Agnieszka Kierner

Expatriation of Dual-Career Couples

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ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

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Julkaisun nimike
Kaksoisurapariskuntien kansainvälinen liikkuvuus

Tiivistelmä
Kansainvälistä uraliikkuvuutta on tutkittu jo paljon, mutta tutkimuksia uraorientoituneiden pariskuntien kansainvälisestä uraliikkuvuudesta on vain vähän. Tämän tutkimuksen empiirinen osio perustuu kaikkiaan 36 syvähaastatteluun (18 kansainväliselle työkomennukselle lähetettyä ekspatriaattia ja heidän 18 uraorientoitunutta puolisoaan). Tutkimuksen muodostaa kaikkiaan neljä artikkelia, joista kolme perustuu empiiriseen dataan. Ensimmäinen artikkeli on kirjallisuuskatsaus, joka tarkastelee tutkimuksen kohteena olevaa ilmiötä kansainvälisessä kontekstissa ja pyrkii vastaamaan kysymykseen: mitä kirjallisuus kertoo pariskuntien kansainvälisestä uraliikkuvuudesta sekä työkomennukselle lähetetyn ekspatriaatin, että hänen puolisonsa perspektiiveistä, ja minkälaista tukea heidän työnantajansa tarjoavat komennuksen onnistumiseksi. Artikkelin lopuksi tehdään ehdotuksia tulevaisuuden tutkimusaiheiksi. Toisessa artikkelissa paneudutaan puolisoiden uratavoitteiden ja -polkujen muodostukseen ja muutokseen kansainvälisen uraliikkuvuuden eri vaiheissa: kotimaasta lähtiessä, uuteen kohdemaahan sopeuduttaessa sekä paluupäätöksen ja kotiutumisen koittaessa. Kolmas artikkeli vastaa kysymykseen, millaisia rooleja puolisoidensa urakehitystä tukevat miehet ottavat mahdollistaakseen puolisoidensa kansainvälisen uraliikkuvuuden onnistumisen. Viimeinen artikkeli vastaa kysymykseen, kuinka urasuuntautuneet pariskunnat sopeutuvat palatessaan kotimaahansa, ja mitkä tekijät vaikuttavat paluusopeutumisen onnistumiseen.
Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat, että käytetty Hope-teoria tarjoaa hyödyllisen viitekehyksen pariskuntien muuttuvien uratavoitteiden analysoimiseen työkomennuksen eri vaiheissa. Lisäksi tutkimuksessa identifioidaan onnistuneeseen kotiinpaluuseen vaikuttavia tekijöitä kuten pariskuntien urajohtamisen taidot, kansainvälinen suuntautuminen, työ- ja perhe-elämän yhdistämisen taso sekä tulevaisuuden uraodotuksien toteutuminen paluun jälkeen. Tutkimus tarjoaa myös käytännön näkökulmia siihen, kuinka kaksoisurapariskunnat ja yritykset voivat parantaa pariskuntien kansainvälisten työkomennusten onnistumista.

Asiasanat
ulkomaankomennukset, kaksoisurapariskunnat, sopeutuminen, toivo-teoria, kotiinpaluu, työurien yhteensovittaminen

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Abstract

This manuscript focuses on the growing phenomenon of expatriation among dual-career couples, where both partners are physically and psychologically committed to their work. Due to both the changing nature of the current workforce and more women aiming to work, this area merits increased attention from scholars.

The empirical part of the thesis is based on two data sets of qualitative research, formed through a total of 36 comprehensive interviews with 18 assigned expatriates and 18 dual-career partners. The study comprises four articles, of which three are based on empirical data. The first article is a literature review of the existing research on dual-career expatriation, including the perspective of the expatriate and the role of their dual-career partner and also the existing corporate support practices. In the end, suggestions for future research are made. The second article addresses the issue of how career goals, pathways, and the agency of dual-career partners change as they progress from international relocation, through their adjustment to the host location, to the decision to repatriate back to their home country The third article examines the roles men adopt to facilitate successful female expatriation. The last article focuses on how dual-career couples adjust after repatriation, and what factors are connected with the level of their repatriation satisfaction.

This study provides multiple theoretical contributions. It indicates that hope theory offers a useful framework for increasing our understanding of the changing goals, pathways and agency thinking of expatriate partners, and identifies a new seeking role undertaken by male expatriate partners supporting a female expatriate while looking for new career opportunities themselves. Furthermore, the study identifies four factors influencing a positive repatriation outcome: dual-career couple career self-management, their international orientation, the integration of work and family life, and the realization and implementation of future career interests. Last but not least, practical contributions include a range of insights for dual-career couples and for HR Managers in corporations that could boost the success of dual-career expatriate assignments and diversity among the workforce.

Keywords:

expatriation, repatriation, dual-career couples, adjustment, hope theory, career coordination, partner roles

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Love,

Agnieszka Kierner

Seattle, 20th of June 2019

Contents

Tables

Abbreviations

APAC	Asia and Pacific
DCC	Dual-Career Couple
DIC	Dual-Income Couple
EMEA	Europe Middle East and Africa
FMCG	Fast Moving Consumer Goods
HRM	Human Resources Management
HRMs	Human Resources Managers
IDCC	International Dual-Career Couple
IHRM	International Human Resources Management
MNC	Multinational Corporation
NA	North America

Publications

[1] Kierner, A. (2015). Dual-Income and Dual-Career Couples in International Context. In L. Mäkelä, & V. Suutari (Eds.), *Work and Family Interface in the International Career Context*, (pp. 95-116). Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing. [1]
An earlier version of this paper has been presented at the International Interdisciplinary Conference on Research on Work, Turku, Finland, 21 - 23 of August 2013.

[2] Kierner, A. (2018) Expatriated Dual-Career Partners: Hope and Disillusionment. *Journal of Global Mobility. The home of Expatriate Management Research* [2]
An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 43rd European International Business Academy Conference, 14th – 16th December 2017, Politecnico Milano, Milan, Italy.
The paper received a 2019 Emerald Award for Excellence, as a highly commended one.

[3] Kierner, A. & Suutari, V. (under review in the *Gender in Management*) Partner roles in international dual career couples: the case of female expatriates and their male partner.[3]
An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 15th Conference on IHRM, Madrid, Spain, 13th - 15th June 2018. Professor Dave Lepak Memorial Prize recognized the paper as one of the five best papers at the IHRM-conference.

[4] Kierner, A., & Suutari, V. (2017) Repatriation of Dual-Career Couples. *Thunderbird Int. Bus. Rev.* 2017, 1–11. [4]
An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 14th Vaasa Conference on International Business, August 23-25, 2017, University of Vaasa, Vaasa, Finland

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1 INTRODUCTION

In our rapidly changing and interconnected world, the mobility of global talent is critical to effective corporate management, business development, innovation, and long-term viability of multinational corporations. Meanwhile, sending employees abroad, known as expatriation, is a significant and evolving phenomenon due to the increased foreign direct investment, business expansion, systematic transformation of the global economy as well as new sociocultural trends (Brookfield, 2016; Parry et al., 2013). More couples are deciding to pursue an international life, in which both partners are career engaged. Hence, issues inherent to the expatriation of dual-career couples are among the critical challenges facing companies aspiring to attract talent from this globally mobile workforce (McNulty & Moeller, 2018; Ravasi et al., 2013; Shaffer et al., 2012).

Dual-career couples (DCCs), make up approximately a quarter of the expatriate population, based on a survey of 163 large corporations from the NA, EMEA, and APAC regions (Brookfield, 2016), with a clear tendency to grow. In the aforementioned survey, the percentage of partners in married expatriate couples that worked before the assignment increased from 41% to 49% between 2013 and 2016. As many as 83% of global mobility managers agree that partner employment has an impact on attracting their first-choice candidates, with greater obstacles for female employees and an adverse impact on creating gender-balanced senior management teams (Brookfield, 2016). The limited literature available on the experiences of dual-career international couples has prompted frequent calls for further research (Huffman & Frevert 2013; Känsälä et al., 2015; Lauring & Selmer, 2010; McNulty & Moeller, 2018; Mäkelä et al., 2011). Unfortunately, to date, neither the size nor significance of the issue has resulted in any visible increase in the quality or quantity of research on this phenomenon (Harvey et al., 2009a; Lauring & Selmer, 2010; Mäkelä et al., 2011, McNulty & Moeller, 2018; Van der Velde et. al 2017).

Meanwhile, dual-career expatriate couples face many unique issues. These challenges include stereotypical perceptions of this group as being less mobile (Moore, 2002), issues with selection for international assignments (Collings et al., 2011), willingness deliberations including fear of being asked to relocate when it is not feasible because of a partner's career (Kraimer & Wayne, 2004), adjustment issues (Braseby, 2010), disruption of family finances connected to the loss of a stream of income (Harvey, 1998), consequences of discontinuity in a partner's career (Riusala & Suutari, 2000) including loss of objective career success (Arthur et al., 2005) or challenges related to professional identity (Khapova et al., 2007),

familial dysfunction (Andreason, 2008) and feeling of isolation, frustration, disappointment and anger (McNulty, 2012; Shaffer and Harrison, 2001).

Furthermore, a large share of existing expatriate research relies on cases involving an American male manager relocating to a developed country, while the actual population of expatriates has significantly changed and diversified. One illustration of these trends is the proportion of female expatriates, which grew from 3% to 25% (GMAC, 2004; Brookfields, 2013–2016; Hutchings et al., 2012). Additionally, work values are likely to have changed for this new modern-day cohort of expatriates and their partners with a very different composition of gender, age, and national culture (Parry & Urwin, 2011). These trends open many new avenues for exploration, among which are matters addressed in this dissertation, including issues experienced by dual-career partners, specific setbacks experienced by male dual-career partners, and repatriation concerns of DCCs, where literature is hard to find.

International dual-career couples now relocate in different directions than those described in the bulk of research on the assigned expatriation process (when a company temporarily sends an employee to work abroad), which used to be driven by the need of multinational corporations (MNCs) - mainly from the United States - to expand into developing markets. Over the years, the need for expatriates has grown and the issue has increased in terms of both complexity and multidimensionality (Brookfield, 2016), ultimately creating a four-pronged change trend (Bonache et al., 2017). First, MNCs are locating their headquarters well beyond the United States. European, Asian, Latin American, and Middle Eastern countries have MNCs requiring the expansion of operations into other nations. Consequently, dual-career couples, may not necessarily move from a wealthy country to an emerging one; often expatriates move from a developing nation to a prosperous one. Second, there is a growing demand for talent to fill the shortage of skilled local candidates in critical areas of innovation or service delivery (Elgebe, 2016; Turner, 2018; Karan et al. 2016). Third, small organizations are often 'born global exporters' and need to expand their footprint without the support of an established HRM department (Cavusgil & Knight, 2015). Fourth, the realization that to facilitate useful global innovation and informed corporate management, companies need to construct teams composed of people with a diverse range of experiences, ways of thinking, nationalities and genders. Organizations cannot exclude dual-career candidates from that process because doing so would naturally limit the talent pool and introduce selection bias. This thesis and supporting research attempts to refresh our understanding based on inclusion of a number of expatriates from these new talent pools and geographical directions representing modern trends in expatriation.

When it comes to organizations considering female expatriates in dual-career relationships, researchers have observed stereotyping during the selection process (Fischlmayr, 2002; Linehan et al., 2001), a lack of female-oriented support practices (Hutchings et al., 2008), and ongoing emotional and family issues (Fischlmayr & Puchmüller, 2016). Finally, most women neither ask for nor accept international assignments which can be seen as extreme jobs (Hewlett & Luce, 2006; Gascoigne et al., 2015) due to difficulties coordinating their career with the career of their dual-career partner (Känsälä et al., 2012), and because female-led repatriation goes against social norms, stereotypes, and expectations of how an ideal family should function described in gender order theory (Connel, 2013; Tolciu & Zierahn, 2012). Therefore, studying male partner roles during expatriation is one of the focus areas of this dissertation, in a quest to understand changing social expectations and learn how male dual-career partners can support successful female-led expatriation.

Multinational corporations should be interested in understanding these phenomena, owing to the need to attract foreign experts to critical positions, and because of the value of sending some of their best talent abroad to grow their international operations and ensure they have senior management teams that are balanced in terms of both gender and thought. Given the significant presence of dual-career couples in the corporate workforce, companies must address problems such as higher refusal rates for positions involving international relocation (Harvey et al., 2009a), assignment failure - argued to be higher among the group of dual-career couples (Andreason, 2008) - as well as the challenges inherent in repatriation (Sanchez-Vidal et al., 2008).

In the light of these facts, this dissertation begins with the identification of research gaps through a review of the literature on dual-career assigned expatriates, starting with issues preceding assignment, followed by an examination of adjustment in a new country, and concluding with the repatriation of dual-career couples to their home country. Further, hope theory is used to understand the pathways, agency, and goals of IDCC partners to shed light on how the issues that they experience influence decision-making on repatriation. Additionally, this work explores the under-researched areas of spousal roles of career-engaged partners of female expatriates, attempting to understand what kind of roles male partners adopt to support successful female expatriation. Finally, the neglected area of repatriation of dual-career couples is explored, following the expectation that experiences and challenges of dual-career couples may differ as compared to single-career cases described in earlier literature, and identifying factors connected with the level of their satisfaction from repatriation experience.

The inquiry is based on two waves of in-depth qualitative research with a total of thirty-six (36) interviewees: eighteen (18) expatriates and eighteen (18) dual-career partners. They were chosen under strict selection criteria to ensure career engagement for both partners, and validation that they have sufficient experience gained by completion of at least one comprehensive expatriate assignment in order to provide robust evidence on the researched phenomena. While being grounded in existing literature this work highlights significant differences that are specific to international dual-career couples, contributing to scientific literature and informing HRMs in charge of global talent management.

1.1 Research question and objectives of the dissertation

This dissertation aims to explore the expatriation of dual-career couples and answer the following primary research question:

How do dual-career couples experience expatriate assignments?

The main research question is answered by the sub-research questions of four articles that form the basis of this dissertation:

Article 1: What does existing research say about dual-career couple expatriation, including the perspective of expatriates and role of their DCC partners and corporate support practices? Where are the gaps in the current research?

Article 2: How do career goals, pathways, and agency of dual-career partners change as they progress from international relocation, through their adjustment to the host location, to the decision to repatriate back to their home country?

Article 3: What kinds of spousal roles do the male partners of female expatriates adopt to make female expatriation possible?

Article 4: How do dual-career couples adjust after repatriation, and what factors are connected with the level of their repatriation adjustment?

This dissertation reviews the scientific literature concerning IDCC expatriation and support practices offered by MNCs (Article 1), and reports findings from qualitative research on the change of hope and agency of partners during the assignment (Article 2), specific issues of male partners (Article 3), and experiences of couples during repatriation (Article 4). Perspectives of both the expatriate and their dual-career partner are considered to understand the varying experiences of DCCs as called for in earlier research (Rusconi et al. 2013; Känsälä et al., 2015; Harvey, 1998).

The research objectives, methods, sample composition, timing of data collection, and theoretical grounding for each of the articles are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of the research objectives, sample, data collection period and theoretical grounding

	Article 1: Expatriate IDCCs	Article 2: Partner hope, goals, pathways, and agency	Article 3: Partner roles of male partners	Article 4: Repatriation adjustment
Research objective	Review existing literature on expatriation of DCCs to identify future research needs.	Explain how career goals, pathways, and agency of dual-career partners change during the full cycle of international relocation.	Identify the kinds of spousal roles that male partners of female expatriates adopt to make female expatriation possible.	Identify and explain critical factors connected with successful repatriation experiences of international DCCs.
Method	Literature review	Semi-structured interviews	Semi-structured interviews	Semi-structured interviews
Sample	Published literature from 1969 to 2014	28 interviewees from IDCCs (14 expatriates and 14 partners)	20 interviewees from IDCCs (10 female expatriates and 10 male partners)	28 interviewees from IDCCs (14 expatriates and 14 partners)
Data collection	January 2014 –October 2014	December 2013 – April 2015	January 2016 – April 2018	December 2013 – April 2015
Theoretical grounding		Hope theory *Snyder, 2002*	Gender order theory Spousal role typology in dual-career couples *Connel, 2013; Välimäki et al. 2009; Mäkelä et al. 2011*	Repatriation adjustment theory *Black et al. 1991; Black et al. 1992*

1.2 Key concepts of the study

This section defines the key terms used throughout the dissertation and the attached articles. A clear understanding of the key constructs used in the study is essential. This is especially true for this work, which links two fields of research: dual-careers and expatriation, both of which have been observed to suffer from poor construct clarity in earlier literature. In particular, recent authors have called for heightened attention to limiting ambiguity of terms used when defining dual-career couples and assigned expatriates (Hughes, 2013; McNulty & Brewster, 2017).

Expatriation

Wherever the term expatriation is used, the author refers to a process of relocating an employee and their family, where the expatriate needs to fulfill four conditions (McNulty & Brewster, 2017). First, the expatriate is employed by the sending organization (MNC). Second, expatriation is for an originally planned temporary period, limited for the purpose of this thesis to long-term expatriation of more than one year. Third, the expatriate is not a citizen of the country where they relocate. Fourth, the expatriate is employed in a legally compliant way in relation to immigration rules (McNulty & Brewster, 2017). The expatriation process starts from decision making to the move abroad and includes the move itself, phase of adjustment in the host country, up to the time the couple is fully adjusted after repatriation.

Repatriation

Repatriation refers in this thesis to the process of the return of the expatriate and their family to their home country after the international assignment. Since the focus of this work is on assigned expatriates, typically, the repatriation process is also financed and supported by the MNC. It may occur at the conclusion of the assignment or any time before or after the agreed term, as negotiated between the expatriate and the multinational corporation (Szkudlarek, 2010; Cox et al., 2013).

International Dual-career Couple (IDCC)

References to international dual-career couples in this thesis denote couples in which both the expatriate and the partner are professionally engaged and invested heavily in their careers, which offer the primary source of self-fulfillment (Bird & Schnurman-Crook, 2005), and thus who are employed and psychologically committed to their work (Harvey, 1998; Challiol & Mignonac, 2005). In places where reference is made to dual-career couples in general, or international context

is made clear in other parts of the sentence, the DCC (dual-career couple) acronym is used.

Expatriate

In the present study, the use of the term 'expatriate' follows a recent definition of legally working individuals who reside temporarily in a country of which they are not a citizen in order to accomplish a career-related goal, relocated abroad either by an organization, by self-initiation, or directly employed within the host country (McNulty & Brewster, 2017 p.32). In the present study, the concept is limited only to those being relocated by an employer organization.

Partner

A partner is an accompanying person, typically a husband or wife in a married relationship. Literature sometimes refers to partners of expatriates also as spouses (McNulty & Moeller, 2018). Since most expatriate programs now treat other domestic partners of the same or opposite sex as persons eligible for relocation benefits (Brookfield, 2016) along with the primary expatriate the term partner is used in this dissertation to refer to all such individuals.

Partner Roles

The use of the construct of partner roles, refers to how couples organize their relative career decisions and the degree to which they support or restrict each other in their careers (Välimäki et al., 2009; Mäkelä et al., 2011).

Adjustment

The use of the construct of adjustment refers to a multidimensional state of emotional and psychological comfort achieved by the individual and their environment (Black at al., 1991). The achievement of the state of adjustment can be studied both during assignment and throughout the repatriation stage.

Hope

The use of the term hope refers to *positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal-directed energy) and (b) pathways (planning to meet goals)*" (Snyder et al., 1991 p.571).

1.3 Intended contributions

This dissertation intends to add to our knowledge with four main findings.

First, it identifies research gaps that future research should cover so that we better understand the expatriation of IDCCs. Along with the review of research on the experiences of expatriates and their partners in different phases of expatriation (pre-departure decision-making, expatriation, and repatriation), existing knowledge on the support practices provided by multinational corporations is analyzed (including the specific needs of DCC-support). The review intends to propose a future research agenda, which is partially addressed within this dissertation.

Second, this dissertation intends to analyze the experiences of couples on an international assignment and to explore how, if underemployed during the assignment, dual-career partners may change their goals and pathways to trigger early repatriation. The intended contribution of this study lies in its detailed description of the evolution of the goals of DCCs during the entire expatriation process using hope theory, which makes it possible to reconstruct the goals, pathways, and agency thinking of both partners in the dual-career couple. Theoretical contributions address the research gap voiced by multiple scholars advocating a comprehensive perspective that describes the experiences of both the expatriate and their partner (Haslberger et al. 2012; Ravasi et al., 2013; Szkudlarek, 2010).

Third, this dissertation intends to explore the under-researched area of dual-career male partners of females who are on international assignments. The proportion of female assigned expatriates, as defined in global relocation surveys, has grown significantly in the last three decades. However, there are still far fewer female expatriates than male (GMAC, 2004; Brookfield, 2013-2016; Hutchings et al., 2012), and fewer research articles cover specific issues of female expatriates, while research concerning their male partners is hard to find. This thesis seeks to provide understanding of the types of roles that male trailing partners of successful senior female expatriates adopt, to describe their experiences and their characteristics, and thereby present new evidence of what made such diverse expatriation possible and successful.

Finally, the intended contribution of this dissertation includes the exploration of the most under-researched area of the dual-career expatriation cycle: repatriation. The analysis of experiences of DCCs returning home aims to uncover whether those experiences might be different than the ones described by earlier research

on single-career expatriates, and what is influencing such repatriation adjustment experiences.

Beyond these intended theoretical contributions, the author aims to provide practical guidance to expatriates, their partners and human resource managers at multinational corporations. These contributions include guidance that increases quality of expatriate decisions, better prepares during pre-assignment phase, and increases utilization of support practices for IDCCs. Moreover, it may guide HRMs to understand the needs and motivations of dual-career expatriates and their partners, in order to build better support and career development programs. These insights may help attract, retain and increase diversity of their talent pools.

1.4 Structure of the dissertation

This dissertation is composed of two parts. The first introduces the dissertation itself, providing an overview of the dual-career expatriation phenomena, reviewing present research and presenting theoretical foundations of the study. The second comprises four articles published by the author, two sole-authored and two co-authored. In the case of both co-authored articles, the author of the dissertation was the primary and corresponding author of the articles, has collected all the interview data for the thesis and led the overall research process by writing the first drafts of the papers. The role of the second author was to participate in the joint analysis and reporting of findings and related conclusions, and to support the refinement of the draft articles before submission.

Chapter one opens the dissertation, discussing its intentions, the research context, and objectives. Chapter two describes the dual-career expatriation process, and presents the main theoretical perspectives utilized within the dissertation to enhance our understanding of the experiences of DCCs. Chapter three discusses the philosophical considerations that inspired the selected research strategy and addresses research quality, the field research and data analysis undertaken by the author. In chapter four, the research papers that form the basis of this dissertation are briefly presented. Finally, chapter five concludes this work by summarizing its theoretical and practical contributions, along with the limitations and suggestions for future research. Section two presents reprints of all articles in their original form.

2 THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

This chapter presents our knowledge about the expatriation experience of dual-career couples organized by chronological phase, along with the theoretical lenses utilized in this doctoral dissertation. The process of expatriation of IDCCs is explored starting with the predeparture decision making, through expatriation to a new location, and repatriation to the home country after an international assignment. Theoretical perspectives follow and include hope theory, gender order theory, spousal role typology, along with expatriate and repatriate adjustment theory.

2.1 Dual-career couples in an international context

2.1.1 Pre-departure decision-making

Two decisions precede any expatriation. First, an organization needs to select and offer an assignment to the future expatriate and then the expatriate needs to accept it. Dual-career couples are participating less often in the expatriation assignments because of two significant factors. First, from an organizational perspective, a common stereotype depicts dual-career couples as being unwilling to accept assignments or failing to complete the assignment. This limits the consideration of members of dual-career couples for international positions (Collings et al., 2011; Moore, 2002). Second, from an individual perspective, the reluctance of the partners in dual-career couples to relocate may lead them to reject expatriation offers (Harvey et al., 2009a).

This is unfortunate because the international experience can have a considerable impact on career progression (Baruch & Altman, 2002) and, in turn, refusal of an assignment may be negatively interpreted by supervisors. Additionally, because DCCs need to consider the careers of both partners, an international opportunity is considered in the context of the consequences that each of the partners would need to accept, and this balancing act often leads to the rejection of an offered assignment (Harvey et al., 2009a). Human resources managers report the significant and growing influence of spousal careers on candidate decisions (Dickman et al., 2008), given that the impact of an international assignment on the career of the partner is a critical factor in a candidate's willingness to accept an assignment (Dickman et al., 2008; Brett & Stroh, 1995; Permits Foundation, 2012). This consideration has different intensity depending on gender, as discussed via gender order theory, suggesting that men and women are socialized differently, therefore bearing different expectations of themselves and what roles

society expects of them (Connell, 2013; Tharenou, 2008). Male candidates are far more likely to accept international opportunities before consulting their partner, while women are far more likely to involve their male partner in decision making (McNulty, 2005; Dupuis et al., 2008). Additionally, family barriers, including consideration of the adjustment required of children, significantly reduce the willingness of married women in dual-career couples to undertake international assignments (Dupuis et al., 2008; Linehan, 2002; Cole, 2012).

Women need to be approached with more attractive opportunities before they would be willing to raise the issue of expatriation at home (Hall & Chandler, 2005), as they also need to believe that their assignment will, in fact, be an excellent opportunity for the entire family (Hall & Chandler, 2005; Tharenou, 2008). Women do however support their husbands' expatriate assignment opportunities, often being open to finding something in it for themselves and their children (Vance & McNulty, 2014), at the time of decision-making. This observation has an important influence, as the support of the dual-career partner and family is vital to the expatriation decision (Dickman et al., 2008). The personal characteristics of the partner, the health of the relationship (Depuis et al., 2008), the timing of the assignment, the international heritage of the family, and attractiveness of the assignment location have been proposed as factors increasing appeal and influencing a DCC expatriation decision (e.g., Konopaske et al., 2005; Dickman et al., 2008; Vance & McNulty, 2014; Groeneveld, 2008).

Among the personal characteristics of the partner entrepreneurship (Chew & Zhu, 2002), 'adventureness' (Konopaske et al., 2005), education (Brandén, 2013), and a personal interest in working abroad (Tharenou, 2008) have been mentioned as having a positive impact on the partner's willingness to accept an international assignment. Additionally, timing plays an important role for two reasons: a partner might be at a stage of their career that can tolerate some disruption (Moore, 2002), and the life stage of the family may be more appropriate for expatriation (Harvey et al., 2009a). In that context, Groeneveld (2008) found that dual-career families planning to become parents, or couples with very young children (of less than five-years-old), were more willing to accept assignments, and so a chance for the couple to self-select themselves for assignment when the time is right seems to ease the decision (Harvey et al., 2009a). The location of the assignment is also an essential factor and involves consideration of safety and quality of life (Pierce & Delahaye, 1996), and in the case of dual-career couples, so is the variety of employment opportunities available (Geddie, 2013). Hence, urban locations with internationally- oriented jobs attract more DCCs than rural or suburban counterparts (McKinnish, 2008; Compton & Pollak, 2004).

Many dual-career couples refuse an assignment offer (Swaak, 1995; Riusala & Suutari, 2000). Refusals are primarily prompted by family and partner career issues (Brookfileds, 2016), concerns over loss of income (Harvey, 1993), strong bonds with relatives at home (Dickman et al., 2008; Richardson & Mallon, 2005), and career considerations (Dickman et al., 2008; Brookfield, 2016). MNCs have developed policies to manage assignment placement and family expatriation (Brookfield, 2016) in order to boost acceptance rates, including assistance in obtaining work permits, shipment of household goods, policy briefings, tax consultation, pre-assignment trips, assistance in selling homes or terminating leases on homes and cars, and a range of medical, security, language, and culture trainings (Cartus, 2007). Unfortunately, however, MNCs seldom aid their employees in securing a role for the DCC partner, which would be highly valued by DCCs (Konopaske & Werner, 2005).

Employer-sponsored pre-departure visits allow prospective assignees and their dual-career partner to see the location, school, housing options, and to get initial training on the culture and relevant assignment issues of their potential home. Such visits seem to make the expatriation decision a more conscious (Harvey et al., 2009a) and self-selecting process (Caligiuri & Phillips, 2003), especially when combined with an adequate briefing and mentoring from recent repatriates (Harvey & Wiese, 1998a). Further, it has been proposed that partners should be included in briefings and should meet other dual-career partners with experience of the assignment location (Konopaske et al., 2005). Additionally, a time-bound approach to relocation and the option of repatriation upon request by a partner may also impact the acceptance rate in DCC situations (Konopaske et al., 2005). HRMs should also be cognizant of the professional identity of the partner, as it is seen as one of the drivers of career change intentions and may later result in pressures to repatriate (Khapova et al., 2007). One of the ways to engage partners in new career plans on assignment might be entrepreneurship programs supported by the MNC and started during the pre-departure phase. Such programs might engage partners in intense career planning and career investment that bodes well for entrepreneurship decisions and actions (Arthur et al., 2005).

2.1.2 Expatriation

Once the decision to expatriate is made, the DCC arrives in the host country. The move may happen simultaneously with the arrival of the family, although in many cases the primary expatriate arrives first in order to make preliminary living arrangements or to accommodate the requirements of the partner. The partner might have to give an employer notice, arrange a sabbatical, or make other

arrangements relating to an employment contract at home, which can take a few months to finalize. In most cases, expatriation creates a great deal of stress for a dual-career couple, therefore, allowing an adequate amount of time to adjust to the new setting is vital to the long-term satisfaction of the DCC's family (e.g., Harvey, 1997; Andreason & Kinneer, 2005; Haslberger & Brewster, 2008; Church, 1982).

Expatriate adjustment, defined as achievement of multidimensional state of emotional and psychological comfort achieved by the expatriate and their environment (Black et al., 1991, has been well documented in scientific literature due to its important role in expatriate life, the potential implied relationship to expatriate performance (Lazarova & Thomas, 2012), and the risk of a premature return or assignment failure. However, earlier opinions suggesting a significant expatriate job performance impact from expatriate adjustment have recently been criticized on the grounds that performance may be related to many other factors like personal and work resources or partner and family adjustment (Lazarova et al., 2010). Assignee and partner adjustment has been analyzed from the perspective of work adjustment (e.g., Black et al., 1992), sociocultural adjustment (e.g., Shaffer & Harrison, 2001), and adjustment in a couple's relationship (e.g., Van et al., 2011).

In the case of dual-career couples, the adjustment of the partners seems to be profoundly interrelated, therefore these processes should be analyzed together (Andreason, 2008; Copeland, 2004). Literature describes both spillover effects, when one dimension of expatriate adjustment affects another, and cross-over effects where deficiencies in the adjustment of one family member affect another person in the family, thereby impeding their adjustment (Andreason, 2008; Lazarova et al., 2010). Spillover has been identified as a major inhibitor of adjustment. In this context, spousal support is an essential ingredient in an expatriate's successful adjustment to the host country (Harvey, 1998; Lauring & Selmer, 2010; Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). Spousal support enables both partners to achieve a state of psychological comfort (Harvey, 1998). Support can come in a variety of forms. Often, expatriates report that their partners have new and diverse roles (Mäkelä et al., 2011). These roles may be renegotiated while on assignment during the transition phase, especially when their move means the work of the partner is disrupted (Van et al., 2011). When spousal support is missing, which can be a result of dissatisfaction with the changed employment status of one of the members of the dual-career couple, partners may find themselves in conflict (Tharenou, 2008).

Therefore, the perspective of the partner seems to be particularly important, especially when one partner wants to continue their career abroad (Copeland, 2004; Harvey et al., 2009a). This understanding of the intentions of the partner is essential, as despite strong job engagement before expatriation, not all partners plan to work during their time abroad. Many decide to change their role to focus solely on their family. In such cases, a previously highly career-engaged partner may temporarily report a high degree of satisfaction, even when they do not have a job (Copeland, 2004). A shift from the workforce to homelife often happens when children are present and require help in adjusting to their new academic and social environment. Assisting children in these efforts may provisionally replace the need of the partner to continue their career (Beck, 2012).

A large proportion of DCC partners, however, want to continue their careers while on assignment, and if they do not find an appropriate opportunity, they may suffer from adjustment challenges (Braseby, 2010). Typically, attitude changes cause interpersonal family conflict, which adversely affects the adjustment of all family members (Van Erp et al., 2011, 2014). Additionally, partners in these situations suffer a loss of business contacts, have diminished perceptions of self-worth, reduced financial independence, and deficiencies in their self-identity (Andreason, 2008). This emotional load may result in the development of alternative strategies such as exploring options that might permit them to continue their careers, or either the maintenance or the creation of new social support networks (Kupka & Cathro, 2007), which may provide psychological comfort for jobless dual-career partners abroad (Beck, 2012).

However, nothing can entirely replace real opportunities to continue a career, which is often viewed as a source of self-fulfillment. Recent research identified a link between partners working while on an assignment and their associated adjustment (Ravasi et al., 2013). Partners report a positive impact on family relationships, health, well-being, and willingness to complete and extend the current assignment or an increased aptitude for additional international positions in the future (Permits Foundation, 2008). Therefore, expatriations of DCCs to locations with job opportunities for IDCC partners, such as cities with a high concentration of MNCs and a strong demand for international employees, facilitate efficacious adjustment and decrease instances of expatriate-partner issues (Ravasi et al., 2013).

The stresses and emotional effort inherent in adjustment to a new country have been a significant cause of expatriates prematurely ending an assignment and returning home (Dowling et al., 2008). About 6% of expatriate assignments end with an early return (Brookfield, 2013). Premature termination incurs both

organizational and financial cost for the MNC (Herman & Tetrick, 2009). The subject of the excessive focus on premature return in scientific literature has however been criticized (Harzing & Christensen, 2004; Harzing, 1995), in large part due to misquoted articles. However, authors of recent papers on expatriate performance agree that corporate support is useful regardless of a DCC's inclination to prematurely return. Hence, organizations need to organize support programs for expatriates, although rarely will such programs help a DCC partner in finding employment, which leads to quite high dissatisfaction levels among DCCs with regard to the support they receive (Kupka & Cathro, 2007; Permits Foundation, 2008). The cross-cultural and language training, followed by a lump sum financial allowance that is provided by roughly one-third of firms and works relatively well for single-career situations is just not seen to be enough by IDCCs (Kupka & Cathro, 2007).

Unfortunately, cost pressures or organizational inertia prevent more comprehensive support programs from being fully implemented and existing practices are often set up without an understanding of what help would be really needed (Brookfield, 2013). Analysis of both the needs and stressors of DCCs suggest improvements in organization and preparation by MNCs of assignment locations to create a better 'market' for jobs for DCC partners. The consequences of a career break for the partner, including reduced psychological safety and employability that can no longer be influenced by job crafting behaviors, (Plomp et al., 2019) are often underestimated. Programs such as access to supportive networks of working partners, and support with finding a job or starting a business are not necessarily costly and could ultimately improve the well-being and adjustment of DCC partners (Cole, 2012; Haslberger & Brewster, 2008, Reynolds & Bennett, 1991). A precondition of such support programs may be that employers are required to secure work permits in countries that demand one (Permits Foundation, 1997). Some partners may want to embark on an entrepreneurial path, and HRMs could enhance their success by including options for career planning and career investment activities that would prepare partners for entrepreneurship (Engel et al., 2017). An alternative option favored by some career-oriented partners is to further their education. Support programs could explore academic study options and provide financial support for such activity (Riusala & Suutari, 2000). Mentoring may also be valuable for expatriate dual-career couples in situations of heightened stress or conflict (Harvey et al., 2010).

While on assignment, it is crucial that dual-career couples maintain close contact with their professional network in their home country. The maintenance of such a professional network is valuable as it opens the door to employment after repatriation. If MNCs can organize an opportunity for regular communication with

the home country, it may help re-establish the psychological comfort of the couple in fostering the ability to construct plans for life and career progress after repatriation (Hammer et al., 1998, Linehan & Scullion, 2002, Kupka & Cathro 2007).

2.1.3 Repatriation

The discussion on dual-career repatriation, defined as a return to one's home country, begins well before a couple repatriates, as it covers the events and behaviors that motivate the decision to return. Sometimes it is the employer that initiates repatriation, as common policies for expatriation assume a maximal time of three to five years per assignment (Scullion & Collings, 2006). Additionally, career planning concerning the return to the home country should ideally start six to twelve months in advance (Herman & Tetrick, 2009). Dual-career couples may require longer advance notice and more time than in a single career case to coordinate the career-related consequences of their return.

The need for repatriation may emerge from the career demands of either partner, who regularly weigh their international experience against the attraction of repatriation to the home country in order to restart their home career. Studies have shown that this delicate balance can be upset by various shocks that stimulate an intention to repatriate, ultimately triggering a job search and eventual repatriation (Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010). Examples of such events include one partner's suddenly becoming unemployed in the host location, or merely the fact that the partner did not find a job in the country of expatriation and thus pressed for a faster return home (Roos, 2013).

Adequate preparation devoted to repatriation may limit stress and prepare the DCC family for the often unanticipated challenges that will arise with their career, family, logistics, and the frequently underestimated cultural issues. Unfortunately, MNCs rarely prepare for their employees' return, which has consequences spanning the entire repatriation process (Linehan & Scullion, 2002; Harvey & Novicevic, 2006). Moreover, expatriate assignments do not result in the promised career progress, as employees are 'out of sight' and thus 'out of mind', leading to a lack of corporate advancement opportunity for executives on international assignments (Harvey, 1996; Kraimer et al., 2012; Suutari & Brewster, 2003).

The repatriation process, first conceptualized in the 1980s (Harvey, 1982), is still an under-researched aspect of expatriation (Szkudlarek, 2010; Cox et al., 2013). This lack of research is despite the difficulties inherent in repatriation adjustment and the fact that research indicates the majority of repatriated employees and

partners are dissatisfied with the repatriation process, owing to the career, organizational, financial, familial, and psychological challenges it poses (Chi & Chen, 2007; Sanchez-Vidal et al., 2008, Black & Gregersen, 1999). Literature on specific repatriation experiences of dual-career couples is difficult to find. The only way to establish a perspective is through analysis of empirical articles in adjacent research streams, such as generic re-entry and repatriation literature (e.g., Black et al., 1992; Szkudlarek, 2010), empirical articles dedicated to DCCs (e.g., Känsälä et al., 2012; Harvey et al.,, 2010), or the growing body of work focused on self-initiated expatriates (Doherty, 2013; Mäkelä & Suutari, 2013; Andresen & Walther, 2012). An additional perspective may be found by studying the research on issues affecting a partner during repatriation (e.g., Storti, 2001; McNulty, 2005). Numerous texts reference single male expatriates and their careers, with few examples relating to female expatriates or dual-career repatriation cases (Roos, 2013; Vance & McNulty, 2014).

Low retention rates during the repatriation process have attracted the interest of researchers and, hence, focused attention on the first six months after return (Linehan & Scullion, 2002; Sanchez-Vidal et al., 2008; Lazarova & Cerdin, 2007). However, the complete process of readjustment may take much longer, and, in fact, is estimated to last between a year and 18 months (Lee & Liu, 2006), during which time both partners may focus on restarting their careers, searching for new housing and schools, completing administrative tasks, and adjusting socially to their home culture. In a similar way to the period surrounding expatriation, one partner often returns while the other partner ties up loose ends at the assignment location, a process that often becomes a source of additional stress (Linehan & Scullion, 2002). The emotions of both partners are heavily intertwined during the highly-stressful process of establishing a new life back home. Emotional effort is 'infectious' and can often spill over to the work environment (e.g., Van Steenbergen et al., 2007; Takeuchi et al., 2002).

Repatriation adjustment challenges are presented as work, interaction, and adjustment to general environment issues (Black et al.,1991; Suutari & Välimaa, 2002). In the work domain, underutilization of the international knowledge gained by the expatriates poses a problem unique to expatriates that results in underemployment (Kraimer et al., 2012). Expatriates typically have more responsibilities and autonomy while abroad than after their return to their organization's home country, and the (likely downward) status shift may create feelings of disappointment (Suutari & Brewster, 2003).

In the interaction adjustment domain of expatriates, who, while on assignment, adopt the values of the host country culture and shift their identity, often

experience some degree of culture shock during repatriation. However, the problem is often experienced more acutely by their families than the repatriate themselves (Black et al., 1992), since families are more embedded in the host country culture than expatriates. who spend more time at work or on business trips. The more people distance themselves from the values of their native country, the greater the culture shock and the more significant the impact is faced during the repatriation adjustment period (Sussman, 2002; Suutari & Välimaa, 2002; Kraimer et al., 2012). Dual-career couples where both partners work while on assignment typically have a significant engagement with their work and relatively little leisure time, so should be exposed to fewer risks related to convergence in respect to a host country's culture and values. Therefore, DCCs may be less exposed to culture shock upon return to their home country (Roos, 2013).

In the domain of general adjustment, expatriates report a loss of status and an impact on their quality of life driven by the withdrawal of company-sponsored premium housing and a range of affordable services like domestic help, drivers, and cooks (Gupta, 2013). Moreover, decreased status hits time-deprived dual-career families particularly hard, causing significant challenges, when combined with the increased workload inherent in repatriation (Mäkelä & Suutari, 2013; Storti, 2001). Changes in expatriation routes, with an expansion of expatriate assignments within the developed world (Bonache et al., 2017; Friedman, 2005) may partially eliminate or reverse this issue, since expatriates may be able to afford more help and services in their home country than during the assignment.

Because DCCs have two separate careers to rearrange during the repatriation stage, one partner may have left his/her previous job and needs to find a new one, unless they had an arrangement where their pre-expatriation job is held open until their return, which is sometimes possible in jobs such as public service or certain freelance careers. International assignments may also raise career expectations among DCCs and increase the perception that their internal and external career opportunities will be improved (Benson & Pattie, 2008). DCCs also typically have enhanced confidence in their acquired skills, and high confidence of their ability to apply their knowledge upon repatriation (Sanchez-Vidal et al., 2008). However, these expectations are seldom met. Repatriates often encounter role conflict or a lack of role clarity after repatriation (Black et al., 1992; Suutari & Välimaa, 2002), and are frequently instructed to complete an assortment of projects to fill the time before a job commensurate with their skill set is found. The lack of role clarity is often compounded by poor organizational support (Black et al., 1992; Handler & Lane, 1997; Riusala & Suutari, 2000; McNulty & Moeller, 2017). Repatriation can also be challenging for the partners in DCCs. They are likely to lack a repatriation agreement, even if the expatriate has one, and so may need to look for a new job,

perhaps having been out of the job market for some years. Furthermore, a multi-year absence from the home job market can impede the search process amidst increased pressure to find employment. Failure to do so may lead to a loss of identity and lowered self-esteem (Storti, 2001), thereby influencing the other dimensions of adjustment.

MNCs aim to increase the retention rate of their repatriates, but it has been shown that repatriates and their partners are often dissatisfied with the support offered (Linehan & Scullion, 2002; Stahl & Cerdin, 2004; Storti 2001). Meanwhile, satisfaction gained from the repatriation process has been shown to diminish the repatriate's intention to leave (Sanchez-Vidal et al., 2008). MNCs should thus develop clear repatriation processes and policy (Sanchez-Vidal et al., 2008) to better support resettlement (Linehan & Scullion, 2002). Such processes should allow for advance notice for both partners and provide ample time to plan the career of both the expatriate and their partner upon repatriation (Linehan & Scullion, 2002). Organizations, however, rarely consider the repatriation process months or years in advance, and assignees returning home are not provided jobs that leverage a repatriate's international experience (Benson & Pattie, 2008; Kraimer et al., 2012; Suutari & Brewster, 2003). MNCs that do provide clear communication on roles and careers, and have well thought out career management processes for repatriates benefit from higher repatriate retention (Brookfield, 2016; Osman-Gani & Hyder, 2008). In the DCC context, a firm conscious of the need for both partners to secure jobs back home could also offer greater flexibility in the timing of the repatriation.

In summary, dual-career expatriation includes a series of complex issues that start with assignment selection and can take as much as 18 months post-repatriation to resolve. The process is increasingly complex because partners need to coordinate the demands of two careers. The determination and adjustment of dual-career couples on assignment and when they return home are likely to be subject to greater stress owing to their specific needs. The challenges in general, organizational, and interaction domains that are typical of the better understood single-career situations are likely to be intensified for dual-career couples. Finally, corporate support practices, as described above, should help dual-career families, although research on the effectiveness of such practices has yet to focus on the specific needs of both partners when they are career engaged. The repatriation phase described above concludes the review of the expatriation of dual-career couples.

2.2 Theoretical perspectives used to analyze the experiences of IDCCs

After describing the dual-career couple expatriation process, which is the scope of this research, the available theoretical lenses are discussed starting with hope theory, gender order theory, the typology of spousal roles, and finally expatriate adjustment theory.

2.2.1 Hope theory

Hope theory is one of the tools available to enhance understanding of the expatriation experience (Harvey et al., 2009b). It is grounded in the idea of the comparison between a person's expectations and their actual experiences (Suutari & Brewster, 2003), as proposed by the theory of met expectations (Calgiuri et al., 2001). *Expectations* are also referred to as *personal goals, personal strivings* (Emmons, 1986), *personal projects (*Little, 1983), or *life tasks,* through which individuals pursue their goals in unique ways (Cantor et al., 1991). Despite differences in the definition of the term, all perspectives are based on the idea that an individual desires to accomplish something meaningful, which can influence an individual's choices and steer their decision-making. In a broader sense, they *structure the experience of daily life* (Cantor et al., 1991 p.425). The field of psychology uses these ideas to assist understanding of cognition, personality, and motivation.

Personal goals are therefore defined as *internal representations of desired states* (Austin & Vancouver, 1996 p.338). This goal theory serves as the bedrock for regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1997) concerning the way individuals set and attain personal goals, and hope theory (Snyder, 2002), which frames goals as anchors from which mental processes evolve.

Hope theory emerged from research in the mid-1980s. Researchers were looking at the excuses people make when they perform poorly or make a mistake, and the reasoning behind those excuses. These excuses are then contrasted with an individual's expectation of themselves in their environment. Hope theory has slowly evolved and now offers a promising way to understand DCCs' expatriation exploration (Harvey et al., 2009b). It is a useful tool because it defines the psychological state of hope, personal goals, pathways thinking, and agency thinking, and binds these ideas together into a single framework.

The ideas of both pathways and agency give hope theory the ability to further decompose the process and formation of an individual's psychological state.

Therefore, hope theory promises to provide more insight than earlier constructs, such as theory of met expectations (Porter & Steers, 1973; Locke et al., 1986) to describe the continuous psychological processes a dual-career couple undergoes during expatriation. It also seems to be more promising than regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1997), which focuses on the content of goals. Regulatory focus theory seems to be more applicable to our understanding of the relationships between the psychological states of expatriates and their work environment (Silbiger et al., 2017). However, regulatory focus theory does not offer the ability to analyze pathways that may be useful in explaining how dual-career expatriates and partners reason, decide, and act (Harvey et al., 2009b).

Goals serve as one of the major cognitive components of hope theory (Snyder, 1994) based on the assumption that humans are goal oriented. Goals can be either formal or informal and may be described visually or verbally. While their timeframe and levels of specificity may vary, goals act as the targets for human actions. There are two general types of goals: those with positive outcomes (i.e., wanting to achieve a goal) and those with negative goal outcomes (wanting to avoida negative consequence).

Pathways thinking emerges from the fact that humans tend to develop a deep sense of time in which they recognize past, present, and future. Accordingly, people create developmental pathways, taking them from point A to point B, the state defined in their goal. High-hope individuals tend to recognize multiple pathways to success whereas people with low-hope are unlikely to see those alternative routes. This can make it increasingly challenging to explore alternatives in cases where primary strategy fails. Pathways thinking may be imprecise at the start of a person's career and become increasingly apparent as the person approaches their goal.

Agency thinking is the "*perceived capacity to use one's pathway to reach the desired goal*" (Snyder, 2002). This belief in one's ability to succeed is an essential component for generating a state of hope and motivating an individual to progress on their chosen pathway toward the goal, thus, combating potential challenges along the way (Snyder, 1994, 2002).

Unfortunately, barriers can discourage and deflate an individual's agency. Lack of agency affects hope, personal emotional state, and ego. High-hope individuals, however, can be expected to rebound agency relatively fast (Baumeister & Exline, 2000). Agency thinking relates well to an earlier concept of self-efficacy defined as task-specific confidence (Locke et al. 1986). It differs, however, by tying the confidence state to a short-term strategic capacity related to a specific pathway and

goal, while self-efficacy is defined as a long-term personal trait. The pathways and agency thinking feed one another and work well as a combined concept.

Hope is an all-encompassing notion leveraging each of the abovementioned three elements. It has been defined as a "*positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal-directed energy) and (b) pathways (planning to meet goals)*" (Snyder et al., 1991 p.571). It can be used to categorize individuals as those with high-hope, who have confidence in their pathway, a likely route to reach their goal, as well as the agency, and the perceived capacity to follow this pathway. High-hope people are expected not only to be more decisive than low-hope people (Snyder, 2002) but also prepared to produce multiple alternatives to reach their goals and are expected to rebound if and when they fail.

The education, motivation, and psychological engagement in the career of DCCs, combined with the complex career coordination strategies could be seen as examples of agency thinking and pathways in hope theory (Känsälä et al., 2015; Bird & Schnurman-Crook, 2005). The condition of high hope is an expatriate state stemming from the intent to set and achieve personal goals, typically before and during the expatriate's international experience (Baumeister & Exline, 2000; Harvey et al., 2009). The hope construct is particularly applicable in states of deprivation when current circumstances are viewed as unsatisfactory, and hence, the individual creates goals and pathways to correct their life situation, striving to return to a state of hope. This concept may fit the situation of dual-career partners, who often find it difficult to continue their careers at an international location. Feelings of dissatisfaction can percolate as their assignment progresses, which may become a source of conflict (Tharenou, 2008) and thus stifle hope. In such a situation, they may generate alternative pathways such as job seeking during the assignment or triggering their resolve to return to their home country (McNulty & Moeller, 2017; Vance & McNulty, 2014).

Additionally, dual-career couples seem to be quite successful in developing a personal goal system with supportive links between their goals (Wiese & Salmela-Aro, 2008). It is expected that DCCs experience greater life satisfaction when they have a balanced goal system rather than a goal system focusing primarily on either work or family (Salmela-Aro, 2009). Partners are likely to provide support to each other to pursue their goals and increase their satisfaction with the relationship (Brunstein et al., 1996). These supportive goals and interconnected pathways may be conceptualized as spousal support roles (Mäkelä et al., 2011) described in the following chapter.

2.2.2 Gender order theory and typology of spousal roles

Societal gender expectations are described by gender order theory, looking at power relations between men and women that can become present on different levels of society (Connell, 2013). The configuration of gender practices are influenced by three gender structures: power relations (the domination of men and subordination of women), production relations (traditional, gender related division of labor in family and its economic consequences) and cathexis (the gender character of sexual desire and emotional commitment) (Connel, 2003; Poggio, 2006). They form a traditional gender order, in which men are expected to be the breadwinners, while women are typically supposed to take care of various aspects of family life, including upbringing of children and care of the household. Therefore, their position is expected to be subordinated and unequal as they provide resources to support their husband's career (Heikkinen et al., 2014). Consequently, male partners in DCCs, where a female is the primary expatriate, struggle because of these social norms, stereotypes, and gender role expectations -- especially so in cultures where national perceptions of how an ideal family should appear or function are particularly present (Tolciu & Zierahn, 2012). Their status as a trailing spouse, one that appears to be predominantly taking care of family and household supporting the career of the female expatriate, is difficult to understand for the people around them (Fischlmayr & Puchmüller, 2016).

Consequently, male expatriate partners, especially in a situation when they did not find a job aboard, may struggle with stigma, stereotyping, and other issues (Heikkinen et al., 2014). These challenges may lead them to a decision to drive the family toward a decision of early repatriation (Kierner, 2018; McNulty & Hutchings, 2016). Not surprisingly, therefore, family-related issues are the most commonly quoted reasons of early repatriation (Brookfields, 2016). These reasons may include either the male partner pressing for a return home or be a consequence of internal or external pressure on the woman to return to her traditional role as a wife and mother. These challenges stemming from societal expectations described in gender order theory lead to stigmatization, marginalization, and (self) discrimination, which are key challenges for female expatriates and their spouses (McNulty & Hutchings, 2016). Female managers in domestic career settings sometimes report that they receive minimal support from their male partners or that they find it irrelevant for their careers (Heikkinen et al., 2014). However in the expatriation context, it is hard for the partner to be agnostic to the situation, as the move to another country has a major impact on their career and life situation, so it needs to be contemplated and accepted by the couple, at least at the beginning of the assignment. Heikkinen et al. (2014) found that spousal roles can change over time such that male-partner support can appear to be

decreasing, which disappointed the female managers surveyed. Finally, in some cases, internationally-oriented women have been reported to look for a specific type of spouse to be able to share an international experience with them (Fischlmayr & Puchmüller, 2016).

When couples engage in two careers and additionally complicate the situation by accepting an international assignment, they will have to construct and re-negotiate spousal roles and support practices to manage scarcity of time and resources. They need to integrate personal life and working life and handle naturally negative interactions between these two spheres (Suutari et al., 2018). The research on career progress in dual-career settings at home (Välimäki et al., 2009), family-relatedness of work decisions (Lysova et al., 2015), and dual-career expatriate contexts (Mäkelä et al., 2011) have identified numerous spousal roles that can illuminate how couples organize their life and relative career decisions.

When one of the partners helps the other one in their career through providing advice, emotional help, and practical assistance, that partner is said to have a *supportive role*. The advice may pertain to significant life decisions or day-to-day consultation on career issues. Emotional help entails an ability to listen, empathize, and understand the other partner's career challenges, while practical support may be given in taking on the bulk of family responsibilities or helping with responsibilities connected with work or the career of the partner.

A relationship marked by *equal roles* is one where the careers of both partners are prioritized equally in the relationship and are pursued independently in such a way that neither impedes the progress of the other. Such a situation is difficult to arrange, may occur only in rare instances, and can result in a split family setting where it is accepted that both careers progress at the expense of risk to the relationship (Mäkelä et al., 2011).

A *flexible partner* adjusts to provide 'silent support' and may accommodate the needs of the other partner's career. It may involve coordination of careers, underemployment, and even temporary breaks in the career of one partner (Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000). The flexibility of a partner is typically assumed to be temporary and may be seen as an anticipated and accepted break from the career to engage in activities that are desired but otherwise restricted; activities such as spending time with children, on additional education, or on hobbies.

When one partner has a 'guiding' influence on the career of the other, it is called a *determining role*. Both careers may remain important, but one of them is considered a lower priority. Progress of one of the partner's careers slows down, while the other partner benefits, recognizes it and is grateful for the support. This

often means a partner follows the primary expatriate purely due to their work, a very common scenario, even when it is a woman who is the primary expatriate (Mäkelä et al. 2011).

The above-listed roles are characterized by a positive attitude and supportive approach, but the relationship might become marked by a more negative spin in one of the following three ways: an *instrumental role* appears when one partner uses the other as an instrument in fulfilling their career ambitions, or as a financial resource or status symbol while expecting gratitude from the partner. A *restrictive* role occurs when one of the partners rejects a change (for example expatriation to a specific location), limiting the progress of the career of the other partner (Mäkelä et al., 2011). *Counterproductive* roles occur when the leading partner has a dismissive attitude to the other partner's career. These defined roles are seen as useful theoretical lenses and help to understand specific approaches to the organization of the life of dual-career couples on an international assignment (e.g., Lazarova et al. 2015; Lysova et al., 2015).

2.2.3 Expatriate and repatriate adjustment theory

Black and Gregersen (1991) define adjustment as the "degree of a person's psychological comfort with various aspects of a new setting." Adjustment has also been defined as a person's general satisfaction with their life in a new environment (Hippler, 2000), the "degree of fit between the expatriate manager and the environment, both work and sociocultural" (Aycan, 1997), or the degree of comfort (or absence of pressure) associated with being an expatriate (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005).

The first studies on expatriate adjustment were motivated by the issues of premature return and assignment failure (Tung, 1988, Baker & Ivancevich, 1971). These studies initially centered around one dimension of adjustment: adjusted or non-adjusted. Progressively, research evolved to address the three domains of adjustment: adjustment to workplace (aka work adjustment), interaction with the host nationals (aka interaction adjustment), and adjustment to the general environment (aka general adjustment) (Black, 1988; Black & Stephens, 1989, Black et al., 1991). At that time, the model of adjustment was mainly based on research on single-career couples, and, therefore, work adjustment related to issues an expatriate needs to address at their new job location, while general and interactional adjustment was based on previous sociocultural adjustment research, and involved both expatriate and the partner. These three areas form a base for later development of the comprehensive model of international adjustment (Black et al., 1991).

Despite the fact that the precise boundaries between those areas of adjustment are not clear, the model gained popularity and was widely applied to adjustment studies in locations within the field of expatriation and repatriation research (Black et al.,1992; Hechanova et al., 2003). Repatriation studies were motivated by issues of increased attrition of repatriates and loss of MNC human capital investment. Consequently, issues unique to the three areas of adjustment: work, general, and interaction are presented, often suggesting that the majority of expatriates and repatriates are dissatisfied with the process and its outcomes (Koncke & Schuster, 2017; Chi & Chen, 2007; Sanchez-Vidal et al., 2008, Gregersen & Black, 1999; Suutari & Välimaa, 2002). This is not surprising, since adjustment is often harder than anticipated due to larger than expected differences between home and host country cultures. For example, in the work dimension, there are large differences between headquarters and subsidiary HRM policies and practices, due to significant influence of context, all of which increase the distance between home and host environment (Parry et al., 2008). Recently, a new approach defined adjustment as a person–environment relationship (Haslberger et al., 2013) with both an external (demands) and internal (needs) element (Haslberger et al., 2014). However this theory has not yet been tested empirically; while it also appeared in this study that the Black at al. (1991) theory was more suitable in analyzing the adjustment experiences of IDCCs, as it has been used and confirmed as applicable in both expatriation (Harvey, 1997) and repatriation (Gregersen and Stroh, 1997) contexts, for both expatriates (Andreason, 2003) and spouses (Shaffer and Harrison, 2001).

There is a comprehensive set of possible antecedents for adjustment based on organizational socialization, sensemaking, work-role transition, and domestic expatriation literature. These were researched extensively in order to devise strategies and support practices that improve the adjustment success of expatriates. Scholars also investigated the relationship between adjustment and work performance (Abrecht et al., 2018; Black et al. 1991; Lazarova & Thomas, 2012). Some studies suggest a link between the two, although the relationship has yet to be proven. This is because individuals may still perform exceptionally well even under high levels of adjustment-related stress (Lazarova & Thomas, 2012).

It has also been recognized that the adjustment of the partner and the expatriate are significantly intertwined. The two are connected because of differences in how family members adjust, and that, in turn, influences the adjustment of other members of the family (Andreason, 2008; Haslberger & Brewster, 2008). The heightened stress experienced by dual-career couples during the assignment cycle means that the support of a partner becomes increasingly important (Lauring &

Selmer 2010; Harvey, 1998). Such assistance may take many forms as expatriates report on the diverse roles of their partners (Mäkelä et al., 2011).

The various roles of the partner are often reformulated while on assignment. The new environment requires expatriate couples to go through a transition phase, during which a partner may experience an emotional disruption, mainly when their move is caused by expatriation as part of their partner's work. Conversely, a lack of partner support can stem from dissatisfaction with the changed employment status of a partner and may be a source of conflict (Tharenou, 2008).

Family conflicts may then spill over into the work domain (Van Steenbergen et al., 2007). According to MacDonald and Arthur (2005), research consistently underestimates the importance of both the partner and other family members in the adjustment of the expatriate. It is widely accepted however that both partners must achieve a state of psychological ease for the adjustment to be successful (Harvey, 1998).

The same adjustment theories (Black et al., 1991) have been extended and utilized in repatriation stage of the assignment (Black et al., 1992; Hyder & Lövblad, 2007). In particular, Black and Gregersen (1991) framed repatriation adjustment theory and defined three interrelated and distinct facets of repatriation adjustment: adjustment to work, adjustment to interacting with home nationals and adjustment to the general environment and culture. Additionally, they noted that some of the variables that benefit expatriation adjustment may inhibit the repatriation adjustment process and divided adjustment into anticipatory and in-country adjustment (Black & Gregersen, 1991). Later authors looked into antecedents of repatriation adjustment including age, gender and marital status, number of assignments and time on assignment, keeping contact with home country and organization, cultural distance between home and host countries, willingness to live an international life, expatriation adjustment and satisfaction, role discretion, conflict and novelty, utilization of skills learned abroad, time to start and finalize new role negotiation and changes to social status (Andreason & Kinneer, 2005; Suutari & Välimaa, 2002; Cox, 2004; Gregersen & Stroh, 1997; Lee & Liu, 2006; Morgan et al., 2004).

Key repatriation concern of the work facet is connected with the underemployment of repatriates, who often are placed in less demanding jobs as compared to their skills and expectations or even put in a holding pattern, since MNCs are often unprepared to fully utilize skills that the expatriate gained while on assignment (Andreason & Kinneer, 2005; Stroh, Gregersen, & Black, 1998, 2000; Suutari & Valimaa, 2002). Research that analyses repatriation facets in context of IDCCs is hard to find, but it may be anticipated that in case of IDCCs this issue is more

complicated as both jobs need to be taken into account. In general and interaction facets, IDCCs may, similarly to single career expatriates, be surprised to experience some degree of culture shock during repatriation, often a more significant change for an expatriate's family than for the expatriate. Multiple studies report that as an expatriate becomes further detached from the culture of their homeland, the amplitude of culture shock and adjustment challenges in both general and interaction domains during repatriation increase (Kraimer et al., 2012; Sussman, 2002; Suutari & Välimaa, 2002). Interestingly, partners may have higher exposure to cultural influence compared to the expatriates who spend more time and have greater engagement in their organization (Haslberger et al., 2012) which may bode for heightened culture shock during repatriation. Lower levels of culture shock are reported among expatriates who spend time with other expatriates (Haslberger et al., 2012). Another issue important in the general and interaction domains is the loss of social status and benefits available during expatriation. Expatriates typically belong to social elites in the host countries and get funding for premium housing and support of cooks or drivers while on assignment, which ceases when they return home. This loss may lead to dissatisfaction, especially in countries with higher level of social differences, such as the United States, but were also observed to be less important when expatriate returned to a country that stresses equality, such as Finland (Suutari & Valimaa, 2002).

In summary, the adjustment of dual-career couples is a significant and multidimensional phenomenon, and so there is a need to increase research, in particular, on the repatriation adjustment of both partners, especially as situations specific to DCCs become more common.

3 METHODS

This chapter outlines the research method used in this dissertation. Following a discussion of philosophical considerations, the chosen qualitative methods are described. Then, field methods are presented beginning with the participant selection, through the interview design, and concluding with the chosen analytical and evaluative approaches.

3.1 Philosophical considerations

Ontology, epistemology, and methodology are critical concepts in the philosophy of social sciences. *Ontology* deals with the ideas of the existence of and relationship between people, society, and the world in general (Burrell & Morgan, 2017). In addition to ontology, which focuses on the question: 'What is there in the world' *epistemology* defines how knowledge can be produced and argued for; it defines the criteria that make knowledge possible, in other words, seeking answers to what is knowledge, and what are the sources and limits of knowledge (Carson et al., 2001). *Methodology,* on the other hand, studies epistemological assumptions integrated in research methods and deals with a question of how the researcher acquires knowledge of the studied issue (Tronvoll et al., 2011).

Ontologically, the majority of early business management research was based on a *positivist approach,* describing the combination of structures, processes, and relationships that were measured quantitatively (Örtenblad 2002, Oakley, 2000). This is different in the *post-positivist* paradigm that assumes a sphere of influence between reality and the researcher. Subsequently, the ontological continuum moves to *constructivism,* where authors argue that reality is socially constructed, shaped by the personal experiences and perceptions of the informant and researcher who can reveal and explain it (Andrade, 2009; Cavana et al., 2001). After analysis of the dual-career couple phenomena and associated range of social issues that shape the experiences of both expatriates, their partners, and the surrounding social relationships, it was decided to adopt constructivism as its philosophical paradigm.

Within epistemology, which involves defining the relationship between reality and the observer, several directions are associated with the central philosophical positions in social science. The first is *empiricism* in which reality is constituted of obvious material things. Empiricism is associated closely and a natural consequence of positivist view of the world (Erikson & Kovalainen, 2015). Second is *interpretivism,* which views reality as being socially constructed. This means

that knowledge is available only through social actors. Interpretivism views reality as material but acknowledges that people interpret it differently in different times and contexts (Silverman, 2013). Epistemologically, due to the complexity of DCCs as well as the contextually relevant and quickly changing issues that surround them, the author of this dissertation has based this enquiry epistemologically on an interpretive approach.

Ontology and epistemology influence the selection of a method. The majority of early business management research following positivist-empiricism approach, was based on an assumption of there being only one version of the truth. Hence there was a defined range of quantitative research methods, and clear criteria for good research quality, centered around truth and relevance (Hammersley, 1992). This has created a strong base for current business management research practice. However, authors have realized that this approach has limitations, such as: context stripping, an inability to factor in the nuances of language and meaning, relationships, and social contexts. In particular, quantitative research cannot deal with the social and cultural construction of its own 'variables' (Silverman, 2013). Researchers have called for an increase in the use of qualitative methods, especially when describing more complex social phenomena (Burr, 2015; Cresswell, 1994; Erikson & Kovalainen, 2015).

Due to the complexity of the expatriation of DCCs and also the contextually relevant and quickly changing issues within these subjects, the author of this dissertation places it philosophically in the *constructivism-interpretative* paradigm, and adopts a qualitative research design. This approach makes it possible to understand the experiences of the expatriates and their partners and attempts to make sense of their perceptions by considering the critical social contexts, such as job-related expectations, the interdependent reality of the expatriate and the spouse, or the external social expectations and demands of the couple. The personal engagement of the author in each interview along with an extensive inquiry into the reasons, and situational background of the respondents, facilitated capturing the context and supports the interpretation of the discussed reality.

The selection of the *constructivism-interpretative* paradigm and the qualitative method employed was also guided by the need to shed light on a new phenomenon, which is exclusive and quite personal for the respondents. In such situations, it is a challenge to employ quantitative approaches, which are further removed from socially constructed realities and require a far larger sample of informants. A qualitative research strategy, on the other hand, is appropriate when research phenomena are new, changing, contextually relevant, and when available samples

of interviewees are limited (Gergen, 1991; Saunders et al., 2009). Moreover, a qualitative approach is particularly suitable for explorative investigations where variables are not easily identified or known, and where the behavior of participants must be explained holistically (Joubish et al., 2011).

Using qualitative methods requires a clear statement as to what constitutes the research phenomena (Erikson & Kovalainen, 2015). Accordingly, considerable efforts were made to first organize a thorough literature review with a specific focus on an unambiguous definition of what constitutes a dual-career couple, and indeed, who qualifies as an expatriate in the context of this work. Consequently, the selection criteria for research participants have been specified in great detail to ensure that all interviews focus on the research phenomena.

3.2 Research process

3.2.1 Selection of research participants

As advised in available research (Hughes, 2013), the recruitment of the sample applied a conservative selection logic to align with the adopted definition of an IDCC (Challiol & Mignonac, 2005; Hughes, 2013). Conservatism in informant sample selection included the following criteria: both partners had to have a university degree, a professional career track record, and be engaged in continual professional employment as a minimum before the start of the expatriate assignment (Bradbury, 1994). In addition, the informant couple had to have completed the entire assigned expatriation process, from the pre-departure decision-making stage, to expatriation, to return back to home country. The respondents were also required to have been offered an assignment by their employer, and thus represent the group of assigned expatriates rather than that of self-initiated expatriates who had gone abroad on their own initiative (Suutari et al., 2017).

Both partners were expected to be working before the onset of the assignment. It was, however, not mandatory for both partners to have worked while on an assignment, as that is not always feasible (Vance & McNulty, 2014). Therefore, the author decided to include cases in which one partner did not work while on assignment. This was done in order to avoid bias in the results and to understand the social and professional consequences of such a decision.

The restrictive interviewee selection criteria necessitated a broad recruitment scope and the leveraging of multiple methods in the process of identifying potential

candidates. First, the existing expatriate databases from previous surveys carried out by the author's research colleagues were consulted and yielded the first participants. Second, the author leveraged a personal network within the international expatriate community. Third, a snowball method was employed to recruit additional respondents known to those DCCs already involved in the study or those that did not meet the selection criteria (Yin, 2017).

The optimal point for the research conversation to take place was about twelve to twenty-four months after the return from the expatriate assignment. This is to balance the fact that over time the world view of the interviewee changes (Qu & Dumay, 2011) with the fact that it takes between a year and eighteen months for the repatriates to fully adjust to their new environment (Lee & Liu, 2006). Recruitment between twelve and twenty-four months after return would ensure that the repatriation adjustment is already complete or at least close to complete, but events experienced during the assignment are still relatively recent enough so participants adequately recall particular issues met during the assignment. Within the first wave of interviews in 2014 and 2015, the interviews took place on average one year and two months after the return from the assignment. The range was between 8 months and 2.1 years. The second wave of research organized as the basis of the findings in Article 3 and conducted in 2017 was based on interviews with participants on average 15 months after their return from assignment; the range being between six and 23 months.

The final samples (see Table 1) included in the first wave of research featured eight male and six female expatriates, and their eight female and six male dual-career partners. The second part of the research focused on interviewing four new female expatriates and their four male partners. In total, the author interviewed 36 informants, among whom were eight male expatriates and ten female expatriates, and who had eight female partners and ten male partners. All the expatriates worked in the private sector (i.e., telecommunications, electronics, FMCG, tobacco, construction, machine building, and banking). They were from the United States (n = 7), Poland (n = 5), Finland (n = 5), and Belgium (n = 1). The expatriation locations included Finland (n = 7), China (n = 3), France (n = 1), Germany (n = 1), Ireland (n = 1), Japan (n = 1), Romania (n = 1), Russia (n = 1), Switzerland (n = 1), and the United States (n = 1). Eleven of 18 partners worked during the expatriate assignment, three full time and six part-time. Two of the partners had a remote working arrangement. All of the partners (bar just one) started working upon their return to their home country, and the remaining one returned to work after a year. They were all still working as of June 2019. Table 1 includes a detailed description of the samples collected in both research studies along with demographic details of all the participants.

Table 2. Interview sample composition

Case characteristics						Primary Expatriate			Dual Career Partner			Partner Work Status		
Nr	Host Country	Industry	Time of Interview	Used in Article	Assignment Length	Nationality	Gender	Position on the assignment	Nationality	Gender	Partner profession	Worked before the expatriation	Worked during the expatriation	Worked after the repatriation
1	China	Telecom	2014	2,3	2	Finnish	Male	Logistics Director	Finnish	Female	Project Manager	Yes	No	Yes
2	Ireland	Construction	2014	2,3	3	Polish	Male	Network Engineer	Polish	Female	Psychologist	Yes	No	Yes
3	Japan	Electronics	2014	2,3	2	American	Male	VP of Marketing and Sales	American	Female	English Teacher	Yes	Part time	Yes
4	Finland	Tabaco	2014	2,3	3	Polish	Male	Regional Director	Polish	Female	Real Estate Company Owner	Yes	Remotely	Yes
5	Finland	Telecom	2014	2,3	3	Polish	Male	Project Manager / Dev Leader	Polish	Female	Architect Designer	Yes	Remotely	Yes
6	Finland	Telecom	2014	2,3	3.5	American	Male	Sr. Global Financial Manager	American	Female	Logistics Manager	Yes	No	Yes 1 year after
7	France	Finance and Banking	2014	2,3	2	Polish	Male	Head of Foreign Exchange	Polish	Female	Librarian	Yes	No	Yes
8	Russia	Machine Building	2014	2,3	3,5	Belgium	Male	Operation Director	Belgium	Female	Nurse	Yes	Part time	Yes
9	China	Construction	2014	2,3,4	2	Finnish	Female	HR Director	Finnish	Male	IT Project Manager	Yes	Yes	Yes
10	Finland	Telecom	2015	2,3,4	3	American	Female	VP of Communication	American	Male	Sales Manager	Yes	Part time	Yes
11	Switzerland	FMCG	2015	2,3,4	1	Polish	Female	Marketing Director	Polish	Male	IT Project Manager	Yes	No	Yes
12	Germany	Telecom	2015	2,3,4	3	Finnish	Female	Senior Legal Counsel	Finnish	Male	Airline Pilot	Yes	Yes	Yes
13	Romania	FMCG	2015	2,3,4	3	American	Female	Associate Director	Polish	Male	Project Portfolio Leader	Yes	Yes	Yes
14	Finland	Telecom	2015	2,3,4	3	American	Female	Communication Manager	American	Male	Partner, Investment Consulting	Yes	Part time	Yes
15	China	Telecom	2017	4	3	American	Female	VP, Manufacturing Director	American	Male	Engineering Manager	Yes	No	Yes
16	USA	IT	2017	4	2	Finnish	Female	VP Marketing	Finnish	Male	VP, Engineering	Yes	No	Yes
17	Finland	Professional Services	2017	4	3	Finnish	Female	Attorney	American	Male	Software Engineer	Yes	Part time	Yes
18	Finland	IT	2017	4	3	American	Female	HR Director	American	Male	Engineering Manager	Yes	No	Yes

3.2.2 Data collection and transcription

The research strategy assumed that both the expatriate and the DCC partner were to be interviewed separately. The interviews were conducted either in person, via Skype, or by telephone in cases where it was impossible to conduct face-to-face meetings. With the permission of participants, all of the interviews were recorded.

In order to prepare for the interviews, it was essential to develop a qualitative interview guide to facilitate a semi-structured interview format. The author prepared it and had it reviewed by two senior researchers and one human resources manager to ensure the validity of the questions (Bryman & Bell, 2003). The guide was then piloted with the first dual-career couple, by conducting a full interview with both the primary expatriate and the partner. Since it performed well in capturing research evidence, the same guide was used in each interview, to cover a comparable range of topics and to generate research material for analysis in subsequent papers. The research guide included several types of questions following the *what*, *how* and *why* method, the most typical to qualitative scientific research design (Silverman, 2013). *What* questions are descriptive and focus on exploring and describing states, situations, and processes. *How* and *Why* questions focus on causes and consequences, and aim to explain the dual-career couple experience in qualitative terms.

The interview guide consisted of five sections. *Section 1* began the interview by asking the informants to share their family and career story. The descriptions of their experiences and feelings were particularly potent and provided many insights that helped increase the clarity of the answers to research questions (Saunders & Rojon, 2014). Then, the guide included *Section 2* of questions relating to the scope and direction of the interviewees expatriation experience to have them focus on the topic. Subsequently, the interview guide included three sections drilling into the expatriation decision-making *(Section 3)*, adjustment in the host country (*Section 4*) and concluded with repatriation and repatriation adjustment (*Section 5*). In these last three sections (3, 4 and 5) of the interview, questions were asked about experiences, goals, agency, perceptions, and behaviors of both the informant and of their partner. In each case, all the questions planned in the semi-structured interview guide were asked to ensure the completeness and comparability of the evidence collected from each research participant. Such design allowed the researcher to compare notes between expatriating duos, contrast their perceptions, and reconstruct their expatriation experience. The research guide was followed in each interview, although, issues that were particularly relevant to a respondent were sometimes discussed more extensively to foster free-flowing

discussion and emergence of issues that could not be considered in advance (Huberman & Miles, 2002).

Most of the interviews were carried out in English apart from the interviews with Polish expatriates, which were conducted in Polish – following a language equality approach (Marschan-Piekkari & Reis, 2004) – when both interviewer and interviewee's mother tongue was Polish. The interviews lasted between 27 and 82 minutes. All recordings were transcribed, resulting in an extensive database of verbatim interviews, as well as initial discoveries of first findings (Lapdat & Lindsay, 1999). All transcripts and recordings were de-identified and stored in a password protected cloud database for future use and to maintain a chain of evidence, while preserving the privacy of informants. They will be deleted five years after the publication of this thesis. The transcripts of the interviews in Polish were subsequently translated into English. The transcribing and translation phases provided an opportunity for initial data analysis using qualitative interpretative methodology (Seale et al., 2004), and helped provide an early understanding of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

3.2.3 Data analysis using replication logic

The transcribed interviews were coded leveraging MaxQDA software to enable a visual understanding of the data and identification of repeating themes in the interviews (Flick, 2014). If two or more cases were shown to support the same theory, replication could be claimed. The greater the number of case studies that show replication, the greater the rigor with which a theory has been established (Rowley, 2002). This replication logic (Silverman, 2013; Rowley, 2002) approach, suited well to the present research as each expatriate-partner pair could be seen as a separate case. Additionally, the author has sought *literal replication*, within each case defined as a situation where the individual expatriate evidence corroborated with the experience of their partner, essentially conveying similar observation, motivation or result (Yin, 2017). All available material was reviewed during the first pass with the aim of identifying key categories (e.g., partner issues connected with underemployment, roles of male expatriate partners or factors explaining the successful repatriation adjustment) and of generating the first coding frame. This first pass utilized concept-driven (deductive) analysis. Next, the concept-driven data was combined with the data-driven (inductive) approach (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015). The coding frame was subsequently refined multiple times to group the findings -- such as the respondents' quotes -- into critical categories. This helped to understand the key themes contained in the research data, to extract findings, and to aid in formulating new levels of interpretation. The author was

looking for new topics that reoccurred in multiple expatriate-partner pairs. Where replication of findings was achieved, the repeating themes were selected for reporting. This allowed for theoretical generalization and replication based on repeating, qualitative evidence (Rowley, 2002).

The final phase of analysis occurred during the process of writing the article itself. Interview excerpts were included in the articles to reflect the complexity of the topics covered and to add context to help readers understand the full picture. This writing approach allowed the author to reconsider the findings, sharpen the perspective on described issues, and provide an evidence pathway for the conclusions.

In the case of two of the four articles, the full transcript material was first independently analyzed by the author of the dissertation who wrote the first draft of the paper. Then the transcripts and drafts of the papers were reviewed carefully and independently by the second researcher to identify both supportive and contrary evidence. After this second analysis, the researchers contrasted the findings, discussed their meaning, and collaborated on the final version of the articles.

3.3 Research quality

There are at least two approaches to ensure research quality when using qualitative methods. One addresses the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability dimensions (Ericson & Kovalainen, 2015), while more frequent discussions, adopted also in this thesis, focus on construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability (Yin, 2017; Rowley, 2002), sourced from quantitative studies and further adapted to qualitative approaches (Rowley, 2002; Riessman, 2008).

Construct validity is about ensuring that the studied concepts are correctly tested, measured, and described. Usage of different sources of knowledge and inquiry, as well as establishing and recording chains of evidence can all enhance construct validity. For qualitative studies there can be two levels of analysis of validity. First relates to the story told by an interview participant, and second level reviews the validity of the analysis, in other words, the story told by the researcher (Riessman, 2008). In this dissertation, both the expatriate and the dual-career partner were interviewed in each case, allowing the author to understand the situation and context from two independent sources. The conclusions derived from the interviews of each couple were checked for consistency of reporting and, in most cases, no major differences were found. Such a strategy was important, not only to

ensure construct validity within the story told by the participant, but also to heighten the understanding of the impact of partner experiences on the behaviors, perceptions, and decisions made by the partners in DCCs, who need to integrate their careers as a family. The earlier-mentioned second level of validity analysis that deals with how the story is told by the researcher has been addressed by frequent use of quotes of informants in the appended articles. While writing the papers the author ensured that the quotes are sourced from a diverse set of informants, and that they adequately convey the stories heard during the interview process.

The validity of the story told by the researcher was also studied by Lincoln & Gauba (1985), who proposed a dependability criterion for qualitative research that can be achieved by a peer auditing process. Each of the articles appended to this thesis has been presented at a minimum of one major international human-resources themed scientific conference, to harvest feedback from other researchers. The majority of feedback received was positive and as part of that process, an early version of Article 3 (Partner roles in international dual career couples: the case of female expatriates and their male partner) included in this thesis, received a Professor Dave Lepak Memorial Prize, which recognized the paper as one of the five best papers at the conference. Subsequently, new findings were published in international, blind-reviewed journals to ensure they were perused by a selection of researchers and editors, and to verify the validity of their argumentation and evidence. The Article 2 (Expatriated Dual-Career Partners: Hope and Disillusionment) received a 2019 Emerald Award for Excellence as a highly commended paper.

Furthermore, the internal validity deals with establishment of causal linkages between variables in the study and is a major concern of quantitative, positivist approaches. However, qualitative studies can also use techniques that increase internal validity (Rowley, 2002). In this inquiry, the interview guide was constructed in a chronological way to help understand the perceptions of participants starting with the expatriation decision making, through adjustment in the host location, and finishing with the repatriation. In each case the discussion followed the script and naturally-formed chains of evidence, thoughts, perceptions, and decisions of each of the informants. Furthermore, two validations were performed in the course of the analysis: a within-case validation of evidence from both the expatriate and the partner, and a cross-case analysis of the elicited phenomena to identify repeating themes in different expatriate-partner pairs. The conclusions derived from the interviews of each couple were checked for consistency of reporting, and while the context of the presented reality changed (as each informant perceives reality differently), the key facts and reasoning behind

decisions were reported relatively consistently by both expatriate and partner. Moreover, whenever findings diverged from existing knowledge, the author ensured that the evidence was particularly strong and supported by multiple cases identified among a range of research participants. These observations further increased the researcher's confidence in the findings and contributed to the study's internal validity. The final phase of analysis occurred during the process of writing the article itself. Interview excerpts were included in the articles to reflect the complexity of the topics covered and to add context to help readers understand the full picture, thus also improving the construct and internal validity of the findings (Saunders & Rojon, 2014).

External validity is concerned with whether findings can be generalized to broader populations than the studied sample of informants. It can be achieved through employing interview methods that limit research bias and an analysis technique called replication, when the researcher seeks similar themes in many independent cases. The dissertation's adopted method of semi-structured interviews has also been found to minimize researcher bias and increase the generalizability of findings (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Consequently, such interview methods can contribute to theoretical generalization (Eisenhardt, 1989). The efforts made within this dissertation to increase external validity include the rigorous selection of informants, the meticulous design and testing of the interview guide, the strict attention paid to precision of transcription and translation, and most importantly, to the ensuring of an independent, unbiased investigation (Seale, 1999). Further endeavors to ensure the external validity of the findings included the plan to organize two separate waves of qualitative research, based on the same qualitative research guide. The first wave took place in 2014 and 2015 and included interviews with 28 informants (14 independent dual-career couples). The analysis of these interviews led to Article 4 concerning the repatriation adjustment of dual-career couples and Article 2 on the development of hope. The second study took place in 2017 and 2018, with the same selection criteria for individuals, but with an adjusted sampling focus that included couples in which the primary assigned expatriate was a woman. It included detailed interviews with eight dual-careerists, completing comprehensive research material on female-led expatriation that informed Article 3. The new evidence captured in the second wave of research appeared consistent with the conclusions presented in Article 2 on hope and disillusionment, and with those of Article 4 on repatriation that were written based on the first wave of research. This consistency supported the view that presented findings have external validity.

Reliability, defined as consistency or dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in qualitative studies, is achieved by careful adherence to the selected research

strategy, including a focus on organization, research planning, and analysis (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2017; Rowley, 2002). The research plan leading to this dissertation was constructed early on. The work started with a thorough review of the available literature presented in the first appended article, which permitted the inclusion of early thinking on theoretical lenses in the research design. The plan additionally included concrete research questions, a data collection plan, and a rough timeline. The method considered both the linear approach to planned progress of the interviews, analysis, and publishing, as well as the ability to continuously improve the quality of the questions and analysis by re-reading and re-writing each of the articles many times in the process of data analysis and research publication.

This consistent focus on construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability was aiming to ensure high research quality, as well as maximize the external replicability of findings and the possibility for theoretical generalization based on qualitative evidence.

4 SUMMARY OF THE ARTICLES

This chapter contains the summary of the four published articles that are an integral part of this dissertation. The first article is a broad overview of the literature in the field of expatriation of dual-career couples. Articles two, three, and four address different aspects of dual-career couples in an international context and fill in research gaps uncovered in the literature review. Next the summaries of these four articles are presented. The complete articles in their published form can be found at the end of this work.

4.1 Dual-income and dual-career couples in an international context

This book chapter reviews the existing research and literature, with focus on expatriate dual-career and dual-income couples. The first part of the article is dedicated to the analysis of historical conditions that created a basis for the taxonomy as well as an analysis of the differences between dual-income and dual-career couples. Furthermore, the distinctions between these two phenomena require more research to parse the specific differences; it is especially important due to the current rapid evolution of the social, economic, and familial climate.

It analyses the available literature and studies concerning the willingness of expatriates and their partners to relocate, as well as their adjustment experience and repatriation process, including the triggers involved in spurring dual-career couples to choose to return to their home country (repatriation decision-making) as well as repatriation adjustment. The expatriation and repatriation adjustment challenges are discussed through the lenses of work, general, and interaction adjustment (Black et al., 1992).

This chapter reviews our current level of understanding on the IDCC issue from both expatriate and partner points of view before, during, and after their international assignment. Finally, the paper outlines various corporate support policies and practices to identify what kinds have been connected with the specific needs of international DCCs and what empirical research exists on them. The article also provides a future research agenda.

The review highlights the significance of the issue and calls for research to address several research gaps. First, the landscape of international work is changing rapidly, as evident from the new types of expatriation emerging in management practice or the growing number of female expatriates accompanied by their dual-career male partners. Second, recent trends among Asian and European

companies include the rapid expansion of their global operations and thus the subsequent increases in the demand for highly skilled workers. Third, the subject of repatriation has been less studied than any of the other phases, and research on dual-career repatriation in particular is scarce. Finally, the emergence of several new expatriation directions limits the ability of the literature, most of which focuses on US expatriates, to formulate international generalizations and exposes opportunities for further research.

Key theoretical gaps include the need for more integrated approaches that link the experiences of expatriates and partners. This type of research would help both advance theoretical inquiry and provide practical contribution, since MNCs are typically interested in a general approach to establish widely applicable support practices. Most studies however to date focus solely on the perspective of either the expatriate or the partner, and there is a shortage of studies that analyze the phenomenon through interviews with both sides of a partnership. Furthermore, longitudinal research is called for as expatriation is a long, multi-year process, and becomes less of a once in a lifetime experience and more of a serial endeavor.

Additionally, recent works have unfortunately suffered from methodological issues, opening avenues for an increased clarity of the constructs used, especially with regard to the use of the terms: *dual-income couple* and *dual-career couple*, which can be confusing. Some studies include the term dual-career couple in their title; however, an analysis of the content, reasoning, and quotes reveals studies including cases of dual-income, rather than dual-career couples. Therefore, the inconsistent application of dual-income and dual-career conditions to research undermine the comparability of findings between various research streams. Moreover, most literature relies on research with small sample sizes comprising individuals often from a single location and with a narrow view of the issue.

4.2 Expatriated dual-career partners: hope and disillusionment

The primary objective of this paper is to analyze the changing career goals, pathways, and agency - critical components of hope theory as identifiable among dual-career partners with experience of a complete cycle of international expatriation. This qualitative study is based on 28 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with international expatriates and their partners. The paper analyzes responses of both partners to provide a complete picture of decision-making processes during the international assignments of DCCs whose partners need to integrate their careers in a family context.

The goals cited in hope theory are the representations of desired states. Pathways are the conceptualized ways to reach goals, while agency thinking is someone's perceived capacity to follow the pathway and reach their goal. Finally hope is the overall emotional state (Snyder, 2002). The study reveals that dual-career partners, who relocate following the assigned expatriate initially build goals, pathways, and agency to support a family move to facilitate the expatriate's career goals, but later the absence of self-career realization diminishes hope and the partner's career comes to drive the goals set for repatriation.

The couples reported that, prior to departure, the expatriation decision was driven by the goal of career progress of the expatriate and that the career of the expatriate was the dominant reason for living abroad. The partner appreciated the opportunities and long-term career benefits related to such international assignment experience and actively supported it, despite the need for temporary suspension of his or her career. During the assignment, however, many partners quickly began to miss having a job, a sense of being needed and being important, leading to depletion of hope. The assumption that they have enough agency to mentally cope with a life without a career weakened over time, and eventually become difficult to accept. The deeply unsatisfied need for professional activity, as well as a feeling of slowed progress or contribution, radically impacted their state of hope, leading to the establishment of new goals relating to employment. Substitute goals such as childhood education, travel, or exploring new cultures, became less satisfying and insufficient for long-term happiness. Therefore, family- and adventure-related goals were consequently reassessed and deprioritized. The lack of work or perpetual underemployment decreased hope and increased negative emotions and conflicts at home. This, as observed in earlier research (Ravasi et al., 2013; Tharenou, 2008), had a cross-over effect on the adjustment of an expatriate (Andreason, 2008; Lazarova et al., 2010), leading to increased stress in the family. The very important expatriate supporting role of the partner started to weaken concurrently with the depletion of hope and agency.

Moreover, frustration caused by the lack of career led to a turnaround in the hierarchy of goals and changes in pathways. The initial high levels of hope of the partner related to expatriation, all the support and motivation provided to the expatriate to accept the assignment, and the complete set of pathways and agency thinking related to satisfying the partner's own goals shifts to focus on one new goal: a strong need to resume professional activity. When the first pathway was selected: finding a job in the host country proved to be exceedingly challenging, the alternative pathway of a return home often became the next plan. The analysis of the interviews exposed that the main motivation of dual-career couples returning home and the primary objective of such repatriation was the goal of the

partner to resume professional activity. When asked about another assignment, only a few couples were prepared to agree to the next assignment with the stipulation that job opportunities had to be available for both while abroad.

The contribution of this article derives from the use of hope theory to explain the expatriation experience of dual-career partners through the entire expatriate cycle. No earlier study on DCC expatriation (Kierner, 2015; Szkudlarek, 2010) has analyzed the experiences of couples to elucidate the dynamics of changing goals and behaviors during the expatriation processes. The goal-pathways-agency triangle has helped understand the intertwined relationships of the couple and explain how they change over time and how they influence one another. In particular the paper identified the depletion of hope for the dual-career partner and as a consequence a change in the goals leading to a new pathway geared to restoration of the career of the partner through repatriation.

Not only do these findings help broaden our understanding of the expatriation experiences of IDCCs but also contain practical information of use to IDCCs and international human resource managers, in that they extend the understanding of the processes a dual-career couple experiences during expatriation. If a IDCC partner does not have opportunities for employment, owing to issues such as obtaining a work visa or a language barrier, assignments should be planned to span shorter periods whenever possible. If the assignee is required to remain abroad for an extended period, human resource managers should try to provide support practices that ensure that it is possible for the partner to continue their career, in order to avoid the marked increases in stress and pressure from the partner to return home. If MNCs wish to reassign a DCC expatriate, they need to secure a fulfilling job for the partner, which can be the primary motivating factor for the couple to agree to an assignment. If that is not always possible due to issues like visa availability or the profession of the partner, the likelihood of a repeat assignment being accepted is limited.

4.3 Partner roles in international dual-career couples: the case of female expatriates and their male partner

The objective of this paper is to understand what kinds of spousal roles the male partners of female expatriates adopt, to make their expatriation possible within dual-career couples. As expected, based on the gender order theory the situations when a DCC male partner follows a woman on international assignment break traditional societal expectations of the role of man and woman in a family. A

qualitative study based on extensive semi-structured interviews with 20 international dual-careerists (female expatriates and their male partners) was conducted. In contrast with earlier research, the study focuses on the gender-specific perspective of male partners and female expatriates and involves both partners of the IDCC in order to fully understand the couple as a dual-career family unit.

Prior research identifies seven different spousal roles (Välimäki et al., 2009; Mäkelä et al. 2011). A *supportive role* appears when one of the partners supports the other in their career through advice, emotional help, and practical assistance. A *partner* adopting a *flexible role* accommodates the needs of the other spouse's career and adjusts to provide "silent support," which may involve the coordination of careers and even a temporary break in the career of one partner (Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000). A *determining role* is evident when the partner has a "guiding" influence on the decision of the expatriate to take up an international assignment. Both careers are still important, but one is subordinate, and the spouse takes advantage. An *equal role* in the context of expatriation happens when the careers of both partners are given the same level of priority and are led independently in such a way that neither of the careers is affected and they can both progress without interruption. An *instrumental role* appears when one of the partners uses the other as an "instrument" in the process of fulfilling her or his own career ambitions, and, additionally, expects gratitude from the partner for the status such career provides.

The study reveals that most men have adopted a *supportive*, *flexible*, or *restrictive role*, while it did not identify *counterproductive*, *instrumental*, and *equal roles* among its sample. The *supportive role* was clearly the most common among male partners and appeared in all three areas identified in domestic career settings: *psychosocial support*, *practical assistance*, and *career assistance* (Ezzedeen & Ritchey, 2008; Heikkinen et al., 2014). Male partners in these expatriation experiences were highly flexible and willing to breach the traditional gender order (Heikkinen et al., 2014). This was essential to the success of the female expatriate and a necessary condition enabling provision of the required level of practical support. A new *seeking role* was recognized, when a partner agrees to expatriate, supports the spouse, but also very actively looks to restart their career while abroad. Partner maturity, self-confidence, and egalitarian gender status views have been found to be conducive to the successful female expatriate experience.

4.4 Repatriation of dual-career couples

The purpose of this article is to enhance the understanding of the repatriation adjustment experiences of international dual-career couples. The study incorporates the perspectives of both the expatriate and partner on the DCC experience. A qualitative research structure was adopted to provide an in-depth understanding of a topic. Twenty-eight semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 highly- skilled and well-educated expatriate couples.

Contrary to earlier literature on repatriation citing it as a challenging experience (Kraimer et al., 2012; Haslberger et al., 2012, Storti, 2001, Mäkelä & Suutari, 2013; Kierner, 2015), many of the interviewed couples reported very positive repatriation experiences with few adjustment challenges. Prior research discusses challenges due to the need to coordinate two careers (Baird & Reeves, 2011; Känsälä et al., 2015), lack of organizational support (Handler & Lane, 1997; McNulty & Moeller, 2018), the job arrangements of the partner (Riusala & Suutari, 2000), shifts of identity caused by the experience of expatriation (Black et al., 1992), culture shocks and repatriation adjustment challenges (Sussman, 2002; Suutari & Välimaa, 2002; Kraimer et al., 2012), practical life issues (Storti, 2001; Mäkelä & Suutari, 2013), loss of additional benefits and allowances (Bonache, 2005), and work-life balance (Mäkelä & Suutari, 2013).

The interviews forming the basis of the article did identify some of the same challenges, earlier listed and categorized by the repatriation adjustment theory. In particular, in the interaction adjustment area dual-career repatriates confirmed issues related to shift in identity and related communication issues with family and friends. The issues in the sphere of general adjustment were less prominently reported, while work adjustment issues were mainly concerning primary repatriate, while partners typically found relief due to an opportunity to re-start their careers often suspended for the time of expatriation assignment. Hence many of the interviewed IDCCs reported overall positive repatriation experiences with few adjustment issues. As an outcome of these findings, the focus was next turned to the analysis of the reasons for such positive findings in order to understand how the specific features of IDCCs impact their repatriation adjustment experiences. The four main factors that facilitated adjustment include active self-management of the expatriation process, previous experience with expatriation and repatriation, successful integration of work and family life, and realization of dual-career interests upon repatriation.

The first factor – active self-management of the expatriation process – is accomplished by meticulous planning of the expatriation and repatriation

processes, which takes into account both DCC careers. Most couples had negotiated shorter term assignments than was suggested by the assigning company and declined to extend their stay abroad or had not accepted earlier proposals that did not suit their situation. The location and timing of assignments were analyzed from the perspective of both partners' careers. In some cases, partners followed the expatriate later, when the timing suited their career requirements. The partner may have also repatriated around six months before the expatriate to meet requirements relating to the maintenance of their career at home. The successful repatriation experience of dual-career couples seems to be partly pre-programmed from the beginning of the assignment if there is proper planning in place, and DCCs typically know how to plan properly when there is a need to coordinate two careers and achieve a work-life balance at the same time.

The second theme to emerge from the interviews relates to the prior international experience of at least one of the partners in the form of a period spent studying or working abroad. Their international orientation boosts the motivation and interest in moving for an assignment abroad, eases adjustment once there, and contributes to successful adjustment upon repatriation. These experiences lead to realistic expectations about life abroad and the demands and consequences of an international assignment. Positive orientations to internationalization, previous international experience, and new expected experiences naturally helped individuals and their family members with the repatriation process.

The third theme identified a factor integral to the symbiosis of work and family life of international DCCs (Rusconi et al., 2013). Planning expatriation was often combined with family planning, which meant partners did not necessarily have additional breaks in their careers. Some families handled this by aligning plans to move abroad to the timing of having children. Owing to a new family situation, career concerns of the female partner were less problematic than they might have been before children were involved. Couples were able to maximize the benefits of their international experience by focusing on family during expatriation. The new family situation, combined with an often-improved financial status, presented opportunities for these DCCs to plan their new family life upon repatriation.

The final factor contributing to the successful repatriation of DCCs was the realization of diverse career interests and aspirations they have back home. It is common for repatriation to be a well-anticipated, favorable situation, which allows both partners to have a career. Job-related factors were therefore high on the agenda during discussions about their return. Often, there were opportunities for continuation of the assignment abroad, although the decision to repatriate was made due to the career interests of the non-assigned partner, for whom it

represented an opportunity to recommence their career. Accordingly, repatriation was generally seen as positive for most DCCs, and that overshadowed any difficulties they had. Naturally, this was important for the partner, but also affected the shared experience of both members of the couple. For example, expatriates were often aware that their partners were making a sacrifice in abandoning their career when moving abroad. In that sense, it was a relief to both partners to get back to life as it used to be as a dual-career couple.

The study fills a research gap by being among the first to analyze the dual-career repatriation process, by incorporating the views of both partners, which was something long called for by other researchers (Harvey, 1998; Känsälä et al., 2015; Rusconi et al., 2013). The paper contributes to expatriation-management literature in two ways: First it illustrates the unexpected positive repatriation experiences of DCCs, and second, it outlines the reasons for such positive experiences. Contrary to expectations, the specific situation of an IDCC seems to facilitate a smooth repatriation process. Four main themes explaining the positive nature of repatriation adjustment of international DCCs were identified, and the study formulates several practical implications for human resources managers implementing programs and policies in MNCs.

5 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the conclusions of this doctoral dissertation, discusses the theoretical and practical contributions, the implications for IDCCs and HRMs, and the limitations of the present study. Moreover, this chapter presents an agenda for further research into the domain of the dual-career couple expatriation.

5.1 Theoretical contributions

This dissertation provides theoretical contributions to the body of research on all phases of dual-career expatriation, with a particular focus on the changing aspects of hope and agency in the host country, situations faced by female expatriates and their partners in dual-career couples, and the most under-researched area of repatriation. This study documents findings from the parallel interviews of both expatriates and their partners to capture a complete view of the researched phenomena as called for by previous authors (Rusconi et al. 2013; Känsälä et al., 2015; Harvey, 1998).

An updated view of the literature concerning each stage of dual-career expatriation highlights gaps in our knowledge of the expatriation and repatriation of DCCs as well as support practices offered by MNCs to both partners. It stresses the importance of contextual and longitudinal perspective, as well as a need for more modern studies, required due to rapid changes in the landscape of expatriation, while noting that perspectives of both partners need to be studied and that the experiences are interconnected and influenced by their career trajectories before and after expatriation. Additionally, it identifies novel lenses, such as goals and expectations for theory-building, to fill gaps and provide a framework for more quantitative research on this rapidly evolving and increasingly common business practice.

The originality of the discussion on the evolution of hope is based on its response to the identified research gap of a need to study dynamic change of pathways and agency of partners in IDCCs, which are driving behaviors in a broader context of an expatriation process starting from decision-making and finishing with repatriation, and the potential consideration of another foreign assignment. This study indicates that hope theory offers a useful framework for increasing our understanding of the changing goals pathways and agency thinking of expatriate partners in the situation of dual-career partners. It highlights changes in the goals and pathways of couples, which were changes from highly positive hope, to depletion of hope driven by a partner being underemployed, and thus pressing for repatriation. An additional theoretical contribution lies in the early view on

potential acceptance of future assignments and how these conditions have changed when compared to requirements expressed prior to the first assignment.

The discussion on spousal roles undertaken by male partners of expatriates contributes to theory building on non-traditional gender order behavior and a seldom researched, yet increasingly common, phenomenon of female-led expatriation. The gender order theory (Connell, 2013), taxonomy of spousal support roles (Välimäki et al. 2009) in combination with specific categorization of types of support (Heikkinen et al., 2013) yields a new representation of predominant roles in such situations: supportive (including emotional, practical and career support), flexible, and restrictive. It identified a new *seeking role,* a phenomenon that occurs when a partner displays highly supportive behaviors and actively looks for new employment opportunities. The term *seeking role* is one coined in this dissertation, albeit one based on earlier research observations on the dynamic and multifaceted nature of partner support (Heikkinen, 2013). Additionally, the insights into the specific characteristics of maturity, self-confidence, and the egalitarian beliefs of male partners, which have enabled successful female expatriate experiences, established the groundwork for future quantitative studies in this rapidly evolving field.

The under-researched phase of the dual-career expatriation cycle identified in this research review is repatriation. In the case of single-career expatriates, repatriation is seen as problematic (Haslberger et al., 2012; Kierner, 2015; Mäkelä & Suutari, 2013). However, this dissertation uncovered the many positive experiences of repatriated DCCs. The analysis and identification of critical factors influencing a positive repatriation outcome, notably, DCCs career self-management, international orientation, integration of work and family life, and realization and implementation of future career interests all contribute to the framework of a person's positive repatriation experience.

Finally, the research embedded within this dissertation exposes the dynamic growth and versatility of the dual-career couple phenomena. Investigation of its phases (pre-departure decision-making, expatriation, and repatriation), caveats introduced by gender (of expatriates and partners), or commitment to a career exposes a complex set of ever-changing relationships. The lenses of adjustment and hope and use of gender order theory combined with definition of spousal roles provides a guide to connect and explain the phenomena, and may be a starting point to development of modified theory concerning expatriation of DCCs.

5.2 Practical contributions

This dissertation guides dual-career expatriates, partners, and human resource managers employed by multinational corporations by providing practical views for stakeholders of the expatriation process. Current and prospective expatriates may be interested in the description of each phase of their experience as well as the support practices available during expatriation. Understanding of the perspective on value of these support practices may encourage future expatriates to utilize them and to request specific help, for example, in the area of job or educational support for dual-career partners. These subjects are systematically described within the first article based on a thorough review of available literature, and are re-examined in context of each described phase and perspective in the articles two, three and four.

Specifically, for expatriates, this work presents the potential challenges inherent to female expatriation and provides a guide to the roles that a male partner needs to adopt for such repatriation to be successful. In helping ensure the expatriate experience is successful, these insights may raise important questions for discussion among DCCs, who should consider whether the male partner is ready to adopt such supportive or seeking roles. This advance discussion between expatriate and the partner may prove beneficial during times of expatriation decision-making, and may decrease potential conflicts, adjustment challenges or assignment failures. The described evolution of hope of partners points out the importance of meaningful employment and can help increase attention to ensuring that the job permit for DCC partner is available prior to leaving for an assignment, or that the job search starts well ahead of expatriation. Alternatively, the ideas put forth can help expatriates negotiate shorter assignment periods and prepare for earlier repatriation. Finally, the positive aspects of repatriation are shown along with guidance on the activities likely to enhance satisfaction. In this context, active participation in career planning or engagement in personal projects, such as building a house or a cabin by the lake, may ease a person's reabsorption into the native country and culture.

Current and prospective expatriate partners may equally benefit from the insights collected in this dissertation, since they are often excluded from HR briefings. They might find it difficult to obtain an overview of the options available to them and this dissertation's literature review could illustrate the processes and support practices they might expect from an MNC. Such awareness may help them increase utilization of available help. Additionally, all the appended articles and discussion in this thesis highlight the importance of job-seeking while on assignment. Knowing this prior to departure could prove an advantage during decision making

and prompt the process of obtaining appropriate work permits and adequate employment. In the case of male partners accompanying a female expatriate, the understanding of the other partner's perspective as described in the article on gender roles may help mitigate emotional stress. Knowing that there are people who have turned this non-traditional and socially difficult situation into a positive and uplifting experience should serve as a guide and an encouragement before and during the process of adjustment. Additionally, analysis of the evolution of hope, pathways, and agency of partners may drive self-awareness and mindful self-management while on assignment. Partners also have a significant role to play during repatriation and will benefit from the guide on maximizing satisfaction, by for example initiating an idea of a personal project.

Managers of expatriates, and human resource managers in charge of diversity and expatriation benefits will find useful analysis of support practices, which provides a portfolio of potential support programs. This portfolio should aid in the design of expatriate benefits and enhance current support systems for partners, who are those most in need of either job or emotional support. Knowledge of the spillover effects between family members (Andreason, 2008; Lazarova et al., 2010; Takeuchi et al., 2002) and the influence of the partner on early repatriation (Kierner, 2018), should motivate MNCs to offer support practices providing meaningful job opportunities for DCC partners such as help in obtaining job permits, help with finding employment abroad or options to further partner's education. HR managers intent on the creation of a diverse and efficacious workforce should find the female-led expatriation article a great source of inspiration. It provides concrete examples of successful female expatriates, as well as guides to the roles male partners should adopt to give a foreign assignment the best chance of success. The male partner support practices suggested therein could increase the recruitment and success rate of diverse expatriate candidates.

Finally, because MNCs often overlook repatriation, the corporate value is lost when returning expatriates leave the company due to dissatisfaction with the repatriation process. Knowledge of successful repatriation of IDCCs may enable MNCs to assist both employees and their engaged partners during their assignment and serve as an encouragement factor for MNCs to consider more DCCs for expatriation assignments. The identified factors connected with positive repatriation experiences may in fact inspire a range of support practices that will be applicable also for single-career expatriates. For example, enhancing active self-management of the expatriation and repatriation process by stimulating expatriates to start planning a return earlier may work equally well for both dual and single career expatriates. Further-on MNCs could create an environment for repatriates that motivates engagement in personal projects and hobbies upon

repatriation by, for example, enlisting repatriates in relevant forums or providing membership in various clubs as part of repatriation benefits.

In summary, this amalgamation of practical guidance may yield more satisfactory and successful outcomes for expatriates, their partners, and MNCs. It may increase the chances of their assignments being successful, and thus yield an efficacious talent pool for MNCs.

5.3 Limitations and areas for further research

The present thesis purposefully highlights experiences of a very selective, albeit growing group of expatriate dual-career couples, based on deep qualitative insights from a very specific context of expatriate managers typically drawn from the western world. Although the scope of the cultural, national and gender backgrounds of respondents informing this study is relatively broad for a qualitative study of social phenomena in the business world, its findings should only be applied with caution beyond the studied populations of Europe and North America, and even within those regions, it is important to note that the subjectivity of the presented views limits generalization beyond couples in similar situations. In this context, further research might extend the purview to other expatriate origins and locations, going beyond the two continents and reaching wider populations.

This work is one of the first of its kind to include analysis of the essential voice of IDCC partners. Because the family unit is also composed of children often accompanying couples on assignments, they have views that have yet to be elicited. Similarly, the perspective of direct managers and HR professionals in multinational corporations would be another useful data point. Additional interviews of these important stakeholders would allow for more extensive discussion of the perspective of children and the effect on work performance that has not been explored in this dissertation and is lacking in the available literature.

The author believes that the interviews captured participants experiences thoroughly, and at a time well after any adjustment stresses had passed. At the same time, it can be argued that a more accurate reading of the situation would be possible had the interviews been organized at intervals to capture their perspective while in the midst of each phase of their assignments. This would have controlled for a potential retrospective bias, especially given the significance of each DCC's experience, which may bias their self-reflection. In the future, a proper longitudinal study based both on qualitative and quantitative methods could provide a more accurate set of observations. The need for such a study is also called

for by other authors, including Suutari and Brewster (2003), Doherty and Dickman (2009), and Kraimer et al. (2009). Further work would also benefit from an interdisciplinary inquiry involving sociology, psychology, and economics views as called for by other authors in career related fields (Khapova & Arthur, 2011).

It should be noted that the researched phenomena undergo significant transformations over time and therefore the applicability of the study has specific time constraints. In particular, gender order and roles are evolving quickly as governments, non-profit organizations, and multinational corporations work to improve diversity, enhance equality, update internal and external expectations, and thus alter gender stereotypes. The rapid shift in global markets, the digitization of work, increased speed of access to information, and educational changes will impact expatriation, as more work can be done effectively from home (Christensen, 2019). The technological shift also lowers communication barriers between countries thanks to automated translation and accessible video-calling services (Tundik et al., 2018). More work can be done from home, meaning more expatriate partners may find meaningful employment telecommuting to their home country. The expansion of various service and retail organizations abroad might also ease adjustment. These are examples of trends that are quickly shifting the face of dual-career couple expatriation and will necessitate frequent repetition of studies such as the ones presented in this dissertation.

Owing to the personal and sensitive nature of some of the interview content, the present study avoids the use of corporate names. The names of all interviewees are subsequently redacted to protect privacy, thus limiting the description of the precise boundary of the interviewed sample (Yin, 2017). Given that the author of this dissertation is an expatriate herself may have both positive and negative effects on the validity of its conclusions, through a personal bias introduced during the collection and analysis phase of research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Hammersley, 2008).

Finally, the qualitative method adopted here is well regarded in the world of social and managerial research, especially when new phenomena are explored, but it has its own limitations especially relating to extending wider generalizations or explaining the relative importance of observed phenomena (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). As such, a further quantitative study should be commissioned. In either case, further quantitative and qualitative approaches would be welcomed to ensure proper identification of career engagement of research participants to adequately distinguish the dual-career and dual-income couples (Hughes, 2013), as well as to establish the different circumstances flowing from company assigned and self-initiated expatriation (Suutari et al., 2017).

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Chapter 6
Dual-Income and Dual-Career Couples in International Context

Agnieszka Kierner

Abstract The relocation of dual-career couples, couples in which *both partners are employed and psychologically committed to their work*, create a great deal of stress and conflict. It is argued that the issues associated with this phenomena are expected to be one of the most challenging ones for international human resource managers worldwide. The chapter provides a comprehensive literature review on expatriate dual-career couples, summarizing research concerning growth of this phenomena, willingness of expatriates to relocate, their adjustment in the new place and repatriation from both theoretical and practical perspectives. In addition to reviewing the current level of understanding of the issue from the expatriate point of view, the chapter discusses the roles of partners and corporate support practices that multinational companies could provide in order to increase the success of dual-career expatriates. Finally, the chapter identifies research gaps, offers a framework for future research and the application of knowledge into practice in this field of study.

Keywords Dual-Income and Dual-Career Couples • Expatriation • Repatriation • Willingness • Adjustment

Introduction

Issues associated with dual-income and dual-career couples are among the important challenges facing companies that aspire to have an internationally mobile workforce (Ravasi et al. 2013; Selmer and Leung 2003; Shaffer et al. 2012). It is estimated that as many as 70 % of all expatriate couples are dual-income couples and that dual-career issues affect 25 % of the total number of expatriate couples (Brookfield 2013; Permits Foundation 2008; Copeland 2004). Unfortunately, to date neither the size nor significance of the issue have prompted the expected increases in the quantity or quality of research on this phenomenon (Lauring and Selmer 2010; Harvey

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et al. 2009a; Mäkelä et al. 2011). Researchers still rarely distinguish accurately between dual-career and dual-income couples (Hughes 2013), and it is difficult to find dedicated literature or advanced, contemporary research on some aspects of the issue.

The above facts are surprising because dual-income and dual-career couples face many unique challenges. These challenges include stereotyping this group as being less mobile than others (Moore 2002), issues with being selected for international assignment (Collings et al. 2011), willingness deliberations, including fear of being asked to relocate when that is not feasible because of a spouse's career (Kraimer and Wayne 2004), certain adjustment issues (Braseby 2010), disruption of family finances connected with the loss of one income (Harvey 1998), discontinuity marring a spouse's career (Riusala and Suutari 2000) and consequences relating to families becoming dysfunctional (Andreason 2008). In addition to those issues that are a direct consequence of dual-income and dual-career situations, international working couples must address the multitude of individual and family challenges associated with international careers.

Multinational organizations may benefit from understanding this topic, as it is in their interests to select appropriate talent for international assignments and because—given the significant presence of dual-income and dual-career couples in their workforce—they must address multiple problems such as higher refusal rates for positions involving international relocation (Harvey 1997), assignment failures, which are argued to be higher among the group of dual-income and dual-career couples (Andreason 2008) and, last but not least, the challenges inherent in repatriation (Sánchez Vidal et al. 2008; Harvey and Buckley 1998).

In light of these facts, the aim of this chapter is to review the existing research and literature on dual-income and dual-career organizational expatriates, starting with the issues preceding assignment, and then examining adjustment in the new country, and finishing with the process of the return of dual-income and dual-career couples to their home country. The new research streams the study identifies, the research gaps that emerge, and the associated suggested future research agenda are presented at the end of the chapter.

Taxonomy: Dual-Income and Dual-Career Couples

Analysis of the available literature and research including references to couples with both partners working—be that in domestic or international contexts—reveals approaches to the definition of these phenomena evolving together with progress in science and developments in the approach to work and careers. The discussion on the taxonomy of working duos started in the 1960s, and it was Rapoport and Rapoport (1969) who first coined the term *dual-career couple (DCC)* and defined it as 'a couple where both partners pursue careers and are married'. If the couple had children, they were called dual-career families. Two years later the same authors added a new term, dual-work families, to distinguish them from dual-career families,

who—being highly committed to work, with expectations of advancement and the belief that their occupations were important—were an elite subset of dual-work families (Rapoport and Rapoport 1976). The discussion continued in the 1980s with Hiller and Dyehouse (1987) proposing the use of the term dual-earner couple, a more generic phrase covering both those heavily involved in their professions and those less involved. Literature has since explored various characteristics of DCCs looking at their engagement in continual professional employment (Bradbury 1994), psychological commitment to their work (Bruce and Reed 1991; Burke and Greenglass 1987; Falkenberg and Monachello 1988); and their desire for personal growth (Bruce and Reed 1991). Dual-career couples have also been further defined as those partnerships in which the partners have invested heavily in their careers because those careers offer their main source of self-fulfilment (Bird and Schnurman-Crook 2005).

The first discussions on dual-income and dual-career couples in the international relocation context appeared in the 1990s and focused on couples with an intense emotional engagement with their work. These studies followed earlier research and adopted the term dual-career couple, standardizing the definition to those duos in which 'both partners are employed and psychologically committed to their work' (Harvey 1997; Harvey and Buckley 1998; Parasuraman and Greenhaus 2002; Challiol and Mignonac 2005).

Most recent literature reflects the changing attitudes towards work, where work plays a less central role in the lives of the younger generation and becomes just a way to secure a reasonable quality of life (e.g., Hughes 2013). Authors often, however, continue to misuse the term *dual-career couple*, while scrutiny of the demographic composition of respondents suggests that many of those described as such should strictly be categorized *as dual-income couples (DICs)*. It has been argued that depending on the definition adopted, dual-career couples form only a small subset of the dual-income couple group (Hughes 2013) who are easier to find and research, but labelling this entire group dual-career seems ill advised. Since selected expatriation challenges do depend on the level of engagement of the partners with their careers, henceforth in this chapter, both terms will be used. Doing so makes it possible to distinguish issues common to all dual-income couples, from those particularly apposite to dual-career couples who are more 'psychologically committed to work'.

Pre-departure Decision Making

Having a pool of internationally experienced managers is critical to the competitive sustainability of many organizations (Permits 2012), but the significant phenomena of dual-income and dual-career couples influences the availability of qualified international assignees in at least two ways. First, from the organizational perspective, the stereotype that depicts dual-income and dual-career couples as unwilling to accept assignments, or as liable to cause a failure in the assignment

project can cause some organizations to overlook members of DCCs for assignments requiring international relocation (Collings et al. 2011; Moore 2002). Second, from an individual perspective, the reluctance of the partners in dual-income or dual-career couples to relocate may lead them to reject relocation packages when they are offered (Harvey et al. 2009a).

This is unfortunate not only for multinational corporations, but also for dual-career couples themselves, as in an economy where international experience is presented as an essential requirement of career progression (Baruch and Altman 2002), being permanently deprived of this important development opportunity may limit the advancement of these highly career-oriented individuals. Since they have to take into account the careers of both partners, each international opportunity needs to be weighed in the context of the benefits and drawbacks that each partner would have to accept, and it can rarely be guaranteed that this balancing act will ultimately lead to the assignment being accepted (Harvey et al. 2009a). The effects of these balancing acts are visible in many interviews with human resources managers that reveal the significant and growing impact of spouses' careers on candidates' decisions (Dickman et al. 2008). Candidates for assignment consistently confirm that the impact of an international assignment on their spouse's career is a key factor in their willingness to accept an assignment (Dickman et al. 2008; Brett and Stroh 1995; Permits Foundation 2012).

Empirical research consistently reveals the significance of gender in expatriation decisions, and role theory suggests that men and women are socialized differently for relocation (Tharenou 2008). Male candidates are far more likely to accept international opportunities before consulting their spouse, while women will engage their male partner in decision making far more often (McNulty 2005; Dupuis et al. 2008). Additionally, family barriers, including consideration of the adjustment required of children, significantly reduce the willingness of women in dual-income and dual-career couple situations to undertake international assignments (Dupuis et al. 2008; Linehan and Sculion 2002; Cole 2012).

This increased resistance means that women need to be presented with even more attractive opportunities before they will raise the issue of relocation at home (Hall and Chandler 2005), and they need to believe that the assignment will in fact be a great opportunity for the family and their male dual-career partner (Hall and Chandler 2005; Tharenou 2008). Women do however often support their husbands' relocation decisions, finding in them something for themselves and everyone in the family (Vance and McNulty 2014).

The important role of the spouse in the dual-income or dual-career couple relocation decision has spurred a growth in research on partner and family related antecedents. That research has produced a number of proposals encompassing areas such as the personal characteristics of the spouse, the family unit situation, the timing of the assignment, and the impact of location (e.g., Konopaske et al. 2005; Dickman et al. 2008; Vance and McNulty 2014).

The personal traits of the spouse have been argued to significantly influence the decision. Attributes such as entrepreneurship (Chew and Zhu 2002), adventurousness (Konopaske et al. 2005), education (Branden 2013), or a personal interest in

working abroad (Tharenou 2008) have all been shown to have a positive impact on the spouse's willingness to accept an international assignment. Timing plays a similarly important role for at least two reasons: the spouse might be at a stage of their career that can tolerate some disruption (Moore 2002), and the life stage of the family may also be more or less conducive to relocation at the relevant time (Harvey et al. 2009a). In that context, Groeneveld (2008) found that dual-income and dual-career families with very young children (of less than 5-years old) were more willing to accept assignments. It has subsequently been recommended that dual-income and career couples are informed about assignments and given a chance to self-select themselves when the time is right for the couple (Harvey et al. 2009a).

Furthermore, specifically in families where responsibilities are shared equally (Jürges 2006), the health of the relationship (Dupuis et al. 2008), indicated by the extent to which an assignee can count on the assistance of a supportive spouse (Dickman et al. 2008) has been argued to play a major role in the willingness to consider an assignment. The international heritage of the family has also been suggested to be influential and the success of previous international assignments has been shown to increase the likelihood of accepting the next one (Groeneveld 2008).

Finally, the destination involved in the relocation and the related likelihood of enjoying a good quality of life have also been shown to affect assignment decision making (Pierce and Delahaye 1996). Particularly in the case of dual-career couples, the critical considerations tend to be related to the likelihood of the partner finding a job in the location. In this context, it has been suggested that the range of employment opportunities available matters (Geddie 2013), and urban locations with a good number of internationally oriented jobs seem to attract more dual-career couples (McKinnish 2008; Compton and Pollack 2004).

The rate of refusal of assignments among dual-income and dual-career couples has been shown to be significant (Swaak 1995; Riusala and Suutari 2000). Research among international human resources managers and candidates who have turned down international job placements highlights three main reasons for an assignment being rejected: compensation, in the sense of losing one family income stream (Harvey 1993), strong bonds with relatives at home (Dickman et al. 2008; Richardson and Mallon 2005), and career considerations (Dickman et al. 2008; Brookfield 2013). Furthermore studies of the career consequences of international relocations (e.g., Kraimer et al. 2012; Suutari and Brewster 2003) highlight that expatriate assignments do not always deliver the promised career progress, as employees who are *out of sight* of the decision-makers at headquarters often also end up being *out of mind* (Harvey 1996). Assuming candidates for assignment are aware of this effect, it would influence their willingness to accept an international assignment. Finally, it has also been argued that the level of corporate support in the form of relocation services offered by the employer matters, and if the assignee and spouse perceive that support to be important, and that being offered by the employer to be adequate, they will be more willing to accept the assignment (Groeneveld 2008).

Policies and Practices of Corporate Support Before Departure

Most international corporations have developed policies to manage assignment placement and family relocation, aware that doing so can boost the acceptance levels of international assignments (Brookfield 2013). The most common corporate support practices include assistance in obtaining work permits, arranging the transfer of household goods, policy briefings, tax consultation, and pre-assignment trips to help familiarise the couple with both the cultural and working environment.

The pre-assignment trip in particular facilitates self-selection on the part of the couple, providing them with the best possible insight into the consequences of the move in relation to their current family situation (Caligiuri and Phillips 2003), and making the relocation decision a more conscious one (Harvey et al. 2009b). It is also recommended that self-selection is supported by adequate briefing and mentoring from recent repatriates (Harvey and Wiese 1998). Such mentoring and network building needs to be extended to the spouse, who should be introduced to recently repatriated spouses, preferably with experience of similar situations. The ideal would be a mentor who is also career engaged and recently returned from the same region that the dual-income or dual-career spouse is considering working in (Konopaske et al. 2005). Finally, clarity on the timing of the assignment and a guarantee of repatriation upon request by the partner has been reported to be an important condition affecting the acceptance of an assignment by a DIC or DCC (Konopaske et al. 2005).

Services offered less frequently, typically due to either their costs or organizational complexity include assistance with selling homes or terminating leases on homes and cars, and a range of medical, security, language, and host culture training (Cartus 2007). In the specific case of dual-income and dual-career couples, foreign service premiums and assistance for the spouse have been found to be among the most valued corporate practices (Konopaske and Werner 2005). Firms might be advised to go further still to support key staff and offer compensation for the spouse's loss of income while looking for a new job in the host location, or provide office facilities to allow the partner to be self-employed, or even help with financing volunteer activities (Punnett 1997).

Overall, pre-departure decision making in dual-career couple situations has been described relatively well in the scientific literature, especially from the perspective of the impact the spouse can have, although the area lacks proper theory development and reports on the effectiveness of support tools. Both could be redressed and validated as it comes to their relative impact by reference to a diverse population of expatriates and their dual-income and dual-career spouses. The next phase of the international assignment cycle concerns the fate of the relocated family in the new location and will be described in the section below on the adjustment of the expatriate, his/her family, and most importantly the dual-income or dual-career spouse.

Adjustment

Adjustment has been defined in research as the 'degree of a person's psychological comfort with various aspects of a new setting', and further explained in the context of multiple facets like general, work, and interaction adjustment (Black and Gregersen 1991). This axiomatic definition is the most commonly used, although it has attracted some criticism recently, particularly because of the limitations of the dimension used and new developments in research on expatriate life suggesting the subject merits broader consideration (Lazarova and Thomas 2012). An alternative model was developed by Searle and Ward (1990), who suggested examining the psychological and sociocultural aspects of adjustment. Finally, a recent tendency is to reconceptualise adjustment into two areas of work and non-work adjustment, and in each of these to look for cognitive (cognitive certainty and strength of knowledge), affective (affective state and correctness of display) and behavioural (effectiveness and adequacy of behaviour) aspects, suggesting that each of these areas may be used as unique dimensions to describe different stage of work and no-work adjustment (Haslberger et al. 2013).

Expatriate adjustment literature is rich due to adjustment phase being central to expatriate life and its implied relationship with expatriate performance (Lazarova and Thomas 2012). The performance of expatriate workers is however also mediated by a number of other factors such as personal and work resources or partner and family adjustment (Lazarova et al. 2010). Furthermore, research on expatriate adjustment addresses assignee topics including work adjustment (e.g., Black et al. 1992), sociocultural adjustment (e.g., Shaffer and Harrison 2001) and also adjustment within a couple's relationship (e.g., Van et al. 2011). Prior research has reported that the need for adjustment creates a great deal of additional stress for a dual-income or dual-career couple (e.g., Harvey 1997; Andreason and Kinneer 2005; Haslberger and Brewster 2008; Church 1982).

Adjustment among assignees and their partners seems to be closely interrelated among dual-income and dual-career couples. Research evidence supports not only the notion of spillover effects, when one dimension of expatriate adjustment affects another, but also of a crossover effect where deficiencies in the adjustment of one family member affect the adjustment of the other members in the family unit (Andreason 2008; Lazarova et al. 2010). Therefore, support from the spouse emerges as an essential ingredient in an expatriate's successful adjustment to a new environment (Lauring and Selmer 2010). Hence, for adjustment to be successful it is important that both partners achieve a state of psychological comfort (Harvey 1998).

The heightened stress experienced by dual-career couples on assignment mentioned above means that spousal support becomes even more important (Harvey 1998; Shaffer and Harrison 2001). Such support may take many forms since expatriates report that their spouses have diverse roles (Mäkelä et al. 2011). These roles are often reformulated while on assignment in the new foreign environment, and expatriate couples go through a transition phase, especially when their move

means the work of the partner is disrupted (Van et al. 2011). Conversely, a lack of spousal support, which can stem from dissatisfaction with the changed employment status of a partner in a dual-income or dual-career couple, may be a source of conflict (Tharenou 2008).

For all these reasons, the research on adjustment among dual-income and dual-career couples has found the perspective of the spouse to be particularly important. First, it has been argued that not all dual-income or dual-career spouses are necessarily interested in continuing their career while on assignment, and only a certain number look for employment (Copeland 2004). Since satisfaction, psychological comfort, and adjustment among dual-income or career spouses depends on their intentions, there are dual-income or career spouses who change their role to focus solely on their family while on assignment and report a high degree of satisfaction (Copeland 2004). The presence of children helps, and in fact mediates some of the stress for that group of spouses that would otherwise want to continue their careers (Beck 2012).

Those partners who hope to continue their careers while on assignment and do not find an appropriate job suffer from particular adjustment challenges with a shift in attitudes about spending money, and a feeling of loss of control (Braseby 2010). The interpersonal family conflict that frequently marks such a situation limits the adjustment of all family members (Van et al. 2011). On the professional side, business contacts, perceptions of self-worth, financial independence, and the self-esteem of jobless spouses can be disrupted (Andreason 2008). Hence they develop coping strategies such as exploring options that might permit them to continue their own careers, or either the maintenance or the creation of new social support networks (Kupka and Cathro 2007). These social support networks and national friendships are an essential component of improved adjustment for dual-income and dual-career spouses abroad (Beck 2012).

Finally, there appears to be a clear link between a spouse working during the assignment and adjustment (Ravasi et al. 2013). Partners and spouses who find work report a positive impact on adjustment, family relationships, health, well-being, willingness to complete and extend their current assignment, or to apply for another in the future (Permits Foundation 2008). From this perspective, relocations of dual-income and dual-career couples to areas with a high concentration of multinationals and with a strong demand for international employees can facilitate more effective adjustment, and effectively significantly reduce adjustment difficulties of expatriate partners (Ravasi et al. 2013).

Policies and Practices of Corporate Support for DCCs During Adjustment

The stress and difficulty of adjustment has been reported to contribute significantly to expatriates returning home from assignments prematurely (Dowling et al. 2008). An earlier than anticipated return home is designated an assignment failure, and

it is argued that organizations pay a significant financial, cultural, mental, and organizational price for them (Herman and Tetrick 2009). The failure rate among dual-income and dual-career couples however seems to be modest as only around 6 % of expatriate assignments end with an early return (Brookfield 2013). Limiting assignment failures would demand deliberate, focused and active corporate support programmes, which some companies report they have implemented (Brookfield 2013), but there is research indicating international dual-income and dual-career couples are not wholly satisfied with these organizational practices (Kupka and Cathro 2007). The support available for spouses has been accused of failing to meet the needs of this special group, especially in terms of either help with securing employment or with re-establishing a social network (Permits Foundation 2008).

The most common adjustment assistance programme offered to dual-income and dual-career spouses is cross-cultural and language training that is provided by roughly seventy percent of firms, followed by a lump-sum financial allowance that is provided in a roughly one-third of organizations. These support programmes are reported to be diminishing in number and training is moving online in response to cost pressures (Brookfield 2013). At the same time, exploration of the true needs of dual-income and dual-career spouses calls for improved understanding and greater effort on the part of multinationals. Available literature on the stated needs and potential stressors of dual-income and dual-career couples suggests that the various practical initiatives that help secure a job should be prioritized (Haslberger and Brewster 2008). Ideally, employers would offer an attractive employment opportunity within their organization abroad, but even providing details of other enterprises open to hiring people who do not speak the local language, or of recruitment agencies, and networks of working spouses would be very valuable to a relocating career-oriented partner (Reynolds and Bennett 1991; Cole 2012). Employers should also help secure a work permit for spouses of their employees in countries that require one (Permits Foundation 2008). One option often favoured by career-oriented spouses is to further their education, and here too a company can offer invaluable support in the form of contacts and financial help (Riusala and Suutari 2000). Finally, as mentioned above, mentoring may be particularly valuable for expatriate dual-income and dual-career couples where international relocation has a significant impact on the trailing spouse (Harvey et al. 2010).

Alongside establishing practices supporting dual-income and dual-career couples on assignment, research suggests employers ensure expatriates remain in contact with head office and the home country environment. That might be achieved through the organization paying for return visits, or allocating the expatriate a mentor in the home organization and by ensuring access to regular communication with the head office (Hammer et al. 1998; Linehan and Sculion 2002). These contacts should ease future repatriation challenges, and seem to be equally important both for assigned expatriates and their dual-income or dual-career partners. For the assigned expatriate, maintaining a strong connection with headquarters can positively influence work adjustment following repatriation, and hence improve retention rates for the employer, and their partners will benefit from maintaining

social and work relationships that will ease their own subsequent repatriation adjustment (Kupka and Cathro 2007).

Expatriate and family adjustment issues have been well covered in the literature, and that literature also includes a fair amount of theory building. The topic of adjustment among DCCs has not yet been subject to the same volume of scientific exploration as other areas, and nor has that exploration been quite as rigorous. Consequently, the area merits further examination. The support practices of organizations would benefit from research on their effectiveness that would help optimize the necessary investments, and popularize the most effective, among multinational corporations. The next phase affecting dual-income and dual-career couples is the phase of returning home.

Repatriation

Repatriation, defined as the return of an expatriate and their family to their home country was conceptualized as long ago as the 1980s (Harvey 1982) but is an aspect of global work assignments that has been largely neglected in both research and in career development practice (Szkudlarek 2010; Cox et al. 2012). This is despite evidence of the difficulty of adjustment post repatriation and reports that the majority of repatriated employees and spouses are dissatisfied with the repatriation process and experience career, organizational, financial, family and psychological challenges (Chi and Chen 2007; Sánchez Vidal et al. 2008, Black and Gregersen 1999). There is a noticeable gap in the understanding of the specific nature of the repatriation experience of dual-income and dual-career couples. One way to form a perspective on this process and formulate a potential future research agenda is through analysis of empirical articles in adjacent research streams citing cases examining repatriation among dual-income and dual-career couples.

Among the five relevant adjacent research streams identified, the most pertinent is the re-entry and repatriation literature (e.g., Haslberger et al. 2012; Szkudlarek 2010), followed by the empirical articles dedicated to the phenomena of dual-career and dual-income couples (e.g., Känsälä et al. 2012; Harvey et al. 2010). The third source is that literature referencing self-initiated expatriates, who ‘expatriate themselves from their home country without the support of an employing company’ (Doherty 2013). Such cases are interesting in a dual-career context, as they may include situations where the self-initiated expatriate is a dual-career spouse of an assigned expatriate (e.g., Mäkelä and Suutari 2013; Andresen and Walther 2012). Fourth, is the limited volume of often older research on issues affecting a spouse during repatriation, which provides singular examples relating to dual-career spouses (e.g., Storti 2001; McNulty 2005). Finally, the studies on male spouses and female expatriate careers provide rare examples and findings on dual-income and dual-career repatriation cases (Roos 2013; Vance and McNulty 2014).

Repatriation Decision Making

If we adopt the methodology of the studies examining the repatriation of assigned expatriates, research on dual-income and dual-career repatriation should start from a point well before the actual physical move home, as it must address what prompts the decision to return. In cases of assigned expatriates, it is assumed that the employer initiates repatriation, typically 3–5 years after expatriation (Scullion and Collings 2006), and it is argued that discussions and career planning concerning the return to the home country should start 6–12 months in advance but firms rarely manage to match this model advance period, and that the failure to do so has consequences spanning the whole repatriation process (Herman and Tetrick 2009; Linehan and Sculion 2002; Harvey and Novicevic 2006).

Allocating sufficient time to preparing to repatriate expatriates and their families can help reduce stress among them and anticipate the challenges that will arise in terms of career, family, logistics, and the frequently-underestimated cultural issues. It can be argued that the repatriation decision may be more complicated for dual-career or dual-income expatriate couples. It seems logical that dual-income or dual-career couples planning repatriation may require even more time in advance, because they have two careers to coordinate. The repatriation decision may then be initiated by the career demands of *either* of the spouses, triggering discussions within the family and both partners having to manage the consequences for their career. The nature of repatriation decision making for a dual-career expatriate couple may in fact be similar to the better-understood processes occurring when a self-initiated dual-career couple returns home (e.g., Tharenou and Caulfield 2010). Studies of the repatriation decisions of self-initiated expatriates indicate multiple ways in which the decision on repatriation can be triggered. The contemporary job turnover framework, for example, has been adapted to show the interplay of host country embeddedness versus home country attraction and repatriation related shocks, which existing studies have shown to correlate with an intention to repatriate, triggering a job search and eventual repatriation (Tharenou and Caulfield 2010). Such shocks might include one of the partners being asked by their employer to repatriate, or the fact that the dual-career spouse did not find a job in the country of expatriation and initiated a swifter than anticipated return of the couple to facilitate their career progress (Roos 2013).

Repatriation Adjustment

The bulk of the existing repatriation literature focuses on the first 6–12 months after a former expatriate has returned to their home country, and on exploring various facets of the repatriation process in an effort to optimize repatriation adjustment, and to address the common problem of the low retention rates of repatriates by their employers (Linehan and Sculion 2002; Sánchez Vidal et al. 2008; Lazarova

and Cerdin 2007). It often takes a considerable part of the first 6 months after repatriation for a dual-career family to settle back into the domestic setting (Harvey and Buckley 1998). The complete process of readjustment may take between a year and 18 months (Lee and Liu 2006), during which time both partners are attempting to restart or continue their careers, find housing and schools, complete a range of administrative tasks, and adjust socially to the home culture. Often the adjustment to the home country has to take place against the background of one partner still having to tie up loose ends in the assignment location, which is a source of additional stress (Linehan and Sculion 2002). Repatriation adjustment literature has often focused on spouses because, as in the earlier phases of expatriation, it has been found that the repatriation adjustment challenges faced by both the spouse and the former expatriate are significantly related to each other and that family conflicts may spill over to the work domain (e.g., Van Steenbergen et al. 2007; Takeuchi et al. 2002).

Repatriation adjustment challenges have been viewed through a number of lenses; the most commonly used being those focusing on adjustment in general, and adjustment as it applies to the job, organization, and social interactions (Suutari and Välimaa 2002). In the job and organization domain, the most common issue is the underutilization of the international knowledge acquired by expatriates that results in them perceiving themselves to be underemployed (Kraimer et al. 2012). In the dual-career context, the spouse also needs to find employment, and failure to do so may lead to loss of identity and self-esteem (Storti 2001).

In the general adjustment domain, an often-reported challenge is the loss of status and the impact on the quality of life occasioned by the withdrawal of company-sponsored premium housing and a range of affordable services like domestic help, drivers, and cooks (Haslberger et al. 2012). This loss of additional support may be felt particularly hard by dual-income and dual-career families, where time needs to be split between family duties and the careers of both partners, creating major challenges, when combined with the increased workload related to repatriation (Storti 2001; Mäkelä and Suutari 2013). It should be remembered however that the findings on the impact of loss of material support have largely come from the historically most common scenario (and even more frequently researched model) of an expatriate from the USA sent to a developing country (Szkudlarek 2010). Changes in global business models, with more expatriation assignments being within the developed world (Friedman 2005), and increasing numbers of expatriates moving from the developing world (with its lower cost of services and the relative purchasing power of professionals) to the developed world where equivalent services are not really affordable, mean that the loss of status and service issues upon repatriation may be less prevalent.

The interaction adjustment domain deals with issues around rekindling the social life at home, and is related to the shift in identity of expatriates, who while on assignment, adopt the values of the host country culture. The family perspective (Black et al. 1992) indicates that expatriates experience some degree of culture shock during repatriation, and the problem is often more acute for their families than for the repatriates themselves.

Multiple antecedents have been conceptualized to better understand the reasons for these challenges. For example, it has been shown that the further apart the values of the destination country are from those of the home country, the greater will be the culture shock and repatriation adjustment challenge faced by the expatriate (Sussman 2002; Suutari and Välimaa 2002; Kraimer et al. 2012). Interestingly, research indicates spouses and self-initiated expatriates are more exposed to the risk of the influence of a remote culture than assigned expatriates who are more engaged in the organizational culture and spend more time with other expatriates (Haslberger et al. 2012). These findings suggest that dual-career couples, due to both partners by definition being highly engaged in work, should be less exposed to the risk of convergence with a host country's culture and values and therefore may be less vulnerable to culture shock upon return.

Furthermore, an important view on the general satisfaction with repatriation of both spouses and repatriates is formed by comparing their expectations of repatriation (Suutari and Brewster 2003). It has been argued that for both spouses and expatriates the more positive their re-entry expectations the more satisfied they will be when they return home (Hammer et al. 1998). At the same time, international assignments lead people to revise their career expectations upwards and they former assignees perceive their internal and external career opportunities should have improved (Benson and Pattie 2008). They have enhanced confidence in their acquired skills, and have high expectations of how their knowledge will be utilized upon repatriation (Sánchez Vidal et al. 2008), even if those expectations are not always met. Hence, expectations can be used as a lens offering insights into the challenges besetting dual-income and dual-career couples on repatriation, while the management and clarification of expectations ahead of repatriation is of considerable interest to researchers and human resource managers alike.

Time on assignment also seems to be significant, because it affects both interaction and job adjustment. The shorter the time on assignment, the less likely the couple is to adopt their host country's values, and there is also evidence that in the case of early repatriation brought about by a dual-income or dual-career spouse's failure to find a job while on assignment, spouses adjust relatively easily back home, due to the short-term absence. Spouses in that situation would presumably have maintained transnational links, and through social ties with former colleagues, have retained their knowledge of the job market, which would help them find employment easily. That is presumably what leads them to frequently describe themselves as satisfied (Roos 2013).

In the job and organization contexts, role clarity and role discretion are seen as the most important antecedents of repatriate adjustment. Repatriates expect to come back to clearly defined roles, rather than remain in a holding pool, but would also like those roles to utilize their individual skills honed while abroad (Black and Gregersen 1991).

Policies and Practices of Corporate Support During Repatriation

Even if multinational firms operate policies to support repatriates and their families in an effort to increase retention, it has been shown that repatriates and their spouses are often dissatisfied with the support offered (Stahl and Cerdin 2004; Storti 2001; Linehan and Sculion 2002), while satisfaction with the repatriation process diminishes the repatriate's intention to leave the firm (Sánchez Vidal et al. 2008). Consequently, researchers have been conceptualizing policies and tools that are most effective in supporting expatriates and their families and scrutinizing existing options (e.g., Gupta 2013). While such research has not yet focused to any great extent on dual-income and dual-career situations, it is fair to suggest that some of those policies and tools are applicable to dual-income and dual-career repatriates, and understanding which tools are in greatest demand would shed light on the challenges that beset both expatriate and spouse.

Firms targeting the retention of their internationally mobile staff should ensure that their repatriation policy is clearly defined (Sánchez Vidal et al. 2008) and efficiently applied to support the resettlement of their staff (Linehan and Sculion 2002). Since organizations sometimes fail to provide jobs that match the enhanced expectations of repatriates, and thus do not clearly signal to their repatriate employees that their international experience is valued (Benson and Pattie 2008; Suutari and Brewster 2003; Kraimer et al. 2012), career planning sessions and similar clear signals that the company values international experience can be very important (Lazarova and Caligiuri 2001). The idea has also been expressed as *professional career management* and *accurate working expectations*, each of which has been seen as a key determinant of repatriate satisfaction, and as having a far greater impact than changes in compensation and social status (Sánchez Vidal et al. 2008). A model career management process would additionally provide early confirmation of the timing of repatriation, and allow for proper planning to benefit the careers of both expatriate and spouse (Linehan and Sculion 2002). While it seems more companies are adopting formal repatriation strategies, only around a quarter of companies currently apply them (Brookfield 2013). The low application rate is perhaps surprising given that it has been suggested that companies that are capable of providing clear communication on roles and careers, and that have clear career management processes for repatriates benefit from higher repatriate retention rates (Osman-Gani and Hyder 2008; Brookfield 2013).

Before repatriation, assignees should also receive comprehensive training, and briefings on what to expect upon return and on changes that have taken place within the company. Although relatively simple and inexpensive, repatriation training is not common, and only between 30 % and 65 % of companies provide it (Osman-Gani and Hyder 2008). Furthermore, repatriation frequently means a major change in material status, when the company-sponsored premium housing and access to services ends abruptly. Consequently, certain researchers suggest that companies could ease resettlement by providing lifestyle assistance and transitional compensation

upon repatriation (Black and Gregersen 1991). Expatriates, and especially those in dual-career couple situations, will have to deal with often-complex tax situations and the employer could help by providing financial counselling and tax assistance (Lazarova and Caligiuri 2001).

It has been found that the availability and application of these tools correlates well with an increased likelihood of retaining single-career repatriates (Lazarova and Cerdin 2007; Lazarova and Caligiuri 2001), but there seems to be no equivalent evidence relating to dual career couples. However, it could be argued that if firms extended specific support to the dual-career spouse, it would help their own employee adjust effectively, and so improve the retention and the willingness of the couple to accept an overseas assignment again. In this context, a firm conscious of the need for both partners to secure jobs back in the home location, could also offer greater flexibility in the timing of the repatriation. This may require support such as help with visas, financial matters and travel when one partner needs to stay longer at the assignment location, after the other has returned home. Similarly to adjustment support practices at the start of an assignment, career counselling while abroad and job search assistance for the spouse when back home may also be appropriate, and it has also been suggested that companies could assume financial responsibility for any loss of income suffered by the dual-income or career spouse upon their return home (Punnett 1997).

There is increasing evidence that dual-income and dual-career repatriation includes a set of complex phenomena that come into play from the point the decision is made to repatriate, and that the decision making process is more complex when two careers are involved. The repatriation adjustment of dual-career and dual-income couples is also likely to be subject to greater stress owing to their specific needs, that add to the various challenges in the general, organizational, job, and interaction domains that are typical of the better-understood single-career situations. Finally, the various corporate support practices described above should be in demand among dual-career and dual-income families, although research on the effectiveness of such practices has not yet focused on the specific needs in situations when both partners are career engaged. The repatriation phase described above concludes the review of complete dual-income and dual-career relocation.

Discussion and Future Research Agenda

This chapter reviewed existing literature and research on dual-income and dual-career couples in an international context. The review encompassed all the different stages of international assignment, from expatriation decision making to adjustment abroad and finally repatriation back to the home country. It reviewed key aspects of these issues with a specific focus on the challenges facing dual-income and dual-career couples and also on the policies and practices available to international organizations to support dual-career expatriation. The empirical evidence from

existing literature presented in the chapter confirms the significance of the issue, and calls for researchers to address the gaps in our understanding.

First, the research reviewed is largely empirical in nature and little theory building has been practiced to date. Earlier studies have primarily used cross-sectional data collection methods, including qualitative research (e.g., Känsälä et al. 2012) and small scale quantitative research (e.g., Cole 2011). More longitudinal research is merited because expatriation is becoming less of a once in a lifetime experience and is increasingly just one of the steps taken by global careerists and their families (Suutari and Brewster 2003; Doherty and Dickmann 2009; Kraimer et al. 2009). Furthermore, as has been reported in the available literature (Hughes 2013), the application of dual-income and dual-career conditions to research phenomena has not been consistent enough to allow for the generalization of findings between various research streams. Analysis of the literature also reveals differences in the adjustment and repatriation challenges faced by dual-career spouses who found employment as compared to those who wanted to, but were unsuccessful (Copeland 2004). The acute differences in those situations call for more discipline in sourcing respondents and the systematic identification of such differences in future research.

Simultaneously, the landscape of international work is changing rapidly, as evidenced by the observed reduction in repatriate retention rates and the increased incidence of self-initiated and female expatriates accompanied by their male spouses (Mäkelä and Suutari 2013; Brookfield 2013). At the same time, the recent trend among Asian companies of rapid expansion in their global operations and deterioration of job markets in some parts of the world render the prevailing body of literature focused on US expatriates less relevant than it once was (Friedman 2005; Szkudlarek 2010; Andresen and Walther 2012). The above listed factors; the need for more modern theory building, the lack of discipline in correctly identifying dual-career couples in samples, and research becoming outdated owing to the evolution of job markets warrant a comprehensive contemporary refreshing of the research on dual-career couple expatriation. New, better-controlled theoretical contexts would be welcome. Empirical investigation, theory building, and quantitative validation of these theories will advance the state of science and benefit international human resource managers.

While the phases of expatriation decision making and adjustment on assignment are becoming better understood, the most pressing research gap is in the area of dual-income and dual-career couple repatriation, where a comprehensive narrative literature review did not reveal specific literature (Szkudlarek 2010). There is an opportunity to build an understanding of the typical challenges facing this group from the time the repatriation decision is made through the phase of repatriation adjustment, and to the time when related career consequences manifest themselves. The importance of personal goals and expectations in shaping repatriation satisfaction (Suutari and Brewster 2003), coupled with the varied degree of dual-income partner adjustment determined by the expectations around career continuation (Copeland 2004) offers a promising lens through which to examine the repatriation of dual-income and dual-career couples. Finally, once personal goals are understood, insights gained into the coping strategies practiced by the expatriate

and the dual-career spouse might reveal the most effective and replicable methods to optimize the work–life balance, adjustment, satisfaction, and performance of international careerists and be of interest to both expatriate couples on assignment and to their employers.

The next research opportunity is to better understand which policies and practices of corporate support most effectively enhance satisfaction and adjustment among dual-income and dual-career expatriates in all phases of their international assignment. The relative effectiveness of proposed practices (Kundu 2013) has not been validated in any comprehensive, contemporary research on a culturally and geographically diverse and representative population of dual-income and dual-career couples. Such understanding could advance scientific knowledge and persuade multinational corporations to invest in a more consistent and focused methodology supporting those among their programmes and policies that have the greatest impact.

In summary, the issues associated with dual-income and dual-career couples are unique, significant, and increasingly important to international careerists and multinational corporations. Specific academic attention on this group is warranted but to date has been limited. More systematic research in the form of both contemporary empirical investigation and robust theory building would be welcome. The most pressing research gaps are in the areas of repatriation and the effectiveness of corporate support policies and practices. Advancing scientific knowledge in these domains could increase our understanding of the management of expatriates and may help human resource managers secure the acquisition, retention, and engagement of talent emerging from the significant global pool of dual-career and dual-income couples.

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Expatriated dual-career partners: hope and disillusionment

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to employ hope theory to explain the psychological process underlying the dual-career couple (DCC) family unit, during the full cycle of international relocation.
Design/methodology/approach – This qualitative study is based on in-depth interviews with 28 international dual-careerists. Hope theory is used to describe the evolution of their goals, pathways and agency thinking before, during, and after expatriation.
Findings – The study reveals that dual-career partners initially build goals, pathways, and agency to support family relocation to facilitate the expatriate's career goals, but later the absence of self-career realization means hope can diminish and the partner's career comes to drive the goals set for repatriation. Future assignments would be considered only if both partners can arrange relevant employment for themselves.
Practical implications – Companies should develop DCC support practices such as designing shorter assignments, ensuring that partners have work visas and support job seeking. Ideally, multinational corporations would employ the spouse in the DCC.
Originality/value – The study is one of the first to explore the evolution of the goals of DCCs during the entire expatriation process.

Keywords Dual-career couples, Goals, Expatriation, Repatriation, Career coordination, Hope theory
Paper type Research paper

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Introduction

With an increase in the international mobility of the global workforce (Ravasi *et al.*, 2013), dual-career couples (DCCs) have come to represent a considerable share of the entire expatriate population in the last decade (Brookfield, 2016). These couples need to address special issues resulting from the necessity of career coordination (Känsälä *et al.*, 2015; Baird and Reeves, 2011), given that their experience of international relocation depends on the career progress of both partners. Several researchers note the importance of analyzing the interplay of attitudes and behaviors between individuals in DCCs, given that their decisions on global career exploration, adjustment and repatriation are interrelated (Harvey, 1998; Andreason, 2008). A particular understanding of the perspectives of both partners has been called for (Rusconi *et al.*, 2013; Känsälä *et al.*, 2015). Most of the current literature, however, has limited its focus to the experiences of one individual – the expatriate (Harvey, Napier and Moeller, 2009; Lauring and Selmer, 2010; Mäkelä *et al.*, 2011).

None of the few studies published on DCC expatriation (Kierner, 2015; Szkudlarek, 2010) analyzes the experiences of the couple through the full expatriation cycle to explain the dynamics of changing goals and behaviors while the couples go through their expatriation processes. This is surprising because it has been noted that there are significant differences in the nature of the couples' concerns before and after expatriation and that "once the dual career couple has expatriated, conflict/stress relative to the trailing spouse's career declines" (Harvey, 1998, p. 237). This is counterintuitive given that subsequent research (Lauring and Selmer, 2010; Andreason and Kinneer, 2005) highlights issues caused by the role and job availability for the partner. It is important to explain these phenomena as it has been observed that the partner plays a critical role in supporting the expatriate (Lauring and Selmer, 2010; Haslberger and Brewster, 2008). Understanding the dynamics of changes associated with spousal attitude may therefore help to explain the motivation, retention, and successful completion of assignments by expatriates, because these feelings of the partner have been observed to possibly have cross-over effects on the other family members (Andreason, 2008).

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In this study, such dynamics are analyzed using hope theory, which has proved effective in analyzing the continuous and adaptive process of global career exploration by DCCs (Harvey, Novicevic and Breland, 2009). This theory defines hope as an individual's ability to identify pathways to achieve his or her desired goals, and to motivate themselves via agency thinking, that is, the perceived capacity to exploit pathways to achieve the desired goals (Snyder, 2002). The objective of this paper is to employ hope theory to explain the psychological process underlying the DCC family unit, during their full cycle of international relocation. Further, this study focuses on the career goals of the dual-career partners as they progress from international relocation decision making, through adjustment in the host location, to the repatriation decision. In addition, it observes the willingness to accept the next potential expatriation cycle and highlights the goals connected with it. From the theory perspective, this study extends application of hope theory from expatriate adjustment to a full cycle of international experience from the pre-departure stage to repatriation, and on to the next assignment stage. Furthermore, while earlier literature has focused on the assigned expatriates, as part of the current study, both the expatriate and the partner were interviewed to provide a comprehensive view of the situation, with particular focus on the discussion of dual-career partners. Finally, this study offers suggestions for human resource managers in multinational corporations on how to manage expatriation programs for DCCs.

Expatriation of DCCs

Rapoport and Rapoport (1969) first coined the term DCC and defined it as "a couple where both partners pursue careers and are married." The literature has since explored various characteristics of DCCs depending on their engagement in continual professional employment (Bradbury, 1994), psychological commitment to their work, and their desire for personal growth (Bruce and Reed, 1991). Further, DCCs have been defined as those couples in which partners have invested heavily in their careers because they offer the main source of self-fulfillment (Bird and Schnurman-Crook, 2005) or where both partners are employed and psychologically committed to their work (Harvey, 1998; Challiol and Mignonac, 2005). The last definition combining the requirements of active employment and psychological commitment to work of both partners is applied in this study, as further described in the research methodology section.

Literature defines various forms of expatriation such as assigned expatriation, where an expatriate is transferred by his or her employer to work in a foreign country, and self-initiated expatriation, where relocation is initiated by the employee. This research focuses on the cases of assigned expatriation, referring to the primary assigned expatriate as an expatriate and to their dual-career partners, who relocate with them, as a partner. DCCs need to coordinate their careers and may employ different strategies, from looking at careers in independent ways, through a hierarchical strategy (which is most prevalent when a man is the primary expatriate) to an equal strategy, which is often employed by female expatriates with male spouses (Känsälä *et al.*, 2015). A review of existing research on DCC expatriation outlines three distinct phases of the expatriation cycle, starting with issues preceding assignment (Harvey, Napier and Moeller, 2009), continuing with challenges faced during the assignment (McNulty and Moeller, 2017; Känsälä *et al.*, 2015), and concluding with issues relating to the repatriation of DCCs (Kierner and Suutari, 2017).

The growing realization of the importance of the dual-career partner in the relocation decision has generated an increased volume of research on partner-related antecedents to accepting international relocation. That research has resulted in a number of proposals in areas such as the personal characteristics of the partner, the family unit situation, the timing of the assignment, and the impact of location (e.g. Konopaske and Werner, 2005; Vance and McNulty, 2014). The personality of the partner has been argued to have a significant impact

on the decision, and attributes such as "adventurousness" (Konopaske *et al.*, 2005), education (Brandén, 2013) or the personal interests and agenda associated with working abroad (Tharenou, 2008) have been shown to have a positive impact on the partner's willingness to accept an international assignment. Timing plays a similarly important role for at least two reasons: the partner's career stage might, to varying degrees, allow for disruption (Moore, 2002) and the family life stage may be more or less conducive to relocation (Harvey, Napier and Moeller, 2009).

In the context of the expatriate adjustment during the assignment, authors have further looked into both the external (demands) and the internal (needs) elements, as part of the broader person-environment system (Haslberger *et al.*, 2012). Several components of the assignee life were investigated, such as work adjustment (e.g. Aycan, 1997), socio-cultural adjustment (Kupka and Cathro, 2007) and couple relationship adjustment (McNulty, 2012). The result of this investigation shows that the adjustment of a DCC creates a considerable amount of additional stress (Andreason and Kinneer, 2005). Additionally, the adjustment of assignees and their partners seems to be heavily interrelated among DCCs. Research evidence supports not only the concept of spill-over effects, when one dimension of the expatriate adjustment affects another, but also cross-over effects, where deficiencies in the adjustment of one family member affect the adjustment of the other members in the family unit (Andreason, 2008; Lazarova *et al.*, 2010).

Therefore, in the case of research on the adjustment of DCCs, the perspective of the partner is frequently analyzed. Those partners who intend to continue their career on assignment but do not find an appropriate job suffer from particular adjustment challenges, with a shift in attitudes about spending money and a sense of loss of control (Braseby, 2010). Some studies address the interpersonal family conflict that frequently develops in such a situation, which limits the adjustment of all the family members (Takeuchi *et al.*, 2002), because the business contacts, perception of self-worth, financial independence, and identity of jobless dual-career partners can be disrupted (Andreason, 2008).

Repatriation, defined as the return of the expatriate and family to their home country, remains a less studied aspect of global work assignments (Szkudlarek, 2010) despite evidence demonstrating the difficulty associated with repatriation adjustment and reports showing that the majority of repatriated employees and partners are dissatisfied with the repatriation process, experiencing career, organizational, financial, family and psychological challenges (Sánchez-Vidal *et al.*, 2008). However, the same issue on repatriation satisfaction has recently been presented in a different light in the specific case of DCCs, where the repatriation process can be considerably more positive than previously believed, particularly based on the findings from single-career expatriate studies (Kierner and Suutari, 2017). It is important to note that beside repatriation, expatriates also have a career option of staying in the international job markets for an extended period of time through new or extended assignments (Brookfield, 2016).

Hope theory

A relevant perspective on the satisfaction of dual-career expatriates and their partners from their expatriation processes can be formed by comparing their expectations with their actual experiences (Suutari and Brewster, 2003), with the use of the theory of met expectations (Caligiuri *et al.*, 2001). In literature, the personal goals casually defined as expectations have also been presented as personal strivings (Emmons, 1986), personal projects (Little *et al.*, 2007), or simply life tasks, which individuals pursue in unique ways (Cantor *et al.*, 1991). All these perspectives share a common theme, in that they are all based on an individual desiring to accomplish something meaningful. Personal goals influence how people make choices and steer their own development and in a broader sense, structure the experience of daily life (Cantor *et al.*, 1991, p. 425). Psychological research also addresses goal constructs in relation to

the progress associated with the understanding of cognition, personality and motivation, defining personal goals as internal representations of desired states (Austin and Vancouver, 1996, p. 338). The goal theory serves as a basis for hope theory (Snyder, 2002), which focuses on goals as anchors from which mental processes evolve. Hope theory has been shown to offer a useful way to understand DCCs' expatriation exploration (Harvey, Novicevic and Breland, 2009), and the theory seems to be particularly appropriate because it defines and ties the concept of the psychological state of hope to personal goals, pathways thinking, and agency thinking. The addition of the concepts of pathways and agency to hope theory offers the ability to further decompose the process of the formation of goals, and to expose an individual's psychological state. For those reasons, hope theory seems more appropriate than earlier constructs like the theory of met expectations (Caligiuri *et al.*, 2001) to describe continuous psychological processes during expatriation.

Hope has been defined as a "positive motivational state that is based on interactively derived sense of successful agency (goal-directed energy) and pathways (planning to meet goals)" (Snyder *et al.*, 1991, p. 571). Furthermore, it conceptualizes high-hope people as those who have confidence in their pathway, a plausible route to reach their goal, as well as agency, and a perceived capacity to follow this pathway. High-hope people are expected not only to be more decisive than low-hope people (Snyder, 2002) but also be ready to produce multiple alternatives to reach their goals.

Goals are the central construct of hope theory, serving as a cognitive component based on the assumption that human actions are goal oriented (Snyder, 2002). Goals may be described visually or verbally and serve as targets for human actions; they may vary in terms of their timeframe and may have various levels of specificity.

Pathways thinking conceptualized using hope theory emerges from the concept of thinking in the context of time and humans developing ways taking them from point A, where they are currently, to point B, the state defined in their goal. High-hope people define multiple pathways to reach their goals as compared to low-hope people who are unlikely to have alternative routes to reach their goal.

Agency thinking is the "perceived capacity to use one's pathway to reach the desired goal" (Snyder, 2002). This self-belief is an essential component for generating a state of hope and motivating an individual to progress on his or her chosen pathway toward the goal, combating potential challenges along the way (Snyder *et al.*, 1991; Snyder, 2002). Research has shown that the agency becomes deflated when people encounter barriers that impact on their personal ego and that high-hope individuals can be expected to rebound relatively fast (Baumeister and Exline, 2000). Agency thinking relates well to an earlier concept of self-efficacy described as task-specific confidence (Locke *et al.*, 1986), although it differs by tying the confidence state to a short term strategic capacity related to a specific pathway and goal, while self-efficacy seems to instead be a long-term personal trait.

The strong career engagement of the members of DCCs and the often-changing career coordination strategies defined as pathways in hope theory (Känsälä *et al.*, 2015; Bird and Schnurman-Crook, 2005) suggest that members of DCCs would often be naturally socialized as high-hope people, who have developed an ability to set and achieve personal goals during their life before their international experiences (Baumeister and Exline, 2000). One of the views on hope also defines its particular applicability to the situation of deprivation when the current circumstances of a person are unsatisfactory, and hence, the person defines goals and pathways to repair their life situation, generating a psychological state of hope. This seems to be particularly applicable to the situation of partners in DCCs, who often find it difficult to continue their careers from an international location, feeling unsatisfied with their progress, which, in turn, could result in becoming a source of conflict (Tharenou, 2008) thereby generating alternative solutions such as an increased willingness to return to their home country (McNulty and Moeller, 2017; Vance and McNulty, 2014).

In the dual-career context, couples seem to be quite successful in developing a personal goal system with supportive links between their goals (Wiese and Salmela-Aro, 2008). Furthermore, it is expected that DCCs experience greater life satisfaction when they have a balanced goal system rather than a goal system focusing primarily on either work or family (Salmela-Aro, 2009). The support that partners give each other to pursue their goals seems to affect their satisfaction with the relationship (Brunstein *et al.*, 1996), and they tend to undertake diverse support roles (Mäkelä *et al.*, 2011).

Methodology

In this study, a qualitative research design was used to provide an in-depth understanding of the evolution of goals and to isolate distill nuances related to the changing pathways and agency of DCCs as they go through their expatriation process. Both the expatriate and the DCC partner were interviewed so as to fully understand the impact of partner experiences on the career decisions made by the partners in DCCs who need to integrate their careers as a family unit. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a diverse set of 14 highly skilled and well-educated expatriate couples (28 interviews in total). The sample recruitment applied a stringent selection logic to adhere to the adopted definition of DCCs (Challiol and Mignonac, 2005). Those criteria included both partners having a university degree, a professional career, and being engaged in continual professional employment (Bradbury, 1994). In addition, the couple had to complete the entire assigned expatriation process, and both partners were expected to be working before the onset of the assignment. It was not mandatory for both partners to work while on an assignment, as that is not always feasible (Vance and McNulty, 2014); however, excluding couples from the sample where one partner did not work could introduce a bias into the results. The ideal time to have such an interview was seen as about one year after returning from the expatriate assignment, as then repatriation adjustment should have been complete, but the experiences acquired on assignment would be relatively recent and easily recalled. In our sample, the interviews were conducted 19 months after return from the assignment on average and the time span ranged from 8 to 42 months.

The sample selection criteria necessitated a broad recruitment scope in the process identifying potential candidates. First, the existing expatriate databases from previous surveys carried out by the author's research group were consulted. Second, a snowball method was employed to recruit additional respondents known to those DCCs already in the study or those that did not qualify owing to the selection criteria. The final sample (see Table I) included male ($n = 8$) and female ($n = 6$) expatriates, and their dual-career partners. All the expatriates worked in the private sector (i.e. telecommunications, electronics, FMCG, tobacco, construction, machine building and banking).

The expatriate and the partner were interviewed separately, and interviews were conducted either in person or by telephone in cases where it was impossible to conduct face-to-face meetings. All the interviews were recorded. An interview guide was prepared, which was checked by two senior researchers and one human resource specialist for validity (Bryman and Bell, 2003) before the guide was piloted with the first couple. Each interview was based on the same guidelines, so as to cover a comparable range of topics. Simultaneously, issues that were particularly relevant to a respondent were sometimes discussed more extensively to allow interesting new lines of discovery to emerge and to foster free-flowing discussion. After initial questions about the assignment, participants were asked about their goals, pathways, and previous agency, during and after the completion of the assignment.

A replication logic (Silverman, 2013; Rowley, 2002) approach was used in the analysis to foster external validity. Initially, all the available material was reviewed to identify the main findings (e.g. categories of goals and what was changing) and to

No.	Assignment characteristics: Host country	Length	Primary expatriate: Nationality	Gender	Dual career partner: Nationality	Gender	Worked before the expatriation	Worked during the expatriation	Worked after the repatriation
1	Romania	3	American	Female	Polish	Male	Yes	Yes	Yes
2	Ireland	3	Polish	Male	Polish	Female	Yes	No	Yes
3	Germany	3	Finnish	Female	Finnish	Male	Yes	Yes	Yes
4	Finland	3	Polish	Male	Polish	Female	Yes	Yes, remotely	Yes
5	Finland	3	American	Female	American	Male	Yes	Yes, at the final stage	Yes
6	China	2	Finnish	Female	Finnish	Male	Yes	No	Yes
7	Japan	2	American	Male	American	Female	Yes	Yes, Part time	Yes
8	Finland	3	Polish	Male	Polish	Female	Yes	Yes, Remotely	Yes
9	France	2	Polish	Male	Polish	Female	Yes	No	Yes
10	Finland	3	American	Female	American	Male	Yes	No	Yes
11	Switzerland	1	Polish	Female	Polish	Male	Yes	No	Yes
12	Finland	3.5	American	Male	American	Female	Yes	No	Looking for a job at the time of the interview
13	Russia	3,5	Belgium	Male	Belgium	Female	Yes	Yes, part time at the final stage	Yes
14	China	2	Finnish	Male	Finnish	Female	Yes	No	Yes

Table I.
Interview sample

generate a first coding frame, employing a concept-driven (deductive) method combined with a data-driven (inductive) approach (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2015). MaxQDA software was used to initially code the interview transcripts (Flick, 2014). The coding frame was subsequently refined to group the findings and respondents' quotes into key categories. The coding process helped to understand the key themes emerging in the data, to index the findings, and to discover and formulate new levels of interpretation. The topics repeating in multiple expatriate-partner pairs were selected for this study to maximize the internal and external replicability of its findings. Each expatriate-partner situation was observed as a separate case study to make it possible to achieve theoretical generalization and replication based on deep, repeating qualitative evidence (Rowley, 2002).

Findings

The main objective of this study is to discuss the changing career goals, pathways and agency identifiable among dual-career partners who have experienced the complete cycle of international expatriation. The responses of both partners are analyzed so as to completely understand the career decisions made by DCC partners who need to integrate their careers with a family unit. The comprehensive perspective on the goals derived from the interviews show a diverse range of expectations relating not only to career but also to family internationalization, children's education, travel and adventure. Owing to the central role of career concerns among DCCs and the limitations of the length of the paper, this study focuses on the goals reported by dual-career partners pertaining to the development of their careers. The goals and hope construct of an expatriate will also be discussed only where they interrelate and affect the experiences of the partner.

Pre-departure stage

The couples clearly indicated that the expatriation decision was driven by the career progress of the expatriate. The partners interviewed declared that the career of the expatriate was the dominant reason for them living abroad, rather than any personal reasons. The partner appreciated the opportunities and long-term career benefits related to such an international assignment experience and very strongly supported it, despite the temporary suspension of his or her own career. This is how partners reported it:

> It was about […] (my husband's) career. His main goal was professional development. (partner of a Polish male expatriate in Ireland)

> That meant a lot to (my wife). I am sure that expat experience is always good for her career […] My professional side was really a small role in the whole thing. (partner of a Finnish female expatriate in Germany)

This supportive approach of their partners was highly valued by the dual-career expatriates, which is very important, as earlier research has classified this supportive role of the partner as crucial for the decision to expatriate and to subsequent adjustment (Haslberger and Brewster, 2008; Mäkelä *et al.*, 2011):

> She wanted me to grow in terms of my career. Her intention was that I would take up that assignment and grow […]. (American male expatriate in Finland)

The concentration on the expatriate's career at a given moment in life rather than one's own career does not mean an abandonment of all personal professional ambition. As previous studies report (Känsälä *et al.*, 2015; Caligiuri and Phillips, 2003) and as confirmed by this research, a proposed international assignment is likely to have appeared at the right time for both partners. Some of the active partners agreed to leave with family-oriented goals, particularly with the objective of expanding the family, supporting children's international education, experience a new culture or to learn the required local language, which at least provided a pathway to some personal professional development by investing in skills needed in future jobs. It appears that the strong career orientation of the partners has been temporarily deprioritized, elevating family goals such that they have positive agency and clear pathways. In other words, they see a realistic way to pursue positive family development during the assignment, as well as believing in the personal ability to make it happen.

In summary, dual-career expatriates and their partners are full of hope when they leave for an assignment, and they have clear goals, pathways, and high levels of agency. Partners also agree to go abroad as they value the international experience for the family, and despite their own psychological commitment to work, support the decision to suspend their career to leverage the opportunity of the assigned expatriate to develop in their jobs abroad.

During the assignment

Many partners, however, quickly started to miss having a job, a sense of being needed and important, or simply began to feel they were making little contribution. The assumption that they can mentally cope with a life without a career becomes increasingly challenging over time, and eventually can become difficult to accept. The deeply unsatisfied psychological need for professional activity, as well as the lack of a feeling of progress or contribution, radically changes the feeling of hope, leading to the establishment of new goals relating to employment. The often-adequate progress of other goals such as the education of children, travel, or learning new cultures, becomes less satisfying and insufficient in the context of a lack of a job; therefore, these family- and adventure-related goals are consequently reassessed and deprioritized. The positive agency disappears, and it is the frustration,

exhaustion, and a feeling of lack of importance and resignation that starts to prevail. This is how the dual-career partners reported it:

> It was really tough for me. Before we moved I was so much excited about it […]. But being home with the child, then with children raised a lot of frustration and thoughts like: I am a well-educated woman, with a lot of plans and ambitions. What am I doing here? (partner of a Polish male expatriate in France)

> "I felt depressed, really physically and emotionally depressed. When I was in the United States, I was working and doing my teaching studies. I was so busy. Every minute of my day was busy, busy, busy. And when I came to Tokyo, I had nothing to do. I had nothing to do. There is this sense of – what am I supposed to be doing? (partner of an American male expatriate in Japan).

As is typical of high-hope, educated individuals (Snyder *et al.*, 2001), they first really want to focus on their initial goal, find a new pathway to succeed with the original plan, and only later look for alternative routes, often including trying new types of careers or types of employment. It quickly became apparent, however, in a dominant number of interviews that even the dual-career partners who succeeded in finding a job, in most cases, had to accept working part-time and most often in jobs that did not match up to their qualifications. This situation is attributed to issues inherent in working abroad: lack of visas, networks, local experience, industry accreditations and language skills, which are consistently reported to be challenges for dual-career partners (Kupka and Cathro, 2007; Ravasi *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, for all these reasons, even for those who found a part-time job or started a business, this temporary engagement most often did not fulfill their strong developmental aspirations and did not restore a satisfactory level of hope. This is how they reported it in the interviews:

> I was doing very basic things. I shouldn't call it work […] It was not a hospital. No contact with patients. My responsibility was more to clean corridors rather than to do any important work. (partner of a Belgian male expatriate in Russia)

> I was also looking for a new job and opened this start-up idea to help Finnish companies enter the US market. I really wanted to make it work, but it was a hassle. (partner of an American female expatriate in Finland)

The lack of work in most cases and the state of underemployment in the remaining ones caused hope to become depleted, an increase in negative emotions and intense discussion at home around the frustrations caused by the lack of a job and the career progression of the partner. This, as observed in earlier research (Tharenou, 2008; Ravasi *et al.*, 2013) has a cross-over effect on the adjustment of an expatriate (Andreason, 2008; Lazarova *et al.*, 2010), leading to increased stress in the family unit. The very important supportive role of the partner starts to weaken concurrently with the depletion of hope and agency. This is how some of the expatriates reported the changing situation at home:

> We argued about it many times being in Russia […] So, there were negative emotions around it […] I know women that like to stay at home and take care of the house, so it is a matter of personality. […] (my wife) doesn't belong to this group. (Belgian male expatriate in Russia)

Repatriation stage

Frustration caused by the lack of work leads to a complete turnaround in the hierarchy of goals. The initial high-hope of the partner related to expatriation, all the support and motivation provided to the expatriate to accept the assignment, and the complete set of pathways and agency thinking related to satisfying the partner's own goals turns to focus on one new goal: a strong need to resume professional activity. The first pathway to meet this goal typically includes the concept of finding a job abroad, that is, in the country of expatriation.

When this proves to be difficult to accomplish, the alternative pathway of a return home becomes the next plan, which is increasingly enforced on the family, and, in particular, also on the expatriate. The analysis of the interviews consistently confirms that the main motivation of DCCs returning home and the primary objective of such repatriation is the goal of the partner to resume professional activity in light of the partner's becoming weary of being simply a homemaker. This is how partners talk about their goals at that time:

> I think I was the driving force behind that. I had no career, no work in any sense. It's hard to say, Gosh, I'd like to say that it was the family or being homesick, missing the people who had stayed in Poland. But come to think of it, I'm wondering whether that was it and I guess we came back because I missed work, I missed development, I missed the feeling of being important. (partner of a Polish male expatriate in Ireland)

Even the expatriates themselves declare in their interviews that the return of their partners to professional activity is the primary goal for repatriation, and far less often mention their own career as an important goal of this approaching and significant life transition. The question of goals related to the return is largely answered by statements describing the career goals of the partner. The professional goals of the expatriate or caring about their own professional progress, which is very important at the time of expatriation, are rarely cited:

> First of all (my husband) definitely needed to get away from Romania, he needed something new, he needed a new work assignment. So I could have potentially stayed one more year, that would have been good for me at work, but we had said three years and he was antsy. (American female expatriate in Romania)

> Her goals were to come back to the company, set it straight and start doing what she likes […]. I wanted my wife to continue her work and for us to be able to have dual-careers in the family again. (Polish male expatriate in Finland)

This agreement of the expatriate to return home motivated by the support of the DCC partner's career goals is provided, even though in some of the reported cases, the expatriates were abandoning their assignment prematurely or rejecting a lucrative contract extension. Although the career impacts of expatriation were mainly positive for the expatriates in the present sample, there were also some cases in which expatriates reported that the return had a negative impact on their career. In these cases, even on the expatriate side, there is a clear declaration that the return was motivated by the partner's need to return to work and not their own goals, which is in contrast to the situation defined before departure, where the focus was on the career of the partner rather than the assigned expatriate:

> I did worry about coming back in terms of jobs. The position I'd had before leaving was taken, someone else got hired. So, I feared whether they'd have something for me. And indeed, what I was offered was a bit of a dead-end […]. (Polish male expatriate in Ireland)

> As far as my career was concerned, I made a step back. We decided to go back to Poland and I returned to the post I was at before my departure. Unless my mobility changes, I have no possibility of further career development […]. (Polish male expatriate in Finland)

Future international assignment willingness

While all the interviewed couples had decided to repatriate back to their home countries, the couples' interests in a possible future international career varied to some extent: some couples would go again, while some of the couples clearly would not, predominantly arguing that it would be difficult to realize the professional career aspirations of both partners.

> Now, no. Because of my wife's career […]. (Polish male expatriate in France)

> I wouldn't even talk to (my wife) […]. (Polish male expatriate in Finland)

For those open to the idea of future expatriation, the move would need to be very clearly connected with a job opportunity for both members of the DCC:

> It depends on the conditions of the contract. I do not think that he would sign up for another two years of sitting at home. (Finnish female expatriate in China)

> No, I think […] no […] and if yes, with clear conditions […] To have a job, not to be limited to following your husband. It is extremely important. (partner of the Belgian male expatriate in Russia)

In summary, the goals shift by 180 degrees toward a focus on finding a plausible pathway to fulfill the partner's need for career progression, which often leads to the repatriation decision. This is motivated by the desire of the partner to recommence professional career development, which is also strongly supported by the dual-career expatriate, who may even give up some of their own professional opportunities to help the partner restore hope. Goals are thus reprioritized to restore the feelings of hope of both partners, and even if in some cases it may involve negative consequences for the career of the expatriate, the couple shows high-hope attitudes and agency to make it happen. In light of their experiences, future international careers could be considered only by some couples and only if job opportunities were available for both abroad.

Conclusions and implications for theory and practice

This research increased the understanding of a largely neglected and rapidly evolving field of DCC expatriation. The results confirm the applicability of hope theory to building an understanding of DCC phenomena, as called for by Harvey, Novicevic and Breland (2009). For the first time, we have been able to use hope theory to explain the expatriation experience of dual-career partners through the entire expatriate cycle. Both the expatriates and the partners were able to relate to, describe, and assess the goals that guided their experiences at each phase of their expatriation. They could also describe pathways conceptualized to achieve the goals and frequently commented on the associated emotions providing insights into the development of agency thinking (Snyder, 2002). This may be attributed to the specific situation of a DCC, where both members are educated, and expatriation decision is more complex and therefore analyzed by both partners in depth, yielding better goal clarity, and permitting a clear identification of pathways serving the achievement of goals. Consistent with earlier research and commonly found among high-hope individuals (Baumeister and Exline, 2000), the results indicate that the goals and pathways of the expatriate and the dual-career partner changed as the expatriate experience progressed, so they came to be focused on trying to maintain and restore hope (Figure 1). The considerably different nature of the goals hypothesized for the next assignment is somewhat consistent with earlier research on goal transitions during important life changes (Little *et al.*, 2007; Salmela-Aro, 2009). An understanding of the patterns of these shifts facilitates scientific progress by explaining the different types of issues and motivators experienced by DCCs.

Alongside the scientific contribution, these findings may be of practical use to DCCs and international human resource managers, because they provide a deeper understanding of the processes a DCC unit goes through, which allows for better recognition of the attitudes and motivations of such employees during an assignment. First, if the DCC partner does not have opportunities for employment, owing to issues obtaining a work visa, language barriers, or other issues, such assignments need to be planned for shorter periods of time. As time progresses, we observe an increase in stress and heightened pressure from the partner to return home. If the assignee is required at the host location for a longer period, human resource managers need to take care of all possible arrangements to allow for the continuation of the career of the partner. Many spousal support practices have been called for in earlier research (Kierner, 2015), including culture and language training, or support for self-employment, and financing volunteer activities (Moore, 2002). Even if these are reported to be among the most valued support practices by the employees (Konopaske and Werner, 2005),

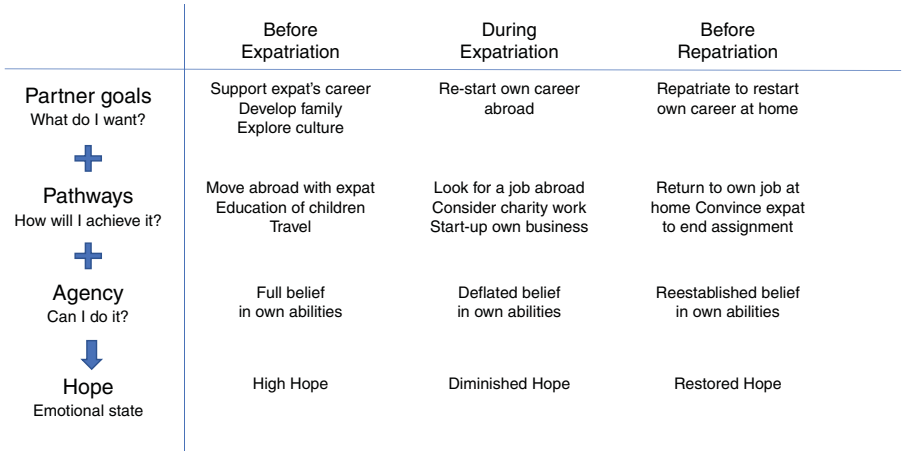

Figure 1.
The changing nature of hope: goals, pathways, and agency of the DCC partner

this study clearly suggests that this is not enough. To ensure full adjustment, the DCC partner would need to have meaningful employment that guarantees his/her career can progress. Since the spousal support role is so important for the complete adjustment of the expatriate (Lauring and Selmer, 2010; Haslberger and Brewster, 2008) and to avoid negative cross-over effects (Andreason, 2008; Lazarova *et al.*, 2010) affecting the adjustment and job performance of the assigned expatriate, human resource managers would be advised to ensure that the partner has a valid work visa, job hunting support or ideally, MNCs should offer employment for the partner.

Furthermore, understanding the changing nature of goals could help managers of expatriates select and apply the most appropriate motivational approach. It is well understood that new assignees are under pressure during the initial phase of the assignment when they need to adjust to the new environment at work and in their private life (Haslberger *et al.*, 2012; Lazarova *et al.*, 2010). This study suggests that in the case of DCCs where the partner does not secure any employment, the family pressures may be even greater a few months after the start of the assignment when the partner loses his/her agency and starts to adjust the family pathways to align with repatriation. Managers of expatriates can be far more effective when they also understand the situation of the partner, empathize with it, provide the necessary help and monitoring to be aware of, rather than be surprised by, reduced levels of motivation or a desire for premature repatriation. Finally, if MNCs wish to reassign a DCC expatriate, they need to understand that securing a fulfilling job for the partner can be the primary motivating factor for the couple to agree to accept an assignment.

The present study has several limitations. Its sample selection was focused on DCCs, who typically come from western countries with strong dual-career traditions and high levels of female participation in the workforce, so the findings can only be generalized to such cultures and situations where both partners are career-engaged. The paper focuses on a career perspective, meaning it necessarily devotes little attention to other goals such as giving children an international experience, to being able to travel, or devoting more time to the family, or using the time to learn languages or engage in further education. These goals appeared to be important to the participants in all phases of the assignment and are the subject of traditional adjustment research. Further research on such alternative goals would thus be useful to fully understand the goals and pathways of couples in broader terms than only those of the career.

Hope theory, however, mainly focuses on the goals of the individual while many of these broader goals have been reported as shared family goals, or in a few situations, individuals

had goals that were about progressing the interests of the other family members such as the partner or children. Hope theory, as conceptualized in the current research (Snyder, 2002), seems to underestimate the importance of these types of goals in building agency and hope for individuals living in tight family units, such as expatriated DCCs, and it could be expanded. Finally, despite the comparably large and diverse sample for a qualitative study and the care taken to ensure the replicability of the findings, further representative quantitative research should also be undertaken. Ideally, such a study would employ a longitudinal sample, with interviews conducted multiple times with the same couples to capture the major milestones of their assignments soon after they occur to minimize possible recall errors.

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PARTNER ROLES IN INTERNATIONAL DUAL-CAREER COUPLES: THE CASE OF FEMALE EXPATRIATES AND THEIR MALE PARTNERS

Abstract:

Purpose: As organizations aim to increase diversity of globally mobile workforce, this paper aims to understand the kinds of spousal roles adopted by the male partners of female expatriates to support the positive expatriation experience of women in dual-career couples.

Design/Methodology/Approach: A qualitative study was undertaken based on in-depth semi-structured interviews with 20 female expatriates, and their male dual-career partners, and the interviews were subsequently analyzed using replication logic.

Findings: The study reveals that most men adopted a *supportive, flexible,* or *restrictive* role, but failed to identify men adopting *counterproductive, instrumental,* and *equal* roles. A new *seeking* role was recognized, which results from a male partner agreeing to expatriate and initially supporting the spouse, but that partner later aiming to restart his career while abroad.

Research limitations/implications: Partner maturity, self-confidence, and egalitarian gender order views were found to be conducive to the successful dual-career experience. Findings extend application of gender order theory and spouse role typology and may guide HR managers in charge of expatriation programs to adopt appropriate selection and partner support practices.

Originality/value: This is the first study of roles adopted by male IDCC partners during expatriation.

Keywords: Expatriation, dual-career couples, spousal roles, male trailing spouse, gender, diversity in the workforce

1. **Introduction**

In such a rapidly changing and globally interconnected world, mobility of diverse, global talent is crucial to corporate management and business innovation. Expatriate assignments of senior female managers are however considered especially challenging due to the need for career coordination with their male dual-career partner. This study is set to analyze experiences of those cases of female expatriation that have been successful and answer *what kinds of spousal roles the dual-career male partners of female expatriates adopt to facilitate female expatriation*.

This is important to understand, since diversity has been cited as a performance driver. Ambitious women, who take on high profile expatriate assignments have been seen to work long hours (Ezzedeen and Ritchey, 2008), and achieve higher levels of work and interaction adjustment (Cole and McNulty, 2011). While the share of female assigned expatriates has grown from 3% to 27% in the last three decades, there are still far fewer female expatriates than male ones (Brookfield 2013–2017; Hutchings et al., 2012).

This may be influenced by societal gender expectations, described by gender order theory (Connell, 2013), in which men are expected to be the breadwinners, while women are typically supposed to take care of various aspects of family life, including upbringing of children and care of the household. Consequently, male partners in international dual-career couples (IDCCs), where a female is the primary expatriate, struggle because of these social norms, stereotypes, and gender role expectations; especially so in cultures where national perceptions of how an ideal family should appear or function are particularly present (Tolciu and Zierahn, 2012).

The gender-specific perspective of couples involving male partners and female expatriates has not yet been studied to any great extent (Collins and Bertone, 2017; Mutter, 2017). Unsurprisingly, further research on equal opportunities, spousal roles, and gender-related issues connected to expatriation has been called for, with a particular emphasis placed on collecting evidence from both partners (Dabic et al., 2015; Ezzedeen and Ritchey, 2008; Mäkelä et al., 2011). Career research in dual-career settings at home (Heikkinen et al., 2014; Välimäki et al., 2009) and in a dual-career expatriate context (Mäkelä at al., 2011) has identified different spousal roles in order to understand the ways couples organize two separate careers within the family and at the same time, their overall family life. The present study applies gender order theory and the dual-career role framework to extend our understanding of applicability of gender theory, deepen knowledge of spousal roles within expatriate dual-career couples and contribute with new insights for the human resources departments that care for diversity in global expatriation programs. This paper will briefly present applicable research and applied theoretical lenses, describe research methodology and discuss findings, practical and theoretical contributions, as well as limitations and ideas for further research.

2. Female expatriation

Growing share of female managers

The discussion about women's rights, and consequently their equal share in professional life underrepresentation in business, particularly at managerial and executive levels, has continued for many years (Peryman et al., 2016). Practitioners and scholars are calling for a bigger share of women in the international workforce (McNulty and Hutchings, 2016). Meanwhile, female participation in expatriation programs is continually increasing, from 3% in the early 1990s (GMAC NFTC SHRM Global Forum, 2004) to 20% in 2012, to 23% in 2013 and 27% in 2017 (Brookfield, 2013–2017; Hutchings et al., 2012; Shortland, 2009). This growth is encouraging, but female representation among expatriates is still far from parity and there is clearly a need for a deeper understanding of the issues affecting the proportion of female expatriates (Altman and Shortland, 2008; Cole and McNulty, 2011).

Female expatriation barriers

The changes in the composition of the current workforce, narrowing the competence and wage gaps (Goldin, 2014) produces an almost equal proportion of qualified female candidates for international assignments (Jacobsen et al., 2015). This has boosted interest in understanding why women do not take up international assignments. The reasons are threefold: organizational, family related, and personal (Shortland, 2015). The majority of research focuses on the organizational factors such as gender bias and stereotyping during selection (Ott and Michailova, 2016), due to both perceived characteristics of work and established work practices requiring longer hours and frequent travel typical for many extreme jobs (Gascoigne et al., 2015). The male-dominated history of expatriate programs has not produced adequate support practices to cater for the unique needs of female expatriates (Hutchings et al., 2008). Other research shows that male managers are more likely to prefer male protegees (Linehan and Scullion, 2008), and up to 30% of male managers have been reported to believe that women cannot be as successful as men (Vance and McNulty, 2014), which disadvantages women. Home country male managers were observed to believe that typically male characteristics are necessary for effective management abroad (Mathur–Helm, 2002). There is also a great deal of unsubstantiated stereotyping, such as the notion that married women, especially with children, are not willing to accept an international assignment (Altman and Shortland, 2008). Therefore, women often have to ask the organization for a career move to show their readiness rather than wait for opportunities to be offered by the organization (Ottsen, 2019). The reduced number of female expatriates also stems from a lack of appropriate networking among women (Uzzi, 2019). Meanwhile, research shows that an informal selection process is a dominant way of recruiting managers for international assignments (Ott and Michailova, 2016); hence, an extensive network, including international branches, is crucial to being visible and chosen.

Influence of Dual-Career Settings

More than two-thirds of expatriate women are married and in dual-career relationships (Permits, 2012). Fifty-nine per cent of international HR managers agree that women face greater obstacles to accepting an assignment than men, and the majority (84%) say that partner employment has an impact on attracting first-choice expatriation candidates. As a consequence, more than half (56%) of the reasons given for refusing an assignment cite family and/or spouse career concerns (Brookfield, 2013-2017). Therefore, the antecedents for the lower participation of women in expatriate assignments may lie in family and male/female career coordination issues.

In conclusion, the number of dual-career female expatriates is growing, but women are still underrepresented in expatriate positions, which needs further research (Bonache et al., 2001; Dabic et al., 2015), in order to increase gender diversity among expatriates (Lynes and Grotto, 2018). So far identified reasons include organizational bias, stereotypical gender order and male partner career related challenges (Fischlmayr and Puchmüller, 2016; McNulty and Hutchings, 2016).

3. Gender order theory and spousal roles among dual-career couples

Gender Order Theory

Male partners in IDCCs are subject to social norms, stereotypes, and gender role expectations arising from national perceptions of how an ideal family should appear or function (Tolciu and Zierahn, 2012). Such societal gender expectations are addressed by gender order theory, in which gender order refers to a historically constructed pattern of power relations between men and women that can become institutionalized on different levels of society (Connell, 2013). According to traditional gender order, women are typically expected to provide resources to support their husband's career and therefore their position becomes an unequal one in relation to their husband (Heikkinen et al., 2014). It is thus often presumed that the man will be the breadwinner, and people around them find it difficult to understand their status when they arrive abroad as a partner of an expatriated female manager (Fischlmayr and Puchmüller, 2016). While dual-career couples and female managers with male partners often challenge the traditional gender order assumptions (Heikkinen et al., 2014), male expatriate partners without jobs may struggle with stigma, stereotyping, and other issues, and, as a consequence, drive a decision in favor of early repatriation (Kierner, 2018; McNulty and Hutchings, 2016). If assignments end early, the most commonly quoted reason is a family-related issue (Brookfield, 2017). These issues may stem from either the male partner pressing for a return home or from internal or external pressure on the woman to focus on her traditional role as a wife and mother.

Navigating stigmatization, marginalization, and (self) discrimination is therefore one of the key challenges for female expatriates and their spouses (McNulty and Hutchings, 2016), and in some cases internationally-oriented women have been reported to look for a specific type of spouse to be able to share an international experience with them (Fischlmayr and Puchmüller, 2016). Female managers in

domestic career settings also sometimes report that they found support from their partner irrelevant to their careers or that they receive minimal support from their male partners (Heikkinen et al., 2014). Heikkinen et al. (2014) also found that spousal roles can evolve over time and that such male-partner support can be inconsistent, which confused and disappointed the female managers surveyed.

Spousal Roles

Research on the careers of dual-career couples at home (Ezzedeen and Ritchey, 2008; Välimäki et al., 2009) and in an expatriation context (Mäkelä at al. 2011) has defined the taxonomy of spousal roles that helps understand how couples organize their career decisions and the overall work–life balance issues involved in such IDCC situations. Seven different roles have been identified in the previous studies.

The *supportive role* is when one of the partners supports the other in their career through offering advice, emotional help, and practical assistance (Välimäki et al., 2009). Ezzedeen and Ritchey (2008) and Heikkinen et al. (2014) later divided supportive roles into three different (sub roles): *psychosocial support*, *hands-on (practical) support,* and *career assistance*. A partner adopting a *flexible role* accommodates the demands of the other spouse's career and adjusts to provide "silent support" (Välimäki et al., 2009). That may involve the coordination of careers and even one partner taking a temporary career break (Friedman and Greenhaus, 2000). A *determining* role is evident when the partner had a guiding influence on the decision of the expatriate to take up an international assignment. Both careers are still important, but one is subordinated, and the spouse takes advantage. An *equal* role has been identified in the context of expatriation and happens when the careers of both partners are prioritized equally and are pursued independently such that neither of the careers are affected and both can progress without interruption. This may, for example, result in a split family setting (Mäkelä et al., 2011). A spousal role can be described as *instrumental* when one of the partners uses the other as an instrument to pursue her or his own career ambitions.

The career roles that partners may adopt also include less supportive roles like a *restrictive* role (i.e. a partner rejects the idea of a change and thus limits the career progress of the other partner) (Mäkelä et al., 2011) or a c*ounterproductive* role (i.e., the leading partner has a dismissive attitude to the other partner's career and complicates it) (Välimäki et al., 2009). However, such situations would not be expected among IDCCs who have already decided to go abroad due to the assignment of the expatriate, and thus the partner has accepted the disruption that assignment causes to his/her career. In turn, such situations may be quite common among IDCCs who have decided to stay at home (Beck, 2012; Copeland, 2004; van Erp et al., 2011).

This taxonomy of roles has been acknowledged to provide insights into IDCC expatriation issues (Mäkelä et al., 2011), so it may also serve well as a lens through which to examine roles adopted by male dual-career partners in expatriation situations. It is thus interesting to review the kinds of roles male partners have adopted in IDCCs and how societal expectations on gender order impact their

experiences. Before presenting the empirical findings on these issues, the methods of the study are presented in the following section.

4. Methodology

Research Strategy

This study adopts a qualitative research design to analyze and provide an in-depth understanding of the roles assumed by male partners of female expatriates. The selection of qualitative method is driven by the fact that the observed phenomena is new, cases are relatively rare, and interpretation of reality depends on cultural and social context of the couple. Such a complex research area is particularly apt to qualitative methods (Burr, 2015; Erikson and Kovalainen, 2015). The approach utilized retrospective semi-structured interviews (Bryman and Bell, 2015), with 10 senior female expatriates and their 10 male partners. Both partners were interviewed separately in order to fully understand the contexts, roles, and the impact of experiences on the career decisions made by the couple who need to integrate their careers as a family unit.

Research Group Selection Criteria

The sample selection was purposefully restrictive in order to focus the study on cases of senior female manager expatriation accompanied by her dual-career partner. The couple had to have spent at least one year on an international assignment and repatriate back to their home country. Both partners had to have a university degree and the male partner had to work before the departure on assignment. Moreover, the male partner had to be invested in his career, which offered the primary source of self-fulfillment (Bird and Schnurman-Crook, 2005), and be psychologically committed to his work (Challiol and Mignonac, 2005). It was not a requirement for the male partners to be pursuing their careers abroad, since that is not always possible (Vance and McNulty, 2014) and removing couples where one partner did not work abroad from the sample could introduce a bias to the results. In all circumstances the female expatriates had been assigned by their employing corporation and typically held a very senior executive position (director level and above), with a large scope of responsibilities within a sizable organization. In all cases the expatriation and marriage was seen as a success, which is slightly biased, since prior literature mentions situations where such assignments result in premature return or a divorce (Känsälä et al., 2015; Lauring and Selmer, 2010).

Research Sample Recruitment

The sample selection criteria and need to find female expatriates in particular, forced the authors to undertake a broad recruitment process to identify potential candidates. First, the existing expatriate databases from previous surveys that were carried out by the research group were used, and, in addition, the snowball method

Case Characteristics					Primary Expatriate				Dual Career Partner				Partner Work Status		
Host Country	Industry	Time of Interview	Children (Ages at start)	Assignment Length	Interview Code	Nationality	Gender	Position on the assignment	Interview Code	Nationality	Gender	Partner profession	Worked before the expatriation	Worked during the expatriation	Worked after the repatriation
Romania	FMCG	2015	Yes (6)	3	1	American	Female	Associate Director	2	Polish	Male	Project Portfolio Leader	Yes	Yes	Yes
China	Telecom	2017	No	3	3	American	Female	VP, Manufacturing Director	4	American	Male	Engineering Manager	Yes	No	Yes
Germany	Telecom	2015	Yes (5, 7)	3	5	Finnish	Female	Senior Legal Counsel	6	Finnish	Male	Airline Pilot	Yes	Yes	Yes
USA	IT	2017	Yes (14, 18)	2	7	Finnish	Female	VP Marketing	8	Finnish	Male	VP, Engineering	Yes	No	Yes
Finland	Telecom	2015	No	3	9	American	Female	Communication Manager	10	American	Male	Partner, Investment Consulting	Yes	Part time	Yes
China	Construction	2014	Yes (8,12)	2	11	Finnish	Female	HR Director	12	Finnish	Male	IT Project Manager	Yes	Yes	Yes
Finland	Professional Services	2017	Yes (4, 7)	3	13	Finnish	Female	Attorney	14	American	Male	Software Engineer	Yes	Part time	Yes
Finland	IT	2017	No	3	15	American	Female	HR Director	16	American	Male	Engineering Manager	Yes	No	Yes
Finland	Telecom	2015	Yes (8, 10)	3	17	American	Female	VP of Communication	18	American	Male	Sales Manager	Yes	Part time	Yes
Switzerland	FMCG	2015	Yes (3)	1	19	Polish	Female	Marketing Director	20	Polish	Male	IT Project Manager	Yes	No	Yes

Table 1. Research Sample background, expatriation directions and work status of the partner

was engaged to recruit additional respondents known to those IDCCs already in the study, or those that did not qualify due to the selection criteria. The final sample included female expatriates (n=10) and their male dual-career partners (n=10). All worked in the private sector (i.e., telecommunications, electronics, FMCG, machine building, and business services). On average, the couples were on assignment for two-and-a half years, with a minimum time of one year and a maximum time of three years. Majority of the couples (7 out of 10) had one or at most two children with them while on assignment.

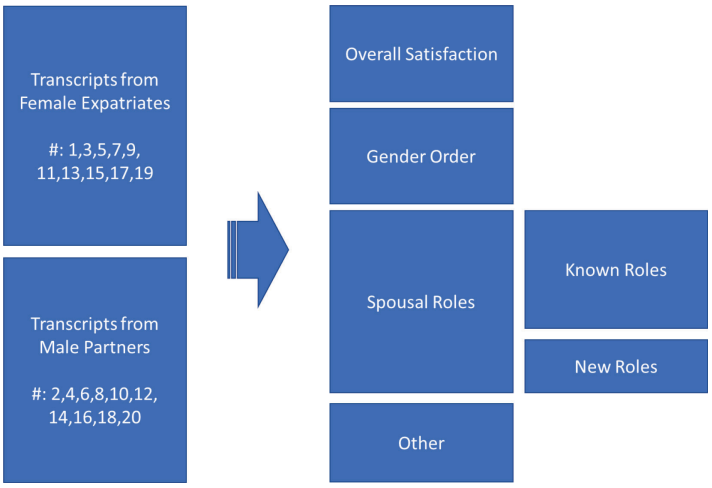
Interview Guide and Data Collection

The expatriate and the partner were interviewed separately, and interviews were conducted either in person or by telephone in cases where face-to-face meetings were not possible. The interviews lasted between 27 and 82 minutes. All the interviews were recorded. An interview guide was prepared, and two senior researchers reviewed it to enhance its structure, flow and quality of questions (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Each interview was based on the same guide to cover a comparable range of topics. The research guide included several types of questions following the what, how and why method, the most typical to qualitative scientific research design (Silverman, 2013). It was structured in 5 sections, starting with career story, direction of expatriation, expatriate decision-making, adjustment to the host country and repatriation experiences. Each section reviewed experiences, goals, agency, perceptions, and behaviors of both the informant and their partner. While the

same guide was followed in each interview the issues that were particularly relevant to a respondent were discussed more extensively to allow interesting new lines of discovery to emerge and to foster unbroken discussion.

Analysis

The analysis utilized replication logic (Rowley, 2002; Silverman, 2013). Initially, all available material was reviewed to identify the main findings (e.g., the main roles assumed by the partner) and to generate a first coding frame, utilizing the



Picture 1. Coding Frame for Interview Transcripts

concept-driven (deductive) method, combined with the data-driven (inductive) approach (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2015). The coding frame (see picture 1) was subsequently refined to group the findings and respondents' quotes into key categories and roles (Mäkelä et al., 2011; Välimäki et al., 2009). Coding helped understand the key themes emerging in the data, to index the findings, and to discover and formulate new levels of interpretation. The findings in each partner-expatriate couple situation were studied in search for literal replication (Yin, 2017), where both partners essentially conveyed similar observation, motivation or result. At the same time each of the 10 couples was treated as a separate case study and finding repetitive evidence of our conclusions among the cases helped ensure their possible theoretical generalization and replication based on sound qualitative evidence (Rowley, 2002).

Research Quality

The study adopted consistent focus on construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability, aiming to ensure high research quality, as well as maximize the external replicability of findings and the possibility for theoretical generalization based on qualitative evidence (Ericson and Kovalainen, 2015; Rowley, 2002; Yin, 2017). Quality assurance approach included the following

techniques: research plan was constructed early, and strictly followed; research guide was tested and consistently applied; all interviews were recorded and carefully transcribed; research was organized in two waves: one in Europe and one in the USA, and evidence captured in both waves corroborated with one another; interviews of both partners allowed for within-case validation; transcripts were independently analyzed by two researchers who discussed and agreed on a consistent set of findings.

5. Findings

Overall Satisfaction from Expatriate Assignment

Most interviews revealed the overall expatriate couple experience ultimately to be quite successful, despite male partners naturally facing some adjustment challenges in a situation where the roles of both couples changed extensively due to expatriation. The findings are still more positive in comparison with the view elicited from the literature, which often cites situations where such couples do not adjust well and return to their home countries, and sometimes reports marriages not surviving the strain (Känsälä et al., 2015; Lauring and Selmer, 2010; McNulty and Moeller, 2018). The interview transcripts were dominated by phrases such as "*I achieved more than I expected" (...) I am grateful to my husband that he helped me to experience it. (9F), or "I feel a healthy balance. I'm enjoying my freedom (8M).* Such positive overall views were typically influenced by the roles adopted by the male partners in order to facilitate the career of the female expatriate, although it may not have been an easy process for all of them.

Earlier identified spousal support roles

The supportive role was clearly the most commonly adopted by male partners. This role appeared in all three areas identified in domestic career settings: psychosocial support, practical assistance, and career assistance (Ezzedeen and Ritchey, 2008; Heikkinen et al., 2014). This was particularly important in the case of our sample of female expatriates, because expatriates often work long hours, sometimes owing to the heightened expectations of the employer, and every so often because of self-imposed pressure to deliver and demonstrate disproportionate value. In the case of female expatriates, this engagement in work may be even higher than among male expatriates (Cole and McNulty, 2011) and as an outcome their role within household will change significantly. At the same time, the family needs to adjust to a new country, all its functions must be continued and realized. This is how two female expatriates described their work situation:

> *(17- F) I worked extremely hard. This assignment was a great chance for me. And I felt a big pressure. You work more because you are on special assignment, you are brought to do special tasks. Expectations are pretty high.*

> *(11- F) I have been working such long hours, like 15 or 18 hours a day sometimes. Due to the global role I had, we attended a lot of online meetings. Due to the different time zone, these meetings were starting, let's say, at seven or eight in the evening. Very often I was working late, until 11 o'clock.*

The male partners of the expatriates were aware of this pressure and typically accepted the fact that the role of an expatriate requires more engagement than a similar role at home, and that they had to take over a good deal of the everyday chores that would normally be done by the female partner, or at least jointly by the couple. Male partners were sensitive to the needs of the female expatriates and generally accepted their expanded responsibilities quite positively and were ready to adjust their role to provide support for the expatriate and other family members:

> *(10 - M) In such situations, you have to be double empathetic, very sensitive. Imagine that you work under such great pressure, you have to prove every day that you are valuable then you come back home and your husband complains, and is always dissatisfied with something. Was always easy for me? Of course not. But it's a relationship, right? So, both people have to help with it.*

Support for the female expatriate could appear in many forms, but typically there was an urgent demand for a practical takeover of family and home duties. In that way, hands-on support or practical assistance (Heikkinen et al., 2014*)* emerged often:

> *(12 - M) My main responsibility was to be a family man. I was taking care of the kids, taking them to school and then picking them up. After the children got back from school, I would help them do their homework, arrange the food and later, during the day, I would shop for all the things we needed. I was doing the work that women usually do. It was a totally new role for me as, when we were home, we split responsibilities equally. Because she did not have much time off, I took over almost all duties from her.*

Male partners in these expatriation experiences were very flexible and ready to break the traditional gender order (Heikkinen et al., 2014). This was essential to the success of the expatriate, and a necessary condition enabling provision of required level of hands-on support. The expatriate women commented along the same lines, describing their partners as very supportive and ready to take on responsibilities typically expected of women:

> *(15 - F) I have to tell you that I didn't do a load of laundry once (while on assignment). I didn't do the grocery shop; I didn't know where the bank was. I didn't have any involvement with the personal life other than my husband. He took care of everything.*
>
> *(3- F) He went to the grocery store; he went to the dry cleaner. I had a driver who picked me up every morning and took me straight to work. I had a driver who took me home. I had a driver that took me to fancy dinners.*

> *And I traveled at least one week, two weeks a month somewhere around the world for meetings. I was not able to do anything at home.*

The third subdimension of the supportive role relates to career assistance and includes guidance, coaching, consultation, and help with resolving challenges encountered by the female expatriate in her work environment (Heikkinen et al., 2014). Both partners and expatriate women reported that some of their conversations at home naturally focused on career and professional issues from the work environment. One woman characterized this type of support as follows:

> *(5 - F) I tried to adjust my business travel so that we could be at home at the same time. We would then play tennis and talk a lot about what goes on in our jobs. It was very helpful for me to have a trusted partner who can hear you and help with some of the job-related stresses and concerns.*

The flexible spousal role appears when a partner adjusts his/her role to respond to the needs of the spouse's career and adjusts his/her career path to enable the partner the expatriation. Such a flexible approach was adopted quite commonly in our sample of male partners. The role was realized mainly through making a temporary break in the professional life or through some kind of job arrangement. This is how male partners reported it:

> *(20 - M) Initially I was concerned about the impact it would have, but I also already worked for a while and it was a good time to have a kind of sabbatical or parental leave. [..] I also wanted to be close to my son, and played with the idea of taking paternity leave since he was three years old.*

> *(2 - M) I could continue doing my job from a different location [..]. I'd work in the morning, then I had a 3-hour break, so I'd work from home. Sometimes I would work from 7 pm to, for instance, midnight to align my hours more with the USA's working hours. In this respect I had to adjust. Work required it, but it was ok.*

A *restrictive role* may occur when one of the partners rejects the idea of a change (for example, expatriation to a specific location), limiting the progress of the other's career (Mäkelä et al., 2011). In our sample of IDCCs who had decided to live abroad, this type of restrictive role was present in several situations when the partner insisted on not prolonging the stay abroad in order to repatriate and to continue their own career. This behavior is consistent with earlier literature suggesting that some male partners have a hard time adjusting and wish to find employment and to return to active work (McNulty and Hutchings, 2016). Though such a situation is common among all kinds of IDCC couples (Kierner and Suutari, 2018), the situation may be experienced even more strongly by male expatriate partners due to different gender expectations discussed above:

> *(1-F) (My husband) definitely needed to get away from Romania, he needed something new, he needed a new work assignment. So, I could have potentially stayed one more year, that would have been good for me at work, but we had said three years and he was antsy.*

> *(5- F) Well, I think that for him, staying longer than that or then extending beyond the third year would have required him to either drop the job or somehow organize it so he could work from (the city of assignment).*

Evidence of the *equal*, *determining*, *instrumental*, and *counterproductive* roles was hard to find in our interview material. This could be because the instrumental and counterproductive situations would be unlikely to be accepted by one of the partners within a highly educated and successful dual-career couple.

Gender Order issues leading to identification of the new seeking role

The analysis of interviews did, however, expose a need to define a new role: *the seeking role*. It is a new role particularly persistent among male partners who agree to an assignment, support their partner, but after some time feel misplaced partially due to gender stereotyping and continuously look for a route to restart their career and return to their expected male role of an active careerist and family provider while still on the assignment. Accompanying male partners clearly appreciate the international experience available for their spouses, their children and also for themselves but their initial enthusiasm, perhaps based on high hopes connected with a career break or being happy to professionally downgrade, changes over time into frustration at not getting a job, such that they lose the feeling of making a valid contribution or being equal:

> *(8 - M) I've never been jealous of my wife's position, I'm an extremely fulfilled man, I'm in her corner. The issue is that any person needs self-realization, fulfillment, and these are typically connected with getting professional satisfaction or financial independence.*

> *(10 - M) There was no need for the stress, we were fine financially. It was just having that culture of working, doing something.*

These feelings often inspire search for a professional challenge while being abroad. Meanwhile, as very active and engaged partners they often provide all kinds of support described earlier as supportive role, but their mind is clearly focused on looking for a return to work. They were not ready to seize the opportunity of having more free time and living in an interesting location, which could allow for developing their hobbies and enjoying life. This internal conflict could also have impact on relationships between the partners as often their needs and expectations started to mismatch:

> *(9 - F) I would say probably that fall, a couple months into it he started to think "This is going to be a lot harder than I thought." He definitely went through up and downs. I kind of encouraged him: "Take the time. You're here in Europe. Go explore, go take some trips or something while I'm gone or working." And he just never felt like he could, maybe.*

The current research also questioned male partners on whether they felt uncomfortable when their wife was working and had an expatriate manager status while they did not have such status and had a new role in the family. Many respondents emphasized that the partner requires a high level of maturity to cope

with this kind of different family situation. The male partners had their own career success experiences behind them and had built good self-confidence to be able to also do something other than expected according to the traditional gender order. Here is how they responded to a question on what has helped them adjust to the new situation:

> *(6 - M) I think I have such strong self-esteem and that I know who I am and what I do. It never crossed my mind.*
>
> *(4 - M) It's maturity, the characteristic you need to have when your spouse is working when you're not. The maturity comes from being able to actually accept it and enjoy it and support her and get everything else done that needs to be done.*
>
> *(16 - M) Everything is in your head; it depends on your maturity. Many men have their own egos that dictate they need to provide for their family. However, I took a different approach. It took me a while to understand that but once I understood it, it was easy.*

6. Conclusions and implications

Discussion and Summary of Findings

The goal of the present study was to analyze what kinds of spousal roles the male partners of female expatriates adopt to facilitate female expatriation among dual-career couples. As a whole, our study indicates that in the case of international dual-career couples consisting of female expatriates and their male partners, the roles within the couple need to be extensively renegotiated and that the roles of both partners change at work and at home during expatriation. Due to gender-related role expectations, such role transitions are considered very challenging, in particular, in the case of female expatriates and dual-career male partners (Fischlmayr and Puchmüller, 2016; Känsälä et al., 2015; McNulty and Hutchings, 2016).

However, the findings of the present study showed that there are also male partners who are able to handle such changes of roles and thus willing to break the traditional gender order (Heikkinen et al., 2014). This is done to support the career of the female expatriate as a temporary arrangement for a few years. The current research also demonstrates that spousal support is very important for female expatriates, as is found in much of the existing expatriation literature (Lauring and Selmer, 2010; van Erp et al., 2014). In line with gender order theory (Connell, 2013), some male partners had suffered from gender-role-related social pressures when their family role as males did not fit the expectations prevalent in the local society (Fischlmayr and Puchmüller, 2016; Tolciu and Zierahn, 2012).

Internally the male partners had still accepted their new role in the family. Those who did so most seamlessly benefited from having a strong sense of self-confidence, maturity, and a belief in gender equality often socialized though their upbringing or the egalitarian culture of their home country. These observations suggest that gender order theory may not apply uniformly to all partners and

situations, but depend on factors such as personal characteristics, beliefs and cultural background of couples. The personal acceptance of their new role temporarily led to a greater overall satisfaction among the couples than could be expected in light of the discussion in the expatriation literature.

Male partners had typically adopted supportive and flexible roles during expatriation settings (Ezzedeen and Ritchey, 2008; Heikkinen et al., 2014; Välimäki et al., 2009). The primary female expatriate typically thus had a determining role in the career of the man. In a sense, the supportive and flexible role of the partner was seen almost as a prerequisite to facilitate the expatriation of senior female managers with onerous job responsibilities. We did not find examples of instrumental or counterproductive roles among our interview sample consisting of those IDCCs who had decided to accept a move abroad, although those roles may be common among couples who had decided to stay at home.

Theoretical and Practical Contributions

Although the new situation was accepted by male partners as a starting point, some of them still became dissatisfied with their role over time and started to look for options to return to work when possible. The identification of this new seeking role contributes to expatriate research as it offers a new, more dynamic construct, describing the behavior of partners while abroad. If male partners ended up changing their role in the family toward more career-oriented activities, the couple needed to renegotiate the family roles within the couple in order to cope with the new situation. Such a situation may sometimes also lead to early repatriation (McNulty and Hutchings, 2016) and thus the adoption of a restrictive role, where such a choice limits the career options of the female partner (Mäkelä et al., 2011). However, among the couples informing the present study such decisions were not made.

The understanding of supportive, flexible, and restrictive roles as well as the conducive nature of self-confidence, maturity and egalitarian views on the part of the partner can be essential to expatriates and human resources managers in multinational corporations. That is because it can spur the insight required to guide the selection of couples for international assignments and efforts to define which support practices could most effectively expedite the successful adjustment of both an expatriate female and her partner. It is also evident that the increased presence of male partners of female expatriates increases the pressure on employers to develop well-defined spousal support programs (Cole, 2012). Creating such support practices may allow more female expatriates to be selected and to be successful in international careers, which would effectively help to progress the efforts to increase diversity at the senior levels of an enterprise.

As implied by the newly identified seeking role, among all the possible support, it seems that activities and support programs enhancing job-seeking and job crafting behaviors (Plomp et al., 2019) while on assignment would be most welcome. Managers of expatriates, and human resource managers in charge of diversity and expatriation support programs could enhance support systems for partners, who are

those most in need of either job or emotional support. Unfortunately, such support programs are rare, sometimes because MNCs do not understand what would be needed, are wary of their cost, or simply fail to follow through on the communication of potential benefits (Brookfield, 2017). Of course, ideally, MNCs would employ IDCC partners, but where it is not possible, they could offer more help in finding employment. This could include matching IDCCs with assignment locations where there is a better market for jobs for IDCC partners and connecting them with that market by creating supportive networks of working partners or other support with finding a job or starting a business (Cole, 2012; Haslberger and Brewster, 2008). Depending on the country of expatriation, it may be necessary to help partners secure a work permit (Permits, 2012). For those partners who want to embark on an entrepreneurial path, the support could start well ahead of the expatriation, and include coaching on career planning and career investment activities that have been established to prepare partners for entrepreneurship (Engel et al., 2017). Some career-oriented partners might wish to further their education; in that case MNCs could provide guidance about academic study options and organize financial support for education (Riusala and Suutari, 2000). Finally, mentoring could also prove valuable for expatriate dual-career partners or for an IDCC (Harvey et al., 2010).

Limitations and directions for future research

As with every study, the present study does have limitations. One is the small sample size, as finding couples that have successfully completed a full cycle of expatriation where the woman was an assigned expatriate and the man was following her was challenging. Additional quantitative research with larger samples of dual-career male partners would be needed to help generalize the findings. Furthermore, although the authors found semi-structured interviews to be a suitable qualitative method to understand the experiences of IDCCs, just a single opportunity to meet the subjects creates some limitations. Longer, more comprehensive longitudinal field studies could be undertaken that would enable the detailed exploration of the expatriation process among IDCCs. The fact that the seeking role is dynamic in nature warrants such longer observation, and therefore forthcoming research designed in such a way that partners are interviewed multiple times during their course of expatriation would be welcome. That method could help control for retrospective bias and enhance our understanding of the evolution of their changing roles. Finally, it must be noted that we focused on a very specific sample of senior, successful women living as part of a dual-career couple, so the findings may not be generalizable to other IDCC situations.

While the findings answer questions on what spousal roles the male partner should adopt to facilitate their female partners' international assignment, they also suggest several new areas for inquiry. First, future research could apply and test additional factors, like the influence of personality, gender expression and identity of the male spouses. Second, future research should specifically assess the differences in international relocations between dual-career and dual-income couples. It is possible that dual-career couples may have different attitudes toward such

relocation opportunities than dual-income couples and the adjustment in the new place may not be as easy. Spouses who are not psychologically attached to their jobs or careers may be more willing than their dual-career counterparts to undertake an international relocation. Third, studies might investigate if the presence of children and their age influences results. Finally, the stage of the male partner's career could also make a difference to the experiences of male partners; perhaps younger male partners feel a greater pressure to develop their own careers than male partners of senior female expatriates.

In summary dual-career male partners may facilitate successful female expatriation against common cultural gender order expectations present in society. This was facilitated by their high level of maturity, self-confidence and egalitarian views. Such male partners adopt supportive and flexible roles during expatriation, although with time increase a need to find employment described under the newly identified seeking role. HRMs in MNCs interested in enhancing diversity of their globally mobile workforce, are advised to enable male-partner job crafting behaviors with tailored corporate support programs.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Repatriation of international dual-career couples

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Combining the realities of dual-career couples (DCCs) and the requirements of international careers can be difficult. In order to improve the understanding of the repatriation experiences of international DCCs, we conducted interviews with both partners in 14 DCCs. Contrary to expectations, the majority of the interviewed couples reported very successful repatriation experiences, and only a few adjustment challenges were raised. The interviews address the factors explaining such repatriation adjustment issues, and also elicit four key factors (active self-management of the expatriation process, earlier experience of expatriation and repatriation, the successful integration of work life and family life, and the realization of dual-career interests upon repatriation) connected with successful repatriation adjustment experiences.

KEYWORDS

adjustment, dual-career couples, expatriation, repatriation

1 | INTRODUCTION

It is argued that dual-career couples (DCCs), which it is suggested have made up around 25% of the expatriate population over the past decade (Brookfield, 2016), pose a challenge for international companies that must maintain an internationally mobile workforce (Ravasi, Salamin, & Davoine, 2013; Selmer & Leung, 2003; Shaffer, Kraimer, Chen, & Bolino, 2012). The limited research evidence on the experiences of such international couples has prompted frequent calls for further research (Harvey, Novicevic, & Breland, 2009; Huffman & Frevert, 2013; Känsälä, Mäkelä, & Suutari, 2015; Lauring & Selmer, 2010; Mäkelä, Känsälä, & Suutari, 2011; Selmer & Leung, 2003).

Gradually, more evidence has emerged on the experiences of DCCs during an international assignment. The associated research has addressed issues such as the willingness to leave for an assignment (Selmer & Leung, 2003), partner career experiences abroad (McNulty & Moeller, in press), partner roles (Mäkelä et al., 2011), dual-career support practices (Harvey, Napier, Moeller, & Williams, 2010; Riusala & Suutari, 2000), cross-cultural adjustment (Ravasi et al., 2013) and career coordination strategies of the couples (Känsälä et al., 2015). However, no research on the repatriation of DCCs was found, despite the increasing body of studies focused on repatriation generally (see, e.g., Szkudlarek, 2010). Overall, the repatriation stage of assignments is still an area in which there are considerable research gaps (Breitenmoser & Bader, 2016; Greer & Stiles, 2016; Howe-Walsh & Torka, 2017; Szkudlarek & Sumpter, 2015), and the existing research has been predominantly focused on repatriates from North America and the United Kingdom (Sanchez-Vidal, Sanz Valle, Barba Aragón, & Brewster, 2007).

Although there is a lack of empirical research focusing on repatriation among DCCs, it has been suggested that DCCs may struggle even more with repatriation challenges than couples in which only one partner is career oriented (Haslberger, Brewster, & Hippler, 2012; Kierner, 2015; Linehan & Scullion, 2002). This is an important finding because repatriation is a challenging experience for any couple (Haslberger, Brewster, & Hippler, 2012; Kraimer et al., 2012; Mäkelä & Suutari, 2013; Storti, 2003). The need to coordinate two careers (Baird & Reeves, 2011; Känsälä et al., 2015) and achieve a reasonable balance between work and personal life adds a new level of complexity.

The partners of expatriates face career-related challenges when they leave their job and career at home. It can be difficult finding relevant employment abroad (McNulty & Moeller, in press), either because work permits are restricted or because of the absence of suitable opportunities in the host country. During the repatriation stage, the career issues of the partners are again among the main concerns of expatriates (Riusala & Suutari, 2000). The negative experiences of the partner may have spillover effects on the expatriate and may lead to dissatisfaction or even to a premature return to the home country (Andreason, 2008). At the same time, the partner can be an important source of support for the expatriate during the whole expatriation process (Haslberger & Brewster, 2008; Lauring &

Selmer, 2010). While it has been suggested that international DCCs would clearly benefit from organizational support practices tailored to their specific needs (Handler & Lane, 1997), such support is seldom offered (McNulty & Moeller, in press; Riusala & Suutari, 2000). Couples thus typically have to deal with the problems related to adjusting to their changed situation on their own.

Against this background, the aim of this article is to increase our understanding of the repatriation adjustment experiences of international dual-career couples. As prior research has suggested, the present study involved the perspectives of both partners—expatriate and partner—to understand the different perspectives on the DCC's experience (Harvey, 1998; Känsälä et al., 2015; Rusconi, Moen, & Kaduk, 2013). The findings show that the vast majority of the respondents, both expatriates and their partners, reported a successful and smooth repatriation adjustment. Therefore, building on the positive side of expatriation experiences (e.g., Breitenmoser & Bader, 2016; Mäkelä & Suutari, 2013; Suutari, Brewster, Dickmann, Mäkelä, & Tornikoski, 2017), we analyze both the adjustment problems of the couples, typical in repatriation adjustment research, and the findings on the factors connected with positive experiences.

2 | INTERNATIONAL DUAL-CAREER COUPLES

Rapoport and Rapoport (1971) introduced the term *dual-career couple* and defined it as "a couple where both partners pursue careers." Literature has since explored various characteristics of dual-career couples looking at their engagement in continual professional employment (Bradbury, 1994), psychological commitment to their work (Harvey, 1997), and the investments the couple make in their careers as those offer the main source of fulfillment (Bird & Schnurman-Crook, 2005). The first discussions on dual-career couples in the expatriation context appeared in the 1990s. The research at that time adopted the term *dual-career couple*, standardizing the definition to those duos in which "both partners are employed and psychologically committed to their work" (Harvey, 1997). Such an approach to DCCs has been widely used in subsequent research in the international career context (e.g., Känsälä et al., 2015; McNulty & Moeller, in press; Vance & McNulty, 2014).

Being a dual-career expatriate couple does not necessarily imply that both partners will work during an international relocation (McNulty & Moeller, in press). For the partner who is not on assignment, the options for finding a job may be limited in the host country; indeed, there may even be legal constraints on having a job as a foreigner. This leads to a situation where the trailing partners may have to interrupt their career or, where paid employment is available, might end up taking a job that does not further that career (Vance & McNulty, 2014). On the other hand, some international DCCs succeed in finding relevant career options for both partners abroad (Vance & McNulty, 2014). Alternatively, some couples resolve the situation by living apart during the assignment so that both partners can continue their careers. Even in such circumstances, such couples are still defined as DCCs due to their long-term career orientation. We next discuss the repatriation of such couples.

2.1 | The repatriation adjustment of international DCCs

Adjustment is about the person–environment relationship (Haslberger, Brewster, & Hippler, 2013) and has both an external (demands) and an internal (needs) element (Haslberger, Brewster, & Hippler, 2014). Adequacy standards for the external requirements are set by the environment [Takeuchi (2010) has emphasized the importance of a variety of stakeholders], whereas internal adequacy standards are set by the individual, that is, the expatriate. Of course, these mutual needs and demands are interdependent (Brammer & Abrego, 1981). Some of the earliest work on expatriate adjustment defined three aspects of adjustment: general adjustment, work adjustment, and interaction adjustment (Black & Stephens, 1989); although the precise boundaries between them are not clear, perhaps largely because the model is based around an easily replicable 14-question instrument that has been much copied (Hechanova, Beehr, & Christiansen, 2003). This approach has also been used for repatriation research (Black, Gregersen, & Mendenhall, 1992). There is increasing evidence demonstrating the difficulty of repatriation adjustment and suggesting that the majority of repatriates are dissatisfied with the repatriation process and experience problems (Chi & Chen, 2007; Gregersen & Black, 1999; Sanchez-Vidal et al., 2008; Suutari & Välimaa, 2002; Tahir & Azhar, 2013).

It has also been recognized that the adjustment of the partner and the repatriate are significantly related to each other, since deficiencies in the adjustment of one family member affect the adjustment of the other members of the family unit (Andreason, 2008; Haslberger & Brewster, 2008). The family conflicts can easily spill over into the work domain (Van Steenbergen, Ellemers, & Mooijaart, 2007). According to MacDonald and Arthur (2005), both research and practice typically underestimate the importance of the partner and other family members in the adjustment to repatriation of the expatriate. For the adjustment of DCCs to be successful, it is important that both partners achieve a state of psychological comfort (Harvey, 1998).

Perhaps the most commonly discussed factors behind repatriation adjustment problems occur at work and include the underutilization of the international knowledge of the expatriate, and the resulting perceived underemployment (Kraimer, Shaffer, Harrison, & Ren, 2012). Expatriates come back confident in their acquired skills and with equally high expectations of how their knowledge will be utilized (Sanchez-Vidal et al., 2008). Expatriates typically have greater job responsibility and autonomy while abroad than they did previously in their organization's home country, and the (downward) status shift may create feelings of disappointment (Suutari & Brewster, 2003). Repatriates also often face a lack of role clarity or even role conflict after repatriation (Black et al., 1992; Suutari & Välimaa, 2002), if indeed they have a defined job to go to and are not put on to some kind of project work to fill the time before a job appropriate to their skill set can be found for them. Few repatriates receive organizational support (Black et al., 1992; Handler & Lane, 1997; McNulty & Moeller, in press; Riusala & Suutari, 2000).

Repatriation can also be challenging for the partners in DCCs. They may be without a repatriation agreement, even if the expatriate has one, and so may need to look for a new job, perhaps having been out of the job market for some years. The partners may feel increased peer and family pressure to find employment, and failure to do so may lead to a loss of identity and self-esteem (Storti, 2003). It is therefore unsurprising that among DCCs, the job arrangements of the partner are among the main concerns of repatriating couples (Riusala & Suutari, 2000). Some expatriates may have been able to keep their jobs at home and thus be able to return to their old job. Partners may also be more realistic in their work and career expectations than expatriates with high expectations, which in turn may support their repatriation adjustment. However, there is no empirical research in these areas to support these suggestions.

There may also be issues related to reentry to the social side of life at home because of the shift of identity caused by the experience of expatriation (Black et al., 1992). Expatriates may be surprised to experience some degree of culture shock during repatriation, and the problem is often greater for the family than for the repatriate. Multiple studies report that the more expatriates depart emotionally from home country values, the greater the culture shock and repatriation adjustment challenges (Kraimer et al., 2012; Sussman, 2002; Suutari & Välimaa, 2002). Interestingly, partners and self-initiated expatriates have been reported to be more exposed to the risk of remote culture influence compared to the expatriate who is more engaged in the organization culture and spends more time with other expatriates (Haslberger, Brewster, & Hippler, 2012). Adjustment challenges often relate to rebuilding social connections after a period of several years abroad.

Of course, there are also many practical arrangements for the couple to deal with (Mäkelä & Suutari, 2013; Storti, 2003). Repatriation also typically leads to the loss of additional benefits and allowances, and thus overall to a substantial reduction in income (Bonache, 2005). The expatriate may have been living in company-provided premium housing supported by a range of affordable services (like domestic cleaners and other support staff). This loss of additional support may be especially painful to dual-career families, who must split their time between family duties and the careers of both partners (Haslberger, Brewster, & Hippler, 2012). When the career of the partner was on hold, the couple may also have benefited from the fact that the other partner stayed at home with the children, contributing significantly to the couple's overall work–life balance (Mäkelä & Suutari, 2013). In the repatriation stage, however, work–life balance can again become a far more challenging issue.

The heightened stress experienced by dual-career couples during the assignment cycle means that the support of a partner becomes even more important (Harvey, 1998; Lauring & Selmer, 2010). Such support may take many forms because expatriates report that their partners have diverse roles (Mäkelä et al., 2011); those roles are often reformulated while on assignment in the new foreign environment, and expatriate couples go through a transition phase, especially when their move means the work of the partner is disrupted. Conversely, a lack of partner support, which can stem from dissatisfaction with the changed employment status of a partner in a dual-career couple, may be a source of conflict (Tharenou, 2008). When addressing repatriating, the couple again needs to renegotiate their roles in the family when both partners wish to continue their careers.

Summing up so far, the repatriation of dual-career couples is a significant and increasingly common phenomenon, but at the same time is clearly an underresearched area. The existing literature on repatriation of expatriates and their partners' reports significant challenges and the specific situation of DCCs is expected to further heighten the adjustment challenges experienced in repatriation. After presenting the methods of the study, we report new findings on the repatriation experiences of such international DCCs.

3 | METHODOLOGY

For this exploratory study, a qualitative research design was adopted to provide an in-depth understanding of a topic on which we have limited knowledge and where there is a lack of established theory. Semistructured interviews were conducted with 14 highly skilled and well-educated expatriate couples (amounting to 28 interviews). They were from the United States (n = 5), Poland (n = 5), Finland (n = 3), and Belgium (n = 1). Several criteria were adopted when selecting these interviews: Both partners had to be working before the assignment and to have expatriated as a couple and then returned home. It was not a requirement that both partners worked while on assignment, as it is not always possible, and removing couples where one partner did not work from the sample could introduce a bias to our results. We also controlled for the fact that both partners were well educated and had a professional career and that each partner met the criteria of being engaged in continual professional employment (Bradbury, 1994) and being psychologically committed to their work and career (Harvey, 1997).

The demanding sample selection criteria meant three sources of potential candidates were used to generate the sample. First, the researcher team utilized its existing expatriate database from previous surveys to identify potential interviewees. Second, the team accessed networks to recruit the parents of children attending international schools. Finally, the snowball method was used to find additional couples already known to those DCCs identified previously. The final sample (see Table 1) included male (n = 8) and female (n = 6) expatriates and their dual-career partners. All the expatriates were sent abroad by their employers and all worked in the private sector (i.e., telecommunications, electronics, fast-moving consumer goods [FMCG], tobacco, construction, machine building, and banking). The respondents thus represent a group of assigned expatriates in contrast to self-initiated expatriates who head abroad on their own initiative (Suutari et al., 2017). On average, the couples were on assignment for 2.6 years, with a minimum time of 1 year and maximum time of 3.5 years. Thus, the assignees fulfill the criteria of having an assignment lasting longer than a year.

The expatriate and the partner were interviewed separately, and interviews were conducted either in person or via telephone in cases where face-to-face meetings were not possible. All the interviews were recorded. Most interviews were carried out in English apart from the interviews with Polish repatriates, which were conducted in Polish and translated into English. An interview guide was prepared

TABLE 1 Sample details

Assignment characteristics		Primary expatriate			Dual-career partner					
Nr	Host country	Length	Nationality	Gender	Position on the assignment	Nationality	Gender	Partner profession	Worked before the expatriation	Worked during the expatriation	Worked after the repatriation
1	Romania	3	American	Female	Associate Director	Polish	Female	Project Portfolio Leader	Yes	Yes	Yes
2	Ireland	3	Polish	Male	Network Engineer	Polish	Male	Psychologist	Yes	No	Yes
3	Germany	3	Finnish	Female	Senior Legal Counsel	Finnish	Female	Pilot	Yes	Yes	Yes
4	Finland	3	Polish	Male	Regional Director	Polish	Male	Property Broker—Company Owner	Yes	Yes, remotely	Yes
5	Finland	3	American	Female	Communication Manager	American	Female	Partner Investment Consulting	Yes	Yes, at the final stage	Yes
6	China	2	Finnish	Female	HR Director	Finnish	Female	IT Project Manager	Yes	No	Yes
7	Japan	2	American	Male	VP of Marketing and Sales	American	Male	English Teacher	Yes	Yes, part time	Yes
8	Finland	3	Polish	Male	Project Manager/Dev Leader	Polish	Male	Architect Designer	Yes	Yes, remotely	Yes
9	France	2	Polish	Male	Head of Foreign Exchange	Polish	Male	Librarian	Yes	No	Yes
10	Finland	3	American	Female	VP of Communication	American	Female	Sales Manager	Yes	No	Yes
11	Switzerland	1	Polish	Female	Marketing Director	Polish	Female	IT Project Manager	Yes	No	Yes
12	Finland	3.5	American	Male	Sr. Global Financial Manager	American	Male	Logistics Manager	Yes	No	Looking for a job at the time of the interview
13	Russia	3.5	Belgium	Male	Operation Director	Belgium	Male	Nurse	Yes	Yes, part time at the finale stage	Yes
14	China	2	Finnish	Male	Logistics Director	Finnish	Male	Project Manager	Yes	No	Yes

and checked with two senior researchers and one human resource specialist for validity (Bryman & Bell, 2003) before the guide was piloted with the first few couples. As a result of this process, the guide was refined and subsequently used for all interviews. Each interview was based on the same guide to cover a comparable range of topics. At the same time, issues that were particularly relevant to a respondent were sometimes discussed more extensively to allow interesting new lines of discovery to emerge and to foster unbroken discussion. The interviews lasted between 27 and 82 min. All recordings were transcribed, resulting in an extensive database of verbatim interview transcripts. All transcripts and recordings were stored in a database for future use and to maintain a chain of evidence.

The interview data were content analyzed using replication logic (Silverman, 2013). In a first step, all available material was reviewed with the aim of identifying the main categories emerging (e.g., repatriation adjustment issues or factors explaining the successful repatriation adjustment) and to generate a first coding frame, utilizing the concept-driven (deductive) way, combined with the data-driven (inductive) approach (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015). At this stage, MaxQDA software was used to arrange and code the interview transcripts (Flick, 2014). The coding frame was subsequently refined to group the findings and respondents' quotes into key categories. Coding helped the researchers understand the key themes emerging in the data, to index the findings, and to discover and formulate new levels of interpretation. Following the coding, the full transcript material was reviewed carefully and independently by the two researchers to find both supportive and contrary evidence. After these reviews, the researchers discussed the findings and collaborated on a final version of the paper to ensure its conclusions were valid, to maximize the internal and external replicability of findings, and to achieve theoretical generalization based on deep qualitative evidence.

4 | FINDINGS

The goals of this research were, first, to analyze the repatriation adjustment experiences and related adjustment problems of dual-career couples and, second, to identify factors identified as connected with the surprisingly positive experiences among international DCCs.

On the whole, the interviewees informing the present study reported positive repatriation adjustment experiences. In most DCC cases, repatriation expectations were met and the adjustment was found to be a very smooth process for both the assigned expatriates and their dual-career partners. Ten couples could clearly be grouped as couples with a shared view that repatriation was an easy process. Such repatriated couples reported in the following manner:

> We were so charged with positive energy that coming back was really hassle-free. (Polish repatriate returning from Ireland)
>
> Coming back was great for me … I was happy to be back, to be able to work things out the way I had planned … I had a whole plan. And so far, all so good. (The partner)

> I can truly say that the whole process of coming back was really easy for us … I am really happy to be back. (American female repatriate returning from Finland)
>
> The repatriation was an easy and in fact a really nice process for us. (The partner)
>
> The repatriation was not really stressful. It was the opposite. It was completely revealing. … We knew what to expect on our way back. (American repatriate returning from Finland)
>
> Our return home was very easy. Everything was arranged well and we landed back in our old environment, friends, and family. The kids were at the perfect age to start new schools. (The partner)

Despite the emerging positive view of repatriation, some challenges also emerged. Four of our couples reported more negative experiences, although in these cases it was typical that only one of the partners had some issues. Reflecting the importance of jobs and careers among dual-career couples, some repatriates faced challenges at work. There were a few cases in which the careers of repatriates seem to have stagnated during the time they were on assignment, and as a result they felt of the *out of sight, out of mind* effect. This is how a few repatriates with some adjustment problems described their experiences:

> The international assignment has not influenced my career too much because when you come back you feel like a small fish dropped in a big ocean. People didn't see you around for a few years, so they basically forgot you. (Belgian male repatriate returning from Russia)

Two repatriates also reported the typical differences in job roles on assignment and after repatriation:

> When you go back to your working life in your home country … then comes the frustration part because you no longer have the freedom at work and you go back to the bigger structure (with less autonomy). (Belgian male repatriate returning from Russia)
>
> Well, I came back to the company to the same position and that was a challenge as I felt no progress. … (Polish male repatriate returning from Finland)

The fact that a DCC comprises two career-oriented individuals creates a situation in which two partners have to adjust to changes to working life on repatriation. Work-related adjustment challenges appeared in a few cases among partners who had not been working abroad, although the most common situation was that they had an option of returning to their old jobs. In such cases the repatriation was naturally much easier. If a new job was required, the fact that partners often had a break in their career made the search more difficult:

> I did not have a job to repatriate to. … Currently, I am working on my resume in order to start looking for a job. It seems it is going to be a challenge. … I lost contact with the job market here. Now I have to rebuild, and it seems to take some time. (Partner of an American repatriate returning from Finland)

The typical difference between expatriates and partners was that the expatriates continued their careers and had new international work experience to add to their curriculum vitae. Partners, by contrast, have often had a break in their careers while abroad due to a lack of knowledge of the local language, lack of a work permit, or owing to an inability to continue in their profession because of different regulations in the host country, or for family reasons. Where they did work, they were not able to have equally high-status jobs. Hence, these respondents did not have such optimistic expectations for career progression after the period abroad as their (working expatriate) partners did. Their main expectation was to get back to the career they had before the assignment. A shared experience was that one partner had prioritized the career of the other for a few years (even though they too wanted the international life experiences for themselves and their family). These partners had been ready to facilitate the career development opportunities of their working partners even if the impact on themselves was not entirely positive. In such cases the family took decisions on expatriation and on repatriation together:

> For him, staying longer … would have required him to either leave the job or somehow to organize it so that he could work from Munich. … That was one of the main reasons that we came back. … It was a decision of the whole family. (Finnish female repatriate returning from Germany)

The literature notes that both repatriates and their partners must deal with significant cultural change while on assignment and come back to their home country as changed individuals (Kraimer et al., 2012; Suutari & Välimaa, 2002). The interviewees thus inevitably faced a few social issues. The native country, when seen through the new perspective acquired while on assignment, can lose its attractiveness, and some cultural aspects were critically reevaluated in the light of new experiences. Rebuilding social connections at home also takes some time:

> Finland is really a very closed society and it is not all that positive. … Finally, you get used to that again, but there is the whole process that you have to go through and adapt yourself to this new environment. (Finnish male repatriate returning from China)
>
> You have not seen these people for few years so it takes some time to reestablish your credibility, get to know them again, and to re-form connections. (Belgian repatriate returning from Russia)

Similarly, a few DCCs reported concerns with the integration of children back into domestic schools, although most saw no problems. One solution was to have the children continue in international schools:

> There was only a problem with my daughter's school. Kids bond with the place, and it was a bit painful for my daughter to change school. After a few months in public school we ended by changing to an international school. (Partner of a Polish repatriate returning from Finland)

While some adjustment challenges were reported in some cases, in the main, the view emerging of the repatriation adjustment of DCCs was far more positive than expected. The following section discusses the factors that may have facilitated this positive repatriation experience.

4.1 | Reasons behind successful repatriation adjustment experiences

The overall positive nature of repatriation seemed to be connected with the nature of the DCCs' experiences. Four main factors that facilitated adjustment to repatriation were identified: active self-management of the expatriation process, earlier experience of expatriation and repatriation, successful integration of work and family life, and the realization of dual-career interests upon repatriation. We discuss each in turn.

4.1.1 | Active self-management of the expatriation process

Our dual-career couples often reported meticulously planning their expatriation and repatriation processes and their careers as a whole. They had often negotiated shorter term assignments than were suggested by the company, declined to extend their stay abroad, or had not accepted earlier proposals that did not suit their DCC situation. The locations and timing of assignments were analyzed from the perspective of both partners' careers. In some cases, partners followed the expatriate later on when the timing suited their own career arrangements. When return happens after a predefined and relatively short time, it is not only easier for the repatriates, but it also helps to maintain a tighter link with the organization. This helps when making repatriation arrangements. The respondents described their planning orientation before leaving on assignment as follows:

> In a way, there are more problems to be solved when both of the people have careers. You need to think really deeply about your life and future, and consider how such decisions influence the many aspects of your life as a couple. (Male partner of a Polish repatriate returning from Switzerland)

> Overall, I need to say that the whole process of deciding to leave was very well thought through. (Polish partner of a repatriate returning from Ireland)

The relocation was typically undertaken at a time that suited the plans of both partners and the assignment was kept within the agreed time frame, even in the apparently frequent cases when employers offered extensions. The successful repatriation experience of dual-career couples may, in fact, be partly preprogrammed from the beginning of the assignment if there is good planning in place. Furthermore, and partly as a result, most of the observed dual-career expatriations were relatively short, between one and three years, and this fact eased repatriation, too. In some cases, the partner repatriated around six months before the expatriate to meet requirements relating to maintaining their career progress at home. Since DCCs need to integrate two careers, the opinions of both partners matter when the time comes to decide on repatriation. This additional demand to thoroughly discuss, align, and plan available options might lead to greater accountability for decisions, which was found to help with repatriation adjustment:

> For me, it was always very clear that I have a timeline during the assignment so it was always two or three years. … This gives me a positive pressure to carefully plan and direct my career. … In China, two years were a clear choice because my wife wanted to go back to work. (Finnish male repatriate returning from China)

4.1.2 | Earlier experience of expatriation and repatriation

It was very common for both partners of DCCs in our sample to be very internationally experienced. Their international orientation boosts the motivation and interest in making a move abroad and eases adjustment when there. Their early international orientation had often led the respondents to study or work abroad previously, and the respondents viewed the experience positively. Such experiences in turn lead to having more realistic expectations about life abroad in general, and about the demands and consequences of an international assignment specifically:

> I was an exchange student when I was like 17. I did one year in the USA and thereafter I had summer jobs in Sweden and in Germany, and then I went to study in Columbia University [in the United States]. … I got married and we lived in Finland. … (Finnish female repatriate returning from Germany)

> Straight after my studies I had a short six-month-long assignment in Holland and I loved it. I wanted to provide the same experience for my wife, and therefore when the opportunity came I was really enthusiastic about it. (Partner of a Polish repatriate returning from Switzerland)

These earlier experiences were remembered very positively as helping develop language skills, cross-cultural competences, and self-confidence. Prior experience naturally eased decision making on future expatriation and was seen to be very helpful on new rounds, both when going abroad and on repatriation:

> Expectations were more positive as we went for the second international assignment as a family. There was no fear of culture shock, no concerns about the kids going to school and those kind of worries. This was the positive enthusiasm that made it easier. … On repatriation, it was my second time now, so I know

> what awaits me. (Finnish male repatriate returning from China)
>
> I knew what to expect because I had been in Sweden before. Therefore, I knew what to expect, and so did my partner. (Polish repatriate returning from Finland)

The international orientation was also reflected in the couples wanting to offer their children or partner the opportunity to have an international experience. Its importance was emphasized by almost all DCCs with children:

> We looked at our children and wanted to give them a bit more of a global perspective, to give them a chance to see the world. (American repatriate returning from Finland)

Afterwards, the partners were usually very satisfied with the international experience of the whole family. Such positive orientations toward internationalization, earlier international experiences, and new positive experiences naturally helped the individuals and their family members with the repatriation process.

4.1.3 | Successful integration of work and family life

For DCCs, family issues demand careful consideration in terms of the career plans of both partners, especially female partners, since having children automatically involves at least a short career break for them. In addition, the need to devote more family time to raising children challenges the work–life balance of two career-oriented people, who might often work long hours or travel extensively for work. In our sample of international DCCs, it was common that the period of living abroad was planned to take account of the growth of the family. Families handled this either by postponing plans to move abroad or by adjusting the timing of having children. Owing to a new family situation, the career concerns of the female partner were less problematic than they might have been before children were involved, and the couple was able to maximize the benefits of the situation by focusing on family issues during expatriation.

> Going abroad we had plans to start a family. … When having children, at least in the beginning, a woman is out of an active career anyway. The fact that during the first year our son was born, and the twins later, were all connected to our plan. Later, there was a question of her professional career and how to continue that. (Polish repatriate returning from Finland)

Since expatriation is a temporary situation, repatriation offers the opportunity to plan daily family life again with a longer term perspective. Repatriates often saw that the new situation made it possible for them to start positive and engaging family projects such as building a new house or a summer cabin. As described above, many families had utilized the period abroad to have children, and so this changed the family situation and new housing arrangements were needed. Such family affairs were facilitated through the savings accumulated abroad, by one partner having a higher status job with the increased earnings than before, or perhaps by the fact that both dual-career partners started to earn again:

> People had told us that when you came back you may get bored. It was one of the reasons we decided to start building a new house … so we decided to have a big project that doesn't allow us to get bored. (American repatriate returning from Romania)

The months immediately after repatriation were thus filled with the realization of new possibilities and dreams that were not possible before the assignment or during it. These additional tasks, undertaken on top of already busy DCC schedules, further reduced opportunities to dwell on potential difficulties. This contrasts sharply with the situation of single-career expatriation, when the nonworking, trailing partner is engaged full time in organizing family and social life in the new place, having more time to notice and contemplate the difficulties of repatriation. Among our sample, almost all previously nonworking expatriate partners returned to work quickly when they got home; there was no time to think about problems. This supported the overall positive impression of the repatriation process.

4.1.4 | Realization of dual-career interests upon repatriation

Owing to the dual-career orientation of the family, it was very common for repatriation to be seen as a well-anticipated, positive situation, which made it possible once again for both partners to have a career. Job-related factors were therefore high on the agenda set for discussions on possible repatriation. Quite often, there were also opportunities for continuing the stay abroad, but the decision to repatriate was made mainly due to the career interests of the nonassigned partner, for whom repatriation represented an opportunity to recommence their career. Accordingly, repatriation was generally seen as something positive for most DCCs, which overshadowed any difficulties. Naturally, this was important, in particular for a partner, but also affected the shared experience of both partners. For example, expatriates were often aware that their partners were making a sacrifice in abandoning their career when moving abroad. In that sense, it was a relief to both partners to get back to life as it used to be as a dual-career couple.

> Living abroad was nice, but personally I need to have a job. … There are very clear ladders in my profession, lots of specialization and related exams. If you are out of it, you are losing everything. … I wanted to repatriate to go back to my job. I missed my work a lot. (Belgian partner of repatriate returning from Russia)
>
> It was difficult for her (to leave her job) because she was in a good place at work, but I think that as a couple it wasn't that hard because it was such a good career opportunity for me. … The decision to come back was actually a relief. (American repatriate returning from Finland)

In a few cases, the partners' careers progressed soon after repatriation, though typically such an outcome involved a change of

employer. The international perspective and increased feeling of self-confidence helps dual-career partners embark on new challenges and encourages the search for new, more, and more rewarding jobs. Sometimes they received new job offers:

> The repatriation process was really easy from my perspective. After coming back home, I have started to work. I still had my position in the old company, but I got an offer from a different company and accepted that. Now I work as a director in an IT company. For me, it was easy to get a new job. (Finnish female partner returning from China)

If the expatriate's partner has strong professional skills, they might have the option of self-employment, either before the assignment or during the expatriation, which can offer the partner a route to maintaining the engagement with his or her career while abroad. If the company was set up in the home country and work was organized at a distance, repatriation offered better opportunities for developing the business and thus added a positive motivation to the repatriation process.

> I am an architect/designer and I used to work for a construction company. … I wanted to be more independent, so I decided one day to open my own company. … I opened my company when we were abroad … and that continued after the return. (Polish female partner of repatriate returning from Finland)

For our assigned expatriates, repatriation made it possible to continue their careers back home, and consequently their assessment of their career situation was largely positive:

> This definitely progressed my career. … I was basically requested to come back to the United States to take over a division. That was a big promotion for me, and so coming back was a very positive experience. (American repatriate returning from Japan)
>
> It gave a certain boost when I got a promotion when I came back to Finland. (Finnish female repatriate returning from Germany)

When career concerns are central to DCCs, career success after the assignment reinforces the positive nature of the overall experience, supporting the view of the DCC partners that the efforts connected with moving abroad were worthwhile, which in turn helps manage the adjustment to repatriation. Future career progress was one goal, if not the main one, for living abroad.

5 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The present study aimed to improve our understanding of the largely neglected angle of dual-career couple repatriation. The findings indicated that the clear majority of respondents and couples reported a very smooth repatriation process. Our findings among dual-career couples thus clearly contrast with previous repatriation research, which builds a view of repatriation as a very challenging experience for repatriates (Haslberger, Brewster, & Hippler, 2012; Kraimer et al., 2012; Mäkelä & Suutari, 2013; Storti, 2003). Furthermore, it has previously been suggested (e.g., Haslberger, Brewster, & Hippler, 2012; Kierner, 2015; Linehan & Scullion, 2002) that DCCs can struggle with repatriation challenges even more than single-career expatriates. However, we found mainly positive experiences, and the few identified repatriation challenges were in line with earlier findings on repatriation (Kraimer et al., 2012; Sanchez-Vidal, Sanz Valle, & Barba Aragón, 2008; Suutari & Välimaa, 2002; Szkudlarek, 2010). Among career-oriented DCCs, it not surprising that some challenges appeared with regard to their work adjustment.

The main contribution of this article, therefore, relates to the unexpected positive repatriation experiences of the partners in DCCs, and in particular to the reasons for such positive experiences. Contrary to expectations, the specific features of a DCC seem to facilitate a smooth repatriation process. Four main themes explaining the positive nature of repatriation adjustment of international DCCs were identified in the present study.

The first factor identified as facilitating successful repatriation of international DCCs concerns their active self-management of the expatriation process. The need for individuals to manage their own career has been emphasized in career theory in line with the increasingly boundary less nature of careers (Andresen, Biemann, & Pattie, 2015). An outcome of professionals' protean career attitudes (see, e.g., Shaffer, Kraimer, Chen, & Bolino, 2012) is that individuals take responsibility for the management of their careers. The role of such attitudes and career-management activities is particularly important in the international career context. Our findings are that career-management activities seem to be very common among DCCs.

However, the reasons for such activity were mainly discussed in connection with the requirements for DCCs to plan their career moves in parallel, taking into account the similar concerns of their partner (Känsälä et al., 2015). It therefore seems that such career-management activities are not so much linked with individual-level protean attitudes as with the realities created by the dual-career situation. The existing research indicates that couples integrate their career interests through a range of career coordination strategies (Solga & Rusconi, 2007). In a hierarchical career strategy, one career is prioritized over the other in decision making (Baird & Reeves, 2011). Doing so might involve prioritizing the family aspect through the partners reducing or abandoning paid work, and abandoning their career path, at least temporarily. Alternatively, the partners might adopt an egalitarian strategy in which the careers of both partners are considered equally important (Solga & Rusconi, 2007). In the current research, the use of the hierarchical strategy was dominant. By accepting international mobility, the partners often have to accept the fact that it is beneficial for the career of one partner, but not for the other. In cases where expatriation was planned in such a way as to facilitate the working lives of both partners, a more egalitarian approach was evident. In line with the findings of Känsälä et al. (2015), some couples changed their coordination strategies during the process; that is, a couple initially prioritizing the expatriate's career might later prioritize the career of the partner when making decisions on repatriation.

The second main theme emerging from the interviews was connected with the earlier experience of the highly educated professional dual-career couples on expatriation and repatriation in the present sample. Such international experience reflects their international orientation (Cerdin & Pargneux, 2010; Suutari & Taka, 2004), which has been found to be common among experienced expatriates. For some, it has been an important aspect in their orientation from the early stages of their education and career, while among others it has developed through their first international experiences being positive, which has heightened the interest in an international career in the longer term (Suutari, 2003). We found that owing to their orientation, the DCCs also saw it as important that their children have such experiences. In particular, such an orientation meant that one or both partners had previous international experience and felt that they could clearly benefit from that during repatriation. This experience thus clearly facilitated a smooth repatriation process.

The third main factor concerned the successful integration of the work and family lives of international DCCs (Rusconi et al., 2013). We found that the planning of expatriation was often closely combined with family planning, which meant partners did not necessarily have additional breaks in their careers. This also affected their repatriation experiences when, for example, Finnish mothers have a legal right to stay on paid parental leave for nine months and then a further legal right to continue family leave for around two years and still keep their jobs. Accordingly, all the couples based in Finland who had very young children during the assignment could keep their jobs waiting for them, making repatriation far easier. The new family situation, in combination with an often improved financial situation, presented new positive opportunities for these DCCs to plan their new family life on repatriation.

The final factor contributing to the successful repatriation of DCCs was the realization dual-career interests upon repatriation. The discussion around the career impact of expatriation is often built on human capital theory, which predicts that developmental job experiences provide valuable learning that should have a positive impact on employees' long-term careers within and/or beyond their organizations (Kraimer, Shaffer, & Bolino, 2009). In the light of that theory, expatriation could be expected to have a positive impact on the careers of repatriates. However, there is a great deal of discussion in the literature over whether the theory holds true for expatriates, who can face problems getting back into the job market in their home countries. Because most multinational corporations do not have clear career-path strategies for repatriates, the anticipated career progress may not happen (Andreason & Kinneer, 2005). The research evidence is mixed, and most studies among repatriates have been carried out fairly soon after repatriation, and thus longer term career impacts may be more positive than reported (Suutari et al., 2017). In the present study, it appeared that among expatriate DCCs, repatriation was usually a positive experience. When expatriates found challenging and interesting jobs after the repatriation, it had a great impact on their overall adjustment to repatriation. This was particularly so among the kind of career-driven business professionals for whom developmental and career-related motivations were important factors influencing the original decision to go abroad. Overall, the employee taking up a suitable job after repatriation is the main determinant of the repatriate's satisfaction, and a key factor in their turnover intention (Lazarova & Cerdin, 2007; Sanchez-Vidal et al., 2007). For example, 86% of the variance in overall satisfaction with repatriation was accounted for by a single item measuring the impact of the assignment on the subjects' career (Gomez-Mejia & Balkin, 1987). The experiences of partners were at least as positive, although for slightly different reasons. The partners were keen to get back to their jobs and careers, and had thus overcome commonly shared frustrations and a feeling of stalled career progress often felt during an assignment (Kraimer et al., 2012). Accordingly, the generally shared view among our DCCs was that repatriation was a positive experience that went smoothly.

Our study also has some limitations that should be borne in mind when interpreting the findings. This is a qualitative study with a limited number of international DCCs; thus, future research with larger samples would help to validate the findings. Our sample was cross-cultural but still dominated by European couples; thus, more evidence would be needed from other institutional contexts to establish whether there are important cross-cultural differences in the situations of DCCs across countries. The presence of children may have a more convoluted impact on repatriation experiences than described in the article. Future research could establish in more detail the effect of the presence and age of children on the repatriation of DCCs in both the short and long term. It may be possible that children initially inhibit satisfaction due to school adjustment challenges, but later improve it as the benefits of acquiring broader perspectives and language skills become apparent as they continue their education in their home country, until finally that effect fades with time. Our sample primarily constituted couples with children, interviewed within one year of return; hence, such longer term effects could not be observed. The other relevant contingency factors may include length of assignment and the spouse's job situation during the expatriation assignment. In particular, it could be expected that if the spouse has a fully satisfying job during the international assignment, the positive effects of returning to a career upon repatriation may be diminished. Such situations are rare, however, at least in our sample, and thus we could not analyze this further. Overall, in order to be able to fully analyze the impact of such contingency factors, a larger sample would be needed. Finally, the expatriates in our sample of highly educated DCCs typically worked at the higher levels of their organizations (e.g., as managers or directors), and thus the findings might be have differed if we had interviewed different people, such as younger couples in the early stages of their careers; however, young people with less experience are rarely sent abroad by their employers.

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