



# Career capital development in global work: The roles of job scope, career adaptability, and gender dynamics

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## ABSTRACT

Global work, characterized as high-density work, presents unique developmental challenges and opportunities flowing from adapting to diverse job characteristics and roles abroad. This study examines how job scope and career adaptability influence perceived career capital development (PCCD) among expatriates, a key form of global work, drawing on the job characteristics model and career construction theory. Using survey data from 327 expatriates, we test the direct effects of job scope and career adaptability on PCCD and investigate the moderating role of gender in the job scope–PCCD relationship, informed by the frog-pond model and its foundation in social comparison theory. Findings reveal that both job scope and career adaptability positively impact PCCD, supporting their critical role in expatriate career development. Additionally, gender moderates the job scope–PCCD relationship, with women experiencing a stronger effect of job scope on the development of career capital dimensions compared to men. These results highlight the importance of gender dynamics in global careers while reinforcing the broader role of job scope and career adaptability in career capital accumulation. This study contributes to expatriation research by demonstrating that career capital development is multifaceted, shaped not only by individual career adaptability and job scope but also by gender. The findings offer practical insights for organizations seeking to enhance expatriate career development strategies and promote gender equity in global work environments.

## 1. Introduction

How does the unique nature of global work impact the development of career competencies? Work in a global context is often characterized by its complexity and demanding nature, exceeding the challenges typically encountered in domestic roles (Shin et al., 2007). Such global work, including expatriate jobs, represents what scholars term high-density (H-D) work experience (Akkan et al., 2022; Shaffer et al., 2012). These roles are marked by a *density* of experience, offering an intense *developmental punch* over time (Tesluk & Jacobs, 1998, p. 329). Individuals in such roles must develop a comprehensive set of career competencies to navigate national and organizational boundaries, and the process should occur both during and after international work experience. The H-D environment of global work offers unique opportunities for individuals to cultivate competencies and accumulate experience, significantly influencing their work interests and future career trajectories (Dickmann et al., 2018; Shaffer et al., 2012). Scholars have also recently asserted that the development of career competencies has such an important meaning to individuals that it should be

considered a key indicator of career success (Briscoe et al., 2021; Shaffer et al., 2012).

Researchers have utilized *career capital theory* to examine the stock of competencies individuals accumulate through their work experiences (Dickmann & Cerdin, 2018; Dickmann et al., 2018; Kirk, 2016; Yao, 2014; Zikic, 2015). This theory emphasizes the importance of individuals actively managing and nurturing their career development (Inkson & Arthur, 2001). The relevance of career capital development in the context of global careers arises from the challenging nature of global work as a catalyst for the development of career capital (Brown et al., 2020). Empirical studies on the development of career capital during expatriation have predominantly utilized qualitative methods (e.g., Brown et al., 2020; Dickmann & Cerdin, 2018; Rodriguez & Scurry, 2014; Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007) with few exceptions (Jokinen et al., 2008; Dickmann et al., 2018).

Furthermore, while existing quantitative studies primarily focus on comparing career capital development between assigned expatriates (AEs), who are sent abroad by their employers, and self-initiated expatriates (SIEs), who independently seek opportunities abroad, these

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studies often fail to consider the diversity of job scopes in different roles and the crucial role of individual adaptation in global settings. This oversight is relevant to the antecedents of career outcomes in general (Spurk et al., 2019) and, more specifically, in international career settings (Mello et al., 2023c). Moreover, although some studies have explored job-related aspects (Stoermer et al., 2022) and career adaptability (Jannesari & Sullivan, 2019) separately, they have not examined the dynamic interaction between individuals and their contexts—a critical aspect highlighted by recent scholarship (Spurk et al., 2019). Our study aims to bridge this gap by simultaneously examining variations in job characteristics across different expatriate roles and corresponding individual adaptability. This dual focus is essential for a comprehensive understanding of how variations in job scope and individual adaptability contribute to the development of career capital (Dickmann et al., 2018). The often-overlooked variability in expatriates' readiness to adapt can lead to incomplete insights into how global work environments influence career competencies. Our study addresses this gap by integrating an analysis of job characteristics with individual adaptation processes, providing a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between people and their international environments.

In response to this gap, the present study incorporates both the *job characteristics model* (Hackman & Oldham, 1976) and *career construction theory* (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012) to our understanding of how *job scope* and *career adaptability* affect perceived career capital development (PCCD) abroad. We chose these two complementary angles to capture both the job-related characteristics of global work and the individual's activity in adapting to such work. First, the job characteristics model suggests that the nature of a job can affect employees' career outcomes, such as job satisfaction (Stoermer et al., 2022), job performance (Humphrey et al., 2007), and learning on the job (Wielenga-Meijer et al., 2010). At the heart of this model is the concept of job scope, which refers to the variety and breadth of tasks a job involves. Job scope addresses how engaging and diverse a job feels to an employee, highlighting the complexity and range of the tasks involved (Xie & Johns, 1995). Therefore, we argue that job scope is crucial for understanding PCCD in global roles, such as expatriate work. While global work is characterized by its high density, the extent of that density may differ for different global positions with different levels of job scope. This aspect is important owing to the relative scarcity of investigations into the nature of expatriate jobs. All such jobs tend to be described as expatriate work (Takeuchi et al., 2019), and thus, researchers tend to treat people working as expatriates as one group. In reality, there are different kinds of expatriate jobs, and the impacts on the development of individuals and future career outcomes differ accordingly as the extent of development of career capital is connected with career outcomes in the longer term (Mello et al., 2023b, Mello et al., 2020).

Second, career construction theory describes how individuals shape their careers through personal and environmental factors (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). At its core, the concept of career adaptability refers to a person's readiness to adapt to changing job circumstances (Hirschi et al., 2015). This theory highlights the importance of adaptability in global settings, influencing career trajectory and career capital development (Hirschi et al., 2015). Together, these theories explain how job scope and career adaptability influence the development of career capital during global work. They are relevant to the development of career capital in global work environments, where professionals encounter varied and complex job demands in a new cultural environment, necessitating the development of new kinds of career capital (Shaffer et al., 2012).

Finally, although the integration of job characteristics and career construction theories helps understand variations in PCCD abroad, they do not address the evident gender variations that have been evidenced in international career literature (Bader et al., 2023). Our study addresses the influence of gender on the relationship between job scope and PCCD abroad. Using the *frog-pond model* (Davis, 1966), based on *social comparison theory* (Festinger, 1954), we explain how individuals assess their

success and competencies relative to their immediate social environment. Women are often underrepresented in international positions (Brookfield, 2013–2016; Jayashree et al., 2020; Bader et al., 2023) and might perceive their professional growth and career capital development more positively than their male counterparts. As expatriate women are treated as foreign expatriates rather than as females (Adler, 1984), they highly value unique opportunities unavailable to local women. This big-frog-in-a-small-pond effect is amplified for women who hold expatriate roles where their gender is underrepresented.

This study contributes significantly by being among the first to integrate the job characteristics model and career construction theory to explore how the interplay between people and their international environments affects PCCD. Utilizing the job characteristics model, we show how job scope explains PCCD variations during global work, leading to diverse stocks of competencies. Additionally, our study connects career adaptability with PCCD, showing that adaptability variations affect the PCCD of individuals engaged in global work. Last, using the frog-pond model, we provide new insights into why women see a stronger link between high job scope and PCCD compared to men, highlighting gender differences in PCCD abroad.

## 2. Conceptual framework and hypothesis development

### 2.1. The high-density global work and career capital development

The *theory of work experience* (Tesluk & Jacobs, 1998) suggests that employee learning is driven more by the density of work experience than employment duration. This view highlights the importance of developmental challenges in job-related situations (Quinones et al., 1995). Researchers recognize these challenges, referring to them as the density of work (Tesluk & Jacobs, 1998; Dragoni et al., 2009).

Additionally, research has shown why global work is considered H-D work, highlighted in studies by Akkan et al. (2022), Shaffer et al. (2012), and Mello et al. (2023c). International relocation in H-D work requires cognitive flexibility, allowing effective interactions with diverse cultures (Shaffer et al., 2012). Moreover, the high physical mobility in these roles often disrupts employees' activities and routines outside of work, known as non-work disruption, particularly when expatriates have their families with them, complicating work-life balance (Kraimer et al., 2022). Subsequent studies also show that task challenges and autonomy are typical in H-D global work, especially among AEs (Mello et al., 2023c). As a result, global work has influenced career outcomes, including PCCD (Dickmann et al., 2018), which has been linked to professionals' increased desire to extend their international stays, impacting global career paths (Felker & Gianecchini, 2015; Shaffer et al., 2012).

Career capital theory, rooted in *intelligent career theory* (Arthur et al., 1995), views career capital as a collection of valuable competencies in a career field (Inkson & Arthur, 2001). This collection, a crucial career investment, includes various knowledge forms seen as the essential "currencies" of career capital, instrumental in developing "intelligent careers" (Arthur et al., 1995, p. 19). Based on DeFillippi and Arthur's (1994) framework, career capital involves *knowing how* (diverse work-related skills), *knowing whom* (social networks providing access to job-related information), and *knowing why* (energy, self-confidence, and work identification, including self-concept and values) (Dickmann et al., 2018). Expatriates develop these competencies during high-density (H-D) global work experiences through continuous self-analysis, learning, and growth (Dickmann et al., 2018).

### 2.2. Factors influencing expatriates' perceived career capital development

While all individuals engaged in H-D global work face various challenges and development opportunities, not all global roles and experiences are the same, and individuals adapt to challenges in different ways. Therefore, exploring the antecedents of PCCD in such contexts is crucial. The conceptual framework of this study, illustrated in Fig. 1,

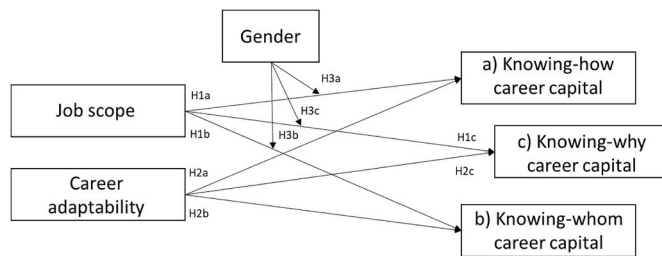


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework.

indicates the antecedents of PCCD in the global work context and the moderating role of gender within that framework. The following sections will provide a detailed exploration of these relationships.

### 2.2.1. Job scope

Job scope, a concept derived from the job characteristics model, denotes the level of enrichment in a job and integrates key elements that define the nature of a job (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). These elements include *skill variety*, which describes the range of skills and activities involved in the job; *autonomy*, reflecting the level of independence the employee has; *task identity*, indicating the completeness of the tasks from start to finish; *task significance*, which is the impact of the job on others; and *feedback*, involving the clarity of performance results directly linked to the job tasks. *Job scope* encompasses all these job features, highlighting how they combine to shape the overall complexity and challenges of a role (e.g., Schaubroeck et al., 2007). This holistic view is crucial for studies seeking to convey a complete picture of a job's nature and potential career influence. Although the association between job scope and career outcomes, such as job satisfaction, is well-established in general career research (Humphrey et al., 2007), evidence within the global career context remains very limited. Only one article has addressed the connection between two aspects (autonomy and feedback) and job satisfaction among expatriates (Stoermer et al., 2020). Furthermore, we lack evidence on the impact of job scope on PCCD.

High job scope is often valued because it provides opportunities and rewards from complex roles (Hackman & Oldham, 1976, p. 254). Those in H-D global work face demanding environments, necessitating a broad set of skills and networks for success (Mäkelä & Suutari, 2009). However, international work varies widely; some roles entail broader responsibilities and greater complexity (Suutari et al., 2018). While all expatriates encounter new cultures, the cultural distance can differ significantly. Additionally, some positions require more extensive social networking with locals and other expatriates (Mäkelä et al., 2016). Variations in job scope, including autonomy and feedback, can also differ (Stoermer et al., 2022). These job scope differences crucially impact the development of the knowing-how, knowing-whom, and knowing-why components of career capital, thereby influencing the extent of PCCD abroad. Considering this, the following hypothesis is proposed.

**Hypothesis 1.** The job scope of global work is positively related to individuals' perceived development of a) knowing-how career capital, b) knowing-whom career capital, and c) knowing-why career capital.

### 2.2.2. Career adaptability

Individuals targeting success in their H-D global work must adapt to challenging job demands in a new cultural and institutional context (Kraimer et al., 2009). In such situations, they need career adaptability that is defined as "a psychosocial construct that denotes an individual's resources for coping with current and anticipated tasks, transitions, traumas in their occupational roles" (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012, p. 662). According to career construction theory (Savickas, 2005; 2013), career adaptability encompasses four key aspects—career concern, career control, career curiosity, and career confidence. These components

focus on preparing for the future, making deliberate decisions, exploring various roles and situations, and coping with challenges. Therefore, how individuals collectively manifest these components of career adaptability significantly impacts their PCCD abroad, as these elements synergistically enhance their ability to navigate and thrive in diverse professional settings.

We expect the overall variation in how individuals manifest career adaptability during expatriation to influence their PCCD. For instance, individuals with high levels of career concern might proactively plan for and anticipate job scope variations, such as different business practices commonly encountered abroad (Shaffer et al., 2012). Similarly, those demonstrating strong career control could be better equipped to navigate roles requiring greater autonomy and adjust their strategies in environments with less structured feedback, a common challenge in expatriate roles (Stoermer et al., 2022). Additionally, career curiosity could trigger exploring new ways to perform tasks, including adapting to tools used in various languages, which is usual in international positions (Caligiuri et al., 2001). Meanwhile, career confidence might enable individuals to embrace new challenges and higher levels of responsibility, typical in expatriation roles (Shaffer et al., 2012). These interconnected dimensions of career adaptability may enhance an individual's perception of their career capital development as they adapt to different jobs abroad.

Career construction theory posits that career adaptability fosters career success (Haeggli & Hirschi, 2020). Empirical evidence supports this notion, indicating that career adaptability is linked to positive career outcomes (Rudolph et al., 2017), such as perceived employability (de Guzman & Choi, 2013), psychological safety and self-efficacy (Gong et al., 2023), and career satisfaction (Chan & Mai, 2015). Overall, few empirical studies address the effect of career adaptability on workers' career outcomes in an international context. Jannesari and Sullivan (2019) studied the relationship between career adaptability and SIEs' performance and adjustment abroad. Ocampo et al. (2022) reported that career adaptability promotes work and general adjustment and is indirectly related to job performance via work adjustment and retention among international workers. Additionally, Mello et al. (2024) assessed the impact of career adaptability on expatriates' career success post-expatriation. However, there is little evidence on whether career adaptability relates to PCCD. Considering the above, it is proposed.

**Hypothesis 2.** The career adaptability of individuals engaged in global work is positively related to their perceived development of a) knowing-how career capital, b) knowing-whom career capital, and c) knowing-why career capital.

### 2.3. The moderating role of gender between the job scope and career capital development

Informed by the frog-pond model (Davis, 1966), which extends the concept of relative evaluation from social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), our study observes the interaction between job scope and PCCD through the gender lens. This model posits that individuals assess their worth and abilities not in isolation but in comparison to the abilities and achievements of their peers. That assertion is particularly relevant in the international career landscape, as the variance in job scope across global positions necessitates a diverse array of abilities and, consequently, can lead to differing levels of achievement among individuals (Stoermer et al., 2022). Such variability underscores the importance of employing a social comparative model to understand career progress in a global context. This comparative framework is key to understanding how job scope variations influence individuals' perceptions of their career achievements relative to their peers in the international arena. The underrepresentation of women in international roles is well-documented (Brookfield, 2016; Bader et al., 2023), highlighting that when women achieve such positions, especially those high in scope, their accomplishments may be more visible, potentially enhancing their

PCCD. Conversely, in roles with a lower scope, women might feel traditional barriers to developmental opportunities —such as access to influential networks, motivational barriers, and gender stereotypes (Ramos et al., 2022)—more acutely than men (Shen & Jiang, 2015).

This dynamic is akin to the big-frog-in-a-small-pond scenario described by social comparison theory. It illustrates that women in low-scope jobs might perceive their career capital development as limited because women quite often perform the same role. This perception may heighten their awareness of the developmental constraints posed by lower job scope roles compared to men. Nevertheless, as job scope expands, women do not merely catch men up but might surpass them in terms of PCCD, owing to the distinct visibility and rarity of high-job-scope positions. This advancement suggests that women could become increasingly aware of their career capital development compared to men as job scope increases.

To examine the nuanced impact of gender on the relationship between job scope and the dimensions of career capital—namely, knowing-how, knowing-whom, and knowing-why career capital—we propose the following hypothesis.

**Hypothesis 3.** Gender moderates the relationship between job scope and the perceived development of (a) knowing-how career capital, (b) knowing-whom career capital, and (c) knowing-why career capital. Specifically, the positive association between job scope and the perceived development of these career capital dimensions is expected to be stronger for women than for men in a global work environment.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Sample

This study obtained data via an online survey targeting expatriate members and recent ex-members of two Finnish trade unions: The Business School Graduates and Academic Engineers and Architects in Finland (TEK). Union membership rates in Nordic countries are typically high, making this group a likely representative sample of all Finnish graduates working abroad in these fields (Suutari et al., 2018). The data were collected in 2020. Initially, the study sample consisted of 422 expatriates who had participated in our earlier expatriate survey with the unions. Following reminders, we had elicited 219 responses (a response rate of 51.9 %). We wanted to work with as broad a dataset as possible, so we used the unions’ online communication channels to invite additional expatriate members to participate. A comparison ensured there were no differences in the PCCD of expatriates between the subsamples. This additional outreach resulted in 108 additional respondents. Ultimately, the study used data from 327 respondents. The sample description is found in Table 1.

#### 3.2. Measures

The present study relied on validated multi-item scales. It was first

**Table 1**  
Sample description.

Variable	%
<i>Gender</i>	
Male	62.00
Female	37.00
<i>Educational background</i>	
Business studies	43.12
Engineering studies	56.88
<i>Expatriate type</i>	
AEs	64.22
SIEs	35.78
<i>Children</i>	
Not having children at home	40.00
Having children at home	60.00

divided into questionnaire sections to mitigate the effects of common method variance when entering scales for predictors and outcomes (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Furthermore, the study guaranteed respondents anonymity and encouraged them to reply honestly and spontaneously.

#### 3.2.1. Dependent variables

The career capital scale of Dickmann et al. (2018) measures PCCD. Participants were instructed: “To what extent did your international work experience help you develop the following abilities?” A 7-point Likert scale anchored with *did not improve/increase at all* (1) and *improved/increased very much* (7) measured all items. The scale consists of 28 items measuring expatriates’ development of knowing-how career capital (18 items), knowing-why career capital (4 items), and knowing-whom career capital (6 items) while working abroad (see Dickmann et al., 2018 for the items). “Knowledge of norms central to your own tasks” (knowing-how career capital), “ability to link resources and activities internationally” (knowing-whom career capital), and “I understand what other people think about me” (knowing-why career capital). Cronbach’s alphas were 0.930 for knowing-how career capital, 0.864 for knowing-why career capital, and 0.905 for knowing-whom career capital.

#### 3.2.2. Independent variables

The job scope of expatriate work was assessed using a 10-item scale derived from the job characteristics model (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). The scale measures skill variety, task identity, task significance, job autonomy, and feedback. In previous studies, researchers have averaged responses related to these five characteristics (e.g., Xie & Johns, 1995) and observed one-factor solutions in factor analyses of them (e.g., Schaubroeck et al., 2007). As these job facets collectively represent the extent to which a job is enriched, job characteristics have often been extracted as a common factor underlying these characteristics (e.g., Schaubroeck et al., 2007). Sample items included “This expatriate job required me to use a number of complex or high-level skills” (skill variety), “This expatriate job required provides the chance to finish the pieces of work I begin (task identity), “The result of my expatriate job was likely to significantly affect the lives or wellbeing of other people” (task significance), “This expatriate job permitted me to decide on my own on how to go about doing the work” (job autonomy), and “After I finished a expatriate job, I knew whether or not I have performed well” (task feedback). The Cronbach’s alpha for this whole scale was 0.853.

The career adaptability of expatriate work was measured using the 16-item *career adapt-ability scale* (CAAS-SF), and the item scores were combined to produce a total (Maggiori et al., 2017). The instruction to the participants was: “Different people use different strengths to build their careers. No one is good at everything; each person has some strengths that are greater than others. Please rate how strongly you have developed each of the following abilities using the scale below”. Sample items included “Thinking what my future will be like” (Concern), “Making decisions by myself” (Control), “Observing different ways of doing things” (Curiosity), and “Overcoming obstacles” (Confidence). All items were measured on 5-point Likert scales. The Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was 0.706.

Regarding gender, males were coded as zero and females as one.

#### 3.2.3. Control variables

This study controlled for several variables that could impact career outcomes. First, we controlled for age, as prior studies indicate it affects expatriate career outcomes (Suutari et al., 2018; Varma et al., 2020). Then, we control for expatriate type since recent studies have reported the relevance of expatriate type on the development of expatriates (Dickmann et al., 2018). Assigned expatriates were coded as zero and SIEs as one. In addition, since H-D global work experience includes the aspect of non-work disruption, the study controlled whether the expatriate has children of an age that requires them to live with their parents. Not having such children was coded as 0, and having such children was

coded as 1. Moreover, evidence suggests that the length of international work experiences impacts development (Dickmann & Harris, 2005; Mäkelä et al., 2016). Thus, we control for the duration of expatriation experience measured in years. Finally, we controlled for the impact of our sample comprising expatriates whose educational background was in business or engineering by coding those with a business education zero and those with an engineering education one.

### 3.3. Analysis

First, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to check if the model fits the data. Based on the standard suggestions (e.g., Hu & Bentler, 1999), the model fit was deemed acceptable when CFI = 0.90/0.95, TLI = 0.90/0.95, RMSEA <0.06/0.08, and SRMR <0.08. Due to the negative variance of knowing-how career capital, its variance was constrained to 0.001. Then, following the validation article of the CAAS-SF (Maggiori et al., 2015), we allowed two measurement residuals of curiosity items (“I investigate options before making a choice” and “observing different ways of doing things”) and two measurement residuals of confidence items (“taking care to do things well” and “working up to my ability”) to covary. The fit indices of the CFA with  $\chi^2 = 1932.106$ ,  $df = 1094$ ,  $p < .001$ , CFI = 0.90, TLI = 0.90, RMSEA = 0.048, and SRMR = 0.064 indicated an acceptable fit. Discriminant validity was investigated in the CFA models’ standardized solution. None of the 95 % confidence interval upper limits of the correlations between factors being above 0.80 indicates there is no problem with discriminant validity (Rönkkö & Cho, 2022). Missing data were handled using listwise deletion, and there were  $n = 46$  missing responses.

Additionally, common method bias (CMB) was tested using the marker variable approach (Simmering et al., 2015). Remote work satisfaction was used as the marker variable because it likely demonstrates similar biasing response tendencies as our other study variables. The model comparisons revealed no significant CMB-related issues, as indicated by the model with marker variable associations to the indicators of other variables not being significantly different ( $p = .72$ ) from the model without associations from the marker variable to the indicators. Additionally, most factor loadings related to the marker variable were non-significant.

After confirming an acceptable factor structure, we used the composite scores and ordinary least squares multiple regression analysis to investigate the hypothesized associations and interactions. This approach was chosen to reduce the number of estimable parameters as the sample size was relatively small for full structural equation modeling, including a second-order latent variable interaction. Generally, the composite sum score approach has been shown to perform reasonably well compared to other approaches (Lodder et al., 2019). According to the simulations by Lodder and colleagues (2019), the composite sum score approach produced spurious interactions only in the presence of high skewness and/or large sample size. The skewness for the job scope measure used in this study was only  $-0.61$ . This choice aligns with

recent previous research (e.g., Booth et al., 2020; Maharjan et al., 2022; Stoermer et al., 2020) utilizing multiple regression analysis.

Continuous composite variables were standardized prior to analysis to obtain standardized estimates and reduce the multicollinearity between variables. Testing for CFA and CMB relied on MPlus (version 8.6; Muthén & Muthén, 1998) software, and multiple regression analysis was performed using R (version 4.3.1; R Core Team, 2024).

## 4. Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations between study variables are presented in Table 2. The results of the unconditional and conditional regression models are presented in Table 3. Regarding Hypothesis 1, it was expected that the job scope of expatriates’ global work would be positively related to their perceived development of knowing-how career capital, knowing-whom career capital, and knowing-why career capital. The results depicted in Table 3 showed that the job scope was positively related to expatriates’ knowing-how career capital ( $\beta = 0.38$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and knowing-whom career capital ( $\beta = 0.35$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and knowing-why career capital ( $\beta = 0.36$ ,  $p < .001$ ) development. Therefore, the data supported Hypotheses 1a, 1b, and 1c.

Regarding Hypothesis 2, it was expected that the career adaptability of expatriates would be positively related to their perceived development of knowing-how career capital, knowing-whom career capital, and knowing-why career capital. The results depicted in Table 3 showed that the career adaptability of expatriates was indeed positively related to expatriates’ development of knowing-how career capital ( $\beta = 0.27$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and knowing-whom career capital ( $\beta = 0.20$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and knowing-why career capital ( $\beta = 0.31$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Therefore, the data supported Hypotheses 2a, 2b, and 2c.

Finally, Hypothesis 3 investigated whether gender moderates the relationship between job scope and perceived career capital development (PCCD). The result indicated that gender moderated the relationship between the job scope of expatriate work and the development of knowing-how career capital ( $\beta = 0.28$ ,  $p = .01$ ) and knowing-whom career capital ( $\beta = 0.34$ ,  $p < .01$ ). In contrast, gender did not moderate the association when the outcome was knowing-why career capital ( $\beta = 0.17$ ,  $p = .11$ ). Figs. 2 and 3 illustrate that at a low degree of job scope, women perceived less development of knowing-how career capital and knowing-whom career capital than men. However, at a high level of job scope, women perceived greater development of knowing-how career capital and knowing-whom career capital than men. So, women perceived themselves in a position to catch up and eventually even surpass men in development in positions where job scope is high. There was also a direct negative association between gender and knowing-how career capital ( $\beta = -0.24$ ,  $p = .05$ ) and between gender and knowing-whom career capital ( $\beta = -0.26$ ,  $p < .05$ ), while gender was not directly associated with the perceived development of knowing-why career capital ( $\beta = 0.08$ ,  $p = .11$ ). This result indicated that, on average, women experienced less knowing-how career capital and

**Table 2**  
Descriptive statistics and correlations.

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1 Age	46.30	10.32	–									
2 Children <sup>a</sup>	0.60	0.49	0.34***	–								
3 Educational background <sup>b</sup>	0.57	0.50	–0.04	–0.04	–							
4 Length of expatriation	3.62	1.56	0.13*	–0.05	0.25***	–						
5 Expatriate type <sup>c</sup>	0.36	0.48	0.13*	0.02	0.11*	–0.19**	–					
6 Job scope	3.75	0.64	0.11	0.12*	–0.04	0.03	0.15**	–				
7 Career adaptability	3.96	0.44	0.00	–0.01	0.02	–0.04	0.03	0.26***	–			
8 Gender <sup>d</sup>	0.37	0.48	–0.19**	–0.17**	0.26***	–0.10	0.04	–0.01	0.21***	–		
9 Knowing how	5.05	1.03	0.03	0.07	0.15**	0.03	0.14*	0.46***	0.34***	0.00	–	
10 Knowing whom	4.96	1.44	0.04	0.07	0.08	–0.03	0.23***	0.43***	0.27***	–0.03	0.79***	–
11 Knowing why	5.01	1.23	–0.12*	0.03	0.10	–0.09	0.16**	0.44***	0.45***	0.16**	0.69***	0.59***

Note: <sup>a</sup> 0 = no, 1 = yes, <sup>b</sup> 0 = engineer, 1 = business, <sup>c</sup> 0 = SIE, 1 = AE, <sup>d</sup> 0 = man, 1 = woman. N = 327. Significance levels: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**Table 3**  
Regression results for hypothesized relationships.

3.a knowing-how career capital							
	Unconditional model			Conditional model			
	$\beta$	SE	95 %CI	$\beta$	SE	95 %CI	
Intercept	-0.22*	0.11	(-0.43, -0.00)	-0.22*	0.11	(-0.43, -0.01)	
Age	0.01	0.06	(-0.11, 0.12)	0.00	0.06	(-0.11, 0.12)	
Children	0.06	0.11	(-0.16, 0.28)	0.06	0.11	(-0.16, 0.27)	
Educational background	0.42***	0.11	(0.19, 0.63)	0.44***	0.11	(0.22, 0.65)	
Length of expatriation	-0.05	0.06	(-0.16, 0.06)	-0.04	0.06	(-0.15, 0.07)	
Job scope	0.38***	0.05	(0.28, 0.49)	0.29***	0.06	(0.17, 0.42)	
Career adaptability	0.27***	0.05	(0.17, 0.38)	0.27***	0.05	(0.17, 0.38)	
Expatriate type	0.14	0.11	(-0.08, 0.36)	0.12	0.11	(-0.10, 0.35)	
Gender	-0.24*	0.11	(-0.47, -0.02)	-0.24*	0.11	(-0.46, -0.01)	
Gender x Job scope	-	-	-	0.28*	0.11	(0.07, 0.49)	
$R^2$			0.31			0.33	

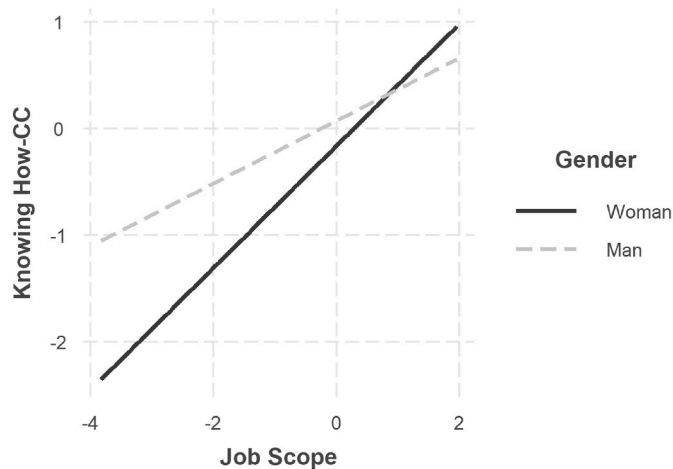
  

3.b knowing-whom career capital							
	Unconditional model			Conditional model			
	$\beta$	SE	95 %CI	$\beta$	SE	95 %CI	
Intercept	-0.21	0.11	(-0.43, 0.01)	-0.21	0.11	(-0.43, 0.00)	
Age	0.01	0.06	(-0.11, 0.13)	0.00	0.06	(-0.12, 0.12)	
Children	0.07	0.11	(-0.16, 0.29)	0.06	0.11	(-0.16, 0.29)	
Educational background	0.28*	0.11	(0.06, 0.54)	0.31**	0.11	(0.09, 0.53)	
Length of expatriation	-0.05	0.06	(-0.17, 0.06)	-0.05	0.06	(-0.16, 0.06)	
Job scope	0.35***	0.06	(0.24, 0.46)	0.24***	0.07	(0.11, 0.37)	
Career adaptability	0.20***	0.06	(0.09, 0.31)	0.20***	0.05	(0.09, 0.31)	
Expatriate type	0.31**	0.12	(0.08, 0.54)	0.29*	0.12	(0.06, 0.52)	
Gender	-0.26*	0.12	(-0.49, -0.02)	-0.25*	0.12	(-0.48, -0.02)	
Gender x Job scope	-	-	-	0.34**	0.11	(0.12, 0.55)	
$R^2$			0.25			0.28	

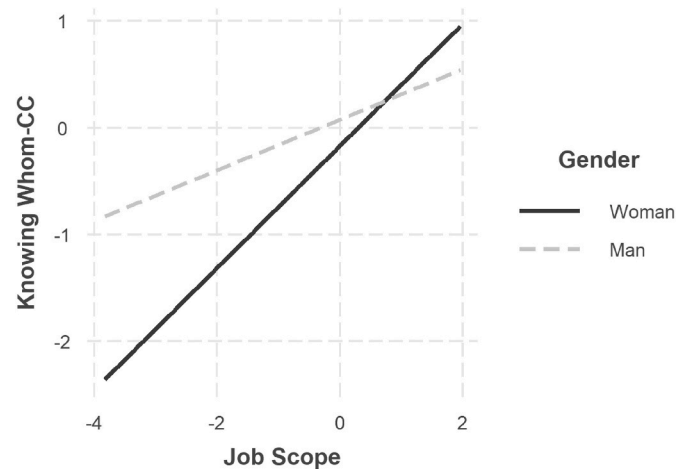
  

3.c knowing-why career capital							
	Unconditional model			Conditional model			
	$\beta$	SE	95 %CI	$\beta$	SE	95 %CI	
Intercept	-0.29**	0.10	(-0.50, -0.09)	-0.30**	0.10	(-0.50, -0.09)	
Age	-0.15**	0.06	(-0.26, -0.04)	-0.16**	0.06	(-0.27, -0.04)	
Children	0.11	0.11	(-0.11, 0.32)	0.10	0.11	(-0.11, 0.31)	
Educational background	0.21*	0.11	(0.00, 0.42)	0.22*	0.11	(0.01, 0.43)	
Length of expatriation	-0.09	0.05	(-0.19, 0.02)	-0.09	0.05	(-0.19, 0.02)	
Job scope	0.36***	0.05	(0.25, 0.46)	0.30***	0.06	(0.18, 0.42)	
Career adaptability	0.31***	0.05	(0.21, 0.42)	0.31***	0.05	(0.21, 0.41)	
Expatriate type	0.19	0.11	(-0.03, 0.41)	0.18	0.11	(-0.04, 0.40)	
Gender	0.08	0.11	(-0.14, 0.30)	0.08	0.11	(-0.14, 0.30)	
Gender x Job scope	-	-	-	0.17	0.11	(-0.04, 0.38)	
$R^2$			0.34			0.35	

The table shows linear regression coefficients. Significance levels: \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01, \*\*\*p < .001.



**Fig. 2.** Interaction effect of job scope of expatriate jobs and gender on knowing-how career capital.



**Fig. 3.** Interaction effect of job scope of expatriate jobs and gender on knowing-whom career capital.

knowing-whom career capital development than men.

The nature of the significant interaction effects was then probed by plotting the relationship between the job scope and knowing-how career capital and knowing-whom career capital development for men and then for women. The simple slope tests revealed that the job scope of expatriates' work was related to knowing-how career capital development for men ( $\beta = 0.29$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and for women ( $\beta = 0.57$ ,  $p < .001$ ), showing that the association between the job scope of expatriate work and knowing-how career capital development was stronger among women than men as indicated by the significant interaction term. Furthermore, the simple slope tests revealed that job scope was related to knowing-whom career capital development for men ( $\beta = 0.24$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and for women ( $\beta = 0.57$ ,  $p < .001$ ), showing that the association between job scope and knowing-whom career capital development was stronger among women than men. Therefore, Hypotheses 3a and 3b were supported, but Hypothesis 3c was not.

Regarding control variables, age was negatively related to the perceived development of knowing-why career capital of expatriates, which meant that the older the expatriate, the lower their perceived development of knowing-why career capital ( $\beta = -0.15$ ,  $p < .01$ ). In addition, expatriates with a business education background perceived they had developed a greater stock of knowing-how career capital ( $\beta = 0.42$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and knowing-whom career capital ( $\beta = 0.28$ ,  $p < .05$ ) than expatriates in engineering. Finally, expatriate type was associated with the PCCD of expatriates. The results showed that AEs perceived they had developed more knowing-whom career capital ( $\beta = 0.31$ ,  $p < .01$ ) than SIEs did, while they did not differ in the development of knowing-how career capital or knowing-why career capital. The other control variables were not significantly related to any forms of career capital.

#### 4.1. Post hoc analysis

Our results revealed a significant association between the expatriate type and the development of knowing-whom career capital, highlighting the need for a more detailed examination of its association with career adaptability and job scope. Since the expatriate type is uniquely relevant to the international career context (Meuer et al., 2019)—unlike general demographic variables such as age and educational background—we focused our subsequent analyses on this control variable. We employed independent samples *t*-tests to investigate potential differences in job scope and career adaptability between SIEs and AEs.

The mean job scope score for SIEs was 3.68, and that of AEs was 3.80, indicating a mean difference of  $-0.12$  ( $t(321) = -2.66$ ,  $p = .008$ ). This difference suggests that SIEs, on average, reported a lower job scope than AEs. The mean career adaptability score for SIEs was 3.89, whereas, for AEs, it was higher at 4.09, with a mean difference of  $-0.20$  ( $t(249.33) = -2.66$ ,  $p = .008$ ). This difference suggests that AEs reported greater career adaptability than SIEs. Additionally, we scrutinized the distribution of AEs and SIEs regarding background variables in the model. There were no differences between AEs and SIEs regarding gender ( $\chi^2 = 0.450$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .502$ ), educational background ( $\chi^2 = 3.429$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .064$ ) and having children ( $\chi^2 = 0.045$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .803$ ). However, the AEs were older than SIEs ( $t(320) = -2.25$ ,  $p = .025$ ), and AEs had less international work experience ( $t(292) = 3.37$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

## 5. Discussion and conclusions

This study investigates the impact of job scope and career adaptability on expatriates' PCCD. Additionally, guided by social comparison theory, it delves into the moderating role of gender in the job scope–PCCD dynamic.

First, adopting the job characteristics model to analyse the impact of job scope on PCCD in the global work context offers a new perspective on the developmental opportunities different global work roles offer.

This analysis differs from the common approach in expatriate research in which all expatriates are typically included in the same category (i.e., those doing expatriate work). However, expatriates have very different kinds of jobs. The findings demonstrate that global work roles differ significantly in their job scope and thus present distinct learning opportunities for individuals. Examining real-life job scope variations in H-D global work roles could significantly enhance our understanding of the variety of roles it encompasses.

Second, this study highlights that career adaptability is a pivotal factor in explaining individuals' PCCD abroad—an observation that has not previously been reported. The capacity of individuals to cope with demanding H-D global work is essential for their development. Such adaptability is critical not only for their immediate adjustment to foreign work, as evidenced in recent studies (Jannesari & Sullivan, 2019), but also for equipping individuals with the appropriate career behaviours that facilitate lifelong learning (Brown et al., 2020). Accordingly, our study sheds light on the role of career adaptability in helping individuals leverage the developmental opportunities presented in the H-D global work environment. It moves beyond mere adjustment to encompass a broader perspective on how expatriates develop their career competencies over time. That development is important because PCCD affects the long-term career success of expatriates, too (Mello et al., 2023c).

The findings revealed significant differences in PCCD between AEs and SIEs. AEs generally exhibited a greater accumulation of knowing-whom career capital. Further analysis indicated that AEs typically scored higher for both job scope and career adaptability, often because they are identified as potential leaders and given significant responsibilities and leverage broader networks (Brewster et al., 2021). In contrast, SIEs—ranging from young adventurers and trailing spouses (McNulty & Vance, 2017; Mello et al., 2020; Martel) to professionals in nursing (González et al., 2021) and academia (Maharjan et al., 2022)—navigate more diverse and less structured career paths (Suutari et al., 2018). Despite their proactive behaviour in initiating and planning their own expatriations (Andresen, Pattie, & Hippler, 2020), SIEs tend to score lower in career adaptability (Mello et al., 2024), potentially because adaptability often requires reactive adjustments following critical incidents (Haeggli & Hirschi, 2020). Without organizational support or formal recognition as potential leaders, SIEs frequently find themselves in roles that poorly match their qualifications, leading to underemployment in positions such as back-office tasks or other low-level roles (Brewster et al., 2021). These findings illuminate the heterogeneous nature of global work and clarify the variations in PCCD among expatriate groups (Shaffer et al., 2012).

Finally, our findings offer a nuanced view of the frog-pond model, which posits that gender will moderate the relationship between job scope and PCCD. The results indicate that the relationship between job scope and PCCD is more pronounced for women than for men in terms of knowing-how and knowing-whom career capital. At lower levels of job scope, women perceive less development in their knowing-how and knowing-whom career capital compared to men. However, women begin to catch up with men as job scope increases. At the highest levels of job scope, women start to surpass men. Accordingly, as job scope increases, women's perceived development of knowing-how and knowing-whom career capital tends to surpass that of men. These results highlight the relevance of job scope for the PCCD of both genders, with a more pronounced impact on women.

However, gender did not significantly moderate the relationship between job scope and knowing-why career capital. The finding suggests that the perceived development of knowing-why capital, which includes personal motivations, values, and identity, is less influenced by gender during expatriation. Unlike knowing-how and knowing-whom, which involve observable skills and networks, knowing-why is more internally driven and less visible to others (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Since the frog-pond model, based on social comparison theory, relies on comparing oneself to others, it may not fully apply to knowing-why career capital, where such direct comparisons are less evident.

### 5.1. Theoretical contributions

This study contributes in several ways. First, the study contributes by applying the job characteristics model for the first time to analyse the individuals' ways of knowing within the career capital framework in H-D global work. Moving beyond the partial application of the model by Stoermer et al. (2022) to study job satisfaction, our study connects the job characteristics model with career capital theory. As an outcome, the study reveals significant variation in job scope within global work and demonstrates how this variance influences individuals' PCCD. Consequently, this research contributes by highlighting the diversity in job scope in global work settings, responding to the call for such analysis (Stoermer et al., 2022).

Second, this study extends the application of career construction theory into the context of H-D global work by being the first to analyse the connection between career adaptability and PCCD. Such an agentic perspective highlights the crucial role of career adaptability in the career capital development of individuals experiencing H-D global work. In line with career construction theory, our findings reveal that enhanced career adaptability significantly boosts individuals' PCCD across all three domains of the career capital framework: knowing-how, knowing-whom, and knowing-why. By offering quantitative research evidence on the impact of career adaptability in the later stages of career development, this research also responds to the call by Rudolph et al. (2017) for a more detailed exploration of career adaptability in those career stages.

Finally, this study significantly contributes to the international career literature by integrating the frog-pond model with gender dynamics within global work. This approach enhances understanding of gender-specific variations in career capital development abroad. The current research combines the frog-pond model, the job characteristics model, and career capital theory to reveal how individual and job-related factors shape PCCD. It also illustrates the moderating effect of gender in these connections. This approach not only broadens the application of the frog-pond model beyond traditional educational settings (Jiang et al., 2014; Skov, 2022) but also highlights gender's moderating role in the relationship between job scope and PCCD. Applying the frog-pond model to global work settings underlines its utility in gendered career analyses. It indicates how comparative self-assessment mechanisms vary across genders, thereby enriching the career development narrative. This angle of development through job scope posits that when women are given the breadth of responsibility and autonomy, they recognize related development opportunities even better than males. Individuals value such development opportunities (Shaffer et al., 2012), so they may be highly motivated and committed to the organization. This finding underscores a crucial message: access to roles with a high job scope can motivate expatriate women and could help promote gender equity in professional growth.

### 5.2. Practical implications

The findings on the impact of job scope, career adaptability, and gender on expatriates' PCCD offer several practical insights for individuals and organizations involved in international business. Despite the literature suggesting that working abroad is a uniform experience for all expatriates (Takeuchi et al., 2019), our results reveal that there are expatriate jobs with different levels of job scope. Therefore, aiming for positions with high job scope can significantly enhance career development. The finding is especially pertinent in an era where individuals are increasingly responsible for managing their own careers (Mello et al., 2023a). It is particularly relevant for women, who tend to perceive challenging jobs as offering greater career capital development. Leaders who understand that might offer more challenging international positions to women (Davoine & Schmid, 2022), especially given the significant gender gap in international roles (Bader et al., 2023). However, all expatriates must ensure that their career adaptability is sufficient to handle challenges without compromising long-term career

sustainability (De Vos et al., 2020), particularly in H-D global work environments (Mello et al., 2024).

In terms of policy implications, governments and multinational corporations can play a crucial role in promoting gender equity in expatriate roles. Implementing policies such as quotas for women in international positions (Tatli et al., 2013) or establishing mentorship programs tailored to support female expatriates (Linehan & Scullion, 2008) can help bridge the gender gap. Such initiatives ensure that women have equitable access to challenging and career-enhancing opportunities abroad, aligning with broader organizational and societal goals for diversity and inclusion.

On the organizational front, understanding the challenges and development opportunities of H-D global work can help HR professionals select suitable candidates for global work positions and tailor training and support programs to help expatriates cope with the challenges they will encounter. Human resource professionals should design training sessions targeting career adaptability skills and prepare expatriates for varied professional challenges, emphasizing scenario-based learning and cultural competence. For example, while it is already common to provide some training and support to assigned expatriates (Kraimer et al., 2001), it is equally important to offer similar support when recruiting international professionals from among SIEs (Chen & Shaffer, 2017), especially in the current career landscape where individuals are less committed to organizations (Sturges et al., 2002). Self-initiated expatriates may become the primary pool of talent in the near future.

Overall, leveraging the fact that women often value challenging jobs abroad more than men provides an opportunity to close the gender gap in international positions (Bader et al., 2023) by actively promoting and supporting women in these roles. Organizations that offer equal opportunities for women and recognize their experiences of career capital development during global work can address gender disparities (Fitzsimmons et al., 2014) and optimize their global talent pool. Specialized support structures considering gender-specific challenges and opportunities should be developed to ensure women receive the necessary tools and networks to succeed. Organizations that support expatriates with an awareness of gender dynamics are likely to enhance PCCD and reap greater organizational benefits. Such an approach to training, selection, and support would both empower all expatriates and promote gender equity in the international career context.

### 5.3. Limitations and future research directions

Like any study, our study has several limitations that pave the way for new research avenues. First, because we used a cross-sectional research design—common in expatriation studies (Andresen & the 5C consortium, 2020)—we cannot draw definitive causal conclusions about the relationships among job scope, gender, and PCCD. Future work employing longitudinal and multi-source data would help illuminate how PCCD evolves in H-D global work contexts. Second, our sample consisted of highly educated Finnish expatriates with university-level engineering and business backgrounds. That may limit the generalizability of our findings to expatriates from other nationalities and educational fields. For example, Finnish culture with progressive gender policies may differ significantly from other cultures where gender disparities are more pronounced (Teigen & Wängnerud, 2009). That may limit the generalizability of our findings to expatriates from other nationalities and educational fields. Additionally, our study focused on highly skilled expatriates, leaving low-skilled expatriates underexplored. Future research could consider more diverse samples, including low-skilled expatriates (Haak-Saheem et al., 2020), to examine how cultural and institutional differences influence PCCD.

There are also other promising directions for future research. One involves studying other aspects of H-D global work beyond job characteristics by including factors such as family circumstances like the number and age of children (i.e., factors connected with non-work

disruption) and cultural distance (i.e., a factor connected with the need for cognitive flexibility). Such an approach would offer a more comprehensive understanding of how varying levels of “density” shape individuals’ career capital. Additionally, because quantitative methods cannot always capture the full complexity of expatriate experiences (Shaffer et al., 2012), future work could employ qualitative approaches (e.g., interviews, focus groups, ethnographies) to gain deeper insights into PCCP experiences abroad. To further explore causality and delve into personal expatriate experiences, employing longitudinal designs alongside these qualitative methods would be crucial (Takeuchi, 2010). Moreover, further exploration of the differential effects of job scope on “knowing-how,” “knowing-whom,” and “knowing-why” is warranted, especially to understand why gender moderation was not evident for the “knowing-why” dimension.

Applying career construction theory in future studies—particularly its subdimensions such as career curiosity and confidence—could further clarify how individuals adapt to and benefit from H-D global work. Researchers could also investigate various forms of global work, including international business travel (Dimitrova et al., 2020), short-term expatriation, and virtual expatriation (Bücker et al., 2020), to gauge whether our findings can be generalized to other types of global work. Finally, leveraging the frog-pond model to examine females and other underrepresented groups (e.g., racial, religious, or sexual minorities) in the context of global work would deepen our understanding of comparative self-assessment processes in diverse global work environments, ultimately advancing both theoretical and practical insights for managing expatriate careers.

#### CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Rodrigo Mello:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Software, Resources, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Vesa Suutari:** Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Conceptualization. **Samu Kempainen:** Validation, Software, Methodology, Formal analysis.

#### Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, Rodrigo Mello, upon reasonable request. The data are not publicly available due to their containing information that could compromise the privacy of research participants.

#### Declaration of competing interest

We hereby declare that the disclosed information is correct and that no other situation of real, potential or apparent conflict of interest is known to us. We undertake to inform you of any change in these circumstances, including if an issue arises during the course of this submission.

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