

Discussion Paper

Theorizing the Meaning(s) of 'Expatriate': Establishing Boundary Conditions

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Abstract

This paper examines the concept of expatriates, arguing that sloppy use of the term in the past has led to problems of inconsistent research, incompatible findings and a lack of clarity in the field. The increasing interest over the last dozen years or so in other forms of international experience, often equally poorly conceptualised, has compounded the problem. We argue for the need for greater construct clarity in studies of expatriates and, by extension, of other forms of international experience. Specifically we attempt to clarify to whom does the term 'expatriate', and specifically 'business expatriate', apply and the boundary conditions under which expatriate employment is enacted.

Keywords

expatriates, expatriate definition, boundary conditions for expatriation, business expatriates, migrants, sojourners

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Introduction

Defining concepts is frequently treated by scientists as an annoying necessity to be completed as quickly and thoughtlessly as possible. A consequence of this disinclination to define is often research carried out like surgery performed with dull instruments. The surgeon has to work harder, the patient has to suffer more, and the chances for success are decreased. Like surgical instruments, definitions become dull with use and require frequent sharpening, and eventually, replacement (Ackoff, 1971, p.671)

A good part of the work called 'theorizing' is taken up with the clarification of concepts – and rightly so. It is in this matter of clearly defined concepts that social science research is not infrequently defective (Merton, 1958, p.114)

This article is based on the notion that there is a lack of consensus as to how expatriates should be defined which has caused problems in the international human resource management (IHRM) field; and that the situation is getting worse. We argue that there has been a sloppy and almost casual use of terminology, a failure to define terms adequately, or in many cases at all, and too many unstated assumptions about the people being researched that, collectively, has resulted in reducing understanding of the meanings of 'expatriate'. This problem means that the measures used in empirical studies may not accurately represent the underlying concept being tested (Cappelli, 2012). It may then be difficult to draw inferences from research and to assess and compare findings across studies (Bono & McNamara, 2011). Critically, we argue that the current situation has led to a considerable 'jangle fallacy' problem (Molloy & Ployhart, 2012) and a set of poor expatriate concepts that "do not necessarily sum to a coherent whole" (Johnson, Rosen, Chang, Djurdjevic, & Taing, 2012, p.63). This results in the worrying problems of construct redundancy and construct proliferation that causes confusion and misinterpretation, where "old and new constructs overlap to such an extent they are largely interchangeable" resulting in a "proliferation of definitions, indeterminate construct boundaries, and confounded measures" (Klein & Delery, 2012, p.59). Following Podsakoff, MacKenzie & Podsakoff's (2016) line of thinking, we propose a tighter definition of the term 'expatriate', and 'business expatriate' in particular, and a more analytic approach to other forms of international experience. To avoid misunderstanding, we include in this all kinds of business, and all kinds of MNE, including those employed in the public sector and non-governmental organizations. Our aim is to achieve construct clarity about the concept of expatriates in the IM discipline for the next generation of expatriate research. Specifically, we address:

- 1) to whom does the term 'business expatriate' apply in the context of international management research?
- 2) what are the boundary conditions under which business expatriate employment is enacted?
- 3) what types of business expatriates make up the talent pool of candidates that are available to multinational enterprises (MNEs) for the purposes of global staffing?

We contribute to construct clarity (Cappelli, 2012; Molloy & Ployhart, 2012), in this case about expatriates, by illustrating that the word 'expatriate' no longer adequately describes the concept it claims to investigate. We offer a theory specific statement about *business expatriates* that parsimoniously organizes and clearly communicates the boundary conditions under which, and to whom, the concept does and does not apply (Bacharach, 1989). Such precision will provide IHRM scholars with a common language and clear conceptual understanding about expatriates in general (Podsakoff et al., 2016) which we hope will stimulate further relevant and interesting research and, perhaps, novel theoretical insights (LePine & Wilcox-King, 2010) offering more detailed, practitioner-relevant implications that capture the context-specific nature of expatriate employment.

The article is organized into five sections. First, we briefly review the history of expatriation and the early business and management studies of it as a base upon which to build our ideas. We then show that few of the early papers attempted to define what was meant by the term 'expatriate' with the vast majority of studies being conducted through MNEs and the definition of expatriates being adopted from the companies that used them. From that, we next summarise the 25 most cited articles, along with other examples, to illustrate the extent of the problem with construct clarity as well as other problems created by the lack of a consensus about expatriate concepts and international experiences. We conclude from this analysis, and illustrate with examples from the assigned expatriate (AE) and self-initiated (SIE) streams of research, that there is a proliferation of messy terminology and concepts. To address these problems, in the section that follows we build on theories of classical and family resemblance approaches and prototype theory to develop a solution: theorising the meanings of expatriate to establish construct clarity. Here, we offer two major insights from our analysis to guide future studies: (1) we develop an empirically-driven theory specific statement (definition) of business expatriates; and (2) we identify four boundary conditions under which the business expatriate concept will and will not apply which, as an inter-related set of features, represents jointly

sufficient attributes that form a prototype ('best example') of a business expatriate. Fifth, and finally, we discuss implications for research and draw some conclusions for future studies.

A brief history of business expatriates

We use the term business expatriates because, beyond the IHRM literature, the term expatriates is often used to refer to people who have retired to a sunnier country or are tax exiles. We use 'business expatriate' because, as we shall argue, we want to restrict study of expatriation in IHRM scholarship to those in employment (no business, no opportunity to meet the Management element of IHRM) and we use 'business' rather than rather than 'corporate' because we want to include all kinds of 'business', and all kinds of MNE: corporate business but also business in the public sector and in non-governmental organizations.

The history of an academic discussion has important implications for the way that knowledge is constructed and the assumptions that develop. Every academic field is built on the foundations of the strengths (and weaknesses) of the early pioneers, with the trajectory of the field developing from those insights and those flaws. Moving forward requires us, first, to acknowledge the base upon which our current understandings and knowledge have been built, to then fix the problems inherent in that base.

Expatriation (from the Latin *ex-patria*: out of country) has existed from the time that there were countries for people to expatriate from. People have always moved about the earth, sometimes making seemingly incredible journeys; empires sent emissaries to other lands, and religious history is full of stories of missionaries sent by the church to achieve their objectives amongst 'strangers' (Freeman, 2008; Oberholster & Doss, 2016; Porter, 1997; Walker, Norris, Lotz, & Handy, 1985). In international trade the Silk Road from China through many different countries to the edge of Europe dates back almost two millenia (Boulnois, 2004; Hipsher, 2008). The huge European trading companies set up to trade with the Far East were established well over four hundred years ago (Stening, 1994).

For much of this time, of course, national boundaries were rather fungible. The formal introduction of passports as a necessity for travel was established only during the First World War (Marrus, 1985). Although the term 'expatriate' was used first in the 17th century, often to refer to the 'pioneers' (including artists, authors and entertainers) who left one (usually European) country to make a life elsewhere without any real possibility of return, or to those who renounced their allegiance or were exiled and denaturalized (see US Expatriation Act of 1868; The Library of Congress, n.d.), it was used as a synonym for what we now call 'migrants'.

Since business studies recognized internationalization (Coase, 1937; Dunning, 1958; Kolde & Hill, 1967; Perlmutter, 1969) the number of people moving around the world to work in other countries has increased, particularly in the last decades. Indeed, between 1970 and 2005, the number of multinational corporations (MNCs) grew from 7,000 to 70,000, with the same rate of growth expected to continue for the next 30 years (Salt, 2008).

The focus of early academic research into business expatriates began in the 1950's with studies of the expansion of American companies abroad including the challenges associated with managing 'overseas executives' (Howell & Newman, 1959; Mandell, 1958; Thompson, 1959; Wallace, 1959). This trend continued into the 1960s with the first studies that looked at expatriates' inter-cultural experiences (Lysgaard, 1955; Oberg, 1960), compensation (Schollhammer, 1969), careers (Gonzalez & Negandhi, 1967), success factors (Kiernan, 1963), knowledge transfer (Negandhi & Estafen, 1965), and selection (Borrmann, 1968; Ivancevich, 1969; Steinmetz, 1965, 1966; Stern, 1966; Triandis, 1963). It included studies of expatriates in non-corporate settings, e.g., the military (Campbell, 1969), aid organizations (Taylor, 1968), and the Peace Corps (Hapgood, 1968; Henry, 1966). A decade later, and with the launch of the *Journal of International Business Studies* in 1970, the study of expatriates was undoubtedly fuelled by a broader interest among scholars in multinational enterprises (Beer & Davis, 1976; Buckley & Casson, 1976). There was a rush of published articles about why companies used expatriates (Baker & Ivancevich, 1970; Edström & Galbraith, 1977), their selection (Miller, 1973; Teague, 1970;), their communities (Cohen, 1977), their satisfaction (Ivancevich & Baker, 1970), and their compensation (Foote, 1977; Reynolds, 1972). Correspondingly, studies began to appear about expatriates themselves – their decision making criteria when undertaking an international assignment (Mincer, 1978), success and failure characteristics (Baker & Ivancevich, 1971; Hays, 1971, 1974; Lanier, 1979; Miller, 1972; Miller & Cheng, 1978), training needs (Jones, 1975), gender roles (Adler, 1979), assignment outcomes (Miller, 1975; Misa & Fabricatore, 1979), and repatriation concerns (Gama & Pedersen, 1977; Heenan, 1970; Howard, 1974, 1979; Murray, 1973). Research into Japanese MNEs also started to emerge (Peterson & Schwind, 1977; Yoshino, 1976). Expatriate researchers' in the 1980's and '90's followed these early beginnings, with a dual-track interest in, first, the policies that MNEs used for managing their expatriates (Mendenhall, Dunbar, & Oddou, 1987; Peterson, Sargent, Napier, & Shim, 1996; Torbiorn, 1982) and, second, an interest in the employees themselves (Black & Gregersen, 1991; Boyacigiller, 1990; Feldman & Thomas, 1992; Hays, 1971; Tung, 1988).

Concept confusion

Generally, few of these early papers attempted to define what was meant by the term 'expatriate'. The majority of studies were conducted through MNEs and simply adopted the definitions they used. Expatriates' were thus widely conceived of as being sent by an organization ('organizationally assigned') to work abroad for a defined period of time ('temporarily'). Decades of research since the 1950s show that the historic conceptualization of the expatriate construct is borne out of business employment, with the demand for expatriates being "tailored to the organizational context of working abroad" (Andresen, Bergdolt, Mergenfeld, & Dickmann, 2014, p.2303) and based on the notion that expatriates will help organizations meet their business objectives (Edström & Galbraith, 1977; Mendenhall et al., 1987; Tharenou & Harvey, 2006; Tung, 1984; Tungli & Peiperl, 2009). While 'corporate expatriate' has remained the predominant term to describe these individuals (e.g., Shaffer, Kraimer, Chen, & Bolino, 2012), researchers have also described them as 'traditional expatriates' (Suutari & Brewster, 2009), and less frequently as 'business expatriates' (Hudson & Inkson, 2006; Selmer, 2006) – the term that we adopt here.

More recently still the concept of expatriates, and business expatriates more specifically, has been extended to include individuals engaging in many forms of international experience (including work and non-work experience), among them: self-initiated expatriates (Shaffer et al., 2012; Suutari & Brewster, 2000); sojourners and students (de Wit, Agarwal, Said, Sehoole, & Sirozi, 2008; Pedersen, Neighbors, Larimer, & Lee, 2011); international business travellers (Mayrhofer, Reichel, & Sparrow, 2012; Meyskens, von Glinow, Werther, & Clarke, 2009); and migrants (Al Ariss & Ozbilgin, 2010; Andresen et al., 2014). Critically, some of these studies imply that business employment is not a criterion for determining who is and who is not an expatriate in the context of management studies.

Although rarely explicitly, different sets of authors define expatriates in different ways in terms of the scope of expatriation, the range of potential means of expatriation, and its various types (e.g., Andresen & Biemann, 2013; Cerdin & Selmer, 2014; Collings, Scullion, & Morley, 2007; Doherty & Dickmann, 2013; Mayrhofer et al., 2012; Shaffer et al., 2012). Some of the typologies contribute to theory building (Doty & Glick, 1994) and some empirically examine the classificatory structures they propose (e.g., Andresen et al., 2014; Andresen & Biemann, 2013; Cappellen & Janssens, 2010). Others suffer from familiar problems in expatriate research, for example, small non-representative samples, cross-sectional data, limited country coverage, atypical firms, unreliable measures of a single informant and lacking in theoretical underpinnings

(see critiques in Cascio, 2012; Kraimer, Bolino, & Mead, 2016). Some confuse categories (e.g., migrants/ SIEs/ sojourners; Al Ariss, 2010; or partners of AEs/ SIEs; Muir, Wallace, & McMurray, 2014; Vance & McNulty, 2014) while others are simply descriptive or even prescriptive (Baruch, Dickmann, Altman, & Bournois, 2013; McPhail, Fisher, Harvey & Moeller , 2012).

Despite the enormous empirical literature about expatriates, and on AEs in particular (e.g., see reviews by Andreason, 2008; Black & Mendenhall, 1990; Thomas & Lazarova, 2006), the outcome is an increasing level of conceptual confusion about the construct of business expatriates in the IM discipline. Following Molloy and Ployhart's (2012, p.154) argument, the problem of poor construct clarity has arisen not because it lacks sufficient operationalization, but because "the theoretical argument as to what the construct is – and why – is left implicit". We contend that if we claim to be IHRM researchers then our focus must remain on individuals employed in business, or immediately impacted by their employment (e.g., business expatriates, their families, co-workers, etc) in order to distinguish them from non-expatriates.

The problem: Poor construct clarity

Although past ideas about expatriates have been insightful (e.g., Black, 1988; Guzzo, Noonan, & Elron, 1994; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985; Ondrack, 1985; Tung, 1987), with expatriation theory developed (e.g., Kraimer & Wayne, 2004; Yan, Zhu, & Hall, 2002) but often untested, recent changes in our understanding about expatriates requires new theorizing. Suddaby (2010, p.346-347) notes that "constructs are the foundation of theory ... and essential to the process of building strong theory." As in other fields of study, a lack of, or weak, construct clarity leads to conceptual confusion and ambiguity and an inability to sensibly compare studies that may have used subtly different definitions of their subject matter (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011; Cappelli, 2012; Molloy & Ployhart, 2012). As a result there is sloppiness about what is being studied and a proliferation of messy terminology. In the field of expatriate studies, research endeavours (including at times our own) are being compromised by this terminological sloppiness because researchers either fail to define their terms adequately, or they define them but do not apply them rigorously, or they define them in a different way than others researching the same phenomenon. This may explain why little of the research into 'new' areas has been published in the top journals.

With few exceptions, the bulk of expatriate studies to date have not developed or tested a theory of expatriates. Instead, the field has amassed a collection of ideas and non-empirical constructs and variables that is: (1) poorly organized; (2) conceptually confusing, because there

is neither agreement about the terms nor the definitions proposed; and, (3) descriptive (i.e., satisfies only the 'what' question). There are supposedly conceptual articles but most are under-theorised, uncritically borrowing concepts from fields such as careers, psychology, ethics or even from practice, but adapting them poorly or imprecisely. Scholars are aware of the problem, hence the reviews and attempts at typologies and taxonomies that we have noted and the proposals to use metaphors (Cappellen & Janssens, 2010; McPhail et al., 2012; Osland, 2000). However, the lack of construct validity (Newman, Harrison, Carpenter, & Rariden, 2016) remains. Missing from the field of expatriate studies are two key elements: (1) a concept that specifies attributes or features about business expatriates that in combination helps to distinguish the concept from other, related, concepts (Podsakoff et al., 2016); and, (2) a theoretical approach to explain or predict the business expatriate phenomenon (how, when, and why) – the latter being essential for theory development (Bacharach, 1989). To illustrate why construct clarity in the field is necessary, we critique the 25 most influential articles assessing traditional expatriates, and then, separately, more recent literature, to identify weaknesses in construct clarity and to indicate the problems that this creates for the field as a whole.

Evidence of poor construct clarity: Definitions in the top 25 most cited articles

We examined the Web of Science and Scopus databases requesting cites with expat* in order to get 'expatriate' and 'expatriation' results. Web of Science returned 9031 cases and Scopus 1593 cases. We then eliminated those that related to fish or to medical problems and not to business employees. Next, we ordered the remaining cases by number of citations, combined the lists (privileging those that appeared on both lists), to identify the 25 most cited articles relating to expatriates or expatriation (see Table 1). There is a degree of subjective judgement involved in the list and we noted some well-known articles that did not make the cut; but since our aim is to establish how the terms were being used rather than to conduct a full literature review, the method is acceptable and certainly identifies articles that have been influential over time.¹ Since citations increase over the years, almost by design the majority of the most cited articles (n=14) are the older ones published between 1985 and 1999 that helped to establish the field of expatriate studies as a business and management topic, with 11 top cited articles published since 2000.

¹ While our method is subject to some limitations (a focus on English language articles and selection of a limited range of databases) advice from academic peers indicates that our sample is an adequate representation of articles related to expatriate studies. We follow others in assuming that extending the sample beyond the top 25 articles will result in decreasing marginal utility.

[insert Table 1 about here]

With our list in hand, we then reviewed these 25 articles and assessed their definitions of ‘expatriate’ or ‘expatriation’. Remarkably, almost none of them defined the terms at all (see Table 1); they just assumed that the words were self-explanatory. It was clear from the methodology section of a number of the articles that the identification of the concept had in effect been sub-contracted to the companies from which the researchers were drawing their databases; if the company defined someone as an expatriate then, for the purposes of the research, they were; if the company did not then they did not count as expatriates for the research. Further, because much of the early research was led by practitioners, it was they who “dictated the research agenda,” resulting in a large body of descriptive research that lacks theoretical rigour and conceptual precision (Kraimer et al., 2016, p.19).

The two articles that made some attempt to define the word expatriate did so in the context of comparing the assumed meaning of expatriates in prior literature with some other form of international experience. Thus, Inkson, Arthur, Pringle & Barry (1997), comparing expatriates with young Antipodians travelling for an overseas experience, indicated that expatriates were abroad as a result of a company initiative, that they had moved within the same company, on a temporary basis, and would return to the same firm in the home-country. Suutari & Brewster (2000), the first article to identify self-initiated expatriates, contrasted them with assigned expatriates, defined as those sent by their employer “outside their home-country for a temporary assignment” (p.417). We conclude from our analysis that there was (and is) a general assumption in most of the literature that ‘we all know’ who expatriates were or are: people defined as such by their employers, usually managers or individuals in relatively senior positions, sent on temporary assignment to another country, and enjoying the enhanced terms, conditions and status of expatriate employment that the lifestyle offered.

Evidence of poor construct clarity: Definitions in other expatriate literature

A wider review of extant literature beyond the top 25 most cited articles shows that there were attempts elsewhere to define terms. As examples, we note one of the earliest formulations by Aycan and Kanungo (1997) who defined expatriates as “employees of business or government organizations who are sent by their organization to a related unit in a country which is different from their own, to accomplish a job or organization-related goal for a pre-designated temporary time period of usually more than six months and less than five years in one term” (p.250). A later definition by Harrison, Shaffer and Bhaskar-Shrinivas (2004) used a very similar formulation: “employees of business organizations, who are sent overseas on a temporary basis to complete a

time-based task or accomplish an organizational goal” (p.203). These definitions implied: (1) that expatriates were already employees of the organization before they became expatriates; (2) that they were sent or ‘assigned’ by (certain kinds of) organizations, being then referred to as ‘organisation-assigned expatriates’ or ‘assigned expatriates’; and, (3) that employment by such an organization is a key characteristic, thus distinguishing business expatriates who are sent to accomplish a job or organization-related goal from non-business expatriates (e.g., tourists, immigrants, refugees, entrepreneurs, and students).

The definitions exclude those who were not employees before they became expatriates, such as experts in the oil and gas (and other) industries recruited directly to international postings or already in the host country. They also exclude those from non-governmental organizations such as charities, aid organizations, religious bodies and international sports and cultural associations. For example, people working for the European Union in Brussels, or the United Nations in New York or Geneva, apply for their jobs through competitive examination and are then hired in those cities - only a small minority of them are, respectively, Belgian, US or Swiss citizens. The definitions also exclude those who are abroad for less than six months or more than five years. On the other hand, they do include all those working for a business in a country which is not their own, even if they are not managers or specialists - a restriction that others (e.g., Cerdin & Selmer, 2014) would now insist on.

With the recent introduction of research about SIEs (Suutari & Brewster, 2000), conceptualization of expatriates now positions them according to two distinct streams: SIEs and assigned expatriates (AEs). This definition has been more or less repeated in other recent conceptualizations (Haslberger, Brewster, & Hippler, 2014, p.2).

While these recent conceptualizations have attempted to provide much needed clarity, we are still not convinced that this body of work overcomes the problem of poor construct clarity rather than further contributes to it, given that the terms ‘expatriate,’ ‘corporate expatriate,’ and ‘SIE’ remain under-theorised and their definition is usually unstated. It is a problem that has existed for decades and which continues to grow. There are now, for example, texts that use the term ‘expatriate’ to describe all categories of international movers including migrants (Al Ariss & Syed, 2011), whilst others take precisely the opposite view “the expatriate has migrant status” (Andresen et al., 2014, p. 2308). Similarly, the same label (SIE) is used for conceptually different constructs (c.f. Cerdin & Selmer, 2014; Doherty & Dickmann, 2013). Critically, we seem to be no nearer to determining the boundary conditions that will help us to decide to whom the term ‘expatriate’ (and ‘business expatriate’ more specifically) does and does not apply.

Evidence of construct proliferation: Terms used in other expatriate literature

For expatriates, weak construct clarity has arisen as a result of construct proliferation and the jangle fallacy, i.e., the use of many different terms to imply the same meaning. To illustrate our point, we reviewed extant literature published since 2000 in Business Source Premier, Emerald Fulltext, IngentaConnect, PsycINFO, Sage Journals Online, Science Direct, Scopus, and Google Scholar and found that, while the focus of these studies is expatriates, many different terms are used. For example, an 'expatriate' (Collings et al., 2007) has also been referred to as an 'international manager' (Bonache-Perez & Pla-Barber, 2005); an 'international assignee' (Bonache & Zarraga-Oberty, 2008; Reiche, Kraimer, & Harzing, 2011); an 'internationally mobile manager' (Andresen & Biemann, 2013); a 'global manager' (Cappellen & Janssens, 2010; Suutari, 2003); 'managers with global careers' (Suutari & Taka, 2004); an 'expatriate manager' (Black, 1988; Black & Stephens, 1989; Harvey & Moeller, 2009; Paik & Sohn, 2004; Thomas, Lazarova, & Inkson, 2005); an 'expatriate assignee' (Toh & Denisi, 2007); an 'international executive' (Caligiuri, Hyland, Joshi, & Bross, 1998); or simply an 'assignee' (Bennett, Aston, & Colquhoun, 2000; Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer, & Luk, 2005). Notably, included in this list are some articles in our 'top 25'.

A broader, if less systematic, review of expatriate studies from 1963 to the present indicates that the problem of jangle fallacy has existed since the inception of the field), with many studies using different terminology to refer to the same thing; for example, *corporate expatriate/ corporate executive/ corporate manager/ expatriate manager/ expatriate personnel/ managerial expatriates/ overseas executive/ overseas personnel* (Andreason, 2008; Borrmann, 1968; Gonzalez & Negandhi, 1967; Hammer, Hart, & Rogan, 1998; Hays, 1971; Heenan, 1970; Miller, 1975; Negandhi, 1966; Stern, 1966; Tan & Mahoney, 2004); or *international manager/ international assignee/ internationally mobile managers/ international personnel/ foreign managers* (Andresen & Biemann, 2013; Arthur & Bennett, 1995; Kiernan, 1963; Murray, 1973; Schollhammer, 1969; Steinmetz, 1966); or *international assignments/ international work assignments/ long-term assignments/ overseas assignments* (Ivancevich, 1969; Kraimer et al., 2016; Miller, 1972; Tung, 1981); and *expatriates of host country origin/ ex-host-country nationals/ ethnically similar-ethnically different expatriates/ returnees/ overseas returnees/ sea turtles* (Fan, Zhang, & Zhu, 2013; Guo, Porschitz, & Alves, 2013; Ho, Seet, & Jones, 2015; Thite, Srinivasan, Harvey, & Valk, 2009; Tung, 2008; Tung & Lazarova, 2006; Yoshida et al., 2009). Obviously this plethora of words and phrases comes with implicit baggage. It may simply not reflect the people the authors are discussing or it may be trying to narrow the field to the people in their sample: some of the terms, for example,

imply that the authors are only interested in internationally mobile managers (or, presumably narrower, even executives), or imply that they are not interested if the foreign stay involves crossing a land border rather than an ocean.

Equally concerning are studies where the above terms are used interchangeably in the same article to mean the same thing; for example, where *international*, *expatriate*, *overseas*, and *foreign assignment* are used interchangeably to imply 'expatriates' or 'expatriation' (see as examples Kraimer et al., 2016, p.17; Kraimer, Shaffer, Harrison, & Ren, 2012, p.404; Thomas et al., 2005, p.341; Yan et al., 2002, p.373), or where a suite of studies by the same author has used interchangeable terms, e.g., *expatriates/ international executive/ overseas executive/ multinational executives/ expatriate managers* (Howard, 1970, 1974a, 1974b, 1979, 1982). Redundant terms have also been used, e.g., *foreign expatriate* (Holtbrugge & Ambrosius, 2015).

In addition, there has been a plethora of proposed new concepts and terms/ abbreviations (sometimes frankly ludicrous) for topics for which there are already appropriate concepts and terms, adding to the 'alphabet soup' and leading to inconsistent research with inconsistent findings. Examples include, among a mass of many possibilities: *flexpatriate/ assigned traveller/ self-initiated traveller/ domestic international manager* (Andresen et al., 2014; Mayerhofer, Hartmann, Michelitsch-Reidl, & Kollinger, 2004; Tharenou & Harvey, 2006) for international business travellers; *propatriate/ glopatriate/ intra-SIEs and CAEs* (Andresen et al., 2014; McNulty et al., 2009; McPhail et al., 2012) for AEs; *inter-SIEs/ drawn expatriates/ self-initiated corporate expatriates/ organizational self-initiated expatriates* (Altman & Baruch, 2012; Andresen et al., 2014;) for SIEs; and *halfpats* (Teagarden, 2010) for bi-culturalists.

The SIE stream has been particularly prone to the problem of ill-defined concepts and overlapping terminology. For example, SIEs have been referred to as *self-selecting expatriates* (Richardson & McKenna, 2002), *self-directed expatriates* (Richardson, 2006), *self-initiated foreign workers* (Harrison et al., 2004), *independent expatriates* (Richardson, 2008), *independent internationally mobile professionals* (Tharenou, 2013), *self-initiated movers* (Thorn, 2009) and *inter-organizational SIEs/inter-SIEs* (Andresen et al., 2014). Terms have been interchanged in the same article, for instance, where Tharenou and Caulfield (2010) simultaneously refer to SIEs as *self-expatriates* and *self-made expatriates*. Others use the SIE conceptualization but with different labels, such as SE (Alshahrani & Morley, 2015). Suutari and Brewster (2000) in their seminal study identified many different kinds of SIEs (young opportunists, job seekers, officials, localised professionals, international professionals, and members of dual career families), yet other categorizations have been noted since (e.g., Andresen et al., 2014) with inadequate integration of the foundational terminology and ideas. Even more concerning is overlapping

conceptualisations: compare Doherty & Dickmann's (2013) SIE criteria (relocation across a national border; a move based on individual volition; and that the move is temporary) with criteria by Cerdin and Selmer (2014; self-initiated international relocation; regular employment (intentions); intentions of a temporary stay; and skilled/ professional qualifications).

Newman et al. (2016) suggest that problems of construct clarity emerge because “[N]ew constructs can change thinking, yield impact, and heighten scholarly reputations; so there is a strong incentive to propose and establish them” (p.4). But the frequent result is poor “construct mixology” (p.1) that is “scientifically stagnant” (p.3) arising from new theoretical constructs that are inadequately conceptualized and operationalized when mixed together with content from older, established constructs. In other words, it is too common for researchers to not only fail to define their concepts and terms adequately, but they often ignore overlaps with similar, long-established concepts addressing the same people but with more common words. These same researchers often make unstated assumptions about the people they are researching. They may assume, for example, they will all have been sent from their MNE's headquarters, or that they are all managers, or that they all know nothing about their new country before arriving there, or that forms of international experience that were previously un-discussed in the literature are suddenly ‘new’ or ‘growing’ just because researchers have recently discovered them. This makes the comparison of findings difficult, or even impossible, because we cannot be sure whom it is that people are actually researching.

Theorising the meanings of expatriate

Why construct clarity matters

In order for future studies of expatriates to have their intended impact there needs to be “clear agreement on the substantive definitional content” (Suddaby, 2010, p.348) – in this case about business expatriates – and that it is linked to their core characteristics. Construct clarity will, in turn, result in higher levels of construct validity, i.e., better and more reliable measures (Gerhart, 2012). In the case of business expatriates we see that, “[o]ver time and over multiple empirical applications, the definition of a construct tends to drift – that is, it acquires substantial ‘surplus meaning’ (MacCorquodale & Meehl, 1948) or meaning beyond the parameters of its original intended definition ... it is critically important for the theorist to strip away the extraneous meaning that has become attached to a construct ... by offering a contextually specific and clear definition of the term” (Suddaby, 2010, p.348).

To overcome what we see as a fundamental problem in relation to poor construct validity about the meanings of 'expatriate', we develop a definition of business expatriates as a means of organizing the field's collective knowledge. We take as a starting point that scholars in our field are engaged with and passionate about the role that expatriate studies play in the field of IHRM. Thus, we all benefit from imposing a parsimoniously organized and clearly communicated statement about the boundary conditions under which, and to whom, the business expatriate concept does and does not apply.

Bacharach (1989) notes that theory offers "a statement of relations between concepts within a set of boundary assumptions and constraints [being] no more than a linguistic device to organize a complex empirical world" (p.496). Critically, "theories are constrained by their specific critical bounding assumptions" (p.498). Tennyson & Cocchiarella (1986) suggest that while definitions can help us to understand a concept, it is the boundaries that help us to understand the limits of that concept, i.e., what the concept is not. In order to progress towards a theory of expatriates, we follow the lead of others (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011; Jack, Calas, Nkomo, & Peltonen, 2008) in challenging the underlying assumptions in extant literature about the construct clarity of 'expatriates', from which to then determine its boundary conditions. We have tried not to reinforce, build upon or extend the established body of research about expatriates, but to disrupt ('over-problematize') its assumptions in such a way as to encourage others to develop better and more reliable measures, and more interesting and relevant research questions, leading to the development of a more rigorous theory about expatriates.

Defining concepts: Family resemblance vs classical approaches

As we have shown, there has been considerable disagreement about the conceptual structure that should be followed. On the one hand, concepts can be defined "by individually necessary and collectively sufficient attributes" (the 'classical' view of 'necessary' and 'sufficient'; Goertz, 2006, p.502), whereby there is no ambiguity as to whether an item does or does not belong to the concept: membership is 'all or nothing' as long as it has the necessary or jointly sufficient attributes (the possession of them all; Sartori, 1970, 1984). Sufficient features and attributes are those that are unique and possessed only by exemplars of the concept; thus, not all items are required to have sufficient attributes. Importantly, the classical view holds that a concept will have far more necessary than sufficient features and attributes, and that necessary (essential) features can be grouped to be 'jointly sufficient'. In contrast, concepts have also been defined according to the extent to which an item shares a feature or attribute with at least one, and probably several, other items that belong to the concept, indicating that membership is

determined by degrees of commonality ('fit') of the features and attributes of the particular item (the 'family resemblance' view; Rosch & Mervis, 1975; Wittgenstein, 1953). Critically, differences in the underlying logical and structural rules of the classical vs family resemblance approach can result in vastly different numbers of features or attributes belonging to the concept depending on which one is used (Podsakoff et al., 2016). For example, the classical view holds that as the number of necessary features and attributes increases, the number of items that will belong to the concept decreases on the basis of it being harder for an item to meet all the criteria (Sartori, 1984). Conversely, the family resemblance approach accepts that as the number of defining features and attributes increases, so too can the number of items that sometimes qualify to be included in the concept, i.e., if there are more features and attributes but an item only needs to satisfy one, then the likelihood of meeting only one feature or attribute increases (Goertz, 2006).

The problem we see in expatriate studies is that the classical view has rarely been applied (see Doherty & Dickmann, 2013 for a recent, although narrowly focused, exception). The family resemblance approach has been more common and is exemplified in more recent studies (Al Ariss & Syed, 2011; Andresen et al., 2014; Andresen & Biemann, 2013; Baruch et al., 2013; Shaffer et al., 2012) that have resulted in such broad conceptualizations of the expatriate concept as to undermine its construct (discriminant) validity. This can result in greater levels of systematic measurement error, i.e., there being something wrong with the measurement item or it being wrongly used by the researcher (Viswanathan, 2005). Poor discriminant validity in turn undermines the expatriate concept's nomological validity and leads to decreased confidence in the findings obtained from expatriate research, as it becomes difficult to determine whether a related concept is an antecedent, consequence or correlate of the concept at hand (Podsakoff et al., 2016). It also leads to results having multiple plausible interpretations and explanations, thus contributing to a lack of confidence in a study's findings when an article is submitted for review (Bono & McNamara, 2011).

If the problem of poor construct clarity and construct validity persists, it will inhibit real progress in the field. When large groups of scholars take on a 'hot' topic that suffers from poor construct validity, and then research it 'to death' (arguably the case with the explosion of SIE research), it can result in a body of research that is only publishable in less rigorous journals and has little real value. Moreover, conceptual confusion can lead to 'good' scholars abandoning a worthwhile topic when the research base upon which they are drawing is so conceptually flawed that it produces diminishing returns. As Barley (2006, p.17) suggests, "like dire wolves, researchers run in packs. Thus, the papers that appear in journals during an era often cluster around a relatively small set of topics and conversely, papers written on particular topics tend to cluster in time. ...

such clustering occurs ... because members of invisible colleges agree on which questions and problems are currently important to their field's further progress ... or it may simply be that topics fall in and out of fashion as researchers first crowd into areas and then eventually become bored."

Business expatriates through the lens of prototype theory

Because, as suggested earlier, the family resemblance approach (whether implicitly or unintentionally applied) has not progressed the field of expatriate studies towards greater construct clarity, we adopt the classical view to determine the necessary (essential) and sufficient (unique) features and attributes of the business expatriate concept and, by implication, closely related concepts. Before we do, we draw on prototype theory to explain how we approach it.

Prototypes are the centres of clusters of similar items, with the centre of the cluster (the 'prototype') being well established and agreed upon by experts and thus representing the best example of the category at hand (Hampton, 2006; Rosch & Mervis, 1975). By extension, prototype concepts are similarity-based clusters of categories with a prototype at the centre but with the boundary between other categories often being less clear and argued over (Hampton, 1998). The category to which an item is placed in a prototypical concept and whether (or not) it is determined to be the actual prototype (best example) depends largely on the features and attributes of that item in relation to the best example (the 'prototype'), i.e., its relative similarities or differences to other items and the categories to which those items belong (Rosch, 1978; Sutcliffe, 1993). Theory-based prototypes - of the kind we are building here - differ in that they additionally hold sets of information about the relationships between features and attributes. Hence, an item's degree of membership ('fit') to a particular category within a theory-based prototype is more than a simple function of having (or not having) a necessary or sufficient feature or attribute; it must also have the right relationships to other features and attributes otherwise its similarity to the prototype will be poor (Hampton, 2006).

Prototype theory positions the categorisation of items by determining their membership vs non-membership (Rosch & Mervis, 1975), low vs high degree of membership (Geeraerts, 1989), borderline, typical or atypical membership (Hampton, 1998; Murphy, 2002), and degree of membership vs degree of representativeness (Geeraerts, 1989). Four phenomena are used to explain how and where an item may or may not be categorised and the extent of its membership in a particular category (Hampton, 1997; Rosch, 1978). The first, *vagueness*, implies that the item is close to the prototypical criterion but does not match it exactly, therefore being 'borderline'

and being placed in a closely related category. *Typicality* refers to matching the criterion or exceeding it, thus being 'typical' of the prototype and being included in the category; category membership is therefore high. *Genericity* suggests a partial match to the prototype but with features or attributes that are not matched by all category members, thus it may be sufficient to be included in a broadly-related (general) category but not the prototype category; category membership may be low. *Opacity* determines that there is no generally held or widely accepted rule about the features or attributes of an item such that it can be successfully categorized in a theory-based prototype with a relative degree of confidence; opaque categorizations often occur, then, by deferring to 'experts', or in the absence of experts, by risking the assignment of an item to the wrong category or by avoiding categorization altogether.

In the context of our earlier discussion about the classical view of concept definitions, prototype theory does not hold to the view that definitions have criteria that are indispensable in order to isolate them from other concepts. Rather, prototype theory rejects the idea that concepts contain only a single set of defining attributes. Instead, it views concepts as being dynamic and flexible based on the sometimes-shifting boundaries of the concepts it aims to describe (Geeraerts, 1989). The challenge in adapting prototype theory to defining the concept of expatriates is to steer away from being unnecessarily rigid (the classical approach of 'necessary' and 'sufficient') while at the same time avoiding a 'kitchen sink' approach by including too many features and attributes. We must find a middle ground that provides sufficient boundaries while being flexible enough to address the many obvious overlaps between the various international experience concepts we consider.

While we believe it is necessary to view business expatriates through the lens of prototype theory, we are convinced that the classical approach is essential in determining necessary and sufficient criteria. We combine these approaches to ensure that we can achieve our aim of defining terms in a way that clarifies our area of study (business expatriates) on the basis that prior attempts that have unintentionally favoured the family resemblance approach have not resulted in the construct clarity the field clearly needs. To guide our conceptualisation of business expatriates, we adopt four prototype theory characteristics (Geeraerts, 1989; Rosch, 1978): (a) that the expatriate concept more broadly cannot be defined by means of a single set of criteria; (b) that the expatriate concept more broadly takes the form of a clustered and overlapping set of categories; (c) membership of the business expatriate category is by degrees of relatedness wherein not every member is equally representative in the category at every point in time; and, (d) that the business expatriate concept is blurred at the edges.

The solution: Establishing construct clarity

We build on the five well-established stages of insights from social science theory (Locke, 2012; Suddaby, 2010) and first identify four boundary conditions that specify who is and who is not included in the concept of business expatriates. We then establish clear terminology for our area of study. Next, we bring these thoughts together into a theory-specific statement, after which we specify the semantic relationships with a simple Figure and emphasize logical consistency.

Boundary conditions for business expatriates

The business expatriate concept is not universal but conceptualized according to the context in which these expatriates live and work. We identify four conditions under which the concept will and will not apply which, as an inter-related set of features, represents jointly sufficient attributes that form the prototype ('best example') of a business expatriate.

The first condition under which the concept will or will not apply in relation to business and management research is that a business expatriate must be organizationally employed. For AEs, this implies employment with an MNE or global organization in a professional role as part of their career. For SIEs the organization may be an MNE or it may be a local organization. While this condition does not require employment at the managerial level, it does exclude, for example, work by 'overseas experience' (OE) seekers (Inkson et al., 1997; Inkson & Myers, 2003) as backpackers picking up casual employment for the purposes of funding further travel. This criterion distinguishes business expatriates from sojourners, migrants, retired and unemployed SIEs and tourists (Shaffer et al., 2012; Tharenou, 2013).

The second condition under which the concept will or will not apply in relation to business and management research is the intended length of time abroad for the business expatriate, i.e., the temporal dimension (Andresen & Biemann, 2013; Konopaske & Werner, 2005; McPhail et al., 2012). This condition is determined by the originally planned temporary nature of the expatriate's stay in the host-country, irrespective as to the actual length of time they are employed there. The intended length of time abroad for a business expatriate can be short (1-12 months for short-term assignees), mid to long term (1-5 years for typical Western AEs, or considerably longer for some Japanese employees; Tungli & Peiperl, 2009), and indefinitely for employed SIEs. We also here note the situation of what have been called 'global careerists' (Cerdin & Bird, 2008; Peiperl & Jonsen, 2007; Suutari, Tornikoski, & Mäkelä, 2012) or sometimes 'global/ international itinerants' (Banai & Harry, 2004; Näsholm, 2012) - they may remain outside

their home-country for substantial parts of their career, but in relation to each assignment they meet our boundary condition for intended length of time.

A third condition under which the expatriate concept will or will not apply in relation to business and management research is whether the individual attains citizenship of the host-country. Some definitions are based almost entirely on this point (“expatriates are non-citizens, including home-country nationals (i.e., citizens of the home-country of the parent company), and third country nationals”; Tan & Mahoney, 2004, p.200). In the case of those with dual-nationality, the condition is determined by whether the expatriate obtains employment as a citizen or non-citizen of the host-country. Citizenship of the host-country or nominating the host-country as the home-country negates expatriate status because citizens cannot also be ‘a foreign-born person who is living abroad’ (Dumont & Lemaitre, 2005) being for all intents and purposes already ‘home’. While expatriates operating as permanent residents of a host-country may use their status as an avenue to eventual citizenship, they nonetheless remain expatriates until it is acquired. In some small (but perhaps growing) minority of cases this may be unnecessarily limiting – there will be bi-cultural people (Brannen & Thomas, 2010; Furusawa & Brewster, 2014) with dual nationality and multiculturalists (Fitzsimmonds, Miska, & Stahl, 2011). There will also be children (including third culture kids; Jan Selmer & Lam, 2004) who have been socialised into global mobility at a young age (Alshahrani & Morley, 2015) and grown up with expatriate or migrant parents in one country whilst having or being entitled to a passport from another (i.e., expatriates of host-country origin; Thite et al., 2009). When they transfer to the host-country the experience of all of them may be so similar to that of other expatriates that we would want to include them. We deal with these exceptions below when we discuss the nature of expatriation as a prototype and note that, for the time being, these exceptions will be few. However, there may in the future be a question about this boundary condition in terms of the role of the European Union: already the distinction between citizens of one member state and another has little legal import, and this may reduce further. Nevertheless, at present this condition is fulfilled for intra-European expatriates also.

A fourth condition under which the business expatriate concept will or will not apply in relation to IHRM research is regulatory cross-border (legal) compliance necessitated by organizational employment in combination with non-citizenship. This condition is determined by the legal context in which expatriate employment is enacted and whether people have the right to stay, and are allowed to seek work legally, in a specific country. Generally speaking, the IHRM literature has eschewed the study of international drug- or people-smuggling rings, for example, and we exclude organizations and individuals explicitly operating in illegal ways. This condition is

not affected, however, by the issue of non-compliance per se, recognizing that some organizations may try to take advantage of the law and that others are particularly vulnerable to (unintentional) non-compliance issues (due, for example, to residency, work permit, and tax irregularities) which can result in financial penalties and fines for organizations and imprisonment for some illegal workers (EY, 2016; PwC & RES Forum, 2015).

Taken together, these four boundary conditions represent the jointly sufficient attributes that form the prototype ('best example') of a business expatriate. A concept's degree of membership ('fit') to the business expatriate category is determined by the extent to which it has the jointly sufficient attributes necessary to qualify for inclusion and/or lesser degrees of representativeness.

Establishing clear terms for business expatriates and expatriation

We developed a glossary of all terms (well over a hundred) used for international experience in the IHRM literature (available from the first named author on request). It formed the basis for developing our own definition and against which to apply our boundary conditions to other international experience concepts.

Most business expatriates will be either AEs or SIEs. In the context of our theory-based prototype, we conceptualise AEs as constituting five specific sub-types that vary according to their purposes and country of origin: parent-country nationals (PCNs), third country nationals (TCNs), inpatriates, short-term assignees (STAs) and expatriates of host country origin (EHCOs). Common to all is, first, that their form of business expatriation is controlled and directed by an organization and, second, that each sub-type possesses the four jointly sufficient attributes necessary for membership in the broader business expatriate category. Separating the sub-types is that each may be used for different purposes (e.g., PCNs are typically used for coordination and control, Edström & Galbraith, 1977; whereas inpatriates are mainly focused on knowledge transfer, Reiche, Harzing, & Kraimer, 2009). Moreover, TCNs and inpatriates do not originate from the HQ country of the MNE whereas PCNs do. These differences do not disqualify any from inclusion in the business expatriate concept.

In contrast to AEs and within the context of our theory-based prototype, SIEs have not, in the first instance, gone to another country at the behest of an organization. A variety of different groups that have been studied under the SIE rubric. There are, for example, localised expatriates (LOPATs) or assigned expatriates who, after completing a long-term assignment contract then transition to full local terms and conditions in the host-country as directed by either the

employer or at their own request (Tait, De Cieri, & McNulty, 2014). Also included are permanent transferees (PTs; commonly known as ‘one-way movers’), defined as employees that resign from the home-country office and are hired by the host-country office of the same MNE but for which there is no return (repatriation) to the home-country, no guarantee of company-sponsored reassignment elsewhere, and only local terms and conditions offered in the host-country (Tait et al., 2014; Yates, 2011). There is a much-studied cohort of academic expatriates (e.g. Trembath, 2016) and a less studied one of employees of intergovernmental organizations, who have moved abroad in order to take up their employment (Suutari & Brewster, 2000). All these SIEs possess the four jointly sufficient attributes necessary for membership in the broader business expatriate category. As for AEs, the criterion for inclusion as an SIE within the broader category of business expatriates is that they are employed by an organization irrespective of whether employment is secured before or after going abroad, and whether one is employed in local organizations or within MNEs.

Theory specific statement about business expatriates

This leads us to the conclusion that the field of expatriate studies requires, as a starting point, a theory-specific statement about business expatriates, on the basis that they are the focus of much research conducted in the IHRM field of expatriate studies. Based on our earlier research (McNulty & Brewster, 2016), and building on the work of others (e.g., Aycan & Kanungo, 1997; Harrison et al., 2004; Shaffer et al., 2012; Tan & Mahoney, 2004), we define business expatriates as,

legally working individuals who reside temporarily in a country of which they are not a citizen in order to accomplish a career-related goal, being relocated abroad either by an organization, by self-initiation or directly employed within the host-country.

We contend that this theory-specific statement about business expatriates supports the major purposes for which expatriates have been (and will likely continue to be) utilized in the IHRM discipline. Specifically, the definition implies that employment by an organization is a key characteristic, thus distinguishing business expatriates from non-business expatriates (e.g., tourists, immigrants, retirees, refugees, sojourners). Our focus on ‘business expatriates’ as the unit of analysis is deliberate. It arises from several necessary and jointly sufficient criteria - (1) that we are IHRM scholars and therefore interested in the management of people who work for organizations; and (2) that we are interested in individuals who: (a) engage in international

geographical mobility; (b) who have legal employment; (c) with organizations and businesses; and (d) in a country where they do not hold citizenship.

Many, but by no means all of these expatriates will be on enhanced terms and conditions to recognize their relocation. This is usual for AEs and it is not unknown for some SIEs to negotiate some form of enhanced travel arrangements, expenses and so on. It is also the case that government employees and employees of intergovernmental organizations apply the same 'international' terms and conditions in all countries, but they invariably include salary adjustments and additional expenses for accommodation, schooling, and other cost of living items. However, whilst remuneration may be seen as one of the prototypical elements of the definition of AEs, at the blurrier edges of the prototype (Klein & Delery, 2012) it is not central to our definition.

Semantic relationships of business expatriates to other forms of international experience

To follow through on the notion of business expatriates as a prototype we need to be clear about the boundaries and identify the blurrier edges of our definition and the relationship to other concepts. Just as thinking about the position of a penguin (which cannot fly) helps us to understand the notion of a 'bird', we have to understand how business expatriates are related to other concepts and to what degree (*typically, vaguely, generally* or *opaquely*). As we have seen, in prior studies, the business expatriate concept is part of a better or worse defined complex web of relationships within the overall broader concept of 'international experiences' (both work and non-work) that includes migrants, sojourners and business travellers. Who, then, is a business expatriate?

As might be anticipated from our discussion above, AEs and SIEs meet the boundary conditions for being a business expatriate; they match or exceed the criteria thus being 'typical' of the prototype; category membership is therefore high.

The international experience concepts that do not meet the boundary conditions and exist alongside it in 'vaguely' or 'generally' similar categories include: (a) international business travellers and commuters; (b) global virtual team members and global domestics (engaging in psychological, but not physical, mobility); (c) EHCs with citizenship/status of the host- country; and (d) sojourners, including retirees and students, because they do not meet the condition of business employment. Also excluded are: (e) migrants unless they meet all jointly sufficient criteria, and if so only until citizenship is acquired after which they no longer meet the condition

of requiring regulatory cross-border (legal) compliance; and, (f) SIEs that are not employed by organizations (Doherty & Dickmann, 2013), including foreigners compensated 'off the books' (Al Ariss & Syed, 2011; Inkson & Myers, 2003) as is the case with many young people and migrant hopefuls whose 'cash jobs' often do not suit their qualifications because of problems in attaining appropriate visa and work permits. This is conceptualized in Figure 1.

[insert Figure 1 about here]

For example, the concept of migrants (as well as many kinds of SIEs; Doherty & Dickmann, 2013) suggests a partial match to the business expatriate prototype but with features and attributes that are not matched by all category members (e.g., skilled migrants are likely to have more features and attributes than unskilled migrants and refugees (Al Ariss, 2010; Cerdin, Abdeljalil-Diné, & Brewster, 2014) and is insufficient to be included in the prototype category of business expatriates specifically. Prototype membership is therefore low. Similarly, international business travellers and commuters possess two of the four boundary conditions for inclusion in the business expatriate concept but because these people do not require regulatory cross-border (legal) compliance for the purposes of residency, though they may for work permits. They are 'borderline' and vaguely related to business expatriates: they are thus placed in a closely related category and, indeed, some may overlap into the business expatriate category. Prototype membership for international business travellers is low, some commuters will be much higher.

We also note the practical issue of fungibility: people will move between and across the boundaries of each category in Figure 1. Thus, a business expatriate may move permanently to another country, becoming a migrant; a migrant may find that things do not work out in their new country, or that a crucial problem in their prior home- country (e.g., civil war) is now resolved, so they go back to their country of origin after a short time. International business trips may get extended into formal short-term assignments and/or become long-term international assignments. While establishing the boundary conditions is vital to our academic analysis, we acknowledge that real life may not respect the boundaries.

Tying it all together: Logical consistency of our theorising

How can we use our conceptualisation of business expatriates, and the distinction from other forms of international experience, in order to advance research and practice? There are important implications for research arising from the application of a clearer definition of the business expatriate concept. First, by distinguishing the concept of business expatriates from other international experiences on the basis of four boundary conditions, researchers will be

able to clarify in the research design of their studies whether the unit of analysis is business expatriates. Correspondingly, when business expatriates are not studied, researchers should now be able to demonstrate greater conceptual clarity about who and what the unit of analysis actually is. Being clearer about the boundary conditions will allow for better understanding and greater comparability of research in the field of expatriate studies because both construct clarity (definitions) and construct validity (measures) are improved.

Second, application of prototype theory illustrates that while business expatriates represent are prototypical, there are other categories that are sometimes included in expatriate research and sometimes left out, making comparison impossible. Even within the prototypical group there are sub-types that have different motivations to expatriate, and different views of success criteria, career ambitions and orientations, which will impact on the construct validity of a particular study to the extent that these differences can be accounted for in the research design, analysis, and overall findings. This is best illustrated using examples that we see as having specific problems. Consider, for instance, a study that attempts to examine the correlation between expatriate interaction with host-country nationals (HCNs) and expatriate effectiveness but which fails to clarify what kind of business expatriate it is addressing: different types of business expatriates (e.g., SIEs) might well be more or less likely to utilize HCN interaction thus confounding the results. Another example is studies about knowledge transfer where it may be posited that cultural differences (among other variables) can increase the difficulty for expatriates to transfer intra-organizational knowledge to subsidiaries: the implicit assumption is that 'expatriates' refers to PCNs, but the problem might look different if the study were to include or separate out TCNs from similar cultures, bi-culturalists or locally-hired SIEs, where cultural distance effects such as failure to adjust, homesickness, or clinical depression, would be considerably reduced. Our point is that future studies of expatriates need to account for and report the types of business expatriates that are included (or excluded) in a study (i.e., accounting for variability, or lack thereof in the research design) to ensure higher levels of construct clarity and to improve construct validity (measures), thereby allowing proper comparison of results. The ideas proceeding from a clear construct such as proposed above offer the opportunity for researchers to develop more nuanced approaches to expatriation in the future.

Conclusions

Despite the enormous empirical literature on expatriates, our study represents a rare attempt to use construct clarity to address how business expatriates are defined and how the concept

relates to other concepts of international experiences. Given the largely a-theoretical nature of expatriation studies, it is important for our field of research, and by implication for practice, that we develop construct clarity using well-established theoretical lenses that have been applied in other fields for many years. Our conceptualization of the meanings of the term 'business expatriate' makes a number of contributions to the field of expatriate studies. First, despite the complexity of its evolution, the field has not yet fully 'connected the dots' in terms of clearly defining business expatriates and linking their employment to global staffing research and practice. Instead, scholars have been preoccupied with clarifying smaller elements of the topic or deciding where expatriates stand in relation to other categories. Our contribution lies in taking one step further back than these attempts - studying the concept of expatriates at its historical core - from which to then move forward with greater clarity and less ambiguity about who it is that we claim to study when we use the word 'expatriate'. Second, in getting back to basics, we enhance scholars' ability to engage in more innovative and theoretically grounded research about business expatriates and the global staffing opportunities they present to MNEs by conceptualizing the boundary conditions under which the term 'business expatriate' can and cannot be applied. Third, to stimulate a more critical dialogue about business expatriates, we have presented arguments that build on historical understandings of expatriates in general, illustrating through examples of prior studies and using early and recent empirical evidence to introduce ideas for new theorizing about this important concept in business and management research. In doing so, we follow on from others (e.g., Kostova, Roth, & Dacin, 2008) in stating that our goal is not modest, but nonetheless an important first step to extend construct development and broaden theorizing about expatriates. The intent of this article has been to be deliberately provocative, by raising questions and starting a necessary debate among scholars in our field as to the meaning(s) of the business expatriate prototype and the boundary conditions under which we can speak of, and study, them.

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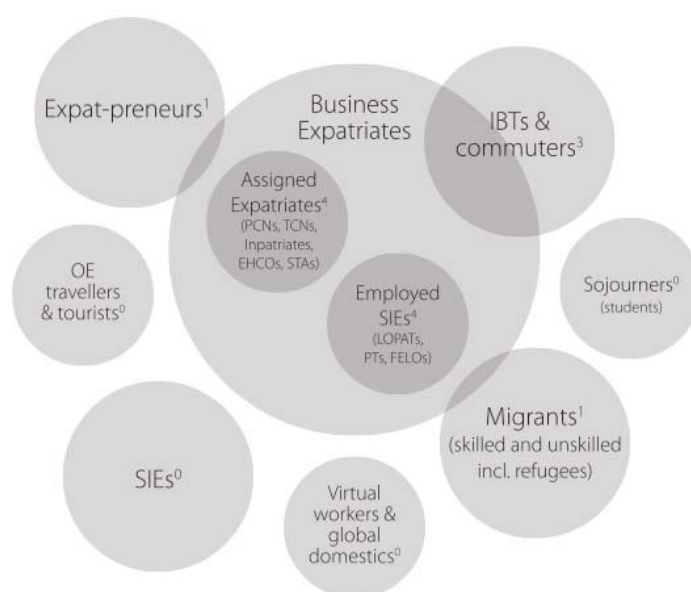
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Figure 1. Prototype Model of Business Expatriates



Note: Numbers denote attributes possessed by the concept (4=all jointly sufficient attributes, 0=no jointly sufficient attributes). Concepts that possess four (4) jointly sufficient attributes qualify for inclusion as prototypical 'best examples' of business expatriates, compared to other concepts that do not qualify but which are vaguely (3) (2), generally (1) or opaquely (1) related, or not related (0).

Legend

Boundary conditions:

- 1) organizationally employed
- 2) originally planned temporary stay
- 3) non-citizenship of host-country
- 4) regulatory cross-border (legal) compliance for residency/work permit necessitated by organizational employment and non-citizenship

Assigned expatriates (PCNs, TCNs, Inpatriates, EHCOs, STAs): Possess attributes (1) (2) (3) (4)

Employed SIEs (LOPATs, PTs, FELOs): Possess attributes (1) (2) (3) (4)

IBTs & commuters: Do not possess attribute (4)

Sojourners (students): Do not possess attribute (1) negating (2) (3) (4)

Migrants (skilled and unskilled incl. refugees): Do not possess attribute (2) negating (3) (4)

Virtual workers and global domestics: Do not possess attributes (2) (3) (4) negating (1)

SIEs (not employed): Do not possess attribute (1) negating (2) (3) (4)

OE travellers and tourists: Do not possess attribute (1) negating (2) (3) (4)

Expat-preneurs: Do not possess attribute (1) negating (2) (3) (4)