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THE DEVELOPMENT OF CAREER CAPITAL THROUGH INTERNATIONAL CONSULTING WORK

A GERMAN CASE STUDY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT:

This study examines the influence of international consulting work on the development of consultant's' career capital. The career capital can be outlined considering the three dimensions Knowing-Why, Knowing-How and Knowing-Whom. International work promotes the development of these dimensions. The first objective of this study is to investigate influencing factors on the development of career capital of individual employees of the case company. The second objective of this study is to identify changes in work processes in international consulting work and the resulting altered influence on career capital development due to the emerging COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions on work activities accompanying it.

With the help of this study, it can be determined that international assignments include various drivers for the promoted and rapid development of career capital. All three components of career capital of the interviewed employees of the case company could be positively influenced by participating in international assignments in different project countries. The most important factors, which were essential for the development of all components, are the change of location and the cultural differences. These two factors entail further promoting effects for each element. They lead, for example, to a distinct corporate culture with accompanying communication and work atmosphere differences that affect Knowing-Why and Knowing-How and Knowing-Whom, respectively. These effects were greatly diminished by the severe restrictions on travel necessary to combat the pandemic successfully. For the development of career capital, personal exposure to cultural differences enabled by business travel is a crucial factor that cannot be replicated or replaced by the use of digital communication media. The use of digital media can lead to communication problems, for example, due to time zone differences, but the experience of international project work in 2020 shows that such work can be carried out successfully without business trips.

The results of this study can be used to complement existing studies in the area of career capital and international work, mainly because of its relation to the pandemic. A qualitative case study is conducted in the course of this, combining an explanatory and exploratory purpose and using an abductive approach. Eight qualitative interviews with global careerists were conducted in order to extend the existing theory with the collected interview results. With the help of the interviews, the normal project management processes prior to the onset of the pandemic will be examined in order to determine an effect of international project work on the development of the career capital. Then, the current procedures will be considered with the perceived changes in terms of career capital development due to the changes in the implementation of projects abroad in 2020.

KEYWORDS: career capital, expatriate assignments, global career, COVID-19, pandemic.

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Abbreviations

AEs	Assigned Expatriates
HR	Human Resource
IT	Information Technology
QA	Question and Answer
SIEs	Self-Initiated Expatriates
WHO	World Health Organisation

1 Introduction

The globalization of the business world creates worldwide competition between companies. This necessitates reactions within organizations with regard to the internationalization of numerous internal and organizational processes in order to keep up with the changing times. Changes in the labor market resulting from globalization create new challenges for human resources. (Baruch & Altman, 2002; Laurent, 1986; Porter, 1990) As a result of globalization, international assignments and expatriation are becoming increasingly important for companies. International projects enhance the success of companies and the professional development of employees. (Dickmann & Doherty, 2008; Dickmann & Harris, 2005; Inkson & Arthur, 2001) Working internationally hence is a crucial factor for both companies and individuals. The common interest to successfully participate in international projects leads to the internationalization and expansion of both parties' work and business scope. Companies can provide their employees with different options for working on international projects and tasks. These options include, among others, short- and long-term assignees, international business travelers and international commuters. These approaches differ in the length and regularity of business trips and stays abroad. (Mäkelä, Saarenpää, & McNulty, 2017) Consulting companies with international clients are also subject to the need to create suitable opportunities for employees with international tasks and projects. These can be business trips and stays of varying lengths in the respective project countries. (Curnow & Reuvid, 2005, p. 293)

Thus, the dynamic and global labor market creates a need for employees to have skills that are transferable to other companies in the same country and internationally. Participation in multiple international transfers, assignments and projects can provide a global career path for individuals that helps to create those kinds of skills. (Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007) All the skills and abilities acquired during a career can be summarized as career capital. It includes knowledge, competencies and expertise required in everyday working life. It also reflects both professional and individual characteristics that can create potential economic value for the company. (Baruch, 2006; Lamb & Sutherland,

2010) Accordingly, global business strategies include tasks that help to develop the career capital of their employees (Dickmann & Doherty, 2008; Dickmann & Harris, 2005; Inkson & Arthur, 2001) and provide sufficient opportunities to develop and enhance it, especially through global careers (Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007).

Today's globalization promotes international assignments, but the current pandemic is hampering their implementation (Caligiuri, De Cieri, Minbaeva, Verbeke, & Zimmermann, 2020). Although international assignments are highly beneficial for the accumulation of career capital (Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007), business trips and the interconnectedness of countries can lead to a simplified and faster spread of the COVID-19 virus (Caligiuri et al., 2020). This pandemic consequently impacts the labor market and eventually leads to changes in organizational processes. During this time, the solution to emerging problems appears to be the increased digitization of work processes to reduce losses due to travel restrictions and other complications. (Blum & Neumärker, 2020)

1.1 Justification of the Study

Research on organizational careers has traditionally aligned individuals, their values and interests with the requirements of the professional environment (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994). However, new challenges arise for human resources departments as the globalization of the business world impacts the labor market. Competition between companies now extends across the globe and demands global operations within companies. This influences economic and social factors and causes an increase in expatriation and repatriation traffic. (Baruch & Altman, 2002; Laurent, 1986; Porter, 1990) Considerable literature is available on the topics of selection, preparation and adaptation of expatriates. But also, performance abroad and repatriation are discussed extensively. (Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991; Fenwick, 2004a; Lazarova & Caligiuri, 2004; Sparrow, Brewster, & Chung, 2016, p. 129ff.; Takeuchi, Tesluk, Yun, & Lepak, 2005) The question of the significance of assignments abroad for career development is still not sufficiently resolved. Previous literature has not yet fully investigated the impact of

international project work on the development of career capital when considering other types of international business traveler than expatriates, who stay in the project country. These other types can be frequent flyers or commuters, for example. Another aspect, that needs more consideration regarding the development of career capital are certain situations that complicate the participation on international work, such as a pandemic. (Dickmann & Harris, 2005)

These considerations can be extended to the consulting industry, as they are also subject to changes due to the globalization of the labor market - technologies reach new standards, changed business models adapt to the fluidity of the labor market. The global competition between companies requires a worldwide presence to cope with the emerging challenges. It is therefore important for the success of the companies to adapt and respond to this trend. This includes the development of an international client base and the adaptation of the respective employees to the needs of these clients. Regular travel and visits to international clients are needed to provide the service of consulting and fulfillment of the needs of the clients. For this, consultants are needed whose set of skills is suitable for international projects and assignments. This skillset needs to be constantly and continuously revised. (Curnow & Reuvid, 2005, pp. 115, 293, 294, 304, 419, 469, 505, 506) This skillset can be understood as a part of the career capital of a consultant, working abroad in different types of international assignments and projects. Studies on the development of career capital of other international workers than expatriates are rare (Mäkelä et al., 2017).

To successfully work abroad, employees need to improve their career capital. The greatest opportunities to develop an individual's career capital are international assignments and experience because of their significant positive effect on developing and expanding career skills (Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007). The development of career capital significantly influences the professional success of a person and is therefore relevant in different phases of work and life. It can be stimulated by education and experience.

With the help of individual development of career capital, an employee can develop into a valuable and respected human resource. (Tempest & Coupland, 2017)

The COVID-19 pandemic, however, restricts the international assignments of employees (Blum & Neumärker, 2020) and, since career capital develops mainly through these assignments (Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007), the virus has most likely an impact on the accumulation of career capital. The final effect of COVID-19 on workers and their career capital remains to be seen, as the crisis is still in progress. To date, no studies on the impact of the restrictions because of this pandemic are available (Akkermans, Richardson, & Kraimer, 2020; Caligiuri et al., 2020)

1.2 Research Problem

The existing studies regarding the development of career capital through participation in international projects can be expanded by considering a specific perspective, focusing on consultants with cross-border projects and different types of international work. Thus, the assumption that international activity promotes the development of the career capital of a person can be verified in a specific context and, if necessary, even supplemented by further aspects. In particular, the lack of studies due to a current exceptional situation can shift the focus of the current trend of career capital.

For this reason, a case company that regularly sends its employees on foreign projects is considered. The first step is to examine whether and how international projects are conducive to the development of career capital is verified within certain circumstances. Furthermore, this study aims to add to the literature regarding the changes in career capital development during the COVID-19 pandemic. For this purpose and as a second step, the handling of international projects at the present time is investigated at the same case company to identify an effect of this new situation on the development of the career capital.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The two research questions posed are intended to cover both significant themes. Likewise, they are designed to fill the gap in the existing literature.

‘How do international assignments promote the development of the career capital of an international consultant within the case study?’

and

‘How does the COVID-19 pandemic affect the accumulation of career capital within the case study?’

Delimitations

To clarify the scope of this study, the delimitations of this study are presented. There are four main delimitations of relevance to the main topics of this study. The first delimitation of this study is the exclusive conducting of interviews with persons of one single company. (Greener, 2008, p. 42) Thus, no generally valid result can be found (Greener, 2008, pp. 42, 51); therefore, a comparison between the interview partners is aimed at. Germany is considered the base country for this study with regard to the development of the career capital of the interviewees due to projects in countries as Australia, Austria, Canada, Colombia, South Africa, Switzerland and the United States of America. All interviewees were able to gain experience abroad during their working time at the case company or during their studies or previous employer.

The second delimitation results from the fact that the company has its headquarters in Germany. Therefore, no conclusions can be drawn for companies with their headquarters in other countries.

Third, the industry of the case company is financial and risk management consulting. Accordingly, it is not possible to draw conclusions for other industries.

The last limitation refers to the method chosen to collect the data. With the help of semi-structured interviews, detailed information regarding the topic of this study ought to be obtained. With this information in combination with the integration of the literature, a deeper analysis can be achieved. This implies, however, that the results cannot be generalized but only be interpreted in certain circumstances. (Greener, 2008, pp. 69-70)

1.3 Definition of Key Concepts

In order to give this study a more comprehensive perspective, the following key concepts are defined. These definitions apply throughout the study. They are used to illustrate the basics so that an understanding of the subject matter is available.

Career Capital

Career capital can be described as a person's use of time, energy, skills and relationships in their professional life. There are three dimensions into which career capital can be divided: Knowing-Why, Knowing-How and Knowing-Whom. (Inkson & Arthur, 2001)

The Knowing-Why competence was originally derived by DeFillippi and Arthur (1994) from the corporate culture, which reflects the company's identity and is composed of values, interest and beliefs. Therefore, a person's Knowing-Why is strongly dependent on values, goals and interests, which are independent of the professional activity, and therefore follow from a person's identity. (Inkson & Arthur, 2001) It refers to a person's inner motivation in relation to their work (Arthur, Amundson, & Parker, 2002). The Knowing-How competence reflects knowledge, abilities and skills that an individual acquires in the course of the career and which are decisive for procedural processes in organizations (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994). According to Dickmann and Harris (2005),

Knowing-How competence consists of declarative knowledge, implicit experience, key qualifications and technical skills. The Knowing-Whom competence describes the access to an extensive network, which can be used to obtain information and advice for the progress of a professional career through communication with people inside and outside of companies. (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994; Dickmann & Harris, 2005). Colleagues, as well as friends, family members and acquaintances, provide information, support and other valuable services. (Arthur et al., 2002)

International Consulting Work

Consulting is characterized by the relationship and joint work of clients and consultants. The consultant plays the role of "expert" in a particular field. Multinational companies provide their employees with cross-border activities with international clients, which usually require transnational travel and relocation, and alternatively, the adaptation of working time to the respective local time. Travel participation is usually determined by the size and length of the project unless it is worked on completely remotely. For longer stays, the consultant is typically accompanied by family; hence, the shorter the stay, the less likely family members will travel with the consultant. In the case of commuters, who usually forgo a full stay with the client due to geographic proximity, the family usually stays in the home country. (Curnow & Reuvid, 2005, pp. 18,293-297) Accordingly, there are different types of international assignments of consultants. These can be long-term/expatriate assignments, which are generally characterized by the fact that the consultants are on-site for more than one year and are accompanied by the family. Furthermore, there are short-term assignments where the consultant lives in the project country for a certain period of time, but this period is usually shorter than one year. Some commuters visit the client on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. Finally, there are frequent flyers who do not relocate. The last two travel options, in particular, are used when there is geographic proximity. When not on-site, consultants usually adjust their working hours when working remotely. (Fenwick, 2004)

Assigned Expatriates (AEs)

The studies regarding the development of career capital are primarily based on expatriates' experiences and influences. Consultants cannot always be explicitly described as expatriates, yet they are always sent by their own companies, hence the definition of AEs to which this study refers:

An expatriate is usually the specialist or manager of a company on a temporary or permanent assignment abroad. The expatriate moves to a foreign country and shifts the center of his life to work there. However, there is the intention to go back to the home country after the completion of the international assignment. (Przytuła, 2017) Expatriates are traditionally sent by a company. They receive assistance in the form of job security, financial and organizational support to successfully work on expatriate assignments. Self-initiated expatriates (SIEs), on the other hand, go on their own initiative to work abroad. (Dickmann, Suutari, Brewster, Mäkelä, Tanskanen, & Tornikoski, 2018) When the assignments last longer than twelve months, the expatriate is usually accompanied by their family, if wanted (Shaffer, Kraimer, Chen, & Bolino, 2012, p. 1286).

Pandemic

An influenza pandemic is unpredictable and occurs when influenza viruses spread worldwide and most people are not immune. In most cases, a pandemic has a negative impact on health, the economy and social and global security. (Heath, 2011; Qiu, Ruthford, Mao, & Chu, 2017; World Health Organization, 2009)

1.4 Structure of this Study

In the first chapter, the literature is reviewed with to career capital, its dimensions and the theoretically expected effect of the pandemic on its development. The third chapter addresses the methodology of this study. It first presents the research purpose,

approach and strategy. Next, the data collection and analysis are described. The quality criteria of qualitative studies (reliability, validity) and the ethics of this research are explained thereafter. The fourth chapter describes the findings of the study. Finally, the last chapter summarizes the findings and compares the findings with the theory, considers limitations and provides an outlook for future research.

2 Literature Review

Globalization demands flexibility and agility from companies, resulting in challenging international assignments for employees. International work is not only considered positive for the success of the company, but also for the individual and career development of the employees. (Dickmann & Doherty, 2008; Dickmann & Harris, 2005; Inkson & Arthur, 2001) Career management, which is nowadays mostly carried out by the individual, is characterized by a lifelong sequence of experiences, skills, acquisition, learning processes, changes and self-transformation. These individual aspects can be summarized as career capital and its considerations in today's dynamic and global world have rapidly gained importance. (Mayrhofer, Iellatchitch, Meyer, Steyrer, Schiffinger, & Strunk, 2004)

To promote the development of the career capital of employees, companies must provide challenging tasks, development opportunities and access to resources. Career capital and its development are personal, dependent on relationships and built on ongoing training. (Mayrhofer et al., 2004) Consulting firms implement this by offering different ways of serving the needs of international clients. To do this, consultants work either on-site or remotely, or a combination of both. Depending on the project, the consultants can use, adapt and expand their competencies to satisfy the needs and demands of the clients and thus enable project success. (Curnow & Reuvid, 2005, pp. 79, 419, 469) Global business strategies focus on development tasks for talented individuals and the resulting growth of their career capital, as this also has an impact on the company's success. (Dickmann & Doherty, 2008; Dickmann & Harris, 2005; Inkson & Arthur, 2001)

2.1 Career Capital

The career capital of an individual can be summarized as the entirety of all professional skills of a person. This includes all skills and knowledge that contribute to everyday working life, but also individual personality traits are essential for career capital if they can create potential economic value for companies. Women and men use career capi-

tal to achieve personal and professional goals and support the further development of existing career capital. Advantages in the workplace can be generated through the targeted use of one's own individual skills and open up opportunities and paths to self-realization. (Baruch, 2006; Lamb & Sutherland, 2010) Sutherland, Naidu, Seabela, Cros-son and Nyembe (2015) describe career capital as a good that is traded across and inside organizations and impacts human resource managers and workers. In the study by Inkson and Arthur (2001), career capital is seen as an investment in companies made by individuals. These investments include time, energy, skills and relationships related to the job and the company and are made on the assumption and expectation of accumulation and expansion. (Inkson & Arthur, 2001)

To define the issue of career capital DeFillippi and Arthur (1994) consider career competencies. In the course of a more detailed understanding of career capital, three dimensions were established. These dimensions are Knowing-Why, Knowing-How and Knowing-Whom and serve to reduce the complexity. (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994) By Knowing-Why, the authors include the beliefs and identities of individuals, while skills and knowledge are subsumed under Knowing-How. Knowing-Whom typifies social networks, contacts and relationships. (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994)

DeFillippi and Arthur (1994) describe the importance of career capital, addressing both individual competencies and the interdependence between them (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994). Jobs, projects and changes in the professional context influence and increase at least one component of the career capital. However, the interdependence of the individual elements means that, ultimately, every occupational change affects all three components. (Inkson & Arthur, 2001)

The career capital established and described by the career competencies is furthermore considered from two additional perspectives, from the perspective of the companies and the individuals. Companies can gain competitive advantages by increasing the career capital of their employees. These advantages can be generated by improving

the corporate culture, enlarging networks and expanding knowledge. (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994) The same benefits are then available to individuals for their personal and individual use. The form and development of the individual professional components influence the inclination of the individual. These propensities lead the individual to change professional attitudes, either intentionally or voluntarily, to pursue a career that the individual would subjectively describe as successful. (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994)

The creation and improvement of the benefits are conditioned by the career concepts of the individual. On the one hand, the development of the company-specific competencies corporate culture, knowledge and networks depend on further developing the employees' career capital. On the other hand, the employee can apply his capital in different work contexts and different ways. Therefore, the workers choose as an employer the company that values the individual competencies most and where the best development of skills can be facilitated. (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994)

2.1.1 Knowing-Why

Knowing-Why competence in working life is an intrinsic and individual matter, characterized by personal wishes, preferences, needs and abilities (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994). Inkson and Arthur (2001) define Knowing-Why as determination, perseverance, motivation and identification with the work that the individual brings to his or her own career, thus serving as one of the most critical positions in the professional career (Inkson & Arthur, 2001).

A core aspect of Knowing-Why competence is self-reflection, which allows, among other things, the identification of one's own strengths, weaknesses and interests. It also shapes a clear picture of realistic career expectations and other specific aspects. (Eby, Butts, & Lockwood, 2003) By building Knowing-Why capital, a certain passion for the work is created, through which commitment to learning and a desired performance is built. (Dickmann & Harris, 2005) The Knowing-Why section answers the question of driving force, individual motive and identification in relation to the choice of work and

industry. The culture of a company is thus made up of the employees' values, beliefs and identities. (Barney, 1986; DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994)

The values, goals and interests of the individual have a strong influence on the professional career. The awareness of the motivation behind the respective professional activity helps to form a clear vision and idea regarding future career development. But as the influence also extends to private life and decisions, the competence is based on the individual's identity. (Lamb & Sutherland, 2010) Thus, there is a close connection between personal identity and professional motivation. The Knowing-Whys of a person consequently influences the personal significance of the individual's career and the resulting identity in the professional context. (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994) However, personal aspects such as personality and character also contribute to work motivation. This includes the influence on the family situation. Especially with regard to the partner and the family, decisions, e.g., regarding total working hours, flexibility and place of work, are decisive for the personal work morale and motivation. (Arthur et al., 2002)

Changes in the professional context, for example, experiences abroad, strongly influence self-confidence and self-understanding as well as the knowledge of one's own goals (Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007). New life situations lead in the course of time to a change of the Knowing-Why-competences because identity and self-perception adapt continuously to new external circumstances (Dickmann & Harris, 2005; Inkson & Arthur, 2001; Lamb & Sutherland, 2010). International assignments enable a clearer formation of values and identity and a better self-reflection of one's own strengths and weaknesses. This leads to increased self-confidence with a renewed clear focus on professional interests and goals. However, these developments can also be attributed to the higher age and generally increased maturity of individuals and are not only the result of international experience. (Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007)

2.1.2 Knowing-How

DeFillippi and Arthur (1994) as well as Inkson and Arthur (2001) define Knowing-How skills as assets that are acquired and accumulated through work experience. This includes abilities, expertise, tricks and techniques that develop throughout a career. Dickmann and Harris (2005) distinguish Knowing-How competencies into declarative knowledge, implicit experience, key qualifications and technical skills. Inkson and Arthur (2001) state that Knowing-How skills can be of a technical, interpersonal, or conceptual nature. In addition, the competencies differ in whether they are company-specific or can be adapted to other external companies. (Inkson & Arthur, 2001)

DeFillippi and Arthur (1994) suggest that Knowing-How skills can be assessed and developed concerning work tasks and employment. It is thus possible to determine the degree of specialization. (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994) Knowing-How competencies are described by Inkson and Arthur (2001) both as narrow competencies, which relate to the production and administration of a single company and as broader competencies, which require an understanding of market requirements and structures in order to enable broader applicability within an industry. The changes in industries require the adaptation and concentration of Knowing-How competencies to new, growing opportunities. (Inkson & Arthur, 2001)

In contrast to the other two career capital competencies, job advertisements and potential development opportunities of a company can describe the know-how skills of its employees in detail. The activities for achieving and exploiting development opportunities represent an interplay of the required Knowing-How competencies that an individual is required to hold. (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994) The skills and expertise relied upon at work is explicit knowledge that can be described in detail, but it is also tacit knowledge that is difficult to describe but is found especially in different types of eligible workers (Arthur et al., 2002).

As a company can clearly describe the required know-how skills, this career capital competence is crucial for internal processes. For the employees, a high level of Knowing-How competence is beneficial. It strengthens the negotiating position, especially if the knowledge and existing skills are transferable to other companies, industries and countries. Looking at the specific abilities of an employee, the Knowing-How competence can be so diverse that the goal of using and developing unique and hidden abilities can be a stimulus for reorientation in the professional career. (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994)

According to DeFillippi and Arthur (1994), companies, on the other hand, focus on those knowledge competencies which they can use and develop in the work context in order to generate essential competitive advantages over their competitors in the labor market. Therefore, it is essential to implement personnel practices that support the company's strategies to ensure long-term alignment of employees' competencies with the expectations and wishes of the company. In this context, a deterioration of the skills previously acquired by the employee prior to his or her employment with the company is possible, as these skills are not desired by the company and are therefore neglected in the development of skills. (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994)

2.1.3 Knowing-Whom

The third factor in defining career capital is Knowing-Whom competence. This competence describes the access to a broad network, which possibly provides information and support for the further course of the career. (Dickmann & Harris, 2005) DeFillippi and Arthur (1994) describe the Knowing-Whom competence as a career network. It enables people from different companies to communicate. Inkson and Arthur (2001) define Knowing-Whom capital as the social network of an individual and emphasize the importance of maintaining and expanding it.

Dickmann and Harris (2005), as well as Suutari and Mäkelä (2007), notice a correspondence between the social capital proposed by Bordieu (1986) and the Knowing-

Whom of career capital. Bourdieu (1986) describes social capital as relationships that exist both inside and outside organizations. This network of relationships can serve as a resource and have relevance for a career, provided that a person participates in this network permanently. (Bourdieu, 1986) Suutari and Mäkelä (2007) describe the importance of networks created through professional activities and developed through the use of social capital. Significantly international activities increase the Knowing-Whom capital, as more action and initiative are required. With international assignments, individuals are offered the opportunity to build and expand a more extensive external and internal business network and their social network. (Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007)

By extending and maintaining the network, advantages can be achieved. Throughout the career, different relationships can be established and various benefits can be obtained from them. These include ties and relationships, but also reputation, sources of information and mutual obligations. In the work environment, this means that superiors, colleagues, and subordinates constitute a large part of the Knowing-Whom capital. But contacts to customers, suppliers, consultants of the company and connections to external experts join the network, which is established in a business context. (Inkson & Arthur, 2001) By cultivating the contacts, the network relationships established remain mostly employer- or industry-independent. Changing jobs can be simplified by the existing relationships. These are not exclusively working contacts. Private or family relationships also influence the Knowing-Whom capital of an individual. (Inkson & Arthur, 2001) However, Pfeffer (1989) emphasizes in this context that work-related networks are more likely to contain career-relevant information and thus can be used as a resource for the employee's career. Companies themselves use access to the network comparatively less since less employer-relevant information is shared. (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994; Pfeffer, 1989)

Nevertheless, in line with other authors and with reference to the competencies, DeFillippi and Arthur (1994) identify three main benefits generated by networking activities

from the company's perspective. The first advantage is that the expertise of other companies can be accessed through networks and be utilized as a resource. (Reed & DeFillippi, 1990) Another advantage of the network is a kind of memory for the reputation and image of a company. If the reputation and image have positive connotations, it can be conducive to forming new business relationships and new joint activities. (Lado, Boyd, & Wright, 1992) Lastly, sharing information and knowledge within the network can create learning effects. These learning effects can bring decisive advantages in competition with other companies. (Powell, Staw, & Cummings, 1990) Therefore, DeFillippi and Arthur (1994) conclude that companies depend on the networking activities of their employees to reap the benefits. (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994)

2.1.4 Importance of Career Capital Accumulation

Career capital has a significant influence on the course and success of an individual's career. On the surface, it seems that career capitalists focus on their own interests and goals, independent of companies and other market participants. There is, for example, the desire for a better salary, more recognition and a sense of achievement. The main focus is on the long-term goals of the individual, which are consistently prioritized over the interests of the employer. This suggests that careers are the property of the individual, not the company, and are therefore motivated by self-interest. Thus, companies do not define the careers of their employees, but the company is shaped by them and their career capital. (Inkson & Arthur, 2001)

This is why career capital is of great importance in every different phase of the work and life of the individual. A key aspect in this topic is the growth of career capital, which is influenced and supported by education and experience. Especially the ability to seize opportunities enables the development and growth of career capital. (Inkson & Arthur, 2001; Tempest & Coupland, 2017) Improvisation and the accumulation of career capital facilitate the successful and more effective use and exploitation of unforeseen new opportunities. Investment in career capital from one area can positively affect unexpected other areas, thus yielding dividends for people and the economy. (Ink-

son & Arthur, 2001) Dickmann and Harris (2005) as well as Tempest and Coupland (2017) emphasize that early initiation of the accumulation of career capital is beneficial. However, not every project or job inevitably leads to an accumulation of career capital. The tasks, projects and jobs must be actively chosen in a supportive way to contribute to the accumulation of career capital. (Inkson & Arthur, 2001)

Looking at the accumulation of career capital from an individualistic perspective and reflecting on the connection between all three career capital competencies, three aspects can be observed: the advantages of the active and conscious acquisition of transferable skills, the development of networks and the identification of the individual motivation of the actors in a work-specific context (Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007). At best, the focus of individuals should be on skills that are flexible, applicable and useful. This can generate transferability to different industries, which in turn opens up different career paths. (Dickmann & Harris, 2005) Inkson and Arthur (2001) compare the accumulation of career capital with investments in financial capital to increase the emphasis on the individual's own will to increase career capital. The development of one's own career capital is a personal contribution, it must be reinvested, needs change and, if necessary, readjust. In this way, the different sectors of a country benefit, whether they are businesses, industries or economies. (Inkson & Arthur, 2001)

Inkson and Arthur (2001) explain additionally that the most important good in the economy is knowledge. The knowledge that is not easily accessible or will be scarce in the future brings the greatest benefits. The accumulation of knowledge from different sources and the resulting expansion and improvement of skills is indispensable. Individuals, therefore, consider jobs that best increase the accumulation of capital and expertise. These serve as training opportunities and individualize the abilities and skills. Over time, employees' capital investments become unique selling points, making them valuable to employers and industries. (Inkson & Arthur, 2001)

Inkson and Arthur (2001) emphasize that the career capitalists have significantly advanced the success of the respective companies. However, this would not have been possible without the ambition and determination of individuals. Thus, the authors suggest that career capitalists achieve more through their extra contribution, which was not expected and planned by the companies, than employees who always remain in their position and area of responsibility. The distribution of the work, ideas, and innovations of career capitalists in different companies leads to the industry's progress and an effective accumulation of knowledge shared with different companies. (Inkson & Arthur, 2001) Seizing the opportunity to work with different individuals and companies to share knowledge and experiences, but also to expand their own knowledge, is a core task of consultants. The dissemination of knowledge and information is beneficial for both companies and individuals. (Curnow & Reuvid, 2005, pp. 18, 19)

Spender (1989, p. 44) points out that people with previous experience of working for other companies are already integrated into the industry and are socialized accordingly. In addition, the people have developed skills through their work that they can transfer to the new company. Consequently, there are existing Knowing-Why and Knowing-How competencies from which companies can profit. By hiring already experienced employees, companies can thus save costs for retraining and benefit from the industry experience of these employees (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994).

The sole focus on technical skills and management qualities, which was previously placed by companies, no longer corresponds to the current needs of the economy and the interests of the parties. (Inkson & Arthur, 2001) Inkson and Arthur (2001) note that in the traditional planning of their employees' careers, companies fail to consider important aspects such as the incorporation of new industry knowledge. As a result, the possible enrichment of companies and host industries by investing in career capital is being neglected. This influences the overlooking of the transferability of accumulated career capital to another position. The accumulation of career capital thus brings economic benefits within the profession, within a sector but also across sectors. (Inkson &

Arthur, 2001) DeFillippi and Arthur (1994) assess that people aiming at enhancing their career opportunities outside of their current employment tend to encounter a greater variety of opportunities. Employee mobility and flexibility make it easier and more cost-effective to transfer industry-specific knowledge, values and beliefs between companies. This concerns both, direct professional knowledge and sector-specific wide-ranging know-how. (Spender, 1989, pp. 44, 169, 172-173) Consequently, a common interest exists in the development of the individual's career capital. For the individual, career capital has a decisive influence on personal and professional success, while companies benefit significantly from successful employees, making their accumulation of career capital relevant to the company. (Inkson & Arthur, 2001)

Baruch (2006) as well as Lamb and Sutherland (2010) find that economic reasons make companies take an interest in the professional goals and career capital development of employees. By using the capital generated by employees, companies and organizations can create competitive advantages. From this, it can be concluded that global companies see a key task in the creation of organizational processes with the focus on the promotion of career capital. This can be achieved by, among other things, facilitating global careers, since international project work and international assignments of employees not only contribute to individual careers by creating global competencies in professional careers but also have a positive impact on companies. (Baruch, 2006; Lamb & Sutherland, 2010) The strategic development to a valuable and respected human resource has become even more important through the digital age and an adjustment of organizational processes to accumulate career capital is demanded (Tempest & Coupland, 2017). These aspects also apply to the consulting industry. The respective companies benefit from the internationalization of internal processes and normal development and adaption of the skills of their employees to the demands of clients around the world. (Curnow & Reuvid, 2005, p. 79)

2.2 Drivers for Career Capital Development in the Context of Global Careers

There are numerous studies dealing with the development of career capital. Expatriates and their international assignments are often the subject of these studies. The large number of these studies illustrates the current relevance of the topic in today's globalized labor market. (Lamb & Sutherland, 2010) An awareness of typical career capital-related characteristics, drivers and outcomes for career capital expansion is necessary to clarify an understanding of global careers and their importance. The globalization of the economy means that the careers of these executives today include different international positions and tasks due to current circumstances and therefore research has to concentrate on this aspect accordingly. (Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007) There are many different ways to work internationally. Among others, there are long-term and short-term assignments, which are particularly suitable for noticing the cultural differences in private and working life due to the permanent stay of a person for a certain period of time. However, international business travelers, frequent flyers and commuters, for example, are also exposed to cultural differences, ways of working and other unfamiliar behaviors, even if they only stay temporarily or not continuously in the other countries. Nevertheless, successful interaction with people and colleagues or clients from other countries is essential to execute the project satisfactorily. Due to the lack of literature related to the development of career capital of individuals who are not expatriates, these groups of individuals will continue to be included in the following literary review. (Mäkelä et al., 2017)

International assignments are crucial for the development and improvement of both general management and global competencies. In detail, these improvements include further development of change management, cross-cultural competencies and a deeper and more comprehensive insight into the international business context and the demands of foreign clients. (Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007) The development of individuals' general and international management skills is significantly enhanced by the length and intensity of the foreign assignments. Based on this conclusion, the necessary skills

for both domestic and foreign positions can be acquired through international work. (Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007) International work experience enables the development of an awareness of existing and expandable career capital. Experiences abroad are highly profitable for the accumulation of career capital. Following challenging positions and business environments developed into desired challenges. (Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007)

The individual career capital determines the career progression of a career; therefore, personal perceived satisfaction regarding one's career progression is related to career capital endowment. Consequently, the skills and competencies of a worker are individualized since the accumulation of skills, personal stories, experiences and resulting decisions are crucial for the individual inclination of a person. (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994)

2.2.1 General Drivers for the Development of Career Capital

The preceding text indicates that career capital has several facets; hence the focus should not be on just one area due to the connections between the individual components. The use of the already existing career capital is one of the most important characteristics for its development. New ambitions, new skills and new contacts are to be created. Career capital includes everything that can be brought into the professional career and, through active use, leads to the three types of capital increasing. (Inkson & Arthur, 2001)

Drivers for Knowing-Why and Knowing-How seem to be identical. In both cases, the nature of the international environment and intercultural differences are among the most important drivers. But also, the wide range of responsibilities and a high degree of autonomy lead to an increase in self-confidence and job-related importance, for example, in Knowing-Why competence. The diverse international experiences resulted in an improvement of the Knowing-How competencies of managers where the extent of responsibility and the associated high degree of autonomy play a decisive role. In terms of increasing Knowing-Whom capital, the authors identified the number of international moves, the degree of responsibility and personal activity in networking as

the most important drivers. This leads to an enlargement of the contact network, which can influence not only the current but also future careers. (Dickmann & Doherty, 2010; Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007)

All three competencies are affected by globalization and changes in the labor market. Due to different changes and developments, the traditional identification of people with their profession, i.e., the Knowing-Why-competence, is shifting. Technological change, professional experiences and learning groups that are used in connection with certain professional problems continuously influence people's identification with their profession. The skills and abilities of employees, i.e., the know-how competence, are improved and sharpened by changing tasks, growing responsibilities and challenges, as well as professional obligations. It also increases the transferability of skills to new industries or employers while at the same time increasing personal responsibility for core competencies and the resulting irreplaceability of the employee within a company. In this way, professional communities are created which can be characterized by the competencies that develop through work. These groups represent a source of solutions for the problem solving of the individual. In addition, they also serve as a supportive force for possible job changes or other steps on the career ladder, thus expanding the Knowing-Whom competencies. (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994)

An important driving force for the development of career capital is the breadth of responsibilities typically associated with international work experience. This driver influences each component of the career capital characteristics. Different aspects of the breadth of responsibility are identified as being conducive to development, whereby broad experience based on different jobs, functions and business processes could be attested. It is pointed out that an international context with far-reaching responsibilities is advantageous in terms of development policy, but the nature and diversity of the tasks were also decisive. While global careers not only provide access to more demanding tasks and positions at a higher organizational level, the importance of international

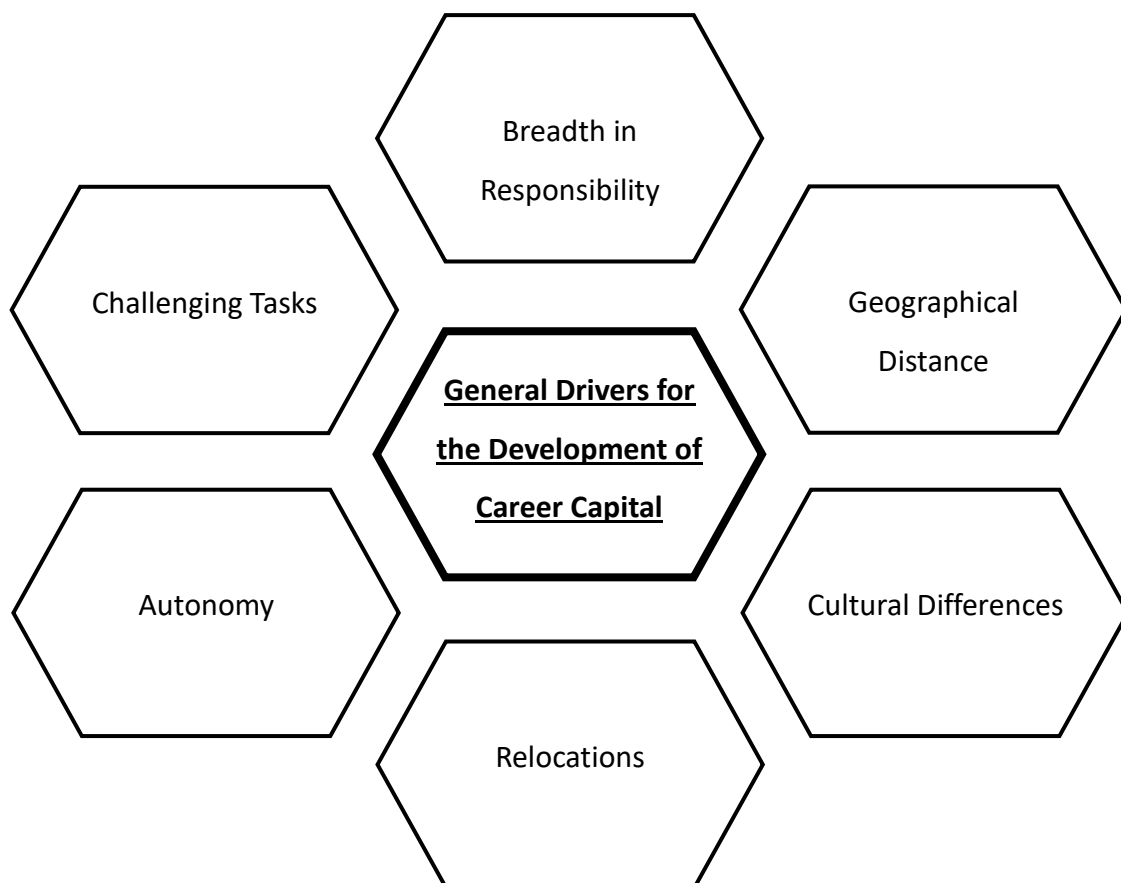
tasks and positions can also be illustrated by comparing them with national careers. (Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007)

Inkson and Arthur (2001) as well as Suutari and Mäkelä (2007) address challenging tasks in new environments as another driving force for the development of career capital. Inkson and Arthur (2001) recommend combining the resulting unfamiliar situations with new approaches and using this as an opportunity for personal growth and learning. This results in an individual and unconventional use of career capital, bringing changes for the individual and the company. Through active target communication with other employees and managers, a creative and novel use of one's own career capital can lead to the successful completion of projects. Even if a project fails, the investment in capital is an enrichment and is appreciated by those involved and bystanders. (Inkson & Arthur, 2001) Suutari and Mäkelä (2007) emphasize the increased challenges and risk factors and the resulting promotion of self-confidence and trust in one's own abilities and skills, as unexpected problems without predetermined solutions occur in other countries. This opens up a clearer picture of one's own strengths and weaknesses and leads to a form of self-assessment in management decisions. (Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007) The goal of improving one's own strengths and developing a range of skills and characteristics in need of improvement is also taken up by Inkson and Arthur (2001). The authors emphasize that the goal should always be to improve overall performance. This means not only one's own improvement but also active participation in the improvement of employees and other active people in working life yielding in an increased performance of the company. (Inkson & Arthur, 2001)

Further vital factors that serve as driving forces are autonomy and geographical distance, which additionally result in industrial affiliation. A certain industry affiliation can be obtained through relocations and international positions. The authors, however, focus on the assumption that identification with an industry leads to investments in knowledge and skills by career capitalists, which in turn can offer added value to clients in that industry. This leads to the uprising of the industry and its associated companies.

The companies as actors of the individual industry benefit from their dedicated employees and can therefore cooperate more successfully with other actors of the industry and compete or coexist with them. From an economic point of view, the maintenance and development of industries is more important than the future of an individual company, making the identification of individuals with the industry even more important. (Inkson & Arthur, 2001)

Picture 1 summarizes the above-mentioned general drivers in an overview. These drivers are possible supporters of the development of all competencies of the career capital of a person. These six drivers are naturally not the only drivers that lead to the further development of the career capital, but they are often mentioned in the previous literature. Therefore, it seems that the drivers are quite often influential and have proven to be effective.



Picture 1. General Drivers for the Development of Career Capital

2.2.2 Drivers for each Dimension of Career Capital

Despite the interconnectedness of the individual factors of the career capital, Suutari and Mäkelä (2007) look at the individual competencies of career capital in order to identify drivers for the accumulation of career capital. Based on the results of their study, they find that career capital is influenced and increased by work experience abroad. All three career skills are enhanced by different drivers and by the global career created by working abroad, leading to a strong career identity of managers. (Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007)

First of all, the career capital competence Knowing-Why is considered. International assignments, in particular, are characterized by new challenges, more responsibility and different prioritization. The accomplishment of these tasks leads to an increase in Knowing-Why competencies by increasing self-confidence and self-esteem and by making one more aware of the goals and ideas regarding the further course of the career. Likewise, an awareness of one's own market value is created, which increases further through international activities. (Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007)

The increased self-confidence and belief, as well as the increased awareness of personal strengths and weaknesses, allow a clearer view of work-related values, thus clarifying career-related preferences and motives. These developments only occur with international experience, as employees are tested in a new, possibly more challenging environment and less external help can be given to the employee due to geographical distance. (Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007)

International assignments might also be inclined with cultural differences, which led the individuals to regularly reconsider the reasons for their actions and reactions (Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007). By questioning own beliefs and exercising as well as promoting self-reflection, personal skills and competencies can be further improved. By creating an awareness of critical self-assessment, an individual career path can be pursued. (Dickmann & Harris, 2005)

International projects and tasks open up challenges and opportunities that are not available in the home country. These opportunities include the perception of the organizational culture and the reputation of a global company. Combined with active coaching and discussions about opportunities in an international context, this can provide a new picture of the career path. A global mindset emerges, which can modify the original Knowing-Why competencies. (Dickmann & Harris, 2005)

Figure 1 summarizes the drivers for the development of the Knowing-Why of the career capital just enumerated in a list and presents them alongside the effects.

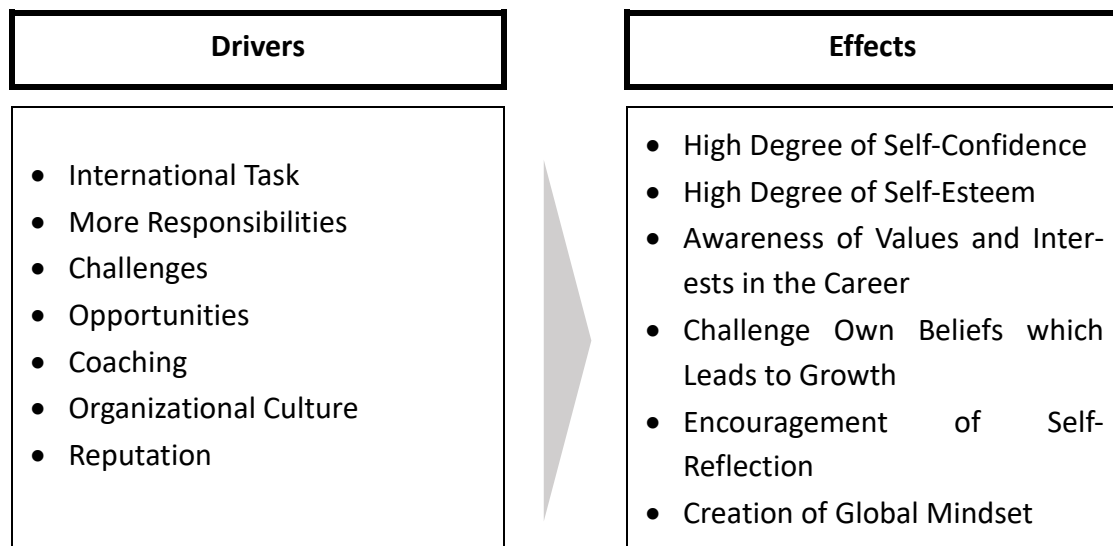


Figure 1. Drivers for Knowing-Why Development and their Effects

Secondly, the change of Knowing-How competencies is considered. Through international assignments, new opportunities and new challenges in new contexts arise, which enables the development of skills through new approaches. It, therefore, leads to diversification as well as specialization of Knowing-How skills. (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994)

Active participation in international projects and job rotations often enables participation in training courses to develop existing and new skills in order to cope with daily tasks in line with expectations. Significant learning effects are brought about by on-the-

job experiences, whereas the examination of new and more comprehensive areas of responsibility produces substantial effects. (Dickmann & Harris, 2005) The successful use of improvisation helps to cope with emerging challenges. In this way, the employee's work ability and resilience can be maintained and correspond to the rapid changes in the workplace. (Inkson & Arthur, 2001) This can also be achieved by adapting the working behavior of other employees in the new company (Dickmann & Harris, 2005).

In order to increase the employee's self-confidence and expand and deepen the skillset, it is beneficial to give the employees a general understanding of the business and the industry. Exposure to new and broader work-related issues requires an adequate reaction and handling. (Dickmann & Harris, 2005) Actively creating these challenging situations and taking advantage of these opportunities can be beneficial for the further development of individual skills. Individuals can thus benefit from it at an early stage. (Inkson & Arthur, 2001)

Figure 2 shows the drivers for the development of the Knowing-How competence and the resulting effects.

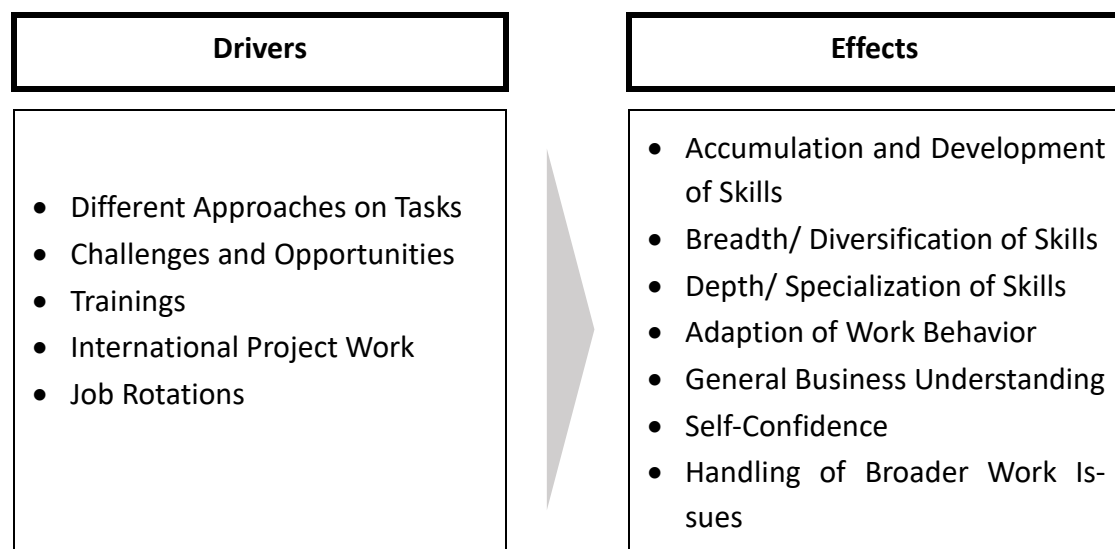


Figure 2. Drivers for Knowing-How Development and their Effects

Third and lastly, the Knowing-Whom competence is examined. By relocating, the employee enters a new geographical, cultural, professional and social environment. The development of an extended network is almost inevitable. This leads to the advancement of intercultural skills. The international network also offers responsiveness and support of the employees within the network in terms of jobs, tasks, questions and ideas. The Knowing-Whom competence is thus enhanced by feedback, inspiration, information and advice. (Dickmann & Doherty, 2010; Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007)

International positions are characterized by a distinct degree of autonomy. This can usually be attributed to the geographical distance of the company headquarters as well as to the comparatively small size of the foreign representative offices. (Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007) With the help of an assigned mentor, support can be provided. A person in this position can not only facilitate the working life by providing information and assistance, but can also build connections to other people through established contacts and skills. (Dickmann & Harris, 2005)

The development of Knowing-Whom capital has an impact on the course of an individual's global career. Making international contacts through cross-border experiences can be of particular benefit. These contacts have been a characteristic feature of the Knowing-Whom capital in global careers, as such contacts increase the size of the network considerably and contain information about job vacancies, projects and ideas. (Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007)

International moves typically involve a large number of different contacts in different countries. These contacts can serve different functions. Social networks are a more informal factor, which includes, among other things, friendship as well as more informal professional relationships. Informal professional networks have experts in a particular field, expatriate networks as well as national CEO panels. However, the structure of social networks is dependent on each individual and their personal networking activi-

ties. Regardless of this, respondents' networks grew as a result of moving to other countries. (Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007)

Going abroad can, however, also been seen as a challenge in terms of caring for established networks. This means that working in an international context can mean that the Knowing-Whom capital decreases. Even though the individual gets in contact with new people in new contexts but former ties may be dissolved because of the new distance and lack of personal contact. (Dickmann & Doherty, 2010) Going abroad can lead to the creation of negative ties. As the integration into new networks, which can be built during working abroad, negative ties can also be created and influence the experiences in an international context. Negative ties can be, for example, relationships that lead to conflicts because of different cultural backgrounds of individuals. However, the handling of negative ties also strengthens the individual and leads to a growth in personal character. (Granovetter, 1973; Labianca, 2014)

To ensure clarity of the drivers just mentioned for the Knowing-How, Figure 3 presents both the drivers and the resulting effects.

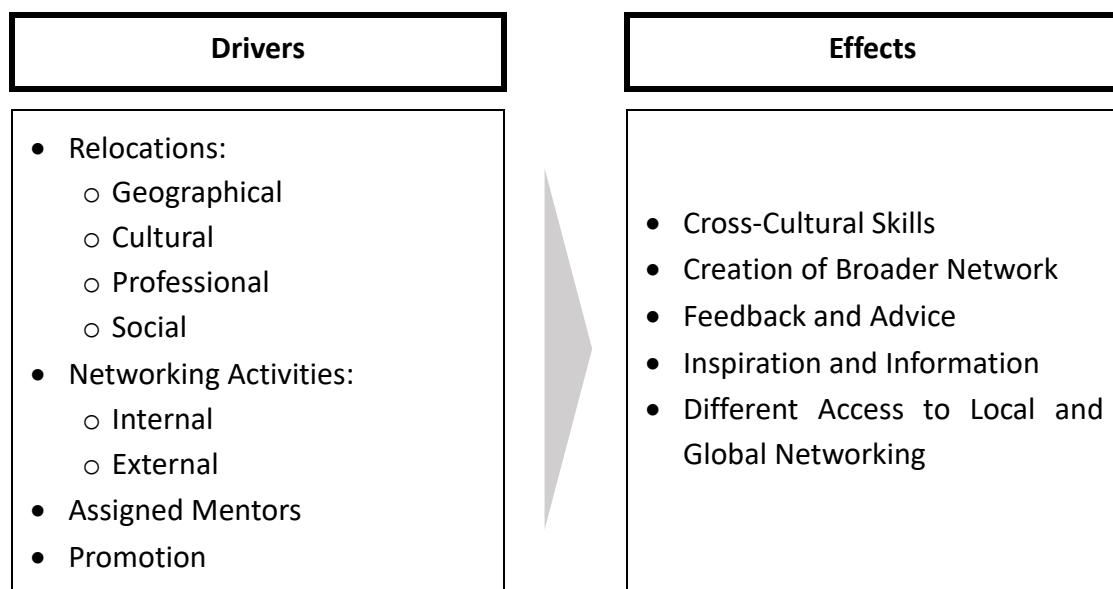


Figure 3. Drivers for Knowing-Whom Development and their Effects

2.3 The Impact of the Recent Pandemic on the Labor Market

At times mankind has always had to fight pandemics and epidemics. These were characterized by a high number of infections and a significant death rate. These two factors had a strong influence on the populations of the continents. Due to improvements in social and health care, it seemed that after the end of the Second World War, there was a growing awareness that infectious diseases were being brought under control. This was due to the purification of the environment and water, as well as the availability of new medicines, especially vaccines and antibiotics. (Zappa, Amendola, Romanò, & Zanetti, 2009)

The recent pandemic COVID-19 has shown that large cities are a crucial venue for the transmission of infectious diseases. This is due to international travel and migration. (Alirol, Getaz, Stoll, Chappuis, & Loutan, 2011) According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the corona virus has already caused 3,277,834 deaths worldwide on May 09, 2021. (World Health Organization, 2021) The combination of globalization and the wait for an effective vaccine against the virus means that everyone is susceptible to the virus. The spread of the corona virus makes it particularly clear that the effects do not only affect individuals or nations, but its consequences affect the whole world. (Esmaeili, 2020)

Thus, globalization contributes to the global spread of diseases, as it can be seen as an intensification of human contact beyond the national or geographical borders. To cope with the fast spreading of the virus, restrictions on travel and mobility were implemented and people were encouraged to stay at home. The necessity of lockdowns is due to the fact that viruses spread through human contact. In times of lockdown, however, the constant and repeated close contact with other people in society could not be maintained. (Esmaeili, 2020)

Blum and Neumärker (2020) thus state that the corona pandemic cannot be regarded as a health crisis alone. Its effects also create financial, economic and social problems

that are spread by globalization to nearly all countries in the world. (Blum & Neumärker, 2020) Apart from the health effects of the pandemic, also Esmaeili (2020) underlines the economic crisis. This has been triggered by lockdowns and has resulted, among other things, in millions of people losing their jobs. (Esmaeili, 2020) Blum and Neumärker (2020) see the economic consequences of the rapidly spreading corona pandemic in 2020. The virus is the trigger for an extensive worldwide stagnation of the economy. (Blum & Neumärker, 2020)

One aspect of the approach to tackle the problems caused by the corona pandemic is the use of digital systems. Digital systems can be used to generate and disseminate information despite the social distance required to maintain communication. (Blum & Neumärker, 2020) Blum and Neumärker (2020) suggest that companies have to operate without business trips and personal conversations due to the pandemic and are looking for an adequate solution. Video conferences, which proved to be helpful in this case, also showed their success in other areas. When the benefits or avoidance of working from home were investigated and tested, it was found that many tasks could be completed satisfactorily even without appearing at work. The technical adaptation of companies to allow the possibility of working from home can therefore be worthwhile. From these results, adjustments for the future of the companies can be drawn. The necessity of business trips and the way to work must be questioned and justified. This view can also be transferred to other areas.

Digitization could lead to changes in the entire labor market. Avoiding business trips and offering home workplaces allows flexibility in the working hours of employees. However, the digitization of the labor market also opens up new challenges for companies and the countries where the companies and their employees are based. The expansion of the networks and the infrastructure required for this are basic prerequisites for successful digitization and thus create a need for investment. Investments in digital change with regard to education in the flexibility of working models should

make it possible to reconcile digital systems and the real world of work and education. (Blum & Neumärker, 2020)

However, this digitization might affect the course of a global career as business trips and relocations are avoided. Each country has its own strategy for dealing with the pandemic, including support for businesses but also travel restrictions. (Blum & Neumärker, 2020) Akkermans et al. (2020) write that it is foreseeable that the pandemic will have an impact on the careers of workers, but it is not yet possible to say whether this will be positive or negative. The development of workers' skills will continue to evolve, especially in relation to technology. In this context, the authors emphasize that the consequences of the pandemic will be different for each person, depending on their career and phase of life. This is due to the fact that the consequences will affect both contextual and individual factors, thus influencing the course of careers. However, it is not possible to predict the long-term impact of the pandemic on the development of skills due to the fact that the pandemic is still ongoing. (Akkerman et al., 2020)

At this point in the ongoing pandemic, studies looking at the impact of the adapting labor market on career capital are not yet available. Caligiuri et al. (2020) assume that the number of and demand for international projects will decrease due to the spread of the virus. Accordingly, there will be consequences for companies, but also for employees. The control, for example, that companies carry out by sending employees to subsidiaries, will have to be carried out alternatively by other methods, possibly digital approaches. However, whether the experience an employee gains abroad can be replicated through digital methods remains uncertain. Cultural differences and on-site skills practice are not the same in virtual reality and poses different challenges. The assumed fewer expatriates abroad, on the one hand, not only have to deal with local restrictions imposed by their respective governments. But additionally, on the other hand, they may also have more responsibilities and be more successful compared to previous generations, as their numbers are more limited and support is limited to virtual contact. (Caligiuri et al., 2020)

A crisis always requires a response from HR in terms of policies, processes and procedures for dealing with expatriates living abroad. Adapting to the current economic and local situation due to the pandemic is imperative for current and future expatriates. Additionally, to have a successful time abroad, companies must develop new strategies to support their employees and adjust expectations according to the circumstances. (Caligiuri et al., 2020; McNulty, Luring, Jonasson, & Selmer, 2019)

Travel restrictions are a crucial factor in an expatriate's life to continue their global career. Frequent flyers and business trips are hampered in working their typical day-to-day life. Some countries are increasing restrictions on crossing their borders. (Levine & Rathmell, 2020) More than a dozen countries require inbound travelers to go directly into quarantine (Gostin & Wiley, 2020). Therefore, the decisions of if, when, and where can no longer be made by companies alone. The consideration of this situation is influenced by the regulations of each country, but also the length of the trip and the employee's sense of security play a decisive role in these times. This concerns the current situation, but also travel after the pandemic has ended. (Caligiuri et al., 2020)

Clear communication regarding the performance of the work and the expectations towards the employee by both parties can help to make the experience abroad as successful as possible under these circumstances. Experiential learning for future work can also be gained. (Caligiuri et al., 2020) The work-life balance of the employees is the pivotal point. Working from home is an important aspect of this in many considerations to protect company employees. This is, of course, shaped by the implementation of technological work steps and digital ways of working. Where this is an option, it can also be important in working abroad and is even preferred by some employees. Regular team meetings and office hours, as well as embedding flexible working hours in global teams, can also ensure support for expatriates in this way, depending on their needs. (Caligiuri et al., 2020) However, an essential factor for working from home or office is that school, daycare centers and care facilities for children or disabled family members

are open to allow the employee to pursue their work. Yet, these factors vary from country to country and therefore need to be considered by companies on an individual basis. (Barnes & Sax, 2020) The restrictions imposed by the impact of the pandemic affect many sectors, including health care, business, gastronomy, learning facilities and leisure. Thus, it complicates being able to spend valuable free time to compensate for work. (Blum & Neumärker, 2020; Esmaeili, 2020)

For people who have traveled extensively due to their global careers, working from home is a deep cut into the usual way of life. This requires a reorientation and new organization in terms of work but also in terms of living with family. (Caligiuri et al., 2020) In times of stress and anxiety, for example, during a pandemic, people tend to seek familiar things. This can mean people and places, but also food. For this reason, communities for expatriate groups establish themselves in all countries and a shift in the demographics of the country occurs. In almost all countries, the comfort food that is culturally based is accessible to enhance the expatriates' well-being as well. (Caligiuri et al., 2020)

The restrictions, which in many countries include physical distancing, hinder the practice of culture, faith and family. In crisis situations, however, these three factors are highly comforting. These restrictions affect the rights of the person. This includes freedom and privacy. But the right of assembly and the right to practice religion are also affected. (Gostin & Wiley, 2020)

As public health, safety and welfare are affected by the pandemic, the constraints affect individuals and communities across a country. Numerous studies show that crisis situations cause stress in the general population. A range of negative effects can occur, characterized by emotional reactions, such as stress, uncertainty, confusion and emotional isolation, or unhealthy behaviors, such as excessive substance use. However, failure to comply with public regulations, such as house arrest or vaccinations, can also negatively impact the well-being of individuals or communities. (Pfefferbaum & North,

2020) Accordingly, these restrictions can impact the health of the employee and their family, making the handling of mental and physical health an important issue for the organization. Not only the prevention of illnesses or negative experiences and periods are important, but also highlighting and generating positive experiences is essential. (Caligiuri et al., 2020)

Due to these facts, a comprehensive observation of expatriates and their families abroad is needed. Particular attention should be paid to factors that could cause stress to employees and fellow travelers. This includes social distancing, exposure to infected individuals, dealing with infected family members and the loss of loved ones. However, economic and business setbacks also affect co-workers and the climate in the family. The psychological effects that may follow, such as depression or anxiety, affect the foreign experience of all expatriates. (Pfefferbaum & North, 2020)

In summary, the pandemic poses new challenges for the development of career capital, as it undermines the supporting factor of international assignment to a certain extent. The previous chapters explain that especially the stay in foreign countries and the personal contact with other cultures is beneficial for each of the dimensions of career capital. The pandemic calls for compensations for career capital development through new approaches to international projects. This could be accomplished by looking at career capital development opportunities from new angles, such as the digitization of skills and industries. (Akkermans et al., 2020; Blum & Neumärker, 2020; Caligiuri et al., 2020)

2.4 Summary of Theoretical Learnings

With the help of the review of the literature, a promoting effect of international assignments and projects on the development of a person's career capital could be identified. With the increasing globalization of the workplace, employees with global skills are invaluable to companies. Developing the skills of individuals in an international context enables them to successfully hold an international position. (Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007) The international context that supports career capital development is also pre-

sent for individuals, such as internationally working consultants, who participate in various forms of international assignments. The types of projects can vary in length, allowing for regular travel and visits from international clients. These different types of projects offer cross-border activities that include relocations and stays. Accordingly, there is a variation of international projects, such as long-term and short-term assignments, commuters and frequent flyers. (Curnow & Reuvid, 2005, pp. 18, 293-297; Fenwick, 2004)

During international work, general management and global competencies are developed, in addition to other skills. This includes the further development of change management skills, the development of intercultural competencies and the expansion of insight into international business and the emerging demands of foreign customers. (Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007) Employees of any company benefit from expanding the career capital of employees. This is also true for consulting firms. Successful international project work depends on the career capital development of consultants in order to meet the needs of international clients. Therefore, sending consultants on international projects has an impact on the development of different skill areas. A supported career capital development results in competitive advantages for the company due to increased effectiveness of the consultants and the emerging specification and expansion of the consultants' skills. (Curnow & Reuvid, 2005, pp. 18, 19, 79, 115, 293, 294, 304, 419, 469, 505, 506)

International activities have distinctive features that serve as drivers beneficial to the increased development of career capital. The connection between individual competencies makes it difficult to focus the development of competencies on just one. As one competency improves, the other two are influenced as well, just to a different degree. (Inkson & Arthur, 2001) Important aspects that are beneficial to all three competencies are, in particular, the international environment and the intercultural differences compared to the home country. Due to the geographical distance from the home country, coping with the new, challenging work tasks is characterized by greater autonomy,

which consequently results in more responsibilities. This creates a stronger work-related self-confidence as well as a greater awareness of the importance of the job. Likewise, this opens up opportunities to make new contacts and further expand the employee's network, which can offer information, help and advice for day-to-day challenges and ideas. Through the active maintenance of the network, influence can also be exerted in the future on the course of the career by the participants of the network. (Dickmann & Doherty, 2010; Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007)

According to the literature reviewed, international tasks, more responsibility and new challenges, as well as opportunities, are important factors in the development process of Knowing-Why competence. Changes in internal motivation can be brought about by, among other things, active coaching, experience in a different organizational and also social culture and the reputation of the foreign company. These induced changes result in increased self-confidence and the ability to assess oneself better. An awareness of one's values and interests for the further course of one's career develops. Reflection on previous decisions and personal attitudes induce a deepening of the individual and the development of a global mindset. (Barney, 1986; DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994; Dickmann & Harris, 2005; Eby et al., 2003; Inkson & Arthur, 2001; Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007)

Knowing-How competence focuses, in particular, on learning new skills or methods. This can be demonstrated by new, different approaches in different cultures, but also training and imitating the work processes of colleagues expands a person's skills portfolio. Working in a different company and culture opens up a new perspective on work processes. This can lead to unexpected challenges, which results in discovering new approaches and leads to a broadening or deepening of previous skills. Successful completion of the perceived more challenging tasks leads to increased self-awareness and a broader understanding of the overall business. In the long run, this leads to the assignment of larger tasks with more responsibility. (Arthur et al., 2002; DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994; Dickmann & Harris, 2005; Inkson & Arthur, 2001)

A change of location is an essential point for increasing the Knowing-Why competence of an employee. Various factors play an important role in connection with a relocation. New places, new cultures, new colleagues and new friends and acquaintances inevitably expand a person's network. Maintaining these contacts leads to internal and external networking activities. With the help of assigned mentors, contacts can be established with other, new people, whether they are professional or not. But promotions can also extend the reach of the network, as different colleagues are found at different levels of a company. With these activities, a person's network grows, both locally and globally and cross-border skills can be expanded. Increasing the size of the network provides a greater source of feedback, advice, inspiration and information. (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994; Dickmann & Harris, 2005; Inkson & Arthur, 2001; Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007)

Enabling international projects to promote career capital development during the COVID-19 pandemic is ambiguous. There are no studies or literature to date that examine the specific relationship between pandemics and the development of career capital. Therefore, it cannot yet be analyzed what kinds of impacts the virus outbreak affects the development of career capital. However, since the pandemic probably reduces the number of international projects and changes the way they have been managed so far, it can be assumed that there is an impact on the development of career capital. (Ak-kermans et al., 2020; Caligiuri et al., 2020)

The restrictions imposed by the impact of the pandemic affect many sectors, including health care, business, gastronomy, learning facilities and leisure. Each country is establishing its own regulations to combat the pandemic. Of particular relevance to this study is the requirement to stay home and travel restrictions. In most countries, individuals are urged not to leave home if possible and to avoid unnecessary travel. These requests affect both a person's work situation and leisure time. For individuals who are working internationally, travel restrictions are a drastic change. In some countries, entry is completely prohibited, while in others, a person must go into quarantine after entering the country. (Blum & Neumärker, 2020; Esmaeili, 2020)

Among other things, the restrictions affect working life and work processes in each country. Companies often rely on working from home when possible. However, working exclusively from home is not possible in every industry. Working in offices is enhanced by new hygiene concepts, such as the provision of disinfectant, regular ventilation, the wearing of mouth and nose protection and distance rules. Both work-from-home and office environments are increasingly leveraging digital processes to compensate for physical meetings. Therefore, many companies are focusing on implementing improved and promising technology to enable the successful completion of work tasks. (Blum & Neumärker, 2020; Caligiuri et al., 2020)

This also includes the approach of managing international projects. Telephone calls, video conferencing and other tools support successful work and communication with each other. However, the individual competencies of the career capital are likely to be greatly influenced by this. A person's Knowing-Why competence is shaped particularly by international experience with colleagues in a different cultural company with new tasks and challenges. These experiences can only be made in a limited way or digitally. The Knowing-How competence of a person could expand in the area of technical skills. Training and knowledge building can be provided through online training. Copying tips and tricks taught to one in person by colleagues is no longer possible in certain situations. Through digital communication channels, of course, it is possible to continue to ask for help. This influences the Knowing-Whom capital. By complying with distance rules and social as well as physical distancing, getting to know new contacts may be more limited. Through active, digital communication, existing networks can be maintained and expanded. The establishment of social contacts may suffer from restrictions if leisure activities are canceled, for example. (Blum & Neumärker, 2020; Dickmann & Harris, 2005)

Next, the research methodology will be presented.

3 Research Methodology

This chapter deals with the methodological decisions that were made to conduct this study. Relevant for this are, among others, the research purpose and which approach, as well as which strategy are used. Another focus is on the data collection method and the detailed description of the sample. This is followed by a data description and technique of data analysis and evaluation of the reliability and validity of the study.

3.1 Research Purpose, Approach and Strategy

A qualitative case study will be conducted to answer the research questions posed. To define the type of case study, the purpose of the research must first be determined. The research purpose and the objectives of a study are important factors in conducting research because they condition the selection of the appropriate research approach and methods. Three different characteristics (explorative, descriptive and explanatory) can be used to describe the research purpose of a study more precisely. In an exploratory study, the goal is to build an understanding of the problem under study by finding out how the problem manifests itself. A literature review, interviewing experts, or conducting focus group interviews are ways to ensure a successful outcome in this type of study. A descriptive study aims to describe people, events, or situations in detail and as precisely as possible, thereby addressing who, what, when, where and how questions. The purpose of an explanatory study, in turn, is to establish causal relationships between variables. However, a research purpose can also be a combination of these types of purposes. (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Mayer, 2015; Zucker, 2009) This study combines an explanatory and an exploratory research purpose: For the explanatory purpose, the study examines whether the promoting influence of expatriate assignments on the development of career capital is also evident in international consulting work with regard to the development of the career capital of the case company's employees. The research purpose is equally exploratory as this consideration of career capital development is also made in times of pandemic. These particular circumstances likely have an impact on the development of career capital for these employees. Using the inter-

views and literature regarding the effects of previous pandemics on the work and well-being of individuals, as well as the development of career capital abroad, should help in the evaluation.

The research approach determines how the use of theories is involved in academic research. Typically, a distinction is made between the deductive and inductive approaches. The deductive approach is characterized by formulating the theory and hypothesis from the existing literature and then testing it. This is particularly important in quantitative research, as one can structure the work well and the results can lead to generalizations. In the inductive approach, on the other hand, data is first collected and analyzed, after which a theory can be derived. This approach offers a lot of flexibility, which is often needed for qualitative research, for example, to allow shifting the focus of the research and thus provide for a better understanding of the nature and meaning of the phenomenon under study. (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007, pp. 153-156) However, most of the time, researchers do not commit to one approach, but both approaches respectively at different stages of the study. Thus, the abductive approach is a combination of inductive and deductive approaches. With the help of this approach, surprising, unexpected or unusual phenomena, observations and experiences in reality can be made understandable and the current understanding and knowledge can be expanded by a new idea, conjecture, hypothesis or explanatory statement. (Gregory & Muntermann, 2011) An abductive approach was chosen for this study, as a thorough review of the literature provided a variety of perspectives on the topic of the development of career capital through expatriate assignments. With this study, the already available information is extended by the interview data collected in order to draw broader conclusions for specific situations, such as international consulting work and the specific case of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The research data of a study can be either quantitative or qualitative. In quantitative research, data is numerical data, most of which are coded and must be decoded for interpretation. Different measurement scales support the description and analysis of

the data and allow for the inclusion and use of charts and statistics to illustrate the results. (Göttfert, 2015) Researchers use quantitative studies when the research goal is to test and verify a specific circumstance based on facts (Aczel, 2015). Qualitative studies are based on words that have meanings. They are non-numerical and are collected through non-standardized methods. These methods include open-ended questions and in-depth interviews. To analyze the results, the data is summarized and categorized and contextualized to highlight relationships among categories and concepts. (Göttfert, 2015; Graue, 2015) Qualitative research is conducted to extend existing but insufficient knowledge regarding phenomena under study. These problems tend to be more unstructured, making qualitative research usually more appropriate than quantitative research. (Gog, 2015) This study is based on qualitative data and its analysis. This is justified by the lack of sufficient literature regarding the topic of this research. The existing knowledge about the development of career capital in combination with international consulting work will be extended by this study, also in reference to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The research strategy illustrates the approach to answering the research questions. One possible strategy for research is the case study strategy. Using a case study, detailed data can be collected from a single sample or small, inter-related samples. In this way, a specific context, including processes and individual cases, can be presented in detail in order to portray a phenomenon accurately. This results in a deeper understanding of the research context and, successively, of the actions involved. New perspectives open up on the phenomenon under investigation. A case study facilitates the possibility of comparing theoretical results with actual activities. New connections between the aspects can be identified since the sighted theory is combined with the analysis of real life. (Aczel, 2015; Baxter & Jack, 2008; Flick, von Kardoff, & Steinke, 2004, p. 147; Kohlbacher, 2006; Saunders et al., 2007, p. 130) In order to thoroughly investigate the topic of this study, the most suitable research strategy is a case study. The theoretical developments of career capital can be compared with real experiences and extended by the new conclusions due to its influence.

3.2 Description of the Company

In the following, the company is described anonymously, as the company does not wish to be identified. The case company was founded over 30 years ago in Germany and, with a workforce of more than 250, has specialized as one of the leading consulting companies in the areas of finance and risk management. The focus is on customized strategy development through to the technical integration and implementation of IT architectures. The clients of the globally operating company are spread over all continents. Relevant for this study are projects of the case company in Australia, Colombia, Switzerland, Austria, South Africa, USA.

Work on projects with the company's international clients is based on voluntary participation. The application process for employees to participate in an international project is twofold. Employees can update their internal profiles to communicate preferences and requests regarding international work. In this way, interest in working internationally is forwarded to the decision-making levels. Another option is that managers ask employees personally whether they are interested in a particular international project. Subsequently, it is examined whether a project abroad is a sensible step for both sides - organization and individual. The current situation and the resulting economic downturn as well as travel restrictions, lead to a re-evaluation of the business model with a focus on the realization of transnational projects through digital solutions.

The company supports the participation in these projects in terms of covering all travel expenses, which additionally includes the option to travel back to Germany every six weeks, as well as accommodation, which includes the search and the payment of it. Every legal aspect, including taxation and visa, is considered and taken care of as well. The company provides a per diem allowance which is a daily amount for food and beverages. Included in this support is the accompanying family. Being accompanied by the close family is not unlikely when going on a long-term assignment that requires moving

to the project country. However, most consultants expressed their interest on participating in international consulting projects when they did not have a partner.

3.3 Data Collection

Interviews were used to collect the data. Since only interviews were conducted, this is a mono-method for collecting primary data. The interview methodology can be adapted in terms of formality and structure to meet the needs of the study. Therefore, a distinction can be made between a standardized, semi-structured and unstructured interview. (Göttfert, 2015; Saunders et al., 2007, p. 130) Semi-structured interviews provide a rich understanding of a phenomenon embedded in its context. By addressing the specific research topic deliberately to the interviewee, this framework can cover all the necessary topics that have been elaborated through the researcher's preparation. (Greener, 2008, p. 89; Hox & Boeije, 2005; Longhurst, 2003)

There are three reasons why semi-structured interviews are particularly appropriate in these circumstances. The first reason is that this data collection method is not influenced by a pre-existing theoretical bias, as the flexibility during the interview allows for a natural progression, potentially uncovering new aspects that did not previously exist in this context. (Horton, Macve, & Struyven, 2004) Another reason is that it does not require a large sample, as the focus is on detailed and rich data rather than looking for a way to generalize the results (Longhurst, 2003). Third, with personal interviews and a flexible structure, a basis of trust, a bond and understanding between both parties can be established, leading to truthful and accurate statements (Barriball & While, 1994; Horton et al., 2004). However, the interviews are conducted only once, so the time horizon can be described as cross-sectional (Greener, 2008, p. 36; Saunders et al., 2007, p. 130).

The sample, which is a part of a population, is studied with the aim of learning information about the population. There are different approaches to selecting the sample. In probability sampling, respondents are randomly selected from the population and

are part of the sample because they all have known and positive inclusion probabilities. In contrast, in non-probability sampling, it is unknown which person is taken from the basic population. The selection is arbitrary and is used to explore a topic. The method is therefore subjective and the results are biased and analytical. (Vehovar, Toepoel, & Steinmetz, 2016) In this study, two types of non-probability approaches are followed to determine the sample. One is convenience sampling and the other is network sampling, which includes snowball sampling. In convenience sampling, respondents are selected based on availability, accessibility and personal judgment of the researcher. Network sampling is an approach that starts from a starting point and sequentially recruits additional respondents for research based on network connections. Snowball sampling means that the sample size can be increased by interviewing acquaintances of respondents who have already been interviewed. (Vehovar et al., 2016) Contact was made with the first key informant based on my personal assessment. Since this person works in a company with many suitable candidates, it was possible to establish contact with a person from the HR department. Based on the position in the company and relevant experience, further contact could be established in a snowball fashion with other persons who are subjectively suitable for this study. This type of sampling setup involves the possibility that the sample does not represent the entire population (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). However, the goal of this study is not to be representative on the part of the sample but to gain new insights

3.3.1 Sample

The analysis of the collected data includes the description of the opportunities for development of the career capital of the employees from the case company in two different setting. First, the experiences of consultants working for international clients and its effect on the consultant's career capital is examined. Second, the pandemic outbreak changes the experience that can be gained through international work. In these new circumstances, the development of the career capital of consultants working internationally is also examined. To enable this, people from a consulting company with suitable international experience (see Table 1 below) are drawn as a sample. With this

sample, the development of international consultants in two different circumstances are investigated and differences are identified. From these differences, possible factors can be found that stimulate the development of the respondents' career capital. Following the identification of these influencing factors, the changes that occur as a result of the pandemic can be determined. This allows a comparison of the career capital development with the help of international projects in the normal case and the special case of the pandemic.

In total, eight in-depth interviews were conducted with consultants from one company. Length of employment with the case company of the employees varies from just over one year to ten years. All interviewees have a background in economics, science or mathematics. The duration of the international projects in which the respondents have participated varies from four months and 2.5 years per project. However, the experience abroad is not limited to one project per employee. Either they have already participated in several projects or they have already gained international experience in their professional career before joining the case company. The consultants, and their international travel activity and stays abroad, can be divided into three categories. The first group of consultants participate in projects in Austria and Switzerland which are geographically close to Germany. Therefore, the consultants usually travel to the project country every week, mainly from Monday to Thursday, and work on-site. The consultants could spend their weekends at home due to the geographical proximity to the home country of the respondents. The second group of consultants work on international projects, which are further away from the home country, but the consultant does not stay in the project country for the whole time. Consultants of projects in Australia and South Africa usually travel regularly for several weeks to the project country. Especially at the beginning of the project, the consultants are on-site; afterward, they either work from Germany or are on-site for weeks at a time. The third group of consultants is characterized by the fact that the consultants were on-site during their entire project participation. The projects were located in Colombia, Canada and the USA.

Table 1 provides an overview of the respondents. At first, the approximate length of employment with the case company is stated. This is followed by the countries in which the consultants have managed projects for the case company. Here, this only includes the current main projects that were talked about the most in the interview. Finally, the length of professional experience of international consulting work for this case company is listed. It should be noted, however, that this time period refers only to the current projects at the case company. Most of the respondents worked either on many short-term projects or had already gained international experience before they were employed by this company.

Table 1. Information on Interviewees

Person	Years with the Company	Location	Length
A	2 years	Austria	4 months
B	1.5 years	Austria + Switzerland	4 months
C	4 years	Switzerland	2 years
D	2.5 years	South Africa	6 months
E	3 years	Australia	6 months
F	7 years	Colombia + United States	3 years
G	10 years	Canada + Austria	4 years
H	7.5 years	Colombia	5 years

3.3.2 Structure of the Interviews

A total of eight key informants from the case company were interviewed. The interviews were held in January 2021 via Skype and Microsoft Teams. They were recorded, with additional notes taken of key aspects of the conversation to allow for follow-up and to prevent technical problems. The length of the conversations varied between 43 and 65 minutes, resulting in an average length of 54 minutes. The interviewees were given the choice to conduct the interview either in English or in German. The intention in offering these options was to create a comfortable atmosphere during the interviews. Overall, two interviews were conducted in German and six in English. When interview-

ing in German, the researcher had to translate the interview and may have mistranslated phrases or used an incorrect translation that could have changed the meaning of the statement. Despite both parties being fluent in the language, it is not the native language. This could be interpreted as a disadvantage as it may have led to misunderstandings during the interview. These misunderstandings can thus affect the validity of this study.

Appendix 1 show the complete list of original interview questions, which was intended to provide a guideline for the interviews. However, as is to be expected in semi-structured interviews (Horton et al., 2004, pp. 340, 348-349), the questions were adapted and reworded during the interview, as well as asked in a different order. Furthermore, follow-up questions were asked that were not on the list and came up individually because of the interviewees. These were dependent on the flow of the conversation and led to the inquiry of further details concerning the topic.

The interview questions were passed on to the HR department to examine and adjust the comprehensibility and wording of the questions. This was done to meet the requirements of the case company. In the course of the interviews, questions were rephrased or expressed in a more understandable way, if this was requested by interviewees, in order to avoid misunderstandings. At the same time, it was emphasized that no information from the interviews would be forwarded but will be only used anonymously for this study. This was to ensure honest answers and not to produce the answer supposedly desired by the company or the researcher. (Adams, 2015)

At the beginning of each interview, there was an introduction of the researcher and the research objective, as well as a general outline of the interview. As a next step, the interviewees were assured that the data collected would be treated confidentially, which was intended to create a basis of trust. Likewise, this should allow respondents to answer honestly and not say what they think is expected of them. They were also asked whether the interview was permitted to be recorded. The interviewees were informed

that the interview could be stopped at any time and that they were welcome to ask questions if any ambiguities arose. The interviews were concluded with the expression of gratitude as the interviewees shared valuable insights and experiences.

3.4 Data Analysis

The analysis of qualitative data requires several steps. First, the data is reduced, then it is presented and finally interpreted. (O'Dwyer, 2004) This process has several phases in which the collected data is broken down, separated and decomposed. Thus, pieces, parts, elements and units can be examined individually and separately in order to put them together or reconstruct them in a meaningful or comprehensive way. (Greener, 2008, p. 81; Kohlbacher, 2006) The results of the qualitative data collection are non-numerical and cannot be standardized. Thus, meanings can be attributed to the individual results. In order to enable an analysis of the collected data, they are summarized and categorized. In this way, connections between these categories and concepts can be discovered and pointed out. (Flick et al., 2004, pp. 150-151; Hox & Boeije, 2005) Summarizing, categorizing and structuring is an organizational process of the researchers in order to be able to work meaningfully with the masses of information and the extensive collected data. The organizational process includes these three techniques, which can be used individually, separately or in combination. (Flick et al., 2004, p. 253; Kohlbacher, 2006) Subsequently, the data obtained can be conceptualized and reworded, thus allowing knowledgeable conclusions to be drawn (O'Dwyer, 2004). The analysis of the data in combination with the abductive approach enables the investigation of a phenomenon with subsequent findings and definition of themes and patterns. These are adopted into a framework and verified through further data collection. This process is repeated. (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 153)

An important factor in the analysis of data is the objectivity of the researcher. This is particularly important in qualitative research, as the data collected is interpreted by the researcher. (Greener, 2008, pp. 17, 81) When reassembling the data, structure and clarity are necessary to show a distinct link between the answers and the research

questions. In this way, a contribution to the literature can be made, which presents the phenomenon under investigation in a comprehensible way. (Flick et al., 2004, pp. 253-254)

For a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the results of the interviews, verbatim transcripts were made. These transcripts were written after the interviews and were used to categorize and identify important themes and aspects. Based on the structure of the interviews, common themes based on the theoretical foundation can be identified. This serves to categorize the data in the respective situations -before and during the pandemic- so that ultimately the two research questions can be answered. After categorization, the interview data was compared to the categories that emerged from the theory to determine similarities and differences. Using the similarities and differences, major themes can be identified for each situation of this study. The comparison of the main themes is used to determine possible relationships between the categories. This allows the respective situations to be considered as a whole and provides a framework, allowing for precise delineation from other circumstances. Finally, the two emerged frameworks of the two situations -before and during the pandemic- are compared to each other to provide a complete analysis for this study. (Greener, 2008, p. 35; Saunders et al., 2007, p. 153)

3.5 Reliability and Validity

For evaluating the quality and credibility of research, reliability and validity are important benchmarks (Flick et al., 2004, p. 184; Greener, 2008, pp. 37-38; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Kohlbacher, 2006; Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002).

Reliability is understood to mean the repeatability and consistency of the data collection techniques and analysis processes of the data to ensure that the results found in a study are independent of random circumstances of their preparation. Accordingly, if it is possible for other researchers to come to an approximately similar result through similar or identical conditions, methods and measurements, the study can be consid-

ered highly reliable. The reliability of a qualitative study reflects the trustworthiness and theoretical transparency. Thus, all research processes, the approach, considerations and execution of the data analysis and the general procedures of the research are described and explained in detail. Subsequently, comprehensible conclusions can be drawn from the given data. (Golafshani, 2003; Greener, 2008, p. 37) In order to improve the reliability and thus the quality of the study, an accurate and detailed specification concerning the process, procedure and analysis steps of the research is essential (Flick et al., 2004, p. 187).

Validity is a quality criterion for the results of a study. Thus, the relevance and the significance of the qualitative results are considered. (Golafshani, 2003) Thus, it clarifies whether the results can be used to make statements and whether this can be meaningfully linked to the research question (Flick et al., 2004, p. 184; Golafshani, 2003; Morse et al., 2002). The creation of the interview questions was conducted by the researcher herself. For orientation and to increase internal validity, questionnaires of other studies regarding career capital (e.g., Kirk, 2016) were reviewed and considered.

The included information of the interviews was drawn from exact quotes of the interviewees, which could increase the validity of the study. Nevertheless, the inexperience of the researcher could affect the reliability and validity of this research. The lack of experience in conducting scientific interviews could be associated with asking the wrong questions, phrasing questions incorrectly, and leaving out important questions. This could also include not discussing topic areas in sufficient depth. (Flick et al., 2004, p. 210; Greener, 2008, p. 40)

3.6 Ethics of the Research

Ethical concerns may arise in any research and should be considered throughout the research process. The conduction of the study, including all processes and results, must be described in detail, accurately, and honestly in relation to the research objective. This includes the strengths and weaknesses of the chosen method, models and results

in all respects. The reader must not be misled in any way. (Greener, 2008, pp. 38, 40-43; Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001; Qu & Dumay, 2011)

When considering the ethical concerns of a study that collects data through interviews, four principles should definitely be included. The first is that no harm should come to the respondents as a result of the study. That is, they must not be embarrassed, harmed, or materially disadvantaged. Furthermore, the results of the study must not be biased by any relationships that have developed between the respondents and the researcher. Likewise, throughout the process and throughout the interviews, the intent of the study must be disclosed. Ultimately, respondents are always guaranteed the right to privacy and confidentiality in any subject matter. (Greener, 2008, pp. 40-46; Qu & Dumay, 2011)

An important issue of both ethical and validity concern is the wording of the question and the manner in which the question is asked. The interviewee's responses can be manipulated in this way. The rephrasing of questions to provide better access to the interviewee must therefore be morally reconsidered to reduce or eliminate manipulation and thus loss of validity. (Greener, 2008, p. 41) Also to be emphasized in this aspect is to inform the respondents about the subject of the study and the researcher's purpose. In this way, the true purpose of the study can be brought to the fore and the respondents will not be misled. (Greener, 2008, 42-43; Flick et al., 2004, pp. 335-337)

Next, the findings of this study will be presented.

4 Findings

This chapter presents the results of the study. The data is analyzed from two perspectives. First, the findings on career capital development in the normal situation are described. Respondents are interviewed about their experiences with international projects, and respectively their development of their career capital, before the outbreak of the pandemic. These results are described in the first subchapter. In the second subchapter, the experiences of the interviewees on implementing international during the pandemic are presented.

4.1 Development of Career Capital during International Consulting Work before COVID-19

Several factors to which the employees are exposed when working abroad influence the development of career capital. The biggest impact on each component of the career capital and yielding in its development is related to cultural differences. These cultural differences manifest in various situations and circumstances. Those factors influencing Knowing-Why and Knowing-How are fairly similar. New challenges and responsibilities, as well as communication and language differences, yielded in the development of these two aspects of career capital. The development of Knowing-Whom competence was additionally influenced by international travel and stays in different countries and the personal and digital interactions between the consultants and the people from different countries.

Cultural Differences

The interviewees revealed different examples and described situations where their career capital was influenced because of certain international factors. The main factor was cultural differences to Germany, which required a reaction and yielded in personal and professional development in every aspect of the career capital. With regard to the Knowing-Why of a person, a major difference occurs in the organizational culture in the

foreign company, which is decisive for the perceived working atmosphere. One respondent explained:

After coming back to Germany, it was really hard. Comparing both countries showed that Germany is more magisterial and more strict and formal. I wasn't used to these formalities in cultural structure anymore. [Country] was more family-like and relaxed.

Another described that:

[Country] was very intensive in terms of workload. The relationships are completely different. Also, the work culture was eye-opening. There, they stick together. They look after you. I always felt – in any country- that I would never be able to repay all the kindness and invitations left, right and center. And I was fairly junior, so it was not like they owed me something. From their side, it was honest.

Depending on the position and the area of responsibility, the daily contacts with people in the company abroad are more active or not. Those with active contact with people from the company and from the project country were able to perceive the mentality of the locals more strongly, which makes it easier to deal with the different cultures. The corporate culture and atmosphere are more relaxed and familiar in almost all project countries compared to Germany, as one respondent explained:

The work is more relaxed than in Germany. You don't have as much pressure, but in Germany, you are indirectly under pressure. All the planned phases have to be executed as they were planned. It has to be finished at a certain time. Sometimes the priorities are not balanced, but the focus is on the planning. [...] In [country name] the boundaries are more blurred. You get to know everyone so-so. There is not such a strong structure. There is a decentralization.

However, one interviewee also noted that this is probably more customer-related than country-related. "It depends more on who works in the company and not where the company is based. If there are many foreigners working in a company, the company culture has little to do with the country".

Nevertheless, cultural differences can also present challenges. Although consultants may find that there is some sort of "foreigner buffer in terms of cultural faux pas", the

different behaviors and approaches to work can lead to misunderstandings are described by one respondent:

Being in a foreign environment still gives you a cultural pardon. Things that a local person would not get away with. [...] But once, I was finishing a workshop with a client. At some point, someone left the room. I was totally confused. But then, later, I found out that they were not interested in having problems put onto their plates unless you have a solution for that. They were keen to hear that everything was fine. But I was pointing out the weak spots because I thought this was his role as a quality review person.

The interviewees shared that there is no cultural preparation for the assignments in foreign countries in the company. However, in some cases, especially in very different countries or in countries where no differences are expected, a source of information, such as presentations and trainings, could be helpful. This would have simplified the development of skills to deal with the differences in a respectful and thoughtful way, as explained:

There were no information about the culture prepared by the company before going to [country]. [...] However, in Asian cultures, for example. It could be very helpful to have a few cultural information beforehand to cope with the differences and be respectful and not shocked about how they live.

These cultural challenges and differences, as well as aspects such as security in foreign countries, may appear to be unattractive. For such projects, one approach is to resolve this issue by having previous information sessions:

[Country] is a dangerous country. And it is really hard to judge a country not only by information you get out of the internet. It would have been nice to talk to someone who has been there before going myself. I cannot remember what convinced me to go anyways, but the information from the internet were totally different to my experiences living and working there.

International work, nevertheless, includes experiences unlikely to have when staying in a national company only. This yields professional and personal benefits and helps the development of a person in both respects by creating and expanding a global mindset. "Traveling helps to get a new perspective on different places and cultures and connects personal experiences with them."

According to some interviewees, working on international projects with people from different cultures leads to a broadening of their horizon. It also eliminates the rigidity of the environment. However, this usually only takes place through a change of location. It is suggested that it does not have this effect in remote work. The cultural differences do not come through as strongly when working remotely and the environment is the same every day. Respondents do tend to work in an international context, but only if there is some travel involved. One respondent said:

The international work has strongly influenced the idea of my professional future. (laughs) I enjoyed my first international project so much that I will specifically look for international projects in the future. I find it hard to imagine being tied to one place. I don't want to always work in the same environment. I like the experience of traveling back and forth a lot.

Regarding working on exclusively remote projects, either national or international, the respondents' minds are divided. While one half still appreciates "the international exchange", the other half is of the opinion that a national project is easier to handle due to familiarity and convenience. If the focus is on the exchange with people with a different culture, it is also possible to work on national projects. "Here at [company], the project teams are mixed in terms of nationalities. [Company] is international in itself, which means that you get to know many different approaches. You don't really have to go abroad for that."

Cultural differences influence the development of the Knowing-How competencies as well. The extent of the development seems to be interlinked with the degree of these differences. These appear to be higher when the geographical distance is larger. The closer the country is to Germany, the smaller the cultural differences. Nevertheless, decisive are the cultural differences of the surrounding people, as stated before. If there are many people who are culturally very different from the project country, a company can still be very different in terms of corporate culture and way of working without being geographically far away. One respondent explained:

When you are further away, you learn intercultural skills. Not necessarily technical skills. For me, at least, that was not so relevant. In my opinion, the cultures

in Europe are not that different. Therefore, there are not so many cultural differences in the companies. So, there are no problems with that.

Another important factor is how long a person is exposed to different cultures. One respondent explained that a shift in perspective is happening and an improvement on how to cope with other people from different countries is taking place:

If you are staying in a country for two and a half years, you are not a tourist anymore. It is possible to integrate in the culture and see the country from a different side. You learn a lot, see a lot, you amplify your horizon, all the time, every day. Openness is a requirement for this. Also, language skills and soft skills.

However, these clear differences and the learning effects only occur after a certain period of exposure to cultural differences. However, this period cannot be firmly defined, as it varies depending on the intensity of the cultural differences:

The more you're exposed to other people or cultures, the more tolerant, relaxed and open you are. Also, when weird situations happen at work. You stay more relaxed and firmer. It is easier to deal with those situations. You stay more calm and more relaxed. Categorize those situations, different behaviors. It helps to improve your own feelings.

With regard to the Knowing-Whom of a person and when establishing contacts, the cultural differences tended not to be a problem, but possibly even a supporting factor. For example, the more laid-back mentality and casual corporate culture help with socializing because of the more relaxed and laid-back atmosphere. It is possible to show private characteristics, thus make friends at work:

In Germany, only the departments belong together and the others don't know each other at all. In [country name], after one week, I already knew people from several departments. [...] The mentality is more relaxed. People greet each other in the hallway, even if they don't know each other. But the greeting is not as formal as in Germany. (laughs) The corporate culture is less hierarchical; it is more authentic. In Germany, you sort of have a work personality and a leisure or private personality. In [country] you are more yourself. You are the same in your private life as you are at work.

However, respondents also cited examples where they tended not to make friends due to cultural faux pas. Nevertheless, these experiences occurred relatively less frequently, as one respondent shared:

Cultural problems weren't really a thing because I had more positive cultural experiences. Only once, I was with people from work and also there was a person from [country] and the environment gave me a certain impression on how to behave, but unfortunately, the other person, who was also a foreigner, did not interpret the environment as I did. Anyways that's the only bad example I can think of right now.

Challenges and Responsibilities

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, cultural differences can increase the influence of other factors on the development of the career capital of a person. Due to the differences, Knowing-Why and Knowing-How are further developed because of the rise of challenges and a broader range of responsibilities. "International projects seem to have a greater complexity, causing a successful handling to lead to an awareness of the own abilities." Through this self-reflection, the respondents were able to identify their skills and abilities, their own strengths and weaknesses and therefore have more self-confidence and self-awareness:

When you are open to new cultures and new ways of work, it can help your personal development. But you have to be open to it. You can then start to work on yourself and see what you can do and where you need help.

With this growth process, decisions regarding professional skills and future can be made. "Working on international projects are within my capabilities. I expect to have more opportunities in my personal career development in the future." This implies that growth of general management and global competencies took place. Traveling to foreign countries allows respondents to be more open to new cultures and new approaches. This further promotes their own development. "Simply surviving in a foreign country can be seen as an enrichment and achievement."

There are possible obstacles like cultural or language misunderstandings that can mark the work abroad as more challenging compared to the same work in the home country even if they are within their own capabilities. Often, however, it is precisely these aspects that have the effect of making the project companies overlook cultural faux pas

and that appreciation prevails, sometimes even making the performance of the task perceived as easier:

If working abroad is more challenging? Possibly even the opposite. Being in a foreign environment still gives you a cultural pardon. Things that a local person would not get away with. People are more forgiving. Most other business cultures, they would appreciate the fact that you are not from there and give you a bit of an advantage because of that.

Opinions differ on whether the skills learned can only be learned abroad. Some respondents are convinced that they could have learned other, similarly relevant skills in Germany as well. The development of skills, they say, is “more project-dependent”. Others, however, think that they learned these skills much more quickly as a result of their experience abroad. On the one hand, this is because they ended up in unfamiliar and very demanding situations. On the other hand, the fact that the company structures were different meant that the scope of tasks and responsibilities expanded much more quickly. A certain ability to improvise and deal with challenging tasks was necessary and opened up the opportunity to test own skills and approaches. “I was confronted with different tasks earlier because of the diverse and different team structure than in German projects. In Germany, people work in bigger teams which results in a longer period of being in one and the same position.” The last group of respondents is convinced that they would never have been able to reach their current level of knowledge without international experience. The international work has led to an overview of the industry in different continents and countries, which has allowed a better understanding of the whole subject of the work. This insight would never have come from working exclusively in Germany. This can be beneficial for the progress of the own career but can also create competitive advantages for the employer. One respondent explained:

Being in a more senior role. It results in something funny. One of the first questions [clients] asked is: “What do the others do?” This allowed me to learn the different trends. Banking as it is in Germany is not the same as it is in Latin America and it is not the same as it is in Australia. Different behavior and different products. Some are more device-driven. The others want physical cash in their hands. [...] I would not have learned these insights when I stayed only in Germany.

Consultants have a supporting function in their projects, as they identify problem areas and engage with the client to find solutions in order to increase the client's overall effectiveness. Because of this, the consultants are sent to the respective countries on the basis of their existing skillset. The interviewees confirm that their experience in the international arena has changed their skills and their range of tasks. Compared to German projects, the scope of tasks and responsibilities is broader in international projects. This requires a more adaptable and flexible set of skills from the consultants to successfully handle international projects. The accumulation of knowledge leads to the transferability of skills to different projects and companies. This increases their area of responsibility and leads to a diversification of their accumulated skills:

Now I have more responsibilities after being on an international project. I have a bigger range of tasks now. I was a technical expert in my field before going and now I am more of a generic expert. My skills are wider and more diversified. I know more stuff about different areas now. This is because teamwork is different in [country name]. The teams communicate more about tasks and help each other in their respective fields. In Germany, for example, you are more focused on your own task.

Otherwise, the technical skills have changed less. Either the tasks of the consultants were designed to bring expertise to the project or the tasks are generic and therefore independent of the country and only dependent on the project. It is therefore only possible to speak of normal development of technical skills, as these would probably have developed the same way in German projects. The soft skills, however, have changed significantly:

The main focus isn't on technical skills. You learn them on every project. The main aspect is to learn how to work with people. Consultants always work with new people. Teams are changing, new teams, you don't work ten years with the same people. Always a new client, always new people. You learn how to be with different people. And you learn how to communicate to which type of people. This is very important.

Communication and Language Differences

Communication skills were rated as an important aspect of the development of Knowing-How competencies. All respondents said that their communication skills had im-

proved as a result of the international project work. This is partly because they found it “easier to talk to colleagues and superiors because of the more relaxed working atmosphere”, and partly because they found that without clear and distinct communication, different priorities became apparent depending on the different culture. “What I learned when being abroad is that you need to clear out everything with people from different cultures to see whether you are on the same page and have the same priorities.”

The way of communicating has also changed. The respondents learned the difference between friendly communication in the workplace and the expected switch to professional communication at the right time:

In [country], I learned how to communicate with different kinds of people. With people from a certain level. Even though the company culture is very open and family-like. I was able to find the line. Find the limit, when to be a friend and when to be a worker or a professional. Like I knew, where does small talk end and when are you talking to a boss-like figure.

The differences in language can be an influencing factor for the development of language skills through the active use of the foreign language. The respondents usually prefer English-speaking countries since English is the company language in many projects anyway. All respondents meet the requirement to speak English well enough to be able to work and live successfully abroad. The longer one works on a project, the more fluent and easier it becomes to communicate in English. Nevertheless, the interviewees generally presented themselves as willing to learn new languages, as it turned out to be helpful to learn the local language for private conversation and normal life in order to get the full experience abroad when not being in an English-speaking country. One respondent shared experience concerning this:

I am generally open to learn a new language, but it would be easier to work on English-speaking projects. But when you are living in a country that does not speak English, it would be helpful to learn a bit of their language. For colleagues, for example, in breaks. Or like for the private life in general, like supermarkets and restaurants and so on.

Despite the universality of the English language, speaking in the local language simplified making contacts, having professional conversations without translators, and enjoying the whole atmosphere at work. A preparatory and accompanying language course is offered by the case company to begin with the learning process of speaking a new language being followed by regularly speaking the language with locals making the progression of learning effects increase. One respondent explained:

I think language is very important. I didn't speak [native language] before going to [country]. At the beginning of the project, we needed a translator. People from [country] do not speak English very well. [Company] offered teachers in the beginning of the project to learn [native language]. Those were intensive courses according to your own level. They came to the office three times a week. It was very helpful. After a while, it was possible that the project was dealt with in [native language].

International Travel and Stays

The development of the career capital competence Knowing-Whom is further developed, according to the respondents, because of different drivers opposed the other two aspects of career capital. They reported that a person's network grows quickly when they frequently travel internationally and stay in the project country. By working abroad, "you automatically get to know new people as soon as you arrive at the foreign company. Socializing is simply better in person. There are coffee breaks, lunches, open-plan offices and team meetings. You can quickly go over to someone and clarify small questions in person." These features enable the building and deepening of contacts and relationships in a new place.

Personal and Digital Interaction between Consultants and People from Different Countries

Basically, a person with a growing and globally distributed network has to maintain all contacts in some way in order to gain advantages from it. However, the coffee breaks and lunches just mentioned not only serve to establish contacts, but also promote the maintenance of professional contacts already made. The quickest and easiest way to

do this, therefore, is to be in personal contact. Through personal meetings with people from other countries, you learn how to behave appropriately, through which behavior you can build a deeper relationship and how to deal with each person. These experiences then help to maintain contacts via social media as well, since it is possible to assess each other. Subsequent to this and additionally to face-to-face contact, is the use of social media, emails and phone calls. This is an important mechanism to maintain contact with people that cannot be seen in person on a regular basis. Social media, emails and phone calls allow for quick forwarding of messages and building some regularity for making and keeping contact. With the help of this, it is possible to schedule visits and joint ventures. A respondent described:

The use of social media helps a lot. A messenger system helps to write regularly. But not every day. The measurement of the quality of a relationship is not done by the frequency of contacting each other but by how you interact with each other to see how the relation is. Anyways, I can write my friends or videocall them. This includes my German or European network. But I try to meet people when it is possible. I try to schedule something to talk together. At least for a night or something like that. This helps a lot to maintain my contacts.

These channels are also used to maintain family and social contacts when the consultant is abroad. Social media, phone calls, video calls and messaging could be used to stay connected with family and friends in the home or other countries. “Contact with the family is made possible by technological achievements and is absolutely manageable. [...] 10 years ago, communication was more difficult. I am very grateful to technology. “

The establishment of interviewee says that lasting professional relationships mainly were established with “other consultants, ongoing professional relationships with clients is rather uncommon”. The maintenance of this large number of contacts as well as turning them into long-term relationships can be a challenge and people have to learn that not all contacts are for eternity. They describe the sorting out of contacts rather as a natural process and this takes place regardless of the place of getting to know each other. “When you have many different projects, you have a lot of contacts everywhere, but it’s hard to stay really close in contact. The more you switch locations, the harder it

is to make long-term relationships.” For keeping contact within the professional network, there is either a reason for the two to meet again or the respondent enforces opportunities to have short conversations and reestablish a more active contact:

Business relationships are not the same as social relationships or friendships. I have both. But when I visit clients, this doesn't mean automatically that those are friends. Though sometimes they ultimately became friends. Anyways, there is either a reason why our paths to cross again or there is a reason why I want our paths to cross again. Then I force it. I find an opportunity to have a quick chat and say appreciation or we value each other for future references.

The sustainability of contacts with international people, however, is perceived as more stable than in Germany. After completion of a project in Germany, the contact usually ends immediately. According to the experience of the interviewees, the contacts made in international projects last longer. Maintaining an internationally comprised network, therefore, appears to be easier than a national network only. “My network in [country name] is pretty big, even though I haven't been there for a year. Compared to Germany. When a project is over there, you say goodbye and the contact is more or less over.”

According to the interviewees, access to the established network has brought them advantages. These advantages were shown, for example, by valuable information regarding job opportunities or the acquisition of a new project. “I still have access to my [country name] network. Through this (laughs) we have actually been able to win another project there. This is connected to the company with which we have been working together [before].” Another interviewee, for example, applied for a job based on information from a university friend. “Through my network, I can gather information. For example, my study friend told me about this job while I was in [country]. This is one reason why I applied for this job.” Furthermore, access to the network opens up the possibility of maintaining a connection with the world, which creates a mental and spatial expanse:

My network grew through going abroad. I have friends all over the world now. And I can go and visit them, see them. Share information. Through WhatsApp as well. This makes me feel more connected to the world. It would be very hard for me to work for a company with only German colleagues.

4.2 Development of Career Capital during COVID-19 Pandemic

This subchapter describes the changed experiences with international projects during the restrictions caused by the pandemic and its effect on the development of the career capital of internationally working consultants. In order to understand how the development opportunities changed during this pandemic, it is necessary to illustrate how the work of international consultants has changed. Subsequently, the opportunities to develop career capitals are described.

4.2.1 Changed Nature of International Work during COVID-19

The start of the pandemic brought about a change to the working practice of all consultants attempting to continue to deliver a good performance and adapt to the new situation despite of the changes. The first aspect that directly impacted the work of the respective consultants was the absence of business travel and stays abroad, as all employees of the case company have been working remotely from their home in Germany since March 2020. One respondent explained:

Currently, I've been working on a project in [country] for two and a half years. I used to go there from Monday to Thursday every week. But since March 2020, I am working from home. Business trips are restricted because of the policy of the client. Even though there would have been time periods. In the summer, for example. Where I could have gone to see the people in [country], but the client didn't let externals in the building. So, there was no point of meeting someone. Internal people are too working from home. They just go to the office one week every four weeks.

The restrictions regarding travel, staying in hotels and apartments abroad and entering business offices do not come exclusively from the case company but also from the clients and the countries of operation. This is why all of the consultants are staying in their home country Germany. "Before making a business trip, they need confirmation from both sides. Both companies and the consultant have to be comfortable with traveling and working physically together at the moment."

This industry, however, is much more conducive to remote work than many other industries. The clients and the case company have been able to gradually learn during the pandemic that many aspects of the daily work routine can be executed without business travel and consultants being on site. The equipment of both case companies and their clients allows for excellent digital communication between both parties. These communication channels can be used almost equally effectively for project acquisition, project processing and subsequent follow-up work:

You have to [inaudible] to videocalls and remote working. But in this finance and insurance area, working remotely is fairly possible as the companies have a good in-house IT architecture. Other consultants who work with delivery or manufacturing or productions companies. That, it's not that easy or not always to expect to have a good IT department. [...] Banks and insurances, on the other hand. Our clients have similar or good enough IT equipment as we have.

Nonetheless, working from home and being located in Germany can cause problems in international projects due to time differences to the project country. Consultants working on projects with clients located in a different time zone try to adjust their working hours. "The time difference is no problem. I am supposed to work German hours, which are not overlapping. But I can do private stuff in the morning and start working later in the day. And everybody is happy. That is no problem for me". The adjustment of the working is an option to deal with the time difference. One respondent explained, that the adjustment of those hours should favorably be within Germany's working hours. It is then possible to arrange meetings with the client either in the morning or in the afternoon, respectively, to share the most important information and discuss the further procedure. Additionally, consultants who work outside of German working hours should then be given additional recognition:

At the moment, I start working at 6 am and it is [afternoon] in [country] and all of them almost finish their work because they want to use their afternoon privately. [...] This means they only have about one hour to communicate. If [country people] are nice, I have two hours with them. But this forces [the client of the client] to work until [night times]. Which is not nice and not in their space of ideal. At the moment, I work from six to eight in the morning with the team in [country]. It is not enough to survive the project. There will be times where we need to communicate more than two hours. [...] A client in Germany might have the same live interaction time, but you can still write e-mails QA and get an answer fairly soon.

[Country], it is always overnight and takes time. A ping-pong game with [country] is different than in Germany. [...] But starting earlier than six am is also painful and not really attractive for the employees. In Germany, working time beginning before 6 am requires additional consideration.

Time differences create challenges for the daily work routine: “It would be helpful that one person, who is working on more than one project, is only assigned to projects in a fitting time zone. So, no one has the necessity to work 24 hours a day.” Another option usually would be to relocate the consultant to a geographically closer destination in order to eliminate or minimize the time difference. This, however, is at this point of the pandemic not feasible:

The problem is that the pandemic is everywhere. [...] Many countries are between here and [client country]. Many countries would therefore ease the pain. But there are countries where you don't want to be or land a project team because of safety reasons like physical safety, harassment safety or health safety. [Country] sounds fantastic [in terms of time difference], but they are worse off than Germany in this pandemic. [...] Work for the [client country] from [country]. This would take away three hours from the time difference. This is not much, but it's possible to arrange three hours of live interaction time with the [clients] afternoon.

Another change due to the pandemic is that everyone, including the working population, is expected to stay at home as much and as often as possible. However, several consultants find it challenging to work from home. The focus here is not on the factor of working remotely on the project but actually on the local aspect of being at home. There is a blurring of the distinction between work and leisure. The balance needed to be able to work focused and concentrated is missing due to the absence of breaks with colleagues and the lack of spatial separation after work. Working and spending free time in the same room leads to an impact on the employees' psyche. The possibilities of spending free time are also limited and therefore cannot provide compensation for working time. One respondent shared:

My work quality is affected because of the mind-body balance. I am motivated to work, but it is difficult to concentrate when working completely alone and getting the work done all by myself. I started faking a bureau or office atmosphere by staying on the phone with a colleague. This helps my motivation to stay focused on the work. Otherwise, I get distracted more easily. [...] But all I can do is go for a

walk. And in Winter, this means walking in the dark outside. This is not very enjoyable then.

4.2.2 Development of Career Capital during the Pandemic

Due to COVID-19-situation, consultants will have to manage their projects from Germany from now on. This affects the situations in which the employees have developed their career capital. These situations were characterized by international features previously mentioned. Now, new situations arise which differ from the conditions before COVID-19 in the following aspects.

Cultural Differences

With the help of digital media, it is attempted to recreate the daily work routine before COVID-19 as well as possible to enable the project work to continue as usual without being on-site. All respondents describe that they are hardly, if at all, exposed to different cultures by working from home. "In written messages, it is hard to see cultural differences and therefore learning how to deal with them is hardly possible. It is always a lot behind the written texts and if you have never seen those people and the cultural group and behavior, it is hard to interpret the message correctly." Despite trying to imitate the daily work routines, one respondent summarizes: "It is not the same. Talking front to front, drinking coffee, talking about private life. You can't build that while working remotely. It's not possible to put those things in a virtual world. You can't learn the culture while not being there." The lack of traveling has a significant effect on skill development. "Traveling to a different country is missing. To go and see people and the country is missing. I cannot broaden my horizon without travel. I cannot develop my soft skills without being there." As a result, the consultants are not able to develop their soft skills, e.g., communication skills, expand their global mindset or escape the rigidity of the working environment to any great extent. "Via calls and videocalls, there is a chance to develop soft skills but not as much as when being there."

Challenges and Responsibilities

The social aspect that automatically flourishes through joint work in the office is difficult to replicate through digital media. This is affecting the development of Knowing-Why and Knowing-How of a person. It is a challenge to develop team spirit, which creates trust between people. This trust is needed to work faster and more effectively. “When working remotely, I miss the social action. Like the building of team spirit. This builds trust and with trust, you can manage more tasks more effective and faster. Because the client trusts you. This leads to more efficacy.” To integrate this social factor into work after all, social activities are recreated through video meetings. This helps the consultants to digitally present themselves in a trustworthy and competent manner and learn how to create ties when not being there in person. “We are trying to do social events with the client to bring people together. And more private session to actively talk about other stuff than work, like weather and corona and so on.”

This addresses the prejudice that often exists in the consulting business. “Clients would initially right-out reject remote work because they have the perception that only when they see the consultant, he is actually working. If I don’t see them, I don’t want to pay them because I don’t think that they are working. This would be a traditional behavior.” However, experiences in the past time now show that it even works better in some cases when the consultants travel less. It can help develop distant project management skills. “You can do a lot of things from home, especially the added burden of travel time is eliminated. But there are also things you can't do remotely.” This refers to the consultants who traveled to the project site every week and spent the weekends at home in Germany:

In regard of the travel times, which used to be, at least to a certain degree, work-free time is now not transferred into more free time. Instead, work hours have increased for me and the project team. Also, within remote work from home, one tends to take fewer breaks and also reduce the effective time of these breaks. Therefore, my productivity appears to be higher.

Working from home enables it to set up the calendar more effectively and work on several projects simultaneously. The latter was not possible when one was on-site with a client. This yields in the development of time-management and organization skills.

The consultants improved distance working skills:

Schedule-wise and focusing on one work task is easier when working remotely. Also, to manage multiple projects is easier. Before, you couldn't talk to a different client while being on-site of a different client. Now you can switch from project to project without any problems. A two hours meeting with one client and then another meeting with a different client.

This can be understood as a new degree of flexibility in the daily work routine. This can lead to more efficacy and the improvement of time management skills. "It saves time to not go to the conference room. From home, you can do many more meetings per day." But it can also lead to overload. "Remote working is sometimes too flexible. And it is not too easy to handle this high degree of flexibility. I would rather work in an office in Germany."

However, during the pandemic, the flexibility created from remote work is combined with the imperative to stay at home as much as possible. This blurs the lines between leisure and work, calling for skills to separate these two areas, manage timeslot during the day effectively and balance leisure time in order to continue to work efficiently:

The areas between private and professional life are not as distinct anymore. This can be positive and negative. I can go to doctors' appointments and stuff like that more easily. I can do that during the day now. This wasn't possible while being on-site. Which is definitely an advantage. But, on the other side, there is the danger to not a border between work and free time. To work late hours and let the work impact too much of your private life.

These organizational challenges can also include technical challenges even though this industry is situated in a promising starting position in terms of its technical equipment. Working from home can cause technical difficulties, which can lead to a longer delay in work due to the absence of the IT department. On the other hand, dealing with technical difficulties can provide learning opportunities regarding dealing with and solving technical issues. "I had technical difficulties working from home in the beginning. And

the IT department can't come over easily to solve the problem. But once the technology works, you can work without any problems. The quality of the work is therefore not affected.”

Communication and Language Differences

Another crucial factor that has changed due to the pandemic is the daily work routine and the communication between consultants and clients. Most clients usually prefer the presence of consultants on site. There is a preference to exchange information in person. Communication between clients and consultants, all of whom now work remotely, is limited to digital communication media such as emails, phone calls and video calls. These media can be used for one-on-one conversations but also for meetings with multiple people. The interviewees use the individual communication media to varying degrees. “I hold a position which requires a lot of communication, meetings, lineaments, arguments and discussions. But because of the distance, I am not able to see people react. I very seldom use video calls. I do not see anyone anymore.”

A particularly big challenge is to bring all people in a group communication to the same level. This is especially the case when people talk to each other after meetings and this is then gradually passed on to others:

Communication in a group is also more complicated. Not everyone in the group has the same information as two are talking together and then two others and so on. It takes more time until each meeting is done and everybody is on the same page and then still not everybody has the same level of understanding. In the end, lots of information get lost because of this way of communication.

Another possible challenge in communicating through digital channels is misunderstandings and different priorities in answering e-mails and calling back to clarify minor incidents, according to a respondent:

In itself, if everything runs smoothly, then everything works great. You work with the same programs, just from home. You solve problems and questions via meetings and video calls and so on. On a daily basis. So far, it hasn't shown any major

downsides. With communication, the only issue sometimes is how others prioritize responding to emails.

This is a new angle on the development of communication skills of the consultants. Clear communication about goals and expectation is necessary to preserve success in handling the project. This also includes an adaption of the expectations at the beginning of a project. Sharing information can be less effective when receiving them through digital channels. The effectiveness of a consultant is as good as before when a certain level of knowledge is reached:

My learning curve is worse compared to being on-site. If I already have all the information and know everything, then I can easily work from home. But on a new project, where I have to meet new people and gather the information to do the work first. The flow of information is different when you are on site. The learning curve is better when everything is still new and you are on site.

This is in line with the impression of another respondent regarding the amount of travel and the advantages of working from home:

The first weeks of a project are key. Therefore, it makes sense to go there and meet them in person. But I would not want to stay too long in another country anymore. Because it would make sense to stay there for a few weeks and make intensive contacts there and then work from home. There are a lot of advantages to work from home. If the organization of work is done carefully and everything is thought of, then you can do good work. Also, reach goals without problems.

International Travel and Stays

The COVID-19 pandemic hampers international travel and stays. In order for projects to be implemented successfully, projects with a high proportion of remote work should allow the possibility of getting to know each other personally for a few weeks. A reevaluation of the nature of relationships made through digital channels is necessary. “Making contacts remotely only works to a limited extent. You have to get to know each other in person at the beginning. You have to be seen and get to know the company from the inside.”

Without personal and physical contact, making contacts is theoretically possible, but it requires significantly more intense communication and, at best, colleagues with experience in making contacts without meeting in person or colleagues that already knows the others in person from former business trips and stays abroad:

Generally, it is possible to build up a network without personal physical contact, but it requires a lot of communication and colleagues with experience. You have to know how to approach people, what the internal communication is like, what the approach is in the project. For this, you should be on the project for a month to be able to make an assessment.

Personal and Digital Interaction between Consultants and People from Different Countries

The respondents outline that when working remotely, it is more difficult to build more than fleeting relationships with others when working on a completely new project. Different approaches and ideas are used to recreate personal meetings with digital media. For this to be successful, there must be a willingness to reevaluate connections and relationships made without face-to-face contact so that new methods, rituals and meetings can be established:

When working remotely, it is a different quality of expertise. It is lacking interaction time. Especially with the further away project. The kitchen corner, for example, is missing. It's like coffee time. [...] Or even occasional team dinner or after-work beers. This is networking beyond work. [...] As we can't walk over to your desk. Now it takes more effort to ping someone. Everything is more formal. It is not possible to casually walking and passing a desk and ask for a coffee. But we still manage to keep meetings and client sessions engaged. As everybody is remote, we try to make little traditions at the beginning of calls. We talk about the weather. We try to loosen it up and make it a bit easier. Sometimes we draw something. Like someone in the meeting has to draw something. You would never do that when you're there. But when working remotely, it can create a relationship.

Next, the discussion concerning the results from the literature section and the findings of the present study will be presented.

5 Discussion

As this study addresses the relationship between international activities and their effect on the development of career capital, this section compares the results from earlier and the results of the present study. The career capital theory emphasizes the importance of an ever-growing career capital in today's highly interconnected world. By breaking down the concept of career capital into the three components of Knowing-Why, Knowing-How and Knowing-Whom, drivers can be found for the development of each dimension through international projects. The interdependence and interrelatedness of the three components clearly demonstrate that the influencing factors of one element inevitably influence the other components as well. The theory describes that the further development of the career capital is beneficial for a person's career course. (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994, Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007)

As a first perspective, the results of the study are reported on how career capital of consultants is developing in the normal situation of the respondents. This is to answer the first research question: 'How do international assignments influence the development of the career capital of a global careerist within the case study?' As a second perspective, the data collected in the interviews are intended to expand the theory by adding the aspect of the influence of the pandemic on the development of career capital. This will answer the second research question: 'How does the COVID-19 pandemic affect the accumulation of career capital within the case study?' Subsequently, the results are compared with the theory and earlier research findings in order to identify similarities and differences. Correspondingly, the limitations of this study are presented. Finally, further research opportunities are identified.

5.1 Development of Career Capital among International Consultants.

The findings show that several factors influence the development of the career capital of the consultants interviewed. The first factor is cultural differences between the work they are used to doing in German companies and working with foreign companies and

the differences that come with it. This factor appears to be one of the most important and influences all three competencies. The literature also shows that intercultural differences have a substantial impact on the development of career capital (Dickmann & Doherty, 2010; Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007).

According to this study, cultural differences manifest themselves in several facets. On the one hand, this creates a different corporate atmosphere, which has an impact on willingness and motivation to work. It also creates a different relationship with colleagues in the workplace. The different cultures lead to learning of how to deal with each other and develop a tolerance for differences. The intercultural interactions lead to the formation of a global mindset, broadening horizons and preventing rigidity of the daily work routine and environment. This can enable freedom in career and psyche through the different aspects. However, these findings show that cultural differences can also lead to discrepancies with one's own expectations of the degree of difficulty and fulfillment of tasks when the foreign companies mostly give the expatriates and the consultants a cultural buffer. Training can be a helpful asset in determining cultural differences and finding a way to deal with them. A further aspect is gathering information about different countries and cultures through training and information packages. Organizational culture is also a driving factor in the literature (Dickman & Harris, 2005). It is composed of, among other things, active coaching and seizing opportunities to engage with other individuals. The literature (Dickmann & Doherty, 2010; Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007) also claims that in an international environment and with intercultural differences, a wider range of responsibility and a greater level of autonomy is mostly expected. This leads to more self-confidence regarding one's own competencies and the constellation of one's own capabilities. In international work, new opportunities and challenges thus arise for the individual to develop his or her own career capital, which would not exist in the home country without cultural differences. This leads to a broadening of horizons and the emergence of a global mindset. (Dickmann & Harris, 2005) According to Suutari and Mäkelä (2007), cultural differences initiate a thinking process, whereby the reasons for actions and reactions are reconsidered. This leads to

the questioning of one's own ideas and values. This process of self-reflection leads to the development of one's way of thinking. This also includes the development of one's own skills, as reflection is made on the implementation and possible new methods of applying already existing competencies, thus enabling the improvement of skills and abilities. (Dickmann & Harris, 2005)

However, these cultural differences are usually only apparent by a change of location and a sufficiently long duration of stay. The extent to which intercultural competencies are developed appears to be related to the extent of the cultural differences. The further away from a company and the respective project country are from Germany, the more significant the cultural differences seem to be. This also increases the effect of these cultural differences. Geographic distance, therefore, has an impact on the development of career capital competencies. However, the extent of cultural differences may also depend on the company, not necessarily on the project country. Similarly, the length of stay affects development. The longer one is abroad with other cultures, the better one learns how to deal with them. The Literature also shows that an important factor is the work abroad. This is the best way to perceive cultural, geographical, professional and social differences. (Dickmann & Doherty, 2010; Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007) Another key factor is the length and intensity of the stay abroad, which contributes to the development of career capital (Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007).

Cultural differences seem to have a positive influence on getting to know new people. The respondents confirm that getting to know new people in foreign countries is comparatively easier than in Germany. Problematic experiences due to cultural faux pas actually occurred less frequently and hardly posed any problems. However, these challenges can be prevented by prior briefings.

As already stated in the literature (Dickmann & Doherty, 2010; Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007), the factors influencing the Knowing-Why and Knowing-How competencies are very similar. In the findings, two subcategories can be identified for this. These are Chal-

lenges and Responsibilities, and Communication and Language Differences. The last category is not intended to undermine the importance of the development of other soft and cross-cultural skills, but during the interviews, particular importance and salience of the development of communication and language skills could be identified.

International work poses a challenge to consultants, as foreign projects usually have greater complexity. This leads to an expansion of the consultant's area of responsibility. Likewise, it creates an awareness of one's own capabilities. This includes the assessment of one's own strengths and weaknesses. This results in self-awareness and self-knowledge. Working and living in a country with a different language leads to a boost in self-confidence and self-esteem and the development of an awareness of one's own abilities, strengths and weaknesses. This includes the openness to new cultures and new approaches, which yields in an evolution of their own thoughts and skills. This process of self-reflection helps the growth and further development of a person's Knowing-Whys. This also reflects in future prospects of careers and decisions regarding the personal and professional future. The literature (Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007) also shows that with challenges, new tasks, and greater responsibility, a person's strengths and weaknesses become apparent, and skill development occurs.

At first glance, international tasks and projects could be considered more difficult than domestic ones. Here, the literature (Dickmann & Harris, 2005) describes that active participation in the projects can be seen as a challenge that can lead to learning of new skills and expanding of the existing skillset. Even though participation and active involvement in international assignments is challenging for the consultants, it was found that it is not necessarily more difficult. This was due to the fact that foreign employers usually expect less than they do from local employees. As a result, working on projects can be seen even as easier in some cases. Successful processing of international tasks also leads to improved self-confidence and perception of the own abilities. That develops an awareness that one is capable of working successfully internationally, which also lowers the difficulty. In combination with the possibly reduced expectations of the

foreign colleagues, this may lead to the situation in which the processing of international tasks is not necessarily more challenging.

The task of consultants is to disseminate expertise in specific areas. Accordingly, they use their existing skillset and pass on information to clients. The consultants, therefore, take on the role of expert and by sharing the knowledge they own, they improve these skills and acquire new ones. This creates a wider scope of work that they can cover and implies a certain autonomy. As consultants abroad are less confined to a single position and the scope of duties is broader, skills become more flexible and transferable to other roles and to the needs of other employers. In line with this, Inkson and Arthur (2001) note that leveraging existing career capital is one of the most important factors in developing it. This allows for the creation of new ambitions, skills and contacts.

The function as an expert, however, means that the focus tends not to be on the development of technical skills. They develop to a normal degree regardless of the location, as these are mostly generic and industry- but not location-specific. Nevertheless, diversification of skills emerges as clients tend to work across task areas for the most part. Similarly, DeFillippi and Arthur (1994) conclude that new challenges and approaches lead to specialization and diversification of skills. According to the theory, international experience influences personal skill endowment through different approaches due to different cultures, as well as through training and imitation of colleagues' ways of working. Thus, one can get a new perspective on work, which could lead to discovering unexpected new approaches. This leads to an expansion of the existing skillset through specialization and diversification. Successful work on international projects with different challenging tasks creates self-confidence and awareness of skills, inevitably giving more responsibility. Likewise, a greater general understanding of business and the ability to handle major problems at work emerge. Companies need to check with employees that skills development is happening in the desired direction. (Dickmann & Harris, 2005)

The opinions of the respondents differ with regard to the uniqueness of skills learned abroad. Suutari and Mäkelä (2007) claim that international projects promote skill development and the respondents of the study have several views in this regard. On the one hand, the development may be project- and not country-dependent, and on the other hand, it might also be the case that the skills learned by the respondents through international project work are not unique but were learned more quickly. This is because consultants usually work more autonomously abroad with a broader range of tasks and responsibilities. Also, there are different approaches and a different corporate culture abroad. In the home country, the teams are usually larger, which means that the distribution of tasks is more specific and the time spent in a position is longer. Abroad, people are more often in unknown situations, where the handling of them is unfamiliar. The last part of the interviewees, however, is convinced that the knowledge and experience could only be achieved through international work. This creates industry-wide expertise and an overview of the industry in other countries. Dickmann and Harris (2005) also claim that international projects provide a general understanding of the business and the industry. Due to the consulting nature of the job, the company's concern to develop unwanted skills is more uncommon.

Successful work in a foreign country builds general management skills and global competencies. A growth process takes place where future decisions can be made based on one's own successes, ways of thinking and abilities. Suutari and Mäkelä (2004) also indicate that international assignments have a conducive effect on the development of competencies and skills. Dickmann and Doherty (2010) join the authors and therefore affirmed that because of successful work, future planning and decisions regarding a person's career are influenced.

The literature describes that a growth process of Knowing-Why competence can be initiated by international tasks, more responsibility and new challenges. This growth process results in increased self-confidence and a better assessment of one's own abilities. It also leads to a process of reflection on one's own professional decisions and the

development and deepening of a global mindset. It can also happen that a person's focus shifts towards personal and professional interests and goals, as the Knowing-Why of a person continuously adapts. (Dickmann & Harris, 2005)

As already mentioned, communication skills are of essential importance in international projects, according to the interviewees. As a result of the experience gained in the international arena, a significant improvement can be seen in terms of clarity and clarity of task assignment, goal setting and expectations. Likewise, communication with other cultures and to persons of different rank within a company is facilitated. International experiences and organizational cultures are less hierarchical, which is why communication between different positions is more frequent. As a result, interaction and adequate behavior are easier. Theory, nonetheless, does not focus on communication skills per se, although Inkson and Arthur (2001) address the importance of clear communication in terms of the expectation of the expatriate and the project. Suutari and Mäkelä (2007), on the other hand, considers the development of soft and cross-cultural competencies, which include effective communication between every party.

Most international projects are dominated and executed in English. As the project progresses, language skills improve. Apart from English, project countries that speak a different language provide skills for learning a new language. This not only broadens a person's linguistic horizons but also allows for immersion in the foreign culture in a new way. This can create deeper connections to the country, culture and people.

Despite the fact that it is more difficult to allocate drivers to the individual components of career capital, international travel and stays have a particular impact on a person's Knowing-Whom. Working on international projects and in foreign locations inevitably leads to the expansion of the network and thus to the development of a person's Knowing-Whom. Suutari and Mäkelä (2007) also describe that many contacts are typically made in different countries through international movements. Therefore, network

growth through international travel and residence is inevitable, regardless of the length of stay.

Personal contact is particularly important for building and maintaining new relationships. Internal networking is a crucial factor for the growth of the network. In this way, dealing with the respective people can be practiced and the ability to assess others can be expanded. By actively networking in foreign companies and countries, the network can be effectively enlarged. Suutari and Mäkelä (2007) and Dickmann and Doherty (2010) describe that active internal and external networking is one of the most important drivers for increasing Knowing-Whom capital. For further support, assigned mentors or job promotions or changes can lead to new acquaintances that additionally expand the network. Contrary to what is suggested in the literature, the active assignment of mentors did not take place (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994; Dickmann & Harris, 2005; Inkson & Arthur, 2001; Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007). Therefore, the study can neither confirm nor prove whether this would make a difference in the development of contacts. The fact that a promotion enables a new target group for networking was not explicitly addressed but resonates due to changing projects and correspondingly different tasks in the project work.

However, it turns out to be a challenge to integrate a large number of new contacts into the network in the long term. To maintain contacts, digital channels serve as an option in addition to face-to-face meetings. Nevertheless, a natural sorting out of relationships is not avoidable. The international nature of the relationships, however, suggests longer sustainability. Respondents stated that most relationships last longer and are easier to maintain. This may be due to cultural differences. Therefore, it is easier to reactivate international contacts. Thus, visits and meetings make more of an impression because it is more difficult to plan and execute. This gives the meeting and the relationship more meaning.

The expansion of the network with international relations brings benefits. These include sharing information, helping each other with problems, feedback, and enable mental freedom and connectedness to the world. Many authors (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1994; Reed & DeFillippi, 1990; Lado et al., 1992; Powell et al., 1990) also identify benefits from network expansion of employees participating in international projects. These include knowledge sharing within the network, spreading an image and reputation of the company, which can develop business opportunities and the possible emergence of learning effects that can have a positive impact on competitiveness.

Consistent with theory (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994), the study confirms the benefits that can be derived from accessing a large network. These benefits can accrue to both the company and the individual. Sharing information, help and support in all matters helps the further development of the individuals' career or the successful execution of projects. Concern that information relevant to the company is inadvertently shared (Dickmann & Harris, 2005) was not identified. Also, negative ties (Granovetter, 1973; Labianca, 2014) were not created.

In summary, and in order to answer the first research question, the data collected supports the theory in the assumption that international activity influences and develops all aspects of the respective personal career capital. Various factors influence the further development of capital to varying degrees and are amplified due to the intercorrelation of all three factors. These factors arise from travel to another country and are often related to the length of stay and the extent of cultural differences.

5.2 Development of Career Capital during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The impact of international activity on career capital development needs reconsideration in light of the constraints on work and travel activities to enable pandemic containment. For this purpose, a literature review was first conducted in relation to expected effects and limitations of a person's labor market and work routine, which are, among other things, supported from experiences of previous pandemics. The pandem-

ic is still affecting the labor market and the economy, as the fight against it is not yet finished. Therefore, the impact on work and private life cannot yet be fully estimated. So far, there are no studies that have examined the effects of the pandemic on the relationship of the development of career capital through international activities. (Akkermans et al., 2020; Caligiuri et al., 2020) The daily work routine has changed significantly for people working internationally due to the outbreak of the pandemic. The employees of the case company have all returned to Germany to stay at home during these times. Therefore, all projects are handled exclusively remotely. This poses several challenges. These include difficulties due to different time zones and the absence of compensatory activities such as hobbies, as the interviewees are required to stay at home.

While in the normal situation, cultural differences were conducive to the development of certain skills and attitudes, inevitably expanding career capital, in this new situation, there is a difference. The use of digital communication tools complicates the positive impact of these cultural differences, as they are hard to notice and thus less salient. Therefore, there is no broadening of horizons and hardly any improvement in communication skills. The perceived freedom and mobility of the working environment also fail to materialize. Also, in literature (Caligiuri et al., 2020), it is assumed that digital communication cannot be expected to be the same as face-to-face meetings. It is, therefore, to be anticipated that such differences will arise in the work area that will have an impact on the employee and on the relationship between a client and a consulting company.

Considering challenges and area of responsibility as factors influencing the growth of career capital, the perspective shifts. A reasonable basis of trust between the parties is an essential factor for effective work on the project. There is a need to find ways and means to build trust between consultants and clients through digital means as well. Accordingly, opportunities are emerging to improve and refine digital presence and portray people through other communication tools. An everyday online presence can be expanded while also integrating and conducting social events that would typically

take place can be used to build trust. The importance of using digital means as the main way to work on projects has already been identified in the study by Blum and Neumärker (2020). They claim it can create opportunities for remote work to be effective and possibly even better than the status quo.

This study finds benefits from remote work that can be leveraged more fully. The benefits come from eliminating commuting and bypassing potential travel time and inconvenience in unfamiliar accommodations, among other things. Working from home can be optimized by building organizing and time management skills. The flexibility created, which may not be available in the office, can be used effectively to complete project tasks quickly. The distance working skills are thereby improved and another aspect is added to the project management skills. This also includes the opportunity to expand technical and IT-related skills due to the more pronounced use of digital media. Blum and Neumärker (2020) already suggested that with the use of digital media comes flexibility in the daily work routine that can be extended to all aspects. Akkermans et al. (2020) add that the changes also affect employees' careers and development, but that it remains to be seen whether the effect is positive or negative.

However, this is a problem of compensation for working hours, which can have a negative impact on the overall quality of work and thus on opportunities for further development. It requires psychological training to be able to mentally relax and unburden oneself, despite the fact that sports and leisure activities are limited. Another approach to circumventing these challenges could be to open offices in Germany, assuming regulations are met and hygiene concepts are in place. This depends on the size of the offices, the residence of the employees and the implementation of a time schedule. Nevertheless, as already described in literature (Esmaeili, 2020), lockdowns are necessary to stop the spread of the virus. Nonetheless, it has already been stated (Caligiuri et al., 2020) that in stressful situations, people tend to fall back on family, faith, familiar places and hobbies, which is a challenge because the pandemic limits many things. To this

end, Pfefferbaum and North (2020) assert that being locked up will negatively impact a person's psyche and well-being and thereby inevitably impact their job.

The absence of face-to-face meetings means that communication between the parties involved needs to adapt accordingly. Challenges arise that the flow of information through digital media should be improved to be as effective as face-to-face, ensuring that everyone is on the same information level. Communication needs to be even more precise and more explicit as misunderstandings become more difficult to clarify. Especially if different priorities have been set in terms of tasks or email responses and callbacks. This new perspective on communication skills forms a new opportunity for further development of these skills. The need for clear communication has already been discussed by Caligiuri et al. (2020). This is intended to bring expectations between employees and clients down to a common denominator so that work can continue to be carried out successfully internationally.

Knowing-Whom competence in particular faces challenges for further development if there are no face-to-face meetings. Establishing contact with new people via digital media is mostly unproblematic. However, it is more difficult to develop these contacts into valuable relationships. This requires intensified communication and a reassessment of the value of contacts made exclusively through digital channels. This is of particular interest if it does not seem as if face-to-face meetings are possible again in the near future. In order to maintain and preserve the contacts made digitally, the willingness of all parties to open up to new ways of creating, maintaining and intensifying contacts is needed. New methods, ways, approaches and rituals must be created for this, which requires a new set of soft skills and creativity as well as innovation. In this way, the benefits of information sharing, feedback and learning effects can continue to be exploited. Caligiuri et al. (2020) also see advantages for the future in the intensive use of digital media. With the help of good communication between colleagues, it will also be possible to work effectively and digitally in the future. This implies that a cer-

tain relationship must be built up between people so that it is possible to work together, communicate clearly and complete a joint project successfully.

Since the study is a qualitative study, no general assumption concerning the effect of the pandemic and its restrictions on the development of career capital can be made. However, it can also be stated that the pandemic limits many career capital development opportunities. The study clearly shows that there are changes in the processing of the projects and thus, changes in the individual competencies of the career capital are revealed. International assignments are particularly conducive to the development of career capital (Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007). However, even if international projects are not currently an option, there are still opportunities to further develop career capital while focusing on other angles in development.

5.3 Limitations

For the interpretation of the results, various limitations must be taken into account. First of all, the study is limited to one company, which means that the generalization of the results must be viewed with caution. Secondly, the study concerns a Germany-based company with projects all around the world. Consequently, drawing conclusions with regard to a company with their base in other countries is not reasonable. Likewise, cross-industry assumptions should be considered with caution. To which extent the collected data and the findings are industry-dependent is not investigated in this study.

A further aspect is that all of the respondents participate in international assignments and projects, which creates a cross-border nature of their employment and a need for internationally adapted skills. (Mäkelä et al., 2017) This study, therefore, assumes that the underlying theory on expatriate assignments boosting the development of career capital also applies to the development of career capital for international business travelers and international commuters. This is also due to the lack of literature on career capital development on international travelers, international commuters or similar types of workers.

Further limitations for the generalization of the results result from the small sample size. The limited time and resources available justify the small sample size in addition to it being a qualitative study. The choice of data collection for the qualitative study aims to understand deeper the development of career capital through international projects and to expand the literature by considering the effect on the accumulation of career capital by the current situation caused by COVID-19. The limitations of the study may thus allow for a context-specific analysis. The data collected in this study were obtained from interviews conducted in English and German and via video call. Despite good language skills, misunderstandings may have arisen when conducting the interviews in English. When conducting the interview in German, the researcher had to translate the interview and might have mistranslated phrases or used the wrong translation that could have changed the meaning of the statement. Also, technical problems with the connection might have caused misunderstandings. These misunderstandings may affect the validity of the study. Ultimately, the researcher's inexperience in qualitative data collection techniques is also a factor that influences the results of the study. Accordingly, the questions may have been formulated inappropriately, which could result in valuable data loss.

5.4 Suggestions for Future Research

Future studies could generalize the results found in this study by conducting a quantitative study. This could show whether the pandemic has actually had a negative impact on career capital development. This study only shows perceived limitations in the development of the respective competencies. It would also be interesting to analyze whether the restrictions will still prove relevant in a few years' time regarding career capital development. It remains to be seen to what extent the work situation will return to normal over the next few years or whether the current situation will become the new standard. It is, therefore, questionable whether the current restrictions have any influence at all if the situation returns to normal in a timely manner and reverts to the old standard. Or whether an influence is significant at all if there is no return to the

old work environment, making the adaptation to the new situation and work processes more relevant than the constraints of ordinary career capital development.

Another very interesting aspect would be the assessment of expatriates who lived abroad during the pandemic. A comparison between people who went back to their home country and people who stayed locally could be sought. This would help determine if there are differences in perceived deterioration in career capital development. The expatriates who remain abroad may still be exposed to cultural differences due to the location, or the country may have a different approach to mitigating the pandemic, drawing clear differences from this study.

Finally, it would be interesting to study how the pandemic affects international projects in their future course. The pandemic showed that working with digital media can be as effective as working on-site. If this finding is applicable to different industries and countries, it can affect the importance of gaining career capital in the digital age. This may interfere with the previous requirements for collecting career capital and shift the focus of desirable work-related qualities into a more technology-based area, also in terms of communication skills.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Semi-Structured Interview Outline in English

1. **General Questions:**
 1. Tell me something about yourself
 - a. School background
 - b. Why did you take this job?
 2. What position do you occupy in this company?
 - a. Typical everyday life
 - b. How long have you been working for the company?
 - c. What proportion of this job is accounted for by international projects?
Are they voluntary?
 - d. When you work on an international project, is that the only project you're working on?
 - e. How and why do you apply for an expatriate assignment? Can you always participate in the desired assignment?
 - f. How long is the duration of international projects and how was the living situation?
 - g. How many international projects have you already worked on? In which countries?
 - h. Do you want to work in the same country or would you like to go to a different one?
 - i. Did the company support your stay in any aspect?
 - i. Do you have regular communication? What about the geographical distance? Or sometimes time-difference?
 - ii. Financial support, assistance for partner and/or children, etc.
 - j. Do you rather work on an international or national project? And why?

2. Career Capital:

KNOWING-WHY:

3. Why do you participate in international projects? What do you gain from it?
4. How did expatriate assignments influence your ideas, values and motivation regarding work and your work-related future?
 - a. Are there certain situations where you noticed a change of mind? Or self-reflection on past experiences?
 - b. Compared to projects in Germany?
 - c. In terms of self-confidence/strengths/weaknesses
 - d. Is there a shift in your perception of your future before and after those international projects?
5. Did you choose this position in your company because of your international activities?
 - a. Why? / If not, why choose this job anyway?
 - b. Do you tend to have a job with or without international projects in the future and why?
 - i. Yes: At this company?
 - ii. No: Would you accept a different position in this company in return?

KNOWING-HOW:

6. What effect do international projects have on your job-related know-how?
 - a. Do all international projects require the same skills? Are those skills unique? Can you transfer them to other areas?
 - b. What have you learned? How did your skills develop? In what situations?
 - c. Are tasks more difficult or challenging than in Germany? Do they approach tasks differently than here?
 - d. Were there trainings in the different companies?

- e. Did your competencies develop? Have your skills deepened or are they more diversified?
- f. Are there regional/cultural differences in the way projects are handled?
- g. How has your range of tasks and responsibilities changed due to international projects?
- h. Would you also have learned these skills in Germany? (Personal opinion)

KNOWING-WHOM:

- 7. How has your professional network developed through the international projects?
 - a. What advantages do you think you can gain from international contacts? Can you utilize your new, bigger network?
 - i. Future jobs/projects, information, mentoring
 - b. Were there cultural differences (language, etc.)?
 - c. Have you been only working with the same people during an international project?
 - d. Have you only been able to establish professional contacts? Did you make friends? Social contacts or work contacts are also friends?
 - e. How do you maintain your contacts? In particular, domestic contacts when you are abroad and international contacts when you come back to Germany?
 - i. Personal meetings/restaurants/bars
 - ii. Too many contacts?
- 8. How is family life during the expatriate assignments? Did they accompany you?
 - a. How did they deal with being in a different country?
 - i. Jobs, school?

After going through these questions regarding the development of your career capital.
Would you say that expatriate assignments have influenced you career capital?

3. Pandemic:

9. What influence does the corona pandemic have on your professional life?
10. How do expatriate assignments now differ from “normal” expatriate assignments?
 - a. Is there a decrease in international projects?
 - b. How are international operations handled during the pandemic? (home country/location) Are you there or here in Germany?
 - c. Suppose you are in Germany and the project you are working on is a project in Australia. Do you have any ideas on how working on these projects from home/remotely could be done effectively and successfully despite the time difference?
 - d. Are business trips restricted?
 - e. How does working from home and using digital communication media make your everyday work easier? Is this an option to successfully handle projects during this time or does it affect the quality of work?
11. What are your expectations of the employer in connection with the interruption of project activities abroad due to a pandemic?
 - a. Problems with coming back to Germany, direct flights, struggles with authorities?
12. How does the pandemic affect their accumulation of career capital?
 - a. Do international projects still have an appeal for you? If so, which one and why?
 - b. What is different now compared to project one or more years ago?
 - c. How does the workflow differ from "normal" procedures if you are no longer on site or have contact restrictions due to the pandemic?

Are digital solutions used to manage projects in times of a pandemic?

- d. Once the pandemic is over, would you prefer to continue using digital solutions or do you prefer to work on site?
 - e. Do you think that you still can learn and develop your competencies when not being on site/ when being restricted by the regulations due to the COVID-19 virus?
 - f. How is the establishment of contacts affected by the absence of personal visits/ by being socially restricted?
13. How is your personal wellbeing during this pandemic?
- a. Hobbies, private life, friends and family
14. How is the family's wellbeing during this time?
- a. Is your family in Germany (home country)?
 - b. If family is abroad: Do you think your family would cope with this situation better when being "home" in Germany?
 - c. Can they work/ go to school?
15. Are there any surprises or particularities regarding the pandemic and career capital that you would like to share with me?