**Returning to the familiar, or returning to the foreign?**

**Expectations and experiences of self-initiated repatriating**

**New Zealanders**

**Mid-study presentation**

**Abstract**

David Ellis

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A significant proportion of New Zealanders are living abroad of their own volition (self-initiated expatriates (SIEs)), and many are now either returning home ([Statistics New Zealand, 2010](#_ENREF_8)) or intending to return ([Kiwi Expatriate Association, 2006](#_ENREF_5)). There is a professional talent shortage in New Zealand, and competition for repatriates is fierce ([Watson, 2011](#_ENREF_12)). In addition, repatriates brought home by employers experience reverse culture shock ([Martin, 1984](#_ENREF_6)), which has negative flow-on effects for organizations. Understanding the expectations and experiences of self-initiated repatriates (SIRs) is therefore critical.

Empirical studies have found gaps between the expectations and experiences of repatriating international assignees (IAs) ([Stroh, Gregersen, & Black, 1998](#_ENREF_10)). In particular, negative career-related outcomes after IA repatriation compound reverse culture shock experiences, especially when expectations are unmet. This also impacts employers through retention difficulties ([Paik, Segaud, & Malinowski, 2002](#_ENREF_7); [Stevens, Oddou, Furuya, Bird, & Mendenhall, 2006](#_ENREF_9)).

However, it is unclear how this growing body of knowledge relates to SIRs. Initial research in Ireland suggested reentry work adjustment might be more difficult for SIRs than for IAs ([Begley, Collings, & Scullion, 2008](#_ENREF_2)), and a subsequent study found differences in how repatriates are received by French, German and Danish employment markets (Andresen & Walther, 2013). There are legitimate calls for more SIR work ([Begley, et al., 2008](#_ENREF_2); [Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010](#_ENREF_11)).

The present study is therefore addressing three key research questions; first, how do SIR New Zealanders experience repatriation? Second, how do they cope with re-acculturation? Finally, how does the reality of repatriation compare with pre-repatriation expectations?

To address these questions, an inductive, qualitative approach to building theory is being utilised. This approach enables richness and flexible exploration ([Alvesson, 1996](#_ENREF_1)) not possible using quantitative methods early in the development of a topic area ([Edmondson & McManus, 2007](#_ENREF_4)). A sample of 32 SIR New Zealanders has been recruited and is being interviewed twice; in the first phase, before repatriation (for expectations), and in the second phase, after repatriation (for experiences). A staged content analysis supported by NVivo and incorporating chunking into thought units, categorizing, and classifying ([Cappellen & Janssens, 2010](#_ENREF_3)), will precede comparisons with prior theoretical and empirical IA and SIE research.

The phase one interviews have been completed along with some initial analysis. This has revealed participants’ motivations for repatriation, as well as their post-repatriation expectations for work and broader life in New Zealand. In this presentation, the tentative contribution of phase one and plans for the remainder of the study are discussed.

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