The Role of Social Support and the Importance of Interpersonal Networks to Minimize Risks of Foreign Assignment¹

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Abstract
This study presents the role of social support and of networks for staff of small and large corporations on foreign assignment. We used both, a qualitative and quantitative approach: qualitative interviews of staff of small and medium-sized companies revealed the special need of support within the scope of the assignment and the immense significance of a well-functioning, supportive network to minimize risks. A quantitative survey with 143 respondents from large corporations and small sized companies examined the relation between the size of the company and the phases for social support and networks. The outcome was that critical phases of foreign assignment were the sojourn and the return phase, marked by less life satisfaction, greater job stress and less perceived company support. Depending on the size of the company, especially employees of large corporations perceived more support.

¹ Erscheint in:
1. Introduction
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 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.

The larger the cultural distance to the country of origin (Wang, 2003) the more difficult a foreign assignment may turn out to be. There is the danger that, due to the culture shock, the expatriate will not be able to do his/her job. The
different phases of a foreign assignment (Kühlmann, 1995; Kühlmann & Stahl, 2001) – preparation, sojourn, and return – harbor certain risks.

Due to time constraints, preparation is often inadequate or does not occur at all (Schmidt & Minssen, 2006). The risks for the assignment are country-specific as well as of a private nature: western expatriates to China experienced a “classical” culture shock (Selmer, 1999), transferees who were not interested in the country of assignment had difficulty to adapt (Selmer, 2001) and consequently to be effective for the company. The company's and home colleagues' lack of appreciation of the returnee (Kühlmann, 1995) were problems specific of the return phase.

2. Theoretical framework

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 (Dücker, 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.

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 companies is like remains unclear. It may be assumed that the situation is especially difficult, because small companies do not have the corresponding resources at their disposal. In this context, interpersonal networks for small and medium-sized companies’ transferees on foreign assignment are gaining in significance. However, their effect is often underestimated by the company.

3. Method
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. Based on the combination of the results of the interviews and the comprehensive survey, we plan to develop training for staff sent on foreign assignment.

Qualitative Approach
In order to investigate the problem of support and networking in foreign assignments, we first conducted guided interviews with the transferees of small and medium-sized companies from April to July 2006. 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 small and medium-sized companies 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 small and medium-sized companies 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 (2002) qualitative respectively structuring content analysis.

Quantitative Method
In order to study certain aspects more closely and put them on a broader basis, we conducted a quantitative survey for small and medium-sized companies and large corporations. To differentiate between German small and medium-sized companies and large corporations in these studies, we agreed unanimously on the following qualitative defining characteristics of small and medium-sized companies: 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 company”). Three different versions of the questionnaire were developed for the preparation, sojourn and return phases, respectively.
Measures

Network Partners. We used Frese’s (1989) 20-item scale to measure support of network partners. 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 $\alpha = .92$, for co-workers $\alpha = .80$, for companions $\alpha = .94$ and for friends $\alpha = .84$).

Perceived Social Support. Perceived social support was measured with Ong and Ward’s item-scale (2005), translated into the German and validated by Spiess (2007), differentiates between two social support factors: 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 .91.)

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 ($\alpha = .82$). We controlled job satisfaction as we wanted to determine the relationship between the type of company, perceived social support and network partners independent of the degree of expatriate job satisfaction.

Commitment. The Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) was developed by Porter and Smith (1970) to measure employee identification with their organization. Commitment is characterized by the following aspects (Mowday, Steers & Porter, 1979; Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982): (a) a strong belief in the acceptance of organizational goals and values (identification), (b) willingness to put oneself out for the organization (willingness to make an effort) and (c) a strong need to remain in the organization (low fluctuation tendency). The significance of commitment exceeds the more passive loyalty to an organization, because an affective commitment is related to a more active and dedicated engagement for the organization. The German-language version of Port and Smith’s questionnaire (1970) was validated by Maier and Woschée.
(2002) and OCQ’s one-factor structure (8-item) was verified by confirmatory factor analyses. Cronbach’s alpha for the scale was adequate ($\alpha = .88$).

**Perceived organizational support.** We used a scale developed by Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison and Sowa (1986) for perceived organizational support. Respondents rated the extent to which they agreed with statements such as “The organization strongly considers my goals and values.”

**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”.

**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.

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

**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 questions** concerning the effectiveness of the support and the building and cultivation of networks for the different phases, e.g.
- most effective support, emotional support in preparing
- needed support, support of the company
- examples of build up/make/cultivate private contacts

**Hypotheses**
The present study analyzes the influence of social support on cultural adjustment. The scale social support at the workplace (Frese, 1989) differentiates between the subscale support by superiors, co-workers, spouses and friends.

Social support helps to reduce or neutralize the negative effects of stress. Moreover, it 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. In other words, a high degree of social support reduces job stress. Especially social support by superiors reduces stress at work. 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.

It is assumed that the different areas of social support are related to the different facets of adjustment, because successful cultural 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).

**Hypothesis 1: There is a negative relationship between job stress and job satisfaction as it is between job stress and life satisfaction.**

Important for the success of a foreign assignment is a high degree of partner interdependence (Nicolai-Krause, 2005; Konopaske, Robie & Ivancevich, 2005). Moreover, due to a spill over 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. Moreover, it is assumed that 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 socio-emotional support on life satisfaction.
Hypothesis 2: Successful cultural adjustment in the realm of life satisfaction may be predicted by the degree of social support by the spouse and by friends.

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.

Hypothesis 3: Job satisfaction can be predicted by perceived support by co-workers and by supervisor/s.

4. Results
4.1 Results of the qualitative interviews
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; all the others had already previously been on foreign assignment. The interviewees worked in medium-sized companies in Munich and surroundings in the following fields: electronics, conveyor systems, paper manufacturing, engineering and mechanical engineering. The destination was in most cases China, other destinations were Japan, Thailand and Indonesia.

Most of the interviewees told us, that they saw a great need for advice and support particularly for medium-sized companies 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 the 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 are the experiences reported about China. Many 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. Many of the interviewed expatriates 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 not to act superior. He built up his own network by playing sports with his Chinese colleagues.

Analysis of the risks and 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. Also helpful are mentor programs integrated in human resources development which may be able to take this interaction into account and promote it.

Also mentioned, other important network partners are the colleagues in the country of assignment and special organizations. 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.

4.2 Results of the survey
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. We approached the companies by databases, personal contacts or by writing to them. 45% of the respondents were employees of small and medium-sized companies, 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 (see Fig. 1): mentioned most often were China (34x), USA (31x), the United Arabic Emirates (9x) as well as Brazil and UK (6x each).

![Figure 1: Expatriates' Countries of Sojourn](image-url)
One of the questions was with whom the respondents spent their leisure time in the different phases of the assignment. In the preparation phase, the individuals spent their leisure time primarily with their families (71%) and with friends from their country of origin (64%), less with colleagues from work (23%). In the sojourn phase, the transferees also spent most of their leisure time with their families (63%). Moreover, the interviewed spent time with new friends from the guest country (43%), colleagues from their country of origin (37%), friends from their country of origin (35%) and colleagues from the guest country (33%).

In the return phase, the interviewed stated in retrospect that they spent most of their leisure time with friends from the guest country (61%); second came colleagues from the guest country (58%). Moreover, the interviewed stated they spent their leisure time with their families (53%), with colleagues from their country of origin (47%) and with friends from their country of origin (31%).

In other words, the family is an important value for the interviewed in all three phases of transfer, a result that had already been confirmed by interviews with transferees of small and medium-sized companies. Furthermore, colleagues and friends from the guest country extend the existing network of the expatriate in the sojourn phase.

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, p<.10, F=2.53), 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, p<.10, F=2.61).

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, p<.05). This result is confirmed by other studies according to which companies invest most in the preparation phase and the least in the return phase.

In addition, the transferees were asked how they perceived the support by the colleagues in the country of assignment and by the colleagues at home during the three phases. The employees felt more supported by their colleagues at home during the preparation phase (M=3.93, SD=0.92) than during the sojourn (M=2.83, SD=1.31, p<.05) and during the return phase (M=2.94, SD=1.37, p<.01). Whereas the expatriates felt more supported by the colleagues from the guest country during the return phase (M=4.19, SD=0.88) than during the sojourn (M=3.66, SD=1.06, p<.01).
The measured distance between the own and the foreign culture: During the return the distance to the foreign culture is perceived less (M=1.33, SD=0.57, p<.01) than during the sojourn (M=1.76, SD=0.63, p<.01) and the preparation (M=1.64, SD=0.77).

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<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>2. Life Satisfaction</td>
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<td>3. Job Stress</td>
<td>2.48</td>
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<td>.26**</td>
<td>.28**</td>
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<td>4. Commitment</td>
<td>3.24</td>
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<td>-18*</td>
<td>.86</td>
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<td>5. Socio-emotional</td>
<td>2.69</td>
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<td>6. Instrumental Support</td>
<td>3.08</td>
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<td></td>
<td>.21*</td>
<td>.27**</td>
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<td>7. NP Supervisor/s</td>
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Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations a

*a n = 144; reliability coefficients are reported along the diagonal: Means and standard deviations reported here are for unstandardized variables. NP Network Partner, POS Perceived Organizational Support.

* p < .05
** p < .01
*** p < .001.

Two-tailed tests

Hypotheses were tested by correlations and regression analyses. There is a significant relationship between support by supervisor (r=.33, p<.001) and coworker (r=.30, p<.01) and instrumental support. Job satisfaction also correlates to support by network partner supervisor (r=.34, p<.001) and coworker (r=.22, p<.01) and to perceived organizational support (r=.62, p<.001). Life satisfaction correlates highly significantly to support by spouse/husband (r=.33, p<.001) and friends (r=.38, p<.001) but also to support by supervisor (r=.31, p<.001) and coworker (r=.20, p<.05).
As predicted, job stress is negatively correlated to job satisfaction (r=-.26, p<.01), life satisfaction (r=-.28, p<.01) and support by supervisor (r=-.27, p<.01). Moreover, there is a significant, negative relation to commitment (r=-.18, p<.05), instrumental support (r=-.27, p<.01) and perceived organizational support (r=-.28, p<.01).

Life satisfaction (β = -.20, p<.05) and job satisfaction (β = -.19, p<.005) predict job stress. The tested model is significant (R²=.10, p<.01).

Support by friends (β = .36, p<.001) and spouse (β = .27, p<.001) predict life satisfaction. The socio-emotional support hardly explains the additional variance (β = .08, n.s.). The tested model is highly significant (R²=.23, p<.001).

Support by supervisor/s (β = .24, p<.01) and instrumental support (β = .24, p<.01) predict job satisfaction. Support by co-workers hardly explains the additional variance (β = .02, n.s.). The tested model is highly significant (R²=.16, p<.001). Moreover, support by friends moderated the relationship between the type of company and the perceived support (Stroppa & Spiess, in press).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>life satisfaction</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>job satisfaction</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>support by friends</td>
<td>.36***</td>
<td>support by supervisor</td>
<td>.24**</td>
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<tr>
<td>support by spouse</td>
<td>.27***</td>
<td>support by coworker</td>
<td>.02</td>
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<td>socio-emotional support</td>
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<td>instrumental support</td>
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<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>R²</td>
<td>.16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adjusted R²</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>Adjusted R²</td>
<td>.14</td>
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</table>

Table 2: Results of Regression Analysis for life satisfaction and job satisfaction

n = 127. Values are standardized estimates.
*p < .10, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001. Two tailed tests.

Only about half of the interviewees answered the questions concerning the effectiveness of the support and the building and cultivation of networks. The answers to the open questions contained multiple mentions. They were arranged in a ranking sequence and divided into large corporations and small companies. In this study, only the top ranked were considered and interpreted.
For preparation, to the question who helped most effectively in preparation, in large corporations the company ranked first, in small companies it was the family. For emotional support the spouse, respectively the family, ranked first both for small and medium-sized companies and large corporations. For the sojourn, to the question what type of contact was sought to the locals, what was mentioned most in all companies was the contact to friends/acquaintances. To the questions concerning the most effective and emotional support, spouse/family ranked first in all companies. To the question concerning support during the sojourn, in large corporations “organizational” ranked first, “no assistance” came second. In small companies it was reverse. As to the question how private contacts came about during the sojourn, in all companies most said “through work”. As examples, how private contacts were cultivated, the internet ranked first and the telephone second.

For the return phase, in the memory of the returnees of all companies contact with the locals came about through colleagues. The most effective support upon return differs: For the small and medium-sized companies it was friends and acquaintances, whereas in the large corporations it was the company, respectively the colleagues. In small and medium-sized companies, emotional support was provided by friends and acquaintances; in large corporations it was the family. Accordingly, returnees of small companies reported that the company did not provide any support at all, whereas in large corporations the company provided organizational support. Forming private contacts was also seen differently in hindsight. In large corporations, they came about through work; in the small companies by going out to eat. For cultivating contacts, the answer was given by large corporations: it occurred through invitations.

The results allow the interpretation that to the most interviewed, the family was very important, which is also confirmed by the results of the qualitative interviews. On the other hand, for the interviewees of large corporations, the company was most important. The staff of small companies needed to take more initiative.
5. Conclusion and Discussion
The cultural risks of the interviewed - ignorance of the do's and don'ts in the foreign culture – can best be avoided in the preparation phase. Relevant information, education and training can enlighten and sensitize and in this way improve intercultural action and acting with confidence in the interviewees' foreign-cultured business world.

On foreign assignment, important were both an interpersonal network which 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 interview results revealed that in small companies involving family and friends is left to the transferees themselves. They tried to arouse the interest of their spouses in the country of assignment though conversation and going on vacation together.

There was little time left for cultivating friendships. There is hardly any contact between network partners, which, apart from family and friends, also includes co-workers, the company in general, locals, other expatriates and supportive organization. Most small and medium-sized companies offer only formal assistance. Apart from language teaching, there was no adequate intercultural training. The companies also did not try to involve the spouse. On the other hand, their demands on the staff and their expectations of success were quite high. The quantitative survey results showed that there were definite differences compared to large corporations, whose staff received more organizational help. However, comparison of the various phases on life and job satisfaction and experienced job stress and experienced company support revealed that all the interviewed expatriates experienced the sojourn phase significantly as most unsatisfactory and most stressful.

First analyses show that the network partner is very important for life and for job satisfaction 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.
In conclusion, there is a great need for action especially when staff of small and medium-sized companies is sent on foreign assignment. 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.

Other, more in depth evaluations will follow. A panel study is planned which takes the preparation phase as the point of departure, the assignment as the 2\textsuperscript{nd} question period and the return as the 3\textsuperscript{rd} question period.

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