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UNLEARNING AND RELEARNING EFFECT ON INDIVIDUALS IN THE EXPATRIATION: THE CASE OF BRAZILIAN MULTINATIONAL COMPANY

ABSTRACT

Expatriation of executives is a significant step in the internalization of the company and becomes necessary when the organization needs an active member to explore new opportunities in new markets. The result of the interaction between the headquarters and the subsidiaries during the expatriation is knowledge continuous flow. Furthermore, it is the expatriate who has the assignment to carry out the connection between the units by establishing this flow of communication and defining a common language that fosters the understanding and the flexibility between the business units. However, during the expatriation executives experience a new culture, and it forces them to abandon old knowledge and routines (unlearn) to establish new ones (relearn). The individual unlearning is here discussed as the abandonment of knowledge and routines of the home country and the acquisition of new one. Since the old knowledge and routines do not necessarily apply to the new country, and the expatriate needs to learn new ones and the individual relearning emerge.

Therefore, the present study aims to approach the unlearning and relearning with the expatriation and repatriation process experienced by executives of a Brazilian multinational company. With a qualitative approach and storytelling, we collected data from nine expatriated executives and triangulated with documents, memos, and reports developed by

the organization and the expatriated members. At this point, we used the direct observation to proceed the content analysis of data.

The main contribution of the study is subcategories emerged from unlearn and relearn for the individual perspective of the expatriation process, once knowledge is constantly renewed during unlearn/relearning changing structures of individuals and consequently the companies.

Keywords: Expatriation; Repatriation; Unlearning; Relearning; Dynamic Knowledge Creation