

Global Mobility: Exploring the Dynamics of Expatriation,
Repatriation, and Factors Influencing the Success of
International Assignments

Bachelor Thesis

submitted by

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List of Abbreviations

HR	Human resources
HRM	Human resource management
HQ	Headquarter
IHRM	International human resource management
MNE	Multinational enterprise
PCN	Parent country national

1 Introduction

This research is about the international assignments of employees to other countries. In the attempt to analyze the problems that can arise during such assignments the specific focus regards the role of human resource management. Furthermore, it assesses the factors that can lead to the long-term success of international assignments.

1.1 Context of globalization and the relevance of international assignments for companies

In the course of internationalization and globalization, an ever-increasing expansion can be identified as a result of which interdependencies between different world economic areas are emerging. To increase competitiveness, many companies are relocating their production and subsidiaries abroad (Neumair et al., 2012, pp. 3–8). Economic exchange is intensifying continuously, therefore more flexibility is needed in terms of global mobility in order to compete in the world market (Neumair et al., 2012, pp. 3–8).

The term internationalization is used when cross-border activities take place that do not affect the whole world; only when the whole world is affected should the term globalization be used. The term internationalization is therefore a more reliable term; however, globalization can be considered a special form of internationalization (Kutschker & Schmid, 2011, pp. 172–175).

As a result of this, to keep up with the challenges of internationalization, it is important to have employees that can act accordingly in different cultural areas. Expatriates are sent on international assignments to improve knowledge-transfer, control, coordination, and management development (Bartholomäus, 2018, p. 87).

The word expatriate is often understood as someone who has left their home country and now lives in another country. However, due to the many different opinions on the term in the literature relating to similar topics, there are often problems with its understanding (McNulty & Brewster, 2017, pp. 14–16). McNulty and Brewster 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.” (McNulty & Brewster, 2017, p. 32).

However, this research will continue to use the term expatriates to refer to parent country nationals (PCN) who are seconded from headquarters (HQ) to a foreign subsidiary (Bartholomäus, 2018, p. 87) and will therefore primarily be focused on these employees.

Despite the realization that international assignments are becoming increasingly important to be successful in the international market, difficulties arise from time to time. These are not always solely attributable to the expatriate but are equally the responsibility of the sending enterprise. Expatriates and expatriate management are easily influenced by many different indicators that can be decisive for the success of the assignment. These indicators can be both directly related to the work and external to it. International HR-managers need to be aware of and recognize this in order to successfully implement strategic business objectives abroad (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005, pp. 257–275).

1.2 Problem statement, research question and aim of the research

The reason for failures at an international level can often be traced back to personnel management. In many cases, the complexity and necessity of a global perspective are underestimated. Strategies that work at a national level are adopted internationally, leading to undesired outcomes for assignments. Multinational companies tend to overlook the fact that personnel matters are just as important as finance or marketing when it comes to international assignments abroad (Festing et al., 2011, pp. 18–19).

As previously mentioned, internationalization leads to an increase in the importance of international assignments. These are often a source of uncertainty for both the expatriate and the enterprise. Moreover, they require a particularly high level of HRM resources compared to the national level to be completed successfully (Festing et al., 2011, pp. 18–20).

Success is often defined as making a profit and earning more money than having expenses (Brewster & Cerdin, 2018, pp. 1–2) with respect to expatriate management this might be understood as not ending the assignment prematurely and completing the planned project. However, success and failure should not be seen as opposites of each other, but as interrelated. For

expatriates the workplace, family, personality, culture, and social life are often also related to the determination of the success or failure of an international assignment. The absence of a single failure does not immediately indicate success (Guttormsen et al., 2018, pp. 124–125).

Therefore, all these factors should be considered in the definition of success, including the organizational perspective and the individual perspective (Canhilal et al., 2015, pp. 380–391).

In many cases, solutions are examined exclusively at individual levels after the failure of an international assignment. Views at the expatriate level and at the subsidiary level can be completely contradictory, as they focus on fundamentally different aspects. Therefore, this should be considered at a corporate level to ensure a suitable process for further international assignments (Connelly et al., 2007, pp. 564–578).

Based on this, this research aims to explore the complex issues faced by expatriates, understanding the complex dynamics associated with expatriation, repatriation and the numerous variables that impact expatriate success. The objective is to understand how individual personality traits, family dynamics, and organizational support interact to facilitate a successful adjustment both during the expatriate assignment and upon return.

During this research, the following research question should be answered:

What are the challenges faced by expatriate employees and factors for the long-term success of international assignments in the context of the role of human resource management (HRM)?

By addressing these complex interrelations, the research aims to make an important contribution to international human resource management (IHRM) by providing useful insights for companies, HR managers, expatriates, potential expatriates, and HR investment decision-makers. It also aims to identify effective ways of promoting the success of international assignments.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is divided into five chapters, with the introduction in chapter one immediately followed by a review of the theoretical framework of effective expatriate management in chapter two.

Introduction

In the second chapter, the underlying trends of IHRM, the significance of IHRM, general concepts and the current state of research are examined. The following section of this chapter will break down the problems associated with expatriation, the preparation process, family matters, language and cultural barriers and the reintegration process. This is done to create a theoretical foundation before moving on to the main body of the work.

The main part of the thesis, which is intended to provide essential statements with sustainable added value, is chapter three. In the third chapter, the methodology, which in this study was a qualitative empirical study through expert interviews, is examined in more detail, as well as the creation of the interview guidelines and the selection of the experts. The analysis of the interviews is also elucidated.

The interviews are then presented, compared, and placed in the context of theoretical knowledge. All interviews were conducted between March and April 2024 and therefore only represent a snapshot in time.

In the fourth chapter the evaluation of the results in the context of the research question is presented and success factors are determined. This is followed by a critical reflection of the methodology used and the results.

Concluding the research, the fifth chapter summarizes the most important findings and possible recommendations for action for companies and the field of IHRM and therefore has the greatest added value. A brief outlook for future research is then provided.



Figure 1: Structure of the thesis

Source: own visualization

2 Theoretical framework of effective expatriate management for multinational enterprises

This chapter explores the theoretical foundations of IHRM in relation to international assignments in more detail and additionally discusses some of the components of the process in relation to possible challenges that might occur during the process of expatriation.

2.1 Current trends and developments in international human resource management

International working has stretched throughout the globe and across national borders with positive effects on organizational structures such as being able to act in different national markets (Dickmann et al., 2016, pp. 4–5).

The economy, technology, and society have a major influence on the way businesses operate nowadays. The range of work, business processes and demands are constantly changing and therefore companies must learn to deal with them to continue to meet market requirements (Gesing & Weber, 2017, p. 1).

Sparrow, Brewster and Dickmann identify compelling forces such as competitiveness, demographics, economy, efficiency, flexibility, and international quality as an influence on IHRM and as decisive factors for purely national HRM. With the advance of industrialization, multi-level perspectives are becoming increasingly important. This should help to simplify inequalities, diversity, and complexity in times of transformation. The multi-level perspective model is based on socio-technical niches, socio-technical regimes, and socio-technical landscapes. Socio-technical niches refer to individuals and smaller groups with alternative approaches and take place at the micro-level (Sparrow et al., 2016, pp. 420–431). Socio-technical regimes relate to institutional structures and take place at the mezzo-level. Socio-technical landscapes are difficult to influence, can be both positive and negative, take place at the macro-level and are often referred to as megatrends (Sparrow et al., 2016, pp. 420–431).

Macro-level changes and developments in terms of production, technology, processes, digitalization, and virtualization of business strategies are shaping

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IHRM. All these factors have a major impact on international work, international mobility, and international assignments and must be considered in IHRM in relation to new global situations (Sparrow et al., 2016, pp. 420–431).

As megatrends form the foundation for transformation processes at other levels, these require further examination. The DGPF (2015) -the German Society for Human Resources Management -, regularly conducts a study on megatrends and examines their significance for human resources management.

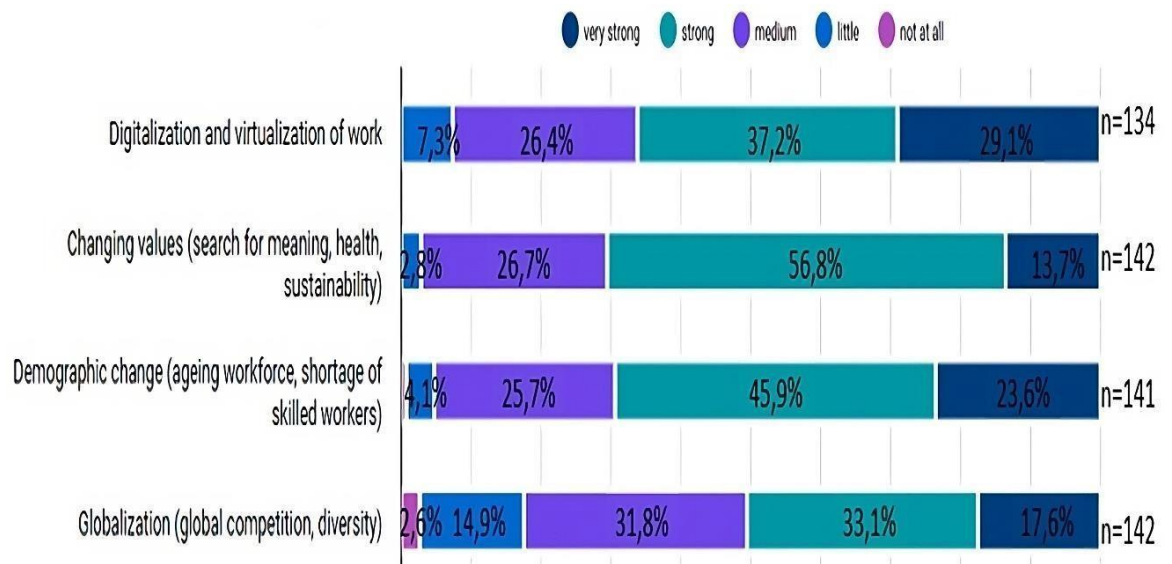


Figure 2: Megatrends and the extent of their impact on HR management

Source: own visualization based on DGFP-study: Megatrends 2015

The megatrends include the digitalization and virtualization of work, changing values, demographic change, globalization, and scarce resources. The respondents' assessment of the influence of digitalization and globalization on human resources management has increased compared to the survey conducted in 2013. The assessment of the influence of globalization dropped from 2011 to 2013 but exceeded the level of the first survey in 2015. Therefore, globalization is to be understood as an important trend even though it did rank fourth in the survey (Beyer, 2015). According to the survey, companies are taking various approaches to respond to the globalization megatrend, with the five most common being: international standardization of HR processes, employer branding, international recruitment, intercultural trainings, and expatriate management. Of the 142 respondents, 48.3% considered expatriate

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management to be a suitable solution for keeping pace with globalization and therefore ranked first in the survey (Beyer, 2015).

2.2 Significance of human resource management in international assignments

In the age of internationalization or globalization, companies are increasingly under pressure to remain competitive, not only in the national market but also globally. IHRM plays a significant role here, as strong responsiveness must be maintained in all markets (Bornay-Barrachina, 2019, p. 174).

As IHRM is involved in all parts that come along with sending an expatriate on an international assignment, it is important that all processes are well monitored and correctly performed (Bornay-Barrachina, 2019, p. 175).

IHRM can be classified by literature into three main approaches. The first approach is cross-cultural management, in which the values and beliefs of the nations must be clear to be able to act accordingly. The second approach is comparative human resource management, where once more differences between nations are looked at, but in terms of labor markets, rights, and trade areas. The last approach is IHRM, which reflects how multinational enterprises (MNEs) build global HR strategies and how international workers (expatriates) are managed (Festing et al., 2013, pp. 161–162).

Geert Hofstede has identified four dimensions of national cultures based on which diversities can be defined. These dimensions are (Hofstede, 1980, pp. 476 ff.):

1. Power distance: This refers to the extent to which countries accept that power is not shared equally within organizations and institutions and additionally refers to how people want to be managed.
2. Individualism versus collectivism: Individualism refers to people thinking more about themselves than others, whereas collectivism is about conforming to a group.
3. Masculinity versus femininity: Masculinity refers to how important things such as material goods, assertiveness and thinking about oneself are to a society, whereas within femininity, equality and nurturing roles are important.

4. Uncertainty avoidance: This refers to how much avoidance of risk is desired and how much structure and rules are put in place to achieve this.

These can strongly influence international assignments depending on how far apart the home country and host country are on the scale. Here, too, the importance of proper IHRM for international assignments becomes evident. Generally, it is important to consider a correctly exercised IHRM as at least partly decisive for the outcome of an international assignment.

2.3 Concepts of expatriate management

An international assignment of an expatriate involves many processes, that do not end with the transfer of the expatriate. Expatriate management includes many individual processes such as the selection of expatriates, the transfer in general, as well as actions during and after the international assignment. These must be designed appropriately in terms of content (Scullion & Brewster, 2001, pp. 353–359).

According to the DGFP (2013) - German Association for Human Resources Management - the planning phase is the basis for approving or disapproving the international assignment. A contract offer must be prepared, reintegration must be planned, employees must be carefully selected, and their families must be informed about the process, among many other requirements. (DGFP e.V., 2013, pp. 107–109).

The process does not begin with the selection of the expatriate, but already during the recruitment. This is organized internally, as international assignments refer to employees being sent from the HQ to foreign branches. Companies recruit employees internally who already possess specific knowledge about the company's structures and products. This is advantageous as they already have prior knowledge and experience as a result of having worked for the company in the past. Human resource managers and supervisors already know the employee and have more background information, which makes it easier to find the right candidate and minimize recruitment errors (Kühlmann, 2017, p. 41).

According to Harris and Brewster (1999), a distinction is made in the selection process between formal and informal, and between open and closed selection systems. In an informal system, usually neither the evaluation basis nor

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selection criteria are defined: instead, reference is made to known personality traits. In contrast, in formal systems, the positions are at least advertised internally, criteria are defined, and then a selection is made (Harris & Brewster, 1999, pp. 493–494).

Decisions may result from the following sources:

Sources for checking foreign suitability	
Source	References
Curriculum vitae	Experience abroad (education, profession, private life)
Performance assessment	Adaptability, dealing with unknown situations, ability to work in teams
Internal personal planning	Development potential, mobility
Interview	Knowledge of cultural differences and the host country, attitude towards it
Test, Assessment center	Intercultural skills, willingness to adapt, language skills

Table 1: Sources for checking foreign suitability

Source: Based on DGFP e.V. *Expat-Management 2013*, p. 114

If the system is open, it is advertised publicly, and applicants undergo interviews and assessments after applying. In a closed system, candidates are nominated internally (Harris & Brewster, 1999, pp. 493–494).

The main objectives of the selection phase are to find suitable and competent candidates, to assign candidates to the right role and to minimize the risk of failure (Waxin & Brewster, 2020, pp. 35–37).

According to the DGFP (2013), from this point onwards, the partner should be involved so that a final decision can be made, as not only the employee but often the whole family is expatriated. At this stage, it also makes sense to suggest conversations with returnees and look-and-see trips to simplify the decision. The next step is preparation, which can be both professional and personal. During the professional preparation, the expatriate is assigned a mentor in the home country with whom deficits are identified and compensated for through training. Parts of the personal preparation are language training, intercultural training, tax advice, safety precautions, know-how protection and medical checks (DGFP e.V., 2013, pp. 123–124).

Those components are elaborated by the DGFP (2013) as in the following: The type of language training depends on the individual case, and it is

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important to bear in mind that not only the work language is crucial, but also the national language for the expatriate to be able to communicate outside of work. For intercultural training the employer must inform the expatriate about differences, between the home country and the host country, with regards to politics, culture, and religion in the host country. In particular, habits and customs should be taught so that employees and potentially their families can prepare themselves. The aim is to ensure that differences can be recognized and dealt with. Medical checks are based on what is important for the host country, tax advisory shall be paid for by the enterprises and know-how protection establishes that not all knowledge should be shared within the new working place (DGFP e.V., 2013, pp. 124–129).

Expatriate support is important at every stage of the assignment. In the host country, superiors, local supervisors, and the HR department should be accessible to help with matters such as finding accommodation, insurance, doctors and much more. However, the chosen mentor and expat management in the home country should also remain points of contact. The last task of expatriate management is reintegration when the expatriate repatriates. Realistic career planning after return is relevant and contractual return guarantees are important for security. Ultimately, reintegration must also be addressed by management and the expatriate (DGFP e.V., 2013, pp. 153–154).

2.4 Existing research gaps and insights in expatriate management

As in most fields, some areas of expatriate management are explored and scrutinized more often than others. Expatriate adjustment is the most researched topic including cultural adjustment and speaking the local language. In addition, expatriates in the context of MNEs and expatriates' careers have been highly researched (Andersen, 2021, pp. 18–21).

The term expatriate has been the subject of much debate and inquiry in academic research, with questions arising about its precise definition. The concepts of the "expatriate" and the "business expatriate" have been separated from each other (McNulty & Brewster, 2017, pp. 1–50).

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Several authors, such as Takeuchi (2010), have also explored the concepts of spouse, family, and expatriate failure in the context of repatriation (Takeuchi, 2010, pp. 1040–1064).

Based on research by Andersen (2021) about certain keywords and their connection to one another, allowing us to better understand expatriate literature, these topics are barely connected to how enterprises manage expatriates in the process. Moreover, keywords like recruitment and selection, job satisfaction and cross-cultural training have no connection to them at all (Andersen, 2021, p. 24).

In consideration of these findings, there appears to be a research gap in the connection between the effects of expatriation on the family and its repercussions in terms of how companies can face these challenges. It is further apparent that the various processes of expatriation regarding the success of international assignments have not been examined in detail in the literature, or only on an ad-hoc basis. All these factors lead to a need to further research these topics to be able to provide important approaches for companies on how these processes are linked as challenges arise. Moreover, how they can be solved in a sustainable way and lead to the success of international assignments.

2.5 Challenges during assignment and repatriation

During an international assignment, many small-step processes are carried out that ultimately lead to expatriation and repatriation. The research gaps and insights show that expatriate failure is an increasing challenge for companies. Therefore, in the next step a closer examination will be conducted of possible challenges in the individual parts to elaborate on possible solutions.

2.5.1 Challenge 1: Preparation and selection

Challenges can occur before the international assignment itself begins. Even at the recruitment stage, it is difficult to find the ideal candidate. Many companies search heavily based on domestic criteria and pay little attention to personal skills and cultural fit. An obvious challenge is to create a suitable qualification profile for the right position with both professional and personal framework conditions for suitability (Kühlmann, 2004, p. 35). In addition, if this recruitment takes place internally, attention should not only be paid to

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company knowledge, as this might prevent that it is not a best fit and the international assignment fails (Kühlmann, 2004, p. 41).

Choosing the right expatriates is the first important step in expatriate management. If a company does not act appropriately in this context, another challenge could arise, the expatriate could be the wrong candidate and thus not only cause deliberate costs such as relocation expenses but also ruin relationships within the host country with customers and the government (Caligiuri & Colakoglu, 2007, p. 398). During the selection process, even for expatriate positions most companies do not make use of intercultural assessment centers or interviews that focus on broader knowledge than just business-related knowledge. Many companies take this challenge because they are convinced that the pool of people who would be interested is so small that they cannot be more selective (Kühlmann, 2004, pp. 44 ff.; Scherm, 1999, pp. 186 ff.).

Another challenge is that enterprises and expatriate management tend to think in a monotone way. If there is no person who is willing to go abroad for an international assignment, but there is a need for one, a company might just make the decision by themselves and put an ultimatum on the employee. Moreover, it might be expected that if someone does an international assignment once, they will be able to go anytime again, since they are expected to be equivalent, even though they might be sent to completely different countries (Bittner & Reisch, 1994, pp. 17 ff.). This mindset of an enterprise might lead to even bigger challenges and problems during the international assignment since it already started with an unwanted and unsatisfactory experience for the employee (Bittner & Reisch, 1994, pp. 17 ff.).

During the preparation phase, there are a few more challenges that can be traced back to the fact that expatriate management and assignment programs are often outsourced because they require an excessive amount of time. In addition, costs are saved because the payment associated with the expatriate's assignment depends on their internal position within the company. This means that the international assignment can cost the expatriate dearly in the long run (GMAC, 2011, pp. 11–16).

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Language courses are often not provided, as English is usually assumed to be a general business language. This may work for the expatriate himself, as he can establish contacts within the new office, but not for his family, if traveling with them. Family-related challenges are explained in more detail below (Bittner & Reisch, 1994, pp. 125 ff.).

The situation is similar when it comes to cultural training or information events, given that there is usually insufficient preparation time, and business culture is expected to be uniform worldwide. Furthermore, it is sometimes expected that the expatriate adapts well and quickly on their own. The logical consequences of these considerations are usually not considered from the enterprise perspective and are subsequently blamed on the expatriate (Kühlmann, 2004, pp. 69 ff.).

2.5.2 Challenge 2: Personality and adaptation

Before sending an expatriate, it is important to understand that it is not only the external influences that are important for the success of an international assignment. The personality of a person contributes a lot to whether adaptation in the host country can be achieved. Therefore, a challenge for the success of an international assignment is to understand why some individuals are more effective in adapting to a new environment and situation than others might be (Ang et al., 2006, p. 101).

According to Ang et al. (2006), there are personality traits that can be indicators of whether an expatriate can adapt accordingly and fulfill the requirements that such international assignments entail. In particular, the Big Five personality characteristics, such as emotional stability, consciousness, agreeableness, extraversion, and openness to experience, provide a basis for this (Ang et al., 2006, pp. 102–103). In addition, these also have a positive influence on career adaptation (Jiang, 2017, p. 93).

The Big Five should be properly understood to be certain prior to the international assignment, requiring an evaluation as to whether an expatriate has these personality traits or not. Selected examples for each personality trait to be considered include: (1) Extraversion: describing a person who is very active, ambitious, social, and assertive, (2) Agreeableness: describing a person who is generally friendly, cooperative and has a calm internal personality, (3)

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Consciousness: describing a person who is organized, persistent and dependable and is also focused on accomplishing specific goals, (4) Emotional stability: describing a person who is not easily distracted and can control themselves and lastly (5) Openness to experience: refers to the fact that the expatriate should be sensitive to the overall situation, intellectually and imaginatively (Ang et al., 2006, p. 103).

Cultural intelligence, as argued by Ang et al. (2006), is also an important part that an expatriate should demonstrate. This refers to the ability to adapt effectively to different cultural contexts and situations and to deal with them appropriately. Cultural intelligence is interrelated with the Big Five because they are partially interrelated or require each other to function fully (Ang et al., 2006, pp. 100–120).

These personality traits of an expatriate have a strong impact on the expatriate's social capital and cross-cultural adjustment (Qomariyah et al., 2022, pp. 8–9).

Resulting from this, it becomes apparent as to why certain expatriates prove to be more effective in an international assignment than others. Ultimately, the challenge is to recognize personality traits and decide accordingly in advance to ensure optimal adaptation to the host country and the new environment.

2.5.3 Challenge 3: Family and expatriation

In most cases, the consequences of a stay abroad are very different for the expatriate and, by comparison, for his or her family. It often means more professional opportunities and experience for the expatriate, while the family gives up everything, including their partner's job, school, place, and apprenticeship. Therefore, there are often strong interactions and challenges that affect the expatriate and their performance (Fish & Wood, 1997, pp. 447–450).

If an expatriate is to be seconded, it is important that their family, if present and traveling with them, is also strongly considered as part of the organization of foreign assignments. It is important to know from the beginning whether the family will be sent along, as the family situation is a frequent reason for rejection. Adaptation problems in the family lead to difficulties during the

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assignment and might even be the reason for the premature end of the assignment (Kühlmann, 2004, p. 12).

Integration problems and resistance from the family are challenges that often arise if the family has not been taken care of well enough in advance. This is one of the biggest challenges regarding the family and expatriation, because negotiations about it usually end with a discontinuation (Bittner & Reisch, 1994, pp. 137 ff.).

Accordingly, it is also very important to organize the experience for the expatriate's partner as well as possible in advance. In theory, the same level of support that the expatriate receives should also be given to the partner. In practice, however, the partner is usually neither supported by the expatriate's employer nor are the costs covered. It is quite clear how difficult it can be for the partner to obtain a work permit on their own and then find a suitable job (Bittner & Reisch, 1994, pp. 137 ff.). All this shows that in most cases, partners who were previously settled in life start over without adequate support to be able to assist their partner's expatriation. This naturally results in issues within the family that complicate the whole process of expatriation. These challenges are particularly pronounced in countries where, for example, a female partner is not allowed to work because it is not socially recognized and must cope with an economic dependency (Bittner & Reisch, 1994, pp. 138 ff.).

Only in exceptional cases is the family included when it comes to preparations for the international assignment. Matters such as language training and cultural training do not consider the importance of the family being able to adapt. In many cases, it is more important that the family is adapted than the expatriate themselves, as they can build up contacts within the company if the business language is English (GMAC, 2011, p. 13). However, partners and children must be able to deal with and live in the national culture and language. If this is not openly communicated and prepared for, it will lead to challenges during the international assignment.

According to Bittner and Reisch (1994), another big challenge is that children from the age of four/five are quite receptive and realize a culture shock, which means that they should also be included in the preparation. Children also tend to compulsively oppose such a situation if it has not been openly

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communicated which companies need to be aware of as well. The next challenge is that expatriates with children want a decent school with a good reputation, which should be part of the expatriate program. However, most companies only pay proportionately and only for schools. As soon as children of university age are involved, companies withdraw and delegate this task to the expatriates. This can lead to a premature return, stressed expatriates or even a rejection of the international assignment (Bittner & Reisch, 1994, pp. 138 ff.).

The expatriate's family appears to be a strong influencing factor during the international assignment. In particular, cultural adaptation seems to be influenced by the family (Kittler et al., 2006, p. 121).

2.5.4 Challenge 4: Language and culture barriers

Cross-cultural interactions bring people with different views and ways of thinking together. Especially for an expatriate who wants to feel comfortable in their new environment and in the host country, it is important to be aware of the other culture. Expatriates who are not familiar with the cultural norms, values and patterns have a hard time finding their way in a new country which can even lead to the failure of the international assignment (Webb & Wright, 1996, p. 40).

According to Oberg (1960), "culture shock" occurs when someone is confronted with cultural differences in a new environment that are significantly different from what they are used to in their original environment. This term can be divided into four parts: honeymoon, crisis, recovery, and adjustment (Daruwalla, 2016, p. 215; as cited in Oberg, 1960). The crisis phase especially influences the international assignment and can lead to challenges for the expatriate.

As stated by Naeem et al. (2015), moving to another country for professional reasons can quickly cause a lot of stress, as the entire environment and the social norms are different. Applying one's own and known norms in the process usually results in a further shift away from adapting to the new environment. To overcome this challenge, cross-cultural training should be offered before departure. Those trainings are mainly meant to raise awareness about the importance of culture and the effort that needs to be put in by the expatriate.

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This should lead to an awareness of what is expected and needed. A lack of such training can strongly influence the international assignment in a negative way. (Naeem et al., 2015, p. 251).

Companies that want to operate internationally by successfully sending expatriates on international assignments must provide the necessary preparation options such as the above-mentioned cross-cultural trainings (Haile & White, 2019, p. 33).

According to research by Webb and Wright (1996), successfully adapting to a new culture and a new environment requires more than just the local language. Communication is based not only on proficiency in a language but also on knowing that not every culture has the same understanding of the same expression. In light of all these considerations, not knowing the language of the host country is an additional challenge for the success of the international assignment. On the one hand, mastering the foreign language is not crucial for success, it can influence the adjustment. On the other hand, knowing or learning the local language will not guarantee success, but it will not prevent it either. After all, not being able to communicate in the language or at least be able to use it on a day-to-day level can make it challenging to do one's best since it causes difficulties. In addition, complications with customers or colleagues can occur as it may not be possible to build or develop a closer connection. Accordingly, language courses for the respective language should be offered in advance or even be compulsory (Webb & Wright, 1996, pp. 40–41).

2.5.5 Challenge 5: Reintegration and repatriation

Repatriates who have completed an international assignment are very valuable for MNEs as they have information about cultural contexts, the foreign market, and its customers (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001, p. 389). Nevertheless, there are some challenges regarding repatriation and reintegration into the HQ.

The first challenge that occurs to organizations is to prevent repatriates from leaving since they have valuable knowledge and were invested in as human capital. Moreover, repatriates tend to take positions in competing firms afterwards (Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001, p. 390).

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According to Black et al. (1992), 25% of repatriates leave their company within the first year after repatriation. One challenge that arises with repatriation and that may be a reason for this is that the process of repatriation is expected to be easy because repatriates are returning home. It is also assumed that the step of repatriation can hardly be more difficult than expatriation and is therefore often neglected since the significance of repatriate adjustment is not always considered. (Black et al., 1992, p. 738).

There are many factors that can become challenges in the process of repatriation, including the misaligned job role, fewer promotion opportunities, too little support in the process, no support in career planning and loss of status (Adler, 1981, pp. 341–356; Black et al., 1992, pp. 737–760).

Another challenge with repatriation is the situation in the company when the repatriate is ready to return to their home country. It often seems that an international assignment improves the career prospects, but repatriates often end up in positions they do not want to be in, which may be perceived as worse than the original one, as nothing else is available at the time of return (Adler, 1981, pp. 341–344). This often leads to a failed reintegration and discourages other employees from taking up such an international assignment in the future since they rely on the negative emotions and feedback of repatriates. (Kraimer et al., 2012, p. 399).

The lack of support measures is another major challenge in the process of reintegration. Many repatriation problems seem to be solvable or perceived as less severe when support comes from the organization. If repatriates have received assistance in the situation, they also tend to stay longer in the organization after repatriation. However, it is also important to note that the perception of the repatriate is relatively subjective, and it is more about how these actions are perceived and not just whether they exist (Feldman & Tompson, 1993, pp. 507–529).

When expatriates embark on their expatriate assignment, they encounter a sense-making effect in which they must question themselves, their identity, and their mindset to function and operate in the new environment. After a while, when a certain international identity is created in them and they repatriate, there is a similar effect. Even after returning to a familiar environment, they

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must readjust and adapt their identity to function properly. Parts of this readjustment process are acclimatization with the environment, personal finances and getting used to the corporate structure again (Adler, 1981, pp. 344–350). This process is also described as a "reverse culture shock" (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963, pp. 41–46). This is often a major challenge in the repatriation process, which could possibly be simplified and improved with support from the organization.

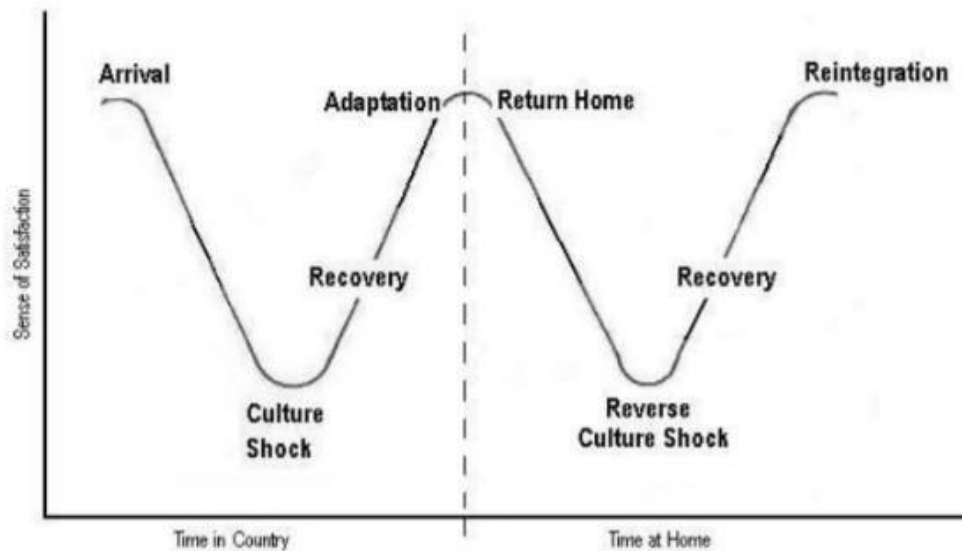


Figure 3: The W-curve: cultural adjustment

Source: Based on Gullahorn & Gullahorn 1963

3 Empirical investigation of success factors and challenges from expatriates' point of view

The empirical investigation is examined in depth in the following chapter. To accomplish that, the procedure for preparing, conducting, and evaluating the expert interviews will be described. Expert interviews were chosen to enable the research question to be evaluated and answered.

Beforehand, however, the literature research procedure should be briefly described to better understand how it was conducted.

3.1 Selection and justification of research methods

To answer the research question raised at the beginning of this paper, an extensive evaluation of the literature is required. The literature research was largely based on current research and subject specialized literature as well as subject specialized articles from acknowledged publication journals. Certain older literature that plays a role in many current research projects was also included. A complete list of literature in both English and German was used and evaluated in this research and can be found in the references at the end of this paper.

The literature review should be seen as the foundation for answering the research question and providing the starting point for the rest of the research.

In preparation for the literature review, key terms were defined in advance to gain a better overview of the research field and existing literature. The key terms or main search terms are expatriate, expatriate management, international assignments, assignment success, expatriate failure, repatriation. During the research, further subordinate terms were added that emerged from the literature.

Both library databases and internet databases - mostly WisoNet, Google Scholar, SAGE Publications and ResearchGate - were used to find suitable and relevant literature. One of the most important sources in this area of research are HR journals such as the Journal of Human Resource Management.

Citavi was used for the citation to ensure that all used and relevant sources could be found correctly in the reference list.

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The interpretation and evaluation of the literature are carried out at the author's own assessment in relation to the research question to be able to form a theoretical framework for providing an answer. This has resulted in the use of both recommendation structures and descriptive sections, depending on the specific bullet points that they refer to.

The theoretical part is followed by the empirical investigation, whereby a decision is made in advance between a qualitative and quantitative method. In a quantitative research method, the results are expressed in figures and can then be correlated using statistical procedures. Surveys are an example of this.

In contrast, qualitative research methods have no relation to statistical evaluation methods. Qualitative research methods must be processed before they can be used, for example by transcribing an interview. The aim is to understand complex relationships and establish connections between different aspects. This paper is based on a qualitative research method with expert interviews and therefore a closer look will be taken at the procedures that come with it.

In addition, it should be noted in advance that the expert interviews are transcribed non-verbatim, but the intention is not to take anything away from what was said, but rather to improve readability and comprehensibility as no stuttering, coughing or filler words are included. Before the interviews were conducted, a coding guideline was developed, and coding was used for the evaluation. Coding allows key pieces of content to be presented and related to each other.

3.1.1 Expert selection

To be able to carry out the selected qualitative research method of expert interviews, it was important in the first step to identify the qualifications the interviewee needs to fulfill to be considered an expert in relation to the research question.

For this research, it was determined that a person is an expert if they meet the definition of an expatriate. This means that they have been seconded by their company's HQ to a foreign subsidiary in another country (Bartholomäus, 2018, p. 87).

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Additionally, it is important that the experts were willing to share their personal views on the process and information on certain measures and factors relating to expatriation and repatriation within the company they conducted the international assignment for.

As part of this empirical investigation, six expatriates who had completed an international assignment within the last ten years were interviewed.

No persons were interviewed who exclusively work in human resources management or who are exclusively responsible for the organization of such an international assignment. As the focus of this research should be on the problems that expatriates experience to be able to identify success factors, only employees satisfying the parameters of the above-given definition have been chosen. This allows to determine factors that expatriates themselves perceive as helpful in the completion of an international assignment and upon repatriation to their home country and organization,

When selecting the expatriates, it was not specified from which country or to which country the expatriates must have been sent to obtain simplicity to be able to get insights into the most important and decisive factors that are not country specific.

Nonetheless, out of six expatriates, four were sent on their international assignment from a HQ in Germany to other countries, and only two were sent from another country on their international assignment.

Various options were used to find and contact suitable expatriates. Firstly, various MNEs were contacted via the HR department to inquire whether they offer expatriate programs and whether there were any expatriates interested in a corresponding interview. This option was unsuccessful, and no expatriates could be generated for interviews. The second option was to contact expatriates from different countries via expatriate groups on Facebook. Four out of six expatriates who were suitable for the interview were found. The third and final option was to share a post on LinkedIn and ask for distribution. Through this option, two more suitable expatriates who were interested in an interview were found.

Contact was maintained via WhatsApp and e-mail until the interview was conducted.

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As determined by a consent form for the interviews, none of the expatriates or sending companies will be named in this paper.

3.1.2 Interview guide development

In the following, the individual questions of the interview are analyzed in more detail and the corresponding coding is explained.

The questions were designed to answer the research question and achieve the aim of the research. Moreover, if necessary, provide additional important insights into the topic.

A closer look at the individual questions and the coding is intended to demonstrate why the questions were asked (needed to be asked) and what expectations were based on the interviewees' answers.

The interview guide is overall composed of 15 questions. In detail, it consists of a short introductory question, questions that were divided into blocks to clarify which area of challenges they refer to (between two to four questions per block) and a summarizing final question.

The introductory question is:

- Could you please briefly introduce yourself and the nature of your international assignment(s) to get a little context before focusing on the challenges and possible success factors?

This question is designed to facilitate a seamless interview start. On the one hand, it should allow the interviewer to obtain information on the person themselves, and on the other hand, it should also give a little context about the kind of international assignment that the interviewee went through. Moreover, it leaves the option open to redirect the interviewee to the international assignment that is most interesting for the research if they have done more than one.

In the first block, the questions refer to challenge one: preparation and selection, and include the following questions:

- How has the selection process for employees for international assignments evolved in your organization?
- Can you provide insights into specific measures to prepare employees for international assignments?

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- Which metrics in the preparation and selection process motivated you and had a positive impact on the implementation and completion of your international assignment? What had the opposite effect?

These questions aim to identify difficulties in connection with the preparation process and the selection of employees for an international assignment. Additionally, insights on how companies handled those processes and what kind of attitude the employees had towards them.

To be able to analyze the answers after the interview the coding rule for these questions was to code all statements that relate to the preparation process and the selection of employees for an international assignment. In addition, the coding rule states special attention to challenges and what they personally found to be helpful.

In the second block, the questions refer to challenge two: personality and adaptation, and are asked as follows:

- Which personal characteristics do you consider to be crucial for successfully adapting to a new work environment?
- To what extent do you consider personal characteristics such as flexibility and openness to be crucial?
- What support mechanisms did your company or companies use to promote the adaptability of their employees during international assignments?
- What could be personal characteristics that make an international assignment difficult and how do you think they could be overcome?

The second block of questions should identify the challenges related to the employee's personality traits and their adaptability to a new cultural and professional environment. It should not only point out a company's perspective on this topic but moreover, their own opinion with respect to the topic.

All information related to personal characteristics and the employee's ability to adapt to a new environment should be coded. Special attention needs to be paid to which characteristics helped them and which made the process harder for them.

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Block three is about challenge three: family and expatriation and includes the following questions:

- What role do family issues play in employees' decisions for or against international assignments?
- Can you elaborate on the support systems available to the families of expatriate employees? How helpful or influential are those in your opinion?

The questions in this block, relating to difficulties caused by family issues when employees are sent abroad and how to overcome them, were kept more generally. Family issues in expatriation and repatriation processes are expected to have a big impact and be connected to other topics as well. Therefore, the experts were given the opportunity to decide for themselves which aspects they considered important in this matter.

The coding rule for this block states that statements that refer to family challenges related to international assignments and their prevention should be coded.

The fourth block consisted of questions about challenge four: language and cultural barriers:

- How does your organization address language barriers to ensure effective communication during international assignments? How efficient do you think they are?
- What strategies are in place to bridge cultural differences and enable smooth operations in an international context?

The questions in block four needed to be asked to understand problems caused by language barriers and cultural differences between the home country and the country of assignment (host country). Furthermore, to what extent can they be overcome and what measures need to be taken?

All statements that relate to language, communication difficulties, and cultural differences should be coded to be properly analyzed and compared.

In the last block questions about challenge five: reintegration and repatriation were posed:

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- What challenges do you see in reintegrating employees after an international assignment?
- Could you provide insights into measures taken to facilitate the repatriation of employees and ensure a successful return to the home organization?

Ensuring a successful return to the home country and the HQ is very important not only for the company but also for the expatriates themselves. To understand how to ensure that this process goes well, challenges that might arise during reintegration and repatriation after an international assignment need to be questioned. Moreover, the expert's opinion on how to ensure a successful return home might help provide solutions.

All information on challenges faced during the return of employees and their integration into the home organization and country should be coded.

Lastly, a final summarizing question is asked:

- Overall, which factors would you consider to be the most decisive for the success of expatriation and repatriation?

The last question is asked to provide a conclusion on the topic from the expert's point of view. It is supposed to be a summary of the interview, but further to allow the expert to emphasize what the most important aspects of the whole process of expatriation and repatriation are. It should give an outlook on where most challenges can be identified and how they could be solved in future international assignments.

3.1.3 Conducting the interviews

Once the experts had been contacted and had agreed to take part in the interview, they were sent the questionnaire in advance so that they could prepare for the interview beforehand.

In addition, declarations of consent were also sent to ensure that the experts remained anonymous. Therefore, in the transcription, all hints and comments that could refer to the person or the company were labeled XXX.

In addition, all experts were assured that the interviews would be destroyed after submission of the thesis and a copy of the thesis can be sent on request after the thesis has been graded.

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All interviews were planned within a time frame of approximately 30 to 60 minutes. Except for two interviews, which only lasted 20 minutes, the other interviews were kept within this time frame.

The interviews were all conducted orally and in most cases via Skype or Microsoft Teams. In one case, a face-to-face interview was arranged in the expert's current office.

Before the interview began, any uncertainties were discussed, and the experts were briefed on the exact purpose of the interview and the research for the thesis. All interviews were recorded by two dictation apps to have a backup and to ensure that no interview got lost.

The questions from the guidelines were partially standardized. This means that some questions were rephrased for better comprehension, were not specifically asked again if the answer was already clear from a previous question or were asked in a slightly different order so that the conversation was not abruptly interrupted.

3.2 Analysis of the results from the expert interviews

In the following, a qualitative content analysis is carried out. By applying the coding explained above, conclusions are to be drawn about similarities and differences in the opinions of the experts. The analysis is intended to extract relevant information to be able to use it in the context of the research question. Since categories have already been deductively extracted in advance based on the insights gained from the theory, the findings can be related to each other afterwards to ultimately obtain an answer to the research question, which was formulated at the beginning of this paper.

3.2.1 Summarization of expert opinions

To get a better understanding of the general opinions of the experts, before analyzing them and going into detail, a closer look should be taken at them. Therefore, the expert interviews will be summarized in this part and the aim is to determine the direction of the expert's opinion on the topic.

The first interview that was conducted was with a man who had been seconded from Turkey to Italy for six months. For this expert the process of selection and preparation was well designed with a focus on knowledge in the field of work and cultural awareness. Regarding personality, he mentions many aspects

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such as openness, flexibility and being proactive in addition to the importance of technical knowledge, which is considered important (A01: 1-50).

The interviewee reports on the various support measures that his company has offered him to help him adapt to the new country. In addition, he considers family, such as partners and children, as an important influence on the decision-making process and cultural training and language courses as something important in the assignment process. Moreover, he also sees a few problems with repatriation, such as the loss of feeling for the home country and says that communication is very important in this process. The sensible composition of the individual processes is to be considered crucial from his point of view (A01: 51-98).

The second interview was conducted with a woman who was sent from Germany to the USA for three years and works in HR while also being an expatriate. She explained the selection process in her company as either looking to fill a position abroad and create knowledge transfer or to give an employee the opportunity to develop further. In preparation, the interviewee says a permanent process is followed to ensure that the employee is advised, and she feels it is important that expatriates feel they have been taken care of. In terms of personality, an open mind and flexibility are considered relevant to adapt to new cultures. In line with this, cultural training and language courses are also offered, which are considered effective in her mind, even if more for some countries than others. The answerer also sees family matters as a challenge, including her partner's career and children's lives, and this is also supported by her company in a financial sense. Regarding repatriation, she says that many people expect more than what is possible when they return and that of course the company tries to accommodate this as much as possible, but it is not always possible (A02: 1-266).

The third interview was conducted with a man who was sent from the Czech Republic to Germany at the age of 23 for seven months. He explained that there was no properly planned selection process for the international assignments because it was difficult enough to get the job and the company would rely on the fact that these people have the capability for it. At the time of preparation, there wasn't much offer in his company that could have supported him, as expert already had a connection to Germany and therefore didn't think

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it would be effective. The whole process leading up to the assignment was perceived as mainly negative by him (A03: 1-59).

In terms of character traits, it is mentioned that inner motivation and flexibility, should be considered crucial, as otherwise it could be difficult to withstand the process. Furthermore, he was also not offered much support in adapting to the host country. The expert sees family challenges as a major influence, as this has an impact on a person's entire life and his company would have offered support in this area as required. He did not consider the culture and language offered to be necessary because of the familiarity of the host country and the language. In addition, he considers the repatriation process to be an easier process because it is faster. There is support with certain administrative and legal matters, which he considers important in this step of the process (A03: 60-209).

The fourth interview was with a female at the age of 48 who was sent from Germany to the US for a year. The expert describes the selection process as well-planned and structured but kept simple so that everyone who is suitable for the role could also go abroad. The answerer had the chance to apply internally and went through an interview process. She considers being able to adapt and taking responsibility to be very relevant as well as flexibility and openness. Her company made sure that she was centrally located in her host country and that the local HR department was consistently available to help her settle in. The interviewee doesn't just see family as a challenge but also as an opportunity to experience something new together with everyone, but she still realizes the importance of everyone agreeing and being aware of the implications of an international assignment. The company would also have helped with the partner's job search if necessary. They were not offering language courses as the company language is English, but she would have found it efficient to refresh her language skills. In addition, there was advice on how to behave in terms of culture beforehand, which was enough. The expatriate thinks that repatriation is often problematic as people expect increased career advancement opportunities when they come back, as they bring a lot of experience with them, and as this is not always possible. Because of that, repatriates are often disappointed, which results in more difficulties (A04: 1-163).

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The next interview was conducted with a 27-year-old male who was sent from Germany to the USA. In his company there was no selection process and no real preparation for the assignment which he considered good as awareness of his potential was shared between all involved parties. The expatriate says that he was internally motivated and that he didn't notice anything negative in the process. Furthermore, discipline, persistence, and inner motivation are crucial from his perspective, although he also mentions flexibility and openness as important. The answerer did not receive any support for adaptation at the company level but did not need any since his colleagues in the host country were taking good care of him. The expatriate also considers family to be an important decision factor as it can influence a lot and therefore says that it is effective if financial support and flights home are offered by the company. He personally does not consider cultural training and language courses to be relevant if the assignment involves an English-speaking country. Moreover, for the expatriate, reintegration was not identified as a big problem in this interview, as the adaptation to new cultures just continues to strengthen, and he believes that after a few years you don't completely lose touch with your home country and therefore don't need any support. In his opinion, the most important factor in an international assignment is the person themselves and their motives (A05:1-200).

The last interview was conducted with a male who was supposed to be sent on his international assignment from Germany to the USA for five years but has ended the international assignment after only one year. The expert reports that there was no real selection process, but that he was simply a particularly good fit for the position that was advertised, and the company requested that he takes the position abroad. During preparation, there were supposed to be language and cultural training sessions for the whole family, which he found very effective but unfortunately never took place. With regards to the character of an expatriate, he believes that they need to be problem solvers and someone who can endure. For the support during the assignment, the foreign HR team was supporting whereas the one from his HQ was not, which bothered him because he felt abandoned (A06: 1-112).

In his opinion, family plays a very important role when it comes to making decisions and should always be involved. Unfortunately, there was no

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guidance from the company, and he would have liked more information and assistance for the family. When it comes to reintegration and repatriation, he believes that the most important thing is honesty afterwards and open communication, including being honest if mistakes happen in the process (A06: 79-158).

3.2.2 Analysis of commonalities and differences

In this next part an in-depth analysis will be undertaken on the commonalities and differences in the expert's opinions and answers that resulted from the interview.

In the first block of questions regarding selection and preparation, there were relatively diverse experiences. During the selection phase, three experts stated that they did not have a proper selection process and that it was a matter of filling the position and being considered a good fit (A03: 25-27; A05: 14; A06: 12- 17). Two other experts had a similar experience where the process was based on presenting yourself as best as possible for the position and demonstrating your expertise (A01: 12-15; A04: 12-30). The last expert stated that a mixture of both procedures was used in their organization (A02: 18-32).

The results of the questions relating to the preparation process showcase that there was no preparation in three cases and another states that preparation in the sense of cultural and language courses were promised but never took place (A03: 33-46; A04: 33-50; A05: 25-32; A06: 24-41). In contrast, the other experts stated that there were voluntary courses on language and culture as well as a continuous review of development and success plans for the individual employee (A01: 18-28; A02: 36-79).

Two experts considered the courses on culture and language and support with relocation to be motivating in the selection and preparation process (A01: 24-28; A06 28-41). Furthermore, two considered attention to the expatriates needs during the process, being taken care of during the assignment, and equal opportunities, as important (A02: 74-80; A04: 46-48). One of the experts stated that being promised a better job after returning from the international assignment was a major part of the motivation for the international assignment (A03: 17-20).

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In general, three experts stated directly or indirectly that their internal motivation was so high that they had not noticed negative aspects in the process, even though it was stated that there might have been aspects that could have been perceived as negative (A01: 27-28; A03: 55-59; A05: 31-32). All the experts that were not talking about very high internal motivation referred to the process of selection and preparation as very important and useful (A02: 78-79; A04: 28-50; A06: 27-30).

In the next block with questions regarding personality and adaptability the answers and experts' opinions had a few more commonalities than in the previous block.

In terms of positive character traits for an international assignment, flexibility and openness are at the top of the list, with five out of six experts agreeing on this (A01: 33-34; A02: 91-93; A04: 62-64; A05: 43-49; A06: 54-56).

Persuasiveness (A05: 37), proactivity (A01: 33-34), adaptability to a new culture (A02: 91-93; A04: 56-59), inner drive (A05: 37), and being a problem-solver (A06: 51) are also mentioned. The experts believe that these aspects are crucial for a person to be able to find their way in a new environment with a new culture.

Taking a closer look at negative personality traits it is noticeable that there is diversity in the expatriate's choice of words but by no means exclude each other. People who are easily stressed and distracted by uncertainties, very traditionally oriented people, superficial people, introverts, and know-it-alls are not seen as ideal for an international assignment (A01: 45-50; A03: 109-117; A04: 78-81; A05: 71-77). Personal development courses and adaptation courses are often suggested, but it is also considered that it depends on whether the employee is motivated to participate in these (A02: 112-117; A06: 75-78).

In terms of adapting to the host country, most experts agree that culture and language training, as well as look-and-see trips, and relocation support are relevant (A01: 43-44; A02: 104-108; A04: 67-74). Most experts, especially those who spoke of a big inner drive beforehand, see relationships with colleagues as the best way to adapt to the new environment and do not expect

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any strategies to bridge cultural differences from within the company (A05: 53-60; A06: 59-68).

In the block with questions relating to family and expatriation, the expert's opinions were uniform, despite their different ages and life situations.

Depending on the family situation of the expert, all identified the career of the partner, the living situation and education of the children as well as the general will of the family to embark on this experience as the main factors against the decision for an international assignment or as problem factors during the assignment. However, one expert says that if the preparation and handling of the family are done correctly, this can also be seen as an opportunity for the family. To overcome these challenges, many expatriates refer to the individual supporting mechanisms they have been offered and what else might have been important to them (A01: 55-64; A02: 123-207; A03: 134-153; A04:91-110; A05: 90-111; A06: 82-98).

From this, a family support service package can be derived, which includes career opportunities and work permits for the spouse, paying for children's education, flights back home, relocation services, and cultural and language trainings for the whole family. Concluding from this, all expert interviews in this section show that it is at least as important to support and prepare the expatriate's family as the expatriate themselves.

When the experts were asked about language barriers, four said that they found language training courses useful to learn the skills for the new environment (A01: 69-71; A03: 161-164; A04: 116-122; A06: 104-105). These were not always offered, especially for secondments to English-speaking countries, as English was seen as a business language (A05: 117-119). The other experts stated that courses were not compulsory, but that there was a personal interest in learning the local language (A02: 196-207). One of the experts also mentioned the recruitment and selection of bilingual employees as a sensible solution to bridge the language barrier (A01: 69).

When asked about cultural differences, the experts agreed that culture training is useful and can help to bridge cultural differences. Two of the experts differentiated between informative and culture-sensitivity training to achieve the best possible effect (A01: 74-76; A02: 221). One expert also stated that

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cultural training is not only effective for expatriates but generally when employees are in contact with other cultures in their company (A02: 210-217). Some of the approaches used in the respective companies included contact with former expatriates to gain insights, visiting the host country and the subsidiary in advance, building a relationship with new colleagues, and teaching behavioral rules instead of cultural training (A03: 167-173; A04: 129-131). One expert explained that the expatriate himself was used as the main part of the strategy for smoothing out cultural differences and misunderstandings and was expected to be able to adapt (A05: 142-156).

Half of the surveyed experts agreed that repatriation and reintegration back into the home country are easier processes than expatriation (A03: 191-193; A04 135-139; A05: 159-162). This could be due to the fact that the experts surveyed with this opinion had spent up to a maximum of one year abroad. For this reason, the opinions of these expatriates are considered below in relation to the general context and not in relation to their own experience and compared with those of the other experts.

Regarding challenges in this area, two of the experts interviewed mentioned the feeling of being lost and the difficulty of reidentifying, as there was a strong identification with the host country culture, and it was therefore difficult to get used to the old environment (A01: 81-85; A02: 230- 239).

In addition, three experts mentioned the fact that newly learned skills and knowledge are not valued as much as desired, which can lead to frustration and difficulty in acceptance (A02: 244-252; A03: 180-185; A04: 145-147). Another challenge mentioned was the changes that happen within a company while the expatriate is abroad, which can limit their career progression (A06: 124-128). One expert referred to the fact that the whole process before repatriation, if not to the expatriate's satisfaction, can also have a strong negative impact on repatriation and reintegration (A06: 121-123).

Among possible solutions, three of the experts mentioned clear communication and honesty as well as managing expectations correctly so that employees are not too disappointed when they return (A01: 88; A02: 150-152; A06: 131-136). In addition, two experts mentioned that career options need to be discussed and a mutual understanding needs to be ensured to

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improve the process (A04: 150-152; A06: 149). Relocation assistance is mentioned to be a helpful tool, by two expatriates in the interviews (A01: 90; A03: 193). In one interview, regular check-ins were also mentioned to improve the process (A01: 88).

In the last question, the experts were asked for the most decisive factors in the decision for or against an international assignment. The two most important factors were the family and its preparation, which four experts named (A01: 95; A02: 259-264; A03: 203-207; A06: 140-144) and, after that, the personality of the expatriate, which three persons stated as a decisive factor (A04: 157-158; A05: 185; A06: 144-152). In addition, having an open position for the expatriate upon return and making the expatriates aware of their opportunities was mentioned two times (A04: 150-152; A06: 149). Lastly, the thoughtful organization of the whole process was stated as decisive once (A01: 96).

Overall, the expatriates seem to have similar opinions relating to expatriation and repatriation, even though their experiences, length of assignment, and place of stay abroad differed. Nonetheless, some differences in their perspective were identified.

3.2.3 Integration of expert perspectives into research findings

To apply the perspective of the experts to the theoretical findings in this step, they will be put into context hereinafter.

The theory shows that the selection and preparation process of the international assignment is an important part, and that the selection of the expatriate is difficult. Furthermore, there should be more focus on other qualities than just the internal know-how and expertise the employee has within the company (Kühlmann, 2004, pp. 35–41). The opinions of the experts are largely in line with this theory, as they consider the initial steps of an expatriation to be decisive and refer to the fact that internal motivation contributes a great deal to whether an international assignment is successful.

The theory showcases that not many companies make use of intercultural assessment centers, language courses, and culture courses in the preparation process, which results in a disadvantage for the companies (Naeem et al., 2015, p. 251). Most experts emphasize that they would consider this type of preparation to be very effective, even if it was not necessarily offered to them

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specifically. However, some experts maintain that no language courses are needed for English-speaking countries as it is the business language and not necessarily cultural courses if one has enough willpower. This statement remains relevant since it is often used in expatriate literature. In general, the opinion of expatriates reinforces the importance of the right selection, preparation, inner motivation, and culture courses.

When it comes to personality and expatriate adjustment, expatriates agree with the theory that some people are simply more effective for such an international assignment than others (Ang et al., 2006, p. 101; Qomariyah et al., 2022, pp. 8–9).

In theory, the big five personality traits that a person should have for this type of assignment are emotional stability, consciousness, agreeableness, extraversion, and openness. The opinions of the experts coincide here even if other words are used the terms all aim for similar characteristics such as flexibility, persuasiveness, openness, and persistence (Ang et al., 2006, p. 103).

Furthermore, the literature speaks of the importance of cultural intelligence, and here, too, the experts' opinions coincide and make it clear that the adaptability of expatriates to a new environment and culture is crucial (Ang et al., 2006, pp. 100–120). Again, several experts argue that culture and language training would be beneficial.

The theory emphasizes that family can have a major influence on the course of an expatriate's international assignment. In most cases, the family and expatriate have different perspectives on the course and status of the assignment, as they look at the situation from completely different points of view (Kühlmann, 2004, p. 12). The experts interviewed agree with these statements and state that children and families are often left out of the equation. Furthermore, they name various options that they consider effective in making the process better. These include finding a job for the partner or a work permit, paying for children's education and preparatory courses for the language and culture of the new country for the family. Again, in most cases the theory coincides, as it is said that the preparation of the family is at least as important as that of the actual expatriate.

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If a closer look at the language barriers, culture barriers, and differences during an international assignment is taken, the theory declares the importance of understanding the new culture and the direct and indirect language. It is therefore important to adapt as well as possible and not to continue trying to apply one's own cultural rules (Naeem et al., 2015, p. 251). Cross-cultural training is deemed to be a good solution as it is usually voluntary and relatively short according to the opinion of the experts. From the experts' perspective, it makes sense to split this training into informative and culture-sensitizing courses to ensure that everyone understands the necessity of overcoming cultural differences.

Language courses are mentioned as solutions for language barriers during international assignments but are often not offered if the national language is also the business language, such as English. Some experts say that refresher courses in English are advisable, others are convinced that they are not needed at all or only on a voluntary basis for the national language. Other solutions mentioned by the experts to overcome these barriers include contact with former expatriates and a visit to the host country.

Previous research on reintegration and repatriation has mostly focused on keeping expatriates in the company after their return. Nevertheless, the process is often seen as simpler than the sending process and is therefore neglected. A large proportion of experts agree with this and do not necessarily consider it wrong (Black et al., 1992, p. 738; Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2001, p. 390).

In earlier research, misplaced job roles, fewer opportunities for advancement, little to no support, and the loss of status are seen as problematic, even if expatriates often think they have a higher value for the company after gaining experience abroad than before (Adler, 1981, pp. 341–344). The experts interviewed have similar opinions on problems in this area and identify change in company, hope for more support and career-related opportunities, being disappointed, and feeling alone. For effective solutions, they cite clear open communication up front, honesty throughout the process, as well as regular check-ins to ensure that it does not become too difficult to re-identify since this, as mentioned in the literature, can lead to a reverse culture shock due to the old but new environment.

4 Discussion

In this chapter, after evaluating the expert interviews and the previous research about expatriation and repatriation, a closer look and the answer to the research question that was posed at the beginning of this thesis shall be answered, and the research methods will be critically reflected.

4.1 Evaluation of results in the context of the research question

The aim of the research in the context of the research question was to understand which challenges expatriate employees face and how these can be overcome to ensure long-term success in the context of the role of HRM.

During the research five main challenges in the process of expatriation and repatriation were identified and examined further. The challenges that expatriate employees face are several different ones that are going to be listed to answer the research question in the following.

In the selection and preparation process, expatriates must deal with the fact that there is often no proper process and that there is not enough time for proper preparation for their assignment abroad. In terms of personality and adaptability, they face the challenge of the company not paying close attention to the expatriates' personalities and which personality traits might be helpful abroad for compatible adaptability but focusing more on expertise and internal know-how. Cultural intelligence is often not considered and therefore the wrong expatriate can be sent abroad, which creates a major difficulty for the company and the expatriate themselves.

Regarding the expatriate's family, additional problems are highlighted such as the lack of understanding of the importance of clear communication, information, and necessary preparation as support for the family. This is often simply omitted and unfolds difficulties during the international assignment.

Furthermore, culture and language also pose some challenges that HR should be aware of in advance. These include the difficulty of getting along in a country if the language or culture is not familiar to the expatriate, and that language as a verbal mean often is not enough to know since non-verbal language can be just as important for a smooth understanding. As a result, people repeatedly encounter major problems in adapting and navigating their international assignments.

In the last step, challenges were raised in the process of repatriation and reintegration. This includes underestimating the importance and difficulty of the return, which often leads to problems as the returnees feel a lack of support by the company in the process and are experiencing a lack of communication.

For those problems certain solutions were determined and are referred to as success factors since these are deemed to improve the performance and personal wellbeing of the expatriates during the assignment.

4.2 Success factors for expatriate management and international assignments

Hereinafter, this chapter provides the second half of the answer to the research question, naming the factors for the long-term success of international assignments in the context of the role of HRM while describing the solution to the above-mentioned challenges.

Addressing the research question, it is important to keep in consideration that success is still to be considered at the organizational and individual level. The answer to the research question does not consist of just one aspect - several aspects play together to achieve the corresponding objective in the long term.

The HR department must be aware that the creation of a suitable recruitment profile regarding personal, professional, and cultural knowledge and the resulting selection of the right person are the first success factors.

Another success factor is identifying the right personality traits and being aware that character is difficult to change.

In addition, recognizing the importance of an expatriate's inner motivation and cultural intelligence to ultimately select the best fit for the job ensures success on both the organizational and individual levels. On the organizational level it can be ensured that the assignment will not be ended prematurely or inappropriately and on the individual level, it can be ensured that the chosen person is motivated and capable of what is needed.

Furthermore, the recognized success factors include the introduction of language courses to better understand and adapt, as well as cross cultural courses that are not only based on information but also culture-sensitizing training. The HR department understands the significance of the expatriate's family needs such as trainings and support as they are equally crucial for

success. It is therefore even more important that the HR department comprehends the relevance of supporting the family in all relevant matters and to communicate openly and sensibly, because it is another success factor if handled correctly.

The final success factor is recognizing and not underestimating the difficulty of reintegration after an international assignment. Open and honest communication and ongoing support are part of this.

Ultimately, all these success factors are interrelated. While individually they can increase expatriate satisfaction or reduce the dropout rate, collectively they need to be combined to guarantee long-term success for international assignments.

4.3 Critical reflection on research methods and results

When the research question was created, the type of methodology to be used to obtain answers was examined. As the research question required a qualitative response, expert interviews were determined to be used as the research method since the highest possible control over the course of the interview was given. The fact that this method had already been used in most of the previous research in this thematic field was also a positive factor.

An alternative option for the methodology would have been quantitative methods such as surveys, as these could have shown the effect of various factors on each other, but in this case, there is little control over the survey group, and it cannot be guaranteed that only expatriates under the above-stated definition will participate in this research.

In addition, questions could be modified and made more comprehensible during the expert interview to get to the desired focus and ensure that the research question could be answered. However, there were certain limitations in the choice of expert interviews, such as the fact that it is difficult to find people from such a niche group to get in contact with them and motivate them to take part in such an interview. Furthermore, there is a limitation in finding people from different countries to get different cultural perspectives, as in this research, mostly Germans were interviewed who were sent to the USA for their international assignments. Due to the number of experts questioned no connections could be drawn between their age or gender effecting their opinion on this topic.

Discussion

The internal validity of this work is considered high, as it was ensured that the interview questions were asked in such a way that the opinion and knowledge of the experts could be proven, but the interpretation of each individual sentence was not reviewed with the participants, which could decrease the internal validity slightly. However, this did not seem to be necessary, as the answers were all formulated clearly and unambiguously or were already followed up during the interview. All questions were formulated in advance in such a way that they did not sound biased or predetermine an opinion.

In terms of external validity, the research findings can be generalized in the context and overlap well with the theoretical framework. However, it may be difficult to apply this to larger populations, as the group of respondents is relatively small and has similar basic characteristics in relation to this area of research. Clear boundaries need to be identified when it comes to generalizations for an internationally applicable regulation because the number of interviews conducted is not sufficient.

Finally, it should be pointed out once again that a quantitative method could possibly have shown improved or superior generalization, but the survey results discussed could not have been nearly as accurate and reliable. In addition, such an alternative would have made it difficult to answer the research question as it was intended.

As there is still a need for further research in this thematic area after this research, a recommendation for further research directions follows at the end of this paper.

5 Conclusions

While this research paper will contribute to the state of research in this field, it is hoped that it will provide added value for both expatriates and companies when it comes to international assignments. In this concluding chapter, key findings are outlined, recommendations for further action are given, and an outlook on future research is given.

5.1 Summary of key findings

When it comes to expatriation and international assignments, there is a lot of ambiguity. This research identified the challenges of expatriation, such as selection and preparation, personality and adaptation, family, culture and language, and repatriation.

It has become clear that the success of an international assignment depends on bridging any possible barriers and obstacles and ensuring good coordination. To achieve the long-term success of expatriate assignments abroad, both for the companies and the expatriates themselves, processes must be planned in detail and a specific emphasis must be placed on personal and cultural influences, as these have a particularly strong influence on international assignments.

In summary, it is important to remember that expatriation is about more than just not prematurely terminating the international assignment. Many things have an impact on this process, and HRM should be aware that individuals and their personal impressions, expectations and experiences can make a huge difference in the outcome of an international assignment.

5.2 Recommendations for companies and international human resource management

Incorrect candidate selection, poor or inadequate preparation, a lack of focus on personality and the ability to adapt, family complications, the occurrence of culture shock, and integration away from home can have a negative impact on international assignments and lead to premature termination, unhappy colleagues and clients in the host country, and desperate expatriates. It is therefore essential that companies, and IHRM in the first instance, get these processes right if they want to ensure success.

Conclusions

When planning an expatriation, sufficient IHRM staff should be available and ready to take care of this process. It is crucial for success that all processes are well planned and managed. Therefore, IHRM should always be ready to react to challenges and face them the moment they arise. In general, it is recommended that the employees responsible for the assignment remain in contact during the assignment and, upon return, provide a point of reference for the expatriate that enables them to orient themselves.

In addition, it is important to be aware that cultural, language, adaptation training, and moving services can be costly but are worth it as these are investments in human capital and ensure that the expatriates do not choose to leave for the competitor's company upon return from the international assignments. Family needs to be included in all these processes, since otherwise the assignment is likely to fail.

All in all, companies and IHRM specifically are recommended to recognize the actual value of such assignments and to understand that all the effort invested in the process has an impact and has a positive outcome for the company and their position on the global market. To carry out the process in the best possible way, it is advisable to adhere to the long-term success factors described above or to observe and adapt them to one's company and assignment location as needed.

5.3 Outlook on future research directions

Based on the results of this research, a foundation was laid for optimizing expatriation and international assignment. Factors for long-term success were identified, confirmed, and contextualized, both from previous research and by experts.

Nevertheless, there is much more to explore in this field that was not possible within the scope of this paper. The aim of this paper is to encourage researchers to research the interrelations between the various factors and examine whether some factors are interdependent and decisive for success. Furthermore, research with larger survey groups would be useful to investigate the influence of demographic criteria on success and the necessary factors for long-term success.

As numerous studies in this specific field are already a few decades old and most researchers rely on the earliest discoveries, new perspectives, and

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approaches are needed to ensure a better understanding of expatriation and repatriation.

Ultimately, the topic of expatriation is becoming increasingly important, as already described in the introduction to this paper, which is why further research should be carried out into how international assignments and the expatriate environment can be organized as effectively, cost-effectively, and successfully as possible in the long term.

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Appendix

Transcriptions of Expert Interviews

Interview 1 (A01):

P1: Please briefly introduce yourself, your company, and the nature of your international assignments to get a little context before focusing on the challenges and possible success factors.

- P2: Hi, this is XXX, I am 35 years old male and working as an expat in Prague/CZ for an IT company called XXX for now, but I'd like to give context about my previous international assignment when I was working in the logistics sector between 2013 and 2020 for XXX-Group in Turkey I was sent to Italy for 6 months.

P1: I would like to start talking about preparation and selection for expatriates in your organization first. How has the selection process of employees for international assignments evolved in your organization?

- P2: The selection process in our organization has evolved significantly with the personal improvements and adaptability skills of the individuals. It was relay important that the individuals themselves do the best to present themselves as the best fit.

P1: Can you provide insights into specific measures to prepare employees for international assignments?

- P2: The main measures were taken about language and cultural adaptation trainings if it was assumed that they are needed but they were not mandatory.

P1: Which metrics in the preparation and selection process motivated you and had a positive impact on the implementation and completion of your international assignment? What had the opposite effect?

- P2: Language, cultural competency assessments and focusing on technical skills were motivating metrics and immigration assistance and settling-in services was also supporting me in my decision. There

were no opposite effects, I was very motivated and therefore I was not particularly missing much.

P1: Next, I would like to talk about challenges related to employees' personality traits and their adaptability to new cultural and professional environments. Which personal characteristics do you consider to be crucial for successfully adapting to a new work environment?

- P2: Openness to new ideas, willingness to learn, flexibility and proactiveness are the keys in my opinion for the successful adaptation.

P1: To what extent do you consider personal characteristics such as flexibility and openness to be crucial?

- P2: While specific technical skills may be necessary for the job itself, flexibility and openness are essential for navigating the human side of any new work environment to building relationships and overcoming challenges.

P1: What support mechanisms did your company/s use to promote the adaptability of their employees during international assignments?

- P2: Relocation assistance, mentorship programs and regular communications was the supportive metrics on adaptability.

P1: What could be personal characteristics that make an international assignment difficult and how do you think they could be overcome?

- P2: New cultures often involve with unfamiliar situations and unclear expectations. Someone who struggles with ambiguity may find this level of uncertainty stressful and hindering their ability to adapt. Also building rapport with colleagues is essential for success.

P1: Difficulties caused by family issues when employees are sent abroad and how to overcome them are the next topic I would want to refer to. What role do family issues play in employees' decisions for or against international assignments?

- P2: Family role is crucial in any case. Partners career plans and children's educations might create the issue to make a proper decision, but it was not the case in my situation.

P1: Can you elaborate on the support systems available to the families of expatriate employees? How helpful/influencing are those in your opinion?

- P2: Family needs assessments like family concerns and schooling for children and spousal career opportunities was in place if needed. Also, relocation, language training, cultural training and individual needs are also pretty important to support the expat families to make a decision and adapt easily.

P1: Now I would like to address problems caused by language barriers and cultural differences. How does your organization address language barriers to ensure effective communication during international assignments? How efficient do you think they are?

- P2: Hiring bilingual employees and language buddy programs are efficient to improve the smooth communication and I believe these two metrics are the most efficient way to make process easier.

P1: What strategies are in place to bridge cultural differences and enable smooth operations in an international context?

- P2: Cultural sensitivity trainings like non-verbal communication styles helps employees understand cultural nuances and avoid misunderstandings.

P1: Looking towards the end of an expatriation challenges that arise during reintegration and repatriation after international assignment should also be discussed. What challenges do you see in reintegrating employees after an international assignment?

- P2: Employees may have developed a strong sense of identity within the host culture. Returning home can lead to feeling of loss and a struggle to re-identify with their home environment. Also, the skills and experience gained may not be readily recognized in the home role. This can lead the feelings of frustration and hinder career progression.

P1: Could you provide insights into measures taken to facilitate the repatriation of employees and ensure a successful return to the home organization?

- P2: Maintaining the clear communication channels, regular check-ins, discussing career goals and opportunities helps the managing

expectations to turning back home. Also, flexible re-entry and relocation assistance are and always will be important for the success.

P1: Overall, which factors would you consider to be the most decisive for the success of expatriation and repatriation?

- P2: First of all, it has a big relationship with the individual characteristics. Then family support, company preparation and ongoing support from organization with a thoughtful repatriation process would help employees address challenges and navigate the back home and to the old work environment.

Interview 2 (A02):

P1: So just for clarification one more time, I'm writing my thesis about expatriation and repatriation and challenges and success factors that might go within those international assignments. I have prepared a few questions for you that I would like to ask you. And I'd like by starting to ask you about a brief introduction, about you, about the company you're working for, the nature of your international assignment, just to get a little bit of context beforehand.

- P2: Of course. So, my name is XXX. I am the head of HR for, um, the functions within XXX Group. XXX-Group is a Dax 30 company based in XXX, headquartered in XXX. Um, I'm having the HR organization for a business field within the organization. My international assignment was planned for a duration of 3 years. Yeah. Was that answering your questions already?

P1: Yeah, that was answering my question already. Thank you, a lot. So, in the first step, I would like to ask about the preparation and selection process within your company and about your personal opinion towards that. May I ask first how the selection process of employees for those assignments was evolved in your organization?

- P2: We have two different things. Once we do one thing that is you have a position abroad where you have the skill and capability required, not available in the country, but then someone in another country. So, for example, you have a very important role in China, but you don't have the right skill set in China. So, you're looking for the right person somewhere within the company to go. And. Transfer knowhow and knowledge to local employees. So that's the assignment where we have type A, type B is we want to invest in the development of an employee. So, someone is based in headquarter XXX. But is so-called talent having a potential. We want to have this person to grow. I always compared with Trivial Pursuit where you have the cake and different parts where you need to fulfil your whole profile. We are investing in the development of an employee by assigning this person for short or long term to a different country to make sure there's skills and capabilities gathered, which we think is essential for the next step.

P1: All right, that makes sense. How about specific measures that your company takes or what they did for you before you went on your international assignment? How do those look? Are there any insights you might give?

- P2: I am with the company for ten years now. So, in terms of, you know, processes up front, I think it's a continuous it's a continuous process. When we have employees joining the company, we do development plans, we do succession plans. So, we try to plan the growth of the employee very consciously means every year development plans are considered. That means we look into where is the employee currently, what kind of skill capability is missing, which roles would fit to make this person grow in the missing skills and capabilities, and then very openly discuss talents in different rounds and position them so they get positions which are vacant. Succession plans the same. We have important roles in the company where we need to ensure succession, and for those successions when we have identified potential successors, we also identify whether this person meets requirements or is not ready now. So, we try to invest into ensuring that this employee is ready when needed. And that's how the whole process of an assignment is planned.

P1: How about the certain metrics and for the preparation and selection, which one of those do you think are motivating or having the most positive impact on the employee before the person leaves?

- P2: I mean, I don't know whether you have a matrix. I mean, every job has a performance factor, right? Every job is measured by results, by impact, by outcome. So, it's not assignment only. For an assignment, you would as a matrix, as a KPI measure, success in the role, growth, development and being ready for the next position for whatever the reason was for a success of an assignment. I would say if this person completed the assignment, that's one of the success factors, right? It's not it's not an early stop. So, you your plan to go for three years, you stay for three years. I think that's a very initial KPI to measure success of an assignment. And then how the person is talking about the assignment, I would say if the person would recommend the assignment for others, how a person is taken care of during the

assignment by different parties who are involved in all the assignment processes. I think that's the KPI. I would say we would measure.

P1: And on a personal level, looking at it, what do you think for you personally has been or maybe also for other employees would be something where they say this motivated me in the process of preparation and selection, not looking at the actual success of the assignment afterwards, but for the employee on the personal, maybe emotional level, what they would think.

- P2: Been taking care of. I think that's the most important. You know, you have someone you can always approach. You are given the feeling of importance. You are given the feeling of, you know, care. It's taken care of your family members as well. The benefits which are given to you to ensure you and your family are safe. You know, I think all those tiny parts of a package make the package.

P1: Okay. alright. What do you think would have the opposite effect on this matter?

- P2: I think in transparency, bad communication, you know, on clarity, not receiving answers, not knowing the whole story. Um, I don't know, experiencing something completely else than what has been told. I think these are the Beth, you know, impacts.

P1: All right. In the next step, I would like to go a bit deeper into the personality and the adaptation of the expatriates to see which challenges might occur in this, uh, aspect and in the professional environment. So which personal characteristics do you consider to be crucial for successfully adapting to a new work environment?

- P2: Being open minded. I think you need to be open minded. You need to be agile and flexible and adaptive to new culture. New pace of living. You, I don't know, language whatever. Being open minded.

P1: Generally. So just have flexibility and openness or being open minded. To what extent do you consider those as crucial?

- P2: I think this is. I don't know if you have a range, but I think this is the most crucial. You know, you cannot move into another country and

compare everything always with your home country. You know, you need to just arrive and accept and adapt.

P1: Alright. What support mechanism does your company use to promote the adaptability to the new work environment during the assignment?

- P2: For me, from Germany to the US, I think this is an easy one. I think it's more of like from China, from us to China, from US to India, where we have huge cultural differences. We offer cultural awareness trainings, language trainings, look and see trips. You know, we offer a bunch of opportunities for the employee as well as the accompanying family members to understand the differences of the cultures, the countries, the languages.

P1: Again, back to the personal characteristics. What do you think would be a characteristic that a person could have that might make an assignment difficult or hard to complete? And how do you think a company could overcome that.

- P2: I think it's, again, you know, going back into the personal way of looking, being open. If somebody doesn't want to go and you're forcing this person, this is like granted for failure, right? Um. Asset flexibility. And if we know this person's not flexible, it's not adaptive. Very old fashioned, very traditional, very conservative. It's hard. What you can do is again training, you know agility training. Flexibility training, adaptivity and communication training.

P1: Yeah. So then going further in the next part, I would like to talk about family during the expatriate expatriation and which difficulties might arise during that. So, what role do you think family issues play in the employees' decision for or against an international assignment?

- P2: Major. I mean, I cannot answer that in Black and White. It depends. If you're married and have kids, it's major. If you are dating someone, you are in a relationship. It might not have that impact. You know, it's very much dependent which state your relationship has and how old your kids are. Like, if you have smaller kids, you might be more flexible. If you have kids who are close to graduation in school, you are not flexible. So, it's not the black and white answer. I think it's a very personal, differentiated to be seen question. Relationship status, each

of the kids' stage of school, you know. Family members. Even having parents you're caring for. If they're old, you don't want to leave. You know, if they're healthy and fine, you may leave.

P1: May I ask how this situation was for you before the international assignment?

- P2: It was very clear. My husband and we had a very open dialogue at home. They were supportive. We have five kids. When we talk to the kids, we asked them, and they were open for an experience in the US. The little ones were hesitant. They were four and five when we decided to move, and for them it was for sure more difficult because they didn't understand the whole impact of a move. Right? For them, that was an adventure. It was easy. My parents live in Turkey, so it doesn't matter whether I talk from Germany to them or I speak from the US to them. So, family wise it was easy. My family was supportive.

P1: That's great to hear. Were there any support systems available in your company for the family of you, or of expatriates in general?

- P2: Yes, there would have been a family support service, which we didn't use.

P1: Can you elaborate a bit further on what this system would be?

- P2: I think so it's someone from the mobility team meeting with the whole family, explaining what the whole move means, right? Giving all the information, sharing with them, but also maybe again, the training sections. But as this was Germany, US, and we were very much interested utilize this offer given to us.

P1: Do you think this offer would generally be helpful for other expatriates, or not?

- P2: It might. I think it's important for the accompanying partner to understand as well what the company is doing, because being fully reliant and dependent on the employee who is assigned, it's hard for the accompanying partner to understand maybe the whole impact and the whole consequences and maybe also just imagining: The woman is employed, wants to leave, and doesn't share fully, transparently all the

risks. Because she is biased. She wants to go. The husband gets only partial information from her. And doesn't think it's important or doesn't understand or is very blonde and thinks why not? And this expat package. It's a very easy financial package as well. So, I think it's definitely beneficial to have very transparent, open discussion with the whole family members to understand the impacts, the consequences, and get the support needed.

P1: Okay. What do you think about support systems? Do you think they would be helpful or influencing?

- P2: Definitely. So, I think, someone who works and needs to get off his own work to join the partner for an assignment can cause trouble because it creates dependency. Imagine I would have been assigned to the US and my husband would have joined me. He had to quit his job and just becomes a house man. Would have been difficult for our relationship. Me being new in a new country and a new office, I immediately do social contacts. My husband would have been home. So, I think that really impacts the relationship in abroad, in a completely new country with new social environments. So, offering job or at least help for the accompanying partner, offering language courses for the partner is very helpful. And I mean, as parents, you always care for your kids. You want to ensure that the kids are taken care of and that they don't risk for three years going abroad, that they're out of school system in Germany or whatever your home country is. So, the school fees to be covered by the company definitely helps decision taking pro assignment rather than against.

P1: Do you think this would have been an option for your company if you would have asked for it or wanted it?

- P2: It's part of our packages if we want it.

P1: Okay. Alright. So that's perfect. And the next step, I would like to go back to culture and language to just started talking about it a little bit. But I have a few further questions on the problems caused by language and barriers and cultural differences. How does your organization address language barriers to ensure effective communication during the assignment?

- P2: I mean, first of all, we are an international company, so we speak English globally, and that's one of the most important things. The other thing is we offer language courses for every employee who's interested to understand the local language, to learn the local language. But the local language is not a mandatory language in business environment.

P1: But so, it's still great that they offered either way. So how efficient do you think these courses are? If you have ever taken one of them or heard about them?

- P2: I haven't taken any of them. I think people who take these courses are considered interested in the country and the local people and really very much enjoy and appreciate sincere interest in local culture and language. So, I think that's definitely opening doors for relationships.

P1: So, what about strategies to bridge cultural differences and enable smooth cooperations. Are there any of those for the international context?

- P2: I would also differentiate again, it's not only limited to signings but also offer to employees in certain roles where we have interactions with different cultures, like in business management roles where you have frequent interactions with, for example, China again, or Japan, where we have known communication differences. So, we also train employees not only on assignment, but also in very important roles where they have into close interactions or regular interactions to know how to communicate or how to not communicate.

P1: May I ask if those trainings are more based on information or if they're more interactive, or if there's maybe something like going to visit the country before to see the people as well?

- P2: Yes. Okay. All of that.

P1: Great. So, in the last step for me, I have a few questions about the repatriation and getting integrated back to your home country back to the headquarter. What challenges do you see in reintegrating employees after an international assignment?

- P2: Personally, as an employee, I cannot say much but as an expatriate that is also an HR person. I can say that you send someone on

assignment, you're pampering. Everything is taken care of. The employee somehow loses responsibility for taking care of school, bureaucracy, taxes, doctors, invoices. Everything is it's an all-inclusive package. Assignment is all inclusive. Your home is taken care of, your rent is taken care of. You know your fees are taken care of. Everything is taken care of. So, sending someone back home is like, you go on assignment, you become a king and you come back and you're not a normal human being again. So, it could cause personality issues really, um, that people perceive they should be treated differently and don't understand. It's their reality again, you know, that's life and that's the one thing. When expatriates they go back, and they have a hard landing. I think that's the most difficult thing.

P1: Are there any insights you can provide on measures that the company takes to make the repatriation easier and more successful?

- P2: What we do is very transparently communicate elements of a salary package linked to the assignment. That means we are trying to manage expectations that things are linked to assignment only. And once the assignment is over, it's gone. So, it's really about managing expectations very clearly from the beginning when you're going back. Typically, there is a development. Something happens because you cannot go abroad for three years or five years and then come back into your job 9 to 5, which you had five years ago. Typically, you have a development, you grow into a new role, and then everything was worth it. So, doesn't mean that we do that 100%, because sometimes we also assign people who might have not been the right skill or capability. So wrong investment. But then it's more or less a mutual agreement that this doesn't match any longer.

P1: Okay. So, from my side that might be everything. I just have one last question for you, which would kind of be like a summary of what we just talked about. So overall, which factors would you consider to be most decisive for the success of expatriation and repatriation?

- P2: Personally, I think the way. Again. If you have a family, the way members are taken care of. I think that's the most important thing for people who have a family joining. For me personally, I think it was very

important again, that we have a good health insurance in place. You know, for my family being abroad and that we are taken care of. And whenever I have a question, somebody is there to help and supportive. (...) Yeah, I think, but that's my very personal decision, my very personal opinion.

Interview 3 (A03):

P1: So maybe then we can directly start with the interview. And I would like to ask you for a brief introduction of yourself first and your former employer that you had the international assignment with. Just to have like a little bit of context about it.

- P2: I started at XXX as a junior manager. It was a training program. And part of the program was that there is the opportunity to be sent abroad. Usually after the Expatriate program there was an offer for a senior role. So, it was the plan for me. We had several options with destinations I chose Stuttgart because Stuttgart was the main headquarter of logistic and I was in logistics at the time, so it made completely sense. So, I went to Stuttgart for seven months. I would say I went there for strategic reasons, since I learned a lot and met very interesting colleagues. So, it wasn't just randomly selected destination. It was very well planned. We really discussed it a lot in advance before I went there. At the time, I was an employee in Prague. It was right after my university. So, it was 23. Something like this. Yeah. I was having a girlfriend at that time in Prague because we met on Erasmus and. And I announced my girlfriend after studies that I will leave Prague for this expatriate program because after this program, there was a promise that I will get the manager position. I was hoping I could get it in Prague.

P1: Okay, that sounds good. And already some challenges occurring. Maybe to go over to a few more detailed questions to really see the difficulties you personally could have had. How was the selection process of the employees for this assignment that happened in your organization?

- P2: Well, there was no selection process because there was a tough selection process to entering the company in general. For XXX there was a huge assessment center and lots of tests. There were 3 or 4 rounds and part of most job descriptions is that there was a promise that you are entitled to be sent for 6 or 7 months to abroad.

P1: And are there any specific measures they made for you before you went on this international assignment to like to prepare you for going abroad, to go to another country with another culture.?

- P2: No. No, not at all. There was one possibility to conduct a very short training. It was two days training. And every time before an employee is sent abroad, he can choose to do this training. It's for free. And external partners are coming to the XXX company, and they are trying to prepare the person. But for me, German destination was not so distinctive from the Czech one. So, I decided that I will skip this training.

P1: Is there anything that after all, you didn't do this training, but you said it would have helped you or something that you think could have motivated you more if you had done it or were offered to do it?

- P2: Well, for people who are sitting whole life in South Bohemia, it would totally make sense. But I was studying in Frankfurt and in Berlin. I have family that is living in Munich, where I was going too. So, I knew the German culture really well. So, I don't think that this would bring me something extra.

P1: Is there anything where you think your employer did it before you went on your international assignment that kind of had like a negative effect on you?

- P2: The whole process was a torture. A that time, I remember that one year before my rotation the process started. So, you are first negotiating the destination because every destination is different. Expensive, it's very huge, different. If you are going for 7 or 8 months to Germany, or if you are going to Romanian or to Bulgaria and or to China or to US. So first you need to get the approval. Second, you need to think with your mentor what you are going to do. In general, for employees when they are sent for abroad. There must be a specific purpose why they are going there because it's a lot of money for the company being expected. And so, we had a lot of rounds of approving explanation, showing the motivation and stuff like this.

P1: I understand. Maybe now going on further to like your personality and the adaptations you had to make and what could have been challenging there? Is there any, like, personal characteristics that you think are important for it to be successful, that you go to a new work environment, especially in a new country?

- P2: Just to be familiar a little bit with the culture we are going into. You must be you must be very motivated. Especially in Germany. In comparison to Czech culture, Germans are working very late hours. For example, in Prague, I was working from 8 to 3, but in, in Stuttgart we were working like from eight to six. You need to be flexible. You need to be adaptive. You need to stay enthusiastic. Of course, you need to speak languages as much as you can, because I was speaking at that time German, English and a little bit Spanish. So, it also helps you when you speak languages.

P1: To what extent do you think that characteristics such as flexibility that you mentioned and even openness are important for that?

- P2: (...)Flexibility, definitely, because you leave everything you have in your country, and you go for 1 or 2 years abroad. So, you need to be flexible. At the same time, the same thing I was going through, I had to help my girlfriend with the administration, taxes, and stuff like this. So, um, it's not only about being flexible, but also be persuasive.

P1: Is there anything else your company did at that time during the process, like while you were abroad?

- P2: I had one other month; I have a meeting with my mentor. And he just asked me, how am I? That was it. I was also, of course, in contact with my home HR department in Prague, but it was more of mental kind of supporting instead of helping me with let's say workshops or general adaptability helps during my assignment.

P1: Is there anything you would have wished for that your company would have done like some support mechanisms that they should have had during your assignment that you missed out on?

- P2: Definitely. They have no clue how the local system is working, for example, how they are looking for flats, how they are organizing my time. So, they had no overview of this stuff. And when I complained about something, they couldn't do anything because it was always a different department. I mean right now the Czech HR and German HR. So, it was completely different processes, different apartment, different people. They didn't even know each other. And I was kind of in the

middle of them. So, it would have helped a lot if they are more connected together, that they are more prepared for sending people from abroad. And receiving them from abroad. Because yeah, they have everything in guidelines. But on the other hand, in the reality, they were a little bit struggling with that to help me and to make me feel comfortable in the new situation.

P1: Is there something you would say is difficult, maybe that you had? Or you generally think if you have these personal characteristics, it might be hard for you to go on an international assignment? And how do you think that certain characteristics can be overcome, like how could a company support these characteristics?

- P2: You need to be proactive. You need to address the problems personally, otherwise no one else will do it for you. I think someone passive is not the best for an expatriate assignment. I think that if you send someone out who is kind of passive, then you need to have more active system for this, for these employees. Because I was like used to read everything on the internet. I was researching everything I could. So, I was very well prepared and still I had a bunch of questions, and I can imagine not to do it. So, people who are just lazy or passive, then for them it would be a huge shock.

P1: Is there any other personal characteristic that you can think of in this case that would have been bad for an international assignment, or that would have made it difficult?

- P2: Yeah. Like being unpunctual or thinking superficially is really bad. You can tell the person that they must be detail oriented or must be punctual or something like that. But if they are missing these characteristics, it's very hard to obtain.

P1: What do you think about characteristics like flexibility and openness? Are they crucial for an international assignment?

- P2: So, openness is not always a positive point in international assignments it is like a double sided sword it can backfire, but flexibility definitely is crucial.

P1: I understand maybe going further to family issues and expatriation. You said before and you had a girlfriend at that time, maybe also considering your general family that lived in your hometown. What role do you think family issues play in the decision for or against going abroad for an assignment?

- P2: When you are deciding if you go abroad, the family factor is the first place. It's not money, it's not destination, it's not position, it's family. Because if you are unhappy at home. You can never perform or outperform at your work. So, you must always be sure that your family is okay with that, that you are going there, that everybody agrees because if not, then you're either you're being sent there alone or commuting home very often. Before I left my company, I got offered to go to Mexico, Germany, or China. And at that time, I have a I had a kid, one year old and we decided to refuse this offers because we would spend their 3 to 5 years abroad.

P1: Was there maybe any some support system? And if there would have been some available, do you think it can influence the decision for or against an international assignment?

- P2: Actually there, there was the possibility to address the local HR and tell them we are thinking about going there for three years. My girlfriend, she was at that time also working for the same company at the time so, it was even easier to get different role or position in the same location. If your partner is like, happy with every position, they are only going there to be with you, then it's okay. But if the partner is ambitious too, it could be frustrating to go abroad.

P1: Maybe we can think in a bit more general sense for the next two questions. Um, was there something in your organization that they addressed the language barriers to ensure that you can effectively communicate during your assignment? And do you think they were efficient if there were any. If they weren't, do you think there should have been some, not only talking about the language in general, but also maybe the way how people communicate in this country?

- P2: Well, if one year before you are being sent abroad in general, you give the opportunity to have a private lesson for languages. So, I was

having once or twice a week personal lecture, one on one German lecture to prepare. Be as fluent as possible for the for the assignment.

P1: Were there any strategies in your company for cultural differences to overcome those?

- P2: There was a plan to get me in touch with the colleagues who went there already. There was external training I would receive for these two days to understand the cultural differences. There is also the possibility to fly to the destination for two weeks with your family, which is 100% covered by company. You just meet with the future boss, and you will see the future workplace, the city and environment. And after that, when you return, you decide if you want to go there or not.

P1: That sounds good. And for the repatriation or the reintegration. So, coming back from your international assignments. Are there any challenges you see with that after spending some time abroad?

- P2: (...) Um. I will tell it to you from the Czech point of view. For checks, if someone is being sent abroad and returns is seen as a more experience. He's seen as someone who was willing to leave his comfort zone and go abroad and get additional knowledge. So, these people are usually welcome back very warmly. Processes in the company you might get used to, you cannot take as a granted that if a process is working in this location, that it will be working in your home department as well in the same way, that might be frustrating. So, it's also that you need to start from the beginning. You need to analyze the processes and you have then you have the possibility to compare them and improve them.

P1: Is there anything the company did for you? Were there some measures taken to help you with the repatriation or to facilitate the repatriation to ensure a successful return?

- P2: Well, the repatriation, I would say, is an easier and quicker process because they have, they have the interest that they will stop paying that much for you. You always get the moving company which is very helpful and paid for. So, in this way, you will get support. They will, of course, help you after you come back. They will help you with the administrative

stuff because you must be assigned again back in the Czech Republic, you need to be assigned back in the new department you are going into and stuff like this.

P1: Alright, that sounds good. So just lastly, one last question. Overall, what would you consider to be the most important factor to decide on the success of expatriation and repatriation? Just as a very quick summary.

- P2: I think that on the first spot, you don't have to earn millions of euros per month. It's not about money. The most challenging thing is that you as a family, if you have family, if you are alone, there is no question about it. You can adapt yourself wherever you want, and you can make a career like this. But if you have a family, it's very challenging that everyone is feeling they're comfortable. So, I think this is the most important factor.

P1: That makes sense overall. Thank you so much!

Interview 4 (A04):

P1: So, for the beginning, can you please briefly introduce yourself, your company, and the nature of your international assignment just to have a little bit of context beforehand?

- P2: Yeah. My name is XXX. I'm a 48 old female. And I work in the supply chain and e-commerce industry. My company offers, logistic processes from order acceptance to delivery. I was sent from Germany to the US for one year.

P1: Okay. That's great. And now to get a closer look at the actual challenges and possible success factors for those, I would like to go first into difficulties with preparation and selection. So how was the selection process of employees for your international assignment involved in your organization?

- P2: Okay. I think finding people for the US project was the biggest challenge for the company. The management was very active in recruiting people to go to the US. It was a treatise on our internal website and announced at our monthly staff meeting. Recruiting employees for the USA was a priority, and employees were assured there would be no problems with their managers and that it would be reinstated to their old position on the on their return. Many colleagues were interested, but the decision was difficult for most of them, especially those with families. Although the company offered support in finding suitable schools, apartments, etc. (...) And made it especially attractive with all the benefits like the salary, the paid apartment, the health insurance, and other contributions.

P1: That's great. So, can you provide any insights on specific measures that were taken to prepare employees for international assignments in your company?

- P2: First of all, you need, to speak the language. That was the first thing. And to have expertise in the required job area, and that's all. They make it easy for us so that all of us have the chance to go to a foreign country if we really want to.

P1: Did they help you, for example, with the language learning, in case you wouldn't really know it?

- P2: I don't know. For others, in my case, no. They conduct an interview and then they say, okay, you can speak English. You can have a conversation and that's all for them. So, it's not necessary and it's okay then. The next step was to apply to this job for this job online. And afterwards we have several interviews with the managers in the US and they say, you have experience, for example, in bookkeeping or you have experience in service delivery and then they must look in the US, where they might need someone with this skillset. That's fine. It was easy. It was not a big thing for us.

P1: That's good to hear. Were there any specific measures that were taken in the preparation and selection process that really motivated you. So, they had a positive impact on the completion and implementation of your international assignment?

- P2: So, the company gave all employees this expertise and decided that we had the opportunity to apply and took care of everything for the foreign assignment. Not so good was that we were confronted with costs into an assignment that had not been communicated before, such to put money aside for taxes and pensions.

P1: That is indeed a bad thing if it was not communicated. Maybe we can go over to the next block now. And it is about personality and adaptation during your international assignment and which challenges might occur with that? Starting with the first question, which personal characteristics do you consider to be crucial for successfully adapting to a new work environment?

- P2: You have to adapt to the rhythm of the locals and get used to the fact that it takes a little longer to make decisions because nobody wants to take responsibility of it and approach others with an open mind and a lot of patience.

P1: To what extent do you consider personal characteristics such as flexibility and you already said openness to be crucial in an international assignment?

- P2: You can never expect everything to go as planned. Therefore flexibility, openness for other solutions and persuasiveness for own ideas are very important.

P1: Alright. What support mechanisms did your company use to promote the adaptability of their employees during the international assignment?

- P2: So, so all aspects are accommodated nearby so that you don't feel alone with all the important information about the area such as where is the bank, supermarket, schools, all the important things. And then we have the meeting with the local HR department who provide all necessary information about the new workplace and the welcome package with several merchandise products from the company. A lot of things like guided tours of the installation and team events to get to know the new colleagues were planned as well.

P1: That is very nice to do. Just cycling back very quickly to personal characteristics. What could be personal characteristics that make an international assignment difficult, and how do you think they can be overcome?

- P2: Being introverted, know it all and solitary minds. But you will always have people like that. So, I would tell these people to listen to other people and try to be open to other ideas especially when it comes to expatriate assignments.

P1: That is great. Do you think there is something specific a company could do?

- P2: To be honest, I don't know how to do it. You can tell them to be a little more open and go to the people and communicate. But I guess a lot of Germans don't want to be told how to do something, so it's very complicated.

P1: Okay, for the next part, I would like to talk about family and expatriation. The first question would be, what role do family issues play in employees' decision for or against an international assignment?

- P2: So, I didn't find it difficult because I knew I would come back after a certain time. After time, I missed my family and my friends. I think for people with family, this is not an easy decision as all family members must agree and I think many have decided against it because of the family. But others have seen it as an opportunity to give their families the chance to know a new country, culture, language.

P1: That's nice. Can you elaborate on the support systems available to the families of expatriate employees in your company?

- P2: I can't say much about it. except that we were paid for flights back home. I guess 2 or 3 in the year. And they offered support for finding a job in the company for the family members, for example.

P1: Okay. Do you think those were helpful or influencing the international assignment in your opinion?

- P2: I guess. For families without children, I guess.

P1: Do you think there's any way a company could in general accommodate someone with kids?

- P2: Help, uh, the families to find the right school for their children since in a new country, you don't know what a good school is and what is not. You must be in the U.S. it's important where you live and in which school you go. This is a big thing there.

P1: Okay. Um, for the next part, I'd like to go over to language and culture barriers and problems that might be caused by those. Moreover, to which extent they can be overcome and what measures need to be taken. So, what do you think: How does your organization address language barriers to ensure effective communication during international assignments?

- P2: I didn't really think about it. I know that they send people, for example, to South America or something like that, but if you go to South America, you can also work in, in English if you speak English. But I guess it would be helpful if they give us an intensive language course either way. All of us speak a little bit English. But to work in the US, you need more vocabulary from the region. It's different. So, you need to learn a lot of new words.

P1: Going over to cultural differences, what strategies are in place to bridge cultural differences and, and enable smooth operations in an international context?

- P2: Listen to your new colleagues and involve them in decisions. Don't decide everything yourself because it's the same in Germany it doesn't have to be the same abroad. It is a very important rule that we were told

from the beginning to ensure good cooperation. There was nothing else to bridge cultural differences, I guess because it was never really needed.

P1: Okay, so for the last part, I would like to talk about reintegration and repatriation and challenges that arise during coming back from your international assignment and how to ensure that you return home successfully.

- P2: For me, it wasn't a problem. You started where you left off or change positions as after an assignment and experienced you gained gave you the opportunity to change your job. I think that many colleagues would like to change their position and want a promotion, but this is not often the case. So, you must continue your old job.

P1: What challenges do you see in reintegration employees in general? Is there anything else you think could be challenging for someone to come back after an assignment so challenging?

- P2: Maybe. If you come back, you. A lot of people say they know a lot more than when I left. So going back to their old job and old manager is difficult. You came back with more knowledge in your job. And you expect more from your company such as you a new job and new challenge in Germany. And that's not often the case.

P1: Were there any measures taken to facilitate the repatriation of employees and ensure that it stays successful?

- P2: They were not any but I guess the company could have found something similar for expatriates, that they can do to accommodate the needs of them as well.

P1: Okay. That's great. So, um, this was everything I had to ask you. I have one last question, which is basically like a summary of what we just talked about. So overall, which factors would you consider to be most decisive for the success of expatriation and repatriation?

- P2: Be flexible to change and expected. Understand that this will not immediately hand the expatriate a better position in their home country. Personally, it's an enrichment and the experience are unique. I would encourage everyone to take this opportunity if possible.

Appendix

P1: All right. That's great. From my side, that would be everything. Is there anything else you would like to add to this topic?

- P2: No, thank you very much.

Interview 5 (A05):

P1: Could you please briefly introduce yourself, the company you worked for, the kind of job you had during your assignment.

- P2: I'm a 27-year-old male. I was working for XXX as an export manager with different functions regarding responsibilities. Key responsibilities during my expat time were building up the structure in the US. We opened a new office in the US which was focused on trading and maximizing the coverage of different countries in the northern and southern American territory.

P1: Further, I have a few questions prepared for difficulties in connection with the preparation of such an international assignment. It's important for me to see how processes can be improved to reach the desired outcome. My first question would be, how was the selection process of your company during the international assignment to see which employee is the best for that?

- P2: There was no real selection process or whatever. It was because I was covering South America. I was studying international business, and so I was internally asking for a challenge and for change. The CEO of the company, that decided for this expansion of the company, knew me quite well and knew what I am capable of and therefore recommended me. He knew that I'm driven and hungry for challenges. And he said he wants to have me there to get this thing started. So, there was no clear process or anything like that. It was more just like trust and obviously some performance related decisions.

P1: Okay, that's good to hear. Were there any specific measures taken to prepare you for the international assignment?

- P2: No not really. I'm not a super structured guy. I was just like, okay, let's get it done. So, it was very easy conversation. Also, in the preparation he said, you want to do it. I said yes. And that is how it was agreed.

P1: Alright. Was there something that went bad in that process where you say this was not working in the way how it should have worked?

- P2: Probably, yes, but I never really thought about it because I was internally motivated.

P1: Okay. I have a few questions about challenges that are related to personality traits and adaptability to new cultural and professional environments. Which personal characteristics are considered crucial or very important for successfully adapting to a new work environment?

- P2: Persistence. Discipline. Having a big inner drive. You will get a lot of rejection. You will get a lot of trouble. You'll get a lot of problems. You'll be lonely. So, you must be very persistent and work for your goals and what you want to achieve. Because otherwise you'll be drowning in emotions like loneliness or something like that.

P1: Okay. What do you think about flexibility and openness in this context?

- P2: Obviously, you have to be flexible and open because, you know, if you will leave your family and your friends it can be hard. I was coming from a small town in Germany, and I went to Chicago, one of the biggest cities in the world. Obviously, you must be open for new environment, for the new city, for new people, for new culture. And of course, you also must be flexible because you will have to deal with a lot of organizational stuff like a visa.

P1: Have there been any supporting mechanisms during your stay to promote your adaptability to the other employees during the assignment, or generally in the other country?

- P2: Well, we already had some employees over there, which we then expanded, but there were nice colleagues. There was one quite young guy. I think he was 32 or something, which I got along with very, very well. And he took brilliant care of me. So, we went to football games together and spend a lot of time together. So that was very good. If you had colleagues in your age that kind of welcome, you and you become friends. But there was no like real official support mechanism by the company that was more personal.

P1: Is there something you would have wanted in this respect?

- P2: No. Not really. I don't think I would have needed it, but it always depends on the persons character how much support they need.

P1: Okay. Coming back to the personal characteristics very quickly, what do you think could be difficult? And how do you think a company and an employee together could overcome this?

- P2: (...) Very difficult question. Obviously, we talked about flexibility and openness, and if you're very limited in your thinking, it will be very difficult to go abroad and work in a different country because you will have to, to adapt and get used to the new environment. You cannot always behave like you did in the past. So, if you are traditional and you don't want to change it anyway, then this will be a little bit difficult for you to adapt and integrate into the new society. I mean, for example, in the US there are huge differences not only in the work environment but also in the in the private environment because in the US everything is huge and big and such is like self-presentation or talking about business, you will always have to make it 20 times bigger than it is, because if you are going in the normal use job and way, just like reporting factual what you did it will not be enough.

P1: Okay, that's interesting. Do you think there is a way for a company to help for a person that has these certain characteristics, for it eventually to still work out?

- P2: I mean, probably they could give some briefing about the culture or on the main differences but again I think it depends on if the person wants to change.

P1: Next thing I would like to ask about are difficulties during the export expatriation that are caused by family issues when you're sent abroad. What do you think family issues play for a role in the decision for or against an international assignment?

- P2: (...) I mean, I think this was very difficult too. Kind of making this decision. Because in the end of the day, you're going to decide for business and for work and against your family in a lot of cases. So, I think that is very challenging. I think that many people don't take the chance because of the family. I think it's it plays a huge role. For me

personally, I didn't have kids or a wife. Although I also had some family issues going on during the time I was in the US because my parents separated during that time, and it was a big thing to just leave in the middle of that.

P1: Have there been any available support systems for families of expatriates during the expatriation or even for the preparation in your company in general?

- P2: I mean, there's. You earn a lot of money and get supported with allowances to be able to support your family financially. And I also got three flights to back home per year. I think every quarter it was. So obviously they made sure that I have access to my family at some point.

P1: Do you think that was helpful enough, or should there have been other options as well?

- P2: So, I had more days off to visit the family than what was usual for the US, and I was okay with that. I could not think of anything additional that was going to hurt more. It was okay. In addition, at that time I also had a girlfriend, the company also offered for her to come to the US and work. I believe offers and support systems like that are very helpful.

P1: Okay. That's great to hear. Next part of my questions is about language and cultural barriers and things that might cause problems during this and how they could be overcome. How does your organization address language barriers to ensure effective communication during the international assignment?

- P2: (...) Why should we have a language barrier? We are all capable of speaking English. I believe for that reason there haven't been any language courses or something similar available for us.

P1: Do you think in general if it would affect another country that you would be expatriates to a language course would be efficient.

- P2: (...) For sure. I mean, if you're not talking about an English-speaking country, then this should be the most important to make sure that the language is understood well.

P1: Okay. Um, then going over to cultural differences, was there a strategy to make sure that the cultural differences are clear and enable a smooth operation in the international context for you?

- P2: (...) Telling me personally, I cannot say anything about this experience because I never had the feeling that we had one. Sometimes the communication with the US colleagues, so not from my side, but with US colleagues to some colleagues in Germany, was a little bit problematic because some German or some people that worked in the headquarter were not very good in English. But that's when I, for example, helped and optimized the communication between these two. As an open-minded young guy, you will easily adapt to the new culture because you know you're open minded and you just go with the flow. You kind of do trial and error and. The more time you spent, the more you will adapt to the culture. But we had a lot of issues with the company culture, that's for sure, because the Germans are very, as they are known for, you know, very factual, very hard. So, for sure we had to find some kind of communication in the middle and some cultural acceptance to each other. But this was more of a task for the expatriates to figure out how to solve it instead of an actual strategy from the company's side that was in place. Probably like cultural awareness courses could have helped. Because you're used to your approach to work, and you're very limited to that because it's the only thing you know and then if you get to know a culture, then it's just like totally different. It's a big cultural clash. So, either although you are prepared for it, it will still shock you and you will still have to slowly adapt to this culture because it won't happen, that you will go to a course, you will have the course, and then you will have like 100% full understanding for everything they do. Because culture is gone in so many different small aspects. So, it's yeah, it can, it can give you a little starter to have a little bit more understanding. But in the end of the day, you will have to get this understanding for yourself. During that time, you will spend with the people.

P1: That make sense. What do you see as challenges in the reintegrating of employees after such an assignment?

- P2: Usually, people have problems adapting back to their old work culture after they just adapted to a new one and getting back to their home country again with getting used to a new language and new cultural barriers. But this was not the case for me. Because after I left the US, I came home and shortly after was assigned to another assignment to Copenhagen. Once again, I had a new culture that I needed to adapt to. And then I came back to Germany.

P1: Are there any measures that your company in general takes when someone comes back and repatriates back home that you know about?

- P2: This company would just demand that you readapt yourself. Everything is going well. Also, it depends on the time you are spending abroad in a different country. I think if you spend like 1 or 2 years, it will not totally change your culture and be like a new person. I think you will just have more understanding for different cultures. You will get all the benefits of you are more open minded. I think it should not be a big problem to reintegrate in my opinion. You will only get back better as a better human being because you will have more understanding for different cultures from different people, for different personalities. That's what I think. But once you're back in the headquarter, for example, in Germany, you would maybe be like for six weeks. It would be like, okay, I need to get back to it, but then it's business as usual after that time. So, I don't think there's a big reintegration you need to do.

P1: Okay. All right. So um, with that coming to my last question, which is more like a summary of what we talked about before, just very quickly. Overall, which factors would you consider to be most decisive for the success of expatriation and repatriation?

- P2: (...) I think the biggest factor is the person itself by far, because if you have a person that does it or that agrees to do the expatriation for the wrong parameters that would not work. The person also must really want it, because there will be a lot of challenges, a lot of problems. And the thing that you or the task you are assigned, you must want to do it 100% no matter what else happens.

Appendix

P1: Okay, great. In this respect, is there anything else you would want to add to this topic?

- P2: (...) They have something in mind which I could talk about?

P1: Not just in general. I'm over with my questions. So, if there's nothing from your side, this is it from my side as well.

- P2: I think so. I think I'm good.

P1: Okay, great. So just for clarification, you have been how long abroad in the US?

- P2: One year.

P1: Thank you, a lot, for your time!

Interview 6 (A06):

P1: Please briefly introduce yourself, your company, and the nature of your international assignments to get a little context before focusing on the challenges and possible success factors.

- P2: My name is XXX I am a male in my late thirties, and I am currently living in the USA. I was working for a company in Germany where I was living at that time, and I was sent to Chicago for what was planned to be 5 years. I unfortunately had to repatriate already after 1 year of being there because of mistakes that happened internally in the HR department.

P1: I am sorry to hear that. But maybe to start how has the selection process of employees for international assignments evolved in your organization?

- P2: We did not have a real selection process. There was a position freeing up that needed to be filled over there with someone that has my skillset, and it was hard for the company. I started talking to a few managers and they casually asked me if I would be interested. I went home discussed it with my family and the next day I told the managers that I would be willing to go. So, there was not really a selection process since they didn't have a big pool to pick from to begin with. Generally, I still think if a company has a selection process, they should be aware of the fact that they cannot just select by the HQ perspective but need to take the subsidiaries perspective into account as well.

P1: Can you provide insights into specific measures to prepare employees for international assignments?

- P2: There were things that in theory should have happened but they didn't really happen in the end. There was supposed to be language and cultural awareness courses for me and my family but unfortunately, they were not available for us at the time for unknown reasons. I guess, it had to do with the fact that I have been to the US a few times for a couple of days because of work related thing but it would still have been very helpful for my 2 kids and my wife.

Appendix

P1: Which metrics in the preparation and selection process motivated you and had a positive impact on the implementation and completion of your international assignment? What had the opposite effect?

- P2: I think something like a trainer for cultures that explains the differences to both sides beforehand would have been really motivating. I mean I had it later in the process, but also only me and not my family and I think I would have needed that before. There are always things that a person needs to prepare for no matter if they go to the USA, UAE, or China. But I think there aren't many companies that actually do it, a lot of them say they do or have it in their theory on their paperwork but not in reality.

P1: In the next part I would like to talk about challenges related to employees' personality traits and their adaptability to new cultural and professional environments. Which personal characteristics do you consider to be crucial for successfully adapting to a new work environment?

- P2: I think what I am about to say is nothing a company would really like to hear but I think a little rulebreaker is good for an international assignment. By that I mean someone that if he realizes the process how it is in the manual is not how it would work best in the foreign country, he is going to do what needs to be done even if he was not told. For an international assignment you need to be a problem solver, you need to be self-aware and to not be too sensitive so that you can actually stick through some hard times.

P1: To what extent do you consider personal characteristics such as flexibility and openness to be crucial?

- P2: Definitely!

P1: What support mechanisms did your company/s use to promote the adaptability of their employees during international assignments?

- P2: The part of the company in the host country managed it very well, whereas the German part from my HQ just went on autopilot. I couldn't reach anyone, they didn't respond when I tried to figure something out, they really weren't helpful at all. The host countries part of the company

was supporting me with legal advice, tax consultancy, as I said before the cultural trainer. Moreover, we had a lot of teambuilding activities throughout the whole year to ensure that I as an expatriate got very well integrated and that I am feeling comfortable. But I would have wished that the HR in my HQ would have taken more accountability and responsibility.

P1: What could be personal characteristics that make an international assignment difficult and how do you think they could be overcome?

- P2: I think as I said a big problem is if you are not open to new cultures and for the world in general. A person should not be fixed too much on their home countries tradition and ways of behavior. Being introverted also surely doesn't help when you want to feel good and integrated in a new country. I feel like a company can provide trainings to try and tell people how they ideally should be, but I don't think it is the most effective. I think they should look for the right candidate in the selection process instead of trying to fix the wrong candidate.

P1: Going over to difficulties caused by family issues when employees are sent abroad and how to overcome them. What role do family issues play in employees' decisions for or against international assignments?

- P2: First, it's important that the partner also has some kind of excitement for the international assignment and is willing to go abroad. Often the partner does not even have a work permit in another country and just sitting at home for a year, you need to be willing to sacrifice something for that and want it. Otherwise, it surely is a big deal for deciding against going abroad for the job. (...) Also, I think if you have kids, it is important that the company explains to you how the school systems work in the new country. For example, in the US you have good and bad school district and in them better and worse schools, you need to know this before because you don't want to sacrifice your children's possibilities for an international assignment.

P1: Can you elaborate on the support systems available to the families of expatriate employees? How helpful/influencing are those in your opinion?

- P2: Nothing at all. I think as I said once again culture and language courses for the whole family would have been helpful for the adaptation process and maybe even providing a work permit for my wife and helping with all the organizational stuff that goes with school of the kids.

P1: In the next step I have some questions about problems caused by language barriers and cultural differences between the home country and the country of assignment. How does your organization address language barriers to ensure effective communication during international assignments? How efficient do you think they are?

- P2: As I said, I was told we will get them, but we never got them. I think a good course would have been very efficient.

P1: What strategies are in place to bridge cultural differences and enable smooth operations in an international context?

- P2: Also, here I will just quickly repeat myself. My co-workers from my host country did best to integrate me with teambuilding and stuff like that but the sending part of my company did not support me in this matter or honestly any other matter during my assignment at all, even though they should have been responsible.

P1: Lastly, looking at challenges that arise during reintegration and repatriation after international assignment and how to ensure a successful return to the Headquarter and the home country. What challenges do you see in reintegrating employees after an international assignment?

- P2: I would like to start this off with the fact that when I left four other colleagues left with me. We had to all come back after one year because the German HR forgot to prolong our work visas. When we got back to Germany immediately three of them left because of the way they were treated or better to say not treated. Feeling left alone during your assignment will make it hard to get comfortable again with your old environment. For me personally, I came back, and I was angry about this as well, but I generally liked my job. What occurred to me as a challenge is that the company on the inside changes people get promoted, fired, or retire, so in the end you come back to your old

environment, but it is not what you knew so your expectations are gone, and you have to try and adapt there again.

P1: Could you provide insights into measures taken to facilitate the repatriation of employees and ensure a successful return to the home organization?

- P2: In the whole time I stayed in the company after my assignment, which was just for a few months but only one person managed to come and say sorry to me for the way all this went. And I realized that honesty and them telling me the truth and be aware of their mistakes and trying to make it up would have helped me and I think a lot of other people as well, a lot with the return to our HQ.

P1: Just as a quick summary of what we just talked about. Overall, which factors would you consider to be the most decisive for the success of expatriation and repatriation?

- P2: I think you need to generally be interested in the host country. You cannot see the international assignment as a career boost. Especially, your family, being open to a new culture and to new people is something that needs to be on your positive side if you want to be successful and have a good time in the other country. I also think that the preparation of the family is always more important than the one of the expatriates, because the expatriate has his job, he will figure it out, but it can be hard for the family, and it can influence the expatriate's performance and motivation so much. And for the end I think there should always be an open position kept for the expatriate so when he returns, he has his job. I know this is very hard especially the longer the assignment gets but it is important to ensure that the company will not just lose you.

P1: Thank you so much, is there anything else you would like to add to this topic?

- P2: I just want to say one last thing. Companies need to be aware that they are putting a lot of energy and money into expatriate programs, and it is a bigger win to put a bit more effort into the programs and do it right instead of losing a good employee that you invested into your competitor. Thank you so much!

Additional Supporting Materials

Interview Guidelines

Coding guidelines: Expert interviews

Coding guidelines and questions for expert interviews on the challenges of international assignments:

Introduction: Please briefly introduce yourself, your company and the nature of your international assignments to get a little context before focusing on the challenges and possible success factors.

a. Challenge 1: Preparation and selection

Definition: Difficulties in connection with the preparation for an international assignment and the selection of employees for this task. Additionally, how to improve the processes to ensure the desired outcome.

Coding rule: Code all statements that relate to the preparation process and the selection of employees for an international assignment. Special attention to challenges and what they found helpful!

Additional questions:

How has the selection process of employees for international assignments evolved in your organization?

Can you provide insights into specific measures to prepare employees for international assignments?

Which metrics in the preparation and selection process motivated you and had a positive impact on the implementation and completion of your international assignment? What had the opposite effect?

b. Challenge 2: Personality and adaptation

Definition: Challenges related to employees' personality traits and their adaptability to new cultural and professional environments.

Coding rule: Code all information related to personal characteristics and employees' ability to adapt to new environments. Take special attention to

which characteristics of theirs helped them and which made the process harder.

Additional questions:

Which personal characteristics do you consider to be crucial for successfully adapting to a new work environment?

To what extent do you consider personal characteristics such as flexibility and openness to be crucial?

What support mechanisms did your company/s use to promote the adaptability of their employees during international assignments?

What could be personal characteristics that make an international assignment difficult and how do you think they could be overcome?

c. Challenge 3: Family and Expatriation

Definition: Difficulties caused by family issues when employees are sent abroad and how to overcome them.

Coding rule: Code statements that refer to family challenges related to international assignments and their prevention.

Additional questions:

What role do family issues play in employees' decisions for or against international assignments?

Can you elaborate on the support systems available to the families of expatriate employees? How helpful/influencing are those in your opinion?

d. Challenge 4: Language and culture barriers

Definition: Problems caused by language barriers and cultural differences between the home country and the country of assignment. Moreover, to which extent they can be overcome and what measures need to be taken.

Coding Rule: Code all statements that relate to language communication difficulties and cultural differences.

Additional questions:

How does your organization address language barriers to ensure effective communication during international assignments? How efficient do you think they are?

What strategies are in place to bridge cultural differences and enable smooth operations in an international context?

e. Challenge 5: Reintegration and repatriation

Definition: Challenges that arise during reintegration and repatriation after international assignment and how to ensure a successful return to the Headquarter and the home country.

Coding rule: Code information on challenges faced during the return of employees and their integration into the home organization and country.

Additional questions:

What challenges do you see in reintegrating employees after an international assignment?

Could you provide insights into measures taken to facilitate the repatriation of employees and ensure a successful return to the home organization?

Closer:

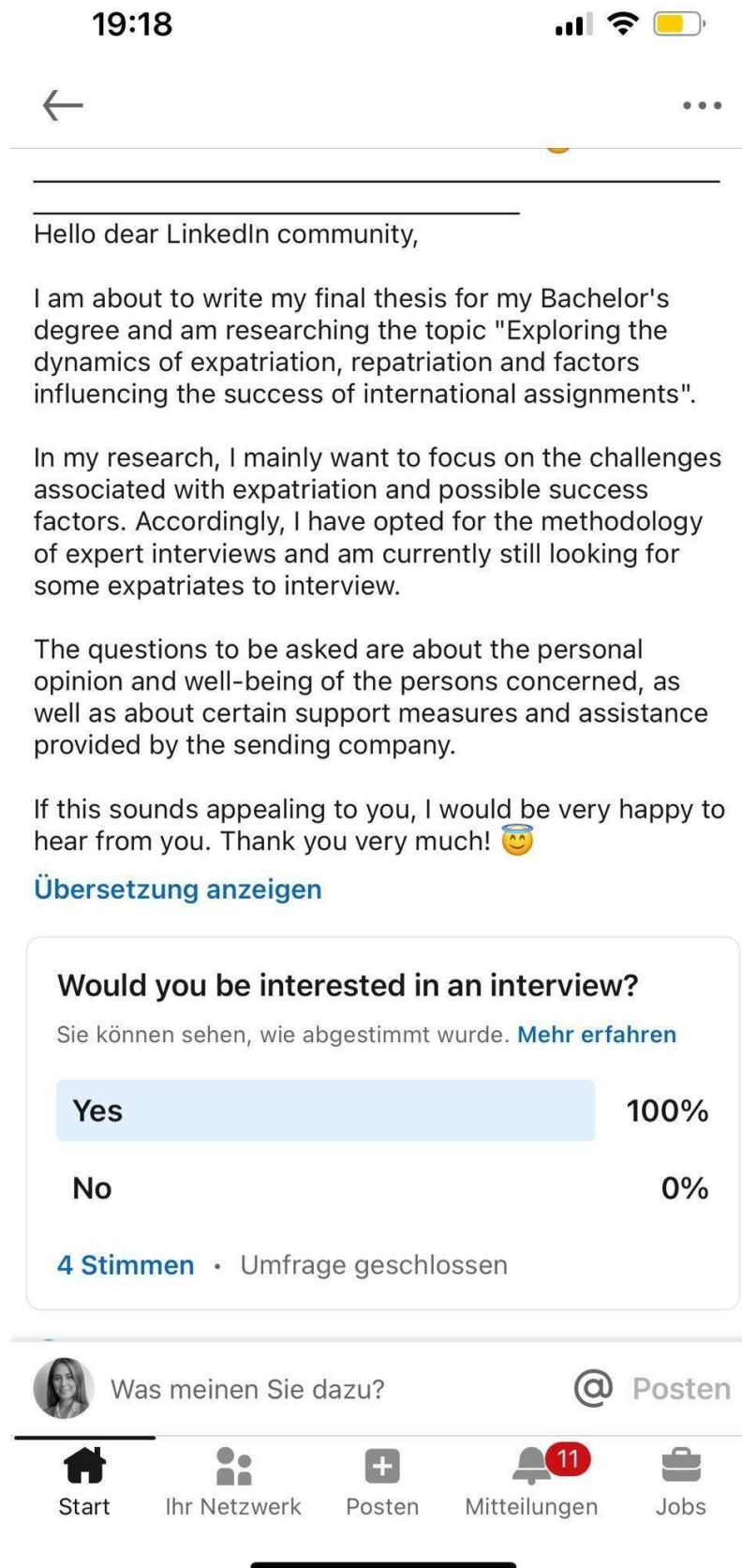
Overall, which factors would you consider to be the most decisive for the success of expatriation and repatriation?

Contacting experts on Facebook



Contacting experts on LinkedIn

Link: <https://shorturl.at/eiJO9>



10/2023

I. Eigenständigkeitserklärung*

*Declaration of originality**

Hiermit versichere ich

Hereby, I

Eco, Lejla

1293777

Name, Vorname

Last name, First name

Matrikelnummer

Student ID number

International studies in management

Studiengang

Study programme

dass ich die vorliegende

affirm that I have prepared the present

(bei Gruppenarbeit mein bearbeiteter Teil) mit dem Thema

(in case of group work the part I have prepared) with the topic

Global Mobility: Exploring the Dynamics of Expatriation, Repatriation, and Factors Influencing the Success of International Assignments

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Ort, Datum
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