Social Support Networks on International Assignments

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Abstract

This study presents the role of social support and of networks for staff of small- and medium-sized enterprises and large corporations on foreign assignment. We used both, a qualitative and quantitative approach: qualitative interviews of staff of small- and medium-sized enterprises revealed the special need of support within the scope of the assignment and the immense significance of a well-functioning, supportive network. A quantitative survey with 143 respondents examined the relation between the phases of an assignment for satisfaction, stress, and company support. The outcome was that critical phases of foreign assignment were the sojourn and the return phases, marked by less life satisfaction, greater job stress and less perceived company support. We differentiated between source of support (network partner) and type of support (socio-emotional vs. instrumental). Consistent with our hypotheses, job satisfaction and job stress could be predicted by source of support and type of support, whereas life satisfaction could only be predicted by source of support. Implications for expatriate adjustment research and practice are discussed.

Due to the pressures of competition from the globalization of markets, professional experiences have gained in importance, and in fact have become a vital asset (e.g., Carpenter, Sanders, & Gregerson, 2001). In particular, multinational companies regard foreign assignment experience as a market advantage (Spreitzer, McCall, & Mahony, 1997). For employees, international professional experience in this context has become a prime prerequisite to becoming an executive (e.g., Daily, Certo, & Dalton, 2000).

This growing trend to send staff on foreign assignment is accompanied by the need to know what has to be done for the expatriates to adjust successfully. For the individual employee, working in a foreign country means major changes in various areas for which he/she has to be prepared and then supported during his/her foreign sojourn. If this does not occur, there is a risk that the employee may become stressed, may become unable to work effectively, and, in the worst case, may have to end his/her sojourn prematurely.

For instance, Wang and Kanungo (2004) demonstrate that the role of interpersonal networks is often neglected and that it has a direct and a significant positive influence on the transferee's well-being. Caligiuri and Lazarova (2002) developed a model showing the relationship between social network, social support, and adjustment. Caligiuri and Lazarova (2002) assume that social interaction and social support (e.g., by example family members, co-workers in the country of sojourn, transferees from home and other countries) can help mobilize psychological resources that can intensify recognition and confirmation, which on the other hand is able to substantially improve intercultural adjustment. Social support can act as a buffer against stress that usually occurs when the transferee tries to adjust to the new environment. Successful intercultural adjustment is closely related to network partners and social support.

Theoretical Background

In recent years, a number of research projects have focused on *social support* in various contexts (family, friends, work) (e.g., Stroebe & Stroebe, 1998; Glazer, 2006). The concept of social support is founded in various research traditions which also deal with the interrelationship of social support and mental health.

From the standpoint of a resource concept (Udris, 1989), social support is, on the one hand, an external *resource* ("receive support"); simultaneously it is an internal resource that an individual can develop, respectively forget, ("provide support") (Udris, & Frese, 1999). There are different forms of social support (Duecker, 1995): material support (e.g., financial), support in the form of helping behavior (e.g., care in the case of illness), emotional support (e.g., affection, trust or sympathy), feedback (e.g., social confirmation), informative support, orientation assistance (e.g., advice), positive social activities (e.g., fun and recreation) being part of a network.

Many studies (e.g., in the overview of Cohen & Wills, 1985) showed a positive relationship between social support at work and the well-being of those who receive the support. Frese and Semmer (1991) name further social support mechanisms: First, social support is a primary need, in which humans have a phylogenetic need to work in a social group. The lack of social support automatically leads to a diminution of well-being. And second, the positive feedback connected with social support directly affects self-confidence and thus other components of mental well-being. Social support and the formation of networks are, therefore, closely related: the network concept is considered broad and multidimensional (Inkpen & Tsang, 2005) and consequently is suited as an "umbrella concept" for social support. There is a difference between the source of social support, i.e., the network partners providing the social support and the manner of support. A review literature by Ong and Ward (2005) showed four core functions of social support (Vaux et al., 1987; Wellmann, 1985): 1) *Emotional support*, e.g., assertion or displays of love, care, and sympathy; 2) *social companionship*, e.g., belongingness to a social group that provides company for a variety of activities; 3) *tangible assistance*, e.g., concrete aid in the form of financial help, required services or material resources; and 4) *informational support*, e.g., the

communication of opinion or facts relevant to a person's current difficulties (e.g., advice, personal feedback).

In the case of foreign assignment, different relationships within the interpersonal network of an expatriate are of interest: the relationship to the spouse, to friends and to co-workers, the two latter however matter in both the home country as well as in the country of sojourn. These networks may be considered an objective reality within which there are dyadic relationships of different strength.

Social support is an essential component of our daily lives and takes on a special significance in the context of assignment to a foreign country. Adelman (1988, p. 183) expresses it this way: "Our ability to cope with daily stressors, critical life transitions and environmental or cultural change is inextricably tied to the social ecology in which we are embedded." The entire social network and the accompanying social support of family, friends, and co-workers are of eminent importance in eliminating the risk of failure of the foreign assignment.

To facilitate adjustment during the sojourn, some large corporations apply comprehensive mentor programs, which are embedded in personnel development (Noe, Greenberger, & Wang, 2002; Peters, Schmicker, & Weinert, 2004). Hechanova, Beehr, and Christiansen's (2003) meta-analysis describes the antecedents and consequences of the adjustment of transferees on foreign assignment. Self-efficacy, i.e., a person's belief in his/her ability to act, the frequency of interaction with people from the host country, improved interpersonal skills and family support proved to be the main predictors for successful adjustment to the overall environment.

The mentioned risks and the antecedents for successful adjustment have been primarily studied in large corporations (e.g., Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1985; Ward, 1996). What the situation in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) is like remains unclear. It may be assumed that the situation is especially difficult, because SMEs do not have the corresponding resources at their disposal. In this context, interpersonal networks for SMEs transferees on foreign assignment are gaining in significance. However, their effect is often underestimated by the company.

Study 1

In approaching the problem, we conducted qualitative interviews of an explorative nature and a quantitative survey for the three phases – preparation, sojourn, and return (cohort design). Participants of the preparation and sojourn phase will be interviewed a second time to measure changes.

To differentiate between German SMEs and large corporations in these studies, we agreed unanimously on the following qualitative defining characteristics of SMEs: 1) the owner plays an active, decisive role in running the company, i.e., usually management and owner are the same person, 2) high degree of product, service or market specialization, 3) a legal entity, and 4) management's self-concept ("We are a small/medium-sized enterprise").

We chose a qualitative approach, because it offered more flexibility and openness for the interviewees. Moreover, the results in this new field may be quite surprising. In accordance with network analyses (Jansen, 2003), the network of interest was selected from the perspective of the interviewee, i.e., an ego-centered network with the transferees as ego. Alteri are family, friends, locals, colleagues, and the company (pointed questions were asked about them) and other network actors as the transferee perceived them. The study was of an explorative nature. The results were used to conceive a comprehensive, quantitative survey. Guidelines were developed separately for the preparation phase as well as for the two phases sojourn and return as they address different problems. The guidelines for preparation were divided according to the following items: preparation measures, questions on the network, personal significance, and the validity of the networks, support by the network for preparation, expectations, description of own and foreign culture of destination, potential particularities for the SMEs, as well as demographics.

The guidelines for the sojourn and for the return inquired about the support by the network during the sojourn and the return, to what extent the network participated, critical incidents (Flanagan, 1954) positive or negative, description of the own and foreign culture, whether there were things particular for the SMEs and demographics.

These first guidelines were intensively discussed with experts from practice and research as well as with students. The guidelines were then developed further and subsequently tested in five test interviews (countries of assignment: China/Taiwan/Japan/South Africa/Indonesia) and then revised again. Various methods were applied to select the participants: companies were approached via databases and internet forums as well as via department contacts and private initiative. The interviews were taped, transcribed, and subsequently written up without naming the respondents. The interviews underwent thorough qualitative analysis. The MAXqda program was used to encode the interviews (Schaaf, 2007). Evaluation was based on Mayring's (2007) qualitative respectively structuring content analysis.

Results

On demographics: All the respondents were male, between 27 and 47 years old. They were in the following phase of the foreign assignment: two before the first foreign assignment, two following their return home; twelve had already previously been on foreign assignment. The interviewees worked in SMEs in Munich and surroundings in the following fields: electronics, conveyor systems, paper manufacturing, engineering, and mechanical engineering. The destination was in eleven cases China, other destinations were Japan, Thailand (2x), Indonesia, and South Africa.

Twelve of the interviewees told us that they saw a great need for advice and support particularly for SMEs regarding preparation for the foreign assignment by providing corresponding information on culture and civilization as well as support during the sojourn and upon returning home, for example, in the form of training, cultural information, and language courses.

For all 16 respondents, family assumed a very important value. However, it was also stressed that keeping in contact and cultivating contacts, mainly over the telephone and via email, demanded special effort. Especially keeping in contact with friends suffered due to lack of time: "One can only work, eat and sleep." If accompanied by a spouse: "Only a busy wife is a good wife, a bored wife is torture."

A special focal point is the experiences reported about China. Eight of the interviewed expatriates who worked in China stressed how important contacts are for the Chinese and that in China "networking runs deeper." A significant problem is language. It is not easy to find Chinese staff with good English language skills: one is dependent on interpreters. They perceived major differences between German and Chinese culture. It is, therefore, essential that the staff is prepared for the culture to prevent culture shock. One respondent who considered himself successful stressed the importance of congeniality, and to not act superior. He built up his own network by playing sports with his Chinese colleagues.

Analysis of the networks revealed that the network partners, which, apart from family and friends, also include co-workers, the company in general, locals, other expatriates, and supportive organizations, are considered subjectively very important (especially the family) and perceived as helpful. However, there is hardly any contact between them. The family offered general support but did not provide any concrete assistance during the sojourn; circles of friends diminish, colleagues often do not realize the expatriate's extraordinary situation. Nonetheless, the entire interpersonal network and the connected social support of family, friends, and colleagues was immensely important in reducing the related risks, and thus for the success of the foreign assignment. In other words, more intensive interaction between the different interpersonal networks and the network partners can be very important for effective staff support. It is also helpful to have mentor programs integrated in human resources development which may be able to take this interaction into account and promote it.

Also mentioned was that the colleagues in the country of assignment and special organizations are other important network partners. Generally, companies only provide the usual information given for normal business trips. Although literary sources (e.g., Hechanova et al., 2003) consider contacts to locals a feature of successful integration, in reality they rarely come about, often due to lack of time. Individuals sent on foreign assignment for short periods lose their usual support in Germany, but do not receive the same degree of support in the country of sojourn. In this case, too, there is a definite need for action, because building new networks is tremendously important for successful business relations.

Study 2

It is assumed that the different areas of social support are related to the different facets of adjustment, because successful adjustment is indicated, e.g., by a high degree of job/life satisfaction, a low degree of stress, and strong ties to the company (Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2002). As in our study we refer to Caligiuri and Lazarova's model (2002), as indicators we utilize successful adjustment, life satisfaction, job satisfaction, and job stress. In addition to these, there are other factors known for successful adaptation, such as contact to locals, acculturation phases (etc.), which this study will not take up in more detail.

We differentiate between the source of social support and the type of social support. The network partners are the source of social support. Frese (1989) differentiates between the subscale support from supervisors, co-workers, friends, spouses among others. We employed this scale to determine the source of social support, and Ong and Ward's scale (2005) for the type of social support. Ong and Ward (2005) included these four domains (*Emotional support*, *social companionship*, *tangible assistance*, *informational support*) in the item-generation phase of the construction of their Index of Social Support for Sojourners (ISSS) scale and showed a stable two-factor internal structure of socio-emotional support and instrumental support. There are already several studies available on spouse support: Important for the success of a foreign assignment is a high degree of partner interdependence (Krause-Nicolai, 2005; Konopaske, Robie, & Ivancevich, 2005). Moreover, due to a spillover effect there is also an interdependence of the adjustment of expatriate couples (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001; Takeuchi, Yun, & Tesluk, 2002). It is also assumed that spousal social support facilitates adjustment in a new culture. Particularly life satisfaction is strongly related to social support by the companion. Moreover, life satisfaction is also strongly related to social support by friends. In this context we tested the influence of source of support and type of support on life satisfaction.

> *Hypothesis 1: Successful adjustment in the realm of life satisfaction may be predicted by the source of support and the provided type of support. We assume that especially socio-emotional support and support from spouses/partners and friends contribute to life satisfaction.*

It may be assumed that a high degree of adjustment in the job realm is particularly related to the perceived support by the company (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002) and to the support by members of the company (Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991). In this context we tested the influence of instrumental support on job satisfaction. Moreover, job satisfaction is also strongly related to social support by co-workers and supervisors. However, there may also be cross-domain effects of social support from family and friends on job satisfaction.
In this context we tested the influence of source of support and type of support on job satisfaction.

> *Hypothesis 2: Successful adjustment in the realm of job satisfaction may be predicted by the source of support and the provided type of support. We assume that particularly instrumental support, as well as support from co-workers and supervisors, contributes to job satisfaction.*

Social support helps to reduce or neutralize the negative effects of stress and has a positive effect on health and well-being (Udris & Frese, 1999). It is, therefore, presumed that social support has a positive effect on the degree of job stress. The influence of job stress in

general has seldom been investigated. Usually the effect of role stressors such as role ambiguity, role conflict, role novelty or role overload on expatriate adjustment (e.g., Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer, & Luk, 2005; Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou 1991) was studied.

> Hypothesis 3: Successful adjustment in the realm of job stress may be predicted by the source of support and the provided type of support.

Method

Participants

In order to study certain aspects more closely and put them on a broader basis, we conducted a quantitative survey for SMEs and large corporations. This study is part of a larger panel study investigating the role of providing employees on foreign assignment in SMEs with social support.[1] We approached the companies by databases, personal contacts or by writing to them. A panel study was planned that takes the preparation phase as the point of departure, the assignment as the 2nd question period, and the return as the 3rd question period. Presently, the first questioning of all participants has been concluded. It was conducted as a cohort analysis, i.e., respondents were from all three phases. We have finished the first interviews of the cross-section study (inquiry period: from April 2007 to December 2007). All 143 individuals were interviewed: 16 in the preparation phase, 90 in the sojourn phase, and 37 in the return phase. The participating companies were in various industries, e.g., automobile, construction, mechanical engineering, telecommunications, IT.

45% of the participants were members of SMEs, 55% of large corporations. The age of the transferees was 38.33 (s.d. = 8.58) and ranged from 25 to 63. 17% of the respondents were female. 80% of the respondents said they were living in a stable relationship or were married; about half of the respondents were accompanied by their families (52%) and children (50%). On average, participants in the preparation phase planned to go abroad for two years, participants in sojourn phase indicated on average 3.3 years (s.d. = 2.24) and in return phase 2.5 years. Three different versions of the questionnaire were developed for the preparation, sojourn, and return phases, respectively.

These data were compiled online, because all the participants were outside the country at the time. Contact was made with the company in Germany which then conveyed the link to the expatriates. The most common destinations were China (34x), USA (31x), United Arabic Emirates (9), followed by Brazil and Great Britain (6x), Kazakhstan (3x), and Slovakia (3x). Mentioned twice each were Germany, India, Japan, and the Ukraine. Participation was voluntary.

Measures

All respondents rated the extent to which they agreed with statements on a scale from 1 to 5.

Source of support – Network partner. We used Frese's (1989) 20-item scale to measure sources of support given by network partner. Frese's scale (1989) differentiates between support of superiors, co-workers, life-long companions, and friends. Depending on the network partner, an overall value can be calculated. Cronbach's alpha for the scales was adequate to high. (For superiors $\alpha = .91$, for co-workers $\alpha = .82$, for spouse/husband $\alpha = .94$, and for friends $\alpha = .84$.)

Type of provided social support. Type of social support was measured with Ong and Ward's 18-item-scale (2005), translated into German and validated by Spiess (2007), differentiates between two types of social support: socio-emotional and instrumental support. This two-factor structure has empirically proven itself. Cronbach's alpha for the scales was high (for socio-emotional support, Cronbach's alpha was .89, for instrumental support .92).

Job Satisfaction. Agho, Prise and Mueller's (1992) 6-item scale was used to measure job satisfaction. Cronbach's alpha for the scale was adequate ($\alpha = .82$).

Job Stress. The interviewees were questioned about stress at work using a scale developed by Sosik and Gotshalk (2000): respondents rated the extent to which they agreed with statements such as "My job makes me jumpy and nervous." Cronbach's alpha for the scale was adequate ($\alpha = .79$).

Life Satisfaction. The interviewees were asked to rate life satisfaction in eight non-job areas; such as satisfaction with health, professional success or with income. Cronbach's alpha for the scale was $\alpha = .68$.

Control variables. A 1-item measure was used to determine whether or not the transferee was accompanied by his/her family. The item was "Did your family (spouse, companion, children) accompany you?" and could be answered with a yes or no answer. Assuming whether or not the family accompanied the expatriate may make a difference, we controlled whether the family joins the expatriate.

Open question. With whom did you spend your leisure time?

Results

Analytic Strategy

We standardized the social network variables (network partner supervisor, network partner co-worker, network partner friends, network partner spouse/husband) by a Z-score transformation to increase interpretability (e.g., Cohen & Cohen, 1983). To test hypotheses 1 and 2, we performed three sets of hierarchical regression analyses: for life satisfaction, job satisfaction, and job stress. In step 1, we included family joins (0 = family does not join, 1 = family joins), sex (0 = female, 1 = male). In step 2, sources of support were included. In step 3, we included type of support (socio-emotional vs. instrumental).

Descriptive Statistics

As the number of participants in the preparation phase was small, the comparisons are only descriptive. We approached the companies by databases, personal contacts or by writing to them. 45% of the respondents were employees of SMEs, 55% employees of large corporations. The average age was 38.33 years. The youngest was 25, the oldest 63 years old. The percentage of women was 17%. At the time of the survey, most of the expatriates had a steady partner or were married (80%). About half of the respondents were accompanied by their family (52%) and children (50%). Those in the preparation phase said that they would stay an average of two years. The average sojourn of those on assignment was 3.3 years. The average sojourn of those in the return phase was 2.5 years. The respondents were sent to various countries: mentioned most often were China (34x), USA (31x), the United Arabic Emirates (9x) as well as Brazil and UK (6x each).

The comparison of the various phases on life and job satisfaction, experienced job stress and experienced company support revealed that all the interviewed expatriates experienced the sojourn phase significantly as most unsatisfactory and most stressful.

As a cross-section interview was carried out in the first interview phase, a phase comparison with little random samplings could be conducted. Our questions included life satisfaction, job stress, and perceived company support. Reported were only statistically significant results, adjusted/corrected. The value, adjusted/corrected in the parentheses, is an average value on a scale of 1 (unimportant) to 5 (very important).

Staff life satisfaction in the preparation phase (M = 3.6; SD = 0.71) was greater than in the sojourn phase (M = 3.2; SD = 0.79) and than in the return phase (M = 3.3, SD = 0.69), which is an indication of the stress experienced during the assignment or is an expression of too high expectations of the assignment. This is also confirmed by the job stress results (example item "My work is stress for me"). Job stress during assignment (M = 2.55, SD = 0.6) and upon return (M = 2.4, SD = 0.73) is greater than during preparation (M = 2.2, SD = 0.50).

The perceived company support during the sojourn phase (M = 3.0, SD = 0.80) is less than during the preparation phase (M = 3.4, SD = 0.71) and the return phase (M = 3.2, SD = 0.75).

Means, standard deviations, and correlations are depicted in Table 1. Non-standardized means and standard deviations of variables are listed for informational purposes only, because standardized variables are used in all the analyses except for the dependent variables. The directions of the correlations of all the experienced variables were in the anticipated direction.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations^a

Variable	Mean	s.d.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Job Satisfaction	3.30	.76	.82									
2. Life Satisfaction	3.61	.58	.29**	.68								
3. Job Stress	2.48	.64	-.26**	-.28**	.79							
4. Socio-emotional Support	2.69	.95	.16	.11	-.08	.89						
5. Instrumental Support	3.08	1.00	.33***	.21*	-.27**	.76***	.92					
6. NP Supervisor/s	3.35	1.08	.34***	.31***	-.27**	.19*	.33***	.91				
7. NP Coworker/s	3.33	.77	.22**	.20*	-.13	.10	.30**	.36***	.82			
8. NP Spouse/Husband	4.00	1.37	.02	.33***	-.01	-.01	.04	.02	-.04	.94		
9. NP Friend/s	3.65	.91	.16	.38***	-.13	.09	.10	.34***	.24**	.13	.84	
10. POS	3.07	.79	.62***	.37***	-.26**	.19*	.35***	.46***	.29***	.07	.37***	.91

^{a} n = 144; reliability coefficients are reported along the diagonal: Means and standard deviations reported here are for non-standardized variables. NP Network Partner, POS Perceived Organizational Support.
Two-tailed tests: * p < .05   ** p < .01 *** p < .001.

Regression Analysis

Table 2 shows the results of the regression analyses. Models 1 through 3 report the constants and the standardized coefficients (βs) associated with each individual step.

Hypothesis 1 assumes that life satisfaction can be predicted by the source and the type of support. Life satisfaction can be predicted by social support by spouse (β = .26, p<.05) and by friends (β = .31, p<.01). This result supports hypothesis 1 for source of support but not for type of support.

Hypothesis 2 proposes that job satisfaction can be predicted by the source and the type of provided support. Job satisfaction can be predicted by social support by supervisor (β = .26, p<.05) and by instrumental support (β = .36, p<.05). The results support hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 3 assumes, that job stress can be predicted by the source and the type of provided support. Job stress can be predicted by social support by supervisor (β = -.27, p<.05) and by instrumental support (β = -.42, p<.01) and by socio-emotional support (β = -.28, p<.05).

Table 2

Results of Regression Analysis for Life Satisfaction and Job Satisfaction[a]

Variable	Life Satisfaction				Job Satisfaction				Job Stress		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Intercept	3.49***	1.88***	1.80***		2.85***	1.90***	1.72***		2.43***	3.06***	3.08***
Step 1: Control Variables											
sex	0.5	0.1	0.1		.24*	.21*	.19*		.03	.06	.08
family joins	0.6	0.1	0.2		.02	.06	.07		.04	.01	.01
Step 2: source of support - social support by network partner											
Friends		.31**	.32**			.10	.12			-.03	-.05
Wife/husband		.26*	.26*			-.01	-.01			.04	.04
coworker		.06	.03			.03	-.04			-.06	.02
supervisor		.16	.14			.26*	.18			-.27**	-.20*
Step 3: Type of support											
Socio-emotional support			-.03				-.15				-.28*
instrumental support			.13				.36*				-.42**
R^2	.01	.26	.27		.06	.16	.22		.01	.09	.15
$R^{2\ adjusted}$	-.01	.22	.22		.04	.11	.16		-.02	.04	.09

[a]n = 127. Values are standardized estimates. Two tailed tests: $+p < .10$, $* p < .05$, $** p < .01$, $*** p < .001$.Discussion

On foreign assignment, important were both an interpersonal network that provided social support and relations within the interpersonal network. In other words, to what extent spouses, friends, colleagues, and superiors are in contact with each other. The aim of the present study was, on the one hand, to examine the social networks of expatriates as a source of social support and, on the other hand, measure received type of support (socio-emotional and instrumental support) and their influence on adjustment.

Results of our qualitative study show that most of the respondents saw a great need for advice and support particularly for SMEs regarding preparation for the foreign assignment by providing corresponding information on culture and civilization, as well as support during the sojourn and upon returning home. Analysis of the networks revealed that the network partners, which, apart from family and friends, also include co-workers, the company in general, locals, other expatriates, and supportive organizations, are considered subjectively very important (especially the family) and perceived as helpful.

The social support scale permits measuring the social network of expatriates: the support of superiors, co-workers, spouses, and friends (Frese, 1989). In addition to this, Ong and Ward's

Sojourner Social Support Scale (2005) was employed to gain information about socio-emotional and instrumental support (type of received support).

First analyses show that the source of support (network partner), as well as the type of support, is very important for life and job satisfaction and for job stress in the phases of sojourn and return. For life satisfaction, the spouse and friends are more important than perceived socio-emotional support. For job satisfaction, the supervisor and the perceived instrumental support play a major role.

The initial stages of most expatriates' assignments are often associated with stress, disorientation, and loneliness (Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2002). In this phase, socio-emotional support can help them overcome negative feelings so that they experience these feelings as a normal part of the assignment and the adjustment process. Therefore, additional research that replicates and/or extends our findings is definitely required to discover the influence of network partners on adjustment.

Limitations

The study's limitations relates to the fact that the study's data hitherto only comprise cross-sectional samples. In the long term, our research project will compile data in a panel study, which is presently not available. Once available it will be possible to compare transferees in the preparation phase, during the assignment, and in the return phase of a foreign assignment. This way, on the one hand, it will be possible to draw conclusions about causalities, thus to explain the direction of the relationship which hitherto could only be assumed on a theoretical basis. On the other hand, with a large set of data we will be able to test a model that integrates social variables (superiors, co-worker, spouse, friends), socio-emotional and instrumental support and shows their influence on the cross-cultural adjustment. Although our cross-sectional data do not allow for testing causalities, it highlights the importance of network partners for adjustment.

Another limitation may be potential threats of common method or same-respondent biases.

Implications for Research and Practice

Despite these limitations, our study has a number of research implications. One significant implication is that the current investigation opens a new direction for expatriate adjustment research with regard to social support. We differentiate between the source of social support and the type of social support. Studies often investigate the success of a foreign assignment, e.g., cross-cultural adjustment, performance, and that the assignment does not end prematurely (Caligiuri, 1997). Other studies focus on the adjustment of the spouse and the spouse's influence on the success of the foreign assignment (e.g., Shaffer & Harrison 2001). However, it is relatively seldom that the topic of social support during foreign assignments is taken up. When authors deal with the social support, they usually consider only partial aspects of it. There are studies on spousal social support (e.g., Takeuchi et al., 2002) and others on the company support (e.g., Kraimer & Wayne, 2004; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002), whereas others concentrate on social ties (Johnson et al., 2003) or social networks (Borgatti & Foster, 2003).

Relevance in practice is the necessity to point out, on the one hand, that effective support measures have to be developed for employees sent on foreign assignment and, on the other hand, that in future concepts of effective support for staff on foreign assignment are also important. It is important to prepare the transferees better and with more relevance, and to provide them with information about the culture in addition to information about the country and the job. Equally important is that the company continues the support beyond the sojourn itself. Improving the contact between the network partners, which, apart from family and friends also includes co-workers, the company itself, locals, other expatriates and supportive organizations, can contribute to reducing the risks involved with the sojourn.

In conclusion, the present research takes a significant step forward and sheds light on the concept of social support and adjustment, and differentiates between source of support and type of support.

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