

**UNIVERSITY OF VAASA  
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**EXPATRIATES' ADJUSTMENT TO THE HOST COUNTRY AND THE ROLE  
OF CROSS-CULTURAL IN-COUNTRY TRAINING AND SUPPORT**

Master's Thesis in  
International Business

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**ABSTRACT:**

**Purpose** The purpose of this thesis is to study the role of cross-cultural, in-country training and support in the expatriates' adjustment to the host country. The concept of international assignments and the cross-cultural adjustment process related to that are studied. The hardships and challenges of expatriates are identified. Cross-cultural, in-country training and support practices provided by the companies for the expatriates are studied.

**Methodology/approach** An exploratory, mono method qualitative study was conducted in order to answer the research question and the objectives. Deductive approach was used in this study. The data was collected through 5 in-depth, semi-structured interviews of former and current Finnish expatriates and expatriate spouses. Narrative approach was used when analyzing the data from the interviews.

**Findings** The effect of the cross-cultural, in-country training and support on the adjustment depends on multiple factors, like the type of training and expatriate's previous international experience. Other factors affecting the adjustment are family and spouse, other support networks in the host country, and personality traits, and according to the findings of this study, these factors can partly even substitute cross-cultural training and support. Therefore, the training and support practices should be highly individualized. Flexibility in timing of the training and adaptability of the content is highly suggested. Traditional, standardized cross-cultural training was not found beneficial, if the expatriate had done thorough research about the host country beforehand, had previous experience of international assignments, or had wide support networks in the host country.

**Value of the study** The ideas for cross-cultural training and support for the expatriates might be useful to consider for a company sending their employees abroad or for consulting firms who arrange pre-departure or after arrival orientations.

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**KEYWORDS:** expatriates, cross-cultural training, in-country training, international assignments, cross-cultural adjustment



# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. Background

More and more companies send their employees abroad to work as expatriates, gain international experience, and develop their global leadership capabilities. International mobility is significantly important for a multinational firm, supporting globalization and global integration. (Pucik, Evans, Björkman & Morris 2016: 266.) However, expatriation never is an easy task for a company or for an individual. It forces an employee to leave their comfort zone and enter a new environment, where not only working conditions, but also the whole life and culture are different to the ones at home. It causes them stress and uncertainty, and expatriates are often faced with challenges and situations that are difficult to predict or prepare for. To support expatriates in their future challenges, there is a strong agreement that companies should invest in training the expatriates to make the international assignment more successful. Especially, when the cultural distance of the host country and the home country is wide, and there is a lot of social interaction involved in a job, the more important it is for the expatriate to prepare. (Evans, Pucik & Björkman 2002.)

Successful expatriation can be very advantageous for an organization because of developmental, functional, and strategic benefits. On the other hand, unsuccessful expatriation can cause issues like inadequate performance, psychological stress, negative effects on the expatriates' families, and even failure of the assignment. (Forster 1997.) Failure of expatriation can have drastic consequences. The most obvious one is early return from the assignment, and therefore probably failing to fulfill the goals of the assignment. However, as Littrell and Salas (2005) conclude, expatriate assignments can still be seen as failures even if the expatriate completes the foreign assignment. The consequences of failure might be realized after return, resulting in, for example, repatriation problems, damaged relations with the foreign unit, or even the former expatriate leaving the company within one year of coming back from the assignment.

Cross-cultural training has been proved successful in avoiding the failure of expatriation. (Littrell & Salas 2005.)

Cross-cultural assignments are important for organizations because of their tendency of developing cross-cultural leadership competencies and causing strategical and functional benefits if succeeded (Caligiuri & Tarique 2012). However, many international assignments end up with failure, which may cause, in addition to failing to achieve the goal of the assignment, financial losses to the organization as well as losing talented employees (Forster 1997). Therefore, avoiding failure is crucial for an organization, and in order to make international assignments successful, the expatriate's adjustment to the host culture is important (Littrell et al. 2005). The positive effect of cross-cultural training on adjustment is widely emphasized in the literature (Andreason 2003, Black et al. 1991, Van Der Bank et al. 2006, Mendenhall et al. 2000, Shaffer et al. 1999, Littrell et al. 2005).

If willing to understand successful expatriation, it needs to be clarified how the success of international assignments is defined. In previous literature expatriate success has been measured by three criteria: the completion of foreign assignment, cross-cultural adjustment, and performance in the foreign assignment (Van der Bank et al. 2006). The most important ones for a company are usually the completion of foreign assignment and performance in the foreign assignment, but cross-cultural adjustment affects both of these. Poor cross-cultural adjustment also leads to failure of cross-cultural assignment by increasing the willingness to terminate it and return home prematurely. (Van der Bank 2006.) Therefore, cross-cultural adjustment is a significant predictor of success in expatriate assignment.

When successful, international assignments can cause significant developmental, functional, and strategic benefits. For example, international experiences can help developing dynamic cross-cultural competencies like tolerance of ambiguity, cultural flexibility, and reduced ethnocentrism, and also developing global leadership effectiveness, as Caligiuri et al. (2012) state. In addition to developing global competencies, organizations can benefit from sending their employees for international assignments in many other ways as well. Expatriation supports global integration, since

expatriates start identifying themselves as a part of global organization, not only as a part of a local unit. It also helps local knowledge sharing between units, builds global social architecture by promoting shared values, creating social capital across borders and developing global mindsets. Expatriation is also one solution for a dilemma of multinational corporations; how to get the right people in the right places, since their value creation is maximized when they are put in right places and positions, therefore utilizing both the organization and themselves. Furthermore, international assignments provide talented employees new challenges and career paths. (Pucik et al. 2016: 267.)

Poor expatriate cross-cultural adjustment can cause inadequate performance, psychological stress, negative effects on the expatriates' families, damage firm reputation, disrupt relationships with locals in the host country, and negative consequences on expatriates' careers in the long run (Forster 1997, Stubler, Park & Agarwal 2011, Puck, Kittler & Wright 2008). Many international assignments end up with a premature return to home country, therefore leaving the international assignment incomplete. One reason behind failure is that human resource practices and expatriate practices are not connected with each other, meaning that organizations neglect to provide cross-cultural training or language, do not give employment assistance or other support to the spouse, or do not offer mentoring or network access to the expatriate (McCaughey & Bruning 2005). This implies that organizations could prevent the failure of international assignments by following their own human resource practices thoroughly.

However, expatriate assignment can be counted as a failure even if the assignment is completed (Littrell & Salas 2005). According to Forster (1997), the expatriates who decide to remain on their international assignments even though they cannot adjust, can be even more harmful for the company compared to the ones who prematurely return to the home country, because they might not be able to perform adequately, thus failing to meet the goals of the assignment. The problems may occur after the return to home country as well, for example as damaged relationships with foreign unit, lost career opportunities, repatriation problems, or even the expatriate leaving the company. There is a high turnover rate of employees after their return, because even 35% leave during the first year after the foreign assignment (Pucik et al. 2016: 284). Therefore, the company

loses not only a talented employee, but also the investment they have made in development of the employee. The intended benefits may remain unattained, and the transfer of competencies is limited. Failure of expatriation also increases resistance towards international assignments, which may already not be seen very desirable by the employees to start with. (Pucik et al. 2016: 284, Björkman & Mäkelä 2013.) So, to conclude, failed international assignments can cause both, big financial losses and talent losses, to a company. Therefore, factors that help avoiding the failure of expatriation and ways to support expatriates to successfully complete their international assignments, should be important to any company sending their employees abroad.

As already mentioned, companies can take action to prevent expatriate assignments ending in failure and increasing their effectiveness and successfulness (McCaughey et al. 2005, Littrell et al. 2005, Andreason 2003). According to McCaughey et al. (2005), many companies concentrate on minimizing the expatriate failure in their global mobility strategies. However, they should probably create synergies between expatriate programs, job satisfaction, and predicts of turnover. The practices that are used to enhance the job satisfaction of domestic employees could be extended to expatriate employees as well. They also address that improving the adjustment of the expatriate increases their job satisfaction and therefore contributes the success of the foreign assignment.

## **1.2. Research question, objectives and delimitations**

The purpose of this thesis is to study expatriates' adjustment process to host country after arrival, and identify the issues which may hinder the adjustment and therefore might be leading to the failure of the assignment. To support and improve a successful adjustment, many companies tend to offer cross-cultural training and support to the expatriates. The aim of this thesis is to concentrate especially on in-country, real-time training and as well as in-country organizational support, and how it affects the adjustment. This information is important for both the company and the expatriate, in order to foreign assignment to be successful. The company needs to know ways to deliver and improve their cross-cultural

training programs, and for the expatriate it is useful to know how to utilize the offered training in order to make their own cross-cultural experience better and successful.

Therefore, the research question for the thesis is:

*What is the role of in-country training and support in expatriates' adaptation to the host country?*

The research question will be answered by studying the adaptation process from the view of expatriates and their experiences of cross-cultural, in-country training. The objectives of the study are:

- 1. To study expatriates' hardships and challenges after the arrival in the host country.*
- 2. To study the role of in-country training and support in the adjustment process.*
- 3. To study how cross-cultural training and support are put into practice during international assignments.*
- 4. To address expatriates' needs for in-country support and training.*

These matters are looked at from the expatriate's personal point of view. Their satisfaction for the experience abroad with or without in-country training is studied. The major challenges the expatriates face are identified and the ways to handle these situations with or without the help of training are studied. The effect of the cross-cultural training on adjustment to the host country is assessed. The effectiveness and successfulness of this type of training and the ways to put it into practice are researched. The effects on the whole experience will be studied, taking personal life and family into account as well, not only the working experience, since that is a big part of the adjustment. Thus, the all three facets of the adjustment; adjustment to work, interaction with host country nationals, and general adjustment, are taken into account when it comes to measuring the effect of the cross-cultural training.

### **1.3. Structure of the study**

The theoretical part of the thesis will consist of three different parts. The first part will be focusing on expatriation and international assignments. The characteristics of international assignments, selection process and different stages of the assignment are studied in order to build an understanding of the process of expatriation, and the underlying hardships that could make the assignment unsuccessful.

The second part will be concentrating on the international adjustment. The integrated model of international adjustment by Black et al. (1991) and the further implications and expansions of it by Shaffer, Harrison and Gilley (1999) will be reviewed. The adjustment process is divided to two different categories, pre-departure and in-country factors. However, for the purpose of this study the in-country factors of adjustment (Black et al. 1991, Shaffer et al. 1999) are mainly considered. These factors are studied in order to identify them in the expatriates' experiences and evaluate the degree of adjustment.

The third part will be about cross-cultural training. There has been a wide research about cross-cultural training from different perspectives, and there are many different ways and methods to deliver cross-cultural training. This study examines specifically in-country training, so other training methods, like pre-departure training, are not focused on this thesis. The characteristics of in-country cross-cultural training and ways to put it into action are reviewed, in order to compare them with the real experiences of expatriates and evaluate their efficiency and usefulness.

The fourth part of the thesis will consist of the research conducted for the study. In the fifth chapter, methodological choices are explained. Chapters six and seven present the findings of the study, based on the qualitative research done by semi-structured interviews. In the last chapter, the practical implications and possible research topics for future are discussed as well.

## **2. INTERNATIONAL ASSIGNMENTS**

In this chapter, the characteristics and the concept of international expatriate assignments are explained. The assignment cycle, organizational support, and hardships of expatriation are discussed. The training can be structured differently, according to each phase of the assignment, since the expatriate's ability to learn and reflect their learning varies during the assignment. Therefore, it is important to understand the different phases. Organizational support can also include training, and it can be offered not only to the expatriate, but the spouse and the family as well, who might even need it more than the expatriate. Some ways to provide support and some common practices are discussed in this chapter. Pre-departure doubts and hardships during the assignment and after return to the home country can undermine the willingness of the employees to embark foreign assignments, or create prejudices and problems that may cause the assignment to fail. These may include, for example, questioning the personal benefits of the international assignment, communication problems with the host country nationals, or repatriation problems. These hardships are important to understand, in order to provide sufficient and suitable support and training to the expatriates.

### **2.1. Assignment cycle**

The international assignment can be divided into different phases, which all have unique characteristics and features. There are certain processes related to all of them. These phases are: selection, preparation, adjustment, performance management, rewards, and repatriation. (Pucik et al. 2016: 270.) Even though all of these are significant in order to complete international assignment effectively and successfully, this paper concentrates especially on the adjustment. Although, to understand the complex nature of international assignments and the many ways a company can affect them, it is important to take a look at the different phases.

The first step of the assignment cycle, or the expatriate management cycle (Caligiuri et al. 2007), is selection. Many researchers have addressed criteria and characteristics of expatriates that may predict success in the assignment, considering for example personality traits, family situation and support, and language skills. Also professional and technical competence, relationship and communication abilities, cultural sensitivity and flexibility, and self-efficacy and tolerance for ambiguity are some of the characteristics of successful expatriates (Pucik et al. 2016: 270), as well as previous international experience (Aycan 1997, Björkman et al. 2013). However, the selection of an expatriate is sometimes still done without proper planning. Aycan (1997) addresses the need for strategic planning in selection. It is important to define the goal of the assignment and set the criteria for selection according to it. It reduces uncertainties and clarifies the meaning of the assignment, as well as defines its importance to the expatriate. By strategic planning, some possible adjustment problems can also be noted beforehand. In selection, quite simple practices are used, like interviewing the expatriate and their family, and visiting the local unit in the host country to see if the proposed expatriate is a suitable candidate. (Pucik et al. 2016: 271-272.)

The next phase of assignment cycle is preparing for the assignment. This phase can include, for example, pre-departure training and arrival support from the company (Pucik et al. 2016: 274). Even though the effectiveness of cross-cultural training for better adjustment has been proved (Black et al. 1991, Shaffer et al. 1997, Littrell et al. 2005), many companies still send their employees abroad without any training at all. Besides training, the organization can provide logistic and social support as well, concerning eg. housing, schooling, medical insurance, or legal requirements. The more support the company can provide, the less stressful the move is for the expatriate.

The next phase, cross-cultural adjustment, can be defined as “the ability to feel at home in a foreign culture without rejecting one’s own roots” (Pucik et al. 2016: 276). Adjustment never is an easy, straight-forward process, but can be seen as a U-shaped process instead: first experiencing honeymoon stage of excitement after arrival, then experiencing downhills and uphill in cycles and feelings of stress, anxiety, frustration,

and culture shock. It hopefully leads to learning, and finally to adaptation to the new culture.

There are three dimensions of cross-cultural adjustment: adjustment to work, general adjustment, and interaction adjustment (Black et al. 1991). Adjustment to work is easier if there is an overlap with previous expatriate (Aycañ 1997), similarity of procedures and policies, and the role at work is clear. Adjustment to general environment depends on the cultural distance between the home and the host country, and can also be eased by company's support and previous international experience. Adjustment to interaction with local nationals is the most difficult dimension of adjustment, and it includes behavioral norms, patterns of culture, and ways of dealing with conflict. The company can support it as well by providing support networks and mentors. (Pucik et al. 2016: 276.)

Coming home from the assignment is not necessarily easy. In fact, it can be even more stressful than leaving, and many expatriates actually decide to leave the company during the first year after their international assignment. The company can make coming back easier by providing support during the transition, keeping up the continuous dialogue through networking or mentoring, and planning and providing real opportunities on return. A good performance in the assignment also predicts successful repatriation. (Pucik et al. 2016: 285.) According to Caligiuri et al. (2007), companies that have a global management strategy are found to make greater use of developmental expatriates, have more senior managers that have expatriate experience, and have a stronger focus on leadership development through international assignments. Most senior executives having international experience also supports successful repatriation (Pucik et al. 2016: 285).

## **2.2. Organizational support for expatriates**

According to the findings of Aycañ (1997), success in expatriation is not only depending on competencies and skills of the expatriate, but on organizational support coming from both, home office and local unit, as well. The support and assistance is needed before and

during the assignment, and also after the return in the home country. Aycan (1997) lists organizational predictors of expatriate adjustment as MNC's international structure, value orientation, organizational life-cycle, diversity training, strategic planning, and socialization.

McCaughey et al. (2005) highlight the need for support in three clusters: pre-assignment support, assignment support, and repatriation support. There are different practices that can be utilized in these phases. Pre-assignment support consists of language and cultural training, involving spouse and family to training and orientation, and defining the importance and value of the assignment and linking it to career goals. During the assignment mentoring (both from home and host country), workplace and family acculturation support, relationship building and spouse's employment or career counselling are practices that can be used. After coming back to home country, repatriation can be supported by revising the career plan and linking international experiences to it, and re-acculturation and re-integration with a certain repatriation plan. The development and knowledge transfer does not end after the return to the home country, but vice versa – continuous development and utilization of the new expertise, as well as transferring the new knowledge to the home country's local unit should take place. It is important that the expatriate feels that their career paths are still attractive and challenging even after the assignment, so, for instance, a promotion or a new role at work could be discussed. (McCaughey et al. 2005.)

The need for organizational support depends on the job and the situation of the expatriate. It is not always necessary, but generally it can be said that there is less support provided than how much there would actually be needed. However, the form of the support should depend on the situation. Companies might decide not to provide support or training for the expatriates, because of the costs of it or because there might be too little time between the selection and departure. Some traditional and probably the most common support practices are look and see visits to the host country headquarters, and arranging the future expatriates to meet and discuss with the earlier expatriates. In addition to that, language training is also common, especially in Europe. Some other ways to provide support, that are addressed in the study of Suutari & Burch (2001) by expatriates, based on what kinds

of support they have received on their assignments, are for example pre-departure support consisting of help with practical arrangements and written information packages, and in-country support like help with accommodation, public authorities, and transportation. The expatriates, however, felt the need for more support, especially for the family and the spouse. Furthermore, the need for a contact person or a mentor was addressed by the participants. (Suutari & Burch 2001).

### **2.3. Hardships of expatriation**

Aside of the actual hardships faced by the expatriates in the host country, there can be many individual doubts affecting the reasoning to even embark on the international assignment. For example, spouse's career can be an issue for dual-career couples, since neither might not be willing to take a break from their careers, which can even be quite long because international assignments can last even 3-5 years. Even though international experience is usually seen as a benefit for an employee and a source of development of global competencies (Caligiuri et al. 2012), sometimes individual benefits can be questioned. In fact, sometimes expatriates feel that the international assignment has caused them more harm than benefit career wise. After repatriation the expatriate might lose their former status and the direction of their careers. The value of the international experience to the company and the lack of appropriate compensation might also be questioned by the expatriates. There may be some concerns regarding the family as well, for example children's education and the quality of it. Because of the negative feelings and doubts towards expatriation, there might be difficulties for a company to find employees willing to go on international assignments. Furthermore, going there with doubts and prejudices can affect the adjustment and the outcome of the assignment. (Selmer 1999.)

Suutari & Burch (2001) study foreign expatriates in Finland, and find some common hardships addressed by the expatriates, for which support is needed. First of all, the expatriates who participated in the study addressed interaction with locals as one of the biggest adjustment challenges. Language was also a big challenge, especially since the

Finnish language is quite different to any other languages, and might be difficult to learn. The expatriates felt that the local language would have been needed everywhere in daily life. Lack of contacts was also addressed as an issue, especially when it came to family and spouse. The expatriates had some contacts at workplace, but for families and spouses it was hard to find support networks. When it came to workplace adjustment, the expatriates faced many challenges, which they mainly saw coming from the difference of the Finnish culture when comparing to their home countries. For example, lack of communication and feedback, different communication and leadership styles, lack of authority, and different organizational structure were some of the workplace adjustment challenges. Finally, weather was also addressed as an adjustment challenge. Some of the adjustment challenges addressed, like weather and language, might be specifically present or typical for foreign expatriates in Finland and can not be applied similarly to other cultures. (Suutari et al. 2001.)

Repatriation and career paths after coming back to the home country may also raise concerns for the expatriates. Difficulties related with repatriation as assembled from previous studies by Crocitto, Sullivan and Carraher (2005) include reverse culture shock and the expatriates feeling that their careers are off the track; they might be unaware of internal job opportunities or be given inappropriate positions at the home office. After challenging international assignment, the expatriates might find their work less satisfying at home. After being away for a long time the personnel at the home office might have changes, so the expected career rewards may not occur, or promotions are not given. (Crocitto et al. 2005.)

### 3. INTERNATIONAL ADJUSTMENT

#### 3.1. Factors of international adjustment

Black et al. (1991) define cross-cultural adjustment as “the extent of psychological comfort that an expatriate experiences when encountering different aspects of the new culture”. The goal of adjustment is acculturation - to be able to cope with a new, cross-cultural environment - not assimilation. Adjustment differs for individuals, so the amount of time needed for it varies, depending on many different variables. (Black et al. 1991.) The adjustment is considered as a multi-faceted phenomenon, consisting of three different aspects. These are:

- 1) *Adjustment to work*, which includes the adaptation to new work roles and tasks
- 2) *Adjustment to interaction with host country nationals*, which includes the degree of comfort that the expatriate feels when interacting with host country nationals at work as well as outside of work
- 3) *General adjustment to the host culture*, which includes the overall adjustment to living in a foreign culture and dealing with everyday domestic tasks. (Black 1988.)

Black et al. (1991) divide the adjustment into two categories, which consist of factors influencing the three dimensions of adjustment as the determinants of adjustment. They address five components of cross-cultural adjustment process. The first category includes the factors related to the factors before the departure, which affect the adjustment. It is called anticipatory adjustment. Pre-departure training, previous overseas experience, and organizational selection mechanisms are related to the issues before departure. The second category of factors is related to in-country adjustment, and includes individual skills and non-work factors. Based on this division, Black et al. 1991 propose an integrated model of international assignment, which is further expanded by Shaffer et al. (1999). They examine the in-country, after arrival factors and expand them to five: job factors, organizational factors, positional factors, non-work factors, and individual factors.

Black et al. (1991) define job factors like role clarity, role discretion, and role novelty as a certain set of tasks and duties executed by a given individual. Clear job design and greater decision-making authority correlate with better adjustment (Shaffer et al. 1999). Shaffer et al. (1999) also highlight the significance of pre-departure training as a factor for better adjustment. The importance of organizational support is also mentioned by Shaffer et al. (1999), although the support coming from the co-workers has found to be even more significant than the support from managers. They suggest that if a company wants to increase the efficiency of their expatriates, building a supportive home-office culture and mentoring system would be beneficial.

Non-work factors include for example cultural novelty (meaning that the host culture is previously unknown and new to the expatriate) and the adjustment of family and spouse. These have both significant effect on the adjustment: if the culture is previously unknown (high cultural novelty), the effect on the adjustment is negative, and good family adjustment has a positive effect. Shaffer et al. (1999) suggest companies handling these factors by providing cross-cultural training to the expatriate and the family. Personal support from the company can even be provided for the spouses, so they do not have to rely only on second-hand information and knowledge from the expatriates. The consequences of poor adjustment of the spouse can be drastic to the whole assignment: it can even result in failure (Andreason 2008).

Individual factors include self-efficacy, relational and perceptual skills, previous international assignments, and language fluency. Previous international assignments affect the relationship between the expatriate and managers and co-workers. Expatriates who have previous international experience tend to rely more on the support of on-site managers than home office, and new expatriates need more local support. Shaffer (1999) states that individual factors can be emphasized by companies by improving their support networks, especially global ones. Positional factors are somewhat related to individual factors. Expatriates in higher hierarchical positions in the company benefit more from having previous international experience than the ones in lower positions. (Shaffer et al. 1999.)

The expatriate's adjustment to the different aspects or dimensions can be measured, and it is possible for the expatriate to be well adjusted to one dimension (for example, work adjustment), but to be poorly adjusted to another (for example, general adjustment) (Puck et al. 2008). However, there are spillover effects from one adjustment domain to another. That means, that adjustment in one domain can have an effect to adjustment to other domain. For example, expatriate's good general adjustment is found to increase the job satisfaction as well. (Takeuchi, Yun & Tesluk 2002.)

### **3.2. Spouse's adjustment**

Black & Stephens (1989) research the influence of the spouse on the adjustment of the expatriate. According to their study, there is a high correlation between the adjustment of the spouse and the adjustment of the expatriate. Spouse's adjustment is affected by the favorable opinion of theirs about the international assignment – if the spouse is in favor of the assignment, the adjustment of the spouse is also better. Andreason (2008) addresses a cross-over effect, which means that the cross-cultural adjustment of the family and the spouse can have an effect on the overall cross-cultural adjustment of the expatriate and vice versa. The explanation for the effect is that the spouses are more dependent on each other in the host country, due to the lack of their home country support networks. When the spouse is better adjusted, they can allocate more resources to support the expatriate emotionally.

There can be drastic outcomes of the spouse failing to adjust: Black et al. (1989) address it as one of the two main reasons for the failure of the assignment. The other reason for the failure is the failure of the employee to adjust to living and working in foreign culture. In addition, Tung (1982) found that half of the 300 expatriates who participated in her study, returned home prematurely because of the unwillingness or inability of their spouses to adjust. All in all, it can be said that the spouse's influence on the whole assignment can be a major one.

According to Black et al. (1989), the spouse might be facing even bigger challenges on the assignment than the expatriate. Whereas the expatriate has the job and all the networks from there, the spouse is lacking that. The expatriate's degree of interaction with host country nationals tends to be lower as well. The expatriate gets to operate in an environment that supposedly is more international and with people who have a global mindset at the workplace, whereas the spouse is more immersed in the host country's culture. However, the companies tend to neglect including the spouse to the selection and the training process with the expatriate managers (Andreason 2008). Therefore, it is suggested that the firms should take spouses into account as well, when it comes to organizational support practices offered to the expatriates. The spouse and the family might actually need even more support than the expatriate (Suutari & Burch 2001).

## 4. CROSS-CULTURAL TRAINING

### 4.1. Definition of cross-cultural training

Cross-cultural training can be defined as “educative process focused on promoting intercultural learning through the acquisition of behavioral, cognitive, and affective competencies required for effective interactions across diverse cultures” (Littrell et al. 2005). According to Littrell et al. 2005, the purpose of cross-cultural training is to prepare the expatriate for the assignment abroad and complex situations they will face there. The main goal is, that the expatriate learns how to examine the situations from the point of view of the host country’s culture, so that their response would fit the culture. Cross-cultural training aims to provide knowledge and understanding that can be applied to real life situations, not straight answers, since there usually are none. Cross-cultural training creates “adaptable people” (Littrell et al. 2005). The positive effect of cross-cultural training on adjustment is widely emphasized in the literature (Andreason 2003, Black et al. 1991, Van Der Bank et al. 2006, Mendenhall et al. 2000, Shaffer et al. 1999, Littrell et al. 2005).

Forster (2000) summarizes the topics that all the cross-cultural training programs should include:

1. An awareness of a major influence of culture
2. The necessary knowledge for survival and success in different cultures, and
3. An understanding of the emotional challenges which can arise and opportunities to acquire skills that can help with psychological adjustment overseas.

The training can be offered not only to the expatriate, but also to his/her family or at least spouse, and to manager and team who is about to receive the expatriate. Training can be very helpful if the method is chosen right. On the other hand, it can also have even a negative impact on the experience. (Evans et al. 2002.)

There are many training methods that are used for preparing expatriates for their time abroad. Pre-departure training and orientation is one of them. It can include, for example, factual information about geography, climate, housing, and schools, cultural orientation, cultural assimilation training, language training, sensitivity training, and even field experience (Forster 2000). However, pre-departure training is criticized for being out of date, being too brief and lacking some important issues like handling family problems (Forster 2000), building stereotypes (Evans et al. 2002), or simply giving only the keys for survival in the new culture – not for success or individual insight of the culture (Mendenhall & Stahl 2000).

There is a debate in the existing literature which kind of training is the most effective and advantageous to expatriates. The most common type of training is probably traditional, pre-departure training, which aims to provide basic, factual information about the working and living conditions in the host country, as well as cultural differences. The weakness of traditional training, also called didactic training (Littrell et al. 2005), is the standardized nature of it, since the foreign assignments are always different and unique to each individual. On the other hand, it is easy for companies to provide and can be delivered in groups. In the worst case didactic training can also have a negative impact on the expatriate if it is conducted too vaguely and briefly, so that it increases stereotypes and assumptions of host culture. (Pucik et al. 2016: 274.) Mendenhall & Stahl (2000) highlight the need for in-country, real time training, which happens after the arrival to the host country. It is continuous by its nature and can be delivered whenever the expatriate needs it, for example, in form of mentoring or coaching. It is also discussed if the training should also be provided to the spouse and the family of the expatriate, since the spouse especially is more exposed to the culture than the expatriate (Mendenhall et al. 2000, Evans et al. 2002: 275).

## 4.2. Types of cross-cultural training

The types of cross-cultural training can vary significantly and the outcome of it is not necessarily positive. Littrell et al. (2005) combine previous studies in order to identify seven different categories of training strategies, which are attribution training, culture awareness training, cognitive-behavior modification training, interaction training, language training, didactic training, and experiential training. These strategies differ from each other by the focus of training intervention.

Attribution training aims to develop attitude and skills that are necessary in order to make attributions similar to the attributions made by people from the host culture. The goal of cultural awareness training is to raise understanding about cultural differences between the home culture and the host culture. Cognitive-behavior modification training aims to teach behaviors that are recommendable in the host culture and how to avoid behaviors that are not. In interaction training, a future expatriate is trained by a former expatriate, who gives them valuable insider knowledge about daily life in foreign culture and workplace. Language training focuses on learning at least the basics of host country's language, whereas maybe the most common type of training, didactic training, provides basic information about working conditions, living conditions, and cultural differences. Experiential training strategy focuses on learning by doing, utilizing, for example, look-see visits, role-plays, intercultural workshops, and simulations, and it has been suggested as the most efficient type of cross-cultural training (Waxin & Panaccio 2005). These strategies can also be combined in the training. However, it has been discussed whether they are all equally beneficial. From the companies' point of view, didactic training is most commonly used. It is probably the easiest to arrange as well, since it can be quite standardized and provides only basic factual information. This type of training, on other hand, may also turn out to have a negative impact, if conducted too shallowly, and might actually increase stereotypes and false assumption of the host culture. (Evans, Pucik & Björkman 2002.)

Black and Mendenhall (1989) identify situational factors to be considered when choosing the training methods. The first one is cultural novelty: if the cultural is very novel, some

basic factual information about the country's values, religious systems and political systems need to be discussed. The second factor is the degree of interaction, meaning how frequent and important the interaction with the host country nationals is, and what is the nature of the interactions. The third factor is job novelty: the job demands, job related tasks and constraints need to be considered. If the job is novel, the more rigorous training should be conducted. The same factors are suggested to be applied to the training of the spouse as well (Black et al. 1989). Waxin et al. (2005) suggest taking the following factors into account when deciding the method of the training: the cultural distance between the expatriate's home and host country, the nature and the duration of the assignment, and the expatriate's position.

It has been suggested that the training methods should be applied differently in different phases of the assignment, since the psychological receptivity of the expatriate changes during the assignment (Selmer, Torbiörn & de Leon 1998). When the adjustment process proceeds, the applicability of habitual behavior that is derived from the home culture decreases, and the applicability of new behaviors that are learned from the host culture increases. In other words, the frame of reference of the expatriate emerges toward the host culture. The frame of reference consists of cognitive elements that are derived from the world view of the individual. Emerging frame of reference causes the need for certain types of training to vary, in order to be as successful as possible. Some studies suggest cross-cultural training to be sequential (Selmer et al. 1998, Suutari et al. 2001), so that it begins before departure but continues after the arrival to the host country, and the content of the training varies depending on the current phase of the assignment.

Selmer et al. (1998) suggest composing the different phases of training as following. At the pre-departure phase, the expatriate experiences foreignness, which means that they are relying on the direction given by the trainer, thus not involving themselves deeply to the training. Therefore, didactic training is suggested at the pre-departure phase, to provide essential information about the host country. At the ethnocentric phase the expatriate already has personal experiences from the host country, so that creates motivation for higher involvement in the training. For this phase, cultural-contrast mode of learning and fact-oriented training are suggested, concentrating on the similarities and

differences between the home and the host cultures. At culture-shocked phase training is the most effective, and should be teaching how to learn about the new culture. Thus didactic training and experiential training combined are suggested for culture-shocked phase, and the aim is to provide tools and methods for coping in different situations and understanding them. For example, role plays and simulations could be used as training methods. At the conformist phase the focus should be on actual practice and immediate transfer from learning to practice, to learn to behave as the host country nationals do. According to Selmer et al. (1998), at the fourth phase of the adjustment, the adjusted phase, training will not be needed anymore.

### **4.3. In-country training**

Whereas didactic training is not seen as being enough in order to prepare the expatriates for their assignments, it has been argued that the most effective type of training would happen after arrival in the host country. This is called in-country training, and it can be delivered in two different formats. The first one, traditional training, can have features of didactic, experiential, and cognitive-behavior modification training which were discussed earlier, but the training happens in the host country, is typically delivered to expatriates in a group setting, and it aims to provide deeper knowledge of the host country's culture. Although, traditional in-country training is necessarily not more effective than traditional pre-departure training. It provides the same content to all the expatriates, and does not go into detail with the specific, individual cultural-related problems that the expatriates might have. (Mendenhall et al. 2000.)

So it can be said that there is need for a training that provides answers and solutions to individual and unique problems. The other form of in-country training, real-time training, aims to provide them. In-country, real-time training is continuous by its nature, and it is delivered when it is actually needed, whenever expatriate faces situations they need advice, "on the fly" (Mendenhall et al. 2000). Flexibility and immediate answers are benefits of this type of training, in addition to the fact that expatriate assignments are always unique and the experience is different to each individual. Real-time training can

be delivered, for example, by using personal consultants or coaches assigned for expatriates. Whereas traditional training provides theories and guidelines, real-time training is individualized and task-oriented. It also gives the expatriate an opportunity to continuously evaluate and develop their leadership skills. Because of task-oriented nature, learnt skills can easily be transferred to the job and be utilized in the future. From the expatriates' point of view, real-time in-country training is also beneficial because it saves time (no need to attend specific training sessions), and gives an opportunity to greater adjustment to their work and better interaction with host country nationals. (Evans et al. 2002.) However, the most effective and personalized training methods tend to be costly for the organization. It takes resources and time to prepare a perfect combination of training methods, including aspects from pre-departure, didactic training, traditional in-country training, and even personal coaching. That is probably why the most companies still lean on pre-departure training and provide only the basic information for the expatriates. (Mendenhall et al. 2000.)

When it comes to in-country, real-time training methods, Mendenhall et al. (2000) suggest, for example, internet chat rooms, repatriates, other current expatriates, local nationals, or CD-rom products as providers of training. There are benefits and downsides in all of these, that are addressed by Magnini (2009). Internet chat rooms and virtual communities enable people from all around the world to discuss about their experiences in similar, challenging situations. This means that new insights and ideas may be introduced and adapted, but on the other hand, the credibility or the suitability of the information is not guaranteed. In addition, virtual communities do not enhance creating bonds and interacting with local host country nationals and co-workers, and the questions and the comments can be left unanswered, so the solutions are not necessarily given. The same problem of not increasing or encouraging to interacting with local nationals also applies to CD-rom products, which otherwise are quite flexible and adaptable tools of training. Other current expatriates or repatriates may be advantageous sources of information, especially repatriates who already have completed their assignments successfully. This, however, regards appropriate conditions for knowledge transfer, for example trust and respect. The same applies to host country locals. Magnini (2009) finds in his exploratory investigation of the real-time training modes in hotel industry, that most

commonly used source of real-time training are local nationals. Expatriates, who have completed previous expatriate assignments before, tend to use less CD-rom training products. Also, the culture distance matters: when the culture distance between the home and the host country increases, the expatriates are less likely to use repatriates as sources of real-time advice. (Magnini 2009.)

#### **4.4. Mentoring**

Using mentors as a form of in-country, real time training and organizational support is mentioned in some studies (Morris et al. 2001, Suutari et al. 2001). Mentoring is advantageous, since it gives the possibility for the expatriate to discuss the real problems that have occurred, and elaborate and adapt the given information to the real life situations (Selmer et al. 1998). In traditional organizational setting mentoring is seen beneficial to the mentored employee, the mentor, and the organization, by means of higher job satisfaction and lower work stress for the employee, improved reputation and acquiring new skills for the mentor, and more adaptable employees and better reputation for the organization.

Crocitto, Sullivan and Carraher (2005) discuss the mentoring benefits in the global setting and why it is needed. They suggest using multiple mentors from different locations instead of building an intense relationship with only one mentor as often is done in traditional organizational setting, because expatriates' needs for mentoring are different and can vary during different stages of the assignment. A knowledge of home country, host country, expatriation process, and the organization is needed, so finding one individual to possess all of these can be quite difficult.

Needs based framework for global mentoring is also proposed by Mezas and Scandura (2005). Different types of specific knowledge are needed during pre-departure, on-site, and repatriation stages, and the best support can be provided by multiple mentors, who also communicate with each other. Pre-departure mentoring consists of helping the expatriate to prepare for the assignment by, for example, building network of contacts in

home and host country, resolving and discussing family concerns, and finding a relocation mentor from the home office to keep the expatriate posted about important events during the assignment. On-site mentoring can be executed by the host country nationals as mentors, and the help is needed to deal with cultural issues and job-related and task-related matters. On-site mentor assists the expatriate with cultural adjustment. Repatriation mentoring consists preparing the expatriate for the return to the home country by assessing gained knowledge and skills, helping the host country's office to replace the expatriate, and assessing future career opportunities. However, mentors are still not used that often, because of the lack of potential mentors, concerns about the cost-benefit ratio, potential lack of organizational rewards or expatriates' lack of motivation to commit themselves in developing meaningful relationships with mentors. (Crocitto et al. 2005.)

#### **4.5. Cross-cultural training and adjustment**

There are conflicting findings about the impact of cross-cultural training on the adjustment. Many of the previous studies are generally researching cross-cultural training, not mentioning if the training is conducted pre-departure or after arrival in the host country, or they are specifically concentrating on pre-departure training and its effect on the adjustment. Overall there is relatively little empirical evidence of in-country training (Suutari et al. 2001).

When it comes to findings about training and adjustment, some studies find a positive or slightly positive relationship between them. Other studies, however, find no relationship at all or even a negative one. The credibility or applicability of the studies are in some cases not that strong, and overall the impact of cross-cultural training on adjustment might be overestimated (Morris & Robie 2001). Okbara & Kabongo (2011) study Western expatriates in Nigeria, and the effect of the different types of pre-departure, cross-cultural training on the adjustment of the expatriates. They find that most efficient types of cross-cultural training were specific experiential ones. Also general conventional cross-cultural training had a positive effect on other types of adjustment, excluding psychological

adjustment, and general experiential cross-cultural training had a weak effect on the adjustment. Selmer (2005) finds that cross-cultural training of expatriates in China had a weak effect on professional adjustment, and no impact on general and interaction adjustment. Puck, Kittler & Wright (2008) find that there is little if any effect of pre-departure cross-cultural training on the adjustment. Waxin & Panaccio (2005) as well as Mendenhall et al. (2004) find a positive effect of cross-cultural training on the adjustment of the expatriates, but Mendenhall et al. (2004) find that there is a negative impact as well. Waxin et al. (2005) find that cross-cultural training affects all three facets of expatriate's adjustment, but the effect is different depending on the type of training. Hechanova, Beehr & Christiansen (2003) study the antecedents of adjustment and find a weak negative correlation between the amount of cross-cultural training received and the general adjustment. However, the factors they find are the common predictors of all the facets of adjustment, which are self-efficacy, family and spouse adjustment (which was also brought up on qualitative studies), and the frequency of interaction with local nationals. However, it can be noted that all of these could be enhanced with suitable type of cross-cultural training, since timing and suitable content, and the consistency of them during different phases of the assignment, are necessary in order the training to be successful and useful for the expatriate (Selmer et al. 1998). Also Morris et al. (2001) find that comprehensiveness of methods and content of the training are more important in order to cross-cultural training to affect the adjustment, than the length of the training and the level of participation of the expatriate.

## **5. METHODOLOGY**

### **5.1. Methodological approach**

Qualitative method was used as a methodological choice in this thesis, since the data was collected by interviewing expatriates (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2012: 165). The data collection was non-standardized, and the technique was semi-structured interviews, in order to possibly alter the questions and the way where the interview was going to, depending on the interviewee. Therefore, this study was a mono method qualitative study (Saunders et al. 2012: 168). The purpose of the study is exploratory, since the aim is to answer to what- and how-questions, and gain insights about cross-cultural in-country training for expatriates. (Saunders et al. 2012: 175.)

### **5.2. Research methods and samples**

This study was conducted by semi-structured interviews because the topic demanded in-depth analysis of a specific area. A non-directive interview without specific “yes” or “no” answers was the best choice, because the study was about individuals’ experiences and unique situations they have faced – and these can not be rated in any way. Furthermore, the outcomes and the ways to feel and handle them are different for everyone. Ideal would have been to conduct the interviews face-to-face, but for real it was too difficult or even impossible to arrange, so interviews were done via the Internet, using Skype. (Saunders et al. 2012: 394.)

The respondents for the study were selected so that all of them were originally from Finland and had been living abroad, either as a company-sent expatriate, a self-initiated expatriate or a spouse of an expatriate. The most important criterion was that they had received some kind of in-country training and support, in order to be able to answer the questions about that. A letter for the possible respondents was sent by email, where the research topic was introduced. Overall, 15 expatriates were originally contacted. Six of

them answered, and finally, four of them agreed on taking part of the study. The last respondent was found because one of the respondents knew her and suggested her for the study. In this research, the employer, the position at work or even the business field where the respondents were working did not affect the selection. Therefore, all the respondents work and have worked for different companies during their assignments. What was a pleasant surprise when getting to know the respondents better, was that they actually had much more experience of international assignments than just one. Therefore, the scope of the study turned out to be wider than originally expected because of a relatively small number of respondents.

The length and the timing of the foreign assignments varied, but all of the respondents had stayed abroad for 2-5 years during one assignment. The timing of the assignments varied quite a lot as well. Some of the international working experiences happened over 10 years ago, and some of the respondents were working abroad when the interviews took place. Since the host countries of all of the respondents were different, the cultural aspects of specific countries and the cultural differences faced by the expatriates because of them, are not emphasized in this study. Those aspects are taken into account, but on a more general level. Common themes evolving around the challenges and cultural differences, as well as the ways to cope with them, are looked for instead. The goal is to produce findings that are not tied to any specific culture or host country.

### **5.3. Semi-structured interviews**

The data was collected by five in-depth semi-structured interviews. The interviews took place through Skype, since all the interviewees were located in different places – some were even on an international assignment at the moment, or living abroad otherwise. The interviews were done in February, March and April 2018. The questionnaire guide was not tested beforehand, but after the first interviews, it was rephrased a bit, in order to be able to answer better to the research question and the objectives. Some questions were also removed or combined with each other, since the interviewees tended to answer to them simultaneously.

All the respondents gave their permission to record the interviews. That gave the possibility for the interviewer to focus on the interview and the responses, and lead the discussion to a preferred direction when needed. All the respondents come from Finland, so the interview questions were translated to Finnish and all the interviews were conducted in Finnish. After recording the interviews, they were transcribed word for word, and the most important parts were translated to English, in order to conduct a deeper analysis than just taking notes from the responses. The transcripts are not attached, since the interviews were confidential.

The interviews lasted 30-90 minutes, most of them for about an hour. The questionnaire guide was applied to the extend of what was suitable for each case. The backgrounds of the interviewees differed from each other, so the questions needed to be altered as well. Since the style of the interviews was semi-structured, that allowed adaptation and the adjustment of the questions, changing the wording of them and even asking them in a different order, depending on the answers. The interviews proceeded as following: At first the topic of the thesis was introduced briefly, followed up with a chance to ask questions from the interviewer. Then the interview begun with some background questions about previous international experience, foreign assignments, and the work background, in order to form a wider picture of the international experience of the respondent and the need for a certain type of questions. The respondents were reminded that all kinds of opinions and experiences were desirable, and there were no right or wrong answers. They were encouraged to base their answers on their feelings.

After the basic background questions the interview was divided into two different themes, around which the questions were formed: adjustment related questions and training related questions. The questions asked were based on the questionnaire guide (Attachment 1), but as already said, the form and the order of them was adapted for each interview specifically, as the interview proceeded. Some interviewees answered to the multiple questions at once, even without having to ask them, and the conversation flowed naturally. It was more like the interviewee sharing their personal experiences instead of a strict interview. Therefore, also the form of the answers for the questions differed a lot.

The interviewees had very different backgrounds and international experiences, even though all of them were originally from Finland. First of all, they had experience from multiple roles in the international assignment: some of them were expatriates sent by the company, some of them were self-initiated expatriates, some had sought for a job abroad by themselves, some were on an assignment as a spouse. However, even those who were not on their own international assignments, were also working from the assignment, either for an organization based in the home country, for a local organization or for a multinational company, where the colleagues were based all around the world. Most of them had experience from multiple assignments, not just from one. Some interviewees had been on their assignments alone, some with a spouse or with a family – some even more than once with a different setting. Therefore, they had experience from different roles as well. So, it can be said that regardless of the fairly few number of interviews, the data collection was wider than expected and quite diverse. All the interviewees had wide range of different experiences and quite a comprehensive view of international assignments and expatriation.

#### **5.4. Data analysis**

Deductive approach was used in this research. The existing theory has been used as a base for formulating the research question and the objectives (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009: 489), and the data was analyzed by the categorization which was derived from the themes based on previous research. The data analyzation proceeded as follows: first, after each interview, a summarization of the interview was produced right away, in order to identify the main themes and meanings of the long narratives told by the interviewees (Saunders et al. 2009: 491). Second, the interviews were transcribed word for word, and the most important citations were translated in English and categorized around the main themes (expatriation assignments, adjustment to the host country and cross-cultural training) used in the study. After all the interviews had been transcribed and the citations had been translated, they were structured even more precisely under the minor themes (living in an expatriate “bubble” and the spouse’s point of view for the theme expatriation

assignments; adjustment to everyday life, cultural differences and challenges, family's adjustment, adjustment to work, and finding support networks for the theme adjustment; and different types of training and support, importance of the training, and ideas for training for the theme cross-cultural training). Then, the citations were organized in a logical order, so that it was possible to identify the similarities and differences of the responses. The citations were interpreted, not just word for word, but also with the application of the narrative approach. The significance of the social context was emphasized in the analysis of the citations, and the meaning was interpreted as a sum of the participant's engagement, the actions they took, the consequences of these and the relationship events that followed (Saunders et al. 2009: 497).

### **5.5. Reliability and validity**

The interviews were conducted through Skype, so because of some technical issues and internet connection, some parts of the interviews were a bit unclear when trying to transcribe them. However, these troubles were almost non-existent, and it was more like a matter of some specific words instead of full sentences. Therefore, the interviews were able to be transcribed word for word quite comprehensively.

Because of the nature of semi-structured interviews, in some cases the answers were partly irrelevant for the research. Also, since the interviews did not take place face to face, the time invested for the interview was no fixed in all cases, so the interviews did necessarily not have time to get into such a deep level in those cases. Face-to-face meeting could have probably increased the commitment of the interviewees. It also has to be mentioned that many possible findings about the hardships of expatriation can be quite personal and not that easy to discuss with a stranger. Therefore, some aspects of challenges faced when living abroad or after coming back to the host country, may have been left out.

The timing of the international assignments varied a lot, and some interviewees had been living abroad many years ago. Therefore, the experiences are not that fresh anymore, and

some aspects might even have been forgotten. However, since some of the interviewees were currently living abroad, their experiences were more up to date and they were able to shed light on them very comprehensively.

In order to prevent the answers during the interview and the findings being biased, the questions were asked on a neutral tone, and the respondents were able to speak freely without any additional comments or interruption. The reactions and the responses of the interviewer were kept as minimal as possible. Even though the wording of the questions varied depending on the direction of the interview, they were asked without any further leading questions. Reliability was also aimed for by transcribing the interviews word for word as precisely as possible. All the interviewees were encouraged to share as much as they could, since the interviews were confidential, which was stated in the beginning of each interview.

## 6. FINDINGS

In this chapter, the findings of the study are presented. The findings are structured around the themes of the study: first, expatriation and international assignments in general, consisting of the experiences of the respondents of living and working abroad, the expatriation bubble they described, and the spouse's point of view. The second theme is adjustment, consisting of the assessment of the respondent's adjustment in general according to their narratives, adjustment to everyday life, cultural differences and challenges faced by the respondents while living abroad, family's adjustment, adjustment to work, and finding support networks in the host country outside the workplace. The third and the last theme is cross-cultural training, where different types of training received by the respondents are presented and the effectiveness and the significance of them for the respondents are analyzed, as well as the respondents' ideas for the possible training procedures are presented.

### 6.1. Expatriation and international assignments

*"Fascinating."* (Respondent 4, when asking about living in a foreign country.)

Overall the respondents were enthusiastic about living abroad and gaining new experiences. The expatriate assignment or the time spend abroad in general were seen as a great richness, which had provided a lot for the respondents and their families. All the respondents were excited to share their experiences about living abroad in different cultures. Overall, the global mindset was very present in all of the interviews and could be seen in each respondent. The time spent abroad was seen as an exiting, challenging yet rewarding adventure. The opinions about this did not differ. Each interviewee highlighted the value of their international experiences multiple times during the interviews, even when not asked. The interviews begun and ended by them repeatedly telling how good and unique of an experience it had been and how everyone should do the same.

*“Very rewarding, very interesting. And then also educational, since I like to learn by doing. And when you are located in a country and culture which is quite novel to you, even after a couple of years you learn something new all the time. That is one of the reasons why I like working here and I have enjoyed all the other ones (foreign assignments) as well.”* (Respondent 1.)

*“It provided so much for our family.”* (Respondent 4.)

Three of the five respondents stated that they would have stayed longer on their assignments or that they either extended their stay, or left for another expatriate assignment to another country. Four of the five respondents said that they have never felt like going back to Finland prematurely.

*“No. No. There was never such a situation.”* (Respondent 4, when asking if they ever felt like coming back to Finland prematurely.)

*“I would have wanted to stay there for longer. I was supposed to stay there for two years but ended up staying three, and I could have stayed even longer. Those were great days.”* (Respondent 2.)

*“My contract is for three years but I have applied to stay for longer.”* (Respondent 1.)

One of the respondents had returned home early. However, the aim never was to stay in the host country for the whole contract, and the respondent felt like he had gotten everything out of the experience he had wished for, therefore he was satisfied of it. The reason for coming back earlier than the contract ended was the changed conditions at the workplace.

*“I didn’t have to leave, I left on my own terms. (...) I was not necessarily even going to stay there for the whole contract. I wanted to go there in order to understand why they behave the way they do and how they work. And that is what I*

*accomplished. (...) When you sum up all the things that changed while I was there; the rules changed, my manager was going to leave, the whole system at the workplace changed. I was like okay, this is it then.”* (Respondent 3.)

When it came to returning to Finland after the assignment, that was seen actually more difficult than leaving. Two of the respondents had struggled after coming back, mostly because of the cultural differences – they had gotten used to the host country’s culture, which had been more open and outgoing than the Finnish culture. Also adjusting back to the Finnish climate with long winter period and less sunlight was seen as a negative thing according to one of the respondents.

*“As I already mentioned, the challenging part was coming back to Finland, especially since people are rude here. (...) We came back in the end of Summer, then after a couple of months the Fall came, it was dark and started raining... That was a rough time.”* (Respondent 2.)

Two of the respondents felt that they could have stayed for a longer time in the host country and extend the assignment, but some factors caused them to leave the host country after all. For one respondent, a language barrier was addressed as a reason to leave the country, and the host country’s climate for another.

*“We could have stayed there if the language issue had not been there.”* (Respondent 5.)

*“The air pollution is at life-threatening levels there during almost the whole year and during the whole day. That is a really bad thing, and that was such a hardship that we decided to leave. We wanted to go live somewhere with cleaner climate.”* (Respondent 1.)

### 6.1.1. Expatriate bubble

A feeling about living in a bubble was addressed by three of the respondents. They talked about a certain “expatriate bubble”, where everyone they interfered with in their daily lives were expatriates or other international people, so the life felt somehow biased. Everyone is open-minded, everyone has a global mindset, everyone is highly educated and well-behaved. This was, however, seen as a negative thing in a way, since the respondents would have preferred to interfere with the locals and get to know the local culture. Both of the respondents, who addressed this kind of troubles, explained that the local contacts were difficult to form because of the language barrier.

*“We lived in an expatriate bubble. Without local friends we would not know anything about the host country. (...) You can live there for years without interfering with the locals.”* (Respondent 4.)

The two of the respondents agreed that the situation is probably similar in other places as well, where there are big, multinational corporations with many international employees and expatriates. Especially the families, for whom the children’s international school is in the middle of the everyday life and its responsibilities, become close with other expatriate families and get to know each other well. However, they may end up living in their own areas and socializing only with other expatriates, when they do not integrate to the host country’s culture. If they want to get to know the host country for real, they need to make an effort to intentionally leave this “bubble”.

*“The other families from the international school became our social circle, so it was like expat this, expat that, all the time, and people were coming and going all the time.”* (Respondent 5.)

*“Expatriates live in their own areas and if you do not go out, you can live there without getting to know local people and the local culture if you do not want to.”* (Respondent 4.)

Eventually, for two of the respondents, the feeling of getting out of the bubble had caused them to leave the host country or not to extend their stay anymore. One of them wanted to come back “for good” to see how life would be in Finland (and ended up leaving for another assignment later).

*“After the third year we had a feeling of living in a bubble. Everything is so well here and we just live here without caring about the rest of the world. This is unreal, should we leave?”* (Respondent 1.)

Another respondent felt like wanting to “jump off from the expatriate orbit” after a multiple international assignments and living in a country of which language their family did not speak, and moving another country on their own terms, with the language of which they knew.

### **6.1.2. Spouse’s point of view**

Two of the respondents had been on international assignments as a spouse, while their partners were working as an expatriate. Both of them had, however, also been working while on the assignment. Their career journeys were different to each other and contained multiple experiences of working from home for multinational and Finnish organizations, doing research, as well as working for local companies and as an entrepreneur. Both of them told that when they left for the international assignments as spouses, they already knew that staying at home would not be enough for them.

*“What if I can not deal with being the spouse? Work has always been very important to me. What if I can not be without it? (...) The biggest crisis there would be that.”* (Respondent 4.)

Since being “just” the spouse was not enough, the respondent who did not already have a job actively searched for things to do in the host country. Those activities included such as studying, starting own business activities, volunteer work etc. The respondent told that

these activities were found through networks and contacts in the host country “by accident – one thing led to another”.

Another respondent addressed that after having children, integrating to the host country and building a life there had been a lot easier than before the children.

*“When it was just me and my spouse, it was terribly lonely for me. (...) I counted minutes for my husband to get back home from work.”* (Respondent 5.)

Without the networks that come from the school, daycare or hobbies of the children, social contacts were difficult to form, since there was no need to “go anywhere”. Even if you work from home as the respondent did, the lack of social life was causing loneliness. While the expatriate spouse had his own networks at work, the spouse at home felt that approaching people and even having access to new contacts was extremely hard. With the network provided by the children’s school, forming social relationships had gotten easier.

*“I like being on an expatriate assignment more, when you have kids. Especially as a spouse it is a lot easier.”* (Respondent 5.)

*“For my spouse it (the adjustment) started with understanding and sorting out everyday life there, then getting into social networks through school.”* (Respondent 2.)

One of the other respondents addressed the hardships of the spouse as well, and the noticed the connection between them and the lack of networks formed through children’s school and hobbies.

*“My spouse has adjusted the worst in here (when comparing the current situation to the previous expatriate assignments), and the main reason is because we no longer have small kids whom you take to school and hobbies, so that kind of*

*networks are lacking completely. (...) The usual frameworks are missing since (the spouse) does not work here.*” (Respondent 1.)

## 6.2. Adjustment

When it came to adjustment to the host country and the new culture in general, all the respondents felt that the process had been relatively easy and smooth. Actually, none of the respondents described experiencing any cultural shock or other major incidents or issues hindering the adjustment. One reason for that may be the cultural distance, which, in some cases, was not that huge. Although, only two of the respondents felt that way. Three of the respondents had been living and working in countries with a bigger cultural distance, when comparing to Finland, at least.

*“We have only been living in Western countries, where, in my opinion, the cultural differences are minimal. (...) I would speak of cultural differences if you go to Asian or African countries, where the norms and habits are really different. (...) We have not experienced any hardships (because of cultural differences) in any countries where we have lived.”* (Respondent 5.)

The adjustment process was seen sort of as an adventure for the respondents: exciting and fascinating. They were eager to find out about the host country’s culture and expected to experience certain differences. All of the respondents had been prepared independently before the move, so they were aware of the cultural differences and could apply their knowledge to the adjustment process. Even basic daily chores like going to a grocery store turn into little, exciting missions. Differences were seen interesting and intriguing instead of challenges:

*“It’s like being a detective.”* (Respondent 4.)

*“Settling felt like going for an expedition in a way. Everything was interesting and you tried things out of curiosity, with a pleasure.”* (Respondent 2.)

Little things like being able to buy groceries and other things you are used to was seen to enhance the adjustment.

*“There was a little Western market right at the gate of the compound where I lived. They sold everything that Western people need. (...) That enhanced the adjustment.”* (Respondent 3.)

#### 6.2.1. Adjustment to everyday life

All the respondents agreed that adjustment to everyday life happened through the everyday actions, like opening bank accounts, signing an electricity contracts and finding the nearest grocery stores.

*“There is so much to do and to take care of that it acts as an adjustor (...), little everyday things you do. Through them you start adjusting to the new culture.”* (Respondent 2.)

The respondents who have children said that the settlement to the life in the host country evolved around the children: getting them to school or daycare, finding hobbies for them, and taking care of their daily schedules. The everyday life at home in the host country consisted of the similar kind of things than in Finland, especially for the respondents who had a family with them.

*“An everyday life was all about kids’ school and hobbies. It does not really differ that much from the family life in Finland.”* (Respondent 4.)

*“The everyday life for me is quite similar. You go to work, help with chores in the evening, spend time with the family and then go to bed. On weekends you do something together. In the other countries it has been quite similar, since I am a family-oriented person.”* (Respondent 1.)

Everyday life abroad was not described as much different to what it would be like in Finland or in some other country by any of the respondents. However, two respondents described it a bit easier, a bit more laid-back. Life abroad was seen consisting of simple things that felt enjoyable. Being able to do familiar things like similar hobbies and family activities according to personal interests was seen to enhance the adjustment. The respondents thought that regardless the country you are living, you tend to gravitate towards similar kind of people and similar kind of everyday activities. The host country's culture was not seen affecting the life at home on a daily basis, since the culture at home was still Finnish.

*“I tend to define this as an active vacation. Working here partly feels as if you had gone to volunteer work during summer vacation, but for a longer time. So it (working abroad) is a very positive experience.”* (Respondent 1.)

*“All in all, the life out there was quite laid-back. (...) The life consisted of simple things: go to pool, read a book, watch Netflix, maybe go meet friends. During weekdays the life was all about the work.”* (Respondent 3.)

*“In my opinion you create quite a similar environment for yourself, no matter where you live.”* (Respondent 5.)

*“When the culture at home is Finnish, you do not even realize you are living abroad until you go out of the door and do not know which of the packages at the store contains milk.”* (Respondent 4.)

### 6.2.2. Cultural differences and challenges

The respondents were able to address multiple cultural differences and challenges they had come across during their time abroad. There were some mutual ones like language, and some that differed a lot depending on the host country, like exotic diseases, pollution or climate. Because all the respondents had mainly been on the assignments in different countries than the others, their opinions and experiences also differed a lot when it comes

to this topic. Some of the challenges and differences are clearly caused by the different culture, some are just general challenges and differences, caused by, for example, different geographical location or the traffic structure of the country. Since all the respondents had experienced different host countries, these findings can not be generalized nor compared.

Language was addressed as a challenge by three of the respondents. The major challenge occurred when the local people did not speak nor understand English at all. One respondent described different intonation and expletives of English language causing some troubles in order to understand and to be understood, even after spending a few years in the host country. All the respondents had used English at work and in daily routines. Also in the relationships formed with other expatriates and their families English was often used as a common language. However, most of the respondents had Finnish friends in the host country as well.

Not having a common language with the locals was seen as a big issue, since it made adjusting to the country more difficult. The language issue was managed by the two respondents by taking classes and trying to learn the local language, so that they could manage in daily situations like grocery shopping or taking a taxi. However, neither of them reached an advanced level of the local language during the time in the host country. Learning a completely different language was seen to take too much time and effort after all. In addition to learning the local language, the respondents got through difficult situations caused by the language barrier by using gestures and common sense, and getting help with translations from the expatriate's organization.

*“The only thing that made me lose my temper sometimes was not having a common language with the locals.” (Respondent 4.)*

*“I want to feel like home wherever I live, and it happens through the language. If you cannot speak with a plumber, a neighbor, or a cashier, you somehow get stuck in a limbo, where you are neither a tourist nor a local.” (Respondent 5.)*

Traffic was addressed as a difference by three of the respondents. However, all of them said that it was easy to adjust to that: it is what it is. The respondents got used to traffic jams and longer distances.

*“You needed to have a car and a driver, and you never knew how much time it was going to take because sometimes there were huge traffic jams.”* (Respondent 1.)

*“I will go to the store and it will take me 4 hours, but that’s okay.”* (Respondent 3.)

Also the time difference was addressed by two of the respondents. One of them worked from home with people from all around the world, so sometimes the work hours were from 9pm to 3am. Another respondent pointed out that time difference was maybe the only real challenge, since the home office was located in Finland. That caused delays at work sometimes. Other general differences experienced by the respondents were climate, housing maintenance, banking and corruption. They had caused some challenging situations, but the respondents did not address them as real challenges, still. According to the respondents, the only major challenges had been the pollution and the language.

*“In Finland you have been used to that the houses do not fall apart. (...) 19 leaks have been blocked here, mainly from the ceiling and the walls.”* (Respondent 1.)

When it comes to cultural differences, the respondents were all able to name some of them. However, those were not seen as challenges, either. One respondent described that experiencing some cultural differences felt “amusing” in the beginning. Almost all of the respondents compared the differences to the Finnish way of doing things and found it more efficient, even though their host countries (multiple host countries for some) differed a lot from each other when it comes to cultural distance.

*“Quite often, especially from the perspective of a Finn, the things are done the most difficult way possible. (...) Kind of ‘do we need to do this like that, for real?’”* (Respondent 3.)

Since the cultural differences the respondents stated differ from each other hugely because of the different host countries, they can not be combined at all. However, what was notable, was that all the respondents spoke of their host countries with respect and valued the differences. Instead of challenges, the cultural differences were seen as “richness”. The most important thing was to understand the culture and take that into account in order to manage. Some cultural differences the respondents named were different kind of logic, religion, behavior, and social interaction.

*“This is a richness at the same time: the difference of the people and the different logic.”* (Respondent 1.)

*“The culture is intertwined with religion. The religion affects the culture and vice versa.”* (Respondent 3.)

*“Corruption, but you got used to it and learned even to appreciate it sometimes.”* (Respondent 4.)

All in all, the cultural differences and the challenges were understood and valued by all the respondents.

*“Even if you face hardships and struggle, it makes it easier to know that your time there is limited, so you need to make the most of it instead of wanting to be somewhere else... definitely not in Finland.”* (Respondent 5.)

### 6.2.3. Family’s adjustment

*“Family comes first, then work.”* (Respondent 1.)

Four of the five respondents were abroad with their families. All of them emphasized how important it is for the assignment that the family adjusts well. According to the previous research, the adjustment of the family and the spouse has a huge effect on the expatriate assignment. The respondents were willing to make certain decisions so that the family’s

wellbeing was guaranteed, like base the decision of the host country on the possibility for the children to get into a good school. One of the respondents described that the experience of living abroad made their family even closer. Another respondent, as well, said that living abroad and getting away from your regular routines gave the family opportunity to spend more time together, for example experience fun trips and leisure time activities together.

*“The bottom line for everything is that the family has to adjust. They need to like the place we live in and be happy about the time we spend together.”* (Respondent 1.)

*“For some reason the presence of a different culture, environment and country brought us closer together.”* (Respondent 4.)

All the respondents with families stated that their children had adjusted well to their host countries. The age of the children of the respondents varied, but regardless the adjustment process was described as quite smooth. One of the respondents, however, had experienced some trouble with the education system, which was not as good as in Finland. Two of the respondents had moved quite a lot with their children, so they were used to moving and living in different countries. The respondents described it as feeling natural for the children. However, choosing a good school for them was seen as a crucial factor in their adjustment.

*“The kids adjusted well, because we found a good school for them where they could keep up with their hobbies.”* (Respondent 1.)

*“We moved in August, and in December I heard my kid speaking English for the first time. After that, it did not take that long until it sounded similar to local language with accents and everything.”* (Respondent 2.)

#### 6.2.4. Adjustment to work

There were many differences when it comes to working abroad experienced by the respondents. However, like the cultural differences in daily life, these differences were also seen as a richness and a way to broaden the view of the world rather than a burden. The respondents had previous experience of working abroad or in an international environment, or working in multicultural teams or with international colleagues, so that they were used to cultural differences at the workplace. Although, when working with other expatriates in multicultural corporations, the work environment was seen quite Western and similar to the one they had been used to. Therefore, the culture of the host country was not that much present at the workplace.

One of the respondents described that the adjustment to work depended on two things; job description and the team. The job itself needs to be related to the personal interests and core competencies, and the team needs to be “functional enough”. The need for “enough support and freedom” was stated as well. Independent and flexible approach to the job description was valued highly, and increased the adjustment to work. The respondent stated that he always based the decisions of leaving for the assignment by these factors, as well as picked the host countries according to where he wanted to live. Therefore, a good satisfaction with the job was achieved.

*“I have managed to form such a job description and operating models for myself that it works well. I can do what I want and how I want.” (Respondent 1.)*

Another respondent also mentioned freedom as one of the factors that was important. In his case, there was not enough of that, which affected the decision to return to Finland before the contract ended. The respondent had been working in a similar job in Finland, so the reverse approach of the host country made the job description also very different – however, the respondent stated, “you were able to adapt to it.”

*“The job was heavily regulated. The instructions were strict and exact. (...) In Finland it is very independent and uncontrolled. There (in the host country) you do not decide about anything by yourself.”* (Respondent 3.)

Another positive thing about working abroad was mentioned by two of the respondents: the people you got to work with. People at the host country’s organization were seen as carefully selected, very competent people, with whom it was nice to work. This applied to stakeholders as well, who the respondent also thought of being more competent and motivated than the people in Finland at similar kind of organizations. Also, the Finnish people abroad were different when comparing to Finnish people in general:

*“They are also selected, kind of the most competent and enthusiastic Finns I get to work with. In Finland a big part of people I associate with (on a daily basis at work) are not as enthusiastic, social, nor have a global mindset.”* (Respondent 1.)

Cultural differences at work that the respondents had experienced included for example different approach to leadership, hierarchy, strict rules, dress code at work, concept of time, and different ways to work in general. Two of the respondents had experience of working in a culture that differs drastically from the Finnish culture, therefore the differences were also more significant. One of the respondents said that even though he had prepared for the different ways to work beforehand, the differences still tend to “surprise you every time it happens”. For both of the respondents who lived in a culture with a high cultural distance to Finland, the solution for the difficult situations was to adapt to the host country’s way to work, even if it did not feel like the best or the most efficient way to do things.

*“There have been two options: either do it their way, which means I would not have any control about the schedule or the quality, or I could start micromanaging. And that has been the solution.”* (Respondent 1.)

Two of the respondents were working from home during the international assignments of their spouses. They, on the other hand, did not notice that much differences when

comparing it to work in Finland or in another country. Both of them had colleagues in Finland, some colleagues were located abroad as well. Both used Skype to contact the colleagues and clients. One of the respondents working from home describes her job a bit lonely, but it comes down merely to the job description. The arrangement is good for the family life and allows a certain flexibility, however, she states that another kind of arrangement (like having a day job at the office from 8am to 5pm) would not even be possible right now in her situation.

*“At the same time it is a bit boring for me. It is a privilege but also a must.”*

(Respondent 5.)

#### 6.2.5. Finding support networks

When it comes to support networks in daily life, the respondents had found those through contacts from work, previous expatriates, at children’s school and hobbies, and other Finns living in the area. The approach of the respondents to finding support networks varied: some felt that it was very easy and there were even too many possibilities to find them, some felt that it was difficult. The need to find networks and friends, which usually is common for all expatriates, was addressed. On one side that was seen as a positive thing, since it was easy to socialize with people in the same situation (who also feel the need to find new support networks as quickly as possible), go for a lunch or for a coffee. However, this was also seen as a negative thing, since when there is a huge need to find friends, it is hard to build deep and lasting friendships – you just take whatever you can get. Even though the respondents noted that other expatriates often are “highly educated, smart people”, and therefore comfortable to be around, one of the respondents said that friendships that are made during the international assignment tend to remain quite shallow. For people who want to build deeper connections and more confidential friendships, the situation where people arrive and leave all the time is not ideal. Also, the respondent stated, in a “traditional” expatriate setting where the international school of the children is the center of daily life, it is likely for the expatriates to make friends with the other expatriates instead of locals, who already have their support networks settled

and do not necessarily “need” new friends. Even if locals are nice and kind people, it is hard to get to know them and make friends.

*“Going for coffee and lunch was not enough for me. I need a soulmate to share all the things with.”* (Respondent 5.)

The other respondents did not address the need to find deeper friendships or any hardships of finding them. One respondent felt that the offering of new contacts and potential support networks was even too much.

*“There have not been issues finding those (support networks), more likely there were too many of them.”* (Respondent 2.)

Other places to find support networks and potential friends were for example Rotary organization and other similar type of organizations, neighbors, language courses, and Facebook groups. One of the respondents had relied quite heavily on his previous contacts in the host country:

*“I had Finnish friends there beforehand. I spend more time with them than with my work community. (...) I would not have wanted to go there without any Finnish back-up community. That would have been quite difficult.”* (Respondent 3.)

The importance of support networks outside the workplace for adjustment was addressed by two of the respondents. Information given by other expatriates (not necessarily from the same company) or local friends was valued even higher and seen as more useful than cross-cultural training provided by the organization.

*“Without the network you would have been lost in many situations.”* (Respondent 4.)

*“Through my Finnish friends I got information about how the things are done here and how to act.”* (Respondent 3.)

*“Our land lady was kind of a local support. She gave us a lot of tips what to do there and how to get started.”* (Respondent 2.)

Two of the respondents also said that they wanted to pass the acquired information of to the newcomers and share their knowledge.

*“I wrote a blog about that and when a new colleague of mine arrived, she told that it was a lot easier to adjust because of the blog.”* (Respondent 3.)

*“I have researched these topics for years and have access to all the information there is (...) so I have tried to provide peer support for others in more difficult situations (than mine) as much as I can.”* (Respondent 5.)

### **6.3. Cross-cultural training**

All of the respondents had received cross-cultural, in-country training or support provided by the company. Some of them had received even multiple different types of training. Most respondents had been very independent and done a lot of research about the host country and the culture on their own before the departure, or relied on their own ability to find information on the fly, whenever they would need it during the assignment. They were aware of the host country’s culture, the ways to behave and manage in everyday life and at work. Only one of the respondents said that he had not really done research before the move, and therefore was surprised by the cultural differences:

*“The most things came as a surprise. I have not done that much research beforehand. (...) All the ways to behave came out of nowhere.”*

On the contrary to many previous researches about the topic, none of the respondents did not really address the need for more training or support for them. They were able to present some ideas how the training could have been improved, but overall they were

quite happy with what they had gotten. However, many of them did not feel that the training was that useful, so that could explain why they did not feel the need to get more of it. Two of the respondents had been moving a lot and living in many different countries, so they were familiar with the process and able to search for suitable and necessary information by themselves. Learning from the previous experiences was especially highlighted by one of the respondents.

*“I did not get any formal training when I moved here, I had a few briefings about the main things. (...) However, the most of the things I researched from the Internet and my spouse found everything out about the school and everything else well before we moved here. We wanted to see if there were suitable schools and hobbies even before taking the job here. So it was quite self-initiated before and during the move, by researching things and talking to people. It would not have been enough if it was not after many other departures and experiences of living abroad. But as it was, it was well enough for us.” (Respondent 1.)*

### 6.3.1. Training and support received by the respondents

Table 1 presents the types of training that the respondents discussed and how many of them had received that certain type of training or support by the organization in at least some of their international assignments.

Table 1. Types of training/support

Type of training/support	Number of respondents who have received it
Pre-departure	2
Information packages	5
Factual training	4
Pre-departure orientation day	2
After arrival orientation day/phase	1
Language training	3
Local support person named by the organization	2
Help with housing	5
Help with other things after arrival	5
”Unofficial” training by the other expatriates/colleagues	4
Training for the spouse	4
Mentoring	2

The most popular type of in-country support received by all the respondents was support with settling to a country. That includes help with housing, and help with various other practical arrangements like opening a bank account, signing an electricity contract, help with taxation and so on. This kind of support was available anytime during the assignment when needed. The respondents used this kind of help for various reasons, for example language barrier, which made it even impossible to deal with certain agencies, or different systems to handle things, which were not familiar for a Finnish person. The support was provided by a certain person from the organization (local office manager or secretary), or the HR department.

*“The office manager acted as a local guide, with whom we took care of all the things regarding bank, cellphone, housing, etc. (...) You can manage with English but since the culture is so different, you needed to have a local with you, even though you knew a lot in theory.”* (Respondent 1.)

*“We got a lot of help from my spouse’s secretary, who was local, and helped us by making phone calls if no one there spoke English and helped with translations.”* (Respondent 5.)

*“They (people from the organization) drove us around during the first days, we went to different organizations to sign papers to get permissions etc.”* (Respondent 3.)

Help with finding housing was received or at least available for all the respondents. The support was either provided by the organization itself (for example the office manager or the HR department), or by another firm paid by the expatriate’s organization.

*“A re-location agency helped us find the apartment. We were on a pre-visit before moving there, (...) the re-location agency showed us around and took us to see houses and schools. (...) It was really good, otherwise that would have been more difficult. And they actually did everything for us, prepared the contract and we just signed it then. My husband’s company paid for that.”* (Respondent 5.)

*“The orientation at work was very thorough and the organization provided a good support. First of all, you get housing and help with everything regarding that. You also get help and tips with transportation and going around.”* (Respondent 3.)

Only one of the respondents said that the help with finding apartment was not needed, even though it was available.

*“There was a possibility for that if needed. But there was no need.”* (Respondent 2.)

Other respondents seemed to find this kind of organizational support very useful and were happy with that. Even as an additional, positive outcome of that kind of support was named by one of the respondents:

*“Because of that we got new friends. The re-location agent and her husband became good friends of ours there.”* (Respondent 5.)

Four of the respondents mentioned receiving an information package from the organization or from some other party, like a consulting firm. However, usually these information packages were not seen necessary. There was “too much” information, and it would have been painful to go through all of that. The respondents also mentioned that it was easier to search for information online, when you knew what you were looking for, or just directly ask from someone instead of searching the answer from a formal, general information package. Three of the respondents admitted not even reading through the whole information package that was provided.

*“The consultant (who was giving the pre-departure training) had written a book about the culture (of the host country), directed for expatriates (...). We got that book with us but I did not even open it at all, not before departure or after arrival to the host country.”* (Respondent 2.)

*“The amount of the material was ridiculous (...), it would have taken forever to read through it all.”* (Respondent 4.)

Four of the respondents had received traditional, factual training. That was delivered in a form of pre-departure training (two respondents had received that), after arrival in-country training (one respondent) or by a person named by the organization (one respondent). Both of the respondents who had received pre-departure training had gotten it delivered by a consulting firm paid by the company. However, neither of them found that very useful. They felt that all the information that was provided by the lectures could have been (or had already been) acquired from elsewhere. One of the respondents had

experienced similar type of pre-departure training more than once, and the outcomes of it were also similar. Pre-departure training delivered by a consulting firm was seen as not comprehensive enough, since the consultants were not that experienced (one had been living in the host country for less than a year, one had not even worked in the host country) or they did not know answers for the questions that the respondents had because of the lack of personal experience. For example, one of the respondents would have wanted to ask about matters related to children and their education in the host country, but the consultants did not have children on their own so they could not provide any information on those.

*“...pre-departure training in Finland held by a Finnish ‘expert’ who had worked there for 8 months and wrote a book about it. It was a bit ridiculous since I had studied there (in the host country) for a year and knew things better than him. That did not provide us any additional information.”* (Respondent 1.)

*“...(pre-departure training) was mostly informative, they went through a long list of things that have to be taken into account. It was actually theory. A lecture, mostly. However, we had a lot of questions, which he was not able to not answer.”* (Respondent 1, about another pre-departure training experience.)

*“That (pre-departure training) was not that useful. I had visited the host country so many times before that I knew those things already.”* (Respondent 2.)

The factual nature of the pre-departure training was criticized. The respondent who had experience of more than one pre-departure orientations would have wished for a more experiential approach. Even the possibility to ask questions, which otherwise would have been beneficial according to the respondents, did not provide useful information, since the consultants could not answer. The topics that were covered in these pre-departure orientations included factual information about the host country, settling in, working there, cultural aspects that needed to be taken into consideration and interaction with people in the different culture. However, especially the cultural aspects would have made more sense if for example simulations or case studies were applied.

*“Even though it was delivered by a consulting firm (...) it was going through theory. No simulations, nothing experiential. (...) We also gave feedback, couldn’t they have gotten someone who had worked there (in the host country) (...) to tell us about that and discuss with us. And preferable someone who had kids. That would have been much more rewarding than listening to theory that we can also study from books and internet.”* (Respondent 1.)

*“We didn’t practice anything. It was more like a discussion, we asked questions and he (the consultant) answered them.”* (Respondent 2.)

One respondent had received after arrival training in the host country. That was arranged by the organization and it was similar for all the new employees from abroad. Training took place during the first days after arrival, and included factual information about the host country and cultural differences as well as ways to work and the processes at the workplace. Religion had a huge effect on the culture of the host country, so it was also addressed in the orientation. The respondent was quite pleased with the training experience, saying that the organization really outshone the Western organizations, when it comes to training.

*“Compared to Western organizations they really shone. The training was on point and they really took care of your possibilities to succeed.”* (Respondent 3.)

However, he criticized the training for being too polished and not very thorough, as well as the process-like nature of it – it was very regulated and similar for everybody. Also there was no connection with theory and practice.

*“The time was unnecessarily spent on theory, that mostly was quite irrelevant in practice.”* (Respondent 3.)

Combining the training with the real-life stories he got to hear from his Finnish friends who had been living in the country for a longer period, he got a good overall picture of

important matters. The Finnish network provided him knowledge that the organization did not provide.

*“Then there was a lecture that lasted a couple of days, discussion about processes and ways to work, and from where you can get information you need. (...) They also addressed cultural differences and how to take the religion into account. We discussed about how it shows, what you are allowed to do and what you are not. Not that much about emotional intelligence etc., but cultural knowledge instead. Not very thoroughly, but well enough in my opinion.”* (Respondent 3.)

*“If my Finnish network was taken away I would have needed more support in everyday life as well, a mentor for daily life.”* (Respondent 3.)

The respondent also criticized the in-country orientation about how and when it was arranged. In his opinion, there was no need to deliver the information face-to-face, and he would have preferred learning it from home. Since the training took place right after the arrival and the respondent had not researched that much about the culture or the country beforehand, he could not utilize the possibility to ask questions.

*“It was very process-like, and since you had been there in the new country for a couple of days, you could not even ask questions. (...) The training would not have needed to be delivered face-to-face, since there was no point of that. The same material could have been filmed.”* (Respondent 3.)

One of the respondents had received informal in-country training delivered by a long-term expatriate who had been living in the host country for years. The former expatriate came to visit them and they went over factual information during lunch. This included local culture, habits and history. The respondent and her husband (the expatriate) were able to ask questions. The respondent thought it was a nice gesture from the company, but not that necessary, since they had already acquired the same information by themselves. Besides of that, the respondent’s husband did not receive any other in-country training as an expatriate during the given assignment.

*“I have to say that we had already read everything from the tourist guides and books, so we did not learn anything new. However, it was a nice gesture from the company, and it was nice to get to know a new person and ask about their experiences in the country.” (Respondent 5.)*

Three of the respondents have received language training, or had a possibility for that but did not utilize it. Two of them were on an assignment as spouses, so the language training was offered to them as well together with their expatriate husbands. One respondent was offered language training, but did not have time for that. All of the respondents, whom the language training was offered, addressed that the time and effort it takes in order to reach a certain level of a new language is enormous. Therefore, continuing the language training after obtaining the basic knowledge, or even starting the training, felt unnecessary.

*“My employer would have sponsored my language studies, but I felt I did not have time for that. (...) It would have been useful, (...) but it would have taken so much effort in order to get to a certain level in that language that you could discuss any work-related stuff.” (Respondent 1.)*

*“My husband could not utilize it, but the possibility was there for both of us. (...) It lasted a couple of years. (...) It was such a luxury, to have a private teacher coming to our house for 1,5 hours only for me, I felt really privileged.” (Respondent 4.)*

Training for the spouse was offered for four of the respondents: language training for two of them as already mentioned, and two of the respondents’ spouses had taken part in the pre-departure training arranged by the company. In addition to that, the spouse of one of the respondents had also gone through aptitude tests with the expatriate before selection.

*“Before I was selected for the job there was an aptitude test for me and my spouse. (...) how my spouse would get along in the new culture, since it affects the family and well, I could say, directly the job as well.” (Respondent 2.)*

Two of the respondents did not feel like the organization should have offered support for the spouse. One of these respondents were on the assignment as a spouse:

*“I don’t know if there would have been more (support), but I did not even ask.”*  
(Respondent 4.)

*“No, we did not even think that the employer would have arranged something like that (support/training for the spouse). It comes from the other frameworks, since my job is not the framework for the spouse. There are other networks and groups for that.”* (Respondent 1.)

However, one of the respondents strongly addressed the need for more information and support for the spouse, especially for a spouse who needs to step aside from the working life and put their careers on hold. According to her, many leave for an assignment with excitement and enthusiasm, without realizing how big of a change it actually is. Therefore, there should be more support systems and networks, peer support and knowledge available and easily accessible for couples going for an assignment together. The companies should also take that into account, since the adjustment of the spouse has a huge effect on the success of the foreign assignment. Her experience was that the companies do not take that into account as much as they should. She addresses the need for more “real talk” about the hardships of the spouse, who can go through a complete identity crisis during the time abroad.

*“Suddenly you are in a new country as a complete nobody: no friends, no status at work, no work identity, no network. You just stay at home and try to find the nearest supermarket and post office and so on, just try to survive. That becomes your life.”*  
(Respondent 5.)

Four of the respondents noted that in addition to the training and support provided by the company, they had gotten unofficial, non-structured training and support from their colleagues or from other expatriates, either Finnish, local or from another foreign

countries. This kind of in-country support was valued even higher than the training provided by the company.

*“There was a local person with a Finnish background with whom you could interact in Finnish if that was the prerequisite, but the advice was given during coffee break discussions, sort of. (...) There was no given person from the organization, but my two colleagues and that HR-person.”* (Respondent 2.)

*“The people at work were really helpful and friendly, so that you could go ask anything and you got an answer.”* (Respondent 3.)

When it comes to organizational support and mentoring, two of the respondents got a support person named by the organization, from whom they could go ask anything. This was found helpful: it was easy to go ask questions when the expatriate knew that it was that person's duty and part of their job description to find answers or solutions. This person was available for them during the whole assignment. However, the respondents told, when you got more familiar with the workplace and the colleagues, you learnt what to ask from whom, and you could go directly to that person instead of asking the local support person everything. Although, this kind of support system was found very helpful especially in the beginning of the assignment. The main takeaway from the in-country training was actually seen as the knowledge from whom to ask and from where to find the information, whether it was a named local person or a colleague. Situations, where this kind of support was especially needed, were caused mainly by cultural differences. Advice about how to act or how something works in the host country's culture was needed, and the local support persons delivered this information well.

*“There is not that much information that can be shared at once. It is discussion of a couple of hours, and after that you know from whom you can always ask. They have promised to help, so that if you can not reach anyone else, you can reach them even during weekends and so. (...) And when there is a person who feels it is their duty to help, that makes it easier.”* (Respondent 1.)

Two of the respondents had experience of mentoring. One of them found it well organized, but did not really utilize the possibility, since he felt that he could ask the same questions from anyone else as well.

*“I had a mentor, who was the closest colleague at the same department. That was great. However, as a person, I do not have a problem to go and ask from anyone about anything. (...) But there was also a mentor, from whom you could ask any job-related questions. (...) It was organized quite well – in theory, after all.”*  
(Respondent 3.)

*“There has been a main support person who has the most experience, so that they can transfer the experience on. A mentor, in a way, has been named (by the organization). (...) Office managers have been locals, because otherwise they would not have known how things work in the local environment. The other support persons have always been expatriates, and in my case, Finnish expatriates as well.”*  
(Respondent 1.)

With in-country support, the respondents found the timing suitable, since they could contact the support person anytime and whenever they needed advice. However, choosing the right kind of person with similar experience was also addressed by one of the respondents.

*“There are many things that you can not get help without the helper having similar kind of experience. For example, when we arrived, none of my colleagues had children at school here, so stuff like that had to be found out in other ways. (...) Mostly through internet and discussion groups on Facebook.”* (Respondent 1.)

### 6.3.2. Importance of the training

The respondents had various opinions about the effectivity of the training they had gotten and the possible need for more training or support. On one thing they all agreed: none of

the respondents felt like they would have needed more training or support. However, all of them added that maybe someone else in their situation might have needed that. They saw that factors like previous experience from the international assignments or living, studying, and working abroad, or working in an international atmosphere, thorough research and preparation, support networks outside the workplace, personality traits, online discussions with other expatriates, good team at work, own and spouse's activity, interesting job description, and the family's adjustment enhanced their experiences. Some of these acted as substitutes for formal training, as well.

*“There are a lot of expatriates in every country, expatriates who are in the same situation in life, and nowadays there are Facebook groups etc. You get answers right away from different points of view. Therefore, I don't feel that we would have needed any more support. The pre-departure training could have been better, though.”* (Respondent 1.)

*“We have been very independent, and my spouse has always researched everything about living, grocery shopping, the school (...), so that everything has been clear well before the departure. All the information has been gathered and we have discussed with people online (...) so we have been pleased with this (the training and support they have gotten).”* (Respondent 1.)

*“No, I could not expect more. In my opinion there was enough cross-cultural training, support, and consulting. I did not want more then, and still do not think there should have been more.”* (Respondent 2.)

*“To be an extrovert to some extent is kind of the pre-requisite for embarking a novel, completely unfamiliar culture. For an extremely introverted person it would be hard to leave.”* (Respondent 3.)

*“For me the situation is a bit different, since I have been researching these topics for years and acquired a lot of knowledge because of that.”* (Respondent 5.)

Building up the knowledge about the host country as the assignment continued was noted: some things from the orientation made sense only after spending some time in the host country. Some information given in the beginning was even seen unnecessary at the time. The most important outcomes of the training were to get the basic things settled, basic knowledge about the host country, and learn from whom you could ask further questions.

*“I don’t think that in the beginning you could internalize a lot of knowledge. That comes through action. As long as you have people from whom you can ask.”*  
(Respondent 1.)

*“Actually the things made sense later, when you had found out more about them, asked questions, and through practice.”* (Respondent 3.)

Only one of the respondents shared that training had provided him better cultural knowledge and understanding. Despite of the independent preparation, he felt that it was still useful to go through all the information with someone.

*“You manage to avoid certain pitfalls, bad behavior and else, better than you would have if you had not gotten that information.”* (Respondent 1.)

Other respondents felt like the training provided by the organization was more like a “formality” or a “nice gesture”. The positive outcomes were new contacts and new friends instead of deepening the cultural knowledge. An independent attitude and a global mindset was highlighted by all of the respondents. The way to react and deal with cultural differences and challenges was emphasized perhaps even more than the importance of the actual cross-cultural training, when it comes to adjustment.

*“In my opinion, if you are going to survive as an expatriate, you need to figure some things out on your own. You can not expect that someone from the organization is going to hold your hand.”* (Respondent 4.)

One of the respondents stated that even when you combine the training provided by the organization, organizational support, and other support networks, there are not solutions or answers to everything. Being able to cope with this kind of uncertainty was seen important in order to successfully complete the foreign assignment, or simply, to be able to live in foreign country.

*“Some questions are never answered and for some you find incorrect information, that happens all the time. But that just happens.”* (Respondent 1.)

When asking the respondents about the challenges they faced, the first impression was that there really were not any challenges at all. Although, when asking further questions, it appeared that there had been some hardships after all, even some major ones, like the quality of the air which actually caused the expatriate not to extend his assignment, even if it had been otherwise desirable. All in all, the challenges were faced with an open mind and appreciation towards different cultures, so in fact they were not seen as challenges at all.

*“The challenges were only a good thing. (...) If you do not want to work through the challenges and find solutions, then you should probably not go there at all.”* (Respondent 4.)

An interesting finding was that even though in some cases the expatriate had chosen to leave from the host country (not precisely prematurely, since they just chose not to extend their stay for a certain reason or had not even intended to stay there until the end of the contract), none of them felt like their international assignments were unsuccessful. Almost all the previous researches address clearly that many international assignments fail, in one way or another. When defining the failure of the assignment according to the previous research, it could be said that some of the assignments of the interviewees also failed. Although, in real life, they seemed to rate them as very positive experiences that only increased their willingness to go abroad, either to move there for good or to seek for potential new assignments. So, even though an assignment is a failure according to a certain criteria and definition based on previous research, for an expatriate it might not

feel like that. Overall, all the respondents emphasized strongly at multiple points during the interviews, how much they enjoyed their time abroad and how much they appreciated their experiences.

All the respondents stated that everyone should try living abroad for a while. The positive outcomes of that, like broader view of the world, were something they wanted everyone to experience. One of the respondents thought that these benefits would be accomplished during a longer stay.

*“When you stay there for more than two years, your mindset changes. You start realizing that the world is a lot bigger and you can enjoy living in many places. You can feel like home everywhere, depending on where your family and your favorite things are located. That is where your home is at the moment.”* (Respondent 1.)

On the contrary, another respondent stated that even six months abroad would be great for everyone in Finnish society.

*“It should be a necessity for everyone, for every Finn, to live abroad at least for half a year. Like a duty. It would provide so much for the Finnish society and mentality. (...) When I think of Finnish self-confidence – there is nothing we should be ashamed of or where we are lesser than the other nations.”* (Respondent 4.)

### 6.3.3. Ideas for training

After letting the interviewees tell about their experiences, they were asked for suggestions about what kind of training and support they would see being useful for an expatriate. A mix of different types of training – pre-departure training, where some stories and experiences from real-life situations by former expatriates could be shared and questions could be asked, and in-country support by mentoring and support groups formed by the employer – was mentioned by one of the respondents. He pointed out that the mentor should ideally be an experienced expatriate who has been in the host country for a longer time, and who also would be in a similar life situation with the expatriate. For couples

there could be mentor couples as well. There could be meetings with the mentoring couple, “unofficial meetings with a certain structure”, with spouses and children included. The meeting could take a place in a form of, for example, lunch, dinner, or a sauna evening.

*“It would not be only about your own activity, if the employer brought the people together and even paid for their lunch or dinner or sauna. That would bring more structure to the whole process. That is how I would do it.”* (Respondent 1.)

Two other respondents also thought that a mentoring system would be ideal. One of them also suggested mixing different types of training, by delivering the factual information at first after arrival, and then giving the opportunity to meet up, ask questions, and discuss after a few weeks. The mentor could be there to support daily situations where the expatriate needed help.

*“There could have been a theoretical part, which could have been in a digital form. Then there could have been a person from whom you could ask anything else, like where is the post office and from where you can buy milk.”* (Respondent 3.)

Another respondent also thought that a buddy system for the expatriates would be a good idea. However, the buddies should be local employees instead of other expatriates. There could be regular get-togethers arranged by the company, with spouses included.

*“In my opinion some kind of a buddy system would be a good idea. The local employees could take the arriving expatriate and their spouse for lunch or dinner, that would be wonderful. That would be like the best possible in-country training, being able to ask questions about the practical stuff at the same time.”* (Respondent 5.)

Three of the respondents addressed the importance of taking the current situation of the expatriate into account when planning the in-country training. One of them, as already stated, said that the support person should be in a similar kind of life situation. One said

that the need for the training and support from the organization also depends on the personality traits and whether or not the expatriate was on the assignment alone or with a spouse or a family. He thought that especially the ones going abroad alone and those with a more introverted personality, could face more hardships than those with families and extroverted personality. Also the team at work affected whether the support was needed or not.

*“There are places where you go alone and do not even have a family with you, so those situations can be challenging. (...) With a certain personality there is a possibility to hide oneself overseas, with different time zones and so. So that would be good if the employer monitored the situation.”* (Respondent 2.)

One of the respondents highlighted the need for applying the concept of cultural intelligence to different types of training. Factual things could be presented without a certain cultural background, whereas in more personal matters, the culture needs to be taken into account. The respondent had experience of living in a culture that differed drastically from Finnish culture, and therefore felt like it was sometimes hard to know what kind of things he was even able to ask.

*“The combination of culture and religion made it difficult to ask people about some things, and in those situations it was good I had my Finnish network from whom I could go to. They presented the things in an adaptable way, when thinking of my own culture.”* (Respondent 3.)

To conclude, peer support, mentoring, and getting help with finding the right support groups and networks were the most important aspects of in-country training and support for the respondents.

## **7. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

In this chapter the conclusions of this study are presented. The summarization of the previous research that was used as a groundwork for the themes studied is combined with the key findings of this study. The limitations of the study are discussed. Finally, practical implications and future research ideas are addressed.

### **7.1. Summary and key findings**

The aim of this research was to study the role of the cross-cultural, in-country training and support practices in the expatriates' adjustment to the host country. More precisely, the objectives were to study the major hardships and challenges of the expatriates after arriving the host country, study the role of cross-cultural in-country training and support in the adjustment process and how the training and support are put into practice, and to address the needs of the expatriates for in-country support and training. The research was conducted as a qualitative research, where deductive approach was applied. The data was collected by semi-structured interviews, and analysis was build around three main themes: expatriate assignments, adjustment, and cross-cultural training. Narrative approach was applied to the interpretation of the citations of the respondents from the interviews.

According to Aycan (1997), success of expatriation depends on competencies and skills of the expatriate, as well as organizational support from home and host country units. The support is needed in all the phases of the international assignment (Aycan 1997, McCaughey et al. 2005). Suutari & Burch (2001) address pre-departure support consisting of help with practical arrangements and written information packages, and in-country support like help with accommodation, public authorities, and transportation as the different kinds of support. However, they also highlight the need of the expatriates for more support, especially for the family and the spouse. The need for a mentor or a support person was also addressed in the study of Suutari & Burch (2001). Similar

findings were produced in this study as well. The respondents of the study addressed the need for organizational support, especially when it comes to settling in the host country. Support with practical things, like finding apartment, opening bank account, getting help with translations, and so on, was found helpful by the respondents. The respondents who had experience of mentoring or having a named contact/support person by the organization, were pleased with that.

When asking ideas for training procedures for the expatriates, the need for different kind of training in different phases of the assignment was addressed. Similar findings have previously been found by Selmer et al. (1998). Using the combination of different training forms, so that the training would be sequential (Selmer et al. 1998, Suutari et al. 2001) as pre-departure/in-country, factual training, and in-country, real time training as a form of mentoring, was suggested. However, according to the respondents, highly individualistic approach for the training would be needed instead of process-like, standardized training programs. The respondents who had experience of this type of training, did not find it very useful. According to them, independent research or digital training packages could substitute traditional training. Instead of that, the ability to ask questions, discuss real-life situations or take part in simulations, would be more useful even in pre-departure and in-country orientations. Traditional training programs and the content of them were found irrelevant in practice, unnecessary, shallow, and even waste of time and money of the organization. The standardized nature of the training and the non-experienced trainers were criticized. Similar critique has been brought into attention before when considering pre-departure training programs (Forster 2000, Evans et al. 2002 & Mendenhall et al. 2000). Mentoring was found to be a useful and a preferred method of training by the respondents, because of the flexibility and the accuracy of it in real-life situations. Mentoring as a form of cross-cultural training, and the advantages of it, have also been mentioned in previous studies (Morris et al. 2001, Suutari et al. 2001, Selmer et al. 1998).

When it comes to choosing the training method, Black et al. (1989) find situational factors as cultural novelty, degree of interaction, and job novelty to be considered. In addition to that, Waxin et al. (2005) suggest considering the cultural distance between the expatriate's home and host country, the nature and the duration of the assignment, and

the expatriate's position, when deciding the training method. The respondents of this study named the support network in the host country as an important factor on which the need for training and support depended. That included both, work and outside of work support network. Also previous experience from international assignments, family's presence, and independent background research, as well as sufficient preparation by the expatriate and the spouse were addressed as factors that enhanced the adjustment. These factors also affected the need for training and support for the expatriate. The adjustment process was seen to happen while settling in the host country and taking care of practical things. Therefore, organizational support would be beneficial to be delivered especially in the beginning of the assignment, right after the arrival in the host country. In later phases of the assignment the support was needed mainly in situations regarding deeper, cultural understanding or interpretation, or when having problems with foreign language. For those situations a mentor or a local support person, as also suggested in previous researches, would be beneficial. However, this kind of support does not necessarily need to come from the organization, if the expatriate has personal support networks outside of the workplace in the host country. Although, this kind of support networks of the expatriate and the spouse were mainly formed through the other expatriates or the contacts from the expatriate's work. Other places to find networks were addressed as the school and hobbies of the children, neighbors, and Facebook groups or other internet chat rooms.

The hardships of the spouse when it comes to finding networks was brought into attention by some of the respondents, especially when the expatriate couple did not have children or when the children were older. The need for more support for the spouse has been addressed before as well (Black et al. 1989, Andreason 2008, Suutari et al. 2001). The findings of this study partly conflict with that: one the respondents emphasized the importance of that and found a crucial need for that, however, other respondents did not think that the company would be responsible for providing support for the spouse, even if there is need for such a support.

When it comes to the role of the cross-cultural training and support for the adjustment of the expatriate, the findings provided were not very clear or easily interpreted. Previous

findings about the role of cross-cultural training are also conflicted, and after this research, they remain so. Overall, the respondents did not put a lot of weight on the organizational training and support when it came to the adjustment or the successfulness of the assignment. Instead, the adjustment and the successfulness of the assignment was seen as a sum of multiple factors, that differed from each other in each case. The most significant ones to consider are probably the experience of the expatriate, previous assignments and international experience, the presence of spouse and family as well as their adjustment, support networks at work and outside the workplace in the host country, cultural distance between home and host country, and preparation. The training could facilitate the adjustment, if the right method was chosen and it was delivered in the right time, however, those circumstances are impossible to prevent beforehand, and the effect of different factors are distinctive for each expatriate. Therefore, the training methods need to be as flexible and adaptable as possible, so that the expatriate could individually choose how to utilize them. Although, the respondents were quite experienced and their approach was derived, at least partly, from many different foreign assignments. New expatriates do not necessarily have the knowledge to make decisions of when and how to utilize the training resources available. In-country, real-time training was seen as a good possibility by the respondents, however, not that many of them had a lot of experience of that. Mostly, their assessment of it was based on theoretical assumptions. In addition to that, all the respondents emphasized their own willingness and ability to research and find solutions by themselves. They did not even think that the company should provide all the support they needed or “hold their hand” in every situation. Leaving for an assignment was seen as an exciting adventure, and the ability to handle uncertainty and deal with challenges were seen as necessary personality traits for all the expatriates.

## **7.2. Limitations**

All the interviewees were from Finland, so their cultural background is quite similar. Their attitude and response to moving abroad was quite similar, as well. Some of that may be because of the similar type of cultural background. However, many expatriates tend to have the same kind of global mindset and openness towards different cultures and

new experiences. Still, it can not be said that the findings of this research would apply to expatriates from other countries than Finland because of the fairly homogeneous pool of respondents. Since many respondents based their answers and opinions on more than just one international experience, it is difficult to determine how a certain type of training at a certain country has affected the adjustment to that country. All the previous international experiences and the background of the expatriates form a big picture, where everything affects the next international assignment.

This research focused on two main aspects, which were the adjustment to the host country and the cross-cultural training, especially in-country training and support for the expatriates. The questionnaire guide was based on these themes. However, some other aspects and factors were not taken into account, which could also affect the adjustment and the successfulness of the assignment. Factors like this could be, for example, the incentive system at work or what happened after the return to the home country. Even though the difficulties and challenges of the expatriates were studied, challenges with repatriation were not taken into account if not mentioned by a respondent without asking. Therefore, the overall picture of the expatriation and foreign assignments could be too optimistic.

### **7.3. Practical implications**

The findings of this study could be utilized by Finnish companies sending their employees for international assignments, and consulting firms providing pre-departure orientation. Especially the ideas for future training needs and possible training procedures by the respondents, based on their own experiences, could be useful. Based on the findings, especially the pre-departure orientations need to be re-examined, in order to be as beneficial as possible. Pre-departure orientations are costly for the organization, and if they are mostly seen as a nice gesture without providing that much new information, arranging them differently should be taken into consideration. Expatriates themselves could probably utilize the same standardized content better, if it was delivered in a digital form instead of face-to-face lectures. If face-to-face orientations were to be arranged,

real-life stories, discussions, simulations and ability to ask questions from someone with wide and accurate experience would be essential. When it comes to in-country training and support, mentoring programs and arranging get-togethers for the expatriates could be taken into consideration.

#### **7.4. Ideas for future research**

There still is not much of research done about cross-cultural in-country training, so the need for more precise and in-depth research is still there. Future research about this topic could also focus on spouse's in-country support provided by the organization. However, finding suitable data for this kind of in-depth research could be difficult, since organizations tend not to provide support for the spouse. Other operators facilitating the adjustment of the expatriates and the successfulness of the international assignments, and even their ability to substitute traditional training, would be interesting research topics as well. Although, highly personalized training programs, where these factors would be taken into account, would probably be hard to find. However, applying the personalized factors into training programs would be an interesting topic for future research as well.

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## APPENDIX 1. Questionnaire guide

### **Background related questions:**

- Where have you been on international assignment, when, and for how long?
- Did you have spouse or family with you?
- Do you have previous international experience (previous assignments, exchanges, cross-cultural teams, training etc.)?
- What is your job position and what was it during the assignment?

### **Adjustment related questions:**

1. How do you feel in the new job/at the workplace? What are the factors facilitating or hindering your adjustment to work?
2. How do you feel in the new culture/environment? What are the factors facilitating or hindering your adjustment to the everyday life in the host country?
3. How would you describe your adjustment to the host country in general? How has your spouse/family adjusted?
4. What kind of challenges/hardships have you/your family experienced during the expatriation?
  - o How did you handle these situations?
5. Have you ever considered returning early from the assignment?
6. How has your family's adjustment affected you?

### **Training related questions:**

7. Have you received cross-cultural training during this assignment?
8. What kind/kinds of training have you received?
9. If you have received in-country training, what kind/kinds of in-country training have you received?
10. Has your family/spouse received in-country training as well? If yes, what kind/kinds of training?

11. Have you gotten any other support from the organization? What kind of support?
12. How do you feel about the training/support you have received? Is it sufficient? Is it suitable for you? Has it been beneficial? If yes, in what way?
13. Has the training facilitated your adjustment in some way? How/why not?
14. Do you feel the need for some other type of training/support during the assignment? If yes, why? Were there specific situations/times during the assignment when you would have needed more training or support?
15. Would you change/suggest something regarding the training – type, timing, content, involvement?