



Vaasan yliopisto  
UNIVERSITY OF VAASA

Ellen Mikkola

**Well-being of international project assignees on  
international project assignments**

In the context of a case organization

School of Management  
Master's thesis in Economics  
Human Resources  
Management

Vaasa 2025

---

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

**Author:** Ellen Mikkola  
**Title of the Thesis:** Well-being of international project assignees on international project assignments : In the context of a case organization  
**Degree:** Master of Science in Economics and Business Administration  
**Programme:** Human Resources Management  
**Supervisor:** Tomi Kallio  
**Year:** 2025 **Pages:** 78

---

**ABSTRACT:**

In today's global world international work is a norm. Different types of international work have become more common in recent years. This research focused on international project assignments. During the latest years the importance of well-being has continued to increase. The aim of this study was to define what affected the international project assignee's well-being on international project assignments in the context of the case organization. Moreover, this study focused on factors that decrease and factors that increase project assignee's well-being on international project assignments in the context of the case organization. The theoretical framework of this study was grounded in the Job Demands–Resources Theory which provided a way to examine how various job demands and resources affected international project assignee well-being.

This study was conducted as qualitative research by interviewing international project assignees from the chosen case organization. Twelve international project assignees were interviewed for the purposes of this study. The participants all spent a significant amount of time per year on international project assignments. The interviews were one on one interviews. All the interviews were conducted online between December 2024 and January 2025. All interviews were recorded and transcript. Most of the interviews were hold in Finnish and some in English.

The analysis of the data was done by using the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) method which allowed the analysis to focus on the individual's own interpretations of their well-being. The findings of the study demonstrated how social support, organizational support, personal resources, free time, experience and contact with family increased international project assignee well-being on international project assignments in the context of the case organization. Pressure, communications issues, lack of routine, challenges in adapting to a new culture, health and safety concerns and feelings of stress and uncertainty on the other hand decreased international project assignee well-being on international project assignments in the context of the case organization.

This study also included suggestions for the case organization to further help in the process of improving their international project assignee well-being on international project assignments. It would be very beneficial for the case organization to take certain actions such as providing better accommodation, offering and providing even more support and hearing and taking the international project assignees' thoughts and opinions into account even more.

---

**KEYWORDS:** well-being, international assignments, short-term assignments, project assignments, job demands, job resources

---

**Vaasan yliopisto****Johtamisen akateeminen yksikkö****Tekijä:** Ellen Mikkola**Tutkielman nimi:** Well-being of international project assignees on international project assignments : In the context of a case organization**Tutkinto:** Kauppatieteiden maisteri**Oppiaine:** Henkilöstöjohtaminen**Työn ohjaaja:** Tomi Kallio**Vuosi:** 2025 **Sivumäärä:** 78

---

**TIIVISTELMÄ:**

Nykyisessä globalisoituneessa maailmassa kansainvälinen työskentely on muodostunut normiksi. Erilaiset kansainvälisen työn muodot ovat yleistyneet merkittävästi viime vuosina. Tämä tutkimus keskittyi erityisesti kansainvälisiin projektikomennuksiin. Viime vuosina työntekijöiden hyvinvoinnin merkitys on kasvanut huomattavasti. Tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli selvittää, mitkä tekijät vaikuttavat kansainvälisten projektikomennuslaisten hyvinvointiin kansainvälisillä projektikomennuksilla kohdeorganisaation kontekstissa. Tarkoituksena oli tunnistaa, mitkä tekijät heikensivät ja mitkä tekijät edistivät heidän hyvinvointiaan. Tutkimuksen teoreettinen viitekehys pohjautui työn vaatimusten ja voimavarojen teoriaan (Job Demands–Resources Theory), joka tarjosi viitekehyksen työssä esiintyvien vaatimusten ja voimavarojen vaikutusten tarkasteluun hyvinvoinnin näkökulmasta.

Tutkimus toteutettiin laadullisena tutkimuksena, jossa aineisto kerättiin haastattelemalla kansainvälisiä projektikomennuslaisia valitusta kohdeorganisaatiossa. Tutkimukseen osallistui kaksitoista kansainvälistä projektikomennuslaista, jotka kaikki viettivät merkittävän osan vuodesta ulkomailla kansainvälisillä projektikomennuksilla. Haastattelut toteutettiin yksilöhaastatteluina, ja ne suoritettiin etäyhteyksin joulukuun 2024 ja tammikuun 2025 välisenä aikana. Kaikki haastattelut nauhoitettiin ja litteroitiin analysointia varten. Suurin osa haastatteluista pidettiin suomen kielellä, mutta osa pidettiin myös englanniksi.

Aineiston analyysissä hyödynnettiin tulkitsevaa fenomenologista analyysimenetelmää (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, IPA), jonka avulla voitiin syventyä yksilöiden omiin kokemuksiin ja tulkintoihin tekijöistä, jotka vaikuttivat heidän omaan hyvinvointiinsa kansainvälisillä projektikomennuksilla. Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittivat, että sosiaalinen ja organisaation tuki, henkilökohtaiset voimavarat, vapaa-aika, aiempi kokemus sekä yhteydenpito perheeseen lisäsivät kansainvälisten projektikomennuslaisten hyvinvointia. Sen sijaan paine, viestinnän haasteet, rutiinien puute, vaikeudet uuden kulttuurin omaksumisessa, terveys- ja turvallisuushuolenaiheet sekä stressin ja epävarmuuden kokemukset heikensivät haastateltavien hyvinvointia kansainvälisillä projektikomennuksilla.

Tämä tutkimus tarjoaa kohdeorganisaatiolle myös käytännön suosituksia, joiden avulla kansainvälisten projektikomennuslaisten hyvinvointia voidaan parantaa. Esimerkiksi paremmat majojen järjestelyt, tuen lisääminen sekä työntekijöiden kokemusten ja mielipiteiden aktiivisempi huomioiminen voisivat edistää hyvinvointia merkittävästi.

---

**AVAINSANAT:** hyvinvointi, kansainväliset komennukset, lyhytaikaiset komennukset, projekti komennukset, työn vaatimukset, työn voimavarat

## Contents

|       |   |    |
|-------|---|----|
| 1     | Introduction  | 7  |
| 1.1   | Background of the study   | 7  |
| 1.2   | Purpose of the study and research questions                       | 8  |
| 1.3   | Structure of the thesis   | 10 |
| 1.4   | Definitions of main concepts of the study                         | 10 |
| 2     | Employee well-being on international assignments                  | 13 |
| 2.1   | Employee well-being   | 13 |
| 2.2   | International assignments   | 14 |
| 2.3   | Factors affecting well-being on international project assignments | 17 |
| 2.3.1 | Work and family   | 19 |
| 2.3.2 | Multicultural teams   | 20 |
| 2.3.3 | Support and organizational support                                | 21 |
| 2.3.4 | Daily recovery from work  | 22 |
| 2.3.5 | Health and safety   | 22 |
| 2.4   | Job Demands-Resources model                                       | 23 |
| 2.4.1 | Job demands   | 23 |
| 2.4.2 | Job resources   | 24 |
| 2.4.3 | Outcomes of Job Demands-Resources model                           | 24 |
| 2.5   | Theoretical framework   | 25 |
| 3     | Research methods  | 26 |
| 3.1   | Case organization   | 26 |
| 3.2   | Qualitative research approach                                     | 28 |
| 3.3   | Data collection and analysis                                      | 29 |
| 3.4   | Ethical considerations  | 32 |
| 3.5   | Considerations related to the implementation of this research     | 33 |
| 4     | Research findings   | 35 |
| 4.1   | Project assignee well-being on international assignments          | 35 |
| 4.2   | Job demands affecting international project assignee well-being   | 37 |

|       |   |    |
|-------|---|----|
| 4.2.1 | Pressure  | 37 |
| 4.2.2 | Communications issues   | 39 |
| 4.2.3 | Lack of routine   | 40 |
| 4.2.4 | Challenges in adapting to a new culture                           | 41 |
| 4.2.5 | Health and safety concerns  | 42 |
| 4.2.6 | Feeling of stress and uncertainty                                 | 44 |
| 4.3   | Job resources affecting international project assignee well-being | 45 |
| 4.3.1 | Social support  | 46 |
| 4.3.2 | Organizational support  | 47 |
| 4.3.3 | Personal resources  | 48 |
| 4.3.4 | Free time   | 49 |
| 4.3.5 | Experience  | 51 |
| 4.3.6 | Contact with family   | 53 |
| 5     | Discussions   | 55 |
| 5.1   | Factors decreasing international project assignee's well-being    | 55 |
| 5.2   | Factors increasing international project assignees' well-being    | 59 |
| 5.3   | Managerial implications   | 64 |
| 6     | Conclusions   | 67 |
| 6.1   | Key findings of the study   | 67 |
| 6.2   | Limitations of the study  | 68 |
| 6.3   | Suggestions for future research                                   | 70 |
|       | References  | 71 |
|       | Appendices  | 77 |
|       | Appendix 1. Interview questions                                   | 77 |

**Tables**

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Table 1. Short-term assignment definition (Shaffer et al., 2012). ..... | 16 |
| Table 2. Sample characteristics.....                                    | 30 |
| Table 3. Key findings .....   | 68 |

# 1 Introduction

This study focuses on the well-being of international project assignees in the case organization. This chapter will introduce background behind the study, the purpose of the study, its relevancy and the research questions of this study. In addition, this section of the study includes an introduction to the structure and main concepts of this thesis.

## 1.1 Background of the study

In today's global world countless companies operate internationally. The global distribution of business operations and the evolving nature of the global economy have contributed to a more dynamic and complex business environment, in which organizations must strategically leverage, manage, and deploy their human talent (Caligiuri et al., 2009). While the future of work presents numerous opportunities, it also brings emerging risks, challenges, and uncertainties that are not yet fully understood (Tamers et al., 2020).

Business travel is a common practice across many organizations. While sustainability concerns have led companies to reduce non-essential travel, it remains necessary in some cases, as not all business activities can be conducted virtually. Baruch et al. (2013) note that earlier research primarily focused on traditional, long-term expatriation. However, in recent years, alternative forms of international work—such as project-based assignments, short- and long-term expatriation, and self-initiated international experiences—have become increasingly prevalent. This study focuses specifically on international short-term assignments, with a particular emphasis on international project assignments.

The human interest in well-being spans thousands of years, from indigenous perspectives to the ancient Greeks (Jarden et al., 2023). The research of Jarden et al. (2023) states how the concept of well-being has persisted over time and remains at a central focus in contemporary social sciences. Well-being remains an important topic for the social sciences (Jarden et al., 2023).

Given the increasing significance of social responsibility and shift in the nature of work, organizations are taking employee wellbeing more seriously (Scott and Spieveck 2019; Wijngaards et al., 2021). The research of Wijngaards et al. (2021) refers a Forbes magazine's 2020 article on human resources (HR) trends and proposes that employee's well-being should be top priority for HR. According to Wijngaards et al. (2021) there is a major interest the well-being of workers.

According to the research of Cabrita et al. (2023) supporting employee well-being at work is crucial since it is directly related to how employees behave at work. Well-being of the workers affects individuals' mental and physical health (Cabrita et al., 2023). It has also an impact on how satisfactory an employee considers their life to be (Cabrita et al., 2023). Worker well-being is a key element for an organization to thrive in today's business environment.

When searching for prior research on international project assignee well-being, the author of this thesis did not find studies focusing specifically on this topic. While literature on general well-being, expatriate well-being, and international assignee well-being exists, there appears to be a gap in research specifically addressing the well-being of international project assignees. Although similar factors may be relevant, the nature of international project assignments may introduce unique challenges and context-specific influences. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by focusing on the well-being of international project assignees and examining the factors that increase or decrease their well-being.

## **1.2 Purpose of the study and research questions**

The aim of this thesis is to study the factors affecting the well-being of international project assignees in the chosen case organization. The purpose is to analyse the factors that have an impact on project assignee's well-being on international project assignments.

The research questions are studied from the job demands-resources model's perspective. The research question of this thesis is:

What affects international project assignee's well-being on international project assignments in the context of the case organization?

Which is further broken down into two sub questions:

- a. Which factors decrease project assignee's well-being on international project assignments in the context of the case organization?
- b. Which factors increase project assignee's well-being on international project assignments in the context of the case organization?

This thesis focuses on the well-being of international project assignees, examining it from both a general well-being and a work-related well-being perspective. Given the unique context of international project assignments, both perspectives play an important role in understanding the well-being of international project assignees.

Based on the author's review of previous research, there appears to be a lack of studies that focus on individual experiences and personal perceptions of well-being in the context of international project assignments. This research includes twelve qualitative interviews of international project assignees in the case organization. The qualitative interviews are analysed with an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) method which focuses on the person's own interpretation of the phenomena (Pietkiewicz, et al., 2014, p.8), in this case their well-being. The aim is to understand which factors international project assignees themselves perceive as influencing their well-being. At the centre of this study are the interview participants from the case organization. By using the IPA method to analyse the interview data it allows the analysis to focus on individuals' own experiences. This research will focus on international project assignees more specifically

short-term project assignments and not on business travellers, long-term expatriation or self-initiated work experiences.

### **1.3 Structure of the thesis**

This thesis will be divided into six chapters. This study starts with an introduction in which the topic and the reason behind the study are shortly explained. The introduction also aims to prove the topicality and need for this study. In the first section in addition to the introduction, the research questions are introduced. Following this the second chapter of this study provides the literature review on well-being and international assignments. The purpose of this chapter is to gain understanding on prior research on the topic. At the end of the literature review, the theoretical framework for this study is presented. The third section of this study will introduce the chosen case organization. The third chapter of this research will introduce the methodology behind analysing the research findings. This section of the paper will describe how the data was collected and analysed. Finally, chapter three will include ethical considerations as well as presenting considerations related to the implementation of this study. In the fourth chapter the research findings are presented. The fifth chapter presents the discussions of the findings and managerial implications. This part of the research aims to connect the research findings with the theory that was previously introduced in the second chapter. At the end of this study there is a chapter six that presents the key findings of the study, limitations of this study and suggestions for further study. Finally, the used references and appendices are provided.

### **1.4 Definitions of main concepts of the study**

This section of the study introduces the definitions of the main concepts of this study. The main concepts of this study play an important role in understanding the contents of this study and therefore will be introduced in this section.

**International assignments** could be defined as a global transfer of workers inside an international organization (Collings et al., 2011). The international assignments normally involve the organizations support with things such as visas, taxation, the move itself and reward packages (Collings et al., 2011). After the international assignment is finished, the international assignee is expected to return to the home country (Collings et al., 2011).

**Short-term assignments** could be defined as less than a year lasting international assignment that are longer than business trips but shorter than regular corporate expatriate assignments (Shaffer et al., 2012). The purpose of short-term assignments is to transfer technology or skill, problem solving, management or development control (Shaffer et al., 2012).

**Well-being** could be divided into two perspectives: hedonic and eudaimonic (Bartels et al., 2019). Primarily, well-being at work focuses on hedonic perspective since it revolves around an individual's cognitive and affective evaluation of their own life and individual's happiness (Bartels et al., 2019). Well-being is not only pleasure and happiness but according to the eudaimonic perspective it is more about human growth (Bartels et al., 2019).

**Job demands** refer to the organizational, social, physical and psychological features of the work that demand psychological or physical skills or efforts and that are linked with specific psychological or physiological costs (Bakker et al., 2007). These costs could be emotionally demanding interactions with clients, work pressure, exhaustion or unsuitable physical environment (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker et al., 2007). Job demands are not automatically negative although they can become job stressors if meeting those requirements demands a great deal of effort (Bakker et al., 2007).

**Job resources** refer to the social, psychological, organizational and physical features of the work (Schaufeli et al., 2004). These features either help to achieve work goals,

decrease the job demands and the psychological and physiological costs that are linked to those demands or increase personal development, learning and growth (Schaufeli et al., 2004).

## **2 Employee well-being on international assignments**

This chapter will introduce the background and meaning of well-being, international assignments, short-term assignments and factors affecting well-being. This chapter will also introduce the main theory of Job resources-demands model which is the chosen theory for this study. The conservation of resources theory is also introduced, and it is directly linked to the main theory of Job resources-demands.

### **2.1 Employee well-being**

In the contemporary world, the time spent at work occupies a massive part of most peoples' lives (Bartels et al., 2019). It is also noted that the time spent at workplace is continuously growing (Bartels et al., 2019). Researchers suggest two perspectives of explaining well-being: hedonic and eudaimonic (Bartels et al., 2019). Primarily, well-being at work focuses on hedonic perspective since it revolves around individual's cognitive and affective evaluation of their own life and his/her happiness (Bartels et al., 2019). On the other hand, eudaimonic perspective is more about human growth and optimal functioning and discusses that well-being is not only pleasure and happiness (Bartels et al., 2019). When measuring the workplace well-being, the hedonic well-being is measured since there is no existing way of measuring eudaimonic well-being at work (Bartels et al., 2019).

Conservation of resources (COR) theory is one of the most well-known theories of organizational psychology and organizational behavior (Hobfoll et al., 2018). The importance of this theory and how established is the reason behind introducing it in this research as well in order to gain a wider understanding of well-being. The COR theory suggests that individuals' well-being is linked to all the different kinds of resources they have (Hobfoll et al., 2018) The COR theory starts with the idea of individuals intent to establish, retain, foster and protect the things that they value (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Some of the values that individuals commonly value highly are resources such as well-being, health, self-esteem, family, meaning and purpose of life (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Since these are some of the assets that people value, they also influence the individual well-being

for example, if a person has a poor self-esteem or is struggling with their life purpose, they most likely will feel lower well-being as well. These resources can be seen as partly dependent on others since they do affect each other either positively or negatively. The resources can be also divided into four different categories which are object resources (e.g., devices that people use at work), personal resources (e.g., personality traits e.g. optimism), condition resources (e.g., job contract) and energy resources (e.g., money, skills) (Hobfoll et al., 2018). The main principle of the COR theory is that losing one of the resources has more significant effects than gaining a new resource (Hobfoll et al., 2018).

Individuals with high work well-being can thrive better at their work since they are feeling good about themselves. Thriving could be defined as vitality and learning at work (Spreitzer et al., 2012). Thriving individuals could be described as people who are growing, developing and feeling energized (Spreitzer et al., 2012). Often people who thrive, feel passionate about their work (Spreitzer et al., 2012). Feeling passionate about one's work is a positive thing for a company's success since passionate and motivated workers can perform better in their jobs.

## **2.2 International assignments**

According to Collings et al. (2011) international assignments involve a transfer of workers globally inside an international organization. The organizations typically support international assignments with things such as visas, taxation, the move itself and reward packages (Collings et al., 2011). After completing the international assignments, the international assignee is typically expected to return to the home country (Collings et al., 2011).

The book of Reiche et al. (2011) states that it is common to use the generic term of "international assignee" to refer to any individual who is relocated internationally. Companies use international assignments commonly for three reasons which are managers' development, subsidiary control or skills and knowledge transfer (Pinto et al., 2012, p. 2296). This thesis will mainly focus on international assignments which focus on skill or

knowledge transfer. The chosen case organization sends employees on international assignments mostly based on the need for skill and knowledge transfer.

The preparation and selection for short-term international assignments is normally quite informal and ad hoc (Reiche et al., 2011). Short-term assignments could be defined as normally less than a year lasting international assignment that are longer than business trips but shorter than regular corporate expatriate assignments (Shaffer et al., 2012). The purpose of short-term assignments is to transfer technology or skill, problem solving or management or development control (Shaffer et al., 2012). Typically, short term assignments are used when a skill transfer is needed, for example in multinational project work (Reiche et al., 2011). The length of the short-term assignments might vary depending on the research used but Shaffer et al. (2012) define short-term assignments as assignments which last usually from 3 to 12 months.

Short-term assignments might include one or more destinations and normally without accompanying family members (Shaffer et al., 2012). There are different ways to provide compensation to the short-term assignees, but the compensation is typically dependent on the company's travel policy, duration and the home country takes care of the compensation (Shaffer et al., 2012). The international human resources management team is usually only a little involved with short-term assignments (Shaffer et al., 2012). According to Shaffer et al. (2012) the advantages of short-term assignments are that they are cost-effective, simple and flexible and offer a global boundary spanner (Shaffer et al., 2012). Short-term assignments are often more cost effective and flexible than long-term assignments (Reiche et al., 2011). However, there are some disadvantages such as challenges in adaptation or possible separation stress from the home country which might cause relationship issues, health issues or alcoholism (Shaffer et al., 2012). Table 1 describes the definition of short-term assignments.

**Table 1.** Short-term assignment definition (Shaffer et al., 2012).

| <b>Short-term assignments</b>                                     |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Definition</b>   | Usually less than a year lasting international assignments that are often longer than business trips but shorter than standard corporate expatriate assignments |
| <b>Purpose</b>  | Problem solving<br>Technology/skill transfer<br>Management development or control   |
| <b>Duration</b>   | Typically 3-12 months   |
| <b>Location</b>   | 1 or several countries  |
| <b>Relocation</b>   | Normally without family   |
| <b>Compensation</b>   | Dependant on the company's own travel policy<br>Depending on the duration, taxation might be a problem<br>Home country takes care of the compensation           |
| <b>Repatriation</b>   | Often not a challenge   |
| <b>International Human Resource Management (IHRM) involvement</b> | Little involvement  |
| <b>Advantages</b>   | Cost effective<br>Simple and flexible<br>Global boundary spanner  |
| <b>Disadvantages</b>  | Deficiency in integration with the host country nationals<br>Possible separation stress – health issues, alcoholism, relationship issues                        |

Bonache (2005) discusses in their study how international assignments can have many positive effects on personal development, long-term career advancement and skill acquisition. The study of Bonache (2005) also highlighted that it is necessary to pay attention to the difficulties that international assignments might pose such as social or family tensions, reverse culture-shocks, loss of status or insufficient respect for gained skills. Short-term assignments typically do not include family relocation (Tahvanainen, 2005). According to the research of Baruch et al. (2013) short-term assignments cause

challenges that relate to the disruption of the individual's social life since often the conditions include being far from the family. Individuals must be able to confront a high level of uncertainty once they go on international assignments (Bonache, 2005, p.110-111).

### **2.3 Factors affecting well-being on international project assignments**

This chapter introduces factors that affect international project assignees well-being. The subchapters will go deeper in specific themes that are found to be crucial factors when considering the well-being of international project assignees. These factors are combining work and family, multicultural teams, support and organizational support, daily recovery from work and health and safety. Those factors can affect employee well-being in general but they specifically are linked with the well-being of international project assignees.

According to Pinto et al. (2012, p. 2296) push and pull factors have an impact on whether the employee will accept the international assignment or not. The study of Pinto et al. (2012) defines pull factors as the positive effects of the assignments, for example the learning and development opportunities. On the contrary, the study of Pinto et al. (2012) states that push factors are negative, for example the lack of a satisfactory job position in the home country. Pinto et al. (2012, p. 2309) found the three most frequent motives for accepting an international assignment to be opportunities for professional and career development, desire of having an international experience or personal challenge in an international assignment.

Firms are becoming more and more aware of the fact that how the workers feel helps the firms to conserve a competitive advantage (Nielsen et al. 2017). The research suggests that employees that feel they have good well-being perform better (Shore et al., 2018). This would indicate that it would be for the companies' advantage to comprehend how to ensure the happiness and efficiency of their workers (Shore et al., 2018). It is of great importance for organizations to identify what factors have an impact on work well-being so that they could enhance those factors that have a positive effect on workplace

well-being (Parent-Lamarche et al., 2019). Psychologically healthy workplaces are those that promote worker's well-being and performance at all levels: on individual, group, leader and organizational level (Shore et al., 2018).

When a worker faces role conflict, uncertainty of their role and excessive workload in their job, it might cause them anxiety, symptoms of depression and negative impacts on their health and family life (Albrecht, 2012). Stansfeld and Candy (2006) suggest that bad work relationships might affect an individual's health poorly (Leifels et al., 2021). It could be said that poor work well-being has often negative effects on an individual's health. However, freedom at work, professional growth, application of expertise and peer encouragement have been connected to individual's well-being that has the possibility to lead to job satisfaction, engagement to the work and even better health (Albrecht, 2012).

Another factor in work well-being is rewarding. Rewarding employees at the workplace can lead to a positive growth in their work well-being when individuals feel more recognized, motivated, valued and identified (Parent-Lamarche et al., 2019). This fulfillment at work can also involve promotions, job security and career prospects (Parent-Lamarche et al., 2019). In contrast, several studies indicate that job insecurity could signify negative growth on well-being and health (De Witte et al., 2016). Job insecurity could have a negative impact on the employees' engagement to work, satisfaction at work, mental well-being and could even cause burnout and other health problems (De Witte et al., 2016).

Personality traits can be defined according to research (Caprara and Cervone, 2000) as individual's tendencies to react in certain ways in different situations (Parent Lamarche et al., 2019). According to the study there are the Big Five general personality traits (John et al., 2008) that are agreeableness, openness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and extraversion (Parent-Lamarche et al., 2019). A person's personality traits affect how people behave in all the aspects of their lives and therefore also affect one's well-being in general and at work. Studies (Ferguson, 2010; Roberts and Delvecchio, 2000; Soldz and Vaillant, 1999) have also shown that the personality traits maintain consistent over

longer periods of time even though some studies (Roberts et al., 2006,2008) also discuss that some traits might change throughout a person's life span (Parent Lamarche et al., 2019).

There is a difference between employees who are truly willing to take on international assignments and those who are compelled to do so (Pinto et al., 2012). Often forcing or compelling people to do something might cause some problems, so it is important to know the reason behind the employee's decision to go on an international assignment. The difference between someone who is obligated to do something and someone who is doing it from a genuine interest can be significant.

### **2.3.1 Work and family**

The interference of work and family has been typically studied from the role stress theory perspective (Greenhaus &Beutell, 1985) which suggests that managing several roles such as employee, spouse and parent can be seen as demanding and to inevitably generate conflicts and strains between the demands coming from family and work (Kinnunen et al., 2006, p. 149). In contrast to this the role enhancement theory argues that having several different roles gives more resources and opportunities for individual growth and helps to operate better in other parts of life (Kinnunen et al., 2006, p. 149). Work and family relations can have both negative and positive effects on an individual. According to the study of Kinnunen et al. (2006) the focus is typically on the negative side but there should be more focus also on the positive side of things as well.

The tension between family and work life is not beneficial for neither families nor organizations (Andres et al., 2012, p. 758). Project work might imply family separation which is likely to signify at least some level of conflict between work and family since absence can make it more difficult to meet the family's needs (Andres et al., 2012, p. 758). Providing the project assignees more time with the loved ones, free time and activities can promote better well-being (Andres et al., 2012, p. 758). It has been demonstrated that

providing family friendly environments can improve both organizational outcomes and employee well-being (Andres et al., 2012, p. 758).

### **2.3.2 Multicultural teams**

Cultural diversity (Erez et al., 1993) signifies the differences in the knowledge structure of the members of the team and it reflects the differences they have in values, behavioral patterns and cognition (Lisak et al. , 2016). Cultural diversity (Dahlin, Weingart, & Hinds, 2005; Durand & Jacqueminet, 2015; Erez, 2010; Hind, Liu & Lyon, 2011; Stahl & Tung, 2014) includes also cultural differences in task design and task associated experiences (Lisak et al., 2016). When teams have members from many different cultures, they can be considered culturally diverse.

Multicultural teams are formed out of individuals that have a different cultural background (Bouncken et al., 2016). According to the research of Barinaga (2007, p. 316) performing in culturally heterogenous groups is different in comparison to homogenous groups. The study of Barinaga (2007, p. 316) states that these differences might affect group productivity, individual's effectiveness, decision-making, group cohesiveness, creativity and more. Working on international project assignments might oftentimes involve working with people from different cultures.

At times multicultural teams might also face some obstacles caused by their differences (Bouncken et al., 2016). Common difficulties these teams might face could be related to their communication and working styles that often differ in different cultures (Bouncken et al., 2016). However, Stahl et al. (2010) highlight in their study that culturally diverse teams do not only have negative effects but also positive effects. The study argues that the positive affects should be studied moreover. For instance multicultural teams might positively contribute to the communication, creativity and satisfaction (Stahl et al., 2010).

Something to remember is that the individuals might behave differently even according to their own national culture and have own personal ways of behavior (Bouncken, Brem

& Kraus, 2016). Learning about cultural differences is a valuable tool in making it easier to communicate with people from different cultures, though everyone should be treated as an individual.

### **2.3.3 Support and organizational support**

The organizational support theory demonstrates the relationship between the employee and the employer regarding social exchange (Baran et al., 2012, p. 123). Perceived organizational support theory (POS) (Eisenberger et al. 1986; Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002) refers to the level of which the employees feel that the organization that they work in cares about their well-being and values their contributions (Baran et al., 2012, p. 123). There is a significant interest in the POS theory in the academic world which could be explained due to its relevance across different occupational contexts, its strong connection to the organizational support theory, its connection between organizationally significant results in citizenship turnover and behavior and its greatly dependable measurement (Baran et al., 2012, p. 123).

The study by Stroppa et al. (2011, p.234) suggests that companies have to be willing and prepared to support the assignees on their international assignments. The research discusses that if companies do not provide sufficient support to the international assignees there exists a high risk that these assignees will experience stress and might be incapable of working effectively. Some difficulties might arise due to the big cultural distance between the home country and host country or due to the lack of appreciation at home country (Stroppa et al., 2011, p.234-235).

Various studies show a positive connection between social support at work and well-being (Stroppa et al., 2011, p. 235). Stroppa et al. (2011, p. 235) states that social support is a primary need meaning that people have a need to be and work in a social group. Companies should aim to support already existing social groups, for example co-workers and family to make sure that the expatriate does not want to return home early due to relationship problems or dissatisfaction (Stroppa et al., 2011, p. 234-235).

#### **2.3.4 Daily recovery from work**

According to Oerlemans et al. (2014) daily recovery from work seems to be in a pivotal role in sustaining a high level of well-being (Demerouti et al., 2009) and performance (Binnewies et al., 2009). Recovery from work could be determined as the process in which the employee's functioning returns to the pre-stressor level and work-connected tension is reduced (Oerlemans et al., 2014, p. 199).

Some off-job activities improve employee well-being. Weekends, holidays and free evenings can briefly relieve workers from job-related efforts (Meijman & Mulder, 1998) since they provide an opportunity to participate in different types of activities (Oerlemans et al., 2014, p. 199). As opposed to this, being busy with thoughts that are related to work drains energy from the individual which might negatively affect individual health (De Jonge et al., 2012, p.325).

#### **2.3.5 Health and safety**

According to Hughes et al. (2021) occupational safety and health are principal to all organizations and all business, industry and commerce branches involving traditional industries, offices, hospitals, schools, care homes, IT companies and universities. All aspects of work are affected by occupational safety and health (Hughes et al., 2021). Hughes et al. (2021) define occupational safety as protecting individuals from physical injuries and occupational health as protecting individuals' minds and bodies from illnesses caused by procedures, materials and processes utilized at work.

Di Fabio (2017) presents in their study how work is in a pivotal role in well-being and health of the employees (Sparks et al., 2001). An important question of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is how to generate healthier societies by promoting healthy organizations (Di Fabio, 2017). According to Tamers et al. (2020) physical work environment affects organizational performance and employee well-being. Nutrious food options and

exercise opportunities can affect positively psychological and physical health (Tamers et al., 2020, p. 1067).

## **2.4 Job Demands-Resources model**

The job demands-resources (J D-R) model is an important framework that aims to give an understanding on how the job characteristics foster worker well-being (Lesener et al., 2019). According to the job demand-resources model, working conditions can be classified into two different categories, which are job demands and job resources (Demerouti et al., 2001). Even though different occupations might possess specific risk factors, the J D-R model can be applied to them (Bakker et al., 2007). According to the research of Demerouti et al. (2001) job demands and job resources describe the organizational, physical and social aspects of the work. The following chapter 2.4.1 discusses job demands and chapter 2.4.2 discusses job resources.

### **2.4.1 Job demands**

Job demands refer to the organizational, social, physical and psychological features of the work that demand psychological or physical skills or efforts and that are linked with specific psychological or physiological costs (Bakker et al., 2007). These costs could be exhaustion, emotionally demanding interactions with clients, work pressure and unsuitable physical environment (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker et al., 2007). Negative costs caused by job demands also include burnout, anxiety and depression (Schaufeli et al., 2004). Bakker et al. (2007) states that job demands are not automatically negative although they can become job stressors if meeting those requirements demands a great deal of effort and from which the worker is not able to recover sufficiently. It is important that an individual knows how to cope with their job demands since not being able to cope with the job demands can affect poorly individual well-being.

### **2.4.2 Job resources**

Job resources refer to the social, psychological, organizational and physical features of the work (Schaufeli et al., 2004). These features either help to achieve work goals, decrease the job demands and psychological and physiological costs that are linked to those demands or boost personal development, growth and learning (Schaufeli et al., 2004). Bakker et al. (2007) highlight that the job resources are not only significant since they help coping with the job demands but the resources are important even as their own. The job resources are linked with Hobfoll's Conservation of resources (COR) theory since the COR theory states that primary human motivation is towards the increase and maintenance of resources (Bakker et al., 2007). The COR theory was previously introduced in this research. Job resources are for example emotionally supportive colleagues, control at work, performance feedback and being part of decision making (De Jonge et al., 2012; Schaufeli et al., 2004). Fostering job resources is important since they can help cope with job demands and having job resources can boost individual well-being.

### **2.4.3 Outcomes of Job Demands-Resources model**

Schaufeli et al. (2004) state that having certain job demands such as work conflicts, work overload and having a lack of certain resources missing such as social support and decision involvement, forecasts burnout. This might also cause other negative outcomes such as absenteeism, physical illness, decreased commitment to organization and turnover (Schaufeli et al., 2004). The J D-R model also proves that job demands, for instance time pressure, shift work and physical demands, are linked to exhaustion (Schaufeli et al., 2004). The absence of some job resources, for example social support, feedback on performance, being part of decision making and job control is linked with disengagement (Schaufeli et al., 2004).

Research (e.g., Demerouti et al., 2001; Karasek & Theorell, 1990) suggests that if the employees do not have enough job resources (e.g. social support at workplace and job

control) to manage their job demands, it might lead to low performance and poor health (De Jonge et al., 2012, p.322). In disadvantageous work situations referring to situations where job resources are low, and job demands are high, detaching oneself from work would positively affect the health of the individual (De Jonge et al., 2012, p.322). Situations where there is a surplus of accessible cognitive job resources can lead to creativity and learning at work (De Jonge et al., 2012, p.326).

## **2.5 Theoretical framework**

The exploration of previous study focused on two things: well-being and international assignments. The previous research provided information on which factors have been found to affect individuals' well-being in general and more specifically on international project assignments. The well-being of international project assignees is affected both by general factors influencing individuals well-being such as personality traits and the support they receive, and by specific factors unique to international project assignments such as adapting to a different culture and distance from family. The previous research demonstrates the need for further study and presented the already existing theory. The theoretical framework illustrates the chosen theories and models and defines the reasons on why this model was chosen for this study.

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in the job demands-resources theory which provides a way to examine how various job demands resources affect international project assignee well-being. Working on international project assignments can provide special opportunities and challenges. By using the J D-R theory it could be possible to find explanations on how different factors such as pressure, social support and contact with family affect the international project assignee well-being. The job demands can have decreasing effects on international project assignees' well-being and job resources can have increasing effects on international project assignees' well-being.

### **3 Research methods**

This chapter of research methods will first introduce the chosen case organization. Relevant information about the case organization and its operations will be shared. Secondly the chosen qualitative research method will be shared. Thirdly the data collection and analysis will be explained. Fourthly the ethical considerations of this study are presented. Lastly this chapter will shortly discuss the validity and reliability of this study.

#### **3.1 Case organization**

Due to confidentiality and privacy reasons, no specific information such as name can be revealed on the case organization. However, some relevant background information can be shared. The case organization is in the field of automatization and robotics. This company focuses on designing, programming and assembling robots for its clients around the world.

The chosen organization has several different country units on different continents and in addition to these international offices the organization partakes in numerous different projects in different countries worldwide. The company's operations are spread to six different continents. The company employs around 500 employees globally. A great number of the employees of the case organization travel for work, and it is common practice in the company for its workers to go on international assignments.

Typically, the international project assignees, the case organization sends on international project assignments, are working on these international projects assembling robots for the customers. This signifies that the international project assignees go to a different type of work environment since the international assignment is not in the organization's own facilities. The organization might not be even aware of all the things happening at the project site since it is on the customer company's site.

The case organization qualifies its assignees slightly differently compared to the categorizing in previous theory and research that was introduced in chapter 2.2. The case organization has project assignees on short-term project assignments and long-term assignments. These differ in the length of the assignment, meaning that typically the short-term project assignments are assignments that last for around three weeks in the destination country after which the assignee will return to the home country for some weeks. After some weeks in the home country, the project assignees normally go back to the project assignment and this pattern repeats. The short-term project assignees might return to the same location, or they might go to a new location.

On the other hand, in the case organization long-term project assignments are usually for projects that might last for more than a year. In these cases, the project assignees can spend a few months in a row at the international project site abroad. After a few months, the assignees get to visit their home country for a few weeks on holiday. Following this visit to the home country, the project assignee returns to the same international project site.

Even though the assignment types of the case organization differ partly from the previous theory that was introduced in this study in terms of the assignment length there are still many qualifications that match the theory of Schaffer et al. (2012) on short-term assignments. For instance, the international project assignments of the case organization are normally without family, technology/ skill transfer, shorter than standard corporate expatriate assignments but longer than business trips, flexible, possible disadvantages of relationship issues and stress and include 1 or several countries. These qualifications from Schaffer et al.'s (2012) short-term assignments match the assignments in the case organization. Since the qualifications of Schaffer et al. (2012) short-term assignment match so closely with the case organizations both assignment types, that is the reason behind including Schaffer et al.'s (2012) short-term assignment definition to this study.

Both assignee types typically spend around 200 to 300 days on international project assignments and therefore were interviewed for the purposes of this research. Even if the assignment type might vary inside the organization, the assignees still spend around the same time on assignments annually. The difference is typically the length of the assignment and usually also the short-term international project assignees might go to a few different project sites and locations in the same year whereas the long-term project assignees tend to work at the same project site. Due to the recognizability of the participants in this research, the specific assignment type is not clarified. Notably, the participants might have experience of both short-term and long-term international project assignments which would have made it difficult for the answers to focus only on one type of assignment type. However, the international assignees from the case organization that participated in this study have been only on international project assignments and not on office assignments.

All the international assignees chosen from the case organization have been to many different countries and therefore discuss their experiences in the variety of countries they have been to on international project assignments. Another thing to mention is that typically the international project assignees are not alone in the project assignments. In most cases they have their coworkers from the same case organization with them on international project assignments. However, there might be moments when an international project assignee is temporarily the only project assignee from the case organization.

### **3.2 Qualitative research approach**

Qualitative research applies a naturalistic approach aiming to give reason to a phenomenon in a specific context meaning that the research aims to provide a more real-life setting to the research (Golafshani, 2003, p. 600). In other words, qualitative research intends to explore and explain the nature and quality of people's behavior, understanding and experiences (Alshenqeeti, 2014, p. 39). As explained in the article of Goladshani (2003, p. 600) where quantitative researchers look for generalization of

findings, causal determination and prediction, qualitative researchers on the other hand look for understanding, illumination and extrapolation of similar situations.

The qualitative research method was chosen for this research since this study wants to specifically study the real-life situations and well-being of the international project assignees. The aim was to get to hear from the project assignees themselves how would they consider their well-being was. The qualitative research provides an opportunity for the research to go into more depth to the causal connection.

When discussing qualitative, human scientific research, interviews could be associated as the main method to collect data (Englander, 2012, p. 13). According to the research article of Kallio et al. (2016, p. 2955) in qualitative research a common data collection method is specifically semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were chosen for this study since they offer a more relaxed interview atmosphere and allow the interviews to be adapted a bit according to all the interviewees. For example, semi-structured interviews allow follow-up questions to be asked (Kallio et al., 2016, p. 2955). This type of approach was considered suitable since the purpose of this study is to listen to the individuals' experiences and semi-structured interviews provide an opportunity for more relaxed conversation and for the respondents to answer more freely the questions. Semi-structured interviews also provide an opportunity to go deeper into the participants' responses with the help of the follow-up questions.

### **3.3 Data collection and analysis**

The people chosen for the interviews were employees in the case organization and people who have traveled a significant number of times on international project assignments in the last three years. People with the most travels in the year of 2024 were preferred in the process of choosing the candidates. Most of the people who participated were male and most of the participants were Finnish although the interviews also included Indian, Spanish and US citizen. This was due to the reason that most of the assignees are male and Finnish in the case organization. The research aimed to be as inclusive as

possible. The interviews were conducted both in Finnish and English and all interviews were held online.

The interviewees were from different age groups and interviewees were roughly between 25 and 65 years old. The experiences of the participants varied a lot with some having more than 20 years of experience and some having less than 5 years of experience. As the age and experience of the participants varied widely, the study was able to provide a broad view of the well-being of international project assignees. Age and experience were considered to be factors affecting the well-being of the interviewees on international project assignments.

The interviewees had worked on international assignments in Europe, Asia, Africa and North America. This means that the cultural settings have varied greatly. For the purpose of this research twelve employees from the case organization were interviewed. The interviewees' job role was either a team member or a supervisor. Table 2 demonstrates the sample characteristics of this study.

**Table 2.** Sample characteristics

| <b>Code</b> | <b>Job role</b> | <b>Experience on international project assignments</b> |
|-------------|-----------------|--|
| ID01        | Team member     | Less than 5 years                                      |
| ID02        | Team member     | Less than 5 years                                      |
| ID03        | Team member     | Less than 10 years                                     |
| ID04        | Supervisor      | More than 20 years                                     |
| ID05        | Supervisor      | More than 20 years                                     |
| ID06        | Supervisor      | More than 20 years                                     |
| ID07        | Team member     | Less than 5 years                                      |
| ID08        | Supervisor      | More than 20 years                                     |
| ID09        | Supervisor      | Less than 10 years                                     |
| ID10        | Supervisor      | Less than 5 years                                      |

|      |             |                   |
|------|-------------|-------------------|
| ID11 | Team member | Less than 5 years |
| ID12 | Team member | Less than 5 years |

All the interviews were conducted between December 2024 and January 2025. The length of the interviews varied between 35 minutes and 1 hour and 40 minutes. The length of the interviews depended on the participants' willingness to share things and experiences with the interviewer. All the participants gave their permission to be interviewed and recorded. All respondents also gave permission for the interviewer to use their answers in this study.

The interview questions were made so that interviewees would have the opportunity to discuss some of the important issues around well-being while also having the opportunity to talk relatively freely about how they experienced their well-being. The question pattern of the interviews included 15 questions related to either well-being or international project assignments. The interview questions can be found in Appendix 1. The interview followed mostly the question pattern but sometimes the order of the questions changed a bit according to the situation of each interview. The interviewer asked additional and further questions according to each situation.

The aim was to make each interview as natural as possible. The interviewees were also provided with the framework of the questions prior to the interview and informed that if they wished they could have a look at the questions before the interview. They were also reminded that this is only the framework for the questions and additional questions may also be asked. Several additional questions were asked in each interview.

To analyze the data of this thesis an interpretative phenomenological analysis was conducted. An interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) combines ideas from hermeneutics and phenomenology which results in a descriptive method (Pietkiewicz, et al., 2014, p.8). According to Pietkiewicz et al. (2014) IPA lets things speak for themselves by how they appear and is interpretative since the method understands that it would be impossible to uninterpret a phenomenon. The aim of an IPA is to examine how people

self-interpret their own experiences (Pietkiewicz, et al., 2014, p.8). This way of analyzing the data fits well the purposes of this study since the aim is to focus on the interview participants.

The data analysis of this study focuses on referring to and analyzing the things that the interviewees have highlighted in the interviews to be important for their well-being. In the analysis process it is understood that all the findings are participants' personal experiences. The answers should not be generalized and seen as only possible outcomes since if there would have been different respondents, the answers could have been different. Instead, the outcomes will be just a reflection of the participants' own perceptions and experiences.

The interviews were recorded in Microsoft Teams. The interviews were also automatically transcribed by using Microsoft Teams' artificial intelligence. After the interviews, the transcripts were read by the interviewer and typed up again in case there were some mistakes. Following this the transcripts were read again and the next step included spotting the themes and patterns that appeared in the interviews. Finally, the connection between the themes was explored and analyzed.

### **3.4 Ethical considerations**

The interviewee candidates were contacted and informed via email about the research and interviews. All the participants could freely choose whether they wanted to participate in the interview or not. No one was forced to participate. The interviewees were given information about the research, its confidentiality and GDPR. All the participants were introduced to how their data would be handled throughout the research process. All of the participants signed a consent form giving their permission for the research. All participants were also given the opportunity to withdraw their approval at any time of the research process.

All the data from the interviews was handled according to privacy standards and respecting the anonymity of each participant. The aim of the study was to honor the privacy of the participants at all times. The findings from the interviews are presented in a way that does not disclose any private matters of individuals.

Interviewees were given quite a lot of freedom to talk about their own experiences and no one was forced to talk about something they did not feel comfortable sharing. However, if participants chose to tell something more personal, that will strictly be kept between the interviewer and the interviewee.

### **3.5 Considerations related to the implementation of this research**

According to Rose et al. (2020, p. 435) validity describes the process of establishing the accuracy of the findings from the researchers, participants or readers of the study. Rose et al. (2020, p. 435) state in their study that research that is considered more trustworthy is more likely to make a difference. Therefore this study aims to be as trustworthy as possible to be able to provide the highest trustworthiness to be able to make an impact. Throughout the writing process of this thesis, ChatGPT was used to support language revision.

Similar studies can be easily reproduced since all the information about qualitative research is provided. For instance, the interview questions are provided in the appendices of this research, and the chosen analysis method IPA was introduced. In addition, this research describes what type of case organization and interviewees were chosen for the purposes of this research. It is possible to replicate this study in a similar setting or even in a very different setting.

One limitation to this study could be due to the fact that the respondents were only chosen from one case company. It could be intriguing to interview people from different organizations to see if the findings would differ from this study. Another limitation to credibility could be also due to the fact that some of the interviews were conducted in

English and some in Finnish. Since the findings of the Finnish interviews had to be translated for the purposes of this study it might provide a challenge to this study. However, the data from the Finnish interviews was being translated as accurate as possible not to modify the findings of this study. Finally, one limitation could be due to the relatively small sample size of 12 interviewees. Conceivably it would be beneficial to interview a larger group of people to have even more accurate findings.

Further studies could intend to interview a larger group of people internationally. Also, when possible, more females could be included in the interviews since the majority of the interviewees of this study were male. This research could be also applied to different groups of people, for example to people that go on international office assignments since these people also change their location and work abroad. Similar or even different issues with well-being might arise.

## 4 Research findings

In this section of the research, the research findings from the interviews are presented. Many themes became repetitive in the interviews, and it was evident that many of the participants had had similar experiences about their well-being on international project assignments. The repetitive themes found were closely linked and provided answers to the research question of what affects international project assignee's well-being on international assignments in the context of the case organization. The first part 4.1 of the findings includes a general description of how the international project assignees considered their well-being. Following that the main findings of this research are categorized into job demands affecting international project assignee well-being and job resources affecting project assignee well-being.

### 4.1 Project assignee well-being on international assignments

First the interviewees were asked about how they viewed their well-being and if they would consider that they had good well-being. Most of the participants viewed their well-being on international assignments as good. Participant ID12 considered their well-being on international project assignments great and did not think that the international project assignments affected negatively their well-being. The participant ID12 described the following:

*“Generally, my well-being is really good. Ninety-eight percent of the time it is nice (being on international assignments) and then the 2 percent (not) is an exception... It's just normal. It's part of working life. Sometimes you have worse days.”*

It could be seen that the interviewees were quite realistic about their well-being in general and what it could and should be. In general, it could be seen that these people do not ask for extravagant things. Instead, the participants considered the normal everyday things to be important.

Some thought that being on international project assignments has affected really positively their well-being. Some of the findings showed that some of the respondents considered they had grown as people and that the international project assignments had improved their well-being. Participants ID11 described their well-being on international project assignments as follows:

*“It is good to see the world and all kinds of people. It (being on international project assignments) has made me grow as a person. My nerves have gotten stronger, and my positive attitude is getting stronger by the day. Overall, very positive experience.”*

However, some participants experienced more difficulties in taking care of their well-being on international assignments and described their well-being as varying a lot based on the situation and other factors. For example, participant ID01 thought that their well-being depended a lot on the destination and the accommodation they were in. When being asked to describe their well-being on international assignments the respondent ID01 explained as follows:

*“It (well-being) of course varies a lot. I would say that generally quite good. The outside factors affect it a lot. Maybe as most important the hotel or accommodation. It affects how it is after work hours and how you bounce back to the next day. But in general, I would say that it (well-being) has been okay.”*

In fact, all of the interviewees considered it to be extremely important where they lived during the international assignment. Many of the respondents highlighted that having a home like living situation made them feel better well-being. Overall, the majority of the respondents considered their well-being to be good even though there is always room for improvement.

## 4.2 Job demands affecting international project assignee well-being

This section will present the job demands that were found to affect the international project assignee's well-being. As introduced in Chapter 2.4.1, the theory on job demands is reflected in the interview findings which revealed job demands of pressure, communications issues, lack of routine, challenges in adapting to a new culture, health and safety concerns and feeling of stress and uncertainty. These job demands were found to be the most significant for the participants and they became repetitive in the interviews. The previous research of Bakker et al. (2007) states that job demands are not automatically negative factors to well-being although they can become job stressors if meeting those job demands requires a great deal of effort and from which the worker is not able to recover sufficiently. Based on the interviews, the job demands identified had a negative impact on the well-being of international project assignees, as the respondents felt that these demands negatively affected their well-being.

### 4.2.1 Pressure

Many participants considered that they were experiencing pressure in their job. Some of the responders contemplated that pressure affected their well-being negatively. The international project assignees experienced pressure, for example due to tight project schedules. ID03 mentioned that there exists a lot of pressure in this work. They described it as:

*“This kind of travel work is personally more intense and demanding for me. The work itself is nice but there is a lot of pressure. “*

Having the support from the headquarters was highlighted to be very important for the international project assignees. Having support from the organization can help deal with the pressure. The participants thought that effective communication can help immensely with the pressure they face on the projects. Interviewee ID03 stated as follows:

*“Having headquarters support is very important... It would be good to have more understanding (at the headquarters) of the fact that it is demanding to be here (on the international project site) and there is a lot of pressure. Having fast responses and giving purposive answers is important.”*

Customer behavior could also cause pressure to the participants. Many respondents mentioned the customer’s behavior also affecting their well-being. In the cases that were mentioned by the interviewees, the customer’s behavior had negative effects on the well-being of the international project assignees. ID11 described it as:

*“If the customer is being tricky and creates this like extra hassle or inconvenience in the long run it is going to affect well-being poorly... With time it can get on the nerves.”*

Some thought that the pressure created stress and further affected their well-being. Participant ID10 mentioned how the unfamiliar new setting of being on international project assignments on different locations and project sites can cause pressure and stress. However, participant ID10 did not consider it entirely bad and in fact stated the following:

*“Pressure to perform in unfamiliar settings can create stress. However, it can be an advantage. We can learn some lessons from those. But there is some stress feeling.”*

Notable was that some of the respondents thought that they handled the pressure well while some others thought they did not cope with the pressure so well. All in all, pressure was something that the respondents considered decreased their well-being. Finding ways to ease the pressure was seen as something that could help the respondents feel better.

#### 4.2.2 Communications issues

Good communication is crucial, but it can be sometimes difficult to maintain strong communication, especially if individuals communicating are far from each other. Some participants felt that they could tell the organization about some things but perhaps in some cases their voice was not heard sufficiently, or actions were not taken towards improving certain things. In some situations, some of the assignees felt that even though they expressed their concerns, they were not taken into account. For example, ID01 described it as follows:

*“If you try to give some improvement ideas, they are not really heard but it is what it is. “*

Sometimes it might be difficult to understand from far what these international project assignees are really experiencing since the organization is not present in those moments. When being far from each other just as in this situation where the international project assignees are far from their home office, it might be challenging to communicate effectively. Sometimes, some of the respondents felt that it was difficult to have a common understanding of things when the organization and the participants had different viewpoints. These situations might have even created disagreements. Participant ID04 described this as follows:

*“There are no disagreements very often. Somewhat disagreement sometimes. The way of viewing things might be different in the headquarters compared with the ones out there in the world (on international project assignments). There (on international project assignments) small things might be of greater importance.”*

Based on the interview findings, the respondents considered that insufficient communication and both sides not fully understanding each other lowered their well-being. According to the interviews it was evident that many of the participants hoped that their voice and opinions would be more heard. It appeared that there is still room for

improvement in terms of communication even though in some cases respondents felt that their ideas were heard.

#### **4.2.3 Lack of routine**

Most of the respondents highlighted the importance of routine in their everyday lives. While away from home it is important to establish a clear routine to be able to adjust and feel good in the new location. All 12 respondents considered accommodation as an important factor affecting their well-being. Almost all the participants mentioned that they prefer staying in apartments instead of hotels. The interviewees believed that in the apartments it is easier to feel at home. For example, respondent ID12 said the following:

*“If I can influence the matter, I always prefer to stay in an apartment instead of a hotel. In a place where you can cook and do laundry. A place that has home like circumstances.”*

Being able to do things that one feels familiar with can help in feeling more comfortable. Doing things that make an individual feel comfortable can help in feeling better. Especially when a person has a specific interest or thing they like to do, it can help them with the routine creation. Participant ID05 said as follows:

*“It is quite personal thing what you like for example do you like sport, reading, video games etc.... You try to make the free time as your own space and homey.”*

Sometimes some participants thought that the routine creation was difficult. In cases where it was difficult to form a routine, most of the respondents felt that it affected poorly their well-being. ID02 described the following:

*“If you are in a hotel for a long time, it can burden you because you can not live a normal life. You can't do normal things like cooking or doing laundry. You don't*

*have so to say your own space... In addition, the place where you stay, they should be good quality that you can really stay there."*

Many respondents mentioned the good quality of the accommodation. The respondents did not refer to any fancy accommodation but instead they meant that the normal things should be in order. The respondents considered that problems with accommodation, which resulted often in lack of routine, affected their well-being poorly. This finding was really significant since all the participants agreed on the importance and highlighted how big an effect the accommodation had on their well-being. After a long workday the respondents went back to their accommodation, so it really made a difference whether the respondents felt comfortable in there.

#### **4.2.4 Challenges in adapting to a new culture**

Being in a new culture provides countless new situations where individuals have to adapt. Individuals might be used to completely different things which make it important to learn and be able to adapt to new things and new ways of doing things. The participants of this research have been to many different countries and cultures. As previously mentioned in the methods section of this research, the international project assignees of the case organization have been on international project assignments in many different continents. The continents varied between Europe, Asia, Africa, North America and South America. This variety of locations provides a vast number of different cultures.

When humans encounter new things, it might be difficult to adapt to the newness of those things. Adapting to a different culture can be challenging. Some participants mentioned that they had some trouble adapting to a new culture. While interviewing the participants, they mentioned some things that were particularly difficult for them to adapt to. For example, participant ID10 stated the following:

*"When we are on international assignments, adapting to local healthcare systems, different food options and adjusting to the climate's condition is difficult."*

Working on international project assignments signifies often working within a multicultural team. The customer company's site is likely to have also the customer company's workers or other external workers working on the site. This might mean that people might have to work with people from different countries. Individuals might feel that working with people that come from similar cultural backgrounds is easier and more familiar for them. Some of the respondents thought that there were some cultures where they did not feel like they belonged, or they had more difficulties adapting. Participant ID03 described their own experience as:

*"There are clearly cultures that don't fit with me. For example, Morocco, it is so much about taking contact (with people), it is very different from what I am used to so the culture is involuntarily stressing me out."*

Nevertheless, even if at times it was difficult to adapt to some cultures, all the assignees considered the cultural differences to be interesting and mostly positive. Many participants seemed to be happy having this experience to get to know different cultures. When going to a different culture, culture shocks are quite common and normal. The international assignees that participated in the interviews were asked if they experienced some level of culture shock and some considered that they had experienced culture shocks whereas some did not.

#### **4.2.5 Health and safety concerns**

In general, the respondents considered the safety on international project assignments relatively good. However, being in such a different international environment could cause some concerns to the assignees that they would not have normally in their home country. Some concerns were related to some problems with the accommodation and food hygiene. Respondent ID01 described their concerns as:

*“This feeling of safety that is this food at the hotel hygienic. Can I eat it... Quite often the belly is not fine, and you wonder how the food was made. It is annoying but it is the local life... Better hotels might have it differently... You learn to think what you eat and where.”*

Some participants mentioned that naturally in an international setting there can be different health and safety concerns. The different settings can provide certain risks that a person is not familiar with or used to. Some mentioned that while abroad they have had to be careful not to get any local diseases. While some respondents were more worried about catching a disease, some others did not mention being particularly worried. ID07 described their health concerns as:

*“It depends on the destination country. In India, you know you can get a disease from a mosquito bite. You know of course it depends. I was lucky not to get anything... I thought if I get it then it is what it is.”*

Quite naturally, no one wants to get infected and being abroad the situation can become even more stressful when there is no familiar health care available or if the disease is not something a person is familiar with. Most of the respondents considered that safety and health concerns decreased their well-being. When asked about safety, some respondents stated that they have faced some safety related issues. Some mentioned that especially transportation was not always as safe as they would like. It is quite common that health and safety standards can vary dramatically between different countries. Transportation is something that can vary a lot between different destinations. When asked about their safety concerns on international project assignments, participant ID04 said the following:

*“Traffic is one of those things (that concern me). It is a big deal how the transportation is arranged and how have we been able to go from one place to another at the destination... There are places where you can drive yourself then of course you*

*have to take into account the amount of traffic and things like that... Once a taxi driver told me and my colleague "see those lights? Never go there. People like you never get alive back from there." ... The tourist areas are safe tough."*

Health and safety concerns should be taken especially seriously on international project assignments. Having safety and health concerns had decreasing effects on some participants' well-being. According to the findings, there had been some safety issues in the past, but most of the participants felt that these issues had been solved somehow. Participants considered it important to take care of health and safety issues.

#### **4.2.6 Feeling of stress and uncertainty**

Some interviewees considered themselves to be more prone to stress or anxiety. Being in a stressful, hectic and new environment could cause them to feel more stressed or anxious. All the participants that mentioned being prone to stress thought that it was indeed part of their personality and something that happens even in their home country. Talking about stress and anxiety is not always an easy thing to do. Participant ID09 described it as follows:

*"Mentioning that you have stress, and anxiety was a sign of weakness and stuff... I held more in than what I should have, and I should have probably been a little bit more open about how I felt and what I was going through. I think that probably being that way would have allowed me to cope or process or address, you know a lot of those things to maybe make them less (stressful or anxious)."*

According to the findings, the participants thought that the international project assignments included uncertainty. Participants discussed how things can change quickly on international project assignments. Flexibility and rapid changes are characteristics for international project assignments. Respondent ID02 talked about the feelings that uncertainty creates for them by saying the following:

*“Usually, I stress so little about things. But of course, the uncertainties and changes while being here cause extra work and effort, for example if you need to change the accommodation often or if there is no certainty that you have the accommodation all the time or something like that. All that extra work and uncertainty creates stress and makes me feel unwell.”*

Situations that are not going as previously planned can cause stressful moments. As already mentioned, it is quite common for things to change on international project assignments and the changes can happen even unexpectedly. Whenever things were not going according to plan or if there were delays, it caused several of the participants pressure and stress. ID05 described it as:

*“If the project is not going as planned: if the shippings are not on time, wrong shippings or something unpredictable comes up those of course always cause a little bit of stress... Or maybe it used to stress me more but not so much anymore.”*

The findings from the interviews highlighted how stress and feelings of uncertainty decrease the well-being of some of the respondents. How well respondents considered coping with stress and uncertainty varied between participants. Those who felt less stress considered their well-being better compared to those who felt more stressed or uncertainty.

### **4.3 Job resources affecting international project assignee well-being**

This section of the study will introduce the job resources that affected international project assignee well-being. As introduced in Chapter 2.4.2, the theory on job resources is reflected in the interview findings which revealed job resources of social support, organizational support, personal resources, free time, experience and contact with family. These job resources were found to be the most important for the respondents and they became repetitive in the interviews. According to the research of Bakker et al. (2007) the job resources are not only significant since they help coping with the job demands but

the job resources are important even as their own. Based on the interviews, the job resources identified had a positive impact on the well-being of international project assignees since the respondents felt that having these resources improved their well-being.

#### **4.3.1 Social support**

The participants of this study were asked about the kind of support they received from their supervisors and co-workers and if the support was enough. All the participants of this research considered getting enough support from their coworkers. Nearly all the respondents viewed that having great social support from coworkers and team members is pivotal. Numerous participants thought that having a nice team really made them feel good and boosted their well-being. ID04 stated the following:

*“The team is important because so big part of the time is spent together so it can affect a lot on what type of chemistry there is between people and how people get along... If there is something (challenges with some people), it should be solved fast to try to make the situation calm.”*

When asked about things that brought happiness and satisfaction to the international project assignees, almost all mentioned a good group of coworkers. This supports the findings that the participants feel that they get sufficient support since it is even giving them happiness and satisfaction. Getting joy from being with other people is really important. Participant ID01 illustrated it as follows:

*“The work team we have is really nice. It is nice to be at work (with them). It helps to cope with the working day... Of course, someone has a bad day always and then you need to let them have their own space a bit.”*

According to the interviews, the social support that the respondents received was often not only limited to work related support but also free time and personal support. Many

respondents felt that they could talk about both work and personal things with their team members. When being asked about the support that the international project assignees received from their coworkers, respondent ID11 answered the following:

*“The support I get all in all is positive and it is sufficient. I get support at work and in my free time as well if needed...I can tell my coworkers if I am having a bad day... The majority (of the coworkers) is listening when needed and helping as much as they can.”*

Overall, based on the interviews, the amount of social support that the respondents received was good and mostly sufficient. Having social support boosted the well-being of the participants.

#### **4.3.2 Organizational support**

Based on the interviews it was evident that having the organization’s support is important to the assignees. Whereas issues with communication, especially with the organization, were considered to affect the well-being of the respondents negatively, receiving organizational support clearly had a positive effect on respondents’ well-being. When being asked about the support that they received from the organization and whether it was enough respondent ID09 answered as follows:

*“I would say mostly it was sufficient. I felt like they did a good job of preparing me for the projects, providing me with the documentation and things that I was going to need to do the job. I felt like for the most part, I was given adequate notification on projects and when I’d be leaving... As far as communication, I thought that they did a very good job communicating with me for the most part. Making sure that, any of the issues that I had, that they were trying to address them.”*

Many participants felt that when they needed help and support, they could get it. Respondent ID06 talked about the good support they received from the organization and

that they could always get help and support when they needed it. They stated the following:

*“We have a backup team that is supporting. It is not 24 hours a day obviously, but we get support every minute that we need. We can call people. Meetings, videos, phone calls. The issue can be solved easily, you know, between the whole team. Brainstorming and the problem can be solved in 2 minutes... At least for me, I don’t have any complaints (with organizational support). It’s a big organization behind that is supporting and trying to solve everyone’s problems.”*

Many respondents considered that they were getting sufficient support from their organization. It was apparent that while the participants were on international project assignments, receiving support from the organization was something that made the respondents have better well-being. In addition, in situations where the organization’s support was not as good as some of the participants had hoped, it had decreasing effects on their well-being as previously mentioned in the chapter about communication issues.

### **4.3.3 Personal resources**

When an individual decides to take on international project assignments it would be beneficial that the individual would have some personality traits that help them cope and handle all the pressure and new challenges that the international project assignments might pose. Having certain personality traits or way of being might make it easier for some to work on international project assignments than for some others. Some participants mentioned that this kind of international project work is quite special work so to be able to do this job, one should really like it. Respondent ID12’s statement really supported these findings by saying that to do this kind of international project work, you really have to like doing it. They stated the following:

*“You don’t do this kind of job if you don’t like it. It’s kind of a way of living and it differs so much from normal 8 to 4 schedule.”*

Other participants seemed to also like the way of living that the international project assignments provided them. Based on the interviews some respondents believed that they have certain characteristics that make it easier for them to do this kind of job. One respondent highlighted how international project assignees have a specific personality trait of adaptability. Participant ID06 said as follows:

*“(International project assignees) are people that have a level of adaptability higher than others. Many people don’t resist this kind of job because they have roots or connections so tight at home that they can’t leave that small place. I never had this problem.”*

Based on these findings, it could be said that having some personality traits might affect positively how individuals adapt to this kind of job. According to the findings, having some personality traits and personal resources might help in having better well-being on international project assignments.

#### **4.3.4 Free time**

According to the interviews, the participants really considered free time to be very important for them. Based on the interview findings it was clear that quality free time really boosted the respondents’ well-being. While on international project assignments the interviewees work typically from Monday to Saturday so that from Monday to Friday, they work ten hours a day and on Saturdays eight hours. Even though the assignees work long hours on international projects they feel like that is what they are there to do. The majority of the respondents thought the long working hours to be okay. Participant ID03 shared their view on the matter:

*“Once I am on an international assignment, I am personally prepared to work long hours since it is part of this job... The work hours are not too much.”*

On the other hand, some interviewees mentioned that it would be great to have more free time. However, the interviewees did not consider having free time to be the same everywhere. Some international project destinations appeared to be more attractive than some others. The location and surroundings had an impact on this. Some locations provide more free time opportunities. Interviewee ID07 expressed the following:

*“It depends on the destination but of course it would be nice to have more free time if you can do something at the destination... It would be nice to get to spend more time there but then on the other hand in some destination it is just being in the hotel room... That is not necessarily a good thing either. “*

The respondents argued that having less free time, long working hours and only one free day a week makes it sometimes difficult to take care of basic things such as doing laundry (work clothes and non-work clothes) or shopping for food. The participants thought that having free time is not only about having free time but about having quality free time. If an individual does not feel that the time after work is truly free time for them, then it is not recovery time. Respondent ID02 articulated as follows:

*“It is not necessary to have more free time here. The bigger question is that the free time we have would be real free time and not taking care of job-related stuff.”*

The participants considered it important to be able to do things in their free time that give them joy. All the respondents expressed that being able to do nice things in their free time affected positively their well-being. Participant ID11 described it as:

*“It brightens you up to go around a little bit and see what is around. You maybe see places that otherwise you wouldn’t... It is nice to do sightseeing and visit museums in your free time. “*

Being able to do things in one's free time that one enjoys was seen as extremely important. When asked about free time, all the respondents considered it to be valuable. Some even responded that having free time and being able to do and experience things in a different country to be one of the reasons behind them going on international project assignments. Participant ID09 illustrated this as:

*“One of the reasons that I committed to the longer stays (assignments) was the fact that I wanted to kind of throw myself into the culture and really have the opportunity to see, you know, how the people lived and how the countryside was and the things.”*

Some participants also noticed that they started enjoying and doing different things on their free time since perhaps it was not possible to practice the hobbies they used to practice at home. Respondent ID09 mentioned that they started to enjoy reading and writing as they did not have the chance to go hiking or bike riding. The new setting provided opportunities for new interests.

#### **4.3.5 Experience**

Some of the participants had over 20 years of experience whereas some others had less than 5 years of experience on international project assignments. It became clear in the interviews that experience affected how the respondents experienced things and situations. A participant, ID04, with over 20 years of experience on international project assignments voiced the following:

*“When I first started doing this, I felt really excited like it had this novelty appeal, and it felt great to be on an international trip. Then the responsibility hit me. There were times when I could not sleep since I was thinking about things... Now with experience everything has become calmer. Things will go the way they will go.”*

Experience can help individuals to deal with job demands more effectively. With experience certain situations might be familiar and the individual might know how to manage some situations better when it is not their first time facing certain situations. Participant ID12 suggested that their life experience helped in having good well-being when being on international assignments. They also mentioned that the good mental space they were in helped their well-being. They stated the following:

*“I believe that being in good shape mentally and also my life experience helped me to feel good whilst being on international assignments.”*

Four of the participants had more than 20 years of experience in international assignments. It is apparent that all those years of experience affect how they view these international assignments. Many of them believed that since they have done this for so long, they know how to handle it. Respondent ID06 said that when you have been living this type of life for long time, it becomes your normality. They described it as follows:

*“You know when you start very young, the body, the brain and the rhythm of life it becomes like a normal thing, a routine. You go out, you come home, you go out and you come home.”*

Based on the interviews, it could be said that the respondents with many years of experience believed that it helped them cope with everything related to the international project assignments. Also, some believed that not only having experience in the international project assignments but also life experiences in general that have come with age, helped them deal with things related to this kind of work and lifestyle. Some of the participants believed that as they grew older, they were able to handle, for example, the pressures and stress better once they have found a way of doing things that work for them. Based on the findings both experience of international work and of life in general helped the participants have higher well-being.

#### 4.3.6 Contact with family

Being in contact with family was pivotal to many of the respondents. Those interviewees with spouses or kids considered it extremely important to be in contact with their families. Based on the findings from the interviewees it was evident that maintaining a good connection with family improved the well-being of the respondents. Many interviewees also mentioned that having adult children made it easier for the assignees to be far from their families. Some mentioned that when the kids were smaller, things were more difficult. For example, respondent ID08 explained it by saying:

*“When the kids were smaller, I was more concerned. My wife was with the kids... There were many times I thought I was in a completely wrong place, and I should be at home... I have said to all (coworkers) that are with me on the project site that if there is something worrying you at home there are always flights leaving (back to the home country) ... Work is not an obstacle from going back home and figuring things out. It is not nice having something on the back of your mind and it does not disappear without going home.”*

When the international assignees are on international project assignments, some respondents with family felt like there are limited things they can do for their families. Naturally, some participants felt like they could not always be present for their close people. Participant ID02 described it as:

*“Being in contact (with family) is manageable but if there are some little everyday challenges (in the family) it is of course limited what can you do in those situations.”*

Family is seen as a joy in life. Many respondents experienced that international project assignments have affected their family life. It could be noticed that many respondents thought really highly about their families and considered them to be very important for them. Participant ID05 wanted to even encourage their coworkers to spend time with their families by stating the following:

*"I have advised the assignees who don't have family yet or have kids on the way, I have always said that the kids are small only for a little while so then it is worth being at home."*

Some participants highlighted that nowadays with all the technological advancements, being in contact with your family is totally about yourself. Some respondents who had more than 20 years of experience mentioned that in the past the situation was different and more difficult compared to today's situation. Many considered that maintaining a good connection is solely an individual's decision since in today's world there are so many ways to do so. Respondent ID08 stated as follows:

*"Nowadays there is WhatsApp and facetime and everything. It's only about sending a message and saying we should make a little call to see each other's faces. Now it (contact with family) is about yourself. You can't blame anymore the bad phone connections because there is probably no place in the world anymore where you couldn't do a call from."*

Few of the participants felt that doing this type of work affects their life in terms of family. Some mentioned that they can do this type of international project work and be away from their home country because they do not have spouses and kids but then on the other hand, they might feel that they do not have spouses and kids because of their job. It is evident that this job affects individual life and that way also individual well-being. Based on the interview findings, being able to be in contact and feel part of the family's life improved the participants' feeling of well-being.

## **5 Discussions**

This part of the study aims to connect the findings with the theory of this study. The findings have been divided into two groups which are factors decreasing and factors increasing project assignees' well-being on international project assignments. According to the findings of this study, factors decreasing the international project assignee's well-being were found to be pressure, communications issues, lack of routine, challenges in adapting to a new culture, health and safety concerns and feelings of stress and uncertainty. Based on the findings of this research, factors increasing international project assignee's well-being were found to be social support, organizational support, personality traits, free time, experience and contact with family. These findings are further discussed in this chapter. After first discussing these two groups of factors, at the end of this chapter the managerial implications are explored.

### **5.1 Factors decreasing international project assignee's well-being**

Some of the factors that were found in the empirical research had decreasing effects on international project assignee well-being. The factors that were found to decrease the well-being of the international project assignees were pressure, communications issues, lack of routine, challenges in adapting to a new culture, health and safety concerns and feelings of stress and uncertainty.

According to Bakker et al., (2007) job demands refer to the organizational, social, physical and psychological features of the work that demand psychological or physical skills or efforts and that are linked with specific psychological or physiological costs. Bakker et al. (2007) state in their study that the cost of job demands include things such as exhaustion, emotionally demanding interactions with clients and work pressure. The findings of this study included pressure that was caused by work and the respondents considered it affecting their well-being negatively. In this research, the findings align with the previous theory of Bakker et al., (2007) that state that emotionally demanding interactions

with clients can cause decreasing effects on well-being. Some participants considered that feeling clients' pressure affected negatively their well-being.

Previous research argues that work pressure can negatively affect well-being (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker et al., 2007; Schaufeli et al., 2004). The findings of this study agree with the previous research since some of the participants felt that pressure affected negatively their well-being. The reasons behind feeling pressure that were found in the research were tight project schedules. Many respondents mentioned that with good planning it could be possible to reduce some of the pressure. Some participants also argued that organizational support helped them cope with pressure. Effective communication and understanding of the situation can decrease the pressure and make the situation easier to cope with.

According to the findings of this study, there were some communication challenges. Based on the interviews it would be beneficial if both the international project assignees and the organization could communicate more effectively so that their viewpoints would become clearer to each other. Creating good communication and understanding would be pivotal in improving communication and bettering the overall relationship between the organization and international project assignees.

The findings show that many respondents thought that when they are on the international project assignments, they see things that the organization might not see. In the case organization's situation, the international project assignees are sent on the customer's project site, so it would be impossible for them to be aware of everything without effective communication with the international project assignees. This makes it even more important to communicate effectively with the international project assignees and take their concerns into account.

Familiar things can help with routine creation. Doing things that give individuals joy or even doing normal things like cooking and laundry can give individuals a sense of

normality and routine. Even if individuals might not specifically like cooking or doing laundry it still might be such a normal pattern for them that it might provide them with calmness and a sense of normal routine. It could be noticed from the interviews of this study that respondents enjoyed doing regular everyday things on international project assignments as well as their hobbies. Based on the findings, having clear routines was something that the respondents of this study considered boosting their well-being.

Another significant thing that was discovered from the interviews of this study was the importance of proper accommodation. Once the international project assignees are abroad, they felt that having comfortable accommodation affected greatly their adaptation to the new location and overall well-being. Significantly all the respondents in this study agreed that that accommodation was one of the top things affecting their well-being. Based on the findings it was evident that making sure that international project assignees are comfortable with their accommodation can really improve their well-being.

The findings of this study demonstrate how some of the respondents of this study felt that it was difficult for them to adapt to some cultures. The research of Bouncken et al. (2016) supports the findings of this study by stating in their research that multicultural teams commonly face difficulties related to the differences in communication or working styles. This might mean that individuals might feel that working with people that come from similar cultural backgrounds is easier and more familiar for them than working with people from completely different cultures.

The challenges in adapting to a new culture were found to decrease the well-being of the respondents of this study. However, the findings also show how some respondents felt it is a positive thing to be in a different culture. The research Stahl et al. (2010) agrees that being part of multicultural teams can also affect positively to creativity and satisfaction. Some respondents felt indeed satisfied with the new challenges that these new cultural settings created. Being able to see the cultural differences as a good thing instead of a barrier helps the individuals feel better.

The findings of this study included some respondents' concerns on the hygiene of the food they were offered on international assignments. The previous research of Tamers et al. (2020, p. 10167) supports the findings since in their study they state that having nutritious food options can affect positively psychological and physical health. Not being able to trust that food is healthy can be stressful for an individual. Having to worry about food can create a feeling of unsafety. Eating food that one feels comfortable eating is important.

Evidently health and safety were important to the participants of this research. Health and safety concerns were found to result negatively on international project assignee's well-being. Di Fabio (2017) supports the findings by mentioning in their study how work is in a pivotal role in well-being and health of the employees (Sparks et al., 2001). In some cases, it would be possible to improve health and safety, but some safety and health issues might be so that they can not be easily solved or that they are not something that the respondent themselves, the organization or the customer could do something about. Nevertheless, in these situations it would be important to find the best ways to manage the health and safety concerns.

Uncertainty on international project assignments is very common. Situations can change fast before, during and even after the international project assignments. The participants thought that at times it was challenging to cope with the uncertainty that the international project assignments pose. The study of Bonache (2005) suggests that individuals must be able to confront a high level of uncertainty once they go on international assignments. The results of this research agree with the theory by stating that individuals who felt that they coped well with uncertainty felt that their well-being was better than those who felt that they struggled with uncertainty.

## 5.2 Factors increasing international project assignees' well-being

While some of the factors decreased the well-being of international project assignees see section 5.1 above, some factors that were found in empirical research increased the well-being of the international project assignees. Parent-Lamarche et al., (2019) state that it is extremely important for organizations to identify what factors have an impact on well-being so that they could enhance those factors that have a positive effect on well-being. That is why this study also aimed to identify the factors improving well-being. The factors that were found to increase the well-being of the international project assignees were social support, organizational support, personality traits, free time, experience and contact with family.

Based on the findings of this thesis, social support was an important factor improving the well-being of the participants. According to the earlier study of Stroppa et al. (2011, p. 235) social support is a primary need meaning that people have a need to be and work in a social group. Since social support is a primary need, it is evident that individuals want to receive social support. Social support includes the support that an individual receives from supervisors and co-workers (Parent-Lamarche et al., 2019). The previous research of Stroppa et al. (2011) also supports the findings by stating that there is a positive connection between social support and well-being. The findings of this study focused especially on the social support that the respondents received from their coworkers. In fact, the respondents of this study considered the coworkers so important, that they felt that their coworkers gave them joy and happiness. The results clearly demonstrated that most of the respondents felt that they had really nice coworkers they enjoyed sharing time with. Feeling this way is important in all workplaces but it is even more important in this special type of work setting of international project work where the international project assignees are far from their homes, friends and families.

The international project assignees spend a great amount of time together on international project assignments and they are typically the only people they know in a location. The international project assignees do not have their own social support network of

friends and family present in the international location, so team members' support gets an even greater value. As the findings highlighted, the social support that the international project assignees receive is oftentimes both work related and free time related. This allows the international project assignees to form a strong bond between each other. In this setting the meaning of social support from coworkers grows its importance even more.

In contrast, the research of Leifels et al. (2021) supports the findings by mentioning that bad work relationships might in fact affect an individual's well-being poorly. The findings of this study focus on good work relationships but however the idea of it being important to solve any possible problems as fast as they arise in order to keep the group's harmony and well-being in good balance, was mentioned to be important. Solving the problems before they get worse could be considered preventive for bad work relationships.

As a result of the interviews, it was evident that having the organization's support was important for the participants of this study. Based on the findings in cases where the respondents felt that they received sufficient support from the organization, they felt that it had positive effects on their well-being. On the other hand, the findings of this thesis also demonstrated that in cases where the support was insufficient or there were communication problems between the respondent and the organization, it had negative effects on respondent's well-being. The study of Stroppa et al. (2011) support these findings by discussing in the research that if companies do not provide sufficient support to the international assignees there exists a high risk that these assignees will experience stress and might be incapable of working effectively.

Previous research states personality traits (Caprara and Cervone, 2000) can be defined as individual's tendencies to react in certain ways in different situations (Parent Larmarche et al., 2019). The findings from this study illustrate that to be able to do this kind of international project work a person should really enjoy doing it. Some respondents of

this study believed it to be beneficial to have certain personality traits to be able to manage and cope with everything that is involved in international project assignments.

A person's personality traits affect how they behave in all the aspects of their lives and therefore also affect one's well-being in general and at work. According to the findings, having some personality traits and personal resources might help in having better well-being on international project assignments. Some respondents considered themselves really positive, open to experience new things and not prone to stress, which made it easier for them to cope with the stress and uncertainty that the international project work exposed them to.

Personality traits are something that come from the inside and therefore can not really be influenced by for example the organization. If a person is a certain way, it is usually something that stays the same for a long time. Studies (Ferguson, 2010; Roberts and Delvecchio, 2000; Soldz and Vaillant, 1999) have shown that the personality traits maintain consistent over longer periods of time even though some studies (Roberts et al., 2006, 2008) also discuss that some traits might change throughout a person's life span (Parent Lamarche et al., 2019). Even if some personality traits could be changed over time only the person themselves could decide if they want to be different. However, it would be beneficial that in the selection process the organization would be aware of what type of person they are sending on the international project assignments. Based on the findings it was clear that those participants that were more prone to stress, did not cope so well with uncertainty and had difficulties in adapting to a new culture, had harder time feeling good on international project assignments.

The findings of this study showed that quality free time improved the well-being of the participants. Free time was something that the respondents valued and found important. Having free time helped the assignees recover from work-connected tensions. The study of Oerlemans et al. (2014) also supports this by determining recovery from work as the process in which the employee's functioning return to the pre-stressor level and work-

connected tension is reduced. For the respondents, it was fundamental that they were able to do nice things in their free time and be able to disconnect from work related thoughts.

The respondents argued that having less free time, long working hours and only one free day a week made it sometimes difficult to take care of basic things such as doing laundry (work clothes and non-work clothes) or shopping for food. The research of De Jonge et al. (2012) supports these findings by discussing in their study that being busy with job-related thoughts drains energy from the individual which might negatively affect individual health. Having free time is not only about having free time but about having quality free time. If an individual does not feel that the time after work is truly free time for them, then it is not recovery time. The findings show that even though the participants only have one free day a week, they did not think that they would need more free time, they just needed it to be good quality free time.

The amount of experience that the respondents of this study had varied a lot. Some participants had less than 5 years of experience on international project assignments whereas some had over 20 years of experience. The findings of this study showed that the more experienced the participants were, the better they experienced their well-being. This was due to the reason that the respondents with more experience on international project assignments and experience in life in general helped them cope with some situations that the international project assignments setting provided. Experience can help individuals deal with job demands more effectively since an individual might be more aware of themselves and be more familiar with certain situations to be able to handle them.

Even though experience was found to have a positive effect on the international project assignee well-being, the lack of experience did not automatically mean that the respondents felt their well-being was worse than those with experience. Having more experience tended to increase well-being but having less experience did not automatically signify

decreased well-being. Experience is something that comes with time and it is not possible to speed up the process of getting experience. It is just something that happens naturally with time. Compared with the other findings, experience and personality traits are something that can not be easily modified.

The previous research of Andres et al. (2012) states that since project work might imply family separation it is likely to signify at least some level of conflict between work and family since absence can make it more difficult to meet the family's needs. The findings of this study align with the previous research of Andres et al. (2012). The respondents of this study considered it difficult sometimes to be far from their families and not being able to be there for their families when they need them. As mentioned in the theoretical part of this study, providing the project assignees more time with the loved ones can promote better well-being (Andres et al., 2012, p. 758). The international project assignees that were interviewed for this study agreed with Andres et al. (2012) statement that spending time with their loved ones affected positively their well-being.

When the international assignees are on international project assignments, some respondents with family felt like there are limited things they can do for their families. In the interviews some participants felt like they could not always be present for their close people and that this caused their well-being to decrease. The research of Andres et al. (2012) supports these findings by stating in their research that family separation and the absence from family can make it more difficult to meet the family's needs. It would be beneficial for the international project assignees to find ways to be as involved in their families' lives as possible even from far since it could really boost their well-being when they feel that they are able to fulfill their families' expectations and wishes.

It could be said that the findings of this study and the previous theory that was presented in this study support each other. However, the findings of this study provided even more insights into the factors affecting the well-being of international project assignees. Understanding the findings of this study could help the case organization understand better

the international project assignee's well-being and be able to assist in improving their well-being.

### **5.3 Managerial implications**

The managerial implication of this study are more specific suggestions for the case organization of this study. However, other organizations with similar operations could benefit from the same or similar suggestions. The managerial implications of this study are significant since this study was conducted by interviewing international project assignees from a chosen case organization. The case organization could really benefit from taking the suggested actions into account and possibly applying them in the future in their operations. This chapter gives ideas on what could be done by the case organization to improve the well-being of the international project assignees while they are on international project assignments.

It is pivotal to take the findings of this thesis into account when considering the well-being of international project assignees in the case organization. The findings of this thesis will give the case organization an idea and understanding of the state of the well-being of their international project assignees at the moment of the interviews. This section will aim to make future suggestions on how the case organization could improve the well-being of their international project assignees based on the findings of this study.

Being able to improve the job demands that affected negatively international project assignee's well-being is pivotal. Something that the organization could do to improve the well-being of international project assignees would be finding ways to decrease the pressure that international project assignees are facing. The organization could try to improve participant well-being by improving the planning stage of operations and to communicate more effectively about the schedules and everything in general. It is important for the organization to try to listen more and take the concerns of the international project assignees even more into account in the decision making. This could lower the

pressure on the international project assignee and therefore increase their well-being. In addition, the feeling of being heard can also boost feelings of well-being.

The organization could help more with the routine creation by providing comfortable accommodation and making sure that the basic things are in good condition. To help with the cultural adaptation, cultural training could be provided to the international project assignees. This could help them to adapt easier and to feel more comfortable in the new culture. If the organization helps with the routine creation and cultural adaptation, the international project assignees can feel more comfortable, which might increase their well-being.

Having hygienic food was important to the assignees so making sure that the accommodation is in good condition also involves making sure that the international project assignees have access to hygienic food. This might be difficult if the organization is far from the destination and unfamiliar with local culture and food options. It might be beneficial to ask for local help if possible. Since stress and anxiety were decreasing the well-being of international project assignees, providing conversational help that would help cope with stress and anxiety could really help the international project assignees to feel better. By finding effective ways to improve these factors that were seen to decrease the international project assignees' well-being, the organization could make a mayor difference.

Strengthening the already found job resources might increase even further the well-being of international project assignees. Even though these factors were considered to already improve the well-being of international project assignees, they should be really cared for and looked after. As already mentioned, improving communication could have positive effects on international project assignee well-being, therefore being more present and available to offer and provide support for the international project assignee would be important. As social support is already considered good, perhaps it could be maintained and even further improved by enhancing the team spirit by being able to spend good quality time together by doing some team building activities together.

Quality free time was mentioned as one important thing affecting their well-being. It would be significant for the participants if some types of arrangements could be done so that the international project assignees do not need to worry about doing work related tasks on their free time. This could be further discussed between the case organization and the international project assignees.

Being able to meet families was important for the participants. Being able to provide an environment where the international project assignees would be able to meet their families when needed is important. Other types of support could be also considered being provided to international project assignees with families. Personality traits and experiences were something that were considered to affect the respondents' well-being. However, those are something that can not be really improved from the outside perspective since they are something that comes from within. The international project assignees could think themselves what they could do to improve those.

By taking these things into account it could be possible to further improve the international project assignee's well-being. Worth mentioning is that overall, the well-being of the international project assignees according to themselves was quite good. These ideas were presented for the case organization to further improve it. It is also notable that the individual themselves could improve their own well-being and one's well-being is always also affected by the individual's own characteristics and decisions.

## 6 Conclusions

This chapter of the thesis will include the key findings of this study, the limitations of the study and suggestions for future research.

### 6.1 Key findings of the study

The aim of this study was to understand what affects international project assignee well-being on international project assignments in the context of the case organization. The focus was on how the international project assignees considered their own well-being. This research met its objectives through its theoretical framework and qualitative analysis and is consequently able to provide these conclusions. This thesis utilized the job demands and resources theory of Demerouti et al. (2001) in which job demands, and job resources describe the organizational, physical and social aspects of the work. The qualitative interview data was analyzed by using the IPA method and by focusing on individual's own perceptions of their well-being. This thesis aimed to answer the research questions of this study.

The research questions of this thesis were:

What affects international project assignee's well-being on international project assignments in the context of the case organization?

Which is further broken down into two sub questions:

- a. Which factors decrease project assignee's well-being on international project assignments in the context of the case organization?
- b. Which factors increase project assignee's well-being on international project assignments in the context of the case organization?

Certain job demands and job resources were found to affect international project assignee well-being on international project assignments. The main findings of this study that were decreasing well-being were job demands: pressure, communication issues,

lack of routine, challenges in adapting to a new culture, health and safety concerns and feelings of stress and uncertainty. On the other hand, job resources that were increasing well-being were found to be social support, organizational support, personality resources, free time, experience and contact with family. All the findings could be considered significant, however there were some things that were emphasized in the interviews. Based on the findings, extremely pivotal factors affecting international project assignee well-being on international project assignments were accommodation, support from organization and coworkers, quality free time and feeling connected to one's family. When these factors were considered to be at a good level, the respondents felt their overall well-being better. The findings of this thesis are summarized into Table 3.

**Table 3.** Key findings

| <b>Job demands:</b>                     | <b>Job resources:</b>  |
|---|------------------------|
| Pressure                                | Social Support         |
| Communications issues                   | Organizational support |
| Lack of routine                         | Personal resources     |
| Challenges in adapting to a new culture | Free time              |
| Health and safety concerns              | Experience             |
| Feelings of stress and uncertainty      | Contact with family    |

The managerial implication of this study included ideas and suggested actions for the case organization to help improve the well-being of their international project assignees. The organization could try to help improve the international project assignee well-being, for example by providing better accommodation, offering and providing even more support and hearing and taking the international project assignees thoughts and opinions into account even more.

## **6.2 Limitations of the study**

This research has also its limitations. This study was conducted as a master's thesis and therefore followed specific instruction on how to conduct a master's thesis and how

extensive and long the master's thesis should be. Due to the specifics and limitations of a master's thesis it could be beneficial to conduct an even deeper study on the topic of international assignee well-being on international assignments.

As previously mentioned, the participants of this study were all from the same case organization which provides its limitations since the international assignees might share similar experiences. The participants chosen for the study were all working on the same project sites in similar settings and with alike conditions. Many of them shared also similar job tasks. The similarities of the participants' situations are likely to affect their responses to the questions. If the interviews were conducted with people from different organizations, it is likely that the responses would have varied more.

Another limitation worth mentioning is challenges related to the language. Most of the interviews were conducted in Finnish and afterwards translated to English which might have affected the particularity of some of the citations of the interviewees. Even though the interviews needed to be translated for the purposes of this thesis, the intention was to describe the participants' responses as truthfully as possible.

One limitation is caused by the relatively small sample size. For this research, twelve people were interviewed, meaning that the findings are narrowed to the experiences of twelve individuals. By increasing the sample size, other themes might become repetitive, and it might provide an interesting new perspective to this topic. The nationality of most of the interviewees was Finnish. Only three participants had different national backgrounds. This might have also affected the results. Cultural backgrounds tend to affect how individuals consider their well-being and how they view the world in general. If more interviewees were from different nationalities, some other themes could have been found or highlighted.

Chosen participants all worked as international project assignees meaning that they work on client's project sites. This fact limited out for example international office

assignments. It could be intriguing to conduct similar studies in other types of international assignments as well. Other significant factors affecting international assignee's well-being could be possibly found.

Finally, most participants were male meaning that the female perspective on this study was fairly limited. Supposing that this research would have had more female participants, the results could have also been different. If the study would have included more females, other things could have emerged from the interviews.

### **6.3 Suggestions for future research**

There is a need for more research on international project assignments. There is still a research gap in the well-being of international project assignees. Many studies discuss in general international assignments, however there is still a lack of research on the field of international project assignments. Project assignments differ from regular international assignments since the working conditions might be completely different. Going to project sites is likely to vary a lot more than going to office settings. Office environments tend to provide more similar settings whereas project site locations might vary greatly. This would be something that could be considered in further studies. Further studies could focus even more on international project assignments since they provide a unique setting for both the individual and organization.

Another suggestion for further study would be to include more nationalities and more women in the study as mentioned already in the limitations section. This could provide more interesting and important insights into this research topic. It could assist in having more diverse answers and important things could be pointed out. By including different people in the research, other important factors could be found to affect international project assignee well-being. It would be also interesting to see if similar things would turn out to be pivotal for other individuals as well.

## References

- Albrecht, S. L. (2012). The influence of job, team and organizational level resources on employee well-being, engagement, commitment and extra-role performance: Test of a model. *International Journal of Manpower*, 33(7), 840-853. <https://doi.org/10.1108/01437721211268357>
- Alshenqeeti, H. (2014). Interviewing as a data collection method: A critical review. *English linguistics research*, 3(1), 39-45. <https://doi.org/10.5430/elr.v3n1p39>
- Andres, M., Moelker, R., & Soeters, J. (2012). The work–family interface and turnover intentions over the course of project-oriented assignments abroad. *International Journal of Project Management*, 30(7), 752-759. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijpro-man.2012.01.006>
- Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2007). The job demands-resources model: State of the art. *Journal of managerial psychology*, 22(3), 309-328. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02683940710733115>
- Baran, B. E., Shanock, L. R., & Miller, L. R. (2012). Advancing organizational support theory into the twenty-first century world of work. *Journal of business and psychology*, 27, 123-147. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-011-9236-3>
- Barinaga, E. (2007). ‘Cultural diversity’at work:‘National culture’as a discourse organizing an international project group. *Human relations*, 60(2), 315-340. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726707075883>
- Bartels, A. L., Peterson, S. J., & Reina, C. S. (2019). Understanding well-being at work:Development and validation of the eudaimonic workplace well-being scale. *PloS one*, 14(4), e0215957. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0215957>
- Baruch, Y., Dickmann, M., Altman, Y., & Bournois, F. (2013). Exploring international work: Types and dimensions of global careers. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 24(12), 2369-2393. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2013.781435>

- Bonache, J. (2005). Job satisfaction among expatriates, repatriates and domestic employees: The perceived impact of international assignments on work-related variables. *Personnel review*, 34(1), 110-124. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00483480510571905>
- Bouncken, R., Brem, A., & Kraus, S. (2016). Multi-cultural teams as sources for creativity and innovation: The role of cultural diversity on team performance. *International Journal of Innovation Management*, 20(01), 1650012. <https://doi.org/10.1142/S1363919616500122>
- Cabrita, C., & Duarte, A. P. (2023). Passionately demanding: Work passion's role in the relationship between work demands and affective well-being at work. *Frontiers in psychology*, 14, 1053455. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1053455>
- Caligiuri, P., Tarique, I., & Jacobs, R. (2009). Selection for international assignments. *Human Resource Management Review*, 19(3), 251-262. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2009.02.001>
- Collings, D. G., Doherty, N., Luethy, M., & Osborn, D. (2011). Understanding and supporting the career implications of international assignments. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 78(3), 361-371. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2011.03.010>
- De Jonge, J., Spoor, E., Sonnentag, S., Dormann, C., & van den Tooren, M. (2012). "Take a break?!" Off-job recovery, job demands, and job resources as predictors of health, active learning, and creativity. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 21(3), 321-348. <https://doi-org.proxy.uwasa.fi/10.1080/1359432X.2011.576009>
- Demerouti, E., Bakker, A. B., Nachreiner, F., & Schaufeli, W. B. (2001). The job demands-resources model of burnout. *Journal of Applied psychology*, 86(3), 499.
- De Witte, H., Pienaar, J., & De Cuyper, N. (2016). Review of 30 years of longitudinal studies on the association between job insecurity and health and well-being: Is there causal evidence?. *Australian Psychologist*, 51(1), 18-31. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ap.12176>

- Di Fabio, A. (2017). Positive healthy organizations: Promoting well-being, meaningfulness, and sustainability in organizations. *Frontiers in psychology*, 8, 1938. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01938>
- Englander, M. (2012). The interview: Data collection in descriptive phenomenological human scientific research. *Journal of phenomenological psychology*, 43(1), 13-35. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156916212X632943>
- Golafshani, N. (2003). Understanding reliability and validity in qualitative research. *The qualitative report*, 8(4), 597-607. <https://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR8-4/golafshani.pdf>
- Hobfoll, S. E., Halbesleben, J., Neveu, J. P., & Westman, M. (2018). Conservation of resources in the organizational context: The reality of resources and their consequences. *Annual review of organizational psychology and organizational behavior*, 5, 103-128. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-032117-104640>
- Hughes, P., Ferrett, E., & MBE, P. H. (2021). International health and safety at work: For the NEBOSH international general certificate in occupational health and safety. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003125549>
- Jarden, A., & Roache, A. (2023). What is wellbeing?. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 20(6), 5006. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20065006>
- Kallio, H., Pietilä, A. M., Johnson, M., & Kangasniemi, M. (2016). Systematic methodological review: developing a framework for a qualitative semi-structured interview guide. *Journal of advanced nursing*, 72(12), 2954-2965. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.13031>
- Kinnunen, U., Feldt, T., Geurts, S., & Pulkkinen, L. (2006). Types of work-family interface: Well-being correlates of negative and positive spillover between work and family. *Scandinavian journal of psychology*, 47(2), 149-162. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9450.2006.00502.x>

- Lazarova, M., Westman, M., & Shaffer, M. A. (2010). Elucidating the positive side of the work-family interface on international assignments: A model of expatriate work and family performance. *Academy of Management Review*, 35(1), 93-117. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.35.1.zok93>
- Leifels, K., & Bowen, P. (2021). The dark side of teamwork—the relationship between social stressors, social resources and team member well-being in monocultural and multicultural work teams. *Cross Cultural & Strategic Management*, 28(4), 867-893. <https://doi.org/10.1108/CCSM-08-2020-0172>
- Lesener, T., Gusy, B., & Wolter, C. (2019). The job demands-resources model: A meta-analytic review of longitudinal studies. *Work & Stress*, 33(1), 76-103. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02678373.2018.1529065>
- Lisak, A., Erez, M., Sui, Y., & Lee, C. (2016). The positive role of global leaders in enhancing multicultural team innovation. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 47, 655-673. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41267-016-0002-7>
- Nielsen, K., Nielsen, M. B., Ogbonnaya, C., Känsälä, M., Saari, E., & Isaksson, K. (2017). Workplace resources to improve both employee well-being and performance: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Work & Stress*, 31(2), 101-120. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02678373.2017.1304463>
- Oerlemans, W. G., Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2014). How feeling happy during off-job activities helps successful recovery from work: A day reconstruction study. *Work & Stress*, 28(2), 198-216. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02678373.2014.901993>
- Parent-Lamarche, A., & Marchand, A. (2019). Well-being at work from a multilevel perspective: what is the role of personality traits?. *International Journal of Workplace Health Management*, 12(5), 298-317. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJWHM-05-2019-0066>
- Pietkiewicz, I., & Smith, J. A. (2014). A practical guide to using interpretative phenomenological analysis in qualitative research psychology. *Psychological journal*, 20(1), 7-14. <https://doi.org/10.14691/CPJ.20.1.7>

- Pinto, L. H., Cabral-Cardoso, C., & Werther Jr, W. B. (2012). Compelled to go abroad? Motives and outcomes of international assignments. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 23(11), 2295-2314. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2011.610951>
- Reiche, B. S., & Harzing, A. W. (2011). International assignments. *International human resource management*, 3, 185-226.
- Rose, J., & Johnson, C. W. (2020). Contextualizing reliability and validity in qualitative research: Toward more rigorous and trustworthy qualitative social science in leisure research. *Journal of leisure research*, 51(4), 432-451. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00222216.2020.1722042>
- Schaufeli, W. B., & Bakker, A. B. (2004). Job demands, job resources, and their relationship with burnout and engagement: A multi-sample study. *Journal of Organizational Behavior: The International Journal of Industrial, Occupational and Organizational Psychology and Behavior*, 25(3), 293-315. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.248>
- Shaffer, M. A., Kraimer, M. L., Chen, Y. P., & Bolino, M. C. (2012). Choices, challenges, and career consequences of global work experiences: A review and future agenda. *Journal of Management*, 38(4), 1282-1327. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206312441834>
- Shore, L. M., Cleveland, J. N., & Sanchez, D. (2018). Inclusive workplaces: A review and model. *Human Resource Management Review*, 28(2), 176-189. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2017.07.003>
- Stahl, G. K., Mäkelä, K., Zander, L., & Maznevski, M. L. (2010). A look at the bright side of multicultural team diversity. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 26(4), 439-447. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scaman.2010.09.009>
- Spreitzer, G., Porath, C. L., & Gibson, C. B. (2012). Toward human sustainability: How to enable more thriving at work. *Organizational Dynamics*, 41(2), 155-162. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orgdyn.2012.01.009>

- Stroppa, C., & Spieß, E. (2011). International assignments: The role of social support and personal initiative. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35(2), 234-245. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2010.09.008>
- Tahvanainen, M., Welch, D., & Worm, V. (2005). Implications of short-term international assignments. *European Management Journal*, 23(6), 663-673. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2005.10.011>
- Tamers, S. L., Streit, J., Pana-Cryan, R., Ray, T., Syron, L., Flynn, M. A., ... & Howard, J. (2020). Envisioning the future of work to safeguard the safety, health, and well-being of the workforce: A perspective from the CDC's National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. *American journal of industrial medicine*, 63(12), 1065-1084. <https://doi-org.proxy.uwasa.fi/10.1002/ajim.23183>
- Wijngaards, I., King, O. C., Burger, M. J., & van Exel, J. (2021). Worker well-being: What it is, and how it should be measured. *Applied Research in Quality of Life*, 1-38. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11482-021-09930-w>

## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Interview questions

1. Where have you been on an international project assignment and for how long?
2. How would you describe your well-being on international project assignments?
3. Do you think your well-being is different on international project assignments compared to when you are in your home country? How?
4. From your experience what types of things supported your well-being on international project assignments?
5. From your experience what types of things weakened well-being on international project assignments?
6. Did these things have an impact on your own well-being?
7. Did some things cause you happiness or satisfaction? What and why?
8. Did some things cause you stress or anxiety? What and why?
9. Have you experienced any safety related problems or concerns while you were on international project assignments?
10. How did the international project assignment affect your personal life?
11. Did you feel you got enough support from your:
  - a. Organization: what type of support and was it enough?
  - b. Supervisor/ Site Manager: what type of support and was it enough?
  - c. Co-workers: what type of support and was it enough?
  - d. Customer: what type of support and was it enough?
  - e. People outside of your organization, for example friends and family: what type of support and was it enough?
12. What could you have done in order to better your own well-being during international project assignments?
13. What could the organization do in order to better your well-being during international project assignments?
14. What advice would you give to a first-time project assignee?

15. Would you like to add something else related to your well-being on international project assignments? Or talk about something else related to this topic?