina	English	F	30-39	S	0	Marketing Manager		Germany	IT / Telecommunication
Kate	English	F	30-39	M	2	Site Manager		France	Consulting / IT
Rick	English	M	40-49	M	0	Industry Manager	Switzerland	France	IT
Barry	English	M	30-39	M	2	Professor		France	Education
Pat	English	M	30-39	LTP	0	IT Consultant		France	IT
Susan	English	F	30-39	S	0	Customer Service Rep.		France	Travel / IT
Peter	English	M	30-39	M	2	Sales Manager		Germany	IT
Nathan	English	M	30-39	LTP	0	Professor	Hungary	France	Education
Katharina	German	F	30-39	M	2	Professor	England	France	Education
Hillary	Irish	F	30-39	LTP	0	Marketing Manager		Germany	IT / Telecommunication
Fiona	Irish	F	25-29	LTP	0	Marketing Manager		France	Pharmaceutical
Louise	Irish	F	30-39	M	1	Channel Manager	Germany	France	IT / Telecommunication
Brian	Irish	M	30-39	LTP	0	Company subsidiary manager	England	Germany	IT / Telecommunication
Francis	Irish	M	30-39	LTP	0	Software Development	England	France	IT
Robbie	Irish	M	30-39	M	1	IT Consultant	Germany	France	IT
Andrew	Irish	M	40-49	M	3	Product Manager	England, Netherlands	Germany	IT
Ingrid	Swedish	F	30-39	S	0	Customer Manager	Germany	France	IT

Notes to Table

All names have been altered to ensure privacy of the respondents

F: Female; M: Male

S: Single; LTP: Long Term Partner; M: Married