

## **INTERNATIONAL TALENT FLOW AND INTENTION TO REPATRIATE: AN IDENTITY EXPLANATION**

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*Working Paper 10/07  
March 2007*

**DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT  
WORKING PAPER SERIES  
ISSN 1327-5216**



### **Abstract**

This paper examines the role of identity in knowledge workers' intentions to repatriate after international work experience. Using a sample of 563 Australian professionals currently working overseas, we investigate the relationships between intention to repatriate and national identity, factors that 'pull' professionals to work outside Australia and those that would 'push' them to return home, and demographic characteristics. This research has implications for individuals, employers and government policy with regard to the management of talent flows of knowledge workers.

**This paper is a work in progress. Material in the paper cannot be used without permission of the author.**

# INTERNATIONAL TALENT FLOW AND INTENTION TO REPATRIATE: AN IDENTITY EXPLANATION

## INTRODUCTION

Globalization has brought many challenges and opportunities for the mobility of individuals and the development of their careers. The movement of labour, particularly the internationalization of professions and professional labour markets, has raised awareness of the importance of understanding the factors that influence individuals' decisions related to their career development. . In line with the trend towards labour mobility, the present study investigates the factors that affect the decision of professionals engaged in knowledge work who are educated and trained in one country, to choose to develop their career elsewhere. The phenomenon has been referred to in the literature as 'brain drain' or 'talent flow' (Baruch, Budhwar & Khatri, 2006; Carr, Inkson & Thorn, 2005; also see Tung & Lazarova, 2006). Recognizing the apparent complexity and importance of the issue, research is growing in this area (see Baruch et al., 2007). The term 'talent flow' is now more commonly used, to provide a broader conceptualisation than brain drain or gain, as it is a more accurate representation of human mobility across geographical and cultural borders. Talent flow has been defined as "the migration of skilled people between countries. Talent flow is governed by human choice and is constituted from boundaryless global careers" (Carr et al., 2005: 387). The flow can benefit countries, provided it is reciprocal and at least balanced in terms of the direction of the talent flows. That is, talent exchange or talent circulation is in the interests of any nation seeking to engage in global business, and particularly in the global knowledge economy (Hugo, Rudd & Harris, 2003; Frey, 2004).

## GLOBAL TALENT FLOW FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF A SMALL ECONOMY

The global knowledge economy has emerged as a challenging competitive environment for business and management (Considine, Marginson, & Sheehan, 2001; Doz, Santos & Williamson, 2001). As a nation with a small domestic economy that has sought to improve its international competitiveness by internationalising, outside any trading bloc, and participating in the global knowledge economy, Australia provides a fascinating backdrop to explore the importance of knowledge workers and global talent flows (Dick & Merrett, 2007; *Australian Government's Innovation Report, 2003-04*; Vaile, 2000). The saying 'knowledge is power' has never been more applicable to Australian policy-makers and managers.

At the national level, the term 'diaspora' has been used to describe the " 'scattering of a people' beyond their homeland" who continue to identify with and cultivate connections between themselves and that homeland (Fullilove & Flutter, 2004: 3). This diaspora includes self-initiated expatriates, who travel overseas in search of employment (Suutari & Brewster, 2000), as well as individuals on international assignments initiated by multinational enterprises. Research suggests the main reason for the Australian diaspora is the motivation of Australians to gain international experience with regard to work and life, rather than any desire to flee conflict or harsh conditions in the home environment (Hugo, 2004). Not surprisingly, because the main impetus to leave has been a subtle one, Australia has taken some time to recognize its diaspora (Fullilove & Flutter, 2004). Recently, concern for attracting and retaining skilled workers, including knowledge workers, to overcome skills shortages has surfaced in the popular media (see for example, Nancarrow, 2004), and is becoming the focus of research and discussion at the public policy development level (Hugo et al., 2003; Fullilove & Flutter, 2004). While Australian managers have been slow to invest in knowledge development in their international operations and networks (Considine et al., 2001), many are increasingly realizing that, to become or remain world class, they need to attract, motivate and retain knowledge workers (Hugo et al., 2003).

A recent study has identified that there is a group of around 860,000 Australians residing overseas, and this group includes highly skilled professionals (Fullilove & Flutter, 2004). In a separate report,

Hugo et al. noted that “[o]ver two-thirds of all Australian-born permanent departures and Australian resident long-term departures are managers, administrators, professionals and para-professionals” (2003: 11). With a national population slightly over 20 million (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006a), the size of this diaspora is noteworthy. As Hugo (2004: 73) has commented, “Australia is one of the world’s major origins of migrants”. While there have been preliminary efforts to encourage highly skilled expatriates to return, research on the factors that will influence individuals’ decisions to repatriate has been scant and this issue remains high on the national agenda. The present study is focused at the individual level but has implications for employers and for national policy. Specifically, we focus on Australian knowledge workers and investigate the role of national identity, factors that ‘pull’ or ‘push’ professionals to work outside their home country, and demographic characteristics, in individuals’ intentions to repatriate.

## **KNOWLEDGE WORKERS AND BOUNDARYLESS CAREERS**

For organizations trying to sustain competitive advantage through the development of a global pool of human capital, professionals or knowledge workers pose a significant challenge. The extent of this challenge is highlighted by Drucker (1999) who proposed that, whereas the most valuable asset of a 20<sup>th</sup> century firm was its production equipment, the most valuable asset of a 21<sup>st</sup> century institution is its knowledge workers. Knowledge workers are distinctive, not only because of their access to educational opportunities, but because in knowledge organizations they own the means of production, that is, their knowledge (Blackler, 1995; Drucker, 1993). As a consequence, productivity is now, more than ever, dependent on the contributions and retention of these specialist workers (Tovstiga, 1999).

Knowledge work involves the acquisition, creation, packaging or application of knowledge. It is characterised by variety and exception rather than routine, and it is performed by professional workers with a high level of expertise (Davenport, Jarvenpaa & Beer, 1996). Drucker (1999) explains that knowledge workers must be able to determine the focus of their task, and have autonomy and responsibility for their own productivity. Their tasks must include a commitment to continuing innovation, and provide for continuous learning. When these factors are not an integral part of the organizational context, the productivity of the knowledge worker is at risk. More importantly there is a strong possibility that they may leave the organization.

Pittinsky and Shih (2004) have used the term ‘knowledge nomads’ to characterise the tendency of these workers to move on in a search of international career enhancement. Knowledge nomads are defined as highly mobile workers who, like nomadic people, move frequently from place to place (2004: 793). Pittinsky and Shih (2004) stress that this pattern of movement does not mean that these workers are not motivated to work hard and commit themselves strongly to the organization in which they sojourn. In line with Drucker’s (1999) description of knowledge workers, however, once these workers have exhausted the potential for learning and innovation within a particular environment, there is a strong possibility that they will move on. The concept of knowledge nomads engaging in expatriate employment fits well with the notion of boundaryless careers (Arthur, 1994; Stahl, Miller & Tung, 2002), in which geographical and national borders do not present barriers to career advancement.

### **Boundaryless Careers and Talent Flow**

From an international business and management perspective, international experience has been associated with the development of international management knowledge, skills and careers (Dickmann & Harris, 2005; Vance, 2005). Much of the research in the field of international human resource management has focused on expatriates who are sent on international assignments as a step in their career in a multinational enterprise (De Cieri, Fenwick & Hutchings, 2005; Harris & Brewster, 2003; Yan, Zhu & Hall, 2002). Inkson, Arthur, Pringle and Barry (1997), however, defined and distinguished two types of international experience, ‘expatriate’ and ‘overseas’. They define each according to its relative value in the way international experience is gained and used to

develop career, organizational and national competencies both inside and outside the country in which the experience is gained. Expatriate experience is usually organization-mediated and linked to an organization-bound career, while overseas experience is usually characterised as an "individual odyssey", associated with a boundaryless career (Inkson et al., 1997: 352). Careers may be considered as "repositories of knowledge" (Bird, 1996, cited in Inkson et al., 1997: 353). These authors argue that overseas experience might be more important than expatriate experience as a means of acquiring knowledge, as it allows individuals to derive their own learning and knowledge from the experience. More recently, Suutari and Brewster (2000) have applied the term 'self-initiated expatriates' to overseas experience that is not company-initiated, and several scholars have investigated the growing number of self-initiated expatriates (Inkson & Myers, 2003; Myers & Pringle, 2005; Richardson & Mallon, 2005). Research suggests that there may be some blurring or merging between the company-initiated expatriates and self-initiated expatriates, with growth in new forms of international work, including international commuting, frequent flying, and transnational project teams (Harris & Brewster, 2003).

Recent research (Inkson, Carr, Edwards, Hooks, Jackson, Thorn & Allfree, 2004) has explored the motivations of members of New Zealand professional associations who left New Zealand to live and work elsewhere. Included in this study were questions about reasons why some who left returned or intended to return and others did not. The study concluded that those who opted to stay away did so because of career development and advancement opportunities while those who returned or intended to return did so because of family and friendship networks back home. While Australian research is scant on this issue, related research by Tharenou (2003) involved a longitudinal study of graduating business students and found that receptivity to working outside Australia was developed initially from "a combination of personal agency, home barriers, and work environment opportunities" (Tharenou, 2003: 509).

The preceding research has provided some insights at the global, national, organizational and individual levels, but still more questions remain about the flow of talented knowledge workers from Australia. Understanding talent flow is of major importance in international business and its management. In addition, taking the Australian context as an example, there is recognition at the public policy level that a loss of highly skilled talent is cause for concern (Hugo et al., 2003; Fullilove & Flutter, 2004). Hence, it is crucial to improve understanding of the influences on knowledge workers' intentions to repatriate.

## **APPLYING IDENTITY THEORY TO EXPLAIN TALENT FLOW**

The present study aims to investigate predictors of intention to repatriate. In doing so, we draw upon Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) theory of reasoned action, which proposes that intention is the best predictor of behavior. According to this theory, intentions are influenced by attitudes and subjective norms. While the theory of reasoned action explains attitude-behavior relationships when the behavior is under a person's volitional control, it is less successful in explaining behavior in other conditions. The theory of planned behavior was developed by Ajzen (1985) to address this limitation; Ajzen introduced the concept of perceived behavioral control, to enable prediction of behaviors that are not under the individual's volitional control. Perceived behavioral control is proposed to derive from underlying beliefs about matters such as resources, opportunities, and past experiences; it can be influenced by both internal (e.g. personal characteristics) and external (e.g. finances) factors. A substantial body of research has shown support for both theories. Further, recent research provides ample support for the role of self-identity in the attitude-behavior relationship (Terry, Hogg & White, 1999).

Following this literature, we also draw upon identity theory, as it explains the connection between self-identity and behavioral intention (Albert, Ashforth & Dutton, 2000). Identity theory conceptualizes the self as a social construct that is "a collection of identities that reflects the roles that a person occupies in the social structure" (Terry et al., 1999: 226). A core notion in identity

theory is that, to predict behavior, we first need to recognize that the self and the social context are linked.

Identity theory has become a substantial field of study in sociology, psychology and organizational studies. As Sluss and Ashforth (2007: 9) note, research on identity has provided a substantial body of knowledge about “how individuals define and locate themselves”. In the management field, this research has focused to some extent on the organizational context (Albert et al., 2000), although there has been growing research on the self-concept and the ways in which social cognitive processes associated with groups influence behavior (Hogg & Terry, 2000). Following the example of Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003), we refrain from providing a review of the entire field; in this paper we focus on our own theoretical position.

There is a lack of consensus about the meaning and definition of identity; to some degree, identity is complex, enigmatic, and multidimensional (Albert et al., 2000; Pratt & Foreman, 2000). Identity theory proposes that “an individual’s identities are at least partially composed of the roles he or she plays” (Pratt & Foreman, 2000: 19). A role can be defined as “a set of expectations as to what constitutes role-appropriate behavior” (Simon, 1992, cited in Terry et al., 1999: 227). Engaging in role-appropriate behavior reinforces or validates one’s role status. For knowledge workers engaged in international work, we suggest that one’s identity roles might include one’s national identity, professional and familial roles, and roles related to one’s gender, age, or other demographic characteristics.

### **National Identity**

Our focus on international talent flows and intention to repatriate places national identity at the core of our research. National identity refers to the broad, or collective, level of identity. Adapting the definition of organizational identity proposed by Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail, (1994), we view national identity as the degree to which a member defines him- or herself by the same attributes that he or she believes defines the nation. Nations encompass political and institutional systems as well as being representational (Kohonen, 2005); national identity refers to emotional attachments to places, cultural artifacts, traditions and historical events (Hall, 1992, cited in Kohonen, 2005) and includes aspects such as ethnicity and citizenship (Phinney, 1990).

### ***Ethnicity***

A major aspect of national identity is one’s ethnicity (Phinney, 1990), which is related to one’s ancestral heritage. This is particularly important for the present study, as Australia has one of the most culturally heterogeneous societies in the world, due to several waves of migration from a broad range of cultural and geographic backgrounds (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, 1998). The social, economic and political implications of this multiculturalism are significant for organizations and Australian society in general. Prior to the 1960s, the majority of migrants to Australia came from Europe, particularly the United Kingdom. Historically, multiculturalism in Australia was regarded as a governmental social policy problem and attempts were made to reduce cultural heterogeneity by restricting immigration to white Europeans. There has, however, been increasing national awareness of the importance of Australia’s Asian geographic positioning vis-à-vis European cultural heritage, with significant demographic change within Australia. In the past few decades, Australian social policy focus shifted significantly to emphasize the benefits and opportunities to be gained in a multicultural society. In the current decade, there is intensification of debate around the benefits and implications of immigration (Betts, 2003; Boreham, Stokes, & Hall, 2004) and discussion at national government levels on the topic of Australian national values and identity (Gordon & Topsfield, 2006). In this context, an understanding of national identity, particularly ethnicity, is important. For knowledge workers who associate their ethnicity with the home country (in this case, as Australian), the push to repatriate would be expected to be stronger than for those who define their ethnicity as associated with another country.

*H1: Home country ethnicity will be positively associated with intention to repatriate.*

## **Citizenship**

A second major aspect of national identity is citizenship, which is related to one's self-concept of current identification with a nation. Arnett (2002) has proposed that globalization influences one's national identity, so expatriates may develop hybrid forms of both local and global identity, developed through personal decisions and choices. We suggest that individuals whose national identity includes being a citizen of their home country (in this case, Australia), will be more likely to intend to repatriate to Australia after an overseas experience. In contrast, those whose identity refers to global citizenship, or citizenship of another country, will be more likely to intend to remain overseas.

*H2: Home country citizenship will be positively associated with intention to repatriate.*

Identity themes have been explored at multiple levels and it is widely agreed that individuals may hold multiple identities (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Pratt & Foreman, 2000; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In turbulent times of global change and new opportunities and challenges, identity choices become more complex, with more identity options and greater scope for identity heterogeneity. As Sanchez, Spector and Cooper (2000) have suggested, the process of expatriation requires a willingness to adjust in many ways, including re-shaping of one's identity. This reflects the dynamic nature of identity. While there is a need for coherence and continuity in one's identity, it is recognized that the salience of different identities will vary over different points/stages in one's life; identity can be viewed as an ongoing process of searching and renewal (Kohonen, 2005). Hence, in addition to investigating national identity, the present study investigates the 'push' and 'pull' factors that are relevant to identity at interpersonal and personal levels and that have been shown to be influential in talent flow (Baruch et al., 2007, Carr et al., 2005).

## **Push and Pull Factors**

Theories of reasoned action and planned behavior can be applied to explain the 'push/pull' factors that influence individual's career decisions (Baruch et al., 2007). Also, these factors can be understood with reference to identity theory, as examples of one's personal and interpersonal identities. One's personal and interpersonal identities are related, respectively, to internal characteristics such as personal values, goals, emotions and cognitions, and to external aspects, or direct relationships with one's world, including career achievement, development of friendships and interpersonal networks. This identity domain may encompass personal/private and professional aspects of one's surroundings and life.

As previous research has shown (Baruch et al., 2007, Carr et al., 2005), numerous factors, including economic, social and legal factors, will influence an individual's decision to stay abroad or to repatriate. Some of these factors will push people to repatriate; others will encourage them to remain overseas. Based on our review of previous talent flow research and research related to the Australian diaspora in particular (Hugo et al., 2003), we have categorized these factors into four broad groups: quality of life, career advancement, personal networks, and social context, as discussed below.

## **Quality of Life**

For any individual considering an international move, the quality of life available in a location is an important factor in the location's attractiveness. Quality of life, particularly from the perspective of knowledge workers, may be conceived of in terms of elements such as social freedoms, socio-economic status, lack of stress, connectivity, opportunities for leisure activities, and subjective well-being (Diener & Lucas, 2000; Hagerty, et al., 2001). We note that New Zealand research (Carr et al., 2005) found that quality of life would be a factor that would pull expatriates to remain outside their home country. However, for knowledge workers and those with affluence, Australia presents a stereotypical example of a location with high quality of life. Based on this understanding, it is hypothesized that:

*H3: Quality of life push to Australia will be positively associated with intention to repatriate.*

### **Career Advancement**

As an initial career step, individual knowledge workers from a small home country economy, when seeking challenging and exciting careers may need to go off-shore if career development opportunities and challenges overseas pull individuals away from the smaller home country market (Carr et al., 2005). For example, Australia's small domestic economy may offer limited opportunities for advancement, particularly in the early stages of one's career (Hugo, 2004; Tharenou, 2003). Once having gained international experience, however, the opportunity to be a 'big fish in a small pond' may push individuals back to Australia, to leverage their overseas experience and success. This is consistent with research that has shown that strong demand for labor in growing economies has encouraged repatriation of individuals to work in key positions in their homeland (Björkman & Fan, 2002; Tung & Lazarova, 2006). Drawing on this research, we hypothesize that:

*H4: Career push to Australia will be positively associated with intention to repatriate.*

### **Personal Network**

When individuals explore careers outside their home country, they typically leave behind their extended family and friendship network. Individuals may tend to repatriate when their family ties in their home country are pulled tighter (Black, Gregersen, Mendenhall & Stroh, 1999); for example, when they reach a life stage that requires attention to non-work family concerns, such as ageing parents or raising children. Personal networks, namely relationships with family and friends in one's home environment, are likely to be a factor that pushes individuals towards repatriation. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

*H5: Personal network push to Australia will be positively associated with intention to repatriate.*

### **Social Context**

In addition to personal concerns, there are push/pull aspects of the social and institutional context, such as education, welfare and security. For example, recent global events, represented by tumultuous events such as corporate scandals, terrorism and the 2004 tsunami disaster in Asia, have heightened awareness of safety and security concerns related to international business (Suder, 2004). Australia provides a prime example of a generally safe social context (Transparency International, 2006; Tharenou, 2003). Individuals concerned about welfare and security may be more likely to view Australia as an attractive location, so the social context in Australia is likely to push individuals towards Australia.

*H6: Social context push to Australia will be positively associated with intention to repatriate.*

### **Demographic Characteristics**

We propose that an important yet sometimes overlooked domain relevant to identity refers to demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, marital status and education. These have been suggested to be ascribed components of identity (Scheibe, 1983). We propose that demographic characteristics are integral to one's personal identity. One's personal identity in the role of 'parent', for example, needs to be understood with reference to the presence of dependents. Indeed, demographic characteristics may be the most salient aspect of one's personal identity, as they are likely to be obvious to others, and therefore influence one's access to group membership. By exploring demographic variables with reference to identity theory, our approach is consistent with recent work by Hogg, Fielding, Johnson, Masser, Russell and Svensson (2006), who have explored the relationship between leadership and gender, using social identity theory.

Demographic characteristics have been examined in the expatriate research literature, although little research has investigated those associated with intention to repatriate (Myers & Pringle, 2005). Based on the existing identity and expatriate literatures, we investigate a range of demographic characteristics.

### **Age**

Age, or generational, differences may influence decisions to repatriate; studies of generational differences provide some valuable insights relevant to talent flow. 'Traditionalists', born between

1925 and 1945, tend to value income and employment security, and tend to be uncomfortable challenging the status quo and authority. 'Baby boomers' (born between 1946 and 1964) have lived through significant social changes, with technological advances and increasing social freedoms; Baby boomers value security but are typically more adaptable and flexible than traditionalists. 'Generation X' (born between 1965 and 1979) typically value rewards and recognition for work accomplishments and opportunities to learn new things. 'Generation Y' employees (born between 1980 and 1994) are often described as more globally aware, technologically savvy and difficult to retain in one organization or job (Drake International, 2006). Our next hypothesis is based on the notion that younger knowledge workers (Generations X and Y) are more likely to have been exposed to global events, via telecommunications, and therefore, are more likely to view themselves as global citizens (Coupland, 1991), while older knowledge workers (traditionalists and baby boomers) are more likely to have a stronger home country national identity and to seek the security of their homeland.

*H7: Age will be positively associated with intention to repatriate.*

### **Gender**

Research literature on expatriates has shown that men are more likely than women to be sent by multinational corporations on international assignments, although women are increasingly engaging in international work (Adler, 2002; Harris, 2002; Janssens, Cappellen & Zanoni, 2006). Myers and Pringle (2005) found women to have a propensity to seek out less risky locations in their pursuit of career development. Janssens et al. (2006: 146) used identity theory to explore the strategies used by successful female expatriates, and concluded that, even when women are successful as expatriates, "their success does not necessarily alter the power relations that make it difficult for women to be international managers". Based on such research, we hypothesize that men are more likely than women to seek prolonged overseas experience.

*H8: Men will be less likely than women to intend to repatriate.*

### **Marital Status**

Overseas experience is perhaps more attractive for those without close personal ties, although this does not appear to have been comprehensively examined in literature related to international careers. For single knowledge workers, identity may be closely linked to their work and their career advancement. In contrast, people in a committed relationship may be more likely to identify with stability and with non-work aspects of life (Pringle & Mallon, 2003).

*H9: Marital status (being married) will be positively associated with intention to repatriate.*

### **Dependents**

Following a similar line of argument as for marital status, those with dependents may be more likely to identify with stability and with non-work aspects of life (Pringle & Mallon, 2003). They may also seek the social support of family members to assist with child-rearing, particularly if in a dual-career couple. As indicated earlier with regard to social context, research has indicated that Australia is viewed as a 'good place to raise children', with well-established educational and health systems (Hugo et al., 2003).

*H10: The presence of dependents will be positively associated with intention to repatriate.*

### **Education**

Drucker's (1999) portrayal of knowledge workers does not specify that the group require a tertiary education, only that the work itself is related to the management of knowledge. Hence, within the broad category of knowledge work, there is likely to be a broad range of educational qualifications held by individuals. In the current global labour market, there is much discussion of opportunities for all knowledge workers (Cappelli, 2005; Michaels, Handfield-Jones, & Axelrod, 2001). Nevertheless, knowledge workers with higher education levels (post-graduate qualifications) are likely to be more highly sought after; they may have highly specialized skills and knowledge that are in global demand. Those with post-graduate qualifications may perceive greater opportunities for international career experience, particularly compared with the relatively smaller scope for opportunities in a smaller domestic labour market.

*H11: Post-graduate education will be negatively associated with intention to repatriate.*

### **Profession**

Professional occupations may be identified by several characteristics, which typically include “sense of identity; common standards of entry and performance; an ethical code of conduct; a distinct body of knowledge; and a requirement for training and certification of practitioners” (Farndale 2005: 661). The global demand for knowledge workers is spread across a wide range of professions. For example, there is a global shortage of engineers and high demand for engineers within Australia, particularly in the mining and resources industries (Graduate Careers Council of Australia, 2006). Within the Australian context, however, there may be one exception to the norm of good working conditions for knowledge workers. The higher education sector in Australia has undergone substantial change in recent years, with universities experiencing “large-scale organizational change, including restructuring, downsizing and government funding cuts” (Gillespie, Walsh, Winefield, Dua, & Stough, 2001: 53). Relative to other professional groups, university academics face a difficult environment that is less attractive with regard to salary than in the US, UK, and some parts of Asia (Boyd, 2001; Thomas, 2002). Based on this previous research, we hypothesize that:

*H12: University lecturers/researchers will be less likely than other professions to intend to repatriate.*

### **Expatriate Location**

It might be expected that knowledge workers would seek employment in locations that provide stimulation, challenge and life/career experiences that are novel and exciting (Drucker, 1999; Pittinsky & Shih, 2004; Stahl et al., 2002). Examples of such destinations include the large cities of Europe and the USA or the rapidly expanding markets in Asia. However, Tharenou (2003) found that many individuals preferred ‘easy’ destinations for expatriation, that is, those that were safe, stable, economically well developed and not corrupt. Specifically for Australian expatriates, the United Kingdom has long been regarded as a major location that is culturally close and meets the criteria for a preferred destination; compared with North America or Asia, the United Kingdom is regarded as more familiar and less intimidating. The United Kingdom has been the first overseas destination for many young Australians seeking an overseas experience. Consistent with Carr et al.’s (2005) research with New Zealand expatriates, Hugo (2004) reported that younger Australians are more likely to visit the United Kingdom, while older and more experienced Australians are more likely to make more permanent moves to the USA or Asia. For those working in the United Kingdom, their visit is more likely to be a developmental experience, not a life-long decision to remain outside one’s home country. Those individuals who have chosen to work in more exotic, or culturally distant, locations may have a greater interest in novel experience; they are more adventurous than those in a culturally similar host environment. Based on this understanding, we hypothesize that knowledge workers located in the United Kingdom are those most likely to intend to repatriate.

*H13: Knowledge workers located in the United Kingdom are more likely to intend to repatriate than those in other countries.*

### **Time Away**

The length of time of an overseas (or expatriate) experience is an important factor to consider with regard to repatriation. The phenomenon of ‘going native’ in a host location has been well-documented (Black & Gregersen, 1992), and typically is correlated with length of time spent in the location. It is a major factor in the determination of assignment length for expatriates in multinational companies (Black et al., 1999). Individuals who have already been away from home for an extended period of time are likely to associate more strongly with the host location, and so feel less inclined to repatriate.

*H14: Length of time away on overseas experience will be negatively associated with intention to repatriate.*

### **Employment**

As discussed earlier, knowledge workers employed outside their home country may include company-initiated and self-initiated expatriates. Review of this literature suggests that most multinational enterprises send employees on international assignments of a pre-determined length,

typically 1 to 5 years); hence, those working for multinational enterprises are likely to be repatriated at the end of their assignment (Yan et al., 2002). In contrast, it is feasible that self-initiated expatriates are likely to be more open to the prospect of remaining overseas (Suutari & Brewster, 2000). Based on this analysis, we hypothesize:

*H15: Expatriates working for a multinational enterprise will be more likely than self-initiated expatriates to intend to repatriate.*

The hypothesized relationships are shown in Figure 1.

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## **METHOD**

### **Sample and Procedure**

For the purposes of this study, we identified professional associations as the most direct way to access knowledge workers working outside Australia. To conduct this research, we approached 44 professional associations and asked them to promote our on-line survey to their members. The decision to utilise professional associations was made for several reasons. First, in view of the often mobile career path taken by knowledge workers, professional associations provide important networking opportunities and become critical arenas through which individuals can connect and access recent technical information. Professional associations also play an important role in providing legitimacy, identity and role definition (See Greenwood, Suddaby & Hinings, 2002; Lounsbury, 2002). Second, as these workers are likely to remain in contact with professional associations for networking and information transfer, this link provides access to a sample representative of the Australian diaspora of knowledge workers, including self-initiated and company-initiated expatriates.

An on-line survey was used to gather the data. Potential respondents were assured of anonymity and that their responses would be confidential. A total of 591 useable questionnaires were received. This was reduced to 563 after removing respondents who did not meet the sampling frame (i.e., they were not currently employed, were retired, or were students). As the survey was conducted on-line, it was not possible to calculate a response rate, as we were not able to determine the exact size of the target population. For on-line surveys, it is difficult to calculate the exact response rate, as the notification of our survey may not have reached all intended recipients (Simsek & Veiga, 2001; Stanton & Rogelberg, 2001). Also, previous research has indicated that on-line surveys yield lower response rates than do surveys distributed by mail (Simsek & Veiga, 2000). Nevertheless, the sample of 563 provides a reasonably powerful sample size for statistical analysis.

### **Measures**

The questionnaire was a replication and extension of the survey developed by Inkson et al. (2004). Following consultation with the New Zealand researchers, minor amendments were required to suit the Australian context.

#### ***Intention to Repatriate***

Respondents were asked to indicate their future plans by selecting one of the following options: (1) I will be returning to Australian permanently; (2) All things considered, I am likely to return to Australia permanently; (3) I have not yet decided whether to return to Australia permanently; (4) All things considered, I am likely to remain overseas permanently; or (5) I will be remaining overseas permanently. For the purposes of this study, this variable was coded 1 = intention to repatriate (categories 1 and 2), 0 = otherwise.

### **National Identity**

National identity was measured using two items: *ethnicity* and *citizenship*. *Ethnicity* was measured by a single item asking respondents to indicate their ethnic group, with categories as utilized by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006b). This followed the approach taken by Inkson et al. (2004). This variable was coded 1 = Australian, 0 = non-Australian. *Citizenship* was measured using a single-item measure, as had been used in the study reported by Inkson et al. (2004). Respondents were asked to select one of 6 options: 'mainly an Australian'; 'mainly an Australian and a citizen of another country'; 'mainly an Australian and a citizen of the world'; 'mainly a citizen of another country'; 'mainly a citizen of the world'; and 'mainly a citizen of another country and a citizen of the world'. For the purposes of hypothesis testing, this variable was coded as 1 = Australian identity, 0 = otherwise.

### **Push/pull Factors**

This construct was operationalised by the identification of "push/pull" factors – the motivating influences which affected decisions regarding returning to Australia or remaining overseas (Carr et al., 2005). Respondents were asked to rate their attitudes on 26 items using the following rating scale: (1) 'draws me strongly towards Australia'; (2) 'draws me towards Australia but not strongly'; 'draws me equally towards Australia and overseas or is irrelevant to me'; (4) 'draws me strongly towards remaining overseas but not strongly'; and (5) 'draws me strongly towards remaining overseas'. The 26 items were identified by Inkson et al. (2004) and included a wide range of items that encompass the four categories of concerns that might push or pull individuals to/from their home country. These items included: work, financial and career concerns (e.g., salaries, career opportunities, business opportunities, challenge, tax system); quality of life aspects (e.g., cultural opportunities, developing new relationships); concerns related to one's personal network (e.g., friends, being close to relatives, parents/older relations); and social context concerns (e.g., sports and recreation opportunities, safety and security, lifestyle, and home ownership). The 26 items were subjected to factor analysis and the findings are reported in the results section of the paper.

### **Demographic Characteristics**

We collected information about a wide range of demographic predictors of intention to repatriate. *Age* was measured by asking respondents to indicate their age in years (coded as 1 = 20-29; 2 = 30-39; 3 = 40-49; 4 = 50-59; 5 = 60 and over). *Gender* was coded as 1 = male, 0 = female. *Marital status* was measured by asking respondents to indicate their marital status (coded as 1 = married, 0 = single, separated or divorced). *Presence of dependents* was measured by asking respondents to indicate whether they have any dependents (the nature of the dependents was not specified, so that this might include children, elderly parents, or perhaps a dependent spouse). This variable was coded as 1 = presence of dependents, 0 = no dependents.

To measure *education*, respondents were asked to indicate their highest educational qualification. For the purposes of hypothesis testing, this variable was coded 1 = postgraduate degree (postgraduate diploma, masters degree, doctorate), 0 = otherwise. *Profession* was measured by asking respondents to indicate their current profession or occupation. Dummy variables (coded 1 = present, 0 = absent) were created for each professional category: accountants, auditors and corporate treasury, finance; miscellaneous business and information professionals; managers, CEOs, directors; building and engineering professionals; university lecturers/researchers, post doctoral researchers; and 'other', which encompassed a wide range of professions not otherwise classified. The reference (omitted) category in regression analysis was the modal professional group (accountants, auditors and corporate treasury).

*Expatriate location* was measured by asking respondents to indicate the location where they are now living and working. To capture the notion that the United Kingdom is psychically closer to Australia than are other locations, such as Asian or North American locations, this item was coded as 1 = United Kingdom, 0 = elsewhere. Respondents were asked to indicate the length of *time of their current overseas experience* (coded as 1 = less than 6 months, 2 = 6 to less than 12 months, 3 = 1-5 years, 4 = 6-10 years, 5 = 11-15 years, 6 = 16-20 years, 7 = over 20 years). Finally,

employment was measured by asking respondents to indicate if they were employed by a multinational enterprise with headquarters or a subsidiary in Australia (coded 1 = yes, 0 = no).

## Data Analysis

As the dependent variable, intention to repatriate, was coded as a dichotomous measure, binary (two-group) logistic regression was used to test the hypotheses (Menard, 2001). As the amount of missing data was very small (1.4% of the sample), listwise deletion was used, yielding an effective sample size of 555 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). To facilitate the comparison of effect sizes from independent variables measured with different scales we standardized the predictors prior to analysis (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001).

When interpreting these results, a positive sign for a coefficient means that higher values on the predictor are associated with intention to repatriate. Prior to analysis, the data were screened for outliers and multicollinearity among the predictors. There was no evidence of outliers or multicollinearity.

## RESULTS

The sample characteristics, shown in Table 1, indicate a reasonable spread across age with a slightly higher representation in the younger age category: 67.1% were aged under 40 years, 17.1% within the 40-49 age range, and 15.1% 50 years and older. Consistent with previous studies of Australian expatriates (Fullilove & Flutter, 2004), over half the respondents were in the prime working age group of 25-44 years. Thirty-six percent of respondents were female. This is a much higher representation of women than has been found in previous research using samples of company-initiated expatriates (Smith & Still, 1996; Adler, 2002). The majority of the respondents had family responsibilities: 58.6% were married and 36.1% were overseas with dependants.

Consistent with the professional status of this group, the cohort was highly educated, with 50.4% reporting a bachelor's degree and 44.3% holding some form of post-graduate qualification. A substantial group of respondents were working as accountants, auditors, corporate treasury and finance related (21.3%). This category was followed by miscellaneous business and information professionals (15.3%), which included project managers, human resource professionals, actuaries and business analysts. Expatriate locations were quite evenly spread between the UK (28.4%), North America (31.4%) and Asia (20.8%). With respect to the length of the stay overseas, 39% had been away from Australia for 6 years or more on their current overseas experience. Fifty-three per cent of the respondents were expatriates working for multinational enterprises. Due to the anonymous nature of the survey, respondents could not be directly compared with non-respondents. Nevertheless, the sample characteristics are highly consistent with government statistics and previous surveys of Australian citizens overseas (Hugo, 2004; Hugo et al., 2003).

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Table 1 about here  
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## National Identity

Table 2 provides data about the national identity of those within the sample, as well as reporting their intentions to stay overseas or repatriate (return home to Australia). The majority of the sample reported their ethnicity as Australian (74.8%); 6.6% were European and 13.5% were of Asian ethnicity; this profile is consistent with Hugo's (2004) research. Forty percent (40.5%) identified their citizenship as Australian; another 49.9% described their citizenship as partly Australian, while only 9.6% viewed their citizenship as unrelated to Australia. With regard to our dependent variable, 53.5% of our respondents indicated that they intended to repatriate to Australia.

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Table 2 about here  
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### Push/Pull Factors

Respondents were asked to respond to 26 items that may either 'pull' Australians to remain overseas or 'push' them to return to Australia, derived from an analysis of the literature (Inkson et al., 2004). Principal components analysis was performed on the 26 items and results are reported in Table 3. Four factors (components) were extracted with eigenvalues greater than 1, explaining 39.7% of the variance. An inspection of the scree plot supported a four-factor solution. To aid in interpretation of the four factors, oblique (promax) rotation was performed. Using a cut of .40, eight items loaded onto the first factor, labelled *quality of life push to Australia*, including access to 'quality of life' opportunities and personal freedom. The scores on the eight items were averaged to form a composite measure (possible range of scores is -2 to +2), with higher scores indicating stronger push towards Australia.

Five items loaded onto the second factor, labelled *career push to Australia*, including career and business opportunities and financial matters (salaries, tax system and cost of living). The scores on the 5 items were averaged to form a composite measure (possible range of scores is -2 to +2), with higher scores indicating stronger push towards Australia.

Four items loaded onto the third factor, *personal network push to Australia*, which encompasses access to a support network and social relationships with family and friends. The scores on the 5 items were averaged to form a composite measure (possible range of scores is -2 to +2), with higher scores indicating stronger push towards Australia.

The internal consistency of the scales was measured using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. For the first three factors, Cronbach alpha coefficients ranged from 0.62 to 0.78 (see Table 3). Although the reliability estimate for the second factor (*career push to Australia*) is less than Nunally's (1978) recommended .70 cut off, internal consistency coefficients greater than .60 are considered acceptable for newly developed measures (Hair, Anderson, Tatham & Black, 1998).

Seven items loaded onto the fourth factor, *social context push to Australia*, which includes raising children, sports and recreational opportunities, home ownership, safety and security and educational opportunities. However, the Cronbach alpha coefficient for the fourth factor (.54) was not improved by removal of any of the items, so we excluded this factor from further analyses. While the items loading onto factor 4 are all related to the social context, they are too heterogeneous to assume that they are measuring the same underlying construct. The following items: *partner*; *paying off student loan*; and *tall poppy syndrome* (an Australian term referring to criticism or 'cutting down' of a successful person; see Feather, 1989; Ramson, 1988) did not load significantly onto any of the factors.

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Table 3 about here  
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### Predicting Intention to Repatriate

Results of the binary logistic regression analysis are shown in Table 4. With regard to national identity, our first hypothesis, that *home country ethnicity* would be positively associated with intention to repatriate, was supported ( $B=.22, p < .05$ ). Also, our second hypothesis, that *home country citizenship* would be positively associated with intention to return to Australia, was supported. Respondents who reported that they have Australian identity were more likely than those with partial Australian identity, or those with no Australian identity to be intending to return to Australia ( $B=.39, p < .01$ ).

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Table 4 about here  
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With regard to push/pull factors, the findings were somewhat surprising. Our third hypothesis, that *quality of life push to Australia* would be positively associated with intention to repatriate, was strongly supported ( $B=.48, p < .01$ ). It is apparent that this factor encompasses reference to personal freedom, having fun, and ethnic mix, which are all characteristics stereotypical of Australia. However, we did not find evidence of the remaining push/pull factors as predictors of intention to repatriate. Our fourth hypothesis, that *career push to Australia* would be positively associated with intention to repatriate, was not supported, as no evidence was found for an association between this factor and intention to repatriate ( $B=.07, p > .05$ ). This may indicate that our respondents are still caught between the novelty of career opportunities overseas (Tharenou, 2003) and a desire to transfer their knowledge back to their home country (Tung & Lazarova, 2006). The relationship may also be influenced by elements such as the personal tax system in Australia, which places a higher burden on individuals than in many other countries, and so may act as a deterrent to repatriation. Our fifth hypothesis, that *personal network push to Australia* would be positively associated with intention to repatriate, was not supported, as no evidence was found for an association between this factor and intention to repatriate ( $B=.16, p > .05$ ). Hypothesis 6, that *social context push to Australia* would be positively associated with intention to repatriate, could not be tested, as the factor was not strong enough to be included in the regression analysis.

The demographic characteristics provided interesting findings. Our hypotheses 7 to 11, with regard to age ( $B=.09, p > .05$ ), being male ( $B=-.01, p > .05$ ), being married ( $B=.18, p > .05$ ), having dependents ( $B=.01, p > .05$ ), and having post-graduate educational qualifications ( $B=-.04, p > .05$ ), were not supported. We found no evidence to support our final hypothesis that those working for a multinational enterprise would be more likely to intend to repatriate ( $B=.12, p > .05$ ).

Three demographic characteristics were, however, found to be strong predictors of intention to repatriate. Hypothesis 12, that university lecturers/researchers would be less likely than other professional groups to intend to repatriate, was supported ( $B=-.30, p < .01$ ). This is consistent with research that shows the higher education sector in Australia is under considerable stress (Gillespie et al., 2001). Hypothesis 13, that those in the United Kingdom would be more likely to intend to repatriate, was supported ( $B=.24, p < .05$ ). Hypothesis 14, that time away on overseas experience would be negatively associated with intention to repatriate, was also supported ( $B=-.56, p < .01$ ); this supports previous research on expatriates who have 'gone native' (Black & Gregersen, 1992), and was the strongest predictor of intention to repatriate.

## DISCUSSION

Using identity theory, we have investigated factors related to one's identity (or identities) that are predictors of intention to repatriate. Our findings show that the strongest predictors of intention to repatriate are: length of time already spent overseas, quality of life available in the home country, national identity (i.e., home country ethnicity and citizenship), profession, and expatriate location. These factors range across different levels (personal, interpersonal and national), supporting the argument that individuals have multiple identities operating at different levels (Pratt & Foreman, 2000; Kohonen, 2005), and those identities are relevant to one's decisions related to talent flows and international career moves.

Self- and company-initiated expatriates both use international experience as a means to develop careers. Much of the previous research in international human resource management has focused on the multinational employers' strategies to manage international talent and knowledge flows, and to develop global competencies in managers and professionals (Dickmann & Harris, 2005; Yan et al., 2002). However, on the basis of our findings, we suggest that, to maximize the potential gains of international work, it is crucial to improve our understanding of the factors that will play a role in

individual's career intentions and behaviors (Baruch et al., 2007; Kohonen, 2005). Our study has captured a much broader group than company-initiated expatriates; the assumptions that have been applied to repatriation of company-initiated expatriates may not be generalizable across the broader diaspora of knowledge workers. One example of this is the higher representation of women in our sample than has been typical in expatriate research to date (Harris, 2002).

As Kohonen (2005) has suggested, research on identity and international experience raises several challenging questions. Are those whose identities are less closely associated with their home country more suited to international work? Should national identity be considered in selection decisions for expatriation? Also, can identity be developed, altered or managed in ways that will influence one's decisions, and behavior, related to international work? Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) have pointed out that identity researchers have tended to assume fairly stable views of one's self. However, these authors argue that it is more fruitful to acknowledge, and indeed emphasize, the dynamic aspects and struggles inherent to the creation of one's sense of self and questions such as 'who am I?' Exploration of the processes of identity construction could be fruitful for developing understanding of career decisions related to global mobility and boundaryless careers.

Our research has focused on intention to repatriate; however, it must be recognized that expatriation/repatriation may not be mutually exclusive forms of work. New forms of international work, such as flexible assignments, international commuting and virtual assignments (Harris & Brewster, 2003) may mean that individuals pursue careers that enable them to move back-and-forth between their home country and overseas.

Research on the 'brain drain' has grown considerably in the past few years, yet there remain many unanswered questions. Our study contributes to the understanding of push/pull factors in several ways. First, with regard to quality of life, our findings suggest that the attractiveness of the home country will influence the salience and direction of this factor as a predictor of intention to repatriate (see also Carr et al., 2005).

Second, with regard to career, and as noted previously when commenting on the cohort's profile, this is a well qualified, valuable and highly skilled group of knowledge workers. From the literature, it would be expected that, these knowledge workers are likely to seek out employment opportunities that build on their employability and further their 'internally' structured careers (Arthur & Rousseau 1996; Dickmann & Harris, 2005; Hugo, 2004; Parker & Inkson, 1999; Sullivan, 1999). However, the lack of evidence of a relationship between the career factor and intention to repatriate may suggest a need to further explore this relationship. On one hand, much of the burgeoning literature on boundaryless careers has assumed that individuals will 'grow' their careers via international experience (Dickmann & Harris, 2005; Myers & Pringle, 2005), and many knowledge workers might be expected to remain overseas to enhance their careers. On the other hand, we argued that repatriation would be an important aspect of this career development, where the home country offers opportunities to transfer knowledge (Lazarova & Tarique, 2005) and to leverage one's international experience (Björkman & Fan, 2002; Tung & Lazarova, 2006). We note that our 'career' factor included some items that make Australia appear unattractive (e.g. salaries are lower and personal tax in Australia is higher than in many other countries). It is possible that, in the same way that knowledge workers view their overseas experience as a 'rite of passage' (Inkson et al., 1997), it is also becoming common to work overseas for a period of time in order to accumulate funds to support the quality of life to which they aspire. Knowledge workers can earn high salaries and pay lower taxes overseas than may be possible in Australia. This combination of variables may make working overseas, for some period of time, a critical success factor for current and future generations of knowledge workers.

Third, we hypothesized that the personal network factor would push individuals to Australia. However, as 39 percent of our respondents had been overseas for 6 years or more, they represent a group which is broader than the company-initiated expatriates on assignments of up to 5 years that have been the focus of much of the expatriate research to date (De Cieri et al., 2005). It is

likely that our respondents have formed new personal networks in their host countries, their partner's career may be tied to the host country (Moore, 2002), and these ties create a form of dual allegiance to both home and host countries (Black & Gregersen, 1992). Overall, the findings were mixed with regard to the push/pull factors; more investigation of these factors is needed to develop our understanding of talent flows and intention to repatriate.

We found that those in the United Kingdom and those who have been overseas for a shorter length of time are more likely to intend to repatriate. Consistent with New Zealand research (Carr et al., 2005), it may be that the least entrepreneurial expatriates are those most likely to repatriate; this presents a challenge for a society aiming to be a 'knowledge nation' (Considine et al., 2001). This may be further compounded by the finding that those working as academics or researchers are less likely than other professional groups to repatriate.

Our findings also indicate that many respondents intend to repatriate. Overall, the reasons for the decision to return home seem to be associated somewhat more with the need to be related to others, rather than achievement concerns. The 'push' home includes reference to national identity and quality of life. This is quite consistent with the family profile of this group, with 58% married and 36% overseas with dependants. Collectively the sample characteristics indicate that the respondents are young, well qualified, highly-skilled and quite a number of them have family responsibilities. The results of this study indicate some interesting work life balance issues for knowledge workers (Harris, 2005). It seems that, in line with this group's desire to fully realize their internal capital potential, they have made the decision to explore opportunities and experiences overseas. There are boundaries to this, however, for those who also seek to temper the need to achieve with the need to be related and affiliated with others. This tension between professional career progression and personal family lifestyle is an issue that has been dealt with in the work-family conflict literature. Our findings are consistent with Campbell Clark (2000) and Kasper, Meyer and Schmidt's (2005) arguments, for example, who reviewed prototypes of managers and reveal that it is rare to find a pure family person or an exclusively profession / career oriented person. As noted earlier, professionals may hold multiple identities. The findings of this study reflect the dynamic nature of work and family identities and, despite, the reported need for knowledge workers to explore self development and career progression at a point in time, the balance between work/ career and family may tip in favour of their repatriation to Australia. This is not to say that the returned traveller will experience a greater commitment to work-life balance in Australian organizations (see Pocock, 2005); it may be that repatriates will become disillusioned if their concept held of the home country is proven to be anachronistic or inaccurate. As previous research on repatriation has shown, repatriates may experience difficulties such as reverse culture shock on their return home (Baruch & Altman, 2002).

### **Limitations of the Study**

This research has provided an empirical investigation of the role of national identity in international talent flows. Although the research has investigated a number of possible individual variables, it has not provided a comprehensive review of the full set of variables that may influence an individual's career development. Hence, this study should be considered to be a further step in the understanding of the talent flows and global careers, rather than a comprehensive review of all possible explanatory factors. Of course, causal inferences concerning the relationship between the national identity, push/pull factors, demographic variables and intention to repatriate must be made with caution, particularly because the data are cross-sectional. The use of a longitudinal or experimental field design would help in future research to strengthen causal inferences. Also, we recommend that future research could explore this area in more depth, by using qualitative research with interviews to obtain rich data exploring individual's reasons for their career moves and their understanding of the influence of national identity. Future research should use multi-item measures to extend the current use of single item measures of citizenship and ethnic identity. Although we believe our single-item measures have face validity, we have no data on their reliability. In part, our rationale for using single-item measures was to keep the survey instrument relatively brief in order to minimize respondent load and maximize the response rate. Also,

Wanous, Reichers, and Hudy (1997: 247) have argued that single-item measures are acceptable provided the construct is “sufficiently narrow and unambiguous”, as we feel is the case for the measures in this study. Finally, another potential limitation is that the data were gathered on reports of intended behavior and could be subject to response biases (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). We recommend a longitudinal study to collect data not only on the individual’s intentions but also on their actual behavior with regard to career choices and repatriation decisions.

### **Implications of this Study**

Whether self- or company-initiated, international experience has important implications for individuals, employers and policy-makers. As Fullilove and Flutter (2004) have noted, the Australian diaspora includes some of the most highly employable citizens; moreover, Australian expatriates are highly valued participants in the global labour market.

For individuals, moving across geographical borders to pursue one’s career is a significant life change that involves considerable stress and investment by the individual. For self-initiated expatriates, the lack of company support networks may be substantial concerns, not only in expatriation but also in repatriation. Our study highlights that there are many expatriates not currently employed by multinational enterprises; this group represents a potentially valuable pool of recruits for Australian (and other) employers. This raises the question of whether these individuals are attracted to, and attractive to, employment in multinational enterprises. It also raises the question of whether multinational enterprises, and recruiting agencies, should invest in attracting and retaining this pool of recruits, particularly for those expatriates with a stronger Australian national identity. The findings of this study also have significant implications for policy development in areas such as immigration, education and global human resource management. They reinforce the importance of Drucker’s (1999) assertion that knowledge workers like to be both seen and treated as assets; this has important implications for employers and policy-makers seeking to encourage repatriation of knowledge workers.

### **CONCLUSION**

In the context of the growing interest in understanding international talent flow, this research explores the role of national identity, push/pull factors, and demographic characteristics in intention to repatriate to Australia. The typical profile of the knowledge worker is to be interested in the acquisition of knowledge and to tend to be nomadic, traveling overseas to explore their full potential and accumulate financial assets. It seems, however, that many Australians living overseas feel the attraction of national identity and quality of life that Australia offers. This tension between boundaryless careers, identities and life priorities may be comparable to a generalised experience for people working at the management level (Campbell Clark 2000; Kasper et al., 2005). For the cohort in the current study, however, the attainment of synergy, rather than conflict, between identities, may be complicated by the decision to either stay overseas or return home. These individuals with highly valued knowledge and life experience face important decisions and challenges; their decisions will have repercussions not only for their own careers but for the development of policy and employment practice.

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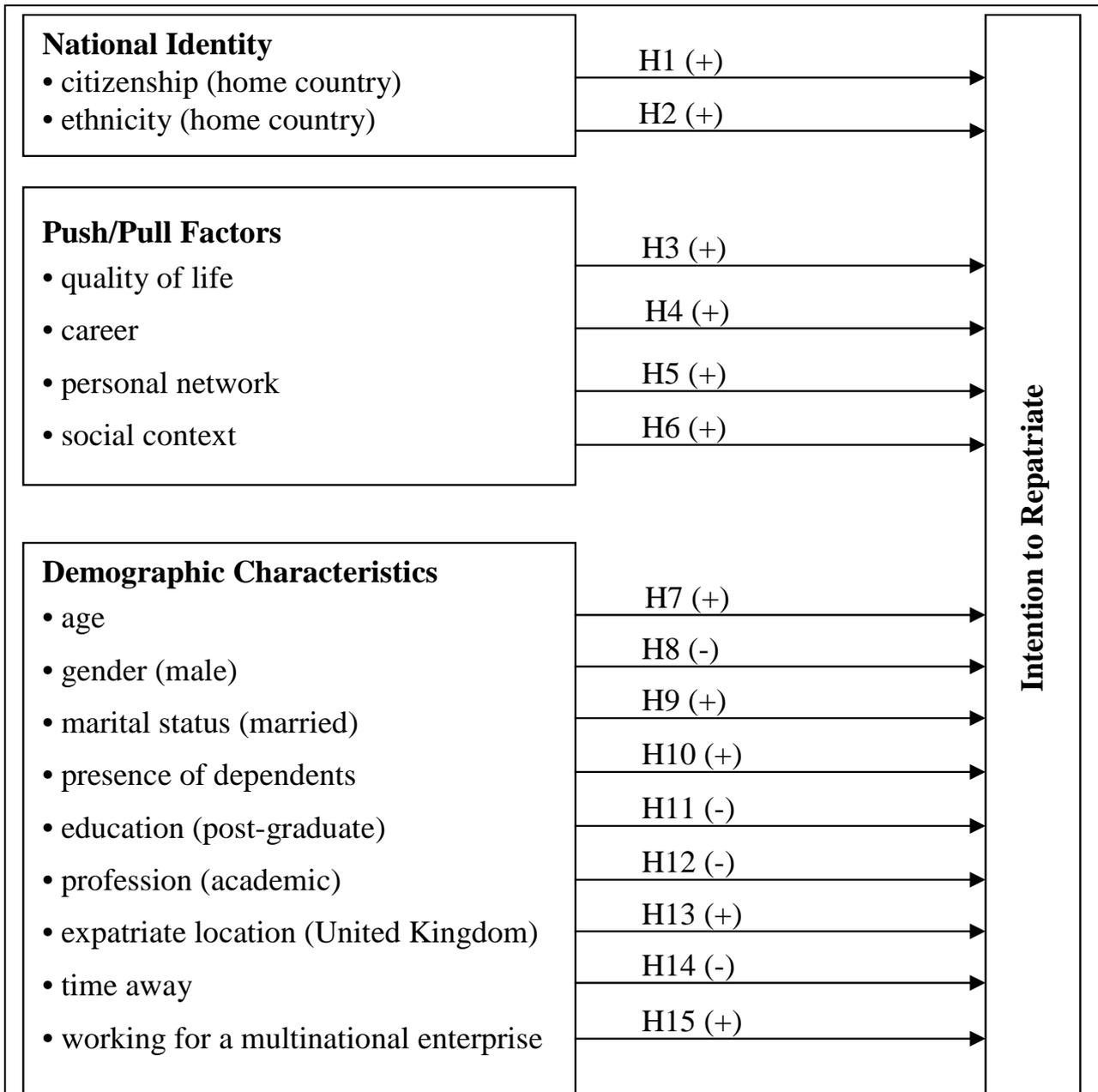
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**Figure 1: Predictors of Intention to Repatriate**



**Figure 1. Predictors of Intention to Repatriate**

*Note.* + or – indicate hypothesized direction of association

**Table 1: Sample Characteristics**

Age	20 – 29	24.5
	30 – 39	42.6
	40 – 49	17.1
	50 – 59	10.3
	60 and over	4.8
Gender	Male	63.9
	Female	36.1
Marital status	Married	58.6
	Single/Separated/Divorced	41.4
Dependents	Respondents without dependents	63.1
	Respondents with dependents	36.1
Highest educational qualification	Postgraduate (Doctorate/Master's degree/MBA/Post-graduate certificate or diploma)	44.3
	Bachelor's degree	50.4
	Other tertiary diplomas and certificates/Secondary	4.8
Profession	Accountants, Auditors and Corporate Treasury, Finance	21.3
	Miscellaneous Business and Information Professionals	15.3
	Managers, CEOs, Directors	14.6
	Building and Engineering Professionals	14.4
	University lecturers/researchers, post doctoral researchers	9.9
	Other <sup>a</sup>	24.5
Location of residence	UK	28.4
	North America	31.4
	Asia	20.8
	Europe	8.0
	Other <sup>b</sup>	11.2
Time away on current OE	Less than 6 months	5.9
	6 to less than 12 months	9.2
	1 – 5 years	45.8
	6 – 10 years	22.2
	11 – 15 years	7.6
	16 – 20 years	4.4
	Over 20 years	4.8
Employment	Working for a multinational enterprise	53.1
	Not working for a multinational enterprise	46.9

<sup>a</sup> 'Other' includes professionals in computing, natural and physical sciences, sales, marketing and advertising, health and social professionals, artist and related professionals, school teachers, government officials.

<sup>b</sup> 'Other' includes (Africa, Pacific, Russia, split between multiple locations, Dubai / Middle East, New Zealand)

Note. N = 563; Totals less than 100% indicate missing data

**Table 2: National Identity and Intention to Repatriate**

		%
Ethnicity	Australian	74.8
	European	6.6
	Asian	13.5
	Other	5.1
Citizenship	Mainly an Australian	40.5
	Australian and a citizen of another country/	49.9
	Australian and a citizen of the world	
	Mainly a citizen of another country/	9.6
	Mainly a citizen of the world/ Citizen of another country and a citizen of the world	
Intention to repatriate	I will be returning to Australia permanently	15.8
	Likely to return to Australia permanently	37.7
	Undecided whether to return to Australia permanently	27.9
	Likely to remain overseas	16.5
	Will remain overseas permanently	2.1

*Note.* N = 563.

**Table 3: Principal Components Analysis of Push/Pull Items**

<b>Factors and Items</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
Cultural opportunities	<b>.80</b>	-.01	.10	-.21
Arts opportunities	<b>.71</b>	-.16	-.11	-.04
Learning for life	<b>.62</b>	.11	-.11	.01
Having fun	<b>.57</b>	.00	.01	.15
Ethnic mix	<b>.57</b>	.03	.23	-.06
Challenge	<b>.51</b>	.30	-.05	-.07
Developing new relationships	<b>.48</b>	.04	.02	.08
Freedom to do what I like	<b>.40</b>	.17	-.07	.30
Salaries	-.05	<b>.77</b>	-.23	-.06
Career opportunities	.10	<b>.68</b>	-.16	-.05
Tax system	-.08	<b>.64</b>	.26	-.19
Business opportunities	.22	<b>.54</b>	.12	-.10
Cost of living	-.13	<b>.42</b>	.22	.27
Tall poppy syndrome	.16	.34	-.09	.12
Paying off student loan	.04	.18	-.07	.11
Parents/older relations	-.04	-.04	<b>.84</b>	-.11
Being close to relatives	-.06	-.07	<b>.82</b>	-.04
Friends	.01	.00	<b>.49</b>	.24
Sense of identity	.32	-.06	<b>.47</b>	.16
Bringing up children	-.05	-.13	.01	<b>.66</b>
Sports and recreation opportunities	.00	-.16	-.05	<b>.65</b>
Home ownership	-.23	.31	.03	<b>.50</b>
Safety and security	-.15	.09	.16	<b>.50</b>
Educational opportunities	.17	-.02	-.24	<b>.46</b>
Lifestyle	.25	-.06	.14	<b>.46</b>
Partner (long-term)	.16	.03	.12	.23
Cronbach alpha for factor	.78	.62	.68	.57
Sum of squared loadings	4.54	2.40	1.92	1.47
Cumulative percent of variance explained	17.46	26.69	34.06	39.71

*Note.*  $N = 563$ . Loadings included in final factor are shown in bold.

**Table 4: Results of Logistic Regression Analysis Predicting Intention to Repatriate**

Predictor	<i>B</i>	
Australian ethnicity	.22	*
Australian citizenship	.39	**
Quality of life factor	.48	**
Career factor	.07	
Personal network factor	.16	
Age	.09	
Male	-.01	
Married	.18	
Presence of dependents	.01	
Postgraduate educational level	-.04	
Profession: Managers, CEOs, directors	-.14	
Profession: Building and engineering professionals	.02	
Profession: Miscellaneous business and information professionals	-.03	
Profession: University lecturers/ researchers	-.30	**
Profession: Other	-.13	
Expatriate location in United Kingdom	.24	*
Time away on current overseas experience	-.56	**
Working for a MNE	.12	
(Constant)	.16	
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	.27	

*Note.*  $N = 555$  after listwise deletion.  $B$  = partially standardized logistic regression coefficient.

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .