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# THE FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO WORK/LIFE CONFLICTS AND ENRICHMENT AMONG FINNISH GLOBAL CAREERISTS

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## ABSTRACT

*It has been argued (see, e.g., Haslberger and Brewster 2008; Lazarova, Westman, and Sheffer 2010; Mäkelä, Käsälä, and Suutari 2011; Mäkelä and Suutari 2011) that expatriates have difficulties balancing work with the rest of their lives. Our understanding of the issues and factors contributing to the work/non-work balance is limited. To increase our understanding of these issues, twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted with Finnish global careerists, each of whom had spent most of their working lives outside their home country. The results of the study indicate that, besides facing conflicts, global careerists benefit from the interface of their work and non-work life. Several work-domain, non-work domain, and individual factors were identified. We argue that the literature regarding the work/life balance needs to take into account context-related factors and to put more emphasis on the perspective of enrichment.*

**Keywords:** Finnish expatriates, work/non-work conflicts, work/non-work enrichment

## INTRODUCTION

Research on the international work force and expatriation has begun to expand its scope from the traditional focus on aspects of the single international assignment cycle within multinational corporations (MNCs) to new topics aimed at better reflecting the reality of international careers. Expatriation—the situation in which people are working outside their home country either as employees sent by the home country employer (organizational expatriates) or as employees who have themselves taken the initiative to be employed abroad (self-initiated expatriates), sometimes discussed in parallel with migration (Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry 2013; Suutari and Brewster 2000)—is more often becoming not only a “once in a lifetime experience” but increasingly involves longer-term “global careers.”

Global careers involve repeated international work experiences, and they encompass a succession of multiple international assignments (Cappellen and Janssens 2005; Dickman and Harris 2005; Mayrhofer et al. 2004; Stahl and Cerdin 2004; Suutari 2003; Suutari and Mäkelä 2007; Thomas, Lazarova, and Inkson 2005). These global careers might also include short-term or long-term internationally oriented jobs in a variety of host countries or at the corporate headquarters. We use the term “global careerists” to refer to people involved in such careers. Managers with such global careers are the most experienced international management group, with learning experiences from many cultural contexts (Roberts, Kossek, and Ozeki 1998) and typically also from different international organizations (Stahl and Cerdin 2004). In the Finnish context there is evidence that, among highly educated Finns, around a third of expatriates (35 percent) have undertaken three or more assignments (Jokinen, Brewster, and Suutari 2008). However, there is limited empirical evidence on the specific features of careers among such people.

Expatriation involves more than just the individual: from the perspective of the global careerists with numerous moves across borders, taking into account the instability and the ongoing adjustments required, the situation can be challenging not just for the assignees but also for their partners and children (Caligiuri et al. 1998; Shaffer and Harrison 2001; Foulkes, this volume). Such careers may be too challenging for many individuals and their families (Forster 2000). Further, it has been suggested that women face more difficulties than men as part of the global workforce (Ho 2006; Man 2004; Mearns 2010; Suto 2009), especially if working in masculine cultures (Hutchings, French, and Hatcher 2008). Lazarova, Westman, and Shaffer reinforce the uncertainty and stress of international assignments but point out that “they also offer the promise of new opportunities and challenges” (2010, 111). For the global careerists, we can expect a learning curve, with the expatriates and their families having the opportunity to use their earlier adjustment experiences on subsequent assignments. How this happens and what the antecedents of its happening

(i.e., factors which are contributing to work/family conflicts and enrichment experiences) are, have, however, been studied little.

At a more general level, the dynamics between working life and personal life have been actively discussed in the literature. Most of the previous research has adopted the view that these two domains are competing, and studies have concentrated on the conflicts between them (see Eby et al. 2005; Kinnunen and Mauno 2008). More recently, some of the positive aspects of work/life dynamics have gained attention, and concepts such as facilitation, enrichment, and positive spillover have been brought into the discussion (Frone 2003; Carlson et al. 2006; Wayne et al. 2007). Usually, the work domain has been seen as the one detracting from personal life, but effects in the other direction have been identified as well (Kinnunen et al. 2010). Both research and practical organizational interventions have focused on how to reduce conflicts rather than how to promote positive interaction between the spheres of the personal life and the work life (Grawitch, Barber, and Justice 2010). In practice, of course, crossover happens, and either domain can influence the other either negatively or positively (see Eby et al. 2005; Frone 2003).

Most of the previous research focused on the crossover effects from work to family and vice versa (for general studies, see Eby et al. 2005; Guest 2002; Lapierre et al. 2008; Rantanen et al. 2008; and for expatriates, see Haslberger and Brewster 2008; Lazarova, Westman, and Sheffer 2010; Mäkelä, Käsälä, and Suutari 2011; Mäkelä and Suutari 2011). However, a broader definition of the non-work dimension is required, to also include individuals other than those with traditional family responsibilities (Fisher, Bulger, and Smith 2009; Grawitch, Barber, and Justice 2010; Sturges and Guest 2004). This broader definition is adopted in the present study. This study, for the first time, uses empirical evidence to explore not just the conflicts but the full range of interactions between work and non-work.

We approach the interface between work and non-work for Finnish global careerists as dynamic and interactional; we consider work to non-work and non-work to work interactions; and we seek both the negative and the positive sides of these phenomena. We aim to analyze (a) how global careerists' work and non-work domains positively and negatively influence each other; and (b) what kind of factors can be identified behind these influences. After a brief review of relevant aspects of the literature, we critique current assumptions on the application of these theories to Finnish global careerists. We then discuss our methodology and present our findings. Finally, we draw conclusions and discuss the relevant implications for theory and practice.

## **THE FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE WORK/LIFE INTERFACE**

The dynamics between work and non-work have been studied mainly by adopting either role theory (Kahn et al. 1964) or conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll

2002). Role theory analysis argues that people have multiple roles, some related to working life (e.g., one person may be a supervisor, technical specialist, trade union representative, etc.), and others related to non-work (partner, elderly parent, sports-club member). The spillover of demands within these roles may create work/life conflicts (Bagger, Li, and Gutek 2008; Greenhaus and Beutell 1985; for a review, see Kinnunen and Mauno 2008). However, the spillover may be positive: for instance, friends may provide useful contacts for solving a work problem. Positive aspects are also termed work/life enrichment, or facilitation (Carlson et al. 2006; Frone 2003; Wayne et al. 2007).

Interaction between work and non-work at the individual level has also been studied using conservation of resources theory (COR). Resources such as time and energy are restricted, and overload causes stress. Here, too, the work/non-work conflicts emerge if resources in one domain are depleted through the demands of the other domain, and enrichment occurs when resources gained from one domain improve the situation in another (Greenhaus and Powell 2006; Carlson et al. 2006).

Studies have explored the antecedents of either conflicts or enrichment (see Eby et al. 2005). Antecedents to work and non-work interactions have been classified in three main categories: work-domain, non-work domain, and individual domain (Guest 2002; Kinnunen and Mauno 2008). Work-domain antecedents (Byron 2005) include flexibility of work schedules, total working hours, co-workers' and supervisors' supportiveness, and organizational culture. The non-work domain includes factors such as families, communities, and choices of leisure-time activities (Guest 2002). These will vary considerably, depending, for example, on whether one is single or has a partner, the number and age of children, and the age of parents (Guest 2002; Frone 2003; Byron 2005, Eby et al. 2005; Kinnunen and Mauno 2008). Individual and demographic variables include such factors as gender, age, career stage, skills, and personality. Research focusing on gender is not unambiguous, but there seems to be evidence that women are more susceptible than men to conflicts between the work and non-work domains, because traditional societal norms require females more so than men to adopt family responsibilities, childcare, and elderly care (see Guest 2002).

### **ISSUES ARISING: EXPATRIATES AND GLOBAL CAREERISTS**

How does this generic evidence of work and non-work interactions transfer to expatriates and then to global careerists? International assignments of more than a few months typically include either the international relocation of the whole immediate family or the splitting of the family. This may be particularly significant in societies where families are "larger" and parents or siblings would be seen as a key part of the family—they are nearly always left behind. As a rule, the literature has not taken a holistic view of the family (Haslberger and Brewster 2008), and in the expatriation

literature, the role of the family on expatriate selection, adjustment, and performance is generally considered only as a restraint that leads to a refusal to relocate (Collings, Scullion, and Morley 2007). Family may also explain the early return of the expatriate (Shaffer et al. 2001).

Working abroad has been found to be challenging for expatriates. Overall, the research (Bossard and Peterson 2005; Gregersen and Morrison 1998; Kohonen 2004; Roberts, Kossek, and Ozeki 1998; Suutari and Mäkelä 2007) suggests that international jobs are perceived both as challenges and as opportunities for professional development. Work issues that caused conflict in expatriates' personal lives occur more frequently than personal conflicts that impacted the work domain. Such conflicts, especially from work to personal life, have also been found to have negative effects on expatriates' health (Grant-Vallone and Ensher 2001; Fishlmayr and Kollinger 2010). The work-related challenge is caused by many factors that are found to be typical features of expatriate jobs. For example, the breadth of responsibilities is usually broader than on domestic tasks because expatriates often work in smaller foreign units, often in less developed contexts, and often at higher organizational levels than before the assignment. They are very visible, and the distinction between work and non-work often becomes difficult to maintain (Caligiuri and Lazarova 2005). Working in another culture and environment is more challenging and risky than working in the familiar domestic environment. At the same time, expatriate managers typically also have more autonomy because of both the distance from headquarters and the smaller size of foreign affiliates.

Assignees, therefore, have to use all their resources and energy to deal with difficult job-related challenges. As a consequence, they may not be able to fully support a family that also faces its own adjustment challenges as it tries to settle down in a new country. There is increased pressure on partners to take on a bigger role in family affairs, which, in turn, makes it difficult for them to concentrate on their own careers (Mäkelä, Käsälä, and Suutari 2011). The centrality of the role of the family in the successful expatriate cycle (Punnett 1997; Shaffer et al. 2001) makes it an important concern for the assignee and the employing organization. For example, the role of the family/partner as a primary reason for costly premature returns to Finland has long been recognized (Riusala and Suutari 2000). Expatriation has also been found to lead couples to divorce or to cause expatriates to worry about the future of their relationships (Fishlmayr and Kollinger 2010).

Sometimes families (e.g., dual-career couples or couples with teenagers) also choose alternative solutions, such as living apart during the international assignment (Hardill 2004). This solution is naturally more convenient when the expatriate assignment is located in a nearby country with good travel connections. It may solve some problems (e.g., making it possible for the children to stay at the same school and in the same living environment in the home country and for the non-assignee

partner to maintain the job in the home country), but, naturally, at the same time it creates other kinds of challenges as families must cope with the problems of an absent partner and/or parent (Mayrhofer et al. 2004). Frequent international travel may also cause conflicts between work and personal life, and its disturbance of the travellers' daily routines, such as eating and sleeping habits, hobbies and social activity, as well as the pressure it places on family and work commitments, all are likely to cause stress and increase the probability of burnout for the commuting partner (Mayerhofer, Mueller, and Schmidt 2010; Demel and Mayrhofer 2010; Konopaske, Robie, and Ivancevich 2009).

When analyzing possible challenges between the work domain and the non-work domain for experienced global careerists, there are two different perspectives: the challenges faced by repeated assignments may either exacerbate the problem, or the expatriates may have learned from past experience how to handle it. From the first perspective, it is not surprising that global careerists and their families may feel "rootless" and face problems in maintaining social relationships when they are frequently changing locations. They are also facing frequent adjustment challenges during relocations and, overall, their lifestyle is pressured by the feeling of discontinuity and uncertainty when it is not clear what happens after the present—often fixed term—assignment (Mäkelä and Suutari 2011). It is, thus, not surprising that challenges to cope adequately with work and non-work life are among the key problems faced in this kind of career (Suutari 2003). Dual-career situations are often problematic and may be related to gender roles (Cooke 2007), female assignees having more problems with their male partners. It has also been shown that the employee's willingness to relocate again is related to their partner's previous experiences of relocation (Selmer and Leung 2003). The most common reasons given for agreeing to be relocated multiple times are adventure, the opportunity for new experiences, a commitment toward an international working environment, and the possibility to be together with the partner (Suutari 2003). The trailing partner also has a significant role in creating connections in a new location, and, moreover, relocation difficulties are eased by being part of a community where other expatriates are facing the same challenges.

From the other perspective, global careerists and their families have already experienced several relocations and undergone the related adjustment processes, and, thus, coping in the international career environment is one of their competences. Clearly, the expatriates—and their families—can utilize some learning points from previous assignments in the new assignments (Jokinen 2010). While the focus has traditionally been on analyzing the adjustment challenges, less is known about the positive issues faced by both of these groups during their global careers. However, it has been reported that global careerists typically perceived that overall the positive implications overrode the negatives (Suutari 2003). In fact, despite the challenges

concerning international assignments stressed in the literature, a global career may offer an enjoyable and inspiring working environment with different kinds of enriching experiences. Such a perspective might also be expected with regard to interactions between work and personal life for these global careerists and their families.

## **METHODS**

International business studies have been dominated by the quantitative research tradition. Recently, however, more qualitative research has started to emerge (Marschan-Piekkari and Welch 2004). Qualitative research is useful when the aim is to gain new insights and explanations in order to understand less studied phenomena (Ghuri and Grønhaug 2010), and interviewing people about their experiences has been found to be an appropriate way to gather data for such purposes (Eriksson and Kovalainen 2008). Therefore, we adopted a qualitative research design based on semi-structured interviews with twenty Finnish managers with global careers, empirically defined as having had three or more international assignments during the course of their working life. The sample was derived from a larger quantitative survey, which was targeted to all the expatriate members of the Finnish Association of Business School Graduates (SEFE) (see Jokinen, Brewster, and Suutari 2008). The necessary sample size of the qualitative extension was evaluated based on the data saturation point rather than sample size (Ezzy 2002), i.e., after a certain number of interviews, the key findings started to appear repeatedly from the data. Twenty interviews were conducted. The respondents represented a variety of industries, and their assignment locations covered thirteen countries and all other continents, except Antarctica. Fifteen of the Finnish global careerists were male and five were female. Fifteen of the respondents had a partner and fourteen had children who had been with them on assignment. Twenty-five percent had been on three international assignments prior to their current one, 30 percent had been on four, and 45 percent had been on five or more assignments.

The interviews lasted between half an hour and two hours and fifteen minutes, resulting in an extensive database of word-by-word interview transcripts for analysis. The interviews were all conducted in Finnish, and the verbatim quotations were translated into English by the authors. Interview data were content analyzed, and emerging themes were identified by focusing on the repetition and replication of the themes within interviews. Semi-structured open-ended questions were used in order to bring out underlying patterns and relationships. First, the interviewees gave a detailed account of their previous career paths and current assignments. Second, we asked them about negative and positive work/non-work experiences which they had faced during their recent assignment as well as during earlier stages of their global careers.

Three measures were applied to enhance the validity and reliability of the study. During the analysis process, the data were first carefully read and reflected on several times by the authors. Construct validity was enhanced via researcher triangulation; in other words, the authors analyzed the raw data independently. The data were coded and allocated to pre-assigned categories reflecting the theory-based dimensions concerning work/life balance and related factors.

## **FINDINGS**

In this section, we report the empirical findings concerning the dynamics between the work and personal life spheres of these twenty Finnish global careerists and the antecedents of experiences in this kind of atypical career environment. Illustrative quotations from our sample are also given as insets. All three categories presented in the previous literature concerning the reasons for different work/life dynamics (i.e., work related, non-work related, and individual antecedents) also exist for global careerists. We explore both the negative and the positive elements of each factor in turn. These seem to impact global careerists differently than other employees, and, additionally, we identified several that did not fit any of these categories. We suggest that this indicates the contextual nature of work/life dynamics, and we explore this factor further in our conclusions.

### **WORK-RELATED FACTORS OF WORK/LIFE INTERFACE**

Work-related issues that had either negative or positive effects on work and personal life included issues such as the number of relocations, type of international assignment, level of autonomy, and compensation. Two organizational-level factors were raised: the organizational policies of the company and the level of organizational experience in international human resource management (IHRM).

#### *Negative Dynamics*

Finnish global careerists experience conflicts between their life spheres that directly reflect their mobility requirements. First, in contrast to domestic jobs, international assignments usually require both the assignee and the whole immediate family to move from one living environment to a different and sometimes a distant one. This creates adjustment challenges when dealing, for example, with new living and working environments, including culture, climate, education, and day-care systems. Sometimes, families live apart if the mobility requirements are too difficult:

We have had challenges to explain our situation even to the tax authorities—living separately for fifteen years now but still being happily married. (Female, 48 years old, office manager)

Second, the mobility requirement and the discontinuity it creates causes conflicts between work and private lives and creates uncertainty. Job-related concerns

may be in conflict with family concerns (e.g., a very interesting job in a very challenging living environment for the family). International assignments typically last only a few years, and, thus, global careerists and their families need to uproot their living arrangements and social connections frequently:

So there is this three- to four-year time-period when everyone changes. It is very hard in a way that one has to re-create these social contacts and networks and so on . . . because those old ones regularly disappear. (Male, 59, EU adviser)

The number of international relocations was found to impact family decisions and situations:

As my life has been so unstable and mobile, it has been hard to create long-lasting relationships. Due to that, I got married rather late, when I was thirty-five. And therefore I became a father very late. I was forty-five years old. (Male, 56, entrepreneur)

Moreover, the international work context was also related to divorces:

We divorced, and I think that partly it was because of my travelling that the relationship with my wife suffered. It was very much due to this work. (Male, 64, marketing manager)

In many cases, decisions concerning the next assignment have to be made very quickly among the alternatives that were available. This causes work/non-work conflicts when families do not know where they will live next year:

It takes quite a lot if you leave your stuff and systems and friends. Take your family and go again and then build it all up somewhere else. And everybody has to; husband and son have to restart with work and schools and friends. (Female, 61, PR manager)

We found many examples of work/non-work conflict among global careerists that were related to the characteristics of the job. These included increased responsibilities in foreign affiliates, high levels of personal responsibility, and a high level of autonomy. Twenty-four-hour availability, long working hours, and lots of traveling affected the global careerists' family lives. As one of our interviewees said:

When working days are long and you are working during weekends as well, it, of course, limits the time you can spend with your family. (Male, 59, EU adviser )

The level of autonomy at work was typically seen to be higher than in their domestic jobs, since there was less control from superiors, who were often located in other countries. The high level of responsibility and the challenging nature of assignments caused conflicts between life spheres:

I worked as a CEO in one company here, started up the whole business for them, recruited people and handled the paper work and created the processes [ . . . ]. I did not have any other life outside of work for about one-and-a-half years. (Female, 39, entrepreneur)

In addition to these conflicts caused by the nature of this international work, other organizational factors were given as a reason for the negative relationship between work and personal life: the lack of organizational policies in the company and the lack of organizational experience in international human resources management (HRM). For example, bigger organizations typically had more experience and more support was available.

However, although working in the international context appeared very challenging, it also created positive dynamics between work and personal lives.

#### *Positive Dynamics*

Living and working abroad sometimes helped the Finnish global careerists to achieve a better balance between work and non-work life:

When you are travelling [to see customers] from Finland, you are not always able to get back home at night. Now I am travelling significantly less than earlier, and those travels are in Central Europe from Frankfurt, and I don't need to stay overnight. (Male, 54, vice president)

Enrichment was also seen to occur in the development and skills of the children. Because of their parents' global careers, the children had a range of opportunities that they would not have had otherwise:

For children, it is of course the opportunity to see the world. It can be said that they have been even in a privileged situation, education here, and now studying in England. (Male, 53, finance director)

Global careerists also talked frequently about the enrichment caused by their international work and the possibility of a better lifestyle and better opportunities to cultivate certain hobbies. Ironically, the enhanced pay packages, one of the reasons why many expatriates accept their international assignments, are hardly ever mentioned in the literature on work/life balance. Obviously, they are important. The overall level of compensation (including benefits) often made it possible to arrange

external help and leisure-time activities, and, depending on the context, also provided a high standard of living:

And now here in Hong Kong we have a full-time housekeeper, and that naturally makes it possible for [my partner] to enjoy leisure activities as well. Those arrangements have had a very central role when I think how she has managed here. (Male, 46, sales manager)

Another interviewee stressed the leisure possibilities:

You can go sailing together [with the family] or spend a skiing holiday together; you can rent a house in the Alps or rent a sailing boat from the Mediterranean and have time together. [. . .] You have opportunities to do these kinds of things when you have enough money. (Male, 59, EU adviser)

Organizational issues were also presented as a reason for positive dynamics between work and personal life. The existence of organizational policies concerning organizational support and training during relocations was clearly an important factor:

There has always been language and cultural training, and I think it is good and we have utilized it fully. (Male, 41, quality manager)

Less typical, but interesting, examples of organizational HRM practices that helped global careerists to balance work and non-work life were that some companies provided work opportunities for the partner or compensated for the partner's lost salary during the assignment. Overall, the experience, policies, and capabilities of the corporation in managing international HRM, and international mobility in particular, were mentioned frequently.

## **NON-WORK RELATED FACTORS OF WORK/LIFE INTERFACE**

When negative and positive dynamics between working and personal life were related to the non-work issues, immediate family status was the most influential factor. If the global careerist had a family—partner and/or children—it had a strong influence on both negative and positive experiences.

### *Negative Dynamics*

Having a family was often pointed out as being a major work/personal life challenge. Families were seen to make global career opportunities more problematic and reduced the global careerists' work and hobby possibilities. For example, one of our interviewees compared his present situation as a father and a partner to the time when he did not have a family and noted that family responsibilities have reduced

his time spent at work and reduced his participation in other leisure time activities beside his family:

[When I was single] I did many working hours per week, and I had more opportunities to have hobbies and spend time with friends and less time at home. And now, when I have family, it is home and work [. . .] only these two alternatives. Less hobbies and less time for friends. (Male, 36, material manager)

In addition to discussing the family situation in general, global careerists highlighted specifically the role of their partner in the dynamics between work and personal life. Many partners had been forced to leave their own careers to support the career of the global careerist. The adjustment of the partner impacted the experiences of the whole family: where there were problems, more time and effort was required from the assignee to support the family. Children were also often mentioned as a source for negative dynamics between work and personal life. As a father of two children (now adults) explained:

[. . .] because we had teenage children at home, it was much more difficult to move. The children were very negative towards this change in situation. (Male, 54, vice president )

Similar issues were mentioned regarding elderly parents living at home, who were in poor health. Respondents found it difficult to support their elderly parents when abroad, and they often found the situation challenging and felt guilty:

This means adaptation to the different situations. . . . My father is already gone. He died when we actually lived in Finland. My mother is getting older, but fortunately my siblings live in the same city with her. (Male, 48, area manager)

#### *Positive Dynamics*

On the other hand, family provided a source of support for expatriates aiming to balance work and non-work life:

[I]t is very important that you have a sort of support group with you, you have a family. . . . Thus there is no risk that you stay alone at home and wonder: what am I going to do? (Female, 61, PR manager)

Another interviewee said:

It is hard to imagine the situation without the family and how I could manage here. I suppose I would have driven myself to burnout with my work. This family is an offset for the work—you don't always need to

think only about the work and the company. Family creates balance and energy to life. It is very important. (Male, 36, material manager)

Families often tended to thrive in the new country:

The most important thing was that family enjoyed the place. Thus you can focus on your work and you have more to give yourself. (Male, 54, vice president)

The non-work domain was presented as having positive influences on working life at a practical level:

Of course, adults learn many things and several ways to handle situations [at home] which one can utilize at work, like flexibility and taking other people into consideration. (Male, 53, finance director)

Among family-related factors, the partner-related arrangements appeared to have a very important role in creating positive dynamics between work and personal life. For the global careerists, their partner was often an important support in ways both practical and emotional. The partner's importance was highlighted particularly in relation to more family-supportive roles abroad (i.e., often staying at home and taking care of family-related tasks fulltime). The partner's attitude towards the global careerists' work and the relocation was also crucial:

My wife understands my work; you are tied to it, and sometimes you need to answer the phone in the evenings and do extra work. Of course, sometimes she criticizes that. (Male, 36, material manager)

Among singles, their family situation was seen as positive:

In a sense I can say that as I don't have a family, it has been good for working life. I have had an opportunity to do this work. (Female, 39, entrepreneur)

Unusually, although the literature discusses the problems of the partners' loss of a job and profession, for many of these Finnish global careerists the partner's profession was mentioned in a positive sense, because they had jobs that were easy to arrange abroad (e.g., nurse or waitress), or the international experiences improved the partner's profession and career. In such cases, work/non-work experiences were positive:

As a nurse, it is quite easy to get a job [in any country] even though not always a permanent contract but temporary posts. (Male, 53, finance director)

Or, as another interviewee explained:

My wife's job, she has an agency and importing company in Finland, it works fine [from any location] as long as the communication facilities such as fax, e-mail, and mobile phone are working. (Male, 54, vice president)

The number and age of the children had a significant impact on experiences of work and non-work interactions. Younger children faced fewer challenges in moving than those starting school or teenagers. Thus, less effort was needed from the assignee and less reflection on such issues. For older children, positive attitudes towards moving and living in several countries played an important enriching role:

For a long time, my children, especially my daughter, had asked if it would be possible if we can move abroad. She studied in the international school, and some of her friends from the school left to the States and someone to Africa and she just felt stuck in Finland. (Male, 53, finance director)

### **INDIVIDUAL FACTORS IN THE WORK/FAMILY INTERFACE**

Several individual-level reasons were identified as impacting global careerists' work and family dynamics. Gender, life and career stages, personal values, and international experience appeared particularly important.

#### *Negative Dynamics*

Gender, here taken as a separate factor even though other aspects could have been discussed from a more gendered perspective, seemed to be related to negative dynamics. Global careers put a lot of stress on the flexibility of the partners and their careers. Female "trailing spouses" (Lauring and Selmer 2010) had often left their own careers and stayed at home while supporting the global career of the assignee (Yeoh and Willis 2005). Such life situations are typically seen as more challenging for female assignees and their male partners than the other way round (Mäkelä, Suutari, and Mayerhofer 2011; Fishlmayr and Kollinger 2010). Our interviewees did not directly talk about gender, but some conclusions can be drawn from our data. Thirteen of our fifteen male interviewees had children; one of our five female interviewees had a child, and another (closer to her fifties than forties) had recently adopted a child as a lone parent. It seems that it may be more challenging for women to work as global careerists and have a family.

Age and career stage were also important issues affecting the dynamics between work and personal life, and again had both negative and positive implications. Respondents discussed the negative effect of early-career stages when typically they had put all their efforts into succeeding at work and building their careers.

I have probably a more transatlantic or somehow capitalistic morale for work. And it has been very much my own decision to work too hard. I've now realized that it is not worthwhile killing oneself with work. (Female, 39, entrepreneur)

*Positive Dynamics*

The positive aspects of global careers may be easier for men as well. Men generally saw themselves achieving a better balance between work and personal life, and, moreover, they saw themselves as being more able to be in charge of these issues:

The most important [goal for me] at the moment is to find a balance between work and personal life. Work has dominated my life in the recent years, and now I need to find a better balance. (Male, 31, controller)

Generally, the individual's own values and personality appeared to have a positive role in global careerists' experiences concerning work and personal life interactions, and many of our participants explained that working and living in an international atmosphere was very important for them. They are people who like to see new places and to live in new environments and who enjoy being in contact with people from other cultures. Earlier international work experience was found to impact these experiences, because both the managers and their families had become used to frequent relocations and because they had identified ways to achieve better work/non-work balance.

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTEXT**

Human resource management, in general, and international HRM in particular, is increasingly conscious of the relevance of context (Brewster 1999; Paauwe and Boselie 2003). The fact that the experiences of these Finnish global careerists seem to be different from much of the reported literature is one indication of the relevance of the context in this case. In addition, contexts-related explanations—both conflictual and enriching—were often mentioned as factors in the work/non-work interface.

*Negative Dynamics*

In some countries, it is difficult to create social connections with locals, and that affected global careerists' perceptions of work/personal life dynamics negatively. This was a particular problem if the global careerists did not have their families living with them abroad.

In New York, it really feels sometimes that there is nothing else but work. (Female, 39, entrepreneur)

The working culture in certain countries created pressure and made it hard to integrate work and family lives:

I try to keep regular working hours—though here that means much longer days than weekly working hours in Finland. (Male, 53, finance director)

Moreover, the quality of the general living environment (e.g., schools, health-care, and climate) in the host country context inevitably had an impact on the extent of challenges faced by these Finnish assignees and their families, and thus caused different levels of stressors for the work/life balance. In addition, the physical distance between the host country and the home country affected experiences of work and non-work interactions by impacting possibilities for visits home, meeting friends, and supporting elderly family at home. This created negative dynamics between work and private life, both for the global careerists themselves and for the family:

You saw your relatives once a year or less, you became quite distant. And those relatively short periods in host countries did not enable you to develop the same kind of friend or family relations as in Finland [. . .]. That was a bit scary. (Female, 46, EU officer)

#### *Positive Dynamics*

On the other hand, the nature of the host culture was also mentioned as a source of positive dynamics between different life spheres:

The life here in Asia is much more social than in Finland or in other parts in Europe. As I said, very often you think, “Is this work or free time?” All the time something is going on: you invite people to your home and people invite you to their homes. (Male, 48, area manager)

Many of the global careerists said that interaction with a diverse group of people both at work and outside of work strongly influenced their own attitudes and behavior and enriched their lives and those of their families:

You have to see the world and different people. In this way your own worldview widens, and you can understand diversity in a totally different way. That is the same with me and my whole family, axiomatically. (Male, 53, finance director)

In addition, some of the global careerists whom we interviewed also noted that working in certain environments enabled better opportunities for cultivating certain hobbies:

Well, [with] certain outdoor hobbies that you have, here, summer is longer, and therefore you can cultivate those differently. (Male, 64, marketing manager)

In a similar vein, another interviewee explained:

I have a very strong interest in downhill skiing and mountaineering, and I thought that it would be much easier to work in a country where I can cultivate my hobbies without a need for travelling abroad. (Female, 39, entrepreneur)

In addition, as the context from which all our participants originated, Finland had an effect on their experiences as well; coming from a country with equal opportunity for high quality education and a strong emphasis on equality between genders was often reflected in the interviews.

## **CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

We believe that this study increases our understanding of the work/life balance issues faced by global careerists, and the factors contributing to such balance. In line with the literature (e.g., Forster 2000; Shaffer et al. 2001; Mäkelä and Suutari 2011), the results of the study indicate that work/life balance was considered a challenging issue for global careerists because of the frequent relocations and related adjustment challenges that they and their families face, and because of the nature of the jobs they had. The identified conflicts were mainly related to the allocation of time and the strain caused by demands of both life spheres. Mobile life was also related to the experience of conflicts. On the other hand, we also noted significant enrichment of the relationship between work and life domains in many cases. Instrumental enrichment occurred in both ways, from the work domain to the non-work domain, and vice versa. These Finnish global careerists talked about affective enrichment especially from the non-work domain perspective, highlighting, in many cases, how important it was that they had a family, interesting hobbies, or other non-work-related important activities. Enrichment was also seen to occur when they were talking about the development and skills of their children and the different opportunities they have had because of their global careers.

At the same time, there were contextual factors within these domains that reflected issues specific to this group of respondents. Work-related factors included the number of relocations, the types of international assignments, levels of autonomy, and levels of compensation. The organizational policies of the company and the organizational experience with international HRM were also significant, reflecting the importance of organizational support found in previous research (Kraimer, Wayne, and Jaworski 2001; Shaffer, Harrison, and Gilley 1999). Within the non-work domain, family-related factors dominated, and the role of the partner was the key one. Other family-related factors included the number and age of children and the age and health of the participants' elderly parents.

Contextually, the host culture had a substantial relationship to work/non-work experiences: some cultures create conflicts and some enhance the work/non-work interface. The quality of the institutional context (e.g., housekeeping, daycare, schools, and healthcare) clearly impacted the challenges that these families faced and, thus, also impacted work/personal life interactions. Finally, the physical distance between the host country and the home country was significant, with elderly parents and friends in the home country taking a central position. Some factors noted in previous research, such as co-worker support, and supervisor support (see Eby et al. 2005), did not appear in our data—probably because of the global careerists' senior positions and the distance to supervisors who are often located in another country. On the other hand, corporate policies that supported the family during relocations and the flexibility offered during the assignment appeared as very important. Overall, it became clear that, from a perspective of work and non-work interactions, the global career is not a choice made solely by these Finnish global careerists but is a family decision.

There are several limitations that need to be taken into account when interpreting our results, including our qualitative approach and the limited number of interviewees. Clearly, more large-scale research is needed to validate our findings. Secondly, all the global careerists were Finns, coming from a small but increasingly internationally oriented economy. Future research is needed with more international samples. Third, the data were collected from the global careerists, and partners and other family members were not interviewed. In future studies, it would be beneficial to include their comments in order to get more balanced views and to focus on the effects of gender (see Foulkes, this volume). However, the evidence is clear that global careerists had both negative and positive perceptions of the relationship between their work and personal life. They stressed the need for active efforts to stay in balance. In most cases, conflict between the two life spheres was more common from work to non-work than from non-work to work, even though both directions appeared to be important. Positive dynamics, or enrichment, was related to the different kinds of opportunities offered to the individual or the family by living and working abroad. Additionally, the family was often seen as a valuable counter-weight to work.

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