



Vaasan yliopisto  
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# **Work Life Balance of Female International Business Travelers**

School of Management  
Master's thesis in  
International Business

Vaasa 2021

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**UNIVERSITY OF VAASA****School of Management**

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<b>Title of the Thesis:</b>	Work Life Balance of Female International Business Travelers
<b>Degree:</b>	Master of Science in Economics and Business Administration
<b>Programme:</b>	International Business
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<b>Year:</b>	2021 Pages: 82

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**ABSTRACT:**

Tämän päivän globalisaatio on tuonut mukanaan vahvan tarpeen kansainväliselle liikematkustamiselle, joka on johtanut kansainvälisten liikematkustajien tutkimuksen kasvuun. Naisten osuus kansainvälisinä liikematkustajina on kasvava ilmiö. Kansainvälisesti liikematkustaviin naisiin keskittyvä tutkimus on vielä vähäistä ja lisäksi työn ja muun elämän yhteensovittamista koskeva kirjallisuus keskittyy edelleen lähinnä perheellisiin työntekijöihin. Johtuen edelleen vallitsevista mielikuvista perinteisistä perherooleista on kansainvälisen liikematkustamisen ja muun elämän yhteensovittaminen hankalaa naisille. Tämä tutkimus on toteutettu sekä perheellisten, että lapsettomien kansainvälisesti liikematkustavien naisten näkökulmasta, sillä työn ja muun elämän yhteensovittamisen ongelmat eivät rajoitu vain perheellisiin työntekijöihin.

Tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena on selvittää millaisia haasteita kansainväliset liikematkustajat naiset kohtaavat pyrkiessään työn ja muun elämän yhteensovittamiseen. Lisäksi tutkimus pyrkii selvittämään millaista tukea kansainvälisesti liikematkustavat naiset saavat ja toivovat organisaatioiltaan. Tutkimusmetodina tässä tutkimuksessa on käytetty laadullista menetelmää. Tutkimus toteutettiin haastattelemalla viittä suomalaista naista, joiden työnkuvaan kuuluu merkittävän paljon kansainvälistä liikematkustamista. Aikaisempi akateeminen kirjallisuus aiheen ympäriltä toimivat tutkimuksen viitekehyksinä. Tuloksia on analysoitu käyttäen sekä tutkimuksessa kerättyä aineistoa, että aikaisempia teorioita ja tutkimuksia.

Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat, että kansainvälisesti liikematkustavat naiset kohtaavat paljon erilaisia haasteita työn ja muun elämän yhteensovittamisessa. Sosiaalisten suhteiden ylläpito vaatii normaalia enemmän ponnisteluja, matkojen jälkeinen väsymys vaikuttaa sekä työhön että vapaa aikaan ja samoin monet käytännön asiat muodostuvat haasteiksi monille kansainvälisesti liikematkustaville naisille. Organisaatioilta toivotaan sekä henkistä, että käytännön tukea työn ja muun elämän yhteensovittamiseen. Työajan ja -paikan joustavuus, kansainvälisyyteen liittyvät koulutukset ja matkavarausten hoitaminen työntekijän puolesta ovat hyviä esimerkkejä organisaation tarjoamasta tuesta. Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat, että organisaatiolta saatu tuki nähdään erittäin tärkeänä ja hyödyllisenä.

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**KEYWORDS:** International Business Traveling, International Business Travelers, Work-Life Balance, Work-Life Conflict

## TABLE OF CONTENT

### List of figures and tables

1	INTRODUCTION	6
2	FEMALE INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS TRAVELLERS	10
2.1	Women in international business	10
2.2	Factors influencing women's success as IBTs	13
2.2.1	Individual characteristics	14
2.2.2	Organizational support	16
2.2.3	Family adjustment	17
2.2.4	Host national attitudes	18
3	WORK LIFE BALANCE FOR INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS TRAVELLERS	20
3.1	Work life balance and conflict	20
3.2	Main theories related to work life balance	22
3.2.1	Spillover theory	23
3.2.2	Compensation theory	25
3.2.3	Segmentation theory	26
3.3	Means of balancing international business travel with non-work life	27
3.3.1	Family friendliness of the company	27
3.3.2	HR support functions for international business travelers	29
3.4	Workload factors and challenges for international business travelers	34
3.5	Summary of the theoretical framework	38
4	RESEARCH METHODS	41
4.1	Qualitative research approach	41
4.2	Data collection and sample	42
4.3	Data analysis	43
4.4	Validity and reliability of the study	44
5	FINDINGS	46
5.1	Challenges of work life balance and international business traveling	46
5.2	Support offered for international business traveling females	56

6	CONCLUSIONS	62
6.1	Key findings	62
6.2	Theoretical contributions	65
6.3	Managerial implications	66
6.4	Limitations and future research suggestions	67
	REFERENCES	68
	Appendices	81
	Appendix 1. Interview questions	81

## List of figures and tables

### Figures

<b>Figure 1.</b> Aspects of work-life balance.	8
<b>Figure 2.</b> Factors related to women's success in international roles (Caligiuri & Cascio 1998).	14
<b>Figure 3.</b> Models of work-life balance theories (Malara 1998: 9-16.).	23
<b>Figure 4.</b> Personnel support functions effect on perceived organizational support (Allen, Shore & Griffeth 2003.)	30

### Tables

<b>Table 1.</b> Recent history of women in international business (altered from Altman & Shortland 2008.)	12
<b>Table 2.</b> Means and benefits of balancing international business travel and non-work life.	33

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Today, international business traveling is often a requirement for success in business. While business traveling can be interesting and rewarding, it also requires a great deal of physical and mental resources. Traveling practicalities, separation from family, adapting to different time zones, exposure to diseases, and changes in sleep and eating habits, among many other factors, can be largely linked to international business travel. (Espino, Sundstrom, Frick, Jacobs & Peters 2002.)

Research interest in international business travelers is growing. However, to date, most research has been mainly in the medical field, with only a few studies on the international business traveler's psychological well-being (Mäkelä & Kinnunen 2016). The workplace environment of international business travel involves many psychological and social factors that can lead to conflict between work and non-work life. These conflicts can cause mental health problems for the individual. (Mäkelä 2016: 7-8.) Many studies have shown that a significantly larger number of traveling staff seek help for psychiatric problems than non-traveling staff (Espino et al. 2002; Liese, Mundt, Dell, Nagy & Demure 1997.)

Aguilera (2008) defines business travel as work-related travel to diverse destinations. Examples of business travel include visiting a customer and attending a conference or meeting. Business travel is defined by Holley, Jain, and Lyons (2008) as travelling on behalf of the employer, that has a work-related purpose. International business travelers can be defined as persons who make business travel as an integral part of their work. In this thesis, international business travelers are seen as employees whose work requires repeated short business trips abroad to various destinations, without the involvement of the family. Short trips generally mean business trips of less than two weeks. (Welch, Welch & Worm 2007.) Today's international business travelers are usually managers, consultants, knowledge workers and other experts working for different multinational companies (Bergström 2010).

The work-life conflict is part of the daily lives of many international business travelers today, both men and women (Linehan & Walsh 2000; Houston 2005: 38; Espino et al. 2002). For women, however, the situation is slightly different Linehan and Walsh (2000) suggest that women experience significantly more social pressure than men to put home and family demands ahead of their careers. Pressures come from many different sources. Women feel that their careers are not considered as valuable as, for example, careers of their spouses (Hochschild 1989: 254; Mathur-Helm 2002). Women continue to have the greatest responsibility for caring for the home and children, regardless of how many hours they work outside the home (Linehan & Walsh 2000). Because of these existing pressures, women need some form of support from outside parties to cope with the contradictions created by international business trips and the life outside work. It would be beneficial to get support from the individual's own organization, family and preferably female colleagues in the same situation. (Varma & Russel 2016.)

In the study of work-life conflict, the family rises to a large extent (Pedersen & Lewis 2012), even though a large part of the workforce is singles, childless, or both (Casper, Weltman & Kwesiga 2007). Thus, non-work life can mean many different aspects of a person's life, such as friends, studies, hobbies and one's own time (Julkunen, Nätti, Anttila 2004: 203). For example, friendships play an important role in an individual's well-being and social skills. In the provision of social support, friendships rise to a very large extent. (Uchino 2004: 157-159.) In this thesis, non-work life refers to all aspects of life outside of work in addition to the family. As presented in the Figure 1 all the above-mentioned aspects are part of work-life balance.

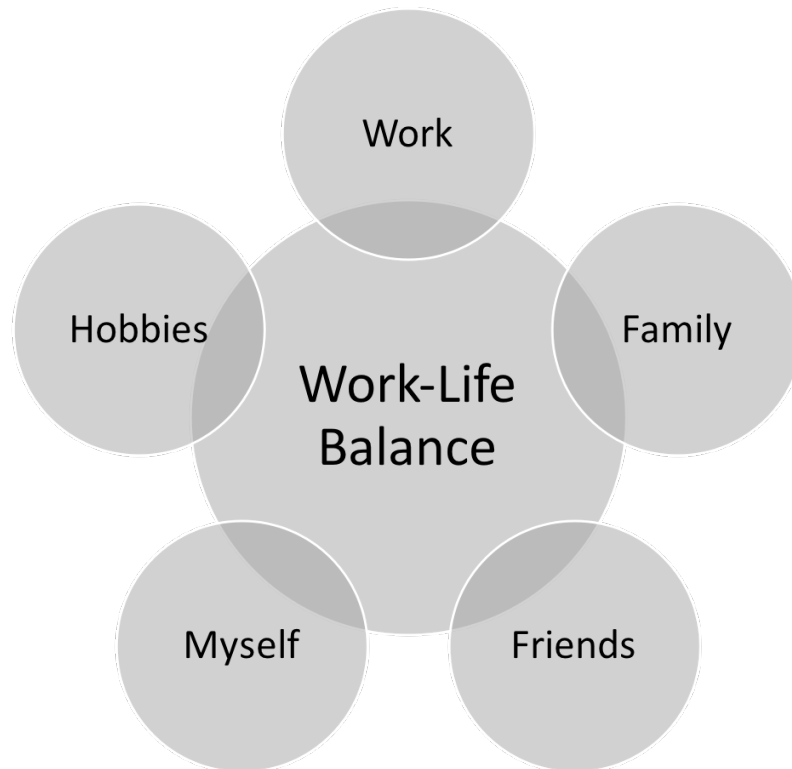


Figure 1. Aspects of work-life balance.

There is a lot of talk in the literature about the differences between men and women working in the international field. The research solely focusing on women as international business travelers is limited. However, when talking about success in international assignments, it has been found that gender-based personality differences can serve women's success (Guthrie, Ash & Stevens 2003; Harris 1993; Haslberger 2010). Guthrie et al. (2003) state that better understanding, evaluation, and use of different personalities in decision-making result in more qualified selection decisions that lead to savings (Caligiuri 2000). This will inevitably lead to women being offered more international jobs than before (Guthrie et al. 2003).

The proportion of women in international business has been growing strongly starting from the 21st century (Altman & Shortland 2008; Varma & Russel 2016). Indeed, it has been argued that top management should not assume that men's careers will continue to be a priority, as it is expected that in the future more and more female leaders will



influence international leadership (Linehan & Walsh 2000). The continuous growth of globalization, as well as the women's increasing interest in international assignments, will affect how organizations conduct their business in the near future (Varma & Russel 2016).

The role of women in working life, and especially in international business, has grown in recent decades and continues to grow (Varma & Russel 2016; Altman & Shortland 2001). Due to traditional gender roles and expectations, women and men face very different problems in working life (Fischlmayr & Puchmüller 2016; Haslberger 2010), although the roles have been changing significantly recently (Ballout 2008). Especially when studying work-life balance, a woman still faces significantly more pressures than a man, these pressures arise both from outside parties and from women themselves (Mathur-Helm 2002).

The higher proportion of women in international business in particular is a relatively recent phenomenon (Houston 2005: 38) and the research of this has remained somewhat limited. Balancing work and non-work life in particular, for women with international careers, is an interesting topic on which requires more focus. (Fischlmayr & Puchmüller 2016.) The aim of this thesis is to find out what kind of challenges international business traveling females face in relation to work life balance and what kind of support they get and want to better achieve work life balance. The two research questions are:

*“What challenges female international business travelers face in relation to their work life balance?”*

and

*“What kind of support international business traveler females get and want with work-life balance?”*

## **2 FEMALE INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS TRAVELLERS**

This chapter focuses on international business traveling specifically from a women's perspective. The chapter begins with a discussion of history of women in international business, which aims to highlight how women with international careers have been and are being seen today. This chapter will then look into the factors that can influence women's success as international business travelers, both in terms of individuals and career-related stakeholders.

### **2.1 Women in international business**

There has been relatively little research on women's involvement in international business and the research is not very long-term (Fischlmayr & Puchmüller 2016). The limited literature on women in leadership has mainly focused on highlighting stereotypes, discrimination and prejudices, and ways to reduce and combat these issues (Burke 2005: 13-30). Women with an international career have been portrayed within the literature as mainly spouses or individuals without families (Challiol & Mignonac 2005). Women who pursue both family and international careers have not been thoroughly addressed in the existing literature (Fischlmayr & Puchmüller 2016). However, in the 2000s, international business traveling for women have grown into a new and growing field of research (Mathur-Helm 2002).

Despite equal opportunities legislation in this era, it has taken women more than 20 years to make up a significant role in the international workforce. Yet women still play a much smaller role in international business than men. (Altman & Shortland 2001.) Harris (1995: 358) and Adler (1994) estimate that in the 1990s, only about three percent of international leaders were women. However, when approaching the next millennium women in international positions had been estimated to be up to 10-12% (Caligiuri & Cascio 1998).

Recent history can be divided into two different eras. From 1980 to 1994 were the so-called formative years, during which the existence of women in business on the international stage was gradually allowed and developed. (Altman & Shortland 2008.) In the 1980s, the proportion of women working abroad was only about 3% worldwide (Adler 1987). Employers were reluctant to even consider sending women to international assignment and business travels as women were considered reluctant and too vulnerable to succeed abroad. (Altman & Shortland 2001). There was also the idea at this time that sending a woman abroad could offend clients and workers in the destination country, because women were not believed to have equal status with men (Adler 1984a).

The years from 1995 to the present are called years of growth, with women becoming more involved in international business and the interest in research on the subject started growing (Altman & Shortland 2008). By the turn of the millennium, the change was already noticeable. Women gained a firm grip on leadership as legislation became more equal. More and more women graduated with relevant degrees and thus increased their appreciation in the work life. Despite the still limited number of women in international and leadership positions, trends emerging in the 21st century seem promising. (Altman & Shortland 2001.) The Table 1 below summarizes the recent history of women in international business.

Formative years		Growth years	
1980-1994		1995-2010	
1980-1989	1990-1994	1995-1999	2000-2010
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women's perceived unwillingness to undertake international assignments</li> <li>• The myth that women are unacceptable to host country</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Validating women's interest to undertake international assignments</li> <li>• Establishing that corporate selection overtly discriminates women</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishing that women are no less interested than men in international assignments</li> <li>• Establishing that being female is a nonissue for host country</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growing interest in research on the subject</li> <li>• Searching for competitive advantages; possibly women are preferred</li> </ul>

Table 1. Recent history of women in international business (altered from Altman & Shortland 2008.)

Altman and Shortland (2008) divide these two periods into even smaller periods for a more accurate picture of history. Each time period is considered from three different perspectives: individual, organization and environment. From 1980 to 1989, there was the idea that women were reluctant to work internationally (Adler 1984a). In addition, around this time, research began on why organizations oppose the posting of women abroad (Adler 1984b; Izraeli, Banai & Zeira 1980). This period also included the myth that it is unacceptable for women to represent the country at home and abroad (Adler 1987).

The next period covers the years 1990-1994. By this time, women's interest in international jobs began to be recognized and, at the same time, reinforced (Hill & Tillery 1992). On the organizational side, companies were found to discriminate clearly against women in their decisions regarding international assignments (Stone 1991). During this period, the environment created the idea that it is acceptable for a woman to represent her own country and organization in front of other countries (Chusmir & Frontczak 1990).

From 1995 to 1999, the perspective on women's international assignments and careers became more enlightening and protesting, and women's rights against men's standards began to be challenged (Altman & Shortland 2008). When looking at individuals, it was found that women are no less interested in international careers than men (Lowe, Downes & Kroeck 1999). In addition, research of the non-discrimination of organizations' practices and methods increased (Forster 1999). It was also noted at this time that femininity was not generally a problem for the host country (Taylor & Napier 1996a, 1996b).

The last period is the last millennium, from 2000 to 2010. Since 2000, the study of barriers to international assignments has become more common, with the study of work-life conflict as a good example (Linehan & Walsh 2000). From the organizations' point of view, the importance of new international roles and their impact on women has been explored (Mayerhofer, Hartmann & Herbert 2004). The environment, for its part, has sought to challenge the prevailing view of women's role in international business, women might be the preferred alternative to men (Guthrie et al. 2003; Tung 2004).

## **2.2 Factors influencing women's success as IBTs**

Caligiuri and Cascio (1998) present four factors related to women's success in international roles. Individual characteristics, organizational policies and practices, family adjustment, and host national attitudes all play a crucial role in a woman's success in international roles (Caligiuri & Cascio 1998). Fischlmay and Puchmüller (2016) and Haslberger (2010) also highlight very similar factors that influence the success of international business travelers. Figure 2 below illustrates the factors related to women's success in international roles.

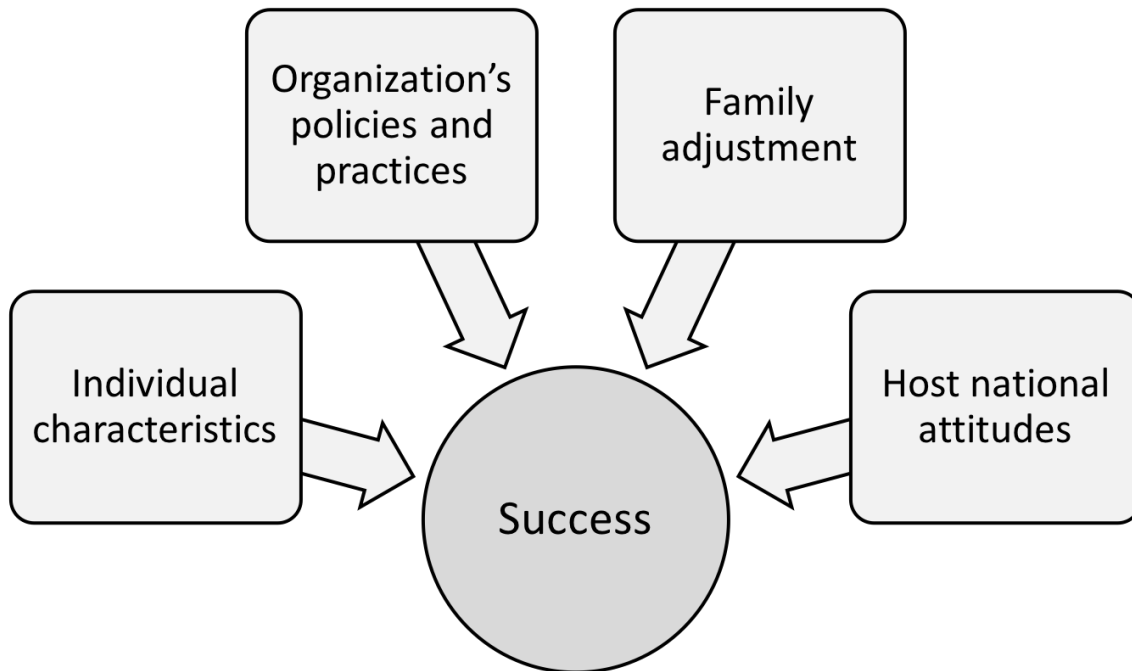


Figure 2. Factors related to women's success in international roles (Caligiuri & Cascio 1998).

### 2.2.1 Individual characteristics

Adler (1984a; 1984b; 1987) has raised many beliefs about women in international positions. One of the beliefs expressed by Adler (1984a) regarding women's international positions relates to women's individual qualities. Women's interest and motivation for international positions is believed to be significantly lower than men's. Because of this belief, organizations easily favor men being posted abroad. However, according to Adler, ultimately there is not a significant difference in interest and desire for international careers between men and women.

Therefore, motivation cannot be seen as a limiting factor (Caligiuri & Cascio 1998). However, Caligiuri and Cascio (1998) suggest that individuals have three other unique qualities that may influence their success in international assignments. Technical competence is the first attribute that directly influences an individual's success in international roles

(Caligiuri & Cascio 1998). Technical competence, or proficiency, can be defined as the rational use of knowledge, technical skills, reasoning, emotions, and values in daily work (Epstein & Hundert 2002). Of course, technical competence is also an important attribute for men, but for women it becomes even more critical. Women continue to be a minority in international positions, and as a minority they must constantly prove their skills in order to gain approval from the majority. (Adler 1987)

Belief in one's own abilities and self-confidence are very important qualities for women in international positions. To succeed, they must fully believe in their own abilities. (Caligiuri & Cascio 1998). High self-confidence has been found to be associated with success in unusual, influential roles for women (Ragins & Sundstrom 1989; Caligiuri & Cascio 1998). Self-confidence plays a very important role especially in international roles, as both verbal and non-verbal encouraging messages can be difficult to interpret due to cultural and linguistic differences (Caligiuri & Cascio 1998). Even if outside encouraging messages are interpretable, it is unlikely that women will increase their confidence in these encouraging messages (Dvir, Eden & Banjo 1995). For this reason, it is important for women to seek self-confidence more from within than from external sources (Caligiuri & Cascio 1998).

In addition to technical competence and confidence, women also need additional characteristics to succeed in international roles (Caligiuri & Cascio 1998). Building relationships has been shown to be strongly linked to women's career development (Ragins & Sundstrom 1989). In international roles, building relationships is also beneficial, as it makes it easier to adapt to a multicultural environment. Understanding cultural differences is not enough for women, as women face significantly more gender differences than men, for example in cultures that see women in a more traditional role. (Caligiuri & Cascio 1998.)

Studies have shown that flexible individuals with a multicultural attitude are more successful in international roles, and that interest in different cultures helps them to adapt

(Harvey 1985; Abe & Wiseman 1983; Mendenhall & Oddou 1985). A study by Haslberger (2010) reveals that women are more adaptable abroad than men, especially in their ability to establish and nurture relationships with other people. Haslberger (2010) suggests that women have better social skills than men, therefore, women learn quickly and are more confident in establishing new relationships in different cultures.

### **2.2.2 Organizational support**

Another factor influencing women's international success is the practices of multinational companies (Caligiuri & Cascio 1998). Adler's (1984a) study of HR managers reveals that HR executives in multinational companies generally believe that women succeed in international positions. They also strongly believe in increasing the proportion of women in international positions. Nevertheless, in a North American study, only 35% of the HR managers had selected a woman for an international position. Potential barriers to choose a female HR manager expressed the host country's prejudice, marital problems and the company's reluctance to send women abroad. (Adler 1984a.)

Even if the company is reluctant to select women for international positions, Caligiuri and Cascio (1998) give two reasons why women should be considered for these positions more often. In many countries the legislation about equal recruitment affects international recruitment (Altman & Shortland 2001; Caligiuri & Cascio 1998). Only the firm's perception that in the host country the woman is not valued for the job, is not sufficient reason by law to not select woman for the job. Another point of view is that suitable male candidates for international positions are beginning to run out. Thus, it is highly likely that companies will have to choose more women for international positions in the future (Adler 1984a), regardless of the reluctance of companies. (Caligiuri & Cascio 1998.)

Caligiuri and Cascio (1998) present practices that can help multinational companies improve women's success in international roles. Studies have shown that multicultural training prior to international assignments helps both women and men adapt to international situations (Earley 1987; Black & Mendenhall 1990; Varma & Russell 2016). In



addition to training women for international positions, companies can shape employees' perceptions of international situations. The company should emphasize that the employee is not selected for the job because of their gender, but because he or she is best suited to the job. (Caligiuri & Cascio 1998). Multicultural companies can also improve women's success through mentors, as mentoring has been identified as a major factor in women's success abroad (Noe 1988).

Women may find international positions challenging and often feel unqualified for the tasks, due to the prevailing attitudes and views (Varma, Stroh & Schmitt 2001). That is why, in addition to training and mentoring, companies should provide their female employees with accurate and up-to-date information on international positions and the role they play when traveling abroad. This would increase women's confidence to seek international roles and ultimately support their work abroad. (Varma & Russell 2016.)

House and Khan (1985) present three different forms of organizational support that would help the international business travelers. These forms are informational, emotional, and instrumental support. Informational support consists on providing more information and advice for the traveler. For example, information regarding childcare, financial matters, and refunds may be helpful. Emotional support, on the other hand, aims to fill the need for empathy. Emotional support can be expressed for example through positive words from family, the boss, or colleagues. The third form, instrumental support, refers to services provided for the travelers. Providing childcare or financial support are great examples of instrumental support. (House & Khan 1985, Puchmüller & Fischlmayr 2016)

### **2.2.3 Family adjustment**

As a third factor in women's international success, Caligiuri and Cascio (1998) report to be family adjustment. Marriages where both parties are committed to their careers can make it difficult to pursue an international career. A study by Mathur-Helm (2002) also found that support from spouses in particular improves women's success in international

roles. International business travel has also been found to be much more exhausting for women than for men. Particularly, the steps before and after the journey are particularly stressful for women, due to the many different roles and responsibilities assigned to them, such as careers, housekeeping, childcare, and relationships. (DeFrank, Konopaske & Ivancevich 2000.)

In addition to marital problems, children play a major role. Because caring for children is still seen as the traditional role of women, the impact of children may affect women's careers more than men. (Caligiuri & Cascio 1998.) Fischlmayr and Puchmüller (2016) support this idea by suggesting that women are typically still responsible for parenting. Even though efforts are now being made to share the responsibilities of home and family equally between both parents, the responsibility of taking care of the children still mainly lies on mothers. The study points out that women seek a great amount of help from other sources in addition to their partner, such as family, friends and babysitters. (Fischlmayr & Puchmüller 2016)

#### **2.2.4 Host national attitudes**

According to Caligiuri and Cascio (1998), the fourth factor is related to the individuals the woman works with in the destination country. The perception of a woman by colleagues, subordinates, supervisors and clients in the target country influences the individual's success in international roles. Adler (1987) has examined the female international business travelers' perceptions about the preconception of the host country nationals. The study found that business traveling women were seen in very different ways from locally working women. Adler explains the phenomenon by the fact that women were first seen as foreigners and only then as women. Stakeholders in the target country felt that a woman must be highly qualified because she was sent to a job instead of a man. (Adler 1987)

All in all, there are multiple factors that contribute to the success of women in international positions. Individuals interest towards international business traveling, technical competence, self-confidence, understanding of different cultures, and social skills are all

important individual characteristics that help the individual to succeed in international positions. (Caligiuri & Cascio 1998.) In addition, organizational support in form of informational, emotional, and instrumental support (House & Khan 1985) as well as family adjustment and host national attitudes are an important part of the success of the international business traveler female (Caligiuri & Cascio 1998).

### **3 WORK LIFE BALANCE FOR INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS TRAVELLERS**

This chapter addresses work life balance for international business travelers. At the beginning, we define the concepts involved in the topic, which form the basis for a more detailed discussion of the topic. Also, ways to better reconcile international business travel with the personal life are presented. Finally, we address the challenges that international business travelers might face by presenting different factors that might cause stress to the international business travelers. These stressors include for example health issues, safety concerns and time pressure while traveling internationally.

#### **3.1 Work life balance and conflict**

Over the last 30 years social science research focusing on work and life management has been extensive (Medved, 2004). The terms work life balance and work life conflict are often used without a precise definition. The terms of work family balance and conflict are often used as well. All these terms, in their own way, illustrate the efforts of employees to balance different personal, home and work responsibilities. (Aldoory, Jiang, Toth, Sha, 2008.)

Clark (2001) describes that work life balance as when the individual is satisfied and has good functioning at both work and home at the same time experiencing minimum of role conflict. Aldoory et al. (2008) states that work life balance is not necessarily a direct result of the efforts made by the individual between the responsibilities, but rather a desire. Consequently, researchers include “balance” to terms that describe the crossroads of personal and work life. Additionally, work life balance can be assessed how especially women are able to manage temporary and permanent interruptions in work and personal lives and daily routines (Medved 2004).

Furthermore Brown (2005) and Clark (2001) emphasize that the term work life balance does not mean that the time is equally devoted to work and other activities in individual's life. Houston (2005: 38) argues that the concept is not just about family and child-care, nor does it mean reducing work. It is about acting sensibly (Clark 2001), being aware of all that is required of work and personal life without compromising the other (Houston 2005: 38).

Conceptions of work-life balance are generally slightly different between the genders. Men feel more desire to integrate work better with their personal time. In addition, men believe that work-life balance is mainly a women's issue and women focus more on this area than men. Women, too, see the work life balance and conflict as a burden for women more than men, placing responsibility for its existence on women. Women perceive that they have higher expectations of themselves in order to fulfill all the duties they are imposed. (Aldoory et al. 2008.) Most organizations' work life balance practices also focus primarily on women and their flexible working hours (Yu, 2014).

The work life conflict has become a concern also for organizations during this millennium (Aldoory et al. 2008). Work life conflict has been recognized as a major problem that is affecting both individual employees and also their employers (Lapierre, Spector, Allen, Poelmans, Cooper, O'Driscoll, Sanchez, Brough & Kinnunen, 2008). Studies have shown that organizations that are more family supportive, employees experience less work-life conflicts, more job satisfaction and commitment than employees in organizations that are less family supportive. This underlines the importance of organizations' perceptions of employees' attitudes and experiences. (Allen 2001.)

Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) define work life conflict as a form of conflict in which the various roles and pressures of work and life are, at least to some extent, incompatible. More recent research also differentiates the direction of the conflict, with work interfering with personal life (work to life conflict) and personal life interfering work (life to work

conflict) (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran 2005). The conflict between work and life is closely linked to individual's feelings of well-being and satisfaction in work and in personal life (Kinnunen & Mauno 1998).

The so-called opposite of work life conflict is work life enrichment or work-family enrichment. Greenhaus and Powell (2006) define the concept so that experiences in one area of life improve the quality of life in another. Experiences gained both at work and outside work can affect the individual's overall well-being and happiness, which in turn is reflected in all other aspects of life. Thus, the work-life enrichment can be perceived, for example, when the positive effects of experiences and feelings at work life transfer outside work and vice versa. (Greenhaus & Powell 2006.)

### **3.2 Main theories related to work life balance**

There are three main theories that are used to explain the processes which link work and non-work life. Both spillover theory and compensation theory state that there is a relationship between work and non-work life. In turn, segmentation theory states that there is no connection between work and non-life. (Lambert 1990.) The Figure 3 below presents the models of the three main theories.

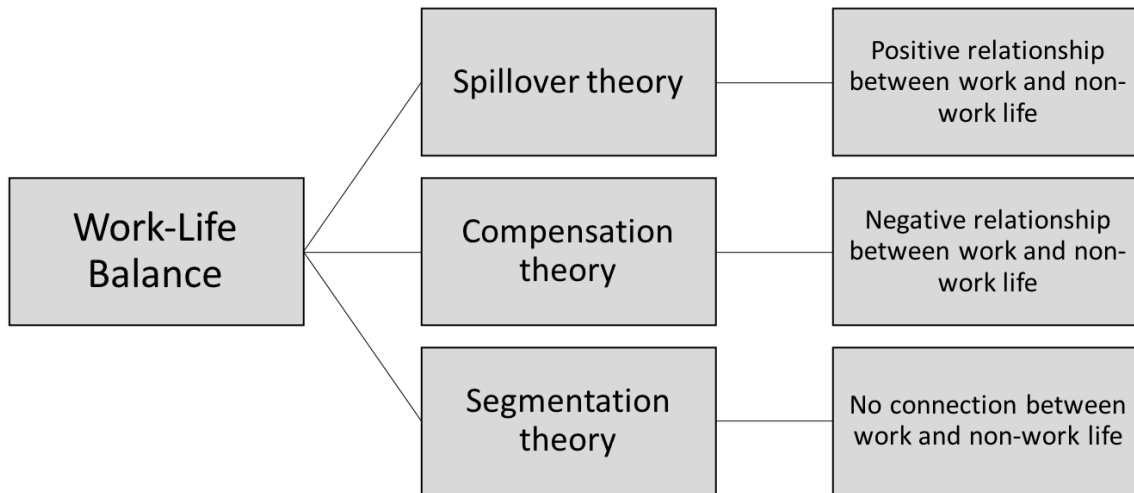


Figure 3. Models of work-life balance theories (Malara 1998: 9-16.).

### 3.2.1 Spillover theory

Spillover theory is strongly linked to the work-life balance. According to spillover theory, the employee's experience at work affects personal life and vice versa (Staines 1980), work and non-work life are seen as working as a whole (Malara 1998: 9). Staines (1980) defines spillover theory as a positive relationship between work and non-work life, with positive experiences having a positive impact on the non-work life and negative experiences having a negative impact.

As a good example of a negative spill, one can imagine the employee's negative feelings about the shift. These negative feelings affect his work and can continue into the home, where they affect the person's other life. A similar situation could be when an individual has problems with their marriage. This clearly affects the life outside work, but also the level of working. The negative reactions at work can thus be an impact of problems in life outside work. (Malara 1998: 9.)

Although these examples are concerned with the transmission of negative emotions from one environment to another, this does not mean that only negative thoughts are transmitted. Positive things, like a promotion, or the joy of completing a project can also be transferred to non-work life. As well as positive experiences outside the workplace can enhance the level of working. (Malara 1998 9-10.) In such a situation, the spillover of experience is can be seen as an enrichment of work and life that improves the overall well-being of the individual (Greenhaus & Powell 2006).

Spillover theory has become the most popular viewpoint in the study of work and life. Spillover theory also has the most research evidence to support it. However, it has been suggested that the research evidence would be somewhat weak in certain respects. In many surveys, the sample has been relatively small, or the survey method has guided respondents' thoughts. (Malara 1998: 10)

Williams and Alliger (1994) investigated working parents and found that women were more likely than men to experience emotional spills from work to non-work life and vice versa. According to the study, women estimate that they experience more stress related to housework than men. Another explanation for the gender gap can also be found in cultural or biological factors. The study also found that negative feelings were more easily spilled than positive feelings. According to researchers, negative emotional states are broader and more persistent than positive emotional states. Researchers find that changing roles during the day breaks a positive emotional state more easily than a negative one. Thus, the negative emotions between work and non-work life spill more than the positive ones. (Williams & Alliger 1994.)

Bakker and Demerouti (2013: 62-63) have developed a newer model of spillover theory, whereby emotions from work are transferred home and home to the family and in the other direction. This model is called the Spillover-Crossover model. The model suggests that spillage is not limited to the work and life of the individual, but that emotional states



change and move beyond this. Studies have shown, for example, that commitment to work passes through the employee as happiness to people involved in his or her non-work life, such as a spouse (Rodríguez-Muños, Sanz-Vergel, Demerouti & Bakker 2014).

### **3.2.2 Compensation theory**

Another theory strongly related to the work life balance is the compensation theory. Compensation theory states that an employee seeks to compensate for work-related events in the life outside work. For example, manual workers are less likely to engage in physical activities outside of work. (Staines 1980.) Like spillover theory, compensation theory sees work and home as part of the same environment (Malara 1998: 11). However, compensation is defined as a negative relationship between work and non-work life. Negativity, meaning that negative experiences at work are linked to positive experiences in life outside work and vice versa (Staines 1980).

An example of compensation theory could be an employee who is experiencing problems at the workplace and therefore wants to leave their job. In this situation, they can direct their energy back home where they feel that they are more appreciated for their efforts. Similarly, when a person encounters problem in their relationship, they can invest more energy in the workplace, where the effects and usefulness of their actions are noticed. (Malara 1998: 12)

Compensation theory can also be viewed from another perspective. It can be seen as detachment from one sector of life, as discussed above, or as a holistic participation in another sector of life, with great disadvantage to the other. An employee can be very committed to their job and feel total satisfaction in their lives due to work experience. However, because of this commitment to work, one does not necessarily want to struggle to develop a life outside work. Similarly, for example, after the birth of a child, work may not be as enthusiastic and interesting as before. In these cases, the person only directs all their energy to work or to other life, whereby there is no longer enough power for the other. This perspective is called involvement theory. (Malara 1998: 12)

### 3.2.3 Segmentation theory

The segmentation theory, which is very different from the spillover theory and the compensation theory, suggests that work and non-work life function as independent entities, with no connection between them. According to segmentation theory, work does not affect in any way, for example, the employee's family or vice versa. (Malara 1998: 13.) Also, according to work-family border theory, an individual builds so-called walls between work and life, with the aim of eventually achieving a balance between them (Clark 2001).

For example, in highly stressful occupations, the employee may want to 'build a wall' to separate work and life outside work (Malara 1998: 13). Lambert (1990) suggests that segmentation does not occur naturally. Instead, employees actively seek to separate work and non-work life in order to cope with work-related stress (Lambert 1990). However, Ridley (1973) and Malara (1998: 13-14) suggest that work-life segmentation can also occur naturally. Natural segmentation may occur, for example, in a situation where work is seen as secondary to non-work life. In such situation, the separation of work and non-work life happens in a way, by itself. (Malara 1998: 13-14.)

Based on his research, Lambert (1990) states that spillover theory, compensation theory, and segmentation theory all explain the relationship between work and non-work life. Often, when studying these theories, the focus has been on comparing and putting the theories against each other. However, theories are believed to coexist and overlap rather than compete. It is possible that an employee's conflicts in the family will spill over into his or her working life while compensating for conflicts at work elsewhere in the life. Similarly, work-related stress can, for example, be transferred to non-work life at the same time as family conflicts are separated from work. There are many different types of stress factors, and there is not just one right theory, or the way employees react to them. (Malara 1998: 16)

### **3.3 Means of balancing international business travel with non-work life**

Many companies have adopted policies, programs and benefits that facilitate the work-life balance. Work-life balance practices clearly shape employees' attitudes and behaviors, such as commitment and work efficiency. Significant outcomes such as employee job satisfaction, declining turnover intentions, and increased engagement are aggregated so that they ultimately affect both the well-being of the individual and the business performance of the company. (Kelly, Kossek, Hammer, Durham, Bray, Chermack, Murphy & Kaskubar 2008.)

#### **3.3.1 Family friendliness of the company**

Organization's family-friendliness is important in balancing work and non-life. The family-friendliness of the company is reflected in the activities and choices the company provides that support and consider the family life of the staff. For example, a company's human resources policy is a good point of reference when examining a company's family-friendliness. When the policies take into account the demands of both family and work, the company's HR policy can be considered family friendly. (Piensoho 2007: 171-172.) Mauno, Kiuru and Kinnunen (2011) suggest that employees' experiences of company's family-friendliness are clearly positively related to job satisfaction, job commitment and employee attitudes. In addition, the family-friendliness of the company reduces the incentive for employees to change jobs. (Mauno et al. 2011.)

The family-friendliness of a company can be seen by employees through three different cultures. In a family-friendly management culture, management and supervisors demonstrate support, flexibility, and a positive attitude to employees' family life. The various requirements for work-life balance are considered and the employer has an interest in the families of the employees and in the rest of their lives. (Mauno, Kinnunen & Ruokolainen 2005.)

The working time culture addresses the needs of employees in their non-work life by providing flexibility. In this case, employees will not experience any pressures or expectations on working hours that will interfere with family or private life. (Mauno et al. 2005.) Brough, O'Driscoll and Kalliath (2005) also argue that working too long increases conflicts between work and non-work life and increases dissatisfaction with both aspects of life. In addition to the flexibility of working hours, work forms and tasks should be easily adaptable to the needs of the employee (Piensoho 2007: 174).

Through a career development culture, employees should be made aware that taking into account family or private life does not lead to negative career consequences. In this situation, for example, family leave or the reduction in working time requested for the sake of family should not affect the employee's career development. The needs of family life should be a permitted topic in the workplace, and in particular men's willingness to take their entitlement to family leave should be acceptable. (Mauno et al. 2005.)

Increasing teleworking opportunities is also a great way to promote family-friendly business (Morganson, Major, Oborn, Verive & Heelan 2010). Kurkland and Bailey (1999) defines teleworking as that work is done wherever and whenever. Garret and Danziger (2007) suggest that teleworking can be done, for example, at home, in branch offices, or when traveling mobile. Morganson et al. (2010) state that telework means all work outside the head office. Teleworkers at home have been found to have a better work-life balance than staff at headquarters. However, the level of job satisfaction for teleworkers at home is very similar to that for head office workers. Home workers value freedom and flexibility but can easily become distant from social groups in the work community. Therefore, companies should develop the inclusion of teleworkers in the work community. Supervisors should hold regular meetings with teleworkers and keep them up to date, including involvement in decision-making to help teleworkers be included. (Morganson et al. 2010.)

Piensoho (2007: 174) suggests that some employees appreciate workplace events to which staff families are also welcome. Such activities emphasize the sense of community and the employer's positive attitude towards the non-work life of employees. However, the company should take into account that for some, family-friendliness can mean exactly the opposite. In other words, staff should also be given the opportunity to keep work and family separate. Not everyone feels the need to discuss family issues at work, or especially to invite a partner to work.

While family-friendliness is a very important part of supporting the work-life balance, it would be extremely important to consider single and childless employees as well. A study by Casper et al. (2007) on the work-life balance of single employees shows that single employees are more likely to experience injustice in organizational behavior than employees with family. Organizations that support a fair work-life balance, both single and employees with family, can benefit from reduced negative behavior on behalf of employees.

Findings indicate that supporting non-family employees can improve employees' engagement to the organization. For example, organizing social events that include both family and non-family members should facilitate the commitment of all employees to the organization. In addition, many flexible working hour practices, which are offered to a large number of family employees, also work for those without a family. Career options are becoming especially important for employees without families, so organizations should develop their mentoring and career development programs to increase the commitment of non-family workers. (Casper et al. 2007.)

### **3.3.2 HR support functions for international business travelers**

In order for international organizations to maintain their healthy and well-performing employees, they have developed various HR support functions for their international employees (Mäkelä & Kinnunen 2016). Typically, these activities are targeted at employees who are moving to another country for a longer period of time. However, also for

international business travelers, the need for staff support has become an issue for organizations. (Collings, Scullion & Morley 2007; Harvey, Mayerhofer, Hartman & Moeller 2010.) However, problems associated with work success and work-life balance, especially for international business travelers, are unfortunately rarely considered as an important component of HR (Ivancevich, Konopaske & Defrank 2003).

Personnel support functions generally refer to organizational methods that communicate that the organization values its employees and is ready to invest in their well-being (Allen, Shore & Griffeth 2003). These methods include, for example, impartial rewarding of employees, participation in decision-making and the opportunity for self-development (Mäkelä & Kinnunen 2016). As an organization implements such activities, staff efficiency and commitment to the organization will increase and thereby positively impact the organization's revenue. (Allen et al. 2003). Figure 4 below illustrates the effect of personnel support functions to job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

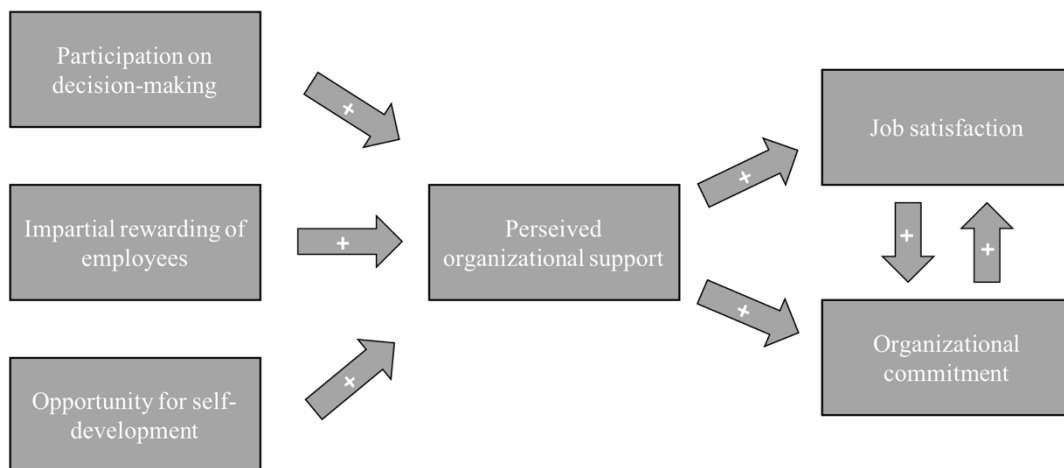


Figure 4. Personnel support functions effect on perceived organizational support (Allen, Shore & Griffeth 2003.)

However, Whitener (2001) also questions how staff members consider the support functions provided to them by the organization. According to him, employees may not perceive the existence of such activities as the organization has assumed. For example, even if an organization encourages staff to participate in decision-making, but the desired actions are not taken despite participation, staff may question the support the organization has given them. Similarly, many organizations see their reward models as relatively equal, but many employees disagree. Despite these considerations, the extent to which an organization provides staff supportive practices greatly influences employee attitudes and behaviors. (Allen et al. 2003.)

There are many staff supporting practices that impact international business travelers in particular. For example, well-functioning travel arrangement systems are important for the success of travel planning, arrangements and the travel itself. (Mäkelä & Kinnunen 2016). This is linked to strong research findings that travel cost savings and disruption during travel have a negative impact on the well-being of international business travelers (Collings et al. 2007; Ivancevich et al. 2003). For these reasons, the safety and well-being of the passenger should be taken into account in human resource management (Mäkelä & Kinnunen 2016). Jensen (2014) presents that work-life conflicts are reduced when the employee is also able to manage travel arrangements. Jensen (2014) and Espino et al. (2002) state that the ability of employees to influence travel arrangements themselves, reduce stress and thereby work-life conflicts.

The organization should also provide multicultural and country-specific training to international business travelers. Currently, training on international assignments is mainly offered only to expatriates, that is to say, to employees relocating to another country for a longer period of time. (Mäkelä & Kinnunen 2016.) However, the need for these trainings is also evident for international business travelers (Tahvanainen, Welch & Worm 2005). Relevant training is one of the activities that support employees and help them cope with the tasks assigned to them (Mäkelä & Kinnunen 2016).

It has also been suggested that many organizations underestimate the impact that business travel has on employees after traveling. International business travel can easily lead to job accumulation and organizations often do not give their employees enough time to cope with both their undone and new work tasks. (Collings et al. 2007.) This has been shown to increase the perceived work-life conflict. Through the work-life conflict, the effect is also reflected in the exhaustion of employees. (Jensen 2014.) Therefore, practices that support traveling staff should also focus on the return of employees after their journey (Mäkelä & Kinnunen 2016).

For example, the above-mentioned means are a good way to show employees the organization's appreciation for international business travelers (Mäkelä & Kinnunen 2016). If business travel is perceived as a necessary element for organizational growth, globalization, goals and strategic plans, it is likely that the culture of the organization will become supportive of international business travelers. Such a culture encourages and supports employees who are involved in international business travel. Differently, if the organizational culture and subcultures do not support the importance of international business travel for the organization, employees are likely to reflect these values in such a way that international business travel is seen as a unnecessary and expensive activity that generates just little economic benefit for the organization. These thoughts reduce the employee's commitment to both the organization and their work. (Ivancevich et al. 2003.) The Table 2 below illustrates the means and benefits of balancing international business traveling and non-work life.



Means of balancing international business travel and non-work life		Benefits
Travel arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No unnecessary cost savings</li> <li>• Minimizing the travel disruptions</li> <li>• Allowing employees to influence travel arrangements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organizational engagement</li> <li>• Job satisfaction</li> <li>• Decreased turnover intentions</li> <li>• Increase in work-life balance</li> </ul>
Trainings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multicultural</li> <li>• Country-specific</li> </ul>	
After traveling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time to rest</li> <li>• Time to take care of undone work</li> </ul>	
Organizational culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supportive towards international business traveling</li> </ul>	

Table 2. Means and benefits of balancing international business travel and non-work life.

Organizational support has been shown to reduce work-related spilling to non-work life, thereby increasing job satisfaction and improving job performance (Ballout 2008). In their study, Brough et al. (2005) also show that employee support functions improve individual's success and satisfaction both at work and outside work. When the employee experiences satisfaction and commitment to the organization and work, the possibility of conflict between work and other life decreases (Mäkelä, Kinnunen & Suutari 2015).

Employee's level of internationalization is seen as having a major impact on the work-life balance for international business travelers (Mäkelä et al. 2015). According to Suutari and Taka (2004) an internationally oriented employee is interested in exploring new experiences by exploring unknown countries and cultures. Carlson, Derr and Wadsworth (2003) and Mäkelä et al. (2015) have shown that individuals' strong commitment to international careers reduces work-life conflict when work often requires traveling. When

an employee considers themselves fit for the job, for example because of internationality, they benefit from a lower work-life conflict and probably a higher positive work-life interaction (Carlson et al. 2003).

### **3.4 Workload factors and challenges for international business travelers**

Frequent traveling includes a lot of planning and different arrangements that can be intensive and cause pressure for the employees concerned (Fischlmayr & Kollinger 2013). Missed and delayed flights, tight meeting schedules and flight connections, different health and safety concerns are among the most commonly mentioned potential stressors regarding business traveling (DeFrank et al. 2000). Safety concerns are not only limited to the negative effects of constant traveling as for example lack of physical exercise, lack of sleep, and poor diet. Also, physical safety, threat of political riots and terrorism are matters of safety concerns for international business travelers. (Welch & Worm 2006.)

In comparison to the expatriates the international business travelers are required to adapt quickly to new and different cultures as the travel times can be only from few hours to few days in a different cultural environment (Fischlmayr & Kollinger 2013). While traveling overseas the health concerns become even more critical, especially regarding personal safety. Traveling across multiple time zones usually result in jet-lag symptoms and the constant personal interaction with people from different cultural backgrounds can be stressful for the international business travelers (Cassidy 1992). Ever-changing cultural specifics of the location, adjusting to the locals and foreign business partners can cause stress for international business travelers and this may even impact the job performance and work satisfaction negatively (Ramsey, Leonel, Gomes & Monteiro 2011).

In addition to the stress caused from the actual travel itself, international business travelers also experience high stress from the planning and arranging the special situations.

While the employee is on a business trip, also the work at the home office needs to be dealt with somehow. This means that there are some arrangements with colleagues, team members and managers that are necessary to handle. These types of arrangements are much more extensive when the business trip is longer. (Ivancevich et al. 2003.) As looking at all the challenging factors making business traveling stressful, these challenges may have a severe impact on the satisfaction and performance of the international business traveler (Fischlmayr & Kollinger 2013).

Travelling is not the only stressor for the international business travelers, but also constant work demands, and possibly stressful working conditions may cause international business travelers to have a negative impact on their work life balance and overall well-being (Wallace 2005). International business travelers are repeatedly confronted with absences of short notice and unplanned. Also, their offices are more seen as a home base where they only return on a regular basis rather than as fixed facilities. Therefore, it is obligatory for international business travelers to be exceptionally flexible and they need to be willing to work at differing places in sometimes inconvenient times. (Felstead, Jewson & Walters 2005.)

While traveling the work at the home office usually does not stop, therefore the longer the business trip, the more of a backlog it is waiting at the home office when the employee returns. Thus, international business travelers often have to endure additional workload during the times of travel. This may cause concerns on how to cope with these additional demands and there is also a threat of exhaustion, frustration and depression for the international business travelers. (Ivancevich et al. 2003.) In order to work on the backlog already during the trip international business travelers often have to work at all possible places, for example at the airports, taxis, trains etc. This allows them to have more time with friends and family when they return and the workload back at the home office has not gained massively.

Today's possibilities offered by modern IT technology are extremely beneficial for the international business travelers as it is easy to communicate both with the home office or of the headquarters of the company and connect with friends and family while on a business trip. However, this might also put stress on the international business traveler as they might feel that they need to be connected to others at all times. In addition, instant telecommunication may intrude the business trip and its aim or erode on personal free time and so increase the workload. (Wech & Worm 2006.)

Welch & Worm (2006) claim that for international business travelers, relationships and other social contacts have become one of the main stressors. Short, irregular, and unexpected business trips put high strain on home and family life, these unplanned absences require flexibility and understanding not only from the traveler but also from the personal environment. For example, the spouse has to cover for the tasks and responsibilities of the traveler, this stands out especially when there are children in the family. (Welch & Worm 2006.) It is common for international business travelers to miss out on important family occasions such as children's birthdays, family gatherings, school events, anniversaries etc. This may become critical issue and cause serious harm especially over time while considering marital and family relationships. (Espino et al. 2002.)

Family stressors can be seen as most critical both right before trip as intensive planning and preparations for the trip cut down the time spent with the family and when returning from the trip because of the conflict between exhaustion of the traveler and demands from the family (DeFrank et al. 2000). Also, Liese (2000) suggests that the coming home part of the business trip is the most challenging part as the traveler returning from the trip is drained and is unable to meet the expectations and obligations of the friends and family.

In addition to travelers with family, it is also challenging for single international business travelers due to the travel obligations to meet friends and maintain social contacts. Although, when traveling frequently these travelers may create new relationships abroad.

However, international business travelers benefit greatly from today's technologies that allow contact with family and other private networks easily and quickly. (Welch & Worm 2006.)

Many physical and psychological effects such as sleep disorders, lack of energy, overweight, headache, and even burnout is often reported by international business travelers due to their multiple pressures, bad nutrition, lack of physical movement, and permanent stress (Welch & Worm 2006). Particularly the lack and irregularity of the sleep patterns put a strain on the body. In addition, different addictions such as alcoholism are common among international business travelers. (DeFrank et al. 2000.) Also issues with physical coordination and reaction time, as well as, physical and mental performance have been reported among international business travelers. These problems might lead to different more severe chronic diseases such as depression or diabetes (Burkholder, Joines, Cunningham-Hill & Xu 2010).

However, elements causing stress and risk to one may be the source of excitement and positive stimulation to another. Perception and response to stress and pressure of international business travel depends mainly on the individual's characteristics, for example, age, family situation and prior travel experience. Also, the level of support received from the organization effects the perceptions. The size of the organization, job to be delivered abroad, and the level of positions might all effect to the level of support from the organization. Also, high social support from the colleagues, supervisors, and subordinates has been proven to positively impact on traveling stressors and pressure. Nevertheless, both social support and personal characteristics have been proven to have an impact on work life balance, job satisfaction, general performance and therefore, turnover. (Welch & Worm 2006.)

### 3.5 Summary of the theoretical framework

The benefits brought by the development of international transport and communications technology have led to an increase in international business. Despite the development of communication technology, face-to-face meetings have not disappeared and thus work tasks related to international mobility have also become more common (Bergström 2010; Ramsey, Leonel, Gomes & Monteiro 2011). With this change, it is no longer enough to recruit only men for international positions. Adding qualified women to the ranks of potential international business travelers increases the chances of companies succeeding better. (Cole & McNulty 2011.)

Women have only been part of international business travel for a few decades. As late as the 1980s, women were not seen as acceptable representatives of the organization, especially in the international market. In addition, women were still seen in the 1990s as reluctant to travel on international business. Around 1995 onwards, women's rights and more equal legislation have shaped these perceptions in organizations and the number of female international business travelers has increased. In the 21st century, research on women as international business travelers has also been on the rise. (Altman & Shortland 2008.)

International business travelers need to have many different characteristics and qualities in order to succeed in their missions. For example, internationality, self-confidence, social intelligence, and flexibility are important attributes for international business travelers. (Caligiuri & Cascio 1998.) Many researchers have shown that women may have even more of these traits than men. In particular social skills are generally stronger for women than men, these important skills become a very great resource, especially in international business travel. From this it can be concluded that women could possibly be even more suitable than men to carry out international business trips for companies. (Guthrie et al. 2003; Tung 2004; Haslberger 2010.) Thus, companies should consider

women's willingness and competence for international business travel and encourage them to face new challenges (Altman & Shortland 2008).

This study considers the special features of international business travel and their impact on the employee. International business travel differs greatly from longer assignments abroad. International business travel refers to repeated short-term trips abroad of less than two weeks. The trips are prescribed on behalf of the employer and have some work-related purpose. Short-term and repetitive work-related trips abroad without a family cause a lot of practical problems. (Welch et al. 2007.)

There are multiple workload factors and challenges related to international business traveling. Everyday planning becomes more difficult and social relationships can suffer due to intermittent absences (Welch et al. 2007). Relationships and other social contacts often cause stress for international business travelers (Welch & Worm 2006). International business travelers often feel stress in relation to the traveling itself but also from all the planning and arranging for the business trips. High work demands and additional workload caused by the business traveling may also cause concerns for international business travelers. (Ivancevich et al. 2003.) In addition, international business travel increases the risk of both physical illnesses, such as sleep problems and infections acquired abroad, and mental illness (Espino et al. 2002). For example, mental exhaustion (Jensen 2014) and stress have been shown to be clearly associated with international business travel. However, it has been suggested that physical detachment from the workplace may also potentially reduce work-related stress (Westman et al. 2004).

International business travel has been found to strongly increase the conflict between work and other life. However, men and women experience conflicts very differently during travel. Men experience conflict between work and the rest of their lives strongly before and during the trip, however, after the trip, the amount of conflict decreases significantly for men. For women, the experience of conflict between work and other life is strongly present in the early stages of the journey but decreases during the journey.

However, returning home significantly increases the conflict between work and the rest of life experienced by women, women at this stage have the strongest experience of conflict. As in many other situations, the reason for the separation of men and women is seen to be found in the prevailing family roles. When women return home, a large amount of housework often awaits, while when men return from a trip, the family seeks to facilitate the return by helping with household chores. (Westman et al. 2004).

In order to find a balance between international business travel and the rest of life, all aspects of life must be in order (Casper et al. 2007). Role conflicts between work and other life make it difficult to find work-life balance. There are many different roles in the lives of international business travelers, and it can sometimes be difficult to meet the responsibilities that come with it. (Linehan & Walsh 2000.) For example, the role of women as caregivers of children can be considered in the culture of the company. A family-friendly culture that supports the balancing of employees' family and work life, helps to engage employees, improves job satisfaction, and thus also contributes to the success of the organization. (Mauno et al. 2005).

Female international business travelers are found to have more problems with work life balance than men. This phenomenon is believed to be due to the still prevailing perceptions of women caring for children, men making a living for the family. (Mathur-Helm 2002.) Today, however, it is very common for both parents in a family to be in working life and wanting to develop their own careers (Tammelin, Malinen, Rönkä & Verhoef 2017). The above perceptions put female international business travelers in a difficult situation where they do not face acceptance of their own choices (Altman & Shortland 2008). Both, outsiders and women themselves, create a lot of prejudice and accusations that women do not take care of their families in the so-called right way (Mathur-Helm 2002). For these reasons, the majority of female international business travelers are unmarried or childless (Challioli & Mignonac 2005).



## 4 RESEARCH METHODS

In this chapter, the design of the research in this thesis is presented. It includes information on the research method, data collection and analyses, as well as, the sample of the research. Lastly this chapter discusses the reliability and validity of the research.

### 4.1 Qualitative research approach

In order to make the research more efficient it must be conducted for a specific purpose. Therefore, the method of research should always be based on the goals determined. (Walle 2015: 26.) A qualitative research method has been chosen for this research as the aim is to understand and interpret the connection between international business traveling and work life balance. Interpretive philosophy is usually associated with qualitative research as there is a need to understand the subjective and the meanings communicated regarding the studied phenomenon. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008: 5.) Interpretivism can be seen also as very suitable in business and especially management studies as the situations in this world are usually complex and exceptional (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2019: 149).

The research method used in this research is called mono method qualitative study. Mono qualitative study means that it includes one specific data collection method that is followed by one specific analysis technique for the collected data (Saunders et al. 2019: 179). Words either written or spoken and still or moving visual images are often the source of qualitative data (Saunders et al. 2019: 813). The meaning behind these images and words are investigated in qualitative research (Saunders et al. 2019: 179). Therefore, it is possible to get more in-depth information on the research question with qualitative data than with numerical quantitative data.

Due to the lack of previous research on the studied phenomenon, international business travelers' perceptions of their work life balance, it is also important to gain in-depth information and understanding on the topic. Exploratory strategy is therefore adopted for this study. Exploratory study is argued to be the most suitable option in order to gain comprehensive information on the studied phenomenon as it offers "valuable means to ask open questions to discover what is happening and gain insights about a topic of interest" (Saunders et al. 2019: 186). When seeking for in-depth information and analysis, semi-structured interviews are recommended (Saunders et al. 2019: 139-140).

## **4.2 Data collection and sample**

The collected data can be either primary or secondary. Data collected specifically for a certain research problem is called primary data. Secondary data, however, is formerly collected for a different purpose. The secondary data is more often quantitative and presented in forms of variables. Therefore, it is easier to use this data in multiple and different researches. Secondary data can be also found in qualitative forms. However, it is more complicated to interpret and use. (Hox & Boeije 2005: 593-594). In this research we are using primary data in order to find answer to the specific research question at hand and to avoid any misinterpretation of the data.

The data collection for this thesis was conducted through semi-structured interviews as it was seen as effective way to reach the research objective. All of the interviews were conducted as telephone interviews due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The questions for the interviews were prepared beforehand and the questions were built around the research question and theoretical background of the study. The interviewees received a description of the interview beforehand that offered them time to orientate themselves to the topic. Each interview was recorded accordingly and transcribed afterwards for accurate analysis. Interviews lengths varied from 20 minutes to 55 minutes depending on the talkativeness of the interviewees.

The target population for this research is Finnish international business traveler females who travel for work multiple times during the year, approximately 1-3 times a month. However, it is not possible to study the whole target population of this vicinity because of the resource limitations, a sample from this group is studied. The sampling for this study is conducted by using self-selection as it is rather difficult to reach the targets. The sample size is five as the saturation point was reached at the fifth interview. During the last interviews there was no new information available and the topics discussed were similar to the previous interviews.

The participants' ages are between 27 and 55 years. The sample represents the target group rather accurately as the age of the target population varies from 20 to 60 years. Three of the participants have a spouse and two are divorced.

Participant code	Career as IBT (years)	Number of business trips (per month)	Travel destinations	Duration of the trips (days)
A	2	2-3	Europe	2-3
B	2	1-2	Nordic countries	2-3
C	6	0-2	Europe	2-4
D	20	2-3	Europe	1-4
E	7	2-4	Europe + USA + Asia	2-6

### 4.3 Data analysis

When conducting the data analysis process the author of the research should aim to detect patterns and identify possible variations and differences and compare the answers to the theory of the study (Adams & Raeside 2014: 152). In order to avoid any misled or false interpretations the data analysis should be done in an objective manner (Saunders et al. 2019: 516). Additionally, the research questions and objectives should be kept in mind during the data analysis process. The focus should be on the research question and the perspective when analyzing the data. (Quinlan 2011: 363.)

There are three different data analysis practices called data-driven, theory-drive and theory-bonded. In this study the theory-bonded approach will be used in the data analysis process. Theory-bonded approach means that the theoretical framework of the study works as a guideline in finding new viewpoints. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009: 95-97.)

#### **4.4 Validity and reliability of the study**

When evaluating the quality of the research, validity and reliability become important. It is vital that the results of a research provide some new information about the topic in question and the information can be generalized in some way. (Adams & Raeside 2014: 252.) Validity and reliability of the research work as a criterion when evaluating the quality of the data and the authenticity of the results (Adams & Raeside 2014: 245).

Firstly, during the time of the interviews Covid-19 was already affecting the business traveling quite heavily. None of the interviewees in this study had the possibility to take on any business travels at the time and therefore their work life was different from normal. Also as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic the awareness of the health issues related to traveling have increased in comparison to before. It is highly possible that the interviewees' perceptions towards business traveling had dramatically changed as a result of the epidemic. However, the focus of the interviews was on their experiences during the period they were still traveling for business.

The reliability of the study refers to the repeatability of the study. That is to say, in case the research would be repeated the result would suggest the same (Adams & Raeside 2014: 245). By asking the following questions the reliability of the study can be assessed (Saunders et al. 2019: 149):

- 1) Would the results be the same on the other occasion?
- 2) Would other make similar observations of the results?
- 3) Is the data analysis process explained in a transparent manner?

When conducting interviews, there may occur certain types of bias. Certain comments, tone, and non-verbal signals of the interviewer might affect the interviewees' responses. This refers to the interviewer bias. This is an important notion as because of the Covid-19 situation all of the interviews were held over the phone. Therefore, the interviewer and the interviewee were unable to see for example each other's non-verbal signals. Also, cultural differences between the interviewees and the interviewer may cause bias. Partly because of this, the interviewees selected for this study are from the same cultural background as the interviewer. Additionally, the interviews were held in the common language, Finnish, in order to minimize any form of bias.

The validity of the research might be weakened in case the interviewees are not feeling comfortable to share their opinions honestly (Saunders et al. 2019: 157). To ensure that the interviewees felt comfortable to share their opinions and views on the matters discussed, complete anonymity was promised. In order to increase the validity of the study, the research methodology is explained in detail.

## 5 FINDINGS

This chapter discusses the key findings from the semi-structured interviews with Finnish female international business travelers. The section “Data collection and sample” (4.2) of this thesis provides the background information of the interviewees. The findings of the interviews are presented through two topics that were 1) challenges of work life balance and international business traveling and 2) support that companies offer for international business travelers. Additionally, this chapter links the findings to the literature and previous researches on the topic.

### 5.1 Challenges of work life balance and international business traveling

This chapter will present how the female international business travelers view their work life balance and the challenges that female international business travelers face when aiming for the work life balance.

As Clark (2001) describes, work life balance is achieved when the individual has good functioning at both work and home and is satisfied with the situation. The interviewees reported that at the moment they feel that they have achieved work life balance as international business travelers. However, they have also experienced times when the balance could not be achieved. One of the reasons for the imbalance of work and life was a high volume of international trips in a short time period.

*“Yes, I have [achieved work life balance] really... really well. But like I said... at some point at the time it felt like... there were too many trips. But it was a while ago... and such a short time.” (A)*

Typically, crossing multiple time zones results in jet-lag that can add to the stress of international business travelers (Cassidy 1992). Also one of the interviewees felt that when she had to cross multiple time zones achieving work life balance was harder.

*“Yes I achieved work life balance, but sometimes... when there were those trips with time difference, it was pretty tough.” (E)*

Also, having young children to take care of while pursuing career as an international business traveler was affecting the work life balance. The interviewees stated that when the children were little, they did not have time to take care of themselves, but the focus was in taking care of the children.

*“So at the moment [I have achieved work life balance], of course, when you are older... and you know how to take care of the calendar in such a way that you can do... a gym and this type of things. But... when the children were little and you have to take care of babysitters and so on... let’s say... you don’t have much time to take care of yourself... or focus on the balance. I didn’t have time to think... I just had to cope with everyday life.” (D)*

*“If you knew that there is coming like a week-long trip, then you had to arrange for the child’s drop offs to hobbies and the babysitters and like... make sure there is food at home and so on.” (E)*

When discussing how female international business travelers have achieved work life balance, different means were brought up. As stated by Fischlmayr and Puchmüller (2016) international business traveler females seek help from also other sources in addition to their partner. Family, friends and babysitters are often asked to help (Fischlmayr & Puchmüller 2016). This particular topic was brought up especially by international business travelers that have children. Many of the interviewees state that their support

network of family and friends played big part when balancing work and life as an international business traveler.

*“Well first of course I had to arrange sort of... a safety net [] you wouldn't be making a career without them... and traveling would have been quite like an impossibility” (D)*

*“I had so many people helping [] Well, you had like that safety net... like grandparents and the child's father.” (E)*

Also, taking care of your health was seen as a great way to take care of work life balance as an international business traveler. For example, exercising when possible and avoiding late nights in restaurants has helped to cope with the time differences and therefore, with the work life balance. Also previous studies show that for example lack of exercise and bad nutrition might result in health issues reported by international business travelers (Welch & Worm 2006), therefore, it is not a surprise that taking care of these things is helping these women with their work life balance.

*“And then the fact that I live a healthy life... that is, if it was possible, then I always played sports... and through that I got time differences reduced and it helped with the balance... and then just did something nice and not like sitting in restaurants all night [] So that self-care is, I think... the essence of it.” (E)*

*“In a way I was able to balance that rest, exercise and social life with the international traveling” (B)*

The interviewees also discussed the ways international business traveling is affecting their work life balance. When traveling for work, you also have to spend your free time away from home. As also the research shows, different social contacts and relationships are one of the main stressors for international business travelers (Welch & Worm 2006).



Different family gatherings are often missed by international business travelers (Espino et al. 2002) and meeting friends due to travel obligations is also a challenge for them (Welch & Worm 2006). This was one topic that was also raised in the interviews. It was seen as a limitation to the traveler's everyday life and therefore, affecting the work life balance of the female international business travelers. For example, everyday activities such as seeing friends, dating and attending hobbies is requiring much more work from international business travelers than others. One interviewee also points out that planning your free time ahead is extremely difficult.

*“Yes, it [international business traveling] affects precisely in the sense that a lot has to be eliminated from the free time... when you don't have the possibility to attend something... sometimes in the middle of the week. Not being able to see friends or family or having to cut down on something like that... so yes... it does affect in a way... that when you travel somewhere and stay there for a couple of days away from home versus you are at work during office hours and would be home after that... so in that sense it limits in some way that everyday life etc. ” (B)*

*“All you own hobbies and other schedules are affected... because you can't participate because you are somewhere else [] like... if you compare that it was like a normal working day, then in the evening you can go to hobbies and do pretty much anything. ” (C)*

*“It affects, of course, because... everyday life circles around work. So I... can't think, for example, that in three weeks or in a month [] I'm going to a Sunrise Avenue gig on Thursday... because there's usually a business trip that then rearranges my own plans completely.” (D)*

When discussing about the amount of challenges and stress related to traveling, most of the interviewees felt the most stressed before and after the trip. Also previous research supports this assumption as Westman et al. (2004) states that women experience

conflict between work and the rest of life strongly before the trip and less during the trip. Returning home from the business trip, however, increases the conflict experienced by women. The reason for this has been seen to be found in still prevailing family roles. (Westman et al. 2004.) Many of the interviewees stated that, before the trip there is a lot to take care of like packing, preparing for the meetings, making sure there is food for the children, arranging the babysitter and so on. On the other hand, when coming home from the business trip the international business travelers are often really tired and they have to take the time to rest at home. When having to take time to rest after the trip there is not that much time to see the family and friends.

*“I think before the trip... of course there is the preparation for the trip in a business sense, that is, what presentations or other things to prepare... [] plus then what kind of country you are going to, what clothes to bring with you, is it summer or winter... Then also the condition of the home and whether there is food and who is caring for the child... There is so many aspects to it.” (E)*

*“I think, probably most [challenges and stress] before the trip and then when coming back [] Before the trip, you have to organize a lot... like how something is taken care of and you have to pack up and you keep thinking about the rest of life... in a way in a big picture... Then when you come back... It is challenging because it always has that some type of hassle too.” (C)*

*“[I was the most stressed] maybe at the airport, or on a plane on the way home [] Also the time differences were a major cause for the tiredness [] Quite often after the trips I was tired... So I gave myself quite a lot of time just to rest after the trips, like not having to go out to do some stuff right away [] Like sometimes when I came home on Friday... I did absolutely nothing over the weekend” (B)*

*“Time differences, of course, because you are so tired... If there was something to do with the friends I couldn't necessarily participate... because if I came home on*

*Thursday night and there was a women's weekend coming... then of course I couldn't go because I had to be at home resting.” (E)*

However, the stress is also present during the traveling for some international business travelers. For example tight schedules during the trip cause stress and exhaustion, also DeFrank et al. (2000) state that tight meeting and flight schedules are among the most mentioned potential stressors for international business travelers. Additionally, the data shows that the workload can easily increase before and after the trip as working while traveling is not always so easy. International business travelers often have to cope with additional workload during the times of travel (Ivancevich et al. 2003).

*“The most challenging is when on the trip... I would say [] If you've had a longer... like 4-day seminar, where you're in meetings from morning till afternoon and then there are still evening programs on top of that. So in a way... I feel like I would need time for a little break during the business trip... time to take a breath [] Sometimes those trips are so intense and the schedule is so tight that you are pretty tired.” (A)*

*“Of course there is the tiredness... Traveling makes the days longer and... In a way, those travels take quite a long time... And then usually you can't make the most of the time to do work or anything else... Of course you always strive for that, but it is really challenging at times to be able to work on an airplane.” (C)*

On the other hand, one of the interviewees felt that during the trips she feels least stress related to work life balance as there is no time to think about the life outside of work.

*“There during the trip itself... somehow you don't even have time to even think about that other life.” (C)*

The data showed also some practical challenges that female international business travelers face in relation to business traveling. For example, the flight schedules are not always perfectly suitable for the situation or sometimes the plane is late and there is a lot to arrange.

*“One quite practical challenge for me is to fly to Denmark, for example... Because there are really limited flight schedules there... That is, even if you would like to leave even immediately after the meeting like normally at five o'clock... Then basically there’s no flights until even nine in the evening... That leaves you with such wasted time, which is really hard for you to use beneficially.” (C)*

*“Well, when there was a babysitter at home and the plane was late, for example, there was something wrong with the plane, then of course everything goes new and things have to be arranged... But the more you travel the more you learn to adapt.” (D)*

Most of the interviewees felt that there is no major challenges they encounter during international work trips that are necessarily linked to their gender. However, the data shows that some challenges can sometimes be also linked to the gender. For example, one of the interviewees felt that the schedules of the seminars are made from the men’s point of view and this might cause challenges and stress for women. In addition, the interviewees talked about the personality differences that could be linked to genders. It was discussed that men can be more relaxed and therefore traveling could sometimes be easier for them than women. Previous studies also show that women often perceive that they have higher expectations than men for themselves to fulfill all of their duties (Aldoory et al. 2008).

*“I don’t experience it, but there might be one challenge... it depends on the person, of course, but somehow you can generalize that there are these seminar schedules... there are dinners that last late into the evening and the next day’s program*

*starts at eight in the morning, so they may have been done that scheduling badly... that is, men don't have to get dressed and make their hair and makeup [] that is something that I have sometimes thought that this has been made in view of men."*

(A)

*"I don't experience challenges that way... But on the other hand, when you are a woman then you stress about everything... going to the store and everything else... So, I could imagine that my boyfriend wouldn't even be able to think about what there is to do at home or if something important has to be taken care of... So like this little difference in personalities."* (C)

*"Yes, I believe there is a difference [] Yes, it is somehow a little easier for men to travel. [] Somehow for women, if you have a family, children and so on then that responsibility is some way different... [] somehow men are perhaps more relaxed."*

(D)

Few of the interviewees also stated that in case the culture of the destination country would not be accepting towards women in international positions, that could affect the challenges that women might encounter compared to men. Respectively the culture of the home country of the business traveler might cause different challenges for the women than men as international business travelers.

*"I do not believe there is a difference... I think anyone is just as tired because of traveling as any other... And like not being able to attend everything and so on... [] Maybe if I would travel to a country where it would not be so acceptable to travel alone as a woman... it might be different."* (B)

*"I don't really know, it definitely depends a lot on the person... But yes maybe a woman has more of a need to organize the home, although this, of course, cannot be generalized... But if a man travels a lot then in some cultures and families there*

*may be an assumption that a woman runs the home... But again this cannot be generalized because the situation depends so much on the family and culture and the position where people are... However, I have not experienced that any challenges have been related to the fact that I'm a woman.” (E)*

In addition, the attitudes of the people around the business traveler females have caused challenges. Especially 15-20 years ago, when one of the interviewees was a single parent to young children the attitudes of other people were against her business traveling. The literature also states that one reason for the majority of female international business travelers being childless or unmarried is that outsiders may make accusations that women are not taking care of their children and families in the so-called with way when traveling for work (Mathur-Helm 2002; Challiol & Mignonac 2005).

*“Well if I think about 20 or 15 years ago and when my kids were little, then of course... When you were a single parent and had little kids... The attitude of quite a lot of people around me was that it is not up to a woman to leave children but to be at home to take care of them [] Apparently, the fact that the mother's place is at home, at least then, was still quite strongly present... Then we just had to think about what is right for our family and how the children will cope with it.” (D)*

The research of the history of women in international positions shows that during the formative years (1980-1994) employers were reluctant to send women to international assignments as women were seen as too vulnerable to succeed abroad (Altman & Shortland 2001). However these perceptions are still somehow present as one of the interviewees felt that in her team, the leaders were unintentionally sending men rather than women on international assignments. The phenomenon where the organization was more comfortable sending men on an international business travels occurred not longer than about a year ago. However, this issue was discussed in the organization and in the end it seemed that the organization was sending more women to represent the organization than men.

*“There was this internal challenge in the organization... It was that men were more easily sent abroad to represent the organization than women... The following year, it turned the other way around... [] This was something that was sometimes discussed... like, why men were automatically sent to represent the organization... After all, women can do that too... [] Back then, there were two men as leaders... so they had quite masculine perspective on things... However, this was by no means an intentional situation and it changed after the discussions.” (B)*

Health and the ability to work is one topic that emerged from the collected data. The interviewees stated that traveling does affect their ability to work especially during the day or two after the trip. Tiredness and the recovery from the time difference and overall traveling does affect the efficiency and the level on concentration. Also previous research states that especially the lack and irregularity of sleep put a strain on the international business travelers body (DeFrank et al. 2000). Also issues with physical and mental performance has been reported among international business travelers (Burkholder et al. 2010).

*“Yes it does [affect the ability to work]... It’s just that those days are so really long when you travel and then there is the recovery from them... I almost always have the situation that I come home in the evening and then I have a normal working day in the morning.... So yes it affects my ability to work in the way that I have not perhaps quite so on top of the things because I’m tired... and of course... when that workload accumulates because of the traveling then it affects the efficiency.” (C)*

*“Sometimes when I came from a trip and was terribly tired the next day was affected... Of course when it is a week away from home and there is the time difference also... so of course it affects you physically and your ability to work.” (E)*

*“Yes the traveling has affected my ability to work momentarily.. like if there is a four days trip then on a Friday at the office I may not be the most effective of all.”*

(A)

Additionally, one of the interviewees stated that speaking a foreign language for a longer period does add to the stress. It has been also studied that it can be stressful to constantly interact with people from different cultural backgrounds (Cassidy 1992).

*“That, too, is a burden... speaking a foreign language... In a way, when you speak Finnish you don't have to think about anything... but even if your English is fluent, you still have to focus more on it... This is quite stressful”* (A)

## **5.2 Support offered for international business traveling females**

This section discusses the findings considering the second goal of this study. The second goal of the study is the support that the international business traveler females are getting and hoping from the organization. Additionally the findings related to the support from the families and friends of the international business traveling females are presented.

The data showed different practical policies of the organizations that makes the traveling easier for the international business travelers. For example, the travel agency booking the flights and accommodations, having the possibility work from home after the trip, permission to use taxi, and the flexible working hours are common practices in many organizations. Also earlier research shows that well-functioning system for travel arrangements is important for the success of the travel planning (Mäkelä & Kinnunen 2016). This is playing an important part of travelers well-being as different disruptions during travel do have a negative impact on that (Collings et al. 2007).



*“In our company, the travel agency took care of everything so luckily I only had to tell them where I will be leaving from and when and to where... So all this is taken care of for me” (D)*

*“Well of course, for example, daily allowances, as such financial support [] the organization has supported in the sense that we are allowed to use a taxi, which makes the transition from one place to another much easier... We also have some online courses related to different cultures and business traveling. [] I have experienced the support given by the organization to be useful... it helps and motivates you to go on business trips in general... One training I did about the cultural differences related to meeting practices, I experienced relatively useful and it has helped the way of working when in the destination country.” (C)*

*“The practical support from the organization is that travel bookings are handled on my behalf... meaning I don't have to think about it myself... Insurance is also in order on behalf of the employer [] You also don't have to go to the airport by public transportation but you can take a taxi so it helps a lot when leaving in the morning... And the working hours are also very flexible.” (A)*

*“The organization helps with travel arrangements... Also if there ever is something, for example, matters related to safety, clothing or the culture, there is always help available [] We have such a rule at work that if you come from a long trip and the flight comes even in the morning... then you don't have to go to work but you are able to work from home... It is really helpful.” (E)*

The data showed that the international business travelers are quite satisfied with the support they are getting from the organization. Many of the interviewees did not come up with any additional support they would need from the organization. Also the moral support from the colleagues and the organization was seen as really important aspect. The possibility to delegate your tasks during your travels, getting prepared for the

meetings together, and discussing any possible problems with colleagues is really helpful for the international business traveler females. Also earlier research supports the statement of high social support from the colleagues to positively impact on travelers stress and pressure by reducing them (Welch & Worm 2006).

*“Definitely I am satisfied... The practices in my organization are very helpful... But the most importantly, I experience moral support...we go things through together... And if there is a problem then we think what to do about it together...I don’t feel like I would need more support [from the organization].” (E)*

*“Yes I am really satisfied [] I am able to focus solely on my job [] Then also the help and support from colleagues... for example, if during my travels I get a call... I can delegate it because I do not have time myself when I'm a meeting, etc. therefore, there is also a lot of support on behalf of colleagues” (A)*

*“There is a lot of support for events that we go abroad for... And also, if you go on a trip on someone’s behalf, you get prep, etc. [] I don’t need more support, I don’t really know what kind of support I would need on top of everything.” (B)*

However, one of the interviewees reported that the support that she has received for the workload, that often increases during international business travels, has not met her hopes. Research shows that international business travelers often have to cope with additional workload during the times of travel and this causes a threat of exhaustion, frustration and depression (Ivancevich et al. 2003). As stated before, many of the international business traveler females felt that the possibility to delegate their tasks during the business trip is seen really helpful. It is clearly seen that also when this possibility is not available, this form of support is seen as important and hoped for.

*“I feel that I may need support for the fact that if I don't have time to check my e-mails while traveling... I shouldn't feel that those things still have to be taken care*

*of at the same time... Sometimes it feels like you just have to take care of some urgent thing even if you are on a business trip and in meetings all day... I would wish such support and help that someone could momentarily help with my work, such a delegation practice.” (C)*

After all, there is always something additional that could be offered to support international business travelers. For example, different type of training, increase in daily allowances, and the possibility to use the taxi was brought up as something not offered by some of organization. For example, as also studies have shown, multicultural training help international business travelers to adapt to international situations (Earley 1987; Black & Mendenhall 1990; Varma & Russel 2016). All of these additional benefits to the employee could however, be really helpful to the international business travelers. After all, the data shows that the international business traveler females are quite satisfied also without the additional support.

*“No separate training, for example, has been offered to us... But I think if asked, the team assistant would explain to me in more detail where I should go... But I feel like I'm doing really well without it.” (A)*

*“Well sure an increase in daily allowances would be nice... Oh and also it would be helpful to be able to use taxi more often as it takes so much time to use the train from and to the airport... but that is also only a problem if you travel more often, otherwise it is okay.” (B)*

The female international business travelers that have children felt that the support from the family and friends was extremely important. Grandparents and friends have been helping with the childcare when the mother is traveling. Also even getting the groceries on behalf of the traveler is helpful.

*“Luckily there was my mother and the girls’ grandmother that was able to help when I was on a business trip... so my mother took care of the children, she moved in with me. And then... fortunately... I have had great friends, even though they too have three children... they have taken care of my children when I've been on business trips. Plus then that neighbor’s student girl lived with us [] and took care of those school pickups and so on.” (D)*

*“The help with the babysitting, getting the groceries and so on... I would not survive without it, it is an absolute prerequisite...” (E)*

The data shows that also international business travelers without children have received support from their families and friends. The previous research shows that all these unplanned absences require understanding and flexibility from the personal environment of the international business traveler (Welch & Worm 2006). Just being encouraging and not opposing ones choice of pursuing a career as an international business traveler is seen really important form of support. However, the data shows that childless travelers did not feel that they require as much support as the travelers with children. They reported that the need for support could be different in case they had children of their own. It has also been stated in previous studies that the support from personal environment plays much bigger role when there are children in the family (Welch and Worm 2006).

*“At least no one in my immediate circle opposes my career as an international business traveler... That is perhaps the most important support... Because if thinking about any kind of guilty conscience about going on a trip that is not in any way your own choice, then it is wonderful that no one causes such a feeling... I've got good encouragement from my family and friends [] I don't need more, it might be a different thing if I lived in the same household with someone or had children.” (A)*

*“I have had the understanding that I am often away... like, no one has ever been mad that I can't always participate [] I am quite satisfied with this. [] Definitely if I had children the situation would be different.” (B)*

Overall, the data shows that the international business travelers feel that the support they are getting from their families and friends is sufficient. Many even reported that they have received all the support they could imagine from their immediate circle.

*“I cannot expect more support... I feel that they have given me all support for my travels.” (E)*

*“I do not think there is anything else that I would need from my friends or family.”  
(B)*

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

The goal of this thesis was to increase the understanding of the challenges international business traveler females face regarding their work life balance and how organizations could support them. In this final chapter the key findings of the research are summarized, and theoretical contributions and managerial implications are presented. Lastly, this chapter discusses the limitations of this study, also the suggestions for future research are given.

### 6.1 Key findings

The findings of this study indicate that international business traveler females recognize the impact of international business traveling to their work life balance. The findings show different challenges that international business travelers face in relation to their work life balance. Additionally, the study identifies different ways how organizations, families and friends can support international business travelers to cope with work life balance. The key findings also provide answers to the research questions of this study.

The first research question of this study was **“What challenges female international business travelers face in relation to their work life balance?”**

All five interviewees stated that they have faced challenges related to business traveling and work life balance. Based on the findings the most stressful and challenging part of business traveling for females is the time before the trip and coming back home from the trip. Women have been reported to experience conflict with work and rest of life strongly before and after the trip (Westman et al. 2004). Before leaving for business trip there is a lot to prepare, for example packing, preparing for meetings and arranging babysitters. Moreover, the international business travelers often feel tired when coming home from the business trip. Also, the amount of workload often increases due to the

business traveling and coping with this might lead to exhaustion and frustration (Ivancevich et al. 2003).

The findings of this study show that mostly international business traveler females do see that the challenges they have faced are not linked to their gender. However, some challenges were identified to be linked to the gender of the international business traveler. Women usually have higher expectations of themselves to fulfil all the duties they are imposed to (Aldoory et al. 2008). The interviewees felt that men have the tendency to be more relaxed and not to stress about the home life while traveling as women usually want to take care of everything and therefore, stresses about the home life also during travels. According to Williams and Alliger (1994) women think that they experience higher amount of housework related stress than men.

In addition, Mathur-Helm (2002) states that both, women themselves and outsiders do create prejudice and accusations that women are not taking care of their families in so-called right way when pursuing career as international business traveler. The findings of this study show that female international business travelers might face such attitudes towards them from people outside that it is not up to a woman to leave children at home. It is seen that the mother's place is at home.

The findings of this study show that international business traveler females often feel tired after the business trips. Recovering from time differences and overall traveling does often affect the efficiency and the level of concentration at work. Especially lack and irregularity of sleep put a strain on the international business travelers' body (DeFank et al. 2000).

The second research question was **“What kind of support international business traveler females get and want with work-life balance?”**

The findings of this study clearly show that international business traveler females appreciate the support they receive from their organizations. Getting support from the organization and colleagues would be beneficial to international business traveler females (Varma & Russel 2016). Based on the findings of this study, especially the emotional support from the colleagues and the team is highly valued. The colleagues' willingness to help with additional workload and the possibility to delegate the tasks during the business trip are playing a big role for international business traveler females. High social support from the colleagues positively impacts on traveling stressors and pressure (Welch & Worm 2006).

There are many employee supporting practices to help international business travelers in particular, for example travel arrangement systems and multicultural training (Mäkelä & Kinnunen 2016). The findings of this study show that having the travel agency handling the bookings for the trip, permission to use taxi, and flexible working hours are commonly used support practices provided to the international business travelers. By providing supporting practices to the employees the organization can show their appreciation for international business travelers (Mäkelä & Kinnunen 2016).

The findings of this study also present that in case the organizations do not provide above mentioned support practices, they are still seen as important and hoped for. For example, in case the organization underestimates the impact that traveling has on employees and their workload it has been shown to increase the perceived work life conflict (Jensen 2014).

The importance of the emotional support is not limited only to the positive words from the boss or colleagues. Also positive words from family is part of the emotional support (Puchmüller & Fischlmayr 2016). As friendships are important part of individual's well-being and social skills, they are a large part of the social support system (Uchino 2004: 157-159) of international business traveler females.



In conclusion, the findings of this study show that international business traveler females whose organizations offer different support practices to their employees feel that they are able to achieve work life balance. Organizational support has been shown to increase job satisfaction and improving job performance (Ballout 2008). Employee support functions improve international business traveler females' success and satisfaction in both, work life and non-work life (Brough et al 2005).

## **6.2 Theoretical contributions**

The main contribution of this study is to increase understanding of the challenges female international business travelers face regarding their work life balance and how organizations and people close to the individual can support with that. As mentioned previously in the theory, the topic of females pursuing career in international business has been getting more attention in the field of international HR. However, the research has been widely focused on expatriates rather than international business travelers. Additionally, the differences between men and women as international business travelers and the support these women would need from the organizations are not as extensively researched.

By interviewing female international business travelers, this research offers in depth understanding of the challenges business traveling females face today while aiming for work life balance. The results support earlier research on the challenges women face as international business travelers. Further the results of this study contribute to the existing literature by highlighting the importance of organizational support for the work life balance of female international business travelers. Based on the findings, this study presents practical suggestions on how organizations can help international business traveler females.

### 6.3 Managerial implications

The findings of this study show that international business traveler females can achieved work life balance with the help of organizations and people close to them. However, they also face numerous challenges related to work life balance and international business traveling. Moreover, some of the challenges are still linked to the gender of the business traveler. There might be a difference in the personalities of different genders as women feel that men might be a bit more relaxed in what comes to the home life, therefore, making it easier for them to balance work and non-work life. Some international business traveler females even feel that other people have accused them of not taking care of their children in a so-called right way or some organizations might still feel more comfortable sending men overseas than women. However, the findings show that mainly the challenges are the same for both women and men.

The findings of this study suggest that organizations should provide support for the international business travelers. Informational, emotional, and instrumental support provided by the company would help the international business travelers (House & Khan 1985). Especially emotional support from the colleagues and the boss is playing a major role for international business travelers females coping with work life balance. Moreover, different HR practices such as flexible working hours and places, help with the travel bookings, financial support, and training are appreciated by international business traveler females.

The findings indicate that international business traveler females also require much support from the family and friends. For business travelers without children, the understanding from the people close to them is important, as it is often difficult to make time to see friends and family. Furthermore, for business travelers with children the support from the people close to them plays even bigger role. Support can be given in many ways, as for example of practical support is helping with childcare and groceries. For emotional support family and friends should allow and encourage women pursuing career as an international business traveler.

#### **6.4 Limitations and future research suggestions**

This study, as all studies, has its limitations. First limitation of this study is the choice of methodology. As object of this study is to understand international business traveling's effect on international business traveler females' work life balance, a qualitative research approach is utilized. Thereby this is limiting the generalization of the findings of this study. The second limitation of the study is the range of the interviewees. There were five interviewees all from separate organizations. Additionally, all of the interviewees were Finnish citizens and the interviews were conducted in Finnish. Therefore, it can be argued that the level of the homogeneous of the target group would be rather high. Additional limitation of the study is the current situation with Covid-19. Many of the interviewees has not been traveling for work recently due to the pandemic and their perceptions of their work life balance as international business travelers might be different from before.

Based on the limitations, the suggestions for future research is offered. As the research focusing solely on female business travelers there are several possibilities for future research. This study focuses on the international business traveling from the perspective of the employees. In the future it would be interesting to research the topic from the employer point of view. Also, in this study the target group included both international business travelers with children and without. It would be interesting to conduct research focusing on these two groups separately. Additionally, the range of age and the length of the career of the interviewees in this study is rather wide. Therefore, it would be interesting to study the difference in international business travelers perceptions of their work life balance between the young professionals and more experienced travelers. Finally, one suggestion for future research is to conduct a comparable research in an international context as all of the participants in this study were Finnish.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Interview questions

#### General information

1. How you ended up as international business traveler?
  - a. Did you initially seek for positions where you could also travel internationally?
2. For how long have you been in a position that includes international business traveling?
  - a. How often do you travel for work?
  - b. Where you mainly travel to?
  - c. How long your trips mainly are?
3. Do you have children and if so, how old are they?
4. Do you have a spouse?
  - a. Is your spouse also an international business traveler?

#### Work life balance as an international business traveler:

1. Do you feel that you have achieved work life balance?
2. Do you feel that international business traveling affects your work life balance?
3. What kind of challenges have you faced as an international business traveler when aiming for work life balance?
  - a. Which part of the trip is the most challenging, before, during, or after?
  - b. Do you feel that these challenges are related to the fact that you are woman?
    - i. Do you feel that the challenges related to international business traveling are different for men and women?
4. Do you feel that international business traveling has affected your health or ability to work in any way?

**Support**

1. What kind of support does your organization offer for international business traveling?
  - a. Do you feel that you have benefitted from the support you are getting?
  - b. Are there any additional ways that your organization could support you better?
2. What kind of support does your family and friends offer for you?
  - a. Do you feel that you have benefitted from the support you are getting?
  - b. How your family and friends support you even better?

**Covid-19**

1. How has Covid-19 pandemic affected you as an international business traveler?
2. Has this situation affected your perceptions about international business traveling?
  - a. Are you still interested in international business traveling (if even before)?  
Or do you feel less interested towards business traveling?