

MASTERARBEIT | MASTER'S THESIS

Titel | Title

Bridging Worlds: A Comparative Analysis of Expatriate Adjustment Factors in
Virtual vs Traditional Assignments

verfasst von | submitted by

Dott. Andrea Messner

angestrebter akademischer Grad | in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science (MSc)

Wien | Vienna, 2025

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt |
Degree programme code as it appears on the
student record sheet:

UA 066 914

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt | Degree
programme as it appears on the student
record sheet:

Masterstudium Internationale Betriebswirtschaft

Betreut von | Supervisor:

Mag. Oksana Galak PhD

German Abstract

In einer zunehmend vernetzten und digitalen Arbeitswelt stehen internationale Fach- und Führungskräfte vor neuen Formen globaler Mobilität. Diese Masterarbeit untersucht, wie sich Expatriates an internationale Einsätze anpassen – sowohl in traditionellen, physischen Entsendungen als auch in virtuellen, ortsunabhängigen Arbeitskontexten. Im Mittelpunkt steht die Frage, welche Faktoren die Anpassung an eine neue berufliche, kulturelle und soziale Umgebung fördern und wie HR-Maßnahmen diesen Prozess gezielt unterstützen können.

Theoretisch stützt sich die Arbeit auf das Modell von Black et al. (1991), das um aktuelle Forschungserkenntnisse erweitert wird. Aufbauend darauf werden drei Kategorien von Einflussfaktoren betrachtet – individuelle, arbeitsbezogene und außerberufliche. Diese werden als interne und externe Treiber der Anpassung zusammengefasst, wobei HR-Maßnahmen als moderierende Mechanismen verstanden werden, die das Zusammenspiel dieser Treiber formen und verstärken. Methodisch folgt die Untersuchung einem qualitativen Forschungsdesign. Zehn Interviews mit traditionellen und virtuellen Expatriates sowie HR-Fachkräften multinationaler Unternehmen bilden die empirische Basis. Ergänzend erfasste ein Pre-Interview-Fragebogen eine Selbstbewertung der Big-Five-Persönlichkeitsmerkmale. Die Auswertung erfolgte mittels qualitativer Inhaltsanalyse in MAXQDA, ergänzt durch eine Frequenz- und Intensitätsanalyse der Codes, um die empirische Bedeutung einzelner Einflussfaktoren sichtbar zu machen.

Die Ergebnisse zeigen deutliche Unterschiede zwischen den beiden Entsendeformen. Traditionelle Expatriates berichten vor allem Herausforderungen bei kultureller Integration, Familienanpassung und lokaler Vernetzung. Virtuelle Expatriates hingegen nennen Hürden beim Aufbau sozialer Beziehungen, in der digitalen Kommunikation und in der Aufrechterhaltung der Work-Life-Balance über Zeitzonen hinweg. Dabei bilden interne Treiber – wie Persönlichkeitsmerkmale, Mindset und proaktives Verhalten – die psychologische Grundlage der Anpassung, während externe Treiber – etwa soziale Unterstützung, organisatorische Strukturen und kulturelle Rahmenbedingungen – den Kontext schaffen, in dem diese individuellen Ressourcen wirken können. Ein zentrales Ergebnis ist die Rolle von HR-Maßnahmen als Bindeglied zwischen diesen beiden Ebenen: Während bei traditionellen Entsendungen vor allem administrative, logistische und kulturelle Vorbereitungen entscheidend sind, erfordern virtuelle Einsätze kontinuierliche organisatorische Unterstützung, klare virtuelle Arbeitsnormen und eine inklusive Unternehmenskultur. Darauf aufbauend entwickelt die Arbeit zwei vergleichbare Modelle der Expatriate-Anpassung, die Gemeinsamkeiten und Unterschiede zwischen traditionellen und virtuellen Entsendungen systematisch aufzeigen. Theoretisch erweitert sie das Rahmenkonzept von Black et al.

(1991) auf neue Formen globaler Mobilität, praktisch liefert sie konkrete Handlungsempfehlungen für Unternehmen und HR-Abteilungen zur Förderung erfolgreicher internationaler Zusammenarbeit. Insgesamt zeigt die Arbeit, dass erfolgreiche Anpassung das Ergebnis eines dynamischen Zusammenspiels zwischen individuellen Ressourcen, organisatorischen Strukturen und kulturellem Kontext ist – ein Zusammenspiel, das durch strategische HR-Maßnahmen aktiv gestaltet werden kann.

Table of Contents

1	Introduction.....	1
2	Literature Review	3
2.1	<i>From Assignment to Adjustment: The Expat Journey.....</i>	3
2.1.1	Virtual Expatriates: A New Era of Global Assignments	4
2.1.2	The Multifaceted Process of Expatriate Adjustment	7
2.2	<i>Individual Factors contributing to Expatriate Adjustment.....</i>	9
2.2.1	How Personality Shapes Expatriate Adjustment.....	10
2.2.2	Proactivity and Coping in the Adjustment Process.....	12
2.2.3	Multiple Intelligences and Their Role in Adjustment.....	16
2.3	<i>Expatriate Work Environment: Work Factors Influencing Adjustment.....</i>	20
2.3.1	Cultivating a Multinational Organizational Culture	21
2.3.2	Job Structure Influencing Expatriate Adjustment	22
2.3.3	The Role of Home and Host Country Mentorship.....	24
2.4	<i>Moving Beyond the Workplace: Non-Work Factors shaping Adjustment</i>	29
2.4.1	Navigating Cultural Differences	30
2.4.2	Support Networks in Expatriation.....	32
2.5	<i>Guiding Global Talent: HR Policies & Strategies to Ease Expatriate Adjustment</i>	35
2.5.1	Supporting Traditional Expatriates: A Holistic HR Approach	36
2.5.2	Effective HR Practices for Supporting Virtual Assignees.....	38
3	Research Methodology	43
3.1	<i>Research Design & Participant Sample.....</i>	43
3.2	<i>Data Collection: Interviews and Questionnaire</i>	44
3.3	<i>Qualitative Data Analysis in MAXQDA.....</i>	46
3.4	<i>Integration of Quantitative Data in MAXQDA</i>	48
4	Empirical Findings	51
4.1	<i>Proposition 1: Big Five Personality Traits.....</i>	55
4.2	<i>Proposition 2: Sources of Social Support.....</i>	61
4.3	<i>Proposition 3: Adjusting to the Work Environment</i>	69
4.4	<i>Proposition 4: Adjusting to the Host Culture</i>	73
4.5	<i>Proposition 5: HR Policies & Strategies.....</i>	80

5	Discussion	89
5.1	<i>Internal Drivers of Adjustment.....</i>	90
5.2	<i>External Drivers of Adjustment.....</i>	92
5.3	<i>HR Policies & Strategies as Moderators of Expatriate Adjustment</i>	96
5.4	<i>Comparative Models of Expatriate Adjustment</i>	98
5.5	<i>Limitations of this Thesis and Future Outlook</i>	104
6	Conclusion	105
	References	106
	Appendices	130
	<i>Appendix A: Pre-Interview Questionnaire for Expatriates</i>	130
	<i>Appendix B: Interview Guidelines</i>	132
B1	Traditional Expatriates	132
B2	Virtual Expatriates	134
B3	Expatriates with Virtual & Traditional Assignment Experience.....	136
B4	HR Professionals.....	137
	<i>Appendix C: Interview Transcripts</i>	138
C1	TE1.....	138
C2	VE1	143
C3	HR1	147
C4	VTE1	152
C5	VTE2	158
C6	HR2.....	164
C7	TE2.....	167
C8	VE2	170
C9	TE3.....	175
C10	HR3	180

List of Figures

Figure 1: Black et al.'s (1991) comprehensive model of international sociocultural adjustment.....	9
Figure 2: Traditional Expatriate Adjustment - Hierarchical Code-Subcode-Model.....	53
Figure 3: Virtual Expatriate Adjustment - Hierarchical Code-Subcode-Model	54
Figure 4: Descriptive Statistics of Questionnaire Answers.....	55
Figure 5: Heatmap of Personality Traits in Traditional Expatriate Adjustment	59
Figure 6: Heatmap of Personality Traits in Virtual Expatriate Adjustment	60
Figure 7: Heatmap of Sources of Support Factors in Traditional Expatriate Adjustment.....	66
Figure 8: Heatmap of Sources of Support Factors in Virtual Expatriate Adjustment.....	68
Figure 9: Heatmap of Work Environment Factors in Traditional Expatriate Adjustment.....	71
Figure 10: Heatmap of Work Environment Factors in Virtual Expatriate Adjustment.....	72
Figure 11: Heatmap of Host Culture Factors in Traditional Expatriate Adjustment	77
Figure 12: Heatmap of Host Culture Factors in Virtual Expatriate Adjustment	79
Figure 13: Heatmap of HR Policies & Strategies in Traditional Expatriate Adjustment.....	86
Figure 14: Heatmap of HR Policies & Strategies in Virtual Expatriate Adjustment.....	87
Figure 15: Traditional Expatriate Adjustment Model.....	100
Figure 16: Virtual Expatriate Adjustment Model	102

List of Tables

Table 1: Comparison of Traditional and Virtual Expatriate Assignments	7
Table 2: Overview of Individual Factors Influencing Expatriate Adjustment	19
Table 3: Overview of Work Factors Influencing Expatriate Adjustment	28
Table 4: Overview of Non-Work Factors Influencing Expatriate Adjustment	34
Table 5: Overview of HR Policies & Strategies Influencing Expatriate Adjustment	41
Table 6: Participant Groups	48
Table 7: Demographic Groups	49
Table 9: Frequency and Intensity of Personality Traits in Traditional Expatriate Adjustment	58
Table 10: Frequency and Intensity of Personality Traits in Virtual Expatriate Adjustment	59
Table 11: Frequency and Intensity of Sources of Support in Traditional Expatriate Adjustment	65
Table 12: Frequency and Intensity of Sources of Support Factors in Virtual Expatriate Adjustment ...	67
Table 13: Frequency and Intensity of Work Factors in Traditional Expatriate Adjustment	70
Table 14: Frequency and Intensity of Work Factors in Virtual Expatriate Adjustment	72
Table 15: Frequency and Intensity of Host Culture Factors in Traditional Expatriate Adjustment	76
Table 16: Frequency and Intensity of Host Culture Factors in Virtual Expatriate Adjustment	78
Table 17: Frequency and Intensity of HR Policies & Strategies in Traditional Expatriate Adjustment .	85
Table 18: Frequency and Intensity of HR Policies & Strategies in Virtual Expatriate Adjustment	86
Table 19: Comparison of Black et al.'s Model and the Traditional Expatriate Adjustment Model	100

1 Introduction

International assignments play an essential role in helping organizations build a global talent pool, transfer knowledge and drive business strategy. Effective expatriate management is critical due to the high costs associated with these assignments. Expatriates – employees who temporarily live and work in a foreign country to fulfill career-related goals - need to adjust quickly to their new environment in order to become productive as soon as possible (McNulty & Brewster, 2017, 2020). As a result, HR professionals face significant challenges in recruiting, retaining and developing globally competent employees (Sparrow et al., 2016). High failure rates among traditional expatriates, including early return intentions (Harzing, 1995), can have serious financial and non-financial consequences. These include damaged corporate reputation and decline of market share for the organization and reduced well-being and loss of peer recognition for the expatriate (Black & Gregersen, 1991). Unfortunately, many organizations assume that their responsibility ends after pre-departure training. As a result, support often decreases once expatriates are abroad, leaving them to navigate challenges related to adjusting to the workplace, interacting with host nationals and adapting to the host country's living conditions (Black et al., 1991).

At the same time, the working world is undergoing major changes, driven by rapid technological advances and the lasting effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (Alfes et al., 2022; Hesselbarth et al., 2024). Such changes in the working landscape led to an increase in virtual expatriate assignments (Selmer et al., 2022; Wicht & Holtbrügge, 2023). In these assignments, employees perform international roles remotely, without having to relocate abroad (Lauring et al., 2024; PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2000). However, virtual assignments are often only seen as extensions of domestic roles rather than true international assignments, resulting in limited organizational support. The lack of physical relocation to the host country frequently excludes virtual assignees from traditional expatriate resources, with many organizations providing little or no cross-cultural training. Organizations often assume that virtual assignees can develop these skills on the job or that reduced exposure to local cultures minimizes the need for training. Cost concerns also contribute to this gap, as organizations often see the cost of cross-cultural training as outweighing the benefits (Bücker et al., 2020). HR professionals tend to take a passive and reactive role in supporting virtual assignees (Bücker et al., 2020; Suutari et al., 2013). However, these assignments present unique adjustment challenges compared to traditional assignments, including work-life balance issues due to time zone differences, cultural misunderstandings and the stress of navigating irregular schedules between home and host countries (Bücker et al., 2020). Despite these challenges, virtual assignments can be as effective as traditional ones in bridging cultural, linguistic and geographical distances, especially given their lower costs and reduced coordination efforts. However, traditional assignments remain the better choice for bridging

emotional and time zone distances or for building trust and high-quality relationships with host country colleagues (Wicht & Holtbrügge, 2023).

Despite their growing prevalence, virtual assignments remain under-researched compared to other forms of international assignments (Selmer et al., 2022; Wicht & Holtbrügge, 2023). Scholars such as Jooss et al. (2021) and Wicht & Holtbrügge (2023) have highlighted the need for further conceptualization and theory development in relation to virtual assignments, particularly calling for more qualitative research in this area. To address this gap, the aims of this thesis are threefold. First, it aims to contribute to the literature by identifying key factors that influence successful adjustment in virtual assignments. While the adjustment factors of traditional expatriates have been extensively researched, this thesis seeks to combine the relatively new topic of virtual assignments with the well-established theoretical framework of traditional assignments. Second, it takes a comparative approach, examining the distinct differences in adjustment factors between these two contexts. Third, this thesis aims to develop two adjustment models—one for traditional expatriates and one for virtual expatriates—allowing for a systematic comparison between the two assignment types. The following two research questions guide the present thesis:

1. *What are the key factors that influence successful expatriate adjustment and how do these factors differ between virtual and traditional assignments?*
2. *How can HR strategies and policies be adapted to better address the distinct adjustment needs of expatriates in virtual and traditional assignments?*

To address these research questions, this thesis builds on Black et al.'s (1991) seminal model of traditional expatriate adjustment, which remains one of the most influential theoretical foundations in the field (Caldwell et al., 2024). After clarifying key terminologies and concepts related to the expatriation literature, I begin by presenting the literature on four key areas: *Individual Factors*, *Work Factors*, *Non-Work Factors* and *HR Policies & Strategies*. Each of these four areas reviews the relevant literature in the context of both traditional and virtual assignments and concludes with propositions derived from the literature. This leads into the methodology chapter, which describes the qualitative research design complemented by quantitative data. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of expatriates' real-life experiences, providing unique insights from both the organization and expatriate perspectives. Building on the existing literature, the findings chapter presents the results of the empirical research, combining insights from the interviews and the questionnaire. The subsequent discussion connects these findings to existing theory, developing two comparative adjustment models for traditional and virtual assignments. Finally, the thesis concludes with a section on limitations and future outlook, followed by a concise conclusion that brings the main insights together.

2 Literature Review

The literature review begins by positioning expatriation within the broader field of International Human Resource Management (IHRM), which concerns the attraction, management and retention of human resources in multinational enterprises (MNE; Taylor et al., 1996, p. 960). IHRM involves the strategic planning and coordination of employees to meet the global objectives of MNEs. Depending on their international orientation, organizations adopt different approaches to managing their subsidiaries (Perlmutter, 1969). These approaches vary in their degree of standardization — that is, the extent to which HR practices such as recruitment, training and performance management are unified across subsidiaries. Geographic and cultural proximity often encourage greater standardization and headquarters involvement, while local responsiveness calls for decentralized approaches (Dickmann & Müller-Camen, 2006). For instance, MNEs pursuing a global strategy typically centralize HR policies to ensure consistency and efficiency across operations worldwide (Tarique et al., 2006).

Within the IHRM literature, international assignments are a central mechanism for transferring knowledge and aligning global operations. These assignments are commonly conceptualized as a three-stage process: *pre-assignment*, *on-assignment*, and *repatriation* (e.g., Cerdin & Pargneux, 2009; Harzing & Van Ruysseveldt, 2004; Zhuang et al., 2013). The pre-assignment stage focuses on candidate selection and cross-cultural preparation; the on-assignment stage involves expatriate adjustment, cultural integration and performance in the host environment; and the repatriation stage concerns the return home and reintegration (Cerdin & Pargneux, 2009). Among these, the on-assignment stage is particularly complex due to the various roles expatriates must assume, including those of expert, subsidiary manager, HQ representative and citizen of both their home and host countries. Such multifaceted roles can lead to role conflicts and complicate the adjustment process (Rahim, 1983). Therefore, this thesis concentrates on the on-assignment stage to explore in depth how individual, work-related and non-work factors as well as HR policies and strategies influence expatriate adjustment—both in traditional and virtual contexts.

2.1 From Assignment to Adjustment: The Expat Journey

Fundamentally, *expatriation* refers to the global relocation of managers to foreign subsidiaries of multinational companies (Harzing & Van Ruysseveldt, 2004). However, the term *expatriate* has been used inconsistently in the literature. To clarify, McNulty & Brewster (2017, p. 46) propose the following definition of *business expatriates*: "*legally working individuals who reside temporarily in a country of which they are not a citizen in order to accomplish a career-related goal, being relocated abroad either by an organization, by self-initiation or directly employed within the host-country*". This definition

includes both *organizationally assigned expatriates* (AEs) and *self-initiated expatriates* (SIEs). McNulty & Brewster (2017) emphasize employment by an organization, temporary residence, non-citizenship, and legal compliance as key criteria, meaning this definition explicitly excludes non-business expatriates such as tourists, immigrants and students. In addition, the intended length of stay for a business expatriate can be either *short* (1-12 months for short-term assignees [STAs]), *medium to long term* (1-5 years for typical Western AEs), or *indefinite* for SIEs (McNulty & Brewster, 2017). This thesis is based on McNulty & Brewster's (2017) proposed definition of a *business expatriate* and focuses exclusively on organizationally assigned expatriates (AEs) with a medium to long term length of stay. This focus allows for a more in-depth exploration of expatriate experiences, since longer assignments may offer deeper insights into the process of adjustment over time. Furthermore, as the thesis is based on Black et al.'s (1991) model, which focuses on organizationally assigned expatriates, this approach maintains conceptual consistency with the underlying framework.

Traditionally, expatriates play key roles in replicating corporate practices, centralizing decision-making, socializing host employees and building informal communication networks throughout the multinational enterprise (Harzing, 2001). Beyond traditional categories such as assignment duration (long versus short term), expatriate nationality, level (managerial versus technical job roles) and assignment objectives (control, coordination and management development goals), expatriates also differ in their roles as *knowledge transfer agents* (Caligiuri & Bonache, 2016). For example, they may act as *commanders*, enforcing strict control in new or less experienced teams; or *connectors*, fostering collaboration and trust with senior staff (Petison & Johri, 2008). Additional dimensions include managing differences between male and female expatriates and the nature of employment relationships, which can range from relational contracts, based on long-term loyalty, to transactional contracts, that are project-oriented (Caligiuri & Bonache, 2016). While international experiences foster cognitive flexibility, enhancing creativity and trust (Cao et al., 2014; Tadmor et al., 2012), they also have a *dark side*. The exposure to different cultural contexts can lead to *moral relativism*, where individuals are more likely to justify unethical behavior, especially if their experiences range across several countries rather than being deeply involved in a single one (Lu et al., 2017). Thus, managing the complexities of both traditional and virtual expatriate assignments requires careful consideration of not only the practical and organizational challenges but also the potential ethical dilemmas posed by global relocation.

2.1.1 Virtual Expatriates: A New Era of Global Assignments

The field of IHRM has been evolving for over 30 years, with research expanding to address the complexities of global work. Recent studies highlight the impact of COVID-19, which has disrupted traditional expatriation and international business travel, forcing organizations to rethink global

mobility strategies. Virtual forms of working across borders are attracting strong interest in the literature and are expected to become even more relevant in the future, yet they remain underexplored (Cooke et al., 2021). One such form is *virtual assignments*, in which employees perform expatriate tasks remotely from their home country without relocating to the host country (Lauring et al., 2024; PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2000), for a period of at least one year (Holtbrügge & Schillo, 2008). These roles are characterized by:

- **International responsibilities:** The virtual expatriate manages or performs work tasks for a foreign subsidiary of the organization (Lauring et al., 2024).
- **Cross-cultural integration:** The virtual assignee is based and interacts within his or her home culture. Operationally, however, he or she is assigned to the foreign subsidiary and therefore works with colleagues from the host country and is exposed to cultural and linguistic differences (Holtbrügge & Schillo, 2008; Lauring et al., 2024).
- **Occasional visits:** Although there is no relocation, occasional visits to the host country may be required (Lauring et al., 2024).

It is important to differentiate virtual assignees from members of a global virtual team (GVT), as these two concepts, while related, involve distinct dynamics. *Global virtual teams* refer to individuals working closely together as a team despite being geographically separated (Henry & Hartzler, 1998), whereas virtual assignments involve a single geographically remote individual collaborating with a team that primarily works face-to-face when not interacting with the virtual expatriate. This leads to an imbalance in collaborative communication, as the virtual expatriate works under different conditions compared to his or her local team members (Wicht & Holtbrügge, 2023). While virtual assignments and GVTs are distinct concepts, the challenges and dynamics they face often overlap. Both types of work require managing cross-cultural communication, using virtual collaboration tools and navigating organizational integration over a distance (Lauring et al., 2022, 2024). Given this overlap, throughout this thesis I draw on the existing body of GVT literature for understanding virtual assignments. This approach is justified by the limited research available on virtual assignments and the applicability of GVT principles to the virtual and cross-cultural nature of these roles.

Additionally, it is also important to clearly distinguish virtual expatriation from the concept of *Working from Home* (WFH), referring to performing one's regular job tasks from a primary residence (International Labour Organization (ILO), 2020). While similar concepts such as *telework/telecommuting*, *virtual work* and *remote work* overlap in their definition, they often represent different notions of WFH. Telework/telecommuting involves performing work at home or other non-office locations near the employee's residence (Vega et al., 2015). Virtual work describes

collaboration of geographically dispersed individuals or teams via technology without face-to-face interaction (Allen et al., 2015). Remote work is a broader term covering all work performed away from headquarters, including subsidiaries or branches. Due to social distancing and lockdowns during the Covid-19 pandemic, remote working has often been used as a synonym for WFH (Lauring et al., 2024). In short, virtual assignments focus on international responsibilities for foreign subsidiaries, while WFH, telework and remote work primarily involve domestic tasks. Furthermore, virtual assignees work with people from different cultures and countries, whereas remote working and WFH typically do not involve cross-cultural interactions. Virtual assignments do not encompass permanent relocation but may require occasional travel, while remote work and WFH rarely require travel and are geographically limited. This distinction highlights virtual assignments as an alternative to traditional expatriation, combining international and cross-cultural responsibilities without physical relocation (e.g., Lauring et al., 2024; McPhail et al., 2024).

Compared to traditional assignments, virtual assignments better align with the career paths of dual-career couples and avoid disruption to children's education. By contrast, traditional expatriation often involves challenges related to repatriation and significantly higher costs for organizations (Holtbrügge & Schillo, 2008). This is largely due to the extensive support packages provided by organizations, such as housing allowances and relocation aid (Shaffer et al., 1999). However, virtual assignments provide flexibility and allow employees to remain in their home communities (Jimenez et al., 2017). Virtual assignments can also facilitate technical knowledge transfer, cultural exchange, socialization and corporate image promotion (Selmer et al., 2022). However, they are not without drawbacks: weaker interpersonal relationships and reduced trust between virtual expatriates and local employees can hinder collaboration (Breuer et al., 2016). Finally, traditional expatriation remains more effective for transferring tacit knowledge, fostering practical learning, and building relationships with external business partners—activities that typically depend on physical presence to achieve optimal outcomes (Selmer et al., 2022).

To illustrate these distinctions more clearly, Table 1 on the next page summarizes the key differences between traditional and virtual expatriate assignments. The table contrasts the two types of assignment along dimensions such as physical relocation, interaction with host nationals, organizational costs and family impact. This comparison demonstrates why different adjustment dynamics, and consequently different personal and contextual factors, are likely to emerge for each type.

Table 1: Comparison of Traditional and Virtual Expatriate Assignments

Source: Created by the author

Dimension	Traditional Expatriate Assignment	Virtual Expatriate Assignment
Physical relocation	Full relocation to host country	Employee remains in the home country; occasional short-term visits to the host country possible
Cultural exposure	Immersive, daily interaction with host culture	Indirect and limited, mediated primarily through technology
Knowledge transfer	Highly effective for tacit and experiential knowledge	Effective for explicit and technical knowledge
Organizational costs	High (relocation, housing, etc.)	Low (no relocation or repatriation costs)
Dual-career & family compatibility	Challenging due to partner relocation and disruption to children's education	More compatible with dual-career couples and family stability, due to flexibility
Interpersonal relationships	Stronger connections with host-country colleagues, clients and partners	Harder to establish; requires trust-building efforts

2.1.2 The Multifaceted Process of Expatriate Adjustment

Expatriate adjustment is considered to be a *multidimensional process* that includes both sociocultural and psychological aspects (Searle & Ward, 1990). *Psychological adjustment* is concerned with individual well-being, including moods such as anxiety, and focuses on attitudinal factors. *Sociocultural adjustment* involves adapting to and coping with everyday interactions in the host culture, as measured by the difficulty of these tasks (Selmer, 2002). Although conceptually similar, psychological and sociocultural adjustment originate from different theoretical frameworks (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). This thesis will build upon Black et al.'s (1991) *sociocultural adjustment model* as it provides an essential foundation for understanding how expatriates adapt to international assignments.

According to the *person-environment fit theory* (Caplan, 1987; French et al., 1974), expatriate adjustment occurs when an expatriate's abilities are aligned with the demands of the new cultural context (i.e., ability-demand fit) and when an expatriate's needs are met by the cultural environment (i.e., needs-supply fit). An expatriate's ability to meet cultural demands leads to *satisfactoriness*, while the environment's fulfillment of the expatriate's emotional and psychological needs leads to *satisfaction*. Therefore, an expatriate's level of adjustment is measured by his or her satisfaction and satisfactoriness (Valenzuela & Rogers, 2021). In particular, expatriate adjustment is considered as the extent to which the expatriate manager fits into work and non-work dimensions of the new environment. A good fit is reflected in reduced conflict and stress and an increase in overall effectiveness (Aycan, 1997). In their meta-analysis, Van Der Laken et al. (2019) identified four key success criteria for international assignments: *adjustment*, *organizational commitment*, *performance*, and *retention*. Organizational commitment is defined as a feeling of obligation to stay, an emotional bond with the company, and a perceived cost of leaving the employment (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Expatriate performance includes managerial skills, technical expertise, prosocial behaviors like helping

others, and expatriation-related tasks such as knowledge sharing (Harrison & Shaffer, 2005). Finally, retention refers to the expatriate's completion of the assignment (Van Der Laken et al., 2019).

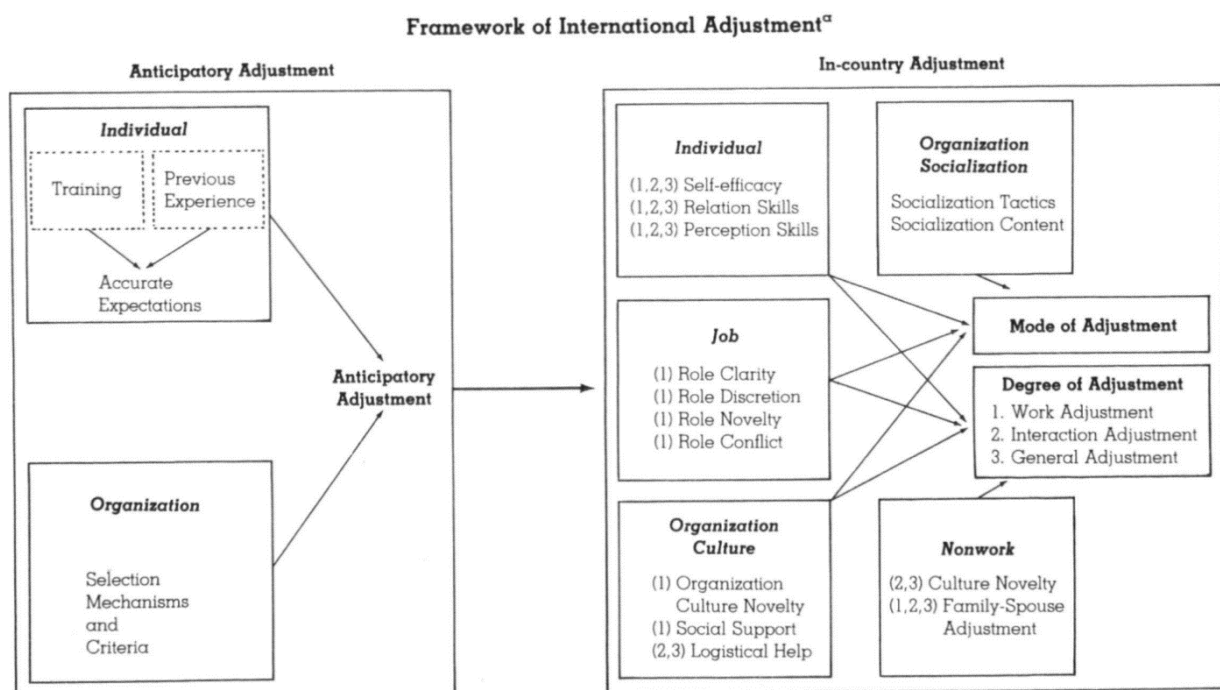
The role of cross-cultural adjustment in virtual work introduces both challenges and advantages. Virtual assignees face unique challenges, such as managing time zones, diverse communication styles, and language barriers without the benefits of face-to-face interaction, which can lead to workplace loneliness and negatively affect commitment and performance (Holtbrügge & Schillo, 2008; Luring et al., 2022; Ozcelik & Barsade, 2018). However, they are spared from the cultural, social and logistical adjustments typically required when moving abroad (see Table 1). Issues such as adapting to a new work environment, building local social networks and navigating daily life in an unfamiliar setting become largely irrelevant. Additionally, virtual assignments eliminate the challenges of family relocation, such as spouse employment and children's education, thereby reducing stress on personal lives. By remaining integrated into their home office's decision-making processes and networks, virtual assignees maintain a continuous connection with headquarters, enhancing their participation in organizational dynamics. The economic benefits, including cost savings for companies and simpler employee reintegration, also highlight their advantages (Holtbrügge & Schillo, 2008; Jimenez et al., 2017).

Adapting Black et al.'s Expatriate Adjustment Model to a Changing World

Black et al.'s (1991) comprehensive model of international sociocultural adjustment, mentioned earlier, divides adjustment into two primary phases: *anticipatory adjustment* and *in-country adjustment* (see Table 1). Anticipatory adjustment can be facilitated by cross-cultural training and previous international experience. In-country adjustment - the focus of this thesis - includes the dimensions of *work adjustment*, *adjustment to interaction with host nationals*, and *general adjustment to host living conditions*. Each of the three dimensions includes various factors that influence expatriate adjustment differently, either positively or negatively. However, as Dimitrova et al. (2023) emphasize, no single holistic model of expatriate adjustment can fully account for the multitude of factors that interact to shape this complex process. Adjustment is an ongoing process, and it can be difficult to determine a definitive point at which full adjustment is achieved.

Despite its fundamental value, it must be acknowledged that Black et al.'s (1991) model has been subject to several criticisms. The model has been criticized for not clearly defining expatriate adjustment (Hippler et al., 2014). In addition, the scales used in the model give equal weight to all factors, neglecting that some areas, such as family, may have a greater impact on overall satisfaction (Glatzer, 1991). Despite these criticisms, this thesis builds on Black et al.'s (1991) model because of its comprehensive structure and fundamental importance in the expatriation literature to this day. Over

the years, numerous researchers have tested, refined and expanded upon this model (e.g. Caldwell et al., 2024; Dabic et al., 2015; Shaffer et al., 1999), enhancing its validity and applicability across different contexts. These revisions have addressed some of its original limitations while further solidifying its role as a foundational framework for understanding expatriate adjustment. As a result, it remains one of the most cited and widely used models in expatriation research. However, there is a significant gap between the number of studies that reference the model and those that actively apply it. An analysis of nearly 700 articles revealed that while 82% mention the model, only 34% incorporate it into their findings or build upon it in a meaningful way (Caldwell et al., 2024). Recognizing both the model's continuing influence and the need for further development, this thesis aims to expand Black et al.'s (1991) model by elaborating on the adjustment factors specific to traditional expatriates and developing a comparable framework for virtual expatriates.



^a Numbers in parentheses indicate the numbered facet(s) of adjustment to which the specific variable is expected to relate.

Figure 1: Black et al.'s (1991) comprehensive model of international sociocultural adjustment

2.2 Individual Factors contributing to Expatriate Adjustment

In their pioneering model of expatriate adjustment, Black et al. (1991) identified individual factors as one of the core determinants of successful adjustment. Specifically, they highlighted *self-efficacy*, *relational skills*, and *perceptual skills* as key personal characteristics shaping how expatriates respond to the challenges of international assignments. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to perform effectively in new and uncertain situations. Relational skills describe an individual's ability to build and maintain effective interpersonal relationships, which helps reduce uncertainty and

promotes smoother interactions with host-country nationals. Perceptual skills involve the capacity to accurately interpret and understand behaviors, norms and expectations within the host culture, thereby easing cultural interpretation and adaptation (Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985).

While Black et al.'s model remains one of the most influential frameworks in expatriation research, it reflects the context of its time and does not capture the full complexity of contemporary international work. In the following sections, this thesis builds on their foundation by examining additional individual factors that have since emerged in the literature—ranging from personality traits and proactive coping to multiple intelligences—to provide a more comprehensive understanding of expatriate adjustment in both traditional and virtual contexts. Table 1 illustrates the key structural differences between traditional and virtual assignments, providing the rationale for why distinct adjustment factors are likely to influence each context.

2.2.1 How Personality Shapes Expatriate Adjustment

Navigating Traditional Assignments: The Big Five Framework

Personality traits are an individual's set of characteristics that serve as critical indicators of the individual's ability to fit into the host culture. This makes them a key determinant of expatriate success (Leiba-O'sullivan, 1999). However, while some researchers in the expatriation literature have used widely accepted frameworks of personality traits, others have focused on specific traits. For example, high levels of internal locus of control, self-efficacy and self-esteem have been linked to successful expatriate adjustment (Johnson et al., 2003; Lii & Wong, 2008; Valenzuela & Rogers, 2021). These fragmented efforts make it difficult to compare studies on personality traits in a valid way. However, the majority of these traits can be associated with the *Five-Factor Model* (FFM) of personality, more commonly referred to as *the Big Five* (Harari et al., 2018; Leiba-O'sullivan, 1999; Shaffer et al., 2006). Despite being a widely accepted framework, the origins of the Big Five model are complex and have evolved through various theoretical and empirical developments (see Goldberg, 1993, for a clarification).

The Big Five personality traits – *openness to experience, extraversion (vs. introversion), agreeableness, conscientiousness* and *neuroticism (vs. emotional stability)*— describe enduring differences in how people think, feel and behave. Openness to experience involves curiosity and imagination towards new ideas. Extraversion captures a person's sociability, energy and enjoyment of interaction, while agreeableness reflects a cooperative, kind and empathetic orientation toward others. Conscientiousness refers to being organized, reliable and self-disciplined, whereas neuroticism describes emotional instability and a tendency toward worry or irritability (Goldberg, 1993). These have been found to significantly influence expatriate adjustment at both the psychological and

sociocultural levels (Feitosa et al., 2014; Shaffer et al., 2006). In particular, extraversion, agreeableness and openness have been identified as facilitators of both general and work adjustment (Aycan, 1997). Extroverts have been found to interact more likely with local colleagues and host nationals than introverts. However, in cultures that value reserve and conservatism, introverts may be more easily accepted by locals. Expatriates high in agreeableness resolve problems in ways that are acceptable to host nationals because they are more likely to maintain harmony. Open-mindedness allows people to be less prejudiced and less likely to have unrealistic expectations of the host country, making them more likely to adjust to their new surroundings. High levels of conscientiousness have also been associated with better work adjustment (Huang et al., 2005). Conscientious expatriates have high self-discipline and are dutiful and achievement striving. In contrast, neurotic individuals struggle more with adjustment, while emotionally stable individuals handle the uncertainties of a new environment with lower emotional reactions, reducing stress and improving adjustment. Research shows that extraversion and conscientiousness are the strongest predictors of how well expatriates successfully adjust in various areas (Harari et al., 2018; McCrae et al., 2005; Wilmot et al., 2019; Wilmot & Ones, 2019).

Essential Traits for Success in Virtual Assignments

In virtual work environments, personality traits play a significant role in influencing work dynamics. For instance, drawing from GVT literature, extraversion is associated with increased engagement in virtual communication, while conscientiousness is associated with higher motivation in virtual teams. Individuals high in openness tend to prefer virtual interactions over face-to-face meetings (Luse et al., 2013). Moreover, high agreeableness correlates with positive attitudes toward remote work and those with low emotional stability may opt for remote work to avoid uncomfortable social interactions (Clark et al., 2012). Successful members of GVTs tend to have high levels of cultural intelligence and open-mindedness (Erez et al., 2013), as well as technical expertise that allows them to use collaboration and communication technologies proficiently (Ramalingam & Mahalingam, 2011).

Another important aspect of virtual work concerns how individuals manage the boundaries between work and private life. The distinction between *segmentors* and *integrators* captures this difference: segmentors thrive with clear work-life boundaries, while integrators perform better when they can switch fluently between tasks. Adapting work routines to these preferences is important because time zone differences can complicate coordination and disrupt work-life balance (Kniffin et al., 2021; Rothbard et al., 2005). Although millennials are often perceived as better suited for virtual work due to their technical skills (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010), there is evidence that older, more experienced employees can also thrive in virtual roles. Their success is more related to experience and

independence than to age or technical skills (Asatiani & Penttinen, 2019). In this context, *virtual work self-efficacy* refers to an individual's confidence in their ability to perform effectively in a virtual setting. Employees with lower self-efficacy may struggle with new technologies and feel socially isolated, leading to resistance to adopting virtual working practices. On the other hand, individuals with higher self-efficacy are less influenced by the work climate, as they tend to embrace virtual work, organize their tasks independently and see it as an opportunity to improve both job performance and work-life balance (Adamovic et al., 2022).

As discussed in this section, the challenges of virtual assignments differ from traditional expatriate experiences. In virtual environments, the lack of face-to-face contact can have a significant impact on how individuals engage with their work and colleagues. Personality traits become essential in overcoming these challenges as they influence how expatriates interact, adjust and maintain motivation in virtual work environments. Building on these insights, the following proposition is offered:

Proposition 1. *Higher scores on the Big Five personality traits—extraversion, conscientiousness, openness to experience, emotional stability and agreeableness—are positively associated with expatriate adjustment in both assignment types, with these traits playing a particularly strong role in facilitating adjustment in virtual contexts.*

2.2.2 Proactivity and Coping in the Adjustment Process

Adaptive Behaviors in Traditional Assignments

The adjustment process is dynamic and interactionist in character, meaning that it is influenced by both *static* (e.g., personal characteristics) and *dynamic* (e.g. proactive behaviors) factors (Dimitrova et al., 2023). Proactive adjustment behaviors include *information seeking*, *feedback seeking* (i.e. actively asking for information regarding one's role and performance) and *relationship building*. Information can be sought out from supervisors or coworkers about how to perform specific job tasks (i.e., technical information); role expectations and what behaviors are expected in the job (i.e., referent information); the organization's culture, norms and values (i.e., normative information); and how well the newcomer fits in with coworkers and how his or her social behaviors are perceived (i.e., social integration; Ashford & Black, 1996; Morrison, 1993; Zheng et al., 2021). Proactively seeking advice from host country nationals (HCNs) is critical to successful expatriate work and interaction adjustment. When expatriates see their HCN colleagues as credible and likeable, they are more likely to seek their advice, which has a positive impact on their general adjustment. This active approach, in which expatriates seek advice when needed, proves more effective than passively receiving support because it increases their ability

to apply the advice in a meaningful way. Engaging in their own socialization and using problem-focused coping strategies enhances expatriate adjustment (Mahajan & Toh, 2014). *Positive framing* (i.e., changing one's view of a situation to a more positive one) is another type of proactive behavior that may be useful for expatriates (Ren et al., 2014). Certain proactive behaviors, such as seeking feedback, may slowly decrease during the first year of an assignment as individuals adjust to the new organization and their new roles (Vandenberghe et al., 2021). Self-efficacy, cultural intelligence (addressed in more detail in section 2.2.3) and cross-cultural motivation were identified as facilitators of expatriate proactivity (Dimitrova et al., 2023). It is important to note, that situations can differ in how clearly they signal what kind of behavior is expected, so called *situational strength*. In situations where expectations are *clear* and *strong*, personality traits have less influence on behavior. However, because the expatriate experience often involves a lot of uncertainty and ambiguity (i.e. *weak situations*), personality traits play a significant role in shaping expatriate outcomes (Harari et al., 2018; Shaffer et al., 2006).

Personality traits also allow an expatriate to develop certain stress management techniques (Valenzuela & Rogers, 2021). Expatriates who use active coping strategies, such as requesting information and training and adjusting their work environment, experience greater success and adjustment during the assignment. In contrast, those who disengaged psychologically experience more adjustment difficulties (Aycan, 1997; Feldman & Thomas, 1992). An expatriate's ability to adjust his or her thought patterns in order to communicate with host nationals and adapt to cultural demands is referred to as *cognitive flexibility* (Shaffer et al., 2012). The greater the need for the expatriate to adjust by adopting different acculturation attitudes to be effective in the host culture, the greater should be his or her cognitive flexibility (Valenzuela & Rogers, 2021). In particular, four acculturation attitudes have been identified in the literature - *integration*, *assimilation*, *separation*, and *marginalization* – respectively ranging from maintaining one's original cultural orientations and adopting those of the new culture (e.g. values, behaviors) to rejecting both cultures altogether (Berry, 1997). In fact, expatriates with an *integrationist attitude*, who seek to blend their own culture with that of the host country, tend to adjust best in the work and general dimensions (Aycan, 1997). Research also shows gender differences in coping with expatriation. Men tend to maintain their own cultural norms, prefer separation and are more likely to use alcohol or substances to cope with stress. Women, on the other hand, are more likely to engage with the host culture, explore and learn the local language (Tung, 2004; Varma & Russell, 2016). Socialization processes may explain these differences, as women tend to internalize stress while men are socialized to express it through behaviors such as alcohol use (Cooper et al., 1992; Wurtz, 2018).

An expatriate whose personality traits do not match the cultural demands is likely to have difficulty adjusting (Huang et al., 2005). Communication skills, especially language skills, have thus been proven to be a useful tool for proactively creating strong connections and for understanding the diverse dynamics of a host culture. Having proficient host language skills reduces social isolation among expatriates. However, it has been found that in countries where the language is more challenging to learn, expatriates' language proficiency will have a greater positive impact on their adjustment compared to countries where the language is relatively easy to learn (Dimitrova et al., 2023; Selmer, 2006; Selmer & Luring, 2015). Thus, fluency in the host language, together with prior international experience, was found to have a direct impact on interactional adjustment by facilitating better communication and understanding with host nationals (Black et al., 1991; Shaffer et al., 1999; Zhang & Harzing, 2016). Interestingly, in regions with significantly higher terrorism risk and perceived threat, language proficiency might increase fear of terrorism and thus hinder adjustment (Paulus & Muehlfeld, 2017).

Navigating Distance, Time Zones and Communication Gaps in Virtual Assignments

For virtual expatriates, physical distance from their teams often limits access to emotional, informational and instrumental social support, making it more difficult to cope with work-related stress. These expatriates rely on interdependence with distant team members to complete tasks, but face challenges in coordinating, interacting, sharing information and sharing resources. Traditional expatriates often manage internal team stress through constant monitoring and shared coping strategies. If one team member perceives a situation as harmful, others quickly notice and respond. In virtual environments, however, the reduced awareness of teammates' behavior weakens this coping process (Nurmi, 2011).

Notably, the impact of distance in virtual teams varies from individual to individual and from group to group. Boundaries such as time zones may or may not be disruptive, depending on how teams manage them (Bülow et al., 2019; Wilson et al., 2008). As a result, distance can pose significant challenges in some contexts while having less impact in others (Asatiani & Penttinen, 2019). Thus, virtual assignments are expected to work well when the time zone difference is small, such as in a north-south setup with more overlap in working hours. However, if the time zones are far apart, such as in an east-west setup, the assignments are likely to be less effective due to coordination challenges (Wicht & Holtbrügge, 2023). However, teams that apply the *follow the sun model*, where tasks are transferred across time zones for uninterrupted workflow, can benefit from such coordination, but it requires careful planning to ensure efficiency (Colazo & Fang, 2009). Well-organized teams can accomplish this by completing independent tasks during non-overlapping times and reserving overlapping times for

problem solving and live discussions (Espinosa & Carmel, 2003). Adjusting to time zone differences often involves individual strategies, such as setting boundaries and prioritizing tasks based on different time frames (Nurmi, 2011). Despite these efforts, time zone-related communication gaps can still affect role clarity and lead to inefficiencies, especially when team members are left waiting for feedback or clarification (Lauring et al., 2022; Sarker & Sahay, 2004).

At the same time, *host-country language (HCL) proficiency* has emerged as a critical factor for expatriate adjustment, especially within virtual work environments shaped by the pandemic (Piekkari et al., 2021). It has been shown to predict how well expatriates adjust to virtual work. Employees with high HCL proficiency are better able to use their language skills to cope with the increased demands of virtual communication. Conversely, expatriates with low HCL proficiency often minimize interpersonal exchanges, leading to increased language-related anxiety (Liu et al., 2023). Although some expatriates may have previously lacked motivation to learn the local language, relying instead on English, the pandemic highlighted the importance of mastering HCL, as many critical pieces of information may only be available in the host language (Piekkari et al., 2021).

Meanwhile, reliance on communication technologies introduces uncertainty and ambiguity for virtual expatriates, as unclear roles, responsibilities and lack of information can hinder their sense of control and ability to predict outcomes (Nurmi, 2011). While *synchronous* tools, like videoconferencing, may reveal language and behavioral differences that are difficult to navigate without face-to-face interaction, *asynchronous* channels, such as email or social media, allow for more thoughtful responses but introduce delays and potential miscommunication due to the absence of immediate feedback (Jimenez et al., 2017). Thus, leaders in GVTs face unique challenges that are more complicated than those in traditional teams. They must bridge boundaries, demonstrate a high level of cultural intelligence and adopt a people-centered leadership style to foster collaboration across diverse and geographically dispersed teams (Zander et al., 2012). Effective global leaders play three critical functions: as *boundary spanners*, they manage relationships between subsidiaries and headquarters, connecting individuals and resources; as *bridge builders*, they navigate cultural differences and improve communication; and as *blenders*, they value the contributions of each team member while cultivating a sense of team identity (Butler et al., 2012).

As highlighted, the type of assignment—traditional or virtual— shapes the expatriate's adjustment experience and the sources of support they rely on. Traditional expatriates often benefit from in-person interactions, which allow them to build close relationships with coworkers and draw on the support of family and friends during their relocation. These external sources of support play a central

role in helping them navigate their new cultural and professional environment. In contrast, virtual expatriates tend to face challenges such as physical isolation and limited informal interaction. As a result, they rely more heavily on individual coping strategies, including proactive behavior and virtual communication with colleagues in the host country, to manage their adjustment remotely. Based on these distinctions, the following proposition is made:

Proposition 2. *Both traditional and virtual expatriates draw on internal and external sources of support during adjustment. However, traditional expatriates, who are physically immersed in the host country, rely more on external support from colleagues, mentors and family. In contrast, virtual expatriates, who are physically distant, depend more on internal coping mechanisms such as proactive behaviors and sustained virtual communication with host colleagues.*

2.2.3 Multiple Intelligences and Their Role in Adjustment

Cultural, Emotional and Political Intelligence in Traditional Roles

Cultural Intelligence (CQ), Emotional Intelligence (EQ), and Political Intelligence (PQ) are three distinct yet critical competencies for expatriate adjustment (Chew et al., 2021). Expatriates with high CQ engage in behaviors that enhance interactions with host nationals, which improves their adjustment in both professional and personal contexts, reduces stress and increases psychological well-being (Chen, 2015). Understanding and adapting to the norms of the host culture indicates a good fit with cultural demands, which promotes expatriate satisfaction and adjustment (Chew et al., 2021). Taking this into account and revisiting the adjustment model of Black et al. (1991), it becomes clear that CQ is closely related to the perceptual skills they referred to in their model. According to Chew et al. (2021), cross-cultural competence facilitates all three dimensions of adjustment from Black et al.'s (1991) model: general, work and interactional. While individuals may possess varying levels of CQ based on their general intelligence and experiences, CQ can be developed over time (Wu & Ang, 2011). Through self-reflection and increased awareness, individuals can shift from an ethnocentric view to a more culturally adjusted mindset (Alexandra, 2023). As outlined by Thomas (2006), the development of CQ is a five-stage process based on experiential learning. It begins with the *reactive stage*, where individuals unconsciously follow their cultural norms and interpret behavior through familiar frameworks. In the *recognition stage*, they gain awareness of cultural differences through cross-cultural exposure. In the *accommodation stage*, they broaden their minds to include general principles from new cultures. During *assimilation*, individuals start to behave naturally within diverse cultural environments. Finally, in the *proactive stage*, they anticipate cultural changes and adapt accordingly (Alexandra, 2023; Thomas, 2006).

Cultural intelligence is divided into four key facets: *meta-cognitive*, *cognitive*, *motivational*, and *behavioral* (Earley & Ang, 2007). Metacognitive CQ refers to an individual's ability to actively plan, monitor and revise his or her understanding of cultural norms and interactions to ensure a thoughtful approach to diverse environments (Ang et al., 2007). Cognitive CQ reflects the knowledge expatriates have about different cultures, such as social norms, legal structures and values, which helps them navigate new cultural landscapes (Triandis, 2004). Expatriates with lower metacognitive and cognitive CQ rely heavily on external support, such as company-provided resources, to help them adjust. They may seek help from local colleagues or the home office if they lack cultural knowledge of the host country (Wu & Ang, 2011). Motivational CQ includes the drive and confidence to engage in cross-cultural experiences and shows a strong relationship with expatriate adjustment in both work and non-work settings (Earley et al., 2010). Individuals with high self-efficacy (i.e., a strong belief in their abilities) are better equipped to overcome obstacles, while those with lower motivational CQ may struggle even with organizational support (Wu & Ang, 2011). Finally, behavioral CQ focuses on adapting verbal and nonverbal behaviors to fit cultural norms, thereby enabling more effective communication with host nationals. This includes conversational elements such as speaking rate, turn taking rhythm and body language. Individuals with high behavioral CQ observe and integrate these cultural cues and analyze situations to respond appropriately (Guðmundsdóttir, 2015). CQ plays a crucial role in not only cross-cultural adjustment but also in fostering *organizational embeddedness*, which enhances knowledge sharing (Stoermer et al., 2021). Organizational embeddedness, unlike cross-cultural adjustment, is the result of proactive efforts by expatriates to shape their environment, rather than merely reacting to stressors in a foreign country (Ren et al., 2014). Expatriates with high CQ tend to build trust with host nationals, leading to more frequent interactions and improved knowledge sharing. By actively integrating into the organization, expatriates improve collaboration and deepen relationships. When they feel their skills align with local needs and perceive career benefits, they are further motivated to share knowledge proactively (Stoermer et al., 2021).

Emotional intelligence (EQ) involves identifying and managing one's own and others' emotions to improve interactions (Lii & Wong, 2008). Key components of EQ include *self-encouragement*—the capacity to remain optimistic in challenging situations—and *social skills*, such as using humor and taking initiative in social contexts. EQ also includes the ability to build strong interpersonal relationships by avoiding conflict, giving sincere praise, managing one's emotions in tense situations, and empathizing with others' feelings (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). In addition to EQ, political intelligence (PQ) plays also a critical role in expatriate adjustment. PQ involves interpersonal influence, networking, sincerity and helps expatriates navigate complex global contexts and achieve organizational goals (Ferris et al., 2007). Expatriates often need to work closely and negotiate with the parent organization

to obtain essential resources for the foreign subsidiary. Those with high PQ navigate the complexities of a global environment more effectively and use this information to achieve personal and organizational goals (Harvey & Richey, 2001). As a result, PQ has been shown to facilitate both general and work adjustment (Koveshnikov & Wechtler, 2017). Those expatriates with high levels of CQ, EQ, and PQ are more likely to adjust successfully to both the work and social environments of the host country, perform better and experience greater psychological well-being (Chew et al., 2021).

Cultural and Virtual Intelligence in Virtual Assignments

The challenges of virtual assignments, such as cultural adjustment, are often more manageable for assignees with high CQ (Wicht & Holtbrügge, 2023). When looking at GVTs, CQ is a key factor influencing collaboration in virtual cross-national teams, as it affects conflict resolution, trust, team cohesion and cooperation (Ang et al., 2007). Higher levels of CQ positively influence individuals' willingness to share knowledge in virtual teams. In addition, cultural openness and self-efficacy are both associated with greater willingness to share knowledge. However, it is important to note that willingness alone does not always lead to actual knowledge-sharing behavior (Collins et al., 2017).

Virtual intelligence (VI), on the other hand, can be defined as “*the ability to identify, direct and sustain cognitive resources in a virtual work environment*” (Makarius & Larson, 2017, p. 160). VI involves recognizing the unique demands of virtual environments (Makarius & Larson, 2017), filtering distractions and directing attention effectively (Wilson et al., 2013). Virtually intelligent expatriates manage cognitive resources through careful planning and reasoning, guiding their actions in establishing norms (Carte et al., 2006), coordinating information (Te’eni, 2001), and selecting suitable communication methods (Maruping & Agarwal, 2004). They maintain cognitive resources by continuously monitoring and updating knowledge (Makarius & Larson, 2017).

Given the complex interplay of these factors in expatriate adjustment, a structured summary helps consolidate key insights. At the end of each subchapter of the literature review—*Individual Factors*, *Work Factors*, *Non-Work Factors* and *HR Policies & Strategies*— Table 2, Table 3, Table 4 and Table 5 outline the key factors influencing traditional and virtual expatriate adjustment based on the current literature. The tables categorize these factors into relevant subfactors, describe their impact on expatriate adjustment and include references to academic sources that have specifically analyzed their influence. Only publications that directly examine expatriate adjustment are included, while broader background sources are excluded. Given the limited research on virtual expatriates, findings from global virtual teams and virtual work are included where relevant, marked with an asterisk (*). These tables focus on more recent and emerging literature reflecting the evolving nature of virtual

assignments. Therefore, factors that are well established in earlier expatriation research, such as general self-efficacy in traditional contexts, are not listed separately. Also, if certain factors are mentioned for traditional assignments but not for virtual assignments and vice-versa, this does not imply that these factors are irrelevant for virtual assignees. Rather, there is limited empirical evidence directly linking some well-established traditional adjustment factors to virtual assignments.

Table 2: Overview of Individual Factors Influencing Expatriate Adjustment

Source: Created by the author

Adjustment Factors	Subfactors	Assignment Type (Traditional/Virtual)	Explanation of Influencing Factors	Key Studies (Year)
Personality Traits	The Big Five	Traditional	The traits extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness and neuroticism/emotional stability influence traditional expatriate adjustment.	Aycan (1997) Feitosa et al. (2014) Harari et al. (2018) Huang et al. (2005) Johnson et al. (2003) Leiba-O'sullivan (1999) Lii & Wong (2008) Shaffer et al. (2006) Valenzuela & Rogers (2021)
		Virtual	The traits extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness and neuroticism/emotional stability influence virtual expatriate adjustment.	Adamovic et al. (2022) * Luse et al. (2013) * Clark et al. (2012) * Erez et al. (2013) * Ramalingam & Mahalingam (2011) *
	Segmentors vs. Integrators	Virtual	Some individuals thrive with clear boundaries between work and life (i.e. segmentors), while others perform better when they can switch fluently between tasks (i.e. integrators).	Kniffin et al. (2021) Rothbard et al. (2005)
	Virtual Work Self-Efficacy	Virtual	Confidence in the ability to perform effectively in virtual work affects motivation and adjustment.	Adamovic et al. (2022) *
Proactive Coping Strategies	Information Seeking	Traditional	Seeking technical, role, cultural and social information supports expatriate adjustment.	Ashford & Black (1996) Aycan (1997) Dimitrova et al. (2023) Feldman & Thomas (1992) Mahajan & Toh, (2014) Morrison (1993) Zheng et al. (2021)
	Feedback Seeking	Traditional	Actively requesting role and performance feedback aids in adjustment.	Ashford & Black (1996) Dimitrova et al. (2023) Morrison (1993) Vandenberghe et al. (2021) Zheng et al. (2021)
	Relationship Building	Traditional	Proactively developing and maintaining connections with host nationals helps with adjustment.	Ashford & Black (1996) Dimitrova et al. (2023) Morrison (1993) Zheng et al. (2021)
	Positive Framing	Traditional	Reframing situations positively may be useful for expatriates.	Ren et al. (2014)

Adjustment Factors	Subfactors	Assignment Type (Traditional/Virtual)	Explanation of Influencing Factors	Key Studies (Year)
Proactive Coping Strategies	Host-Country Language Proficiency	Traditional	Language skills facilitate adjustment and reduce social isolation.	Dimitrova et al. (2023) Paulus & Muehlfeld (2017) Selmer (2006) Selmer & Luring (2015) Shaffer et al. (1999) Tung (2004) Varma & Russell (2016) Zhang & Harzing (2016)
		Virtual	Language skills help expatriates adjust to virtual work.	Liu et al. (2023) Piekkari et al. (2021)
	Time Zone Coordination	Virtual	Time zone differences affect communication, collaboration and adjustment in virtual work.	Lauring et al. (2022) * Nurmi (2011) * Wicht & Holtbrügge (2023)
Multiple Intelligences	Cultural (CQ)	Traditional	CQ involves understanding and adapting to the norms of the host culture, which improves expatriate adjustment.	Chen (2015) Chew et al. (2021) Earley et al. (2010) Stoermer et al. (2021) Triandis (2004) Wu & Ang (2011)
		Virtual	CQ enhances virtual teamwork, trust and knowledge sharing, thereby facilitating expatriate adjustment in virtual settings.	Ang et al. (2007) * Collins et al. (2017) * Wicht & Holtbrügge (2023)
	Emotional (EQ)	Traditional	EQ involves managing one's own and others' emotions. It improves expatriate adjustment.	Chew et al. (2021) Lii & Wong (2008)
	Political (PQ)	Traditional	PQ aids in navigating global complexities and securing resources for success. It improves expatriate adjustment.	Chew et al. (2021) Ferris et al. (2007) Koveshnikov & Wechtler (2017)
	Virtual (VI)	Virtual	VI helps manage cognitive demands and optimize virtual collaboration, supporting effective virtual expatriate adjustment.	Carte et al. (2006) Makarius & Larson (2017) *

2.3 Expatriate Work Environment: Work Factors Influencing Adjustment

Work domains encompass the expatriate's host workplace or organization, including elements such as management styles, procedures (e.g., norms and incentives), and employee social relations, which involve establishing connections with members of the host company (Haslberger et al., 2013; Takeuchi et al., 2005). *Organizational socialization*, an influencer on adjustment in Black et al.'s (1991) model, generally unfolds in three key stages. First is the *anticipatory socialization*, in which individuals make initial adjustments through organizational choice and selection, resulting in easier and faster adjustment to the new work environment. Next comes the *encounter stage*, where individuals master work tasks and establish organizational relationships (Fisher, 1986). Finally, the *role management stage* occurs when individuals are fully accepted within the organization, having adopted its norms and

values (Feldman, 1976). As expatriates move through these socialization stages, their organizational culture's characteristics play a crucial role in their success.

In Black et al.'s (1991) expatriate adjustment model, two categories—*job factors* and *organizational culture factors*—were identified as essential dimensions shaping the on-assignment experience. The job-related factors include *role clarity*, *role discretion*, *role novelty*, and *role conflict*, while the organizational culture category comprised *organizational culture novelty*, *social support*, and *logistical help*. Since these categories together describe the professional and structural environment in which expatriates operate, this thesis combines them into a single overarching category, referred to as *Work Factors*. This integrated perspective reflects the interconnected nature of expatriates' daily work experiences. Based on this foundation, the following sections examine each of the abovementioned factors in detail and incorporate additional factors that have emerged in more recent literature. Together, these factors provide a comprehensive view of how the work environment shapes expatriate adjustment. As summarized in Table 1, the structural and contextual differences between traditional and virtual assignments—such as relocation, interaction patterns and modes of knowledge transfer—explain why distinct work-related factors are discussed for each assignment type in the following sections.

2.3.1 Cultivating a Multinational Organizational Culture

The Role of Entrepreneurial Culture in Traditional Assignments

An international organization with an entrepreneurial culture tends to facilitate better expatriate adjustment (Lii & Wong, 2008). *Entrepreneurship*, as defined by Morris et al. (1994), is the process of creating value through the combination of unique resources and the development of opportunities. Highly entrepreneurial firms are characterized by a desire to proactively explore new markets and products, flexibility, a hard-working mentality, competitive know-how, a broad social network and the ability to adjust to changing environments (Hitt et al., 2001).

Company size also plays a significant role in expatriate adjustment. Expatriates working in large companies tend to adjust better than those in small and medium-sized companies (SMCs). Large companies have the financial resources to send more expatriates on assignment, thus minimizing the work overload on individuals and promoting better adjustment. In contrast, SMCs may benefit from forming alliances with other organizations in similar industries, which can facilitate negotiations with host countries and help address the unique adjustment challenges their expatriates face (Lii & Wong, 2008).

Creating a Supportive Climate for Virtual Working

Despite its increased popularity, managerial resistance hinders the wider use of virtual work, especially following the COVID-19 pandemic (US Government Accountability Office, 2017). For virtual work practices to persist beyond the crisis, fostering a supportive virtual work climate is crucial. A positive virtual work environment, characterized by perceived managerial and peer support, along with access to appropriate technology, can encourage employees with low self-efficacy to embrace virtual work. Therefore, fostering a virtual work climate that provides the necessary resources, training and encouragement is essential to reduce individual resistance (Adamovic et al., 2022). In addition, a virtual work climate that integrates distributed organizational architectures enhances flexibility (Hesselbarth et al., 2024) by overcoming traditional boundaries and merging fixed hierarchies with dynamic collaboration and coordination (Neirotti et al., 2017).

Information and communication technology (ICT) plays a critical role in managing complex, non-linear workflows in remote and distributed teams. Through the use of ICT, organizations can efficiently integrate knowledge from distributed units, reduce operational complexity and increase external flexibility. This approach is particularly effective in overcoming organizational barriers such as time zones, language differences and different management styles (Hesselbarth et al., 2024). Specifically, network structures enable organizations to adapt to external changes by facilitating access to critical information, while flat structures and decentralization enable the rapid identification of key insights in complex international environments (Bjørnstad & Lichacz, 2013). To mitigate external complexity, MNEs benefit from managing networks and technological infrastructure to obtain important information, fill knowledge gaps and adapt structures as needed based on environmental demands (Hesselbarth et al., 2024).

2.3.2 Job Structure Influencing Expatriate Adjustment

Managing Job Demands & Role Dynamics in Traditional Roles

The *Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory* categorizes job characteristics into *job demands* and *job resources* (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, 2014; Demerouti et al., 2001). Job demands require effort and are associated with psychological costs, such as role stress, role ambiguity, workload, role conflict and work pressure (Lee & Ashforth, 1996). In contrast, job resources support task completion and foster personal growth, for example through support from coworkers and supervisors and performance feedback (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

In their model Black et al. (1991) originally identified several job factors that significantly affect the cross-cultural adjustment of expatriates. *Role clarity* refers to the clarity about role expectations, which

facilitates work and general adjustment. *Role conflict* is characterized by conflicting role demands and expectations, which negatively influences work and interaction adjustment. *Role discretion* allows individuals to make autonomous decisions to adjust their roles to better fit their needs, thereby improving work and interaction adjustment. *Role overload* refers to the feeling of being overwhelmed at work. Specifically, individuals may feel that they lack the necessary skills to perform a task (qualitative role overload) and/or have difficulty completing tasks within the allocated time (quantitative role overload; Maslach & Jackson, 1984; Selmer & Fenner, Jr., 2009). Finally, *role novelty* is the extent to which the current role is different from previous roles, which increases uncertainty and thus negatively impacts work and general adjustment (Black et al., 1991). Extending this theory, Shaffer et al. (1999) also identified *hierarchical level* (i.e., upper-, middle-, or lower-level management), *functional area* (i.e., technical or managerial functions) and *assignment vector* (i.e., parent country nationals, host country nationals and third country nationals) as *positional job factors*, influencing work, interaction, and general adjustment. Examining hierarchical status is particularly important because expatriates in higher-level positions responsible for managing foreign subsidiaries may be less willing to conform to local norms and values. Instead, these expatriates may choose to adjust their new work environment according to their own standards, which could lead to culture shock for existing employees in the organization (Dimitrova et al., 2023).

Beyond these role-related factors, expatriate adjustment is further complicated by specific job demands, such as *international travel requirements*, *cognitive flexibility*, and *non-work disruptions*. International travel or relocation affects physical mobility, while cognitive flexibility encompasses the ability to adapt one's thinking and behavior to diverse cultural contexts. Additionally, non-work disruptions occur when professional obligations interfere with personal life, adding another layer of complexity to expatriate adjustment. Together, these factors illustrate the multifaceted challenges expatriates face in their assignments (Shaffer et al., 2012). Beyond these challenges, effective work adjustment also depends on performance-reward contingency and ongoing communication and support. Appropriate performance appraisals and performance-based rewards increase motivation and commitment, while ongoing support from the home organization helps expatriates maintain their effectiveness during the assignment. Aycan (1997) argues that a *multi-rater approach* is essential for a comprehensive evaluation of expatriates. Host company co-workers and managers are well-positioned to assess an expatriate's general adjustment and ability to collaborate with the team. In contrast, the parent company is more suitable for evaluating the effectiveness of information exchange between headquarters and the host organization (Aycan, 1997).

Performance Evaluation: Addressing Trust, Clarity and Compensation Gaps

Virtual teams often face challenges such as reduced trust, role conflict and ambiguity due to increased social distance, all of which negatively affect role clarity and performance (Lauring et al., 2022). *Trust* plays a vital role in improving role clarity and performance, but time zone differences and role overload can heighten these difficulties, complicating the evaluation process (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999). In virtual work environments, traditional methods of performance evaluation need to be adapted due to the lack of direct supervision, often resulting in a shift toward results-focused evaluations, which have been shown to be effective (Kniffin et al., 2021; Pritchard et al., 2008). However, there is limited literature on specific evaluation methods for virtual assignees, who are often evaluated in the same way as employees with no international responsibilities, with little attention paid to their cultural skills or adjustment success. Compensation practices also lag behind, with most organizations maintaining the assignee's home country package as they are not physically relocating. Some companies address time zone flexibility by offering compensatory time off, but other benefits specific to virtual assignments remain rare (Bücker et al., 2020).

As outlined in sections 2.3.1 and 2.3.2, organizational culture and job structure play a critical role in how expatriates adjust to their work environment. Traditional expatriates are physically present at the host location, allowing them to engage more directly with the organizational culture through face-to-face interaction. In contrast, virtual expatriates work at a distance and often lack access to these informal cues. For these individuals, adjustment depends more heavily on the structural aspects of their roles, such as clearly defined responsibilities, that compensate for the absence of in-person interaction. These differences lead to the following proposition:

Proposition 3. *An inclusive organizational culture and clear job structures facilitate adjustment across all assignment types. Yet, traditional expatriates benefit more from inclusiveness and local integration in the host working environment, while virtual expatriates depend more on job clarity and structured work processes to collaborate remotely.*

2.3.3 The Role of Home and Host Country Mentorship

The Impact of LMX, POS and Responsible Leadership on Traditional Expatriates

Research on expatriate mentoring has gained more attention over the years. Mentors provide four main types of support: *role modeling*, *career guidance*, *task assistance*, and *psychosocial support* (Turban & Dougherty, 1994). In particular, the literature recognizes two main channels of expatriate support: *home country mentors* and *host country mentors* (Mezias & Scandura, 2005). Host country mentors are locals (HCNs) who provide insight into the lifestyle and culture of the host country and

help expatriates adjust. Home country mentors are individuals who have expatriation experience in the same host country and can provide advice on both the home and host country contexts. Expatriates may more easily connect with home-country mentors due to their shared experience. However, both types of mentors, typically senior managers, have a profound knowledge of office politics and behaviors within the organization. Mentors' psychosocial support improves general adjustment, their role modelling improves interactional adjustment in the office and their career development functions support work adjustment in the host country. Thus, a network of multiple mentors from both home and host countries is considered to better facilitate expatriate adjustment. In particular, home country mentors are more effective in facilitating general and interaction adjustment due to their similar expatriation experiences, while host country mentors provide better assistance in identifying and addressing work-related adjustment issues (Zhuang et al., 2013). For mentoring relationships to be most effective, mentors should be paired with mentees who share similar values and attitudes (Zheng et al., 2021). However, mentors should participate in these programs voluntarily, as those who choose to mentor are more likely to be attentive to the needs and interests of newcomers rather than view the role as an obligation (Allen et al., 2006). Additionally, Hofstede's (1984) cultural dimensions—such as power distance, individualism-collectivism and uncertainty avoidance—play a role in mentoring effectiveness (these dimensions are discussed in more detail in section 2.4.1). Expatriates are more likely to be mentored in cultures with low power distance (i.e. low degree of inequality between superiors and subordinates), low uncertainty avoidance (i.e. low levels of formalization and standardization of procedures) and individualism (i.e. high priority of individual over group interests; Feldman & Bolino, 1999).

Although mentoring is often supported or initiated by HR, in this thesis it is included under work factors because it occurs within the expatriate's daily professional environment rather than representing a formal HR policy.

Beyond mentoring relationships, expatriate adjustment is also shaped by broader social exchange processes. The literature suggests that expatriates create exchange relationships with individuals in their social environment (Van Der Laken et al., 2019). Studies show that social exchange, including *perceived organizational support* (POS) and *leader-member exchange* (LMX), has a positive impact on expatriate adjustment (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Kraimer & Wayne, 2004). LMX, specifically home and host country LMX, refers to the relationship that home and host country supervisors establish with expatriates built on joint efforts and mutual support (Sher et al., 2019). POS, on the other hand, measures the extent to which employees feel valued and cared for by their organization, thereby influencing their commitment to organizational goals (Wayne et al., 1997). POS has three dimensions: *financial*, *career*, and *adjustment*. Financial POS refers to support through compensation and benefits.

Career POS involves providing expatriates with career development opportunities, with higher POS leading to more positive engagement. Adjustment POS focuses on support during the transition to a foreign country, helping expatriates adjust more quickly (Kraimer & Wayne, 2004). In particular, supervisor support is highly correlated with expatriate adjustment, commitment, retention and performance, making the establishment of quality LMX a top priority for MNCs (Van Der Laken et al., 2019). Female employees in MNCs often experience lower POS compared to their male counterparts, primarily due to limited opportunities for career advancement into middle and senior management, cultural biases and a lack of female mentors and networks. While more women are taking on long-term international assignments, their presence in top leadership positions remains limited (Varma & Russell, 2016). Both male and female expatriates are more likely to adjust successfully when they feel supported and valued by their organization. Consequently, fairness within an organization significantly impacts employee behavior and attitudes. Employees typically evaluate the fairness of the outcomes they receive (i.e., distributive justice), the processes by which those outcomes are determined (i.e., procedural justice) and their interactions with supervisors (i.e., interactional justice). Expatriates' perceptions of organizational justice in HR practices positively influence their perceptions of social exchange, resulting in their general, interactional and work adjustment (Chen, 2010). When expatriates are supported by both home and host supervisors (i.e. positive LMX), they are more confident in making suggestions to improve the operations of the subsidiary - this is known as the *expatriate voice*. Because headquarters may not have direct oversight of its foreign subsidiaries, expatriates can bring up areas for improvement. Host country supervisors, because of their closer working relationships with expatriates and local knowledge, are often better equipped than home country supervisors to help expatriates voice their concerns. However, because expatriates are assigned by the parent company, MNCs must face the question of whether these suggestions will be listened to by host country supervisors (Sher et al., 2019).

In addition to traditional leader-follower relationships such as LMX, *responsible leadership* (RL) has recently gained more attention (Marques et al., 2023). RL can be understood as a *values-based leadership approach* (Marques & Miska, 2021), where leaders are guided by ethical principles and values in their interactions with a range of stakeholders both within and outside the organization. In the context of expatriation, responsible leaders assume two different roles toward stakeholders in order to respond to their demands. First, the role of *coach*, which refers to a leader who fosters relationships, encourages collaboration and recognizes and respects individuals from different backgrounds. Second, the role of *meaning enabler*, referring to a leader who helps establish shared meaning through open discussion (Maak & Pless, 2006). In their study, Marques et al. (2023) positively

associated RL with expatriate well-being and work adjustment, through which RL may help overcome the negative consequences of international assignments (i.e., the dark side of expatriation).

The Role of Emotional, Appraisal and Informational Support Channels

Virtual assignees benefit from three main types of support: *emotional*, *appraisal* and *informational*, although the nature of the support differs from traditional settings due to the lack of face-to-face interaction with host nationals. In contrast, instrumental support, such as housing assistance, is less relevant for virtual assignees, who remain in their home country and do not face the logistical challenges of relocation (Lauring et al., 2024). However, emotional support, which includes empathy, encouragement and positive gestures (Van Bakel et al., 2017), is crucial to reduce feelings of isolation and maintain work engagement in virtual environments (Panteli et al., 2019). But geographical and time zone barriers, as well as reduced informal interactions, limit the opportunities for HCNs to provide such support effectively (Sommerlad et al., 2022). Appraisal support, which helps expatriates evaluate their behavior and adjust to the host culture (Lauring et al., 2024), is also limited in virtual contexts due to less frequent and more formal communication, which reduces HCN engagement and honest feedback (Charlier et al., 2016). Finally, information support, which is essential for acquiring job-related knowledge and reducing uncertainty (Toh & DeNisi, 2007), remains crucial for virtual assignees. While explicit job information is relatively accessible in virtual environments, opportunities for informal, tacit knowledge sharing and learning through observation are significantly limited (Lauring et al., 2024).

In virtual assignments, mentoring can be enhanced by understanding the role of leader-member exchange quality and differentiation in reducing the negative effects of virtuality. High quality LMX relationships, in which leaders maintain strong, individualized connections with team members, can compensate for the loss of psychological bonds and trust often seen in virtual environments. This is critical to the success of virtual teams, as strong LMX relationships have a positive impact on team performance and knowledge sharing (Hahn & Semrau, 2023). At the same time, *LMX differentiation*—where leaders engage in higher-quality exchanges with some members and lower-quality ones with others—can also be advantageous in virtual settings. Since virtual environments limit the visibility of differential treatment, this approach can enhance team learning and coordination without the usual risks of perceived unfairness (Liden et al., 2006; Martin et al., 2018). However, while virtual assignments may reduce physical markers of dominance, fostering more collaborative relationships, they may also decrease subordinates' access to feedback from supervisors, which could limit learning opportunities (Kniffin et al., 2021). This reduced feedback could in turn decrease organizational commitment and increase the risk of turnover (Vandenberghe et al., 2021).

Table 3: Overview of Work Factors Influencing Expatriate Adjustment

Source: Created by the author

Adjustment Factors	Subfactors	Assignment Type (Traditional/Virtual)	Explanation of Influencing Factors	Key Studies (Year)
Corporate Culture	Entrepreneurial Culture	Traditional	Entrepreneurial firms foster better expatriate adjustment through flexibility and innovation.	Hitt et al. (2001) Lii & Wong (2008)
	Company Size	Traditional	Large firms provide more resources, easing expatriate workload and adjustment.	Lii & Wong (2008)
	Virtual Work Climate	Virtual	A supportive environment fosters virtual work success through training, encouragement and resources.	Adamovic et al. (2022) *
	Technological Infrastructure	Virtual	ICT helps overcome organizational and cultural barriers such as time zones and varying communication styles in remote teams.	Hesselbarth et al. (2024) *
Job Structure	Role Clarity	Traditional	Clear job expectations improve work and general adjustment.	Black et al. (1991), Selmer & Fenner, Jr. (2009)
		Virtual	Understanding one's responsibilities within a role is often more challenging in virtual teams due to social distance and communication barriers.	Lauring et al. (2022) *
	Role Conflict	Traditional	Conflicting role demands hinder work and interaction adjustment.	Black et al. (1991), Selmer & Fenner, Jr. (2009)
		Virtual	The lack of direct supervision and communication in virtual teams often leads to tension and confusion.	Lauring et al. (2022) *
	Role Overload	Traditional	Feeling overwhelmed at work negatively impacts expatriate adjustment.	Black et al. (1991) Selmer & Fenner, Jr. (2009)
	Role Discretion	Traditional	Autonomy in roles improves work and interaction adjustment.	Black et al. (1991) Selmer & Fenner, Jr. (2009)
	Role Novelty	Traditional	Unfamiliar roles increase uncertainty and negatively impacts work and general adjustment.	Black et al. (1991),
	Positional Factors	Traditional	Hierarchical level, functional area and assignments vector influence work, interaction and general adjustment.	Shaffer et al. (1999) Dimitrova et al. (2023)
	Performance Evaluation & Compensation	Traditional	Traditional expatriates benefit from multi-source performance and compensation systems that support effective adjustment.	Aycan (1997)
		Virtual	Virtual workers face outdated performance and compensation models.	Bücker et al. (2020) Kniffin et al. (2021) * Pritchard et al. (2008) *

Adjustment Factors	Subfactors	Assignment Type (Traditional/Virtual)	Explanation of Influencing Factors	Key Studies (Year)
Job Structure	Trust	Virtual	Trust is crucial for role clarity and performance, but is often diminished in virtual teams due to increased social distance.	Lauring et al. (2022) *
Mentoring	Home & Host Country Mentoring	Traditional	Mentors offer career, cultural and social support to expatriates, helping them adjust.	Zhuang et al. (2013) Sher et al. (2019) Van Der Laken et al. (2019)
	Leader-Member Exchange Relationship	Traditional	Strong relationships between home and host country supervisors and expatriates improve adjustment.	Bhaskar-Kraimer & Wayne (2004) Sher et al. (2019) Shrinivas et al. (2005)
		Virtual	Strong relationships between supervisors and expatriates can compensate for the loss of psychological bonds and trust in virtual settings.	Hahn & Semrau (2023) * Liden et al. (2006) * Martin et al. (2018) *
	Perceived Organizational Support	Traditional	Feeling valued by the organization enhances expatriate adjustment.	Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. (2005) Chen (2010) Kraimer & Wayne (2004)
	Responsible Leadership	Traditional	Ethical leadership fosters expatriate well-being and work adjustment.	Marques et al. (2023)
	Emotional, Appraisal & Informational Support	Virtual	Emotional support includes showing empathy and encouragement. Appraisal support helps expatriates evaluate their behavior and adjust to the host culture. Informational support is essential for acquiring job-related knowledge.	Lauring et al. (2024) * Panteli et al. (2019) *
	Feedback Access	Virtual	Virtual work limits feedback opportunities, affecting learning and retention.	Kniffin et al. (2021) Vandenberghe et al. (2021)

2.4 Moving Beyond the Workplace: Non-Work Factors shaping Adjustment

Both non-work and work domains significantly influence the psychological and sociocultural adjustment of expatriates, suggesting that these domains, while different, are interconnected. *Non-work domains* include factors of an expatriate's life outside of the work environment and include *public order and political systems* (i.e., regulations that govern the host country), *economic habits* (i.e., transactions or consumption patterns), *social relationships with host members, family dynamics* and *ideological aspirations* (i.e., religion and worldview; Navas et al., 2005).

In their foundational model, Black et al. (1991) identified *nonwork* as a distinct category influencing expatriate adjustment, specifically highlighting *cultural novelty* and *family-spouse adjustment* as central components. This category captures the extent to which expatriates and their families must adapt to unfamiliar cultural norms and living conditions outside the professional context (Black et al., 1991). Building on this foundation, the following sections discuss these factors in greater depth and incorporate additional insights that have emerged in more recent research—particularly those that address the evolving nature of non-work dynamics in virtual assignments. As outlined in Table 1, such differences in physical relocation, cultural exposure, and host-country interaction underscore why non-work influences manifest differently across assignment types.

2.4.1 Navigating Cultural Differences

Embracing the Host Culture: From Distance to Acceptance

The level of development of the host country was found to be an important factor in traditional expatriates' intention to leave before the end of their assignment (Florkowski & Fogel, 1999). *Cultural novelty*, also known as *cultural toughness* or *cultural distance*, refers to the difficulty of adapting to a host culture that is significantly different from one's own (Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985). In particular, cultural novelty has been found to have the greatest negative impact on adjustment during the first two years of an assignment, with its influence decreasing after this period (Valenzuela & Rogers, 2021). Continuous learning usually leads to more accurate knowledge and behavior, which results in positive feedback and improved moods among individuals. However, as expatriates learn more about the host culture, they may find themselves disagreeing with certain aspects of the culture based on their own beliefs. For example, a male expatriate may realize that women are treated as inferior in the host culture, but he may not want to engage in such behavior. Thus, his own values differ from what is considered appropriate by the locals (Hippler et al., 2015).

Although cultural novelty is an important non-work factor influencing expatriate adjustment, it does not take into account the willingness of locals to interact with newcomers. Perceived acceptance has a significant impact on psychological well-being and expatriate adjustment. HCNs resistance often arises from concerns about increased communication difficulties in the workplace and hindering organizational goals. Furthermore, MNCs tend to offer expatriates more favorable compensation packages than local employees, which can increase perceived wage inequalities (Florkowski & Fogel, 1999). However, HCNs are more likely to support expatriates when they perceive the expatriate as likable and share value similarities (Varma et al., 2016). Among the Big Five personality traits, HCNs high in agreeableness provide more support in helping expatriates adjust to work settings (Wang & Fang, 2014). Despite this, expatriates tend to receive more support from fellow expatriates than from

HCNs, even though both groups offer equally valuable work and non-work-related information (Johnson et al., 2003). *Ethnocentrism*—the belief in the superiority of one's own culture—acts similarly to employment discrimination and hinders expatriate adjustment (Hall & Gudykunst, 1989). In contrast, *cultural acceptance* is key to successful adjustment, referring to the ability to appreciate and embrace a new culture. Without this acceptance, learning and adaptation are obstructed because new cultural practices may be viewed as inferior. Traditional expatriates typically encounter obvious, *superficial cultural differences*, such as unfamiliar living conditions. In contrast, *deep cultural differences* involve unspoken norms that are not easily observed. Acceptance of a culture can occur at either the surface or deep level. Expatriates who resist adjustment are less likely to interact with HCNs and may retreat to their home country. On the other hand, when expatriates accept local norms, they are more likely to receive support from local mentors, which increases their understanding and further acceptance of the culture (Friedman et al., 2009).

Cultural Dimensions and Virtual Team Dynamics

As briefly mentioned in section 2.3.3, Hofstede (1984) identified four dimensions to describe national cultures: *power distance*, *individualism-collectivism*, *uncertainty avoidance* and *masculinity-femininity*. Power distance measures the extent to which a society accepts unequal power distributions. Individualism-collectivism measures the emphasis placed on individual initiative versus the importance of groups in collectivist cultures. Uncertainty avoidance measures how societies deal with ambiguity; cultures with high uncertainty avoidance tend to have more regulations, greater distrust of younger people and a tendency to avoid conflict. Finally, Masculinity-femininity distinguishes between cultures that value assertiveness and material success (masculine) and those that prioritize caring for others and community interdependence (feminine; Feldman & Bolino, 1999; Hofstede, 1984). These dimensions are relevant to this thesis as they help explain how cultural contexts shape interpersonal relationships, communication and support mechanisms during expatriate adjustment. It is important to note, however, that while Hofstede's cultural dimensions provide a useful theoretical framework for this research, their validity has been criticized for poor methodology and lack of generalizability (see McSweeney, 2002, for details).

Understanding these cultural dimensions is essential, as each expatriate's experience with culture shock can vary significantly based on the nature and duration of their assignment, as well as their individual levels of exposure to and sensitivity toward cultural differences. Consequently, an expatriate may encounter multiple waves of culture shock, leading to repeated periods of frustration and clarification (Friedman et al., 2009). Similar challenges arise in GVTs, where cultural differences among team members can cause coordination problems and interpersonal conflicts (Hofstede, 1984). For

example, French employees, who often prefer polychronic working styles - involving flexibility and multitasking - clash with their German counterparts, who typically prefer monochronic working styles, characterized by clear schedules and a structured approach (Adamovic, 2018; Kaufman-Scarborough, 2017). However, cultural acceptance or openness to diversity - valuing and respecting different perspectives - can foster information sharing and improve job role clarity by providing broader knowledge and better communication in GVTs (Lauring et al., 2022; Van Knippenberg & Van Ginkel, 2022). In virtual assignments, cultural differences are often observed at a surface level, such as communication styles, while deeper differences, like values or beliefs, may be overlooked due to the focus on work-related interactions and limited participation in local social life. However, written communication in virtual work provides the advantage of allowing more time to interpret messages, which can reduce misunderstandings and enhance clarity (Van Vianen et al., 2004; Wicht & Holtbrügge, 2023).

2.4.2 Support Networks in Expatriation

Family Support and Community Ties in Traditional Assignments

A successful expatriation is often supported by various social agents across different domains. These domains—*work*, *family* and *community*—are critical sources of support, with agents providing assistance tailored to specific needs at different stages of the expatriation process (Van Der Laken et al., 2019). The literature on social support distinguishes four main types of support: *emotional support* (e.g., love, care), *social companionship* (e.g., belonging), *informational support* (e.g., advice) and *material support* (e.g., financial assistance; Vaux et al., 1987; Wellman & Hiscott, 1985). In the family domain, spouses and relatives provide emotional stability (Van Der Laken et al., 2019). Spouses are often the primary source of support, and thus well-adjusted spouses have repeatedly been shown to have a positive impact on expatriate adjustment (Abdul Malek et al., 2015; Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Black & Gregersen, 1991; Shaffer et al., 1999). This positive impact is due to the *spillover effect*, meaning that an expatriate's experience in one area can influence an outcome in another area (e.g., a challenging family situation may also influence the expatriate's work domain). Contacts outside the workplace, while valuable, are often neglected in IHRM. Social networks of spouses and other family members are important, as their well-being can affect the expatriate's adjustment through the crossover effect, where emotional states or stressors are transferred from one family member to another (Takeuchi et al., 2002). Additionally, the literature found that expatriates with host country partners seem to adjust better over time than those with home country or third country partners (Davies et al., 2015). Finally, in the community domain, interactions with local friends and acquaintances provide emotional support and cultural learning opportunities (Johnson et al., 2003). As the assignment progresses, the type of support needed evolves: logistical and spousal support are

crucial pre-assignment, while career-related support gains importance as the assignment concludes. During the early stages, host country agents help with adjustment, while home country peers and mentors provide primarily emotional support (Van Der Laken et al., 2019).

Social networks can be categorized into *strong (close) ties* and *weak ties*. Strong ties typically consist of family, friends, and fellow expatriates facing similar challenges, while weak ties include connections beyond this core group, such as local neighbors, teachers and landlords (Granovetter, 1973). Employees in SMEs often rely more heavily on their own social networks due to limited organizational support (Stroppa & Spieß, 2010). A larger and more diverse support network, including both strong and weak ties, significantly enhances interaction adjustment by providing a wider range of social resources. Frequent interactions within these networks are particularly valuable for leveraging resources and facilitating general and interaction adjustment. Expatriates with prior international experience benefit even more from their networks, as they can draw on previously acquired coping strategies and realistic expectations, leading to improved overall adjustment (Claus et al., 2015).

The Importance of Virtual Support Platforms

The physical or virtual distance from support agents can impact their ability to provide essential resources such as knowledge, mentoring and emotional guidance (Van Der Laken et al., 2019). International assignees who depend on virtual ties for support often experience less work adjustment, as these distant interactions tend to lack the empathy and understanding needed to address the unique challenges of the host environment. In contrast, face-to-face relationships, typically formed in the host country, provide more relevant support in dealing with work-related issues (Claus et al., 2015).

Recent advancements in technology and the growth of virtual platforms have emerged as pivotal in reshaping the expatriate adjustment process. Access to digital platforms and social networks can enable expatriates to gather more accurate information about their host country, connect with other expatriates and start building their support network even before their relocation, significantly easing the transition into the new roles (Caldwell et al., 2024). Simultaneously, virtual platforms provide informational, emotional and instrumental support, crucial for navigating the complexities of the modern expatriate experience. Through both *online participation* (engaging in digital communities and networks) and *offline participation* (in-person interactions facilitated by online connections), expatriates gain access to a support system that enhances their adjustment by offering advice, reducing feelings of isolation, and helping solve practical problems encountered in the host country (Canhilal et al., 2022). However, the increasing use of communication technologies and virtual realities has disrupted traditional support dynamics and made overcoming geographical distance less time-

dependent (Colbert et al., 2016). In addition, virtual workers now have access to a range of powerful communication tools based on artificial intelligence, including machine learning and natural language processing. Features such as automated live captioning and transcript generation are increasingly being used in online meetings (Seeber et al., 2020). Future technological developments, such as the combination of virtual reality and holographic technologies, could further mimic the experience of a traditional office environment. These technological developments could facilitate virtual assignments and help to address common challenges such as emotional disconnection in virtual work environments (Wicht & Holtbrügge, 2023). However, while virtual reality systems are getting closer to replicating in-person meetings, their widespread use is limited by bandwidth constraints, especially in some developing and developed countries. Despite these limitations, advanced online tools, virtual reality platforms, and videoconferencing are becoming increasingly accessible, allowing even remote locations to engage in communication that comes close to in-person interactions (Jimenez et al., 2017).

This section highlights how traditional expatriates typically adjust through immersion in the local environment, including participation in expatriate networks and everyday cultural encounters. Such experiences foster gradual cultural learning and social integration. In contrast, virtual expatriates lack direct exposure to the host culture and must rely on alternative strategies to build cultural understanding and a sense of connection. Digital tools, such as videoconferencing and messaging platforms, play a central role in simulating in-person interaction, while occasional visits to the host location can provide essential personal touchpoints. These differences lead to the following proposition:

Proposition 4. *Cultural understanding supports adjustment for all expatriates. Traditional assignees achieve this primarily through engaging in expatriate networks and other in-person community activities, whereas virtual assignees rely more on digital tools, such as videoconferencing and occasional visits to build comparable cultural understanding.*

Table 4: Overview of Non-Work Factors Influencing Expatriate Adjustment

Source: Created by the author

Adjustment Factors	Subfactors	Assignment Type (Traditional/Virtual)	Explanation of Influencing Factors	Key Studies (Year)
Cultural Differences	Perceived Acceptance by HCNs	Traditional	Local acceptance enhances expatriate well-being and adjustment.	Florkowski & Fogel (1999) Varma et al. (2016) Wang & Fang (2014)
		Virtual	Valuing and respecting diversity enhances virtual communication and collaboration.	Adamovic (2018) * Lauring et al. (2022) * Wicht & Holtbrügge (2023)

Adjustment Factors	Subfactors	Assignment Type (Traditional/Virtual)	Explanation of Influencing Factors	Key Studies (Year)
Cultural Differences	Cultural Distance	Traditional	Greater cultural distance increases expatriate adjustment challenges.	Hippler et al. (2015) Valenzuela & Rogers (2021)
Social Support Networks	Spouse & Family Support	Traditional	Well-adjusted spouses and family positively affect expatriate adjustment.	Abdul Malek et al. (2015) Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. (2005) Black & Gregersen (1991) Claus et al. (2015) Davies et al. (2015) Shaffer et al. (1999) Takeuchi et al. (2002) Van Der Laken et al. (2019)
	Community Support	Traditional	Local friends and acquaintances provide emotional and cultural support.	Claus et al. (2015) Johnson et al. (2003)
	Physical Distance	Virtual	Virtual expatriates often experience less work adjustment, due to physical distance from host support networks.	Claus et al. (2015) * Van Der Laken et al. (2019) *
	Digital Platforms	Virtual	Social networks and digital platforms aid expatriate adjustment by providing information and support.	Caldwell et al. (2024) * Canhilar et al. (2022) * Wicht & Holtbrügge (2023)

2.5 Guiding Global Talent: HR Policies & Strategies to Ease Expatriate Adjustment

Supportive HR practices—such as *recognition, career growth opportunities, fair compensation, and involvement in decision-making*—reflect a company's commitment to its employees' well-being (Allen et al., 2003; Mäkelä & Kinnunen, 2018). However, the effectiveness of these practices depends on employees' perceptions, making POS a critical factor (Karin Andreassi et al., 2014). As organizations shift from traditional models to more distributed, digital environments, HRM encounters new challenges in managing geographical and interpersonal dynamics (Donnelly & Johns, 2021). These issues are particularly relevant in virtual settings, where the lack of face-to-face interaction requires more focused efforts to foster a sense of belonging and support among remote workers (Donnelly & Johns, 2021; Parry & Tyson, 2011). Furthermore, the rise of virtual work transfers more autonomy and task authority to local units and requires adjustments to global strategies and HR policies, such as talent development and career patterns (Lee et al., 2022; Selmer et al., 2022). Finally, early face-to-face interactions remain essential for building trust and cohesion in virtual teams (Jimenez et al., 2017) and hybrid forms of global work are likely to persist (Selmer et al., 2022).

Black et al.'s (1991) model primarily focuses on factors influencing expatriate adjustment from the assignee's perspective. However, it does not explicitly address HR mechanisms that could facilitate this process in the on-assignment stage, only selection mechanisms and criteria in the pre-assignment phase. This thesis expands on that foundation by incorporating the role of HR policies and practices as an additional layer influencing adjustment outcomes also during the assignment. In the following section, I will review the existing IHRM literature and expert recommendations on how HR professionals can best support traditional expatriates, followed by an examination of strategies for supporting virtual expatriates in the next section. Although this subchapter distinguishes between traditional and virtual contexts for analytical clarity (based on Table 1), it is important to note that many HR principles—such as social support, fair compensation and cross-cultural training—apply to both forms of global work, differing mainly in their mode of implementation rather than in their conceptual importance. Thus, this review will provide insights into current best practices and theoretical frameworks for expatriate support and lay the foundation for the empirical part that follows, which will test Propositions 1-5.

2.5.1 Supporting Traditional Expatriates: A Holistic HR Approach

In line with HRM literature, Wu & Ang (2011) emphasize that successful adjustment depends on a bundle of integrated HR practices, including *pre-departure orientation*, *career and family support*, and *financial assistance*. Similarly, Guzzo et al. (1994) argue that comprehensive expatriate packages—covering *training*, *logistical* and *family-related assistance*—strengthen the relationship between the expatriate and the organization, fostering greater commitment and smoother transitions. Building on a synthesis of recurring themes across the IHRM and expatriation literature, the following section identifies four key areas in which HR policies and practices most consistently facilitate adjustment: *cross-cultural preparation and training*, *social integration* and *mentorship*, *psychological and health support*, and *logistical, legal, and career assistance*. These categories do not constitute a formal framework but rather reflect analytical clusters emerging repeatedly across studies, providing a structured lens through which existing approaches can be examined.

Cross-Cultural Training

Comprehensive pre-departure and in-country training remains one of the most effective tools to prepare expatriates for relocation. Such preparation should include not only language instruction and cultural awareness sessions. If resources are available, MNCs can also build expatriate training centers in the host country that address local customs, laws and job-specific policies to enhance expatriates' ability to perform their assignments. Organizations can also collaborate on research projects to study the impact of pairing expatriates with either HCNs or home country mentors, different types of cross-

cultural training or different benefits packages on expatriate success (Van Der Laken et al., 2019; Zhuang et al., 2013). To reinforce mutual understanding, cross-cultural training can also include host-country nationals. Training HCNs to understand cultural differences and the rationale behind foreign assignments can improve collaboration and perceived credibility, encouraging expatriates to seek advice and build trust (Florkowski & Fogel, 1999; Mahajan & Toh, 2014).

Logistical, Legal and Career Support

Effective logistical and legal support remains another cornerstone of traditional expatriation. Organizations can reduce adjustment barriers by providing administrative and financial assistance, including relocation aid, travel and housing allowances, healthcare assistance and education support for children (Guzzo et al., 1994; Shaffer et al., 1999; Van Der Laken et al., 2019; Wu & Ang, 2011). At the same time, Bücker et al. (2016) observe that confusion often arises from a lack of clarity about responsibilities among HR, legal, finance and ICT departments. To avoid such issues, organizations can coordinate these support units early and clearly communicate who manages which aspect of the expatriation process.

Beyond logistical support, career planning and repatriation preparation also form part of a comprehensive HR approach. Although repatriation itself lies outside the scope of this thesis, research underlines the importance of viewing expatriation and repatriation as a continuous process to sustain employee commitment and retain global talent (Wang, 2023). Early career discussions, mentoring and post-assignment follow-up can reassure expatriates of long-term opportunities within the organization, helping preserve the developmental and strategic value of international assignments (Burmeister & Deller, 2016; Florkowski & Fogel, 1999; Fuchs & Primecz, 2025; Howe-Walsh & Torka, 2017).

Social Integration

The quality of social connections—both within and outside the workplace—plays a central role in adjustment. Companies can facilitate these connections through initiatives such as mentorship programs that pair new expatriates and their families with those who have successfully adjusted, or by connecting newcomers with local groups and community activities (Dimitrova et al., 2023; Harari et al., 2018; Johnson et al., 2003).

Successful expatriate programs also extend beyond the individual employee to include family-related support—for example, helping spouses find employment, identifying schools for children or providing opportunities for family integration. These practices help prevent maladjustment in accompanying

family members, which can otherwise negatively affect the expatriate's own adjustment (Wu & Ang, 2011). Notably, social support from host-country nationals has been shown to play an even more critical role in expatriate adjustment than support from fellow expatriates. In fact, reliance on expatriate-only clubs, private international schools or isolated compounds may impede interaction with HCNs and, consequently, the adjustment process. Therefore, opportunities can be provided for expatriates and their spouses to regularly engage with HCNs. This can include facilitating local hobbies, helping them find local schools or connecting them with social communities. Even regular interactions with housekeepers or childcare providers can serve as valuable local contacts (Zhuang et al., 2013).

Supportive Work Environment

Beyond practical support, expatriates also require attention to their psychological well-being, as they often experience stressors such as role ambiguity, cultural novelty, or safety concerns, which may increase the risk of substance use, including alcohol and drugs (Faeth & Kittler, 2017; Kraimer & Wayne, 2004). Social norms, including the host country's or organization's tolerance for alcohol and drug use, can influence substance use behavior. In some cultures, alcohol consumption is even part of the business culture and may be used to facilitate professional adjustment. HR can mitigate these challenges by taking proactive steps to address them. This could include offering anonymous support groups and organizing testing in high-risk work environments. Expatriate candidates can also be educated about the increased risk of substance use before accepting international assignments. Companies can implement stress management programs such as yoga, meditation and workload limits to ease adjustment and reduce the risk of substance use (Wurtz, 2018). In addition, strengthening LMX relationships with home and host supervisors can encourage expatriates to express concerns more openly while working abroad (Sher et al., 2019).

However, Wu & Ang (2011) caution that HR initiatives alone may not suffice without intrinsic motivation from the expatriate. Individuals who are not personally motivated to engage with the host environment may not fully benefit from available support systems, underlining the importance of aligning HR programs with personal readiness and selection.

2.5.2 Effective HR Practices for Supporting Virtual Assignees

While many of the HR practices discussed for traditional expatriates—such as social integration and cross-cultural training—remain relevant in virtual contexts, the shift toward digital collaboration introduces additional complexities that require adapted strategies. The following section therefore builds on these foundational principles but focuses on how HR policies must evolve to support

expatriates in virtual assignments, where physical distance, reliance on technology and limited social interaction alter the dynamics of adjustment, as illustrated in Table 1.

As teams increasingly operate along a continuum between traditional and remote environments, HR best practices for virtual assignments emphasize a balanced integration of face-to-face and virtual work. This approach ensures that technology complements human tasks while fostering collaboration between virtual and physical workspaces (Asatiani & Penttinen, 2019; Jones et al., 2018). To increase the success of virtual teams, organizations are advised to provide both *tangible resources* (e.g., information on remote working, employee assistance) and *psychological support* (e.g., feedback, regular contact via video conferencing). Building on Walton's (1976) framework, Adamovic (2018) highlights the necessity of tailored HRM strategies to enhance the adjustment of expatriates in virtual teams. To achieve this, HRM is advised to concentrate on four key areas: *developing international skills*, *fostering an international culture*, *implementing appropriate HR policies* and *ensuring work-life balance* for expatriates. While the four areas proposed by Adamovic (2018) are broadly applicable to international assignments in general, they are particularly valuable to virtual contexts because they were developed to address the challenges of geographically dispersed collaboration. In this thesis, these areas are renamed—developing international skills as *cross-cultural training*, fostering an international culture as *social integration*, implementing appropriate HR policies as *supportive work environment*, and ensuring work-life balance for expatriates as *virtual work norms*—to facilitate clearer comparison with the HR practices discussed for traditional assignments. Thus, Adamovic's (2018) framework provides a relevant foundation for understanding how HR policies can support adjustment in virtual contexts, where digital communication and reduced social presence reshape traditional adjustment mechanisms.

Cross-Cultural Training

A comprehensive training prepares expatriates to navigate cultural diversity effectively and must thus emphasize the development of CQ, EQ and conflict management skills. Training in global mindsets and technological tools is vital to facilitate seamless communication and collaboration across geographical distances, thereby mitigating feelings of isolation. Leadership development programs are equally important, equipping managers with the necessary skills for effective coordination, planning and goal-setting (Adamovic, 2018; Erez et al., 2013). In addition, HR departments can implement clear language policies and practices to ensure that important information is communicated to expatriates in a timely and understandable manner. Providing both online and offline language support for expatriates with lower host-country language proficiency is also essential (Liu et al., 2023). However, despite the recognized value of cross-cultural training for expatriates and their families, participation remains low,

and research shows mixed results. Generic approaches to training have been found to be either ineffective or even counterproductive for adjustment (Jenkins & Mockaitis, 2010; Selmer, 2005). Experts suggest that short, frequent cross-cultural experiences and participation in global teams are more effective in building CQ (Engle & Crowne, 2014; Lenartowicz et al., 2014).

Social Integration

Establishing a robust international organizational culture through social inclusion and team-building is crucial for fostering trust and cohesion within virtual teams (Adamovic, 2018). Teams open to cultural diversity can enhance performance and clarify job roles through time zone adjustments, while those less open to diversity should first focus on building an inclusive culture before addressing logistical concerns such as time zone coordination. To foster inclusivity, companies can offer diversity awareness training at early face-to-face meetings and develop programs to improve expatriates' intercultural skills (Lauring et al., 2022). Face-to-face meetings early in the team's formation have been shown to alleviate the adverse effects of cultural diversity and reduce stereotyping (Adamovic, 2018). Occasional physical meetings at strategically critical times can improve social engagement and role clarity (Richter et al., 2021). Additionally, promoting fairness through the establishment of team rules can improve perceptions of equality among team members (Adamovic, 2018). Clarifying goals and fostering a psychologically safe environment will further help mitigate conflict and align teams (Kniffin et al., 2021). However, many teams struggle to enforce such norms effectively. Thus, communication norms must be mutually accepted and followed by the entire team (Nurmi, 2011).

Supportive Work Environment

HR policies should also provide clear guidance on compensation, representation and job expectations to mitigate uncertainty and conflict within GVTs. Transparent performance evaluation systems and fair compensation structures are essential to preventing dissatisfaction among virtual workers. Moreover, it is crucial for HRM to ensure that all team members, regardless of their geographical location, have a voice in decision-making processes and are treated fairly. This approach can help prevent feelings of disengagement, particularly among expatriates working in subsidiaries (Adamovic, 2018). In addition, rewarding managers for effectively managing diverse teams and using team-based strategies that encourage collaboration across nationalities can further promote openness and cooperation (Lauring et al., 2022).

Virtual Work Norms

Finally, since virtual assignments do not require physical relocation and thus involve less logistical support than traditional assignments, establishing clear and flexible virtual work norms becomes

especially important for addressing time zone challenges and supporting expatriates' work-life balance. Structured team environments, clear hierarchies and a well-designed technological infrastructure can significantly enhance coordination and reduce misunderstandings, allowing expatriates to thrive in their virtual assignments (Adamovic, 2018). Organizations are increasingly implementing data management systems to centralize critical information. This is crucial for ensuring compliance, data transparency and proactive risk management. Additionally, the use of global equity tracking tools is growing as well, driven by the need to monitor employees in real time and manage compliance, particularly as remote working arrangements increase. While automation and artificial intelligence offer potential benefits such as reducing administrative costs and improving workflow efficiency, their adoption is still limited by budget constraints. Although virtual assignments are generally less costly than traditional expatriation, they still present significant compliance risks and require ongoing HR oversight (KPMG International, 2023). By aligning HR policies with the unique needs of virtual expatriates, organizations can effectively support expatriates and foster their success in virtual roles.

This section highlights the different HR support needs of traditional and virtual expatriates. Traditional expatriates benefit more from comprehensive preparation before departure, including cultural training and logistical support. In contrast, due to no relocation virtual expatriates face ongoing challenges throughout their assignment that require more sustained HR support, such as inclusive team norms and clear communication structures, in order to navigate the demands of virtual collaboration. This leads to the fifth and final proposition:

Proposition 5. *HR support is essential throughout the expatriation process. Traditional expatriates benefit more from pre-assignment preparation, including cultural and logistical training. In contrast, virtual expatriates, due to their physical distance, require more continuous HR engagement during the assignment, making a supportive virtual work environment crucial for successful adjustment.*

Table 5: Overview of HR Policies & Strategies Influencing Expatriate Adjustment

Source: Created by the author

Adjustment Factors	Subfactors	Assignment Type (Traditional/Virtual)	Explanation of Influencing Factors	Key Studies (Year)
Pre-Assignment Support	Cross-Cultural Training	Traditional	Training improves adjustment by preparing assignees for cultural and linguistic differences in the host country.	Florkowski & Fogel (1999) Mahajan & Toh (2014) Van Der Laken et al. (2019) Zhuang et al. (2013)

Adjustment Factors	Subfactors	Assignment Type (Traditional/Virtual)	Explanation of Influencing Factors	Key Studies (Year)
Pre-Assignment Support	Cross-Cultural Training	Virtual	Training for virtual assignees builds global mindsets, cultural and emotional intelligence, and conflict management skills.	Adamovic (2018)* Erez et al. (2013)
	Logistical, Legal & Career Support	Traditional	Providing administrative, logistical, and career assistance promotes adjustment by reducing stress related to relocation.	Guzzo et al. (1994) Shaffer et al. (1999) Van Der Laken et al. (2019) Wu & Ang (2011)
On-Assignment Support	Social Integration	Traditional	Fostering relationships with HCNs and local communities strengthens adjustment by providing cultural learning and emotional support.	Dimitrova et al. (2023) Harari et al. (2018) Johnson et al. (2003) Wu & Ang (2011) Zhuang et al. (2013)
		Virtual	Building inclusion in virtual teams through social connection and fairness promotes trust and cohesion despite distance.	Adamovic (2018)* Kniffin et al. (2021) Lauring et al. (2022)* Richter et al. (2021)
	Supportive Work Environment	Traditional	Supportive leadership, psychological safety, and wellness initiatives can reduce stress and uncertainty, thus enhancing adjustment.	Sher et al. (2019) Wurtz (2018)
		Virtual	Supportive digital environments help expatriates maintain engagement and well-being across time zones and physical distance.	Adamovic (2018)* Lauring et al. (2022)*
	Virtual Work Norms	Virtual	Establishing clear virtual work norms enhances coordination and fairness in virtual collaboration.	Adamovic (2018)* KPMG International (2023)

3 Research Methodology

Building on the theoretical foundations presented in the literature review, this chapter explains the methodology used to explore the key factors that influence expatriate adjustment in both virtual and traditional assignments. It outlines the process of sample selection, data collection and qualitative and quantitative data analysis, providing a clear structure for how the research questions are addressed and how this thesis contributes to the existing body of literature.

3.1 Research Design & Participant Sample

In order to address the research questions and propositions, *semi-structured interviews* were chosen as the primary research method for this thesis. To complement the interviews, a short *pre-interview questionnaire* for expatriate participants was also included, providing a self-assessment of the Big Five personality traits and basic demographic information. This combination allowed for a richer contextualization of the qualitative data and offered useful quantitative insights, particularly for analyzing Proposition 1, which examines the role of personality traits in expatriate adjustment.

This mainly qualitative approach to exploring expatriate adjustment was chosen, as most existing studies on this topic use quantitative methods. An analysis of 566 articles revealed that 66% of studies on expatriate adjustment were quantitative, 30% were qualitative and 4% utilized mixed methods (Caldwell et al., 2024). Specifically, for virtual assignments, Wicht & Holtbrügge (2023) emphasize the need for more qualitative research. The lack of qualitative studies in this area may be due to the complexity of the expatriate experience, which is difficult to quantify, as well as the challenge of accessing expatriates for in-depth interviews. In addition, as noted by Dimitrova et al. (2023), while qualitative studies do exist in the expatriation literature, they are often not published in high quality journals and may not be widely cited. However, the choice of a qualitative methodology is justified not only by the lack of qualitative studies, but more so by the specific advantages it offers for understanding expatriate adjustment. Qualitative methods are particularly well suited to studying dynamic processes and capturing changes in expatriate adjustment over time. While quantitative studies provide valuable generalizations through statistical analysis, they often fail to capture the depth of personal experience, nuanced cultural interactions and organizational dynamics that influence expatriate adjustment, particularly in virtual assignments (Dimitrova et al., 2023). Through semi-structured interviews, this thesis explores subjective experiences, emerging themes and complex relationships that a purely quantitative approach might overlook.

This thesis's empirical research was based on a sample of ten participants — seven expatriates and three HR professionals — from five multinational organizations. Participants were recruited through a

combination of targeted and snowball sampling. The initial targeted outreach was conducted via LinkedIn by filtering profiles based in Vienna and using keywords such as *expatriate*, *assignment*, *global mobility* and *assignee*. Potential participants were screened for relevant international experience and contacted directly. Out of approximately twenty individuals approached, five agreed to participate. These initial interviews then led to referrals within the same organizations (i.e. *snowballing*), resulting in six additional participants—either HR professionals or other expatriates. This referral process was particularly valuable for accessing relevant organizational networks and ensuring that participants were embedded in comparable corporate environments. The sample size of ten was considered sufficient for this thesis, as the interviews revealed recurring patterns and consistent themes, indicating that thematic saturation had been reached.

The interviewees are employed by large MNCs operating across diverse industries, including consulting, manufacturing, insurance and digital services - sectors characterized by frequent cross-border collaboration and growing interest in hybrid and virtual mobility arrangements. While company names are withheld to maintain confidentiality, the firms are comparable in size and international orientation, supporting consistency across cases. All organizations employ between 2,000 and 9,000 people globally and have either their headquarters or a major subsidiary in Vienna, Austria. Vienna was selected as the geographical focus due to its role as a regional hub for international business operations and global mobility programs, providing an ideal context to examine both traditional and virtual expatriation. The seven participating expatriates had diverse assignment backgrounds: three traditional expatriates (TE), two virtual expatriates (VE) and two with experience in both assignment types (VTE). All expatriates had recently completed their assignments and hold positions ranging from mid-level specialists to senior management. The participants represent diverse functional areas—ranging from engineering and marketing to HR leadership and intercultural consulting—and vary in gender (six female, four male), age (20–50+) and nationality (Austria, Italy and the Netherlands). All participants were employed under formal company contracts, either through traditional international assignments or virtual mobility arrangements. Although efforts were made to include direct HR-expatriate pairings within the same organization, this was not feasible for the final sample, as is acknowledged in the Limitations subchapter.

3.2 Data Collection: Interviews and Questionnaire

Prior to each interview, all seven expatriate participants were asked to complete a short questionnaire (see Appendix A). This questionnaire included definitions of virtual versus traditional expatriation and expatriate adjustment, as well as background questions on their assignment experience (e.g. how many years they had spent abroad and how many and what type of assignments they had completed)

and demographic questions (e.g. age and gender). There was also a brief personality assessment, which was based on the Big Five personality traits and used a 10-item Likert scale (two statements per trait), where respondents indicated their level of agreement on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Since this assessment provided specific insights into expatriates' personalities, it was only relevant for them and was not administered to HR professionals.

The subsequent interviews with the seven expatriate participants began with a short introduction outlining their structure and purpose. This was followed by a discussion of the participants' most recent assignment. The main body of the interview was divided into three thematic sections — *individual factors*, *work-related factors*, and *non-work factors* — each including two core questions and one scenario-based question. To encourage reflective comparisons, traditional expatriates were asked to imagine being in a virtual setting and vice versa. For those who had experienced both types of assignments, the scenario-based questions were replaced by direct comparative prompts. The interviews concluded with follow-up questions on any unaddressed topics and an open-ended question inviting participants to share advice for other expatriates. In contrast, the interviews with the three HR professionals were based on a separate guideline, focusing instead on organizational strategies and support systems for expatriates. Although all interviews were semi-structured and guided by the literature and research questions, flexibility was maintained to allow participants to elaborate on aspects of their experiences that were personally significant to them.

Four tailored interview guidelines were developed prior to the interviews, to capture these different perspectives comprehensively:

- Traditional expatriates (with scenario questions about virtual assignments; see Appendix B1)
- Virtual expatriates (with scenario questions about traditional assignments; see Appendix B2)
- Expatriates with experience in both assignment types (comparative approach; see Appendix B3)
- HR professionals (organizational focus; see Appendix B4)

All interviews were conducted online via Microsoft Teams, which provided flexibility regarding scheduling and location for both parties. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and was conducted in English. With participants' consent, all sessions were audio-recorded and later transcribed using *intelligent verbatim transcription*. This method removes irrelevant fillers and repetitions to enhance readability while preserving meaning and tone. For example:

Before: *“Mm hmm. Yeah, that’s a good point. I think and that’s what I meant with it’s difficult for HR to support the expatriate once they have actually started.”*

After: *“It’s difficult for HR to support the expatriate once they have actually started.”*

Before: *“Yeah. Hmm. I think, actually, I think this would be a little different given that for virtual expatriates, it’s not so, let’s say natural, to meet new people.”*

After: *“This would be a little different given that for virtual expatriates it’s not so natural to meet new people.”*

Participant quotations used throughout the Empirical Findings chapter are referenced according to the style recommended by the qualitative data analysis software *MAXQDA*. Each quotation is cited with an anonymized participant code and the corresponding position number from the transcript, for example (*TE1, Pos. 4*). The participant code (e.g., TE = Traditional Expatriate, VE = Virtual Expatriate, VTE = Virtual & Traditional Expatriate, HR = Human Resources Professional) indicates the interviewee group, while the position number refers to the exact location within the transcript, displayed on the left-hand side of the *MAXQDA* export (see Appendices B1-B4). The Empirical Findings chapter includes direct quotations to illustrate key themes in the participants’ own words and support the interpretation of the data. Complete interview transcripts are provided in the Appendices C1-C10.

3.3 Qualitative Data Analysis in MAXQDA

The data analysis for this thesis followed the *grounded theory* approach by Strauss (1995), which provides a systematic yet flexible procedure for developing theory directly from empirical data. Rather than proceeding linearly, grounded theory relies on repeated cycles of data collection, coding, comparison and memo writing that gradually lead to theoretical saturation. According to Strauss (1995), the data analysis begins with *open coding*, during which the data is examined line by line to identify meaningful concepts. This is followed by *axial coding*, where relationships between codes are organized and finally *selective coding*, which integrates and refines the most central themes or *core categories* that best explain the observed phenomenon. Throughout all stages, the constant comparison of data to data and data to codes, ensures that insights remain grounded in the empirical material (Strauss, 1995).

In this thesis, the grounded theory procedure was operationalized using *MAXQDA*, a software specifically designed for qualitative data analysis. The interview transcripts were imported into *MAXQDA* and reviewed multiple times to identify relevant patterns and themes. Both *deductive* and

inductive approaches were combined. The deductive approach involved applying concepts derived from the literature as initial codes, while new concepts emerged inductively from the data (Strauss, 1995). Thus, the initial code system was developed deductively prior to data collection, drawing on insights from existing expatriation literature. It was structured around the adjustment factors and subfactors presented in Table 2, Table 3, Table 4 and Table 5. These codes focused on key adjustment areas: *Individual Factors*, *Work Factors*, *Non-Work Factors* and *HR Policies & Strategies*, each containing several subfactors. During coding, several predefined subfactors were refined or replaced as the interview data revealed new or more nuanced themes not explicitly addressed in the literature (inductive approach). For instance, the theme *Lack of Informal Interaction*—not previously conceptualized as an independent adjustment factor—emerged repeatedly as a key challenge for virtual expatriates and was later incorporated as a distinct adjustment factor in the findings. After several refinements, the final code hierarchy is limited to four levels to maintain clarity and manageability. Each code contains between two and twenty-five coded segments, avoiding both undercoding and overfragmentation (see Figure 2 and Figure 3).

Open Coding

In the first round of analysis, I conducted open coding as suggested by Strauss (1995), reviewing each transcript line by line and breaking down participants' statements into small, meaningful units. Often, even a single interview question resulted in several distinct codes because participants addressed multiple ideas within one answer. For instance, one response could yield up to five separate codes capturing different sources of support. This microscopic approach helped avoid overlooking nuances and provided a conceptually rich foundation for the data analysis.

Axial Coding

During axial coding, connections between codes were established and broader categories were refined (Strauss, 1995). For example, the initial subfactor *Personality Traits* under *Individual Factors* (applied to both traditional and virtual expatriate adjustment) appeared frequently in the data. As interviewees repeatedly referred to specific traits, I expanded this code into five subcodes representing the Big Five personality traits: *openness*, *extraversion*, *conscientiousness*, *agreeableness* and *neuroticism*.

Selective Coding

In the final stage, selective coding, the focus shifted toward integrating and refining the most central categories (Strauss, 1995). Initially, the code system included three main categories: *Traditional Expatriate Adjustment*, *Virtual Expatriate Adjustment*, and *HR Policies & Strategies*. As coding

progressed, I adjusted the hierarchy by splitting *HR Policies & Strategies* into two separate categories—one for traditional and one for virtual adjustment—and moving them to a lower level as subfactors alongside *Individual*, *Work*, and *Non-Work Factors*. This restructuring aligned with Strauss's (1995) recommendation to maintain focus on a small number of core categories—here, *Traditional Expatriate Adjustment* and *Virtual Expatriate Adjustment*.

Memo Writing, Constant Comparison and Theoretical Saturation

Memo writing formed an integral part of the analysis, serving as a bridge between raw data and conceptual abstraction (Strauss, 1995). In MAXQDA, memos can be attached directly to coded segments, allowing the documentation of analytical insights and emerging interpretations in real time. For example, when participant VTE2 stated: “*If you work with the team locally, of course it's better to see them once in a while, at least if it's necessary to be there, but once in a while would be better also for company culture.*” (VTE2, Pos. 9), I added the memo: “*Occasional physical presence helps maintain corporate culture.*” This note later evolved into the final code *Frequent Visits to Host Country as Work Factor* in *Virtual Expatriate Adjustment*. Such memos were continuously reviewed and refined, helping to identify conceptual links between categories and guiding theory development. As suggested by Strauss (1995), the coding process continued until theoretical saturation was reached—when additional data no longer produced new insights.

3.4 Integration of Quantitative Data in MAXQDA

Once theoretical saturation in the coding was achieved, quantitative data from the pre-interview questionnaire—such as Big Five scores, age, gender and assignment type—were collected in an Excel file and basic descriptive statistics (mean, median, maximum, minimum, standard deviation) were computed. To enable systematic comparison of different types of international assignments, the interviewees were organized into *participant groups* and *demographic groups*. As Table 6 illustrates, the participant groups distinguished individuals by their assignment type or professional role:

Table 6: Participant Groups

Source: Created by the author

Participant Group	Description	Number of Participants	Participant Codes
Traditional Expatriates (TE)	Individuals currently or previously assigned abroad in a host location.	3	TE1–TE3
Virtual Expatriates (VE)	Individuals conducting international assignments remotely without relocation.	2	VE1–VE2
Traditional & Virtual Expatriates (VTE)	Individuals with experience in both traditional and virtual assignments.	2	VTE1–VTE2
HR Professionals (HR)	HR managers or global mobility specialists responsible for managing international assignments.	3	HR1–HR3

The *demographic groups*, in contrast, were derived from the pre-interview questionnaire and applied only to expatriate participants. As Table 7 shows, these groups allowed for cross-case comparisons along key demographic variables:

Table 7: Demographic Groups

Source: Created by the author

Demographic Variable	Grouping Criterion	Participant Codes
Gender	Male vs. Female	Male: TE2, VTE2, VTE1, VE1 (n=4); Female: TE3, VE2, TE1 (n=3)
Age Group	20–39 vs. 40+	20–39: VE2, TE2, VTE2, VTE1, VE1 (n=5); 40+: TE3, TE1 (n=2)
Assignment Frequency	First-Time vs. Repeat Assignees	First-Time: VTE2, VE2, VTE1, VE1 (n=4); Repeat: TE3, TE2, TE1 (n=3)
Assignment Experience	Low (≤ 1.5 years) vs. High (> 1.5 years)	Low: VE2, VTE2, VE1 (n=3); High: TE3, TE2, VTE1, TE1 (n=4)

For simplicity, individual age responses from the questionnaire (20–29, 30–39, 40–49, 50+) were merged into two consolidated categories: 20–39 and 40+.

To facilitate comparative analysis in MAXQDA, *document sets* were created for each participant and demographic group. Document sets are essentially folders that allow clustering and comparing subsets of data without changing the original coding structure. Sets were created for *Male Expats* and *Female Expats* (gender), *High Assignment Experience* and *Low Assignment Experience* (assignment experience), *First-Time Assignees* and *Repeat Assignees* (assignment frequency), and *Age Group 20–39* and *Age Group 40+* (age group). The transcripts were also grouped by participant type (TE, VE, VTE, HR). These document sets supported more targeted comparisons in the visual analysis phase.

Next, a *frequency and intensity analysis* was conducted. In other words, the frequency with which themes were mentioned, whether positively or negatively, and the emotional intensity with which they were mentioned were counted. For this purpose, each coded segment in MAXQDA was assigned an intensity rating from 1 to 3, reflecting how strongly the participant emphasized the statement: 1 = short, neutral mentions (e.g., “*mentoring helped a bit*”); 2 = detailed mentions with some emphasis (e.g., “*mentoring was very important to me during the first months*”); and 3 = highly emotional, repeated, or emphatic statements (e.g., “*I could not have adjusted at all without my mentor*”). This weighting was added as a *code weight* in MAXQDA to differentiate between casually mentioned and strongly emphasized factors. Furthermore, all coded segments were categorized as positive or negative, indicating whether the code was framed as a facilitator (positive) or a barrier (negative) to adjustment. The resulting data were exported to Excel, where the total mentions, distribution of intensity levels, and positive/negative balance for each code were compiled into summary tables (e.g. see Table 8). To visualize these patterns, heatmaps were created and integrated in the Empirical

Findings chapter to display the frequency of mentions across participant groups and personality traits or adjustment factors. In these visualizations, darker shades indicate higher frequencies, making it easier to identify which traits or factors were most salient within and across groups (e.g. see Figure 5). This combination of tables and heatmaps provides a structured overview of the most relevant adjustment factors and helps to identify differences across demographic and participant groups (see Table 6 and Table 7), as well as factors, at a glance. For instance, the heatmaps illustrate how often *Communication & Language Skills* appeared across experience levels.

Finally, these qualitative and quantitative findings were organized according to their relevance to Propositions 1-5. These summarized results formed the basis of the Empirical Findings chapter, which in turn informed the Discussion chapter.

4 Empirical Findings

This chapter presents the key empirical findings of the thesis, structured around the five propositions derived from the literature review. Propositions 1 to 4 address Research Question 1, examining the factors that influence expatriate adjustment in virtual versus traditional assignments, while Proposition 5 relates to Research Question 2, focusing on the role of HR strategies in supporting adjustment. Although all propositions are grounded in qualitative interview data, Proposition 1 additionally integrates quantitative data from the pre-interview questionnaire, which assessed participants' personality traits based on the Big Five model.

The findings are presented proposition by proposition. Each subchapter includes an in-depth, code-by-code qualitative analysis. This analysis integrates illustrative quotes from the interviews to capture individual perspectives and highlight nuanced differences across experiences. Additionally, the results of the frequency and intensity analysis are presented, quantifying the salience of specific factors within each proposition. The subchapters conclude with a summary assessing whether the proposition is supported, partially supported, or refuted by the data. This approach provides a systematic overview and an in-depth analysis of the factors shaping expatriate adjustment and the role of HR in supporting it.

Final Coding Hierarchy

Before conducting the proposition-by-proposition analysis, it is helpful to provide an overview of the final code hierarchy derived from the interview data. Figure 2 and Figure 3 display the code–subcode models for the adjustment factors of virtual assignments (VA) and traditional assignments (TA), created using the visual tool *MAXMaps* in MAXQDA. In these visualizations, larger elements represent factors that were mentioned more frequently by interview participants, whereas smaller elements indicate less frequently mentioned factors.

The first main category *Traditional Expatriate Adjustment* includes a total of 250 coded mentions, distributed across the subcategories *Individual Factors* (95), *Work Factors* (52), *Non-Work Factors* (51), and *HR Policies & Strategies* (52). The code-subcode model (see Figure 2), highlights a broad spread of adjustment factors across individual, work- and non-work domains. Strongly represented codes include *Personal Mindset* (23), *Communication & Language Skills* (22), *Organizational Culture* (18), *Host Community Support* (18) and *Administrative & Legal Support* (19). For ease of reading, the corresponding model is presented on the subsequent pages.

The second main category *Virtual Expatriate Adjustment* contains a total of 170 coded mentions, distributed among *Individual Factors* (48), *Work Factors* (71), *Non-Work Factors* (12), and *HR Policies & Strategies* (39). As shown in Figure 3, the code-subcode model indicates that, compared to Traditional Expatriate Adjustment, adjustment challenges cluster strongly around work-related factors. There were particularly high numbers of coded segments for *Lack of Informal Interaction* (23), *Job Structure* (19) and *Supportive Work Environment* (20). While individual factors such as *Proactive Behavior* (9), *Openness* (5) and *Emotional Stability* (3) also played a role but appeared less prominently compared to structural or interactional aspects of the assignment. The corresponding model is presented in Figure 3 further below.

Comparing the two models, it becomes evident that TA adjustment reflects a broader balance between individual factors, work- and non-work factors, while VA adjustment is comparatively more work-centered and structurally constrained. These overarching patterns provide the background for the detailed analysis in the following subchapters, in which each proposition will be addressed individually.

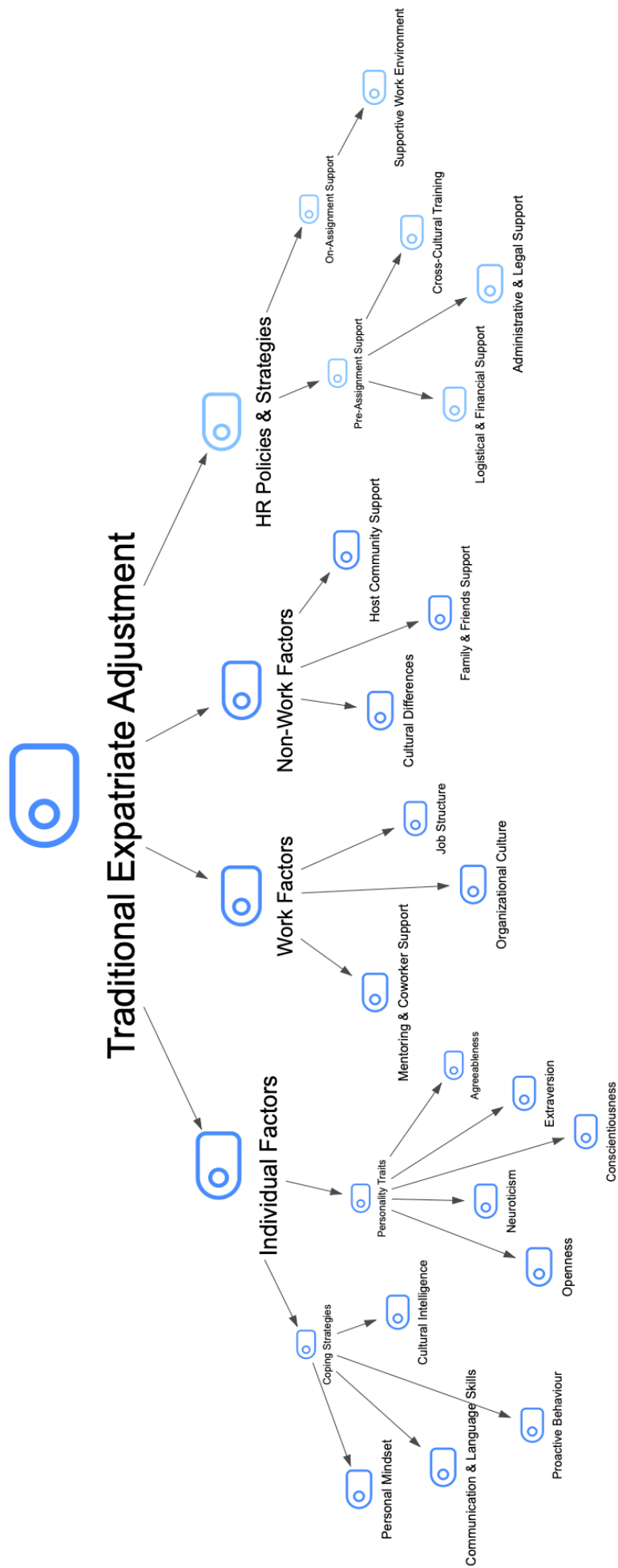


Figure 2: Traditional Expatriate Adjustment - Hierarchical Code-Subcode-Model

Source: Created by the author in MAXQDA

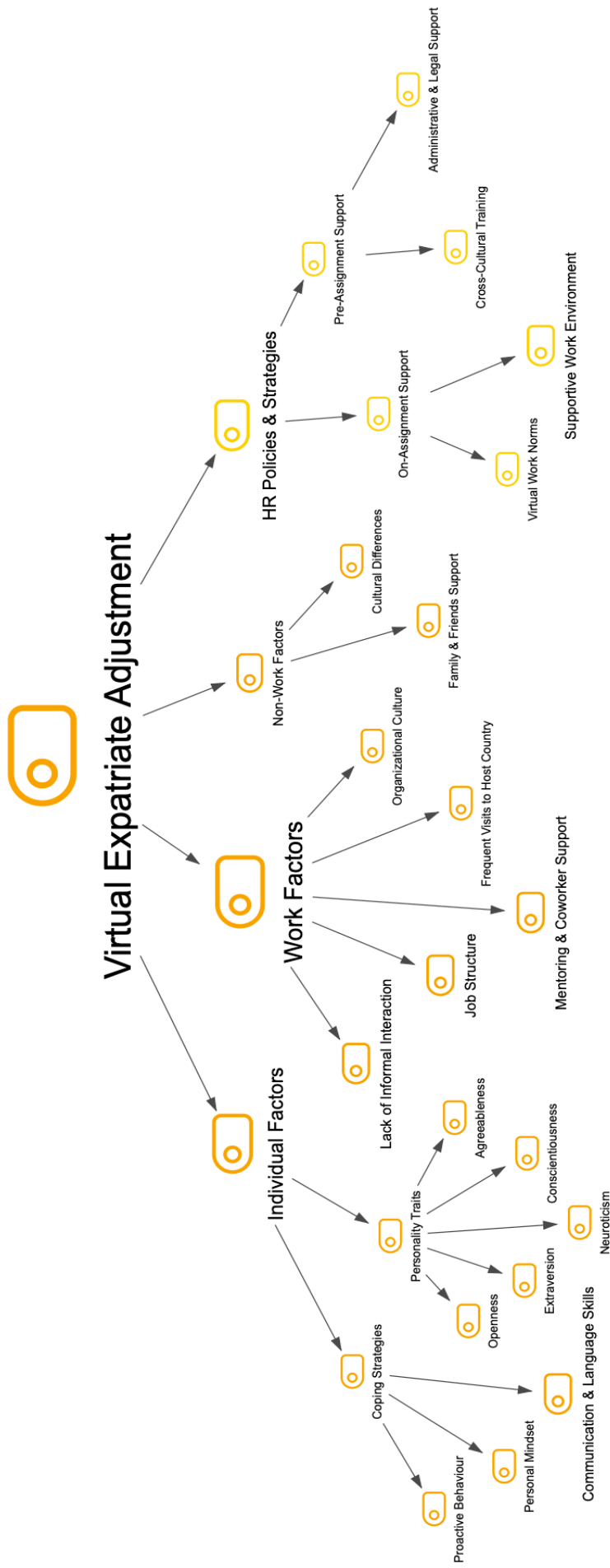


Figure 3: Virtual Expatriate Adjustment - Hierarchical Code-Subcode-Model

Source: Created by the author in MAXQDA

4.1 Proposition 1: Big Five Personality Traits

Proposition 1. *Higher scores on the Big Five personality traits—extraversion, conscientiousness, openness to experience, emotional stability and agreeableness—are positively associated with expatriate adjustment in both assignment types, with these traits playing a particularly strong role in facilitating adjustment in virtual contexts.*

Descriptive Statistical Findings

This proposition was examined by combining the results of a personality self-assessment with the interviews, providing a more comprehensive understanding of how the Big Five personality traits facilitated or hindered adjustment to traditional and virtual roles. The self-assessment was conducted prior to the interviews with all seven expatriates, using a 5-point Likert scale. Figure 4 presents the results of the descriptive statistics of the personality assessment from the pre-interview questionnaire. It includes the mean, median, minimum, maximum and standard deviation (SD) for each of the five personality dimensions, as well as the number of assignments and years of assignment experience. Each of the Big Five personality traits was measured with two statements, and a mean score per trait was computed for each participant (e.g., openness ratings of 4 and 5 resulted in a mean of 4.5). Descriptive statistics revealed generally high levels of openness ($M = 4.42$), conscientiousness ($M = 4.43$), and agreeableness ($M = 4.14$), alongside low neuroticism ($M = 2.07$) across the sample. Variability was particularly evident in conscientiousness ($SD = 0.84$) and extraversion ($SD = 0.89$), suggesting individual differences in how these traits may play out during adjustment. The data also highlight that the expatriates in the sample had, on average, relatively limited assignment experience, with a mean of 1.71 assignments (ranging from 1 to 4) and a mean of 4.42 years spent abroad (ranging from 1.25 to 16 years). This variation in international experience likely influenced how participants perceived and managed adjustment challenges.

Figure 4: Descriptive Statistics of Questionnaire Answers

Source: Created by the author in Excel

Expatriates	Number of Assignments	Years of Experience	Openness	Conscientiousness	Extraversion	Agreeableness	Neuroticism
TE1	2	4	4,5	5	3,5	4	2
VE1	1	1,5	4	3	3,5	4	2,5
VTE1	1	4	5	4	3	4,5	2
VTE2	1	1,5	4	3	2,5	4	2,5
TE2	2	2,7	4	3,5	2,5	3,5	2,5
VE2	1	1,25	4,5	4	4	4	1,5
TE3	4	16	5	5	5	5	1,5
MEANS	1,71	4,42	4,43	3,93	3,43	4,14	2,07
MIN.	1,00	1,25	4,00	3,00	2,50	3,50	1,50
MAX.	4,00	16,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	2,50
MEDIAN	1,00	2,70	4,50	4,00	3,50	4,00	2,00
SD	1,11	5,24	0,45	0,84	0,89	0,48	0,45

When comparing assignment types, a distinction emerges. While high scores in traits like openness and agreeableness are prominent across both traditional and virtual expatriates, certain traits appear more critical for virtual adjustment, particularly conscientiousness, openness and low neuroticism. The following paragraphs will discuss these traits in more detail, presenting the qualitative findings from the interviews.

Interview Results

Openness

Qualitative results revealed that openness emerged as the single most universal facilitator of adjustment. HR professionals emphasized that expatriates need *“courage to learn new things, to also step out of your comfort zone”* (HR1, Pos. 29) and warned that those *“not open enough for new customs, new traditions, new people, new ways of living”* (HR3, Pos. 21) were unlikely to thrive. Traditional expatriates described it as *“openness, curiosity, willingness, going the extra mile and staying positive”* (TE2, Pos. 27). For virtual roles, openness was described as even more critical: *“I am quite adaptable and curious, which helped me navigate the difference in communication styles and expectations”* (VE1, Pos. 23). Another expatriate added: *“Being open and being able to adapt always helps... you need to put in a little bit more effort to get to know the people”* (VTE2, Pos. 33).

Conscientiousness

In the interviews, conscientiousness was particularly highlighted for virtual work: *“Time management with time difference and self-discipline were vital since I was working remotely across time zones”* (VE1, Pos. 27). Another virtual expatriate similarly emphasized planning: *“For virtual assignments, it needs more planning... to think about who are the people you want to get to know, to plan meeting them... Have some questions prepared in case you don’t know what to talk about”* (VE2, Pos. 25; Pos. 26). Traditional expatriates and HR professionals mentioned conscientiousness less often, framing it as useful for practical preparation, but not central to adjustment itself. For instance, one HR professional explained: *“make sure to handle everything beforehand, especially if you’re moving with family”* (HR3, Pos. 37).

Extraversion

Interview data revealed that adjustment is *“easiest when you’re outgoing, when you want to meet people, when you want to connect with people”* (HR1, Pos. 29). Likewise, one expatriate described how being *“communicative and sociable... open minded in terms of meeting people from any cultural*

background” (TE3, Pos. 23) eased adjustment abroad. However, for virtual assignments, extraversion seemed more about proactive outreach than inherent sociability: *“Especially in a virtual environment, it’s probably easier if the person already has a very outgoing personality, proactively reaches out to people, checks in with them on a regular basis”* (HR1, Pos. 31). Yet one interviewee cautioned that while extroversion helps, those needing daily social contact might actually struggle in virtual settings: *“There are a lot of people who need that [personal interactions], want to go to the office... probably those people [virtual expatriates] do not need that, otherwise they will not be that happy”* (HR2, Pos. 25).

Agreeableness

Qualitative data highlighted the role of agreeableness in virtual empathy. One expatriate emphasized: *“You would need a lot, lot of empathy for a virtual assignment”* and *“you also should read people’s feelings, not just jump into a meeting”* (TE1, Pos. 25). For traditional assignments, agreeableness was not addressed at all by the interviewees.

Neuroticism (Emotional Stability)

Interview data indicates that emotional stability was somewhat more consistently linked to adjustment in traditional than in virtual contexts. One traditional expatriate described themselves as *“not easily kicked out of balance”* (TE1, Pos. 23). One virtual expatriate, however, highlighted virtual-specific stressors: *“I tend to sometimes overthink which made me second guess my tone or word choice in a virtual meeting”* (VE1, Pos. 23). They also reported frustration with *“technical issues during meetings”* (VE1, Pos. 27). In contrast, one expatriate explained: *“I am self-sufficient and I can be on my own so I might be alone, but I don’t feel lonely and I always feel connected”* (VTE1, Pos. 39).

Frequency and Intensity Analysis

To complement these qualitative findings, this section presents a frequency and intensity analysis of personality traits in traditional and virtual expatriate adjustment. As outlined in the methodology, the interview participants were organized into participant groups (see Table 6) and demographic groups (see Table 7). The visualizations and tables below quantify how often each trait was mentioned, how strongly it was emphasized and whether it was framed positively or negatively. The tables summarize the number of positive and negative mentions as well as the distribution of intensity ratings, while the accompanying heatmaps display the frequency of mentions across participant subgroups. Together, they help illustrate which traits were perceived as most relevant for adjustment and how their importance varied across contexts.

Table 8 presents the results for *Traditional Expatriate Adjustment*. Frequency and intensity analysis revealed that among traditional expatriates, *Openness* emerged as the dominant trait with 18 mentions, all of them positive, distributed across weak (6), medium (7), and strong (3) intensity levels. *Neuroticism* also appeared with 7 mentions, framed in largely positive terms, including 3 strong mentions. *Extraversion* (4 mentions, all positive) and *Conscientiousness* (2 mentions, all positive) were acknowledged but played a more situational role, while *Agreeableness* was not mentioned at all.

Table 8: Frequency and Intensity of Personality Traits in Traditional Expatriate Adjustment

Source: Created by the author

Factor	Total Mentions	Positive Mentions	Negative Mentions	Weak Intensity	Medium Intensity	Strong Intensity
Openness	18	18	0	6	7	3
Extraversion	4	4	0	2	1	1
Conscientiousness	2	2	0	2	0	0
Agreeableness	0	0	0	0	0	0
Neuroticism	7	7	0	1	1	3

The accompanying heatmap in Figure 5 provides a more detailed view by illustrating how the frequency of mentions varied across demographic and participant groups. Since *Openness* and *Neuroticism* showed the most distinct patterns, these traits are discussed in more detail. Mentions of *Openness* were particularly high among younger expatriates aged 20–39 (11 mentions) compared to those aged 40 and above (2), and among first-time assignees (9 mentions) compared to repeat assignees (4). Across participant groups, virtual expatriates (6 mentions) and HR professionals (5 mentions) referred to openness most often. In contrast, *Neuroticism* showed higher mention frequencies among expatriates with high assignment experience (6 mentions) compared to those with low experience (1), among male expatriates (5) compared to female expatriates (2) and among the younger age group (5) compared to older expatriates (2). Across participant groups, traditional expatriates (5 mentions) and those with experience in both assignment types (5) referred to neuroticism most frequently, whereas HR professionals did not mention it at all. The remaining three traits — *Extraversion*, *Conscientiousness*, and *Agreeableness* — showed only minimal variation across subgroups, with zero to two mentions each, and are therefore not further differentiated in the heatmap discussion.

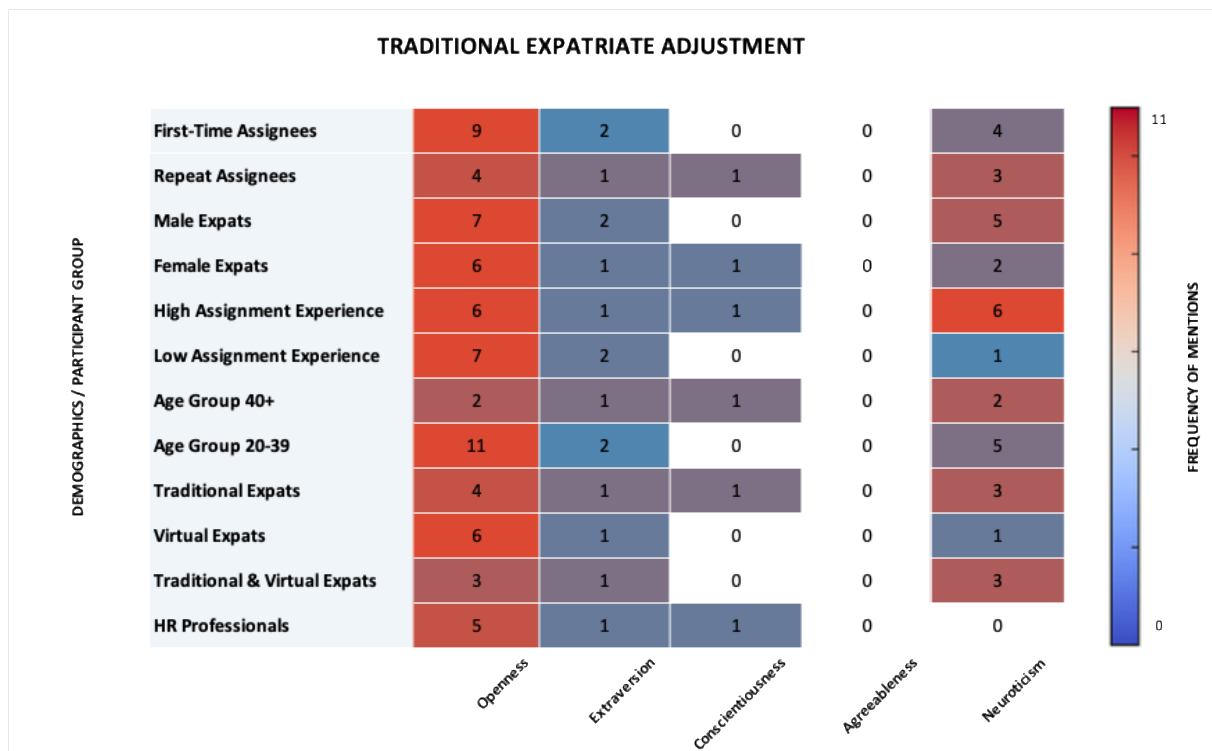


Figure 5: Heatmap of Personality Traits in Traditional Expatriate Adjustment

Source: Created by the author in Excel and MAXQDA

Table 9 presents the corresponding results for *Virtual Expatriate Adjustment*. Frequency and intensity analysis revealed that *Openness* was again the most frequently mentioned trait with 5 positive mentions, though far less dominant than in traditional settings. *Extraversion* (3 mentions, all strong and positive), *Agreeableness* (3 mentions, all positive, including 1 strong), *Conscientiousness* (2 mentions, all positive) and *Neuroticism* (4 mentions, with a mix of 2 positive and 2 negative) were also noted. Overall, all personality traits were mentioned less frequently for virtual expatriate adjustment than for traditional expatriate adjustment.

Table 9: Frequency and Intensity of Personality Traits in Virtual Expatriate Adjustment

Source: Created by the author

Factor	Total Mentions	Positive Mentions	Negative Mentions	Weak Intensity	Medium Intensity	Strong Intensity
Openness	5	5	0	2	2	1
Extraversion	3	3	0	0	0	3
Conscientiousness	2	3	0	1	2	0
Agreeableness	3	3	0	0	1	1
Neuroticism	4	2	2	3	0	1

The accompanying heatmap in Figure 6 illustrates that personality traits were less frequently emphasized in the virtual adjustment process. *Openness* was the only trait mentioned at least once across *all* demographic and participant groups, though the frequency remained low (ranging from 1 to

2 mentions). *Extraversion*, by contrast, was mentioned exclusively by HR professionals (3 mentions) and not by any expatriate subgroup. *Agreeableness*, which was not mentioned in traditional adjustment, appeared only in the virtual context. It was cited particularly by first-time assignees (3 mentions) compared to none among repeat assignees and by individuals with low assignment experience (3 mentions) compared to those with high experience (0). Among participant groups, virtual expatriates were the only ones to mention agreeableness (3 mentions). *Neuroticism* was more often referenced by male expatriates (3 mentions) compared to female expatriates (1), and by the younger age group (3 mentions) compared to older participants (1). Across participant groups, it appeared equally among traditional and virtual expatriates (2 mentions each). Finally, *Conscientiousness*, showed minimal variation across subgroups, with only isolated mentions (0-2). Therefore, it is not differentiated further in the heatmap discussion.

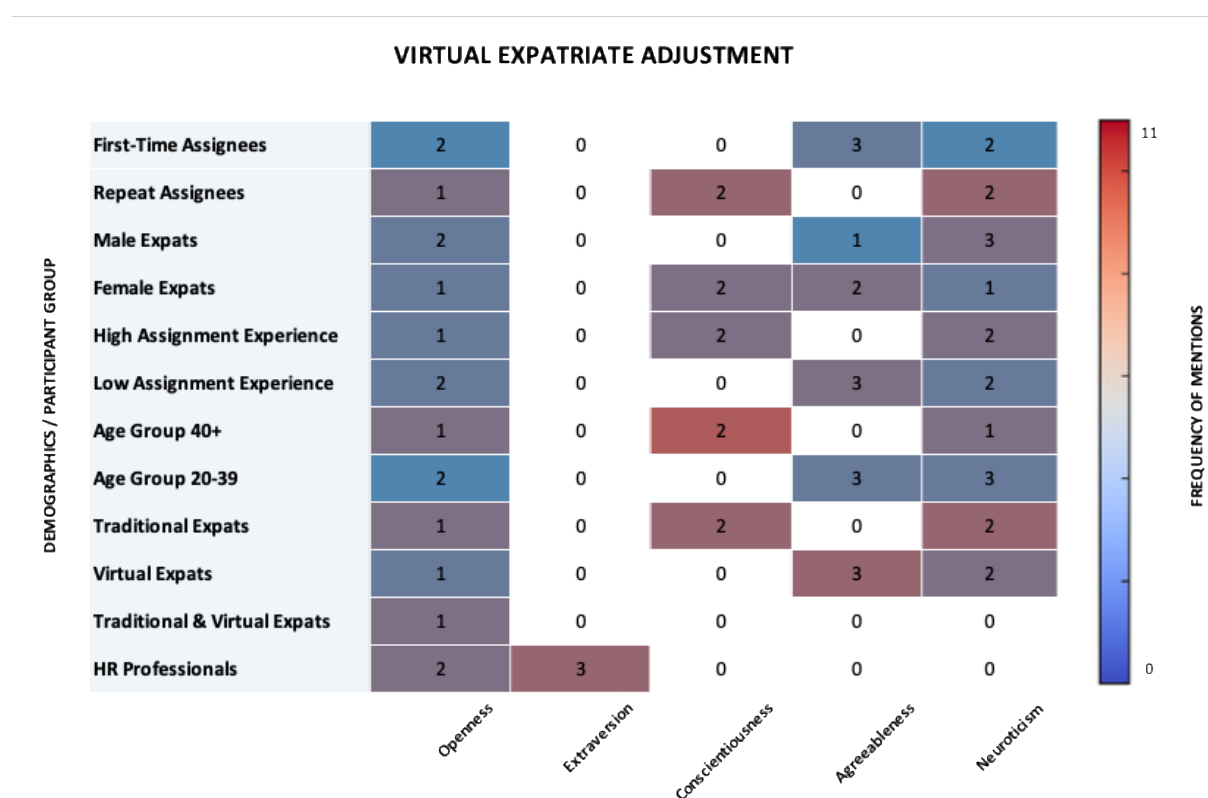


Figure 6: Heatmap of Personality Traits in Virtual Expatriate Adjustment

Source: Created by the author in Excel and MAXQDA

Proposition Evaluation

The integrated analysis of quantitative scores, qualitative narratives and frequency–intensity patterns indicates that Proposition 1 is only partially supported. The findings suggest that not all Big Five traits equally predict expatriate adjustment, especially in virtual contexts. The decisive role of openness—

and to a lesser degree, emotional stability—contrasts with the more situational influence of conscientiousness, agreeableness and extraversion. The heatmap results further highlight that perceptions of personality–adjustment links differ across subgroups: openness and agreeableness were emphasized by younger, less experienced, and virtual assignees, whereas neuroticism was mainly mentioned by experienced and traditional assignees. Thus, Proposition 1 is only partially supported: higher scores across all five traits do not uniformly enhance adjustment, but certain traits—particularly openness—appear more critical depending on the assignment type.

4.2 Proposition 2: Sources of Social Support

Proposition 2. *Both traditional and virtual expatriates draw on internal and external sources of support during adjustment. However, traditional expatriates, who are physically immersed in the host country, rely more on external support from colleagues, mentors and family. In contrast, virtual expatriates, who are physically distant, depend more on internal coping mechanisms such as proactive behaviors and sustained virtual communication with host colleagues.*

Interview Results

Personal Mindset

Mindset emerged as a decisive factor across both settings. For traditional assignments, adaptability and patience were often stressed: *“My secret was to accept every situation as it is and being fully flexible... This was something which calmed me down in this mess I was sometimes experiencing”* (TE2, Pos. 23). HR professionals similarly advised: *“It might be very frustrating at the very beginning... It will get better after a while, just as in any other situation. Just be patient with yourself”* (HR1, Pos. 43). One traditional expatriate emphasized personal responsibility: *“I always knew, if I am not making an effort, nobody will make an effort”* (TE1, Pos. 19). One virtual expatriate stressed intentionality: *“Don’t think about coming back... You’ll always miss out on some things if you think it’s not worth doing it”* (VE2, Pos. 9). In contrast, one interviewee emphasized individual variability: *“There is not one or two characteristics that’s crucial to have a successful expatriate, because the expectations will be different from one expat to the other”* (HR2, Pos. 23).

In virtual assignments, mindset was equally central, but more explicitly tied to self-motivation. One interviewee admitted a tendency to stay work-focused in a hypothetical virtual assignment: *“I would be focusing on work. I would not easily set up a conversation just to chat. That’s just not my personality”* (TE1, Pos. 17). Similarly, another traditional expatriate described a blurred identity: *“You might not feel*

being an expatriate when you are virtual, even though you are formally, of course one" (TE3, Pos. 33). In contrast, one virtual expatriate individual stressed intentionality: *"Think about what you want your experience to be like and how you want to reach that"* (VE2, Pos. 39). Another individual connected mindset with assignment duration: *"different time frames require different skills... If I'm gonna do it for a year it's different, if I do it for two years, three years, five years"* (VTE1, Pos. 51). The highly personal nature of adjustment was also addressed: *"It's just a personal energy and a personal decision, how you want to go about your expat experience"* (VTE2, Pos. 51).

Proactive Behavior

Expatriates in both groups underlined the need for proactive strategies. For traditional assignments, proactivity often meant preparation and openness to new contexts: *"Get to know the country... get to know at least a little bit of the culture beforehand"* (HR3, Pos. 37). A traditional expatriate added: *"When you move today, you do some research"* (TE3, Pos. 25). For virtual assignees, proactivity was more central to avoid isolation: *"Really actively looking for connections because it's easy to lean back and wait for it to come"* (HR1, Pos. 31). One virtual expatriate gave specific examples: *"I participated in online classes, in online language classes and joined some informal virtual coffee chats with local colleagues"* (VE1, Pos. 15) and *"I found a couple of online forums and groups for expats"* (VE1, Pos. 43). Another assignee highlighted digital tools outside of the work environment: *"There's a couple of apps... where you just meet strangers for dinner and you connect"* (VTE1, Pos. 55). One participant described planning interactions at work deliberately: *"Think about who are the people you want to get to know... It helps to think about who is this person? What might that person be interested in?"* (VE2, Pos. 27). This intentionality also extended to small gestures: *"Connection-wise, the best thing is to set a lot of meetings and discuss also personal things. Just little things, how was your weekend for example"* (VE2, Pos. 39). Adaptability was also emphasized: *"you need to put in a little bit more effort to get to know the people"* (VTE2, Pos. 33).

Cultural Intelligence

A unique code for traditional assignments was cultural intelligence: *"Have an interest in getting to know a different culture, it's a non-negotiable"* (HR3, Pos. 23). One participant emphasized the gradual development of intercultural competence: *"People react to their environment and develop intercultural competencies... It helps a lot to reflect your own reactions and your own adaptation process"* (TE3, Pos. 23). One virtual expatriate similarly noted: *"In traditional settings... adapting to local customs in real time and networking with people becomes important and also crucial"* (VE1, Pos. 29). Another virtual expatriate summarized: *"Accepting the way other people are, because every culture is different... Not to judge, just because something is different"* (VE2, Pos. 23).

Communication & Language Skills

Strong communicative and language skills were emphasized in both contexts. For traditional assignees, language ability was described as indispensable for deeper integration: *“People feel more at ease to speak in their own language after all. I underestimated that effect really”* (TE1, Pos. 27). One interviewee admitted: *“I struggled the first two years with the language... This was a disappointment, which had an impact on the adaptation process”* (TE3, Pos. 3). One HR professional reinforced: *“The biggest issue was, if a person was relocated to a country where English would not be the first language... the company itself had a working language as English, but outside, social life and people would talk in a different language”* (HR3, Pos. 13). Regarding communication in general: *“having the skill to also listen and ask questions, to really show interest is also important for an expatriate to have”* (HR1, Pos. 33), was also stressed. Likewise, one traditional expatriate emphasized the need of a *„high communicative awareness or sensibility“* that expatriates should have (TE3, Pos. 29). In contrast, virtual assignees highlighted clarity and adaptability in communicating professionally: *“Communication was key, especially being able to express myself clearly in writing”* (VE1, Pos. 27). One virtual expatriate underlined the importance of small linguistic gestures: *“In the virtual, you can just learn a few words... if you can even say how are you and what was the day like, you already won”* (VE2, Pos. 29). Yet even in virtual assignments, language mattered in hybrid interactions: *“If you’re with 10 people on an afterwork... they will not speak English... It was important for me to know what they were talking about... then I could ask any question in English and we could continue on the topic”* (VE2, Pos. 21). Another expatriate confirmed: *“If you understand the language and understand the culture, you understand the people better. That makes your team work better”* (VTE2, Pos. 51).

Mentoring & Coworker Support

Support from coworkers, mentors and supervisors played a crucial role in both traditional and virtual assignments. For traditional assignees, colleagues often became mentors and friends, easing the integration process: *“I had a colleague... somehow turned into my natural mentor... Our relationship started off as a professional one, but turned into a friendship”* (TE1, Pos. 11). Another expatriate highlighted the value of structured guidance: *“In the beginning there was somebody who guided me through, kind of a mentor”* (TE3, Pos. 13). Other interviewees reinforced this, noting that mentors could be decisive in the success of an assignment: *“For traditional expatriate a mentor could really make or break the adjustment period. A good mentor can provide first cultural insights, which is super important at the beginning, and help with navigating office politics, offer emotional support in a new environment and also how to understand how the entire team set up is working”* (VE1, Pos. 13). Supervisors also played a key role: *“My manager in Italy had a meeting with me every month... asking*

me how I'm feeling, if there's something she can change... She gave me feedback on presentation skills and confidence" (VE2, Pos. 33). Regarding coworker support, one expatriate mentioned: *"It was absolutely clear that if I'm the only one not speaking Italian, that they will change the meeting to English"* (TE2, Pos. 31).

For virtual assignees, mentoring structures often played a deliberate role: *"If you are left alone with a team that you don't see... just having someone who can help you... would be very beneficial"* (TE1, Pos. 13). The impact of structured mentoring was also underlined: *"I had a supervisor both in Austria and also a local contact person in Brazil who acted as informal mentor... I appreciated the structured monthly reviews which helped track progress and resolve issues quite early"* (VE1, Pos. 11). Others pointed out that while mentoring functions were similar across both assignment types, the relational dynamics differed: *"I don't think there are any differences except that if you actually see... your mentor, you probably have more moments of informally get to know each other"* (VE2, Pos. 15). One assignee emphasized how decisive managerial support could be: *"If I would have had a different manager... wouldn't have been possible so easily to actually do this [assignment]"* (VTE1, Pos. 21). Another assignee described the colleagues at work as *"really open"* and *"very welcoming"* (VE2, Pos. 5) and also talked about bonding: *"there were a few people my age, who were very welcoming. One colleague even invited me on vacation"* (VE2, Pos. 21). This individual also explained: *"we did a lot of work together, especially me and that one colleague that also started. We tried to figure everything out by ourselves... That's how we got to know each other, spending all day and sometimes nights together trying to get the topic done"* (VE2, Pos. 37).

Friends & Family Support

Both groups highlighted the centrality of family and friends. For traditional assignees, family facilitated adjustment: *"I had the luxury to being able to go with my husband... He was there, which was very important, in particular in the beginning"* (TE1, Pos. 19). Another traditional expatriate, however, reflected on relational strain: *"The relationship at the end broke up due to the fact that it was abroad"* (TE2, Pos. 19). The integrating role of children was also emphasized: *"With children it's easy, you connect easily... I felt very welcomed"* (TE3, Pos. 19).

In virtual assignments, by contrast, support can be experienced differently: *"If I were to work virtually all day long and then I go out and I am with my friends and family I wouldn't say there is much of a difference. It plays a bigger role... if you're relocating physically"* (TE1, Pos. 21). Another expatriate added: *"From a family or friends perspective, nothing has changed. You are still there, you're going out, you're meeting them"* (TE2, Pos. 21). One virtual expatriate highlighted the benefit of remaining close: *"I could still spend time with family and maintain my local friendships, which helped me manage stress."*

However, this also meant I didn't fully engage in the host country's social life" (VE1, Pos. 19). The limits of support were also addressed: "They [friends & family] support with coping and talking about it, but... you always stay a little bit disconnected" (VTE2, Pos. 27). Likewise, one assignee highlighted: "While emotional support is sometimes crucial, being physically apart can make it hard to maintain relationships" (VE1, Pos. 21). The importance of visits was also mentioned: "my partner came to Italy every second or third week, and that was also important" (VE2, Pos. 21). Digital contact also played a key role: "I have a very closed and tight social group... we communicate everyday... Without this, probably wouldn't have done it [the assignment]" (VTE1, Pos. 35).

Frequency and Intensity Analysis

To complement the preceding qualitative findings, this section provides a frequency and intensity analysis of the identified sources of social support in traditional and virtual expatriate adjustment.

Traditional Expatriate Adjustment

Table 10 presents the results for *Traditional Expatriate Adjustment*. Frequency and intensity analysis revealed that, *Personal Mindset* was the most frequently mentioned factor (25 mentions, 22 positive), with a balanced distribution of weak (7), medium (10), and strong (8) intensity ratings. Similarly, *Mentoring & Coworker Support* (23 mentions, 21 positive) and *Communication & Language Skills* (22 mentions, 16 positive) also emerged as critical, with many strong intensity mentions (8 and 10 respectively). *Friends & Family Support* (14 mentions, 12 positive) was also influential, though more ambivalent with some negative mentions (2). By contrast, *Proactive Behaviour* (8 mentions, 7 positive) and *Cultural Intelligence* (9 mentions, 8 positive) were recognized as helpful but less central, with fewer mentions and lower intensity.

Table 10: Frequency and Intensity of Sources of Support in Traditional Expatriate Adjustment

Source: Created by the author

Factor	Total Mentions	Positive Mentions	Negative Mentions	Weak Intensity	Medium Intensity	Strong Intensity
Personal Mindset	25	22	3	7	10	8
Proactive Behaviour	8	7	1	3	4	1
Cultural Intelligence	9	8	1	4	2	3
Communication & Language Skills	22	16	6	6	6	10
Mentoring & Coworker Support	23	21	2	8	7	8
Friends & Family Support	14	12	2	2	4	8

The corresponding heatmap in Figure 7 provides a more differentiated view by illustrating how often

each source of support was mentioned across demographic and participant groups. **Personal Mindset** stood out most clearly, being mentioned particularly often by first-time assignees (14) compared to repeat assignees (4), by male assignees (14) compared to female (4) and by the younger age group (17) compared to age 40+ (1). It was equally prominent among individuals with both low and high assignment experience (9 each) and was most frequently addressed by expats with experience in both assignment types (9) and HR professionals (7). **Mentoring & Coworker Support** was mentioned most often by the younger age group (15), first-time assignees (12), and participants with high assignment experience (13), while virtual expats (10) and traditional expats (7) led among the participant groups. **Communication & Language Skills** followed a similarly broad pattern, with high mentions among female expatriates (11), the younger age group (10), and those with high experience (10), and was discussed most often by traditional expats (8) and HR professionals (6).

Cultural Intelligence and Proactive Behaviour appeared less frequently overall but still revealed notable subgroup differences. **Cultural Intelligence** was mentioned primarily by first-time assignees (6), the younger age group (6), and male expatriates (5), while virtual expats and those with experience in both assignment types (3 mentions each) were the participant groups most likely to raise this theme. **Proactive Behaviour** showed the lowest overall frequency (ranging from 1–5 mentions), appearing most often among high-experience assignees (5) and female expatriates (4), and was slightly more common among traditional expats (3) than among the other participant groups (1–2 mentions each). Finally, **Family & Friends Support** was mentioned mainly by younger assignees (11) compared to older expatriates (3), by first-time assignees (10) over repeat assignees (4), and more by male (9) than female (5) expatriates. Across participant groups, it appeared most often among expats with experience in both assignment types (7), while it was not mentioned at all by HR professionals.

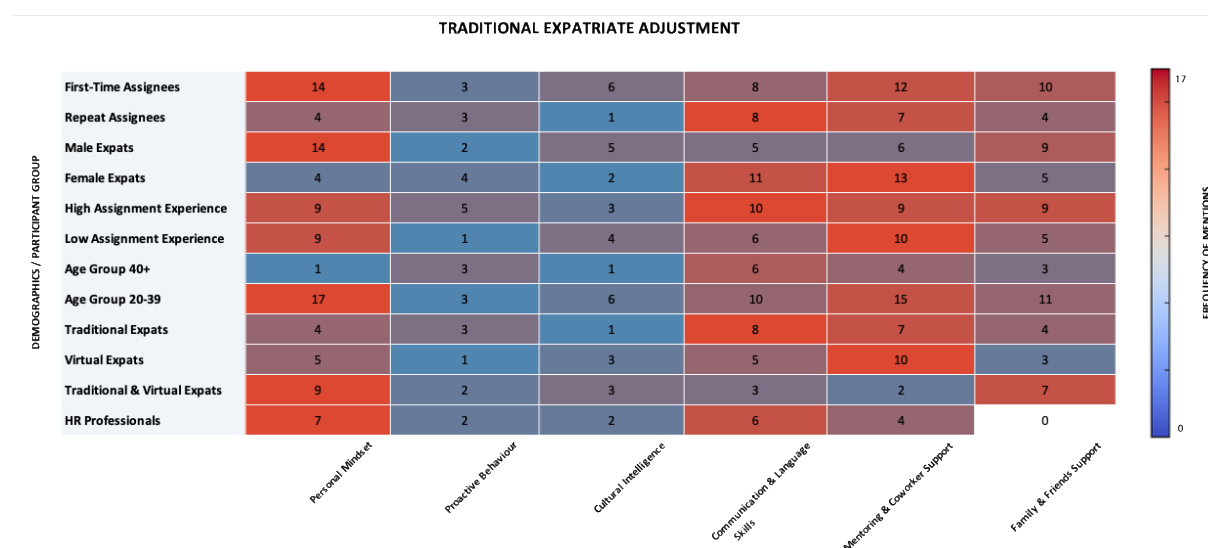


Figure 7: Heatmap of Sources of Support Factors in Traditional Expatriate Adjustment

Source: Created by the author in Excel and MAXQDA

Virtual Expatriate Adjustment

Table 11 presents the corresponding results for *Virtual Expatriate Adjustment*. Frequency and intensity analysis revealed that *Communication & Language Skills* gained stronger relevance in virtual assignments, with 15 mentions (14 positive), including 6 strong intensity ratings. Likewise, *Mentoring & Coworker Support* (13 mentions, all positive) emerged as highly important, with 6 strong mentions. *Proactive Behavior* also gained prominence compared to the traditional context, with 9 mentions (all positive), mostly at medium to strong intensity. Meanwhile, *Personal Mindset* (7 mentions, 5 positive) remained relevant but played a somewhat diminished role compared to traditional settings, while *Friends & Family Support* (7 mentions, 5 positive) showed several strong positive mentions but also 2 negatives.

Table 11: Frequency and Intensity of Sources of Support Factors in Virtual Expatriate Adjustment

Source: Created by the author

Factor	Total Mentions	Positive Mentions	Negative Mentions	Weak Intensity	Medium Intensity	Strong Intensity
Personal Mindset	7	5	2	1	3	3
Proactive Behaviour	9	9	0	0	6	3
Communication & Language Skills	15	14	1	2	7	6
Mentoring & Coworker Support	13	13	0	3	4	6
Friends & Family Support	7	5	2	0	2	5

Overall, the heatmap in Figure 8 reveals fewer mentions compared to traditional assignments. Two factors in particular—*Mentoring & Coworker Support* and *Communication & Language Skills*—displayed distinct and noteworthy patterns. *Mentoring & Coworker Support* was most frequently mentioned by first-time assignees (10) compared to repeat assignees (2), by the younger age group (10) compared to age 40+ (2), and twice as often by female expatriates (8) than male expatriates. Among participant groups, it was clearly emphasized most by virtual expats (9). *Communication & Language Skills* also showed a strong pattern, particularly among female expatriates (11) compared to male (2), and were mentioned more frequently by repeat assignees (8) than first-timers (5) and by those with high assignment experience (8) compared to low (5). Among participant groups, this factor was mentioned most often by traditional expats, while notably absent among those with experience in both assignment types.

By contrast, *Personal Mindset* and *Friends & Family Support* were mentioned less frequently overall. *Personal Mindset* appeared most often among first-time assignees (4) and the younger age group (4), with minor variation across participant groups—though it was slightly more often highlighted by expats with experience in both assignment types (3). *Friends & Family Support*, while infrequently mentioned,

appeared primarily among repeat assignees (5) and those with high assignment experience (5), with the highest frequency among traditional expats (5) and only single mentions across the other groups. Finally, *Proactive Behavior* was mentioned exclusively by first-time assignees (7) and those with low assignment experience (7), while not once by repeat or high-experience assignees. Within the participant groups, virtual expats accounted for nearly all mentions, while traditional expats did not mention this factor at all.

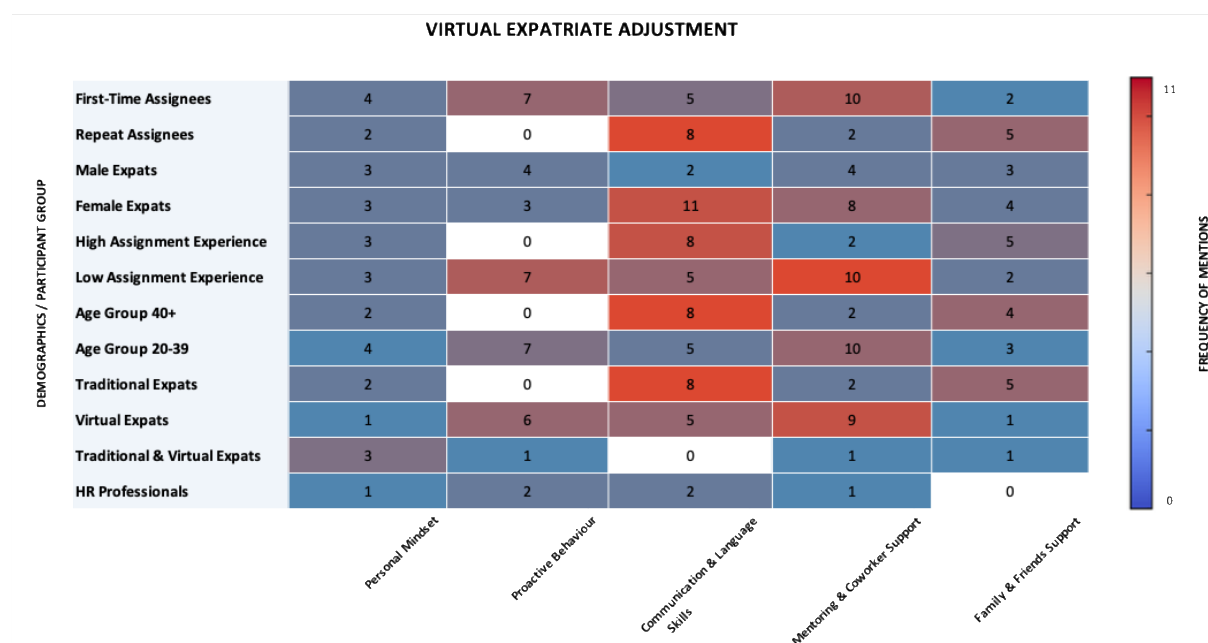


Figure 8: Heatmap of Sources of Support Factors in Virtual Expatriate Adjustment

Source: Created by the author in Excel and MAXQDA

Proposition Evaluation

The interview findings support Proposition 2. Traditional expatriates relied more on external sources of support—coworkers, mentors, family and friends—which were crucial for integration and coping with on-site challenges. This was reflected in both the frequency–intensity data and the heatmap results, where *Mentoring & Coworker Support*, *Communication & Language Skills*, and *Personal Mindset* were most frequently mentioned by younger, first-time assignees and traditional expatriates. *Family & Friends Support* appeared less often but remained a relevant, if ambivalent, adjustment resource. In contrast, virtual expatriates drew more heavily on internal coping mechanisms, particularly *Proactive Behavior* and *Communication & Language Skills*, compensating for the lack of physical proximity. The heatmap showed that *Proactive Behavior* was mentioned almost exclusively by first-time and less experienced assignees, while *Mentoring & Coworker Support* and *Communication & Language Skills* remained important but focused on maintaining connection and clarity across distance. Overall, the results confirm the distinction between externally anchored support in

traditional assignments and internally driven coping in virtual ones, while highlighting that both rely on a balance of internal and external mechanisms.

4.3 Proposition 3: Adjusting to the Work Environment

Proposition 3. *An inclusive organizational culture and clear job structures facilitate adjustment across all assignment types. Yet, traditional expatriates benefit more from inclusiveness and local integration in the host working environment, while virtual expatriates depend more on job clarity and structured work processes to collaborate remotely.*

Interview Results

Job Structure

Across both virtual and traditional expatriates, performance management and compensation were strikingly consistent: expatriates were evaluated and rewarded much like any other employee. One HR professional confirmed that *“compensation ... doesn’t differ from any other employee’s ... usually there might be a variable bonus ... but otherwise it’s the same for all employees, no matter if they’re expatriates, virtual expatriates or not”* (HR1, Pos. 21). It was also explained that performance indicators remain *“very focused on the actual job and the scope of the job, the responsibilities”* (HR1, Pos. 21) because *“In the first year... it’s really about settling in, about learning about your task, getting to know the people”* (HR1, Pos. 19). One participant agreed: *“Evaluation didn’t matter if I was there or in Vienna ... there was no extra bonus, no adjustments or no different work”* (VTE2, Pos. 41). Another individual confirmed: *“My performance was evaluated through projects, through milestones and deliverables, just like my local counterparts”* (VE1, Pos. 37). It was also described how evaluation was even coordinated across borders: *“I still had my manager in Austria ... and [my host manager and home manager] discussed my performance together. Compensation during my virtual assignment didn’t change”* (VE2, Pos. 31).

During the interviews, also the challenges of *“different time zones”* and the need to *“find a way to communicate with each other”* were noted (HR3, Pos. 9). At the same time, one virtual expatriate described adapting to time-zone challenges: *“I adapted my schedule, starting later in the day and working into the evening. We also had clear rules about overlapped hours for meetings because otherwise it would get way too late sometimes for me”* (VE1, Pos. 33). Similarly, one individual also reflected on the complexity of the new job role, arriving as both a newcomer and a new team lead: *“I arrived in a new team, I was a new boss”* (TE1, Pos. 31).

Organizational Culture

Inclusive and international corporate environments were repeatedly addressed during the interviews. The importance of shared experiences, where assignees could connect with colleagues *“that have gone through similar things ... that might also not speak the local language, that want to reconnect, want to build connections”*, were noted during the interviews (HR1, Pos. 15). Another individual emphasized that *“the company sets the tone ... diversity, inclusion and empowerment ... it makes it easier if you move to a foreign location”* (HR3, Pos. 15). One interviewee recalled being *“absolutely welcomed”* into a diverse environment (TE2, Pos. 31), while another highlighted that global diversity was part of daily work: *“We really find our colleagues everywhere and therefore we are also quite used to working in different cultures and in a very diverse environment of people”* (TE1, Pos. 7).

For virtual assignees, culture mattered less for local integration and more for how well the company embraced remote collaboration: *“It’s a difference if you work for a company where it’s completely normal that you have teams spread in different locations ... it’s part of the culture”* (HR2, Pos. 11). One expatriate stressed that *“communication and information flow is very crucial in such a [virtual] setting”* (TE3, Pos. 11), while another added that acceptance of remote arrangements depends on *“how traditional is the company? How modern is the company? Is remote work a thing ... is that normal in the company?”* (VTE2, Pos. 9).

Frequency and Intensity Analysis

Traditional Expatriate Adjustment

Table 12 shows that *Organizational Culture* dominated with 18 mentions, 17 of them positive, distributed across weak (7), medium (7), and strong intensity (4). In contrast, *Job Structure* received 11 mentions, split between 6 positive and 5 negative, with relatively weak intensity overall (6 weak, 2 medium, 3 strong).

Table 12: Frequency and Intensity of Work Factors in Traditional Expatriate Adjustment

Source: Created by the author

Factor	Total Mentions	Positive Mentions	Negative Mentions	Weak Intensity	Medium Intensity	Strong Intensity
Job Structure	11	6	5	6	2	3
Organizational Culture	18	17	1	7	7	4

The corresponding heatmap in Figure 9 provides additional insights into how these factors were distributed across demographic and participant groups. *Organizational Culture* was mentioned particularly often by the younger age group (10) compared to age 40+ (4), and more frequently by first-

time assignees (9) than by repeat assignees (5). It also appeared more often among those with high assignment experience (9) than among those with low experience (5). Within the participant groups, it was most frequently discussed by expats with experience in both assignment types (7), followed by traditional expats (5). On the other hand, *Job Structure*, while mentioned less frequently overall, appeared primarily among individuals with high assignment experience (5) and those belonging to the older age group (5). In terms of participant groups, mentions were most common among traditional expats and HR professionals (both 4).

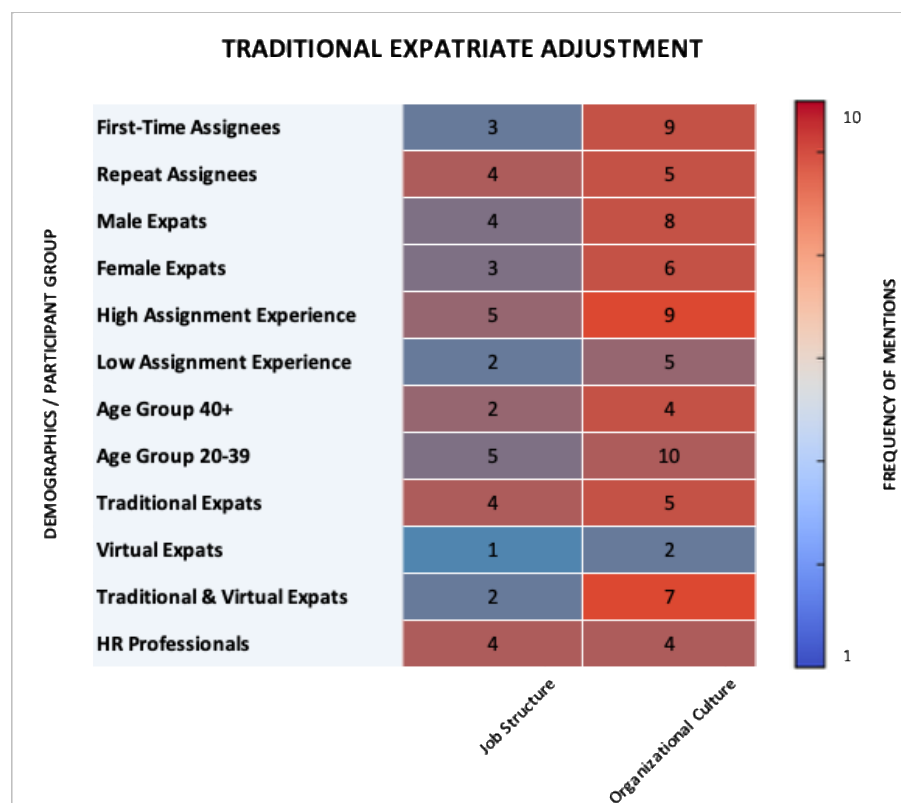


Figure 9: Heatmap of Work Environment Factors in Traditional Expatriate Adjustment

Source: Created by the author in Excel and MAXQDA

Virtual Expatriate Adjustment

For virtual expatriates, Table 13 shows that *Job Structure* became the most frequently mentioned factor with 19 mentions (15 positive, 4 negative), mainly at weak-to-medium intensity (8 weak, 8 medium, 3 strong). *Organizational Culture*, by contrast, appeared less often in virtual settings with only 5 mentions, all positive, yet carried mostly strong intensity (3 strong, 1 medium).

Table 13: Frequency and Intensity of Work Factors in Virtual Expatriate Adjustment

Source: Created by the author

Factor	Total Mentions	Positive Mentions	Negative Mentions	Weak Intensity	Medium Intensity	Strong Intensity
Job Structure	19	15	4	8	8	3
Organizational Culture	5	5	0	1	1	3

The heatmap in Figure 10 illustrates that overall, *Job Structure* showed distinctively more mentions than *Organizational Culture*. Thus, *Job Structure* was mentioned most frequent among the younger age group (20–39) (14) compared to age 40+ (1), and notably higher among first-time assignees (11) than repeat assignees (4). Gender differences were also visible, with male expats (10) mentioning job structure twice as often as female expats (5). Within the participant groups, it was most often discussed by virtual expats (7), followed by relatively equal mentions across the remaining groups (4 each). *Organizational Culture*, in contrast, showed only very few mentions—ranging between 0 and 2 across most demographic and participant groups. Notably, it was never mentioned by virtual expats themselves, while a few references appeared among the other participant groups, particularly HR professionals and traditional.

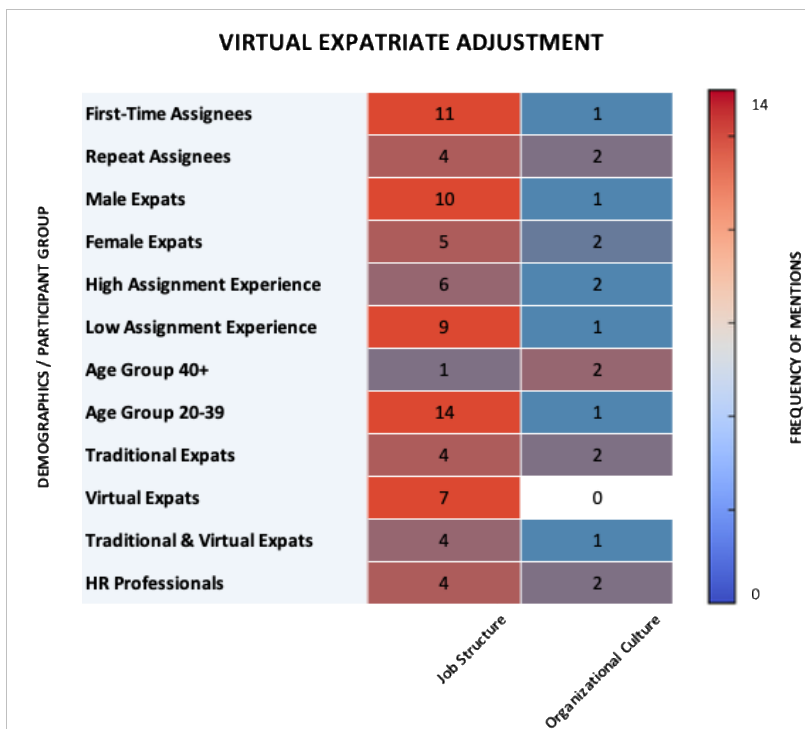


Figure 10: Heatmap of Work Environment Factors in Virtual Expatriate Adjustment

Source: Created by the author in Excel and MAXQDA

Proposition Evaluation

The interview data support Proposition 3. Traditional expatriates emphasized the importance of inclusive organizational cultures that foster belonging, diversity, and openness in facilitating adjustment to host environments. In contrast, virtual expatriates consistently highlighted the need for clear job structures, defined communication norms, and explicit policies to navigate distance, time zones and evaluation challenges. The results from the frequency and intensity analysis align with this pattern. In traditional assignments, *Organizational Culture* emerged as the dominant factor, particularly emphasized by younger and first-time assignees and by traditional expats and those with experience in both assignment types. *Job Structure*, while less frequent in this context, was noted mainly by more experienced and older assignees. In virtual contexts, this balance reversed: *Job Structure* showed markedly higher frequencies across all participant groups—especially among younger, first-time, and male expatriates—while *Organizational Culture* was mentioned only sporadically and not at all by virtual expats themselves. Overall, these findings confirm that traditional assignees rely primarily on cultural integration, whereas virtual assignees depend on structured roles and procedural clarity to support adjustment, reflecting the differing demands of in-person versus remote international work.

4.4 Proposition 4: Adjusting to the Host Culture

Proposition 4. *Cultural understanding supports adjustment for all expatriates. Traditional assignees achieve this primarily through engaging in expat networks and other in-person community activities, whereas virtual assignees rely more on digital tools, such as videoconferencing, and occasional visits to build comparable cultural understanding.*

Interview Results

Lack of Informal Interaction

For virtual expatriates, one of the most consistent challenges was the absence of casual, everyday encounters that normally build trust and belonging: “When you're at the office, you meet them at the coffee machine, you have lunch together. It's easier to build connections without actually needing to schedule a time or needing to reach out to people” (HR1, Pos. 17). A shift once colleagues returned to the office during Covid was also described: “People started going back to the office and I couldn't... They had all those little moments where they could talk about anything and everything... That's when I started to miss out a little bit” (VE2, Pos. 5). Also, virtual replacements such as online coffee talks rarely lasted: “You're sitting the whole day behind your laptop, do you really want to spend more time there?”

After 2-3 months these remote talks... it's not something that really stuck around" (VTE2, Pos. 23). Several interviewees stressed that cultural learning in particular was slowed without these spontaneous interactions: *"If I had done that whole assignment virtually and not in person, I would have realized that [feeling of adjustment] slower and not to the same extent... casual conversations around lunch or coffee also give a lot of insight into how a company works or how a culture is set up"* (TE1, Pos. 9). Another interviewee added: *"To get in touch with the organizational culture with all those implicit things, you cannot hear, you can't feel, it's crucial to be there in the offices"* (TE2, Pos. 7). Team belonging was also addressed: *"if you're sharing the same experiences, if you're sitting as long as the others are sitting in the offices, you're becoming one team. You can also talk with them about your problems and your experiences or your solutions. Having a virtual assignment, I'm not sure if it's possible"* (TE2, Pos. 33). Others emphasized the limits of virtual communication itself: *"You are lacking most of the time nonverbal signals, which is a strong part in communication... Sometimes it's not possible to have the camera on"* (TE3, Pos. 29). One expatriate also highlighted missed everyday cues: *"if you're not there, you don't hear the language on the street, you don't see what's happening in the city."* and *"if you're locally there, it's [adjustment] gonna happen anyway... you feel the culture, you experience it. It goes way quicker"* (VTE2, Pos. 33).

These insights illustrate that while traditional assignees benefited naturally from informal encounters, virtual assignees experienced an acute gap in cultural immersion and team belonging. This explains why *Lack of Informal Interaction* emerged only as a code for *Virtual Expatriate Adjustment*, not for traditional assignees.

Frequent Visits to Host Country

Virtual expatriates frequently pointed to occasional in-person visits as a way to bridge distance. One HR professional suggested: *"It's not easy for them to go back and forth all the time, but for those special occasions, once a year, twice a year, it would be very cool if the person could really join in person, meet the people that they have been working with"* (HR1, Pos. 25). One expatriate confirmed the importance of periodic presence: *"If you work with the team locally, of course it's better to see them once in a while... would be better also for company culture"* (VTE2, Pos. 9). Such visits also served leadership purposes: *"To just check in with the team, go for lunch, see how they're doing in person. Although virtual is great, it's sometimes also difficult to read body language"* (VTE2, Pos. 11). At the same time, visits carried limitations: *"Flying every month after a while it became a little bit of a burden. That's also why I decided instead of two years to come back after one and a half years... I felt a little bit like I'm not living there... I'm just somewhere in between"* (VTE2, Pos. 29). One traditional expatriate even suggested sequencing assignments, proposing: *"A combination could be good, but it would be*

important to start on a traditional [assignment]... to get in touch with the culture and then moving to a virtual assignment" (TE2, Pos. 33).

While occasional visits cannot fully replace immersion, they provided virtual expatriates with an important alternative for face-to-face connection. This explains why *Frequent Visits to the Host Country* appeared only in the context of virtual assignments.

Host Community Support

For traditional expatriates, adjustment was strongly shaped by local support systems and expatriate communities: *"There were also families who were former expatriates... and then put their children to the International School... With these people it was easy to relate"* (TE3, Pos. 15). Expatriate networks were often the first and most reliable source of guidance: *"There is always an expatriate network that's very easy to connect to... The mutual support is very big... It's a wonderful giving and taking"* (TE3, Pos. 19, Pos. 23). Online resources were also mentioned: *"Facebook groups and WhatsApp... also on Reddit where expats help expats"* (VTE1, Pos. 55). At the same time, participants acknowledged that these networks could become *bubbles*: *"I felt very welcomed, but it was in a bubble... When you're all alone, you are much more exposed. You have to set up various relationships to feel welcomed"* (TE3, Pos. 31). Connecting beyond expat circles required deliberate effort: *"To get professional contacts and also become friends is easy, but on a private level it's very difficult. Through associations and sports clubs is a very good way... You have to be very active to get to the locals... it takes a lot of effort"* (TE3, Pos. 15). Social media was mentioned as an important modern tool: *"Today, much goes through social media and it's much, much easier to find associations and networks to connect with"* (TE3, Pos. 25). Still, some participants noted that both family life and workplace expatriate density could reinforce isolation: *"You stay in your family bubble and you stay in your work bubble. If your local team also consists of a lot of expats, it will probably be very difficult to integrate"* (VTE2, Pos. 25). Another expatriate echoed challenges in forming friendships: *"If you move abroad, you get to know people that already have their friend group, that already are settled in life, maybe have their family"* (VE2, Pos. 9).

Community networks provided essential adjustment support for traditional expatriates, though often with boundaries. This explains why *Host Community Support* was identified only as a code for traditional assignments, not for virtual ones.

Cultural Differences

Traditional expatriates described cultural contrasts most clearly in everyday leadership and social practices: *"I'm not fond of working in a very directive manner... I thought I could do the same [as in*

Austria], but that was a clash of cultures when they were there, expecting me to tell them what to do" (TE1, Pos. 23). One expatriate highlighted broader living differences: *"Finland was a very safe place to live. We lived also in India, which was not a safe place, people were much more afraid of travelling or going around doing shopping"* (TE3, Pos. 23). Another expatriate underlined communication norms: *"The language and the communication style is more direct, it's more open. In Austria, it's much more reserved... more conservative"* (VTE2, Pos. 21). Several participants also emphasized expectations before arrival and the limits of integration: *"You feel you're getting a bit integrated, but you still have a bit of a closed group as well"* and *"I was going in here and being like, gonna be easy because you know Europe"* (VTE1, Pos. 29). Similarly, one assignee remarked: *"Every country is a bit different and also the group thinking is a bit different"* (VE2, Pos. 5).

Virtual expatriates, by contrast, described how cultural expectations became visible even in online interactions. One HR professional explained: *"In our company we have virtual coffee dates or virtual lunches, and if that person is not aware of these traditions or customs in that region, it would offend people. Also in virtual settings, it's crucial to know who you're talking to, from where this person is, what their values are and what their tradition is"* (HR1, Pos. 23). One virtual expatriate stressed that *"Even if it was in virtual settings, the team in Brazil places a lot of importance on building trust and maintaining a regular informal communication"* (VE1, Pos. 7). Another expatriate pointed out nuances across seemingly similar cultures: *"Even within teams... you can see different behaviors although it's so close and the culture is so related. You have these little details... and if you are aware, it helps you"* (VTE2, Pos. 17).

Frequency and Intensity Analysis

Traditional Expatriate Adjustment

Table 14 illustrates that both *Host Community Support* (18 mentions, 10 positive, 8 negative) and *Cultural Differences* (19 mentions, 14 positive, 5 negative) emerged as prominent factors. *Host Community Support* was a decisive but mixed element, with seven strong intensity mentions. *Cultural Differences*, in turn, leaned more positive, with many expatriates valuing opportunities for cultural learning, though medium intensity mentions revealed challenges for some.

Table 14: Frequency and Intensity of Host Culture Factors in Traditional Expatriate Adjustment

Source: Created by the author

Factor	Total Mentions	Positive Mentions	Negative Mentions	Weak Intensity	Medium Intensity	Strong Intensity
Host Community Support	18	10	8	4	7	7
Cultural Differences	19	14	5	8	8	3

The heatmap in Figure 11 further differentiates these findings across demographic and participant groups. Overall, *Host Community Support* showed strong variation, being mentioned most often by female expats (15) compared to males (3) and by those with high assignment experience (14) rather than low (4). Similar patterns were evident among repeat assignees (13) and the older age group (13). Within the participant groups, traditional expats (13) mentioned this factor by far most often, while it was not mentioned at all by HR professionals. *Cultural Differences*, by contrast, were most often discussed by the older age group (13) compared to younger expats (6) and by individuals with high assignment experience (12) rather than low (7). Gender differences were also evident, with almost twice as many mentions by male expats (12), compared to female expats (7). Within the participant groups, traditional expats (8) and those with experience in both assignment types (10) most frequently addressed this factor, while, again, HR professionals made no mentions.

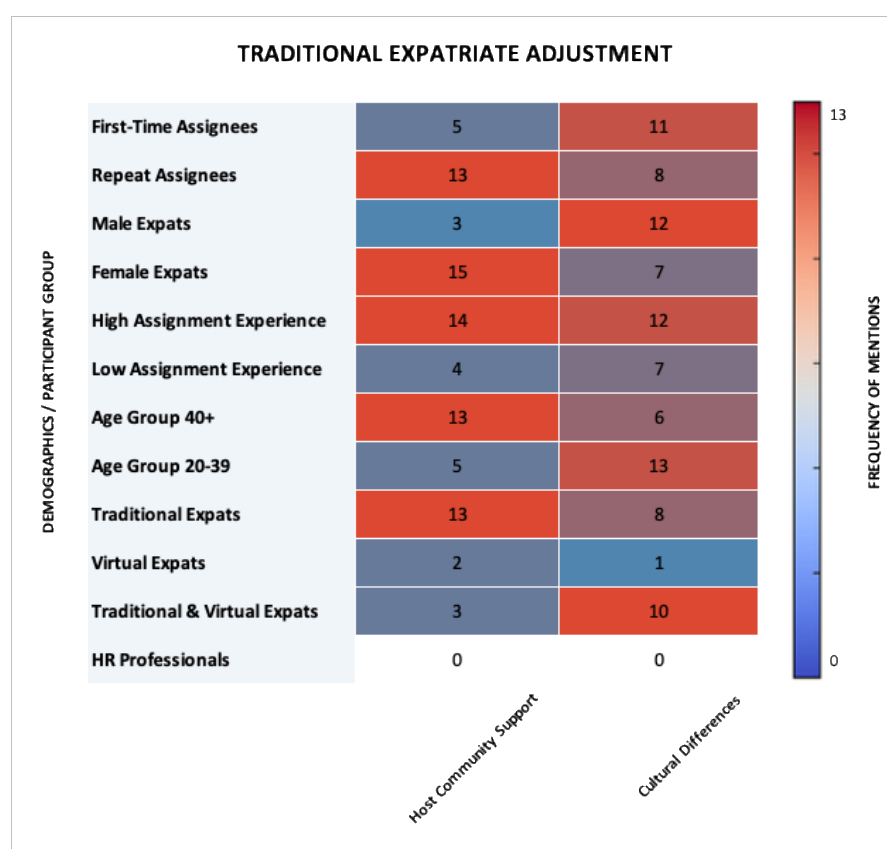


Figure 11: Heatmap of Host Culture Factors in Traditional Expatriate Adjustment

Source: Created by the author in Excel and MAXQDA

Virtual Expatriate Adjustment

Table 15 illustrates that the *Lack of Informal Interaction* stood out as the most significant obstacle, with 23 mentions, of which 15 were negative, accompanied by 11 strong intensity ratings. At the same

time, *Frequent Visits to the Host Country* (11 mentions, 8 positive) and *Cultural Differences* (5 mentions, 4 positive) played compensatory roles, helping overcome distance-related adjustment barriers and reinforcing cultural engagement.

Table 15: Frequency and Intensity of Host Culture Factors in Virtual Expatriate Adjustment

Source: Created by the author

Factor	Total Mentions	Positive Mentions	Negative Mentions	Weak Intensity	Medium Intensity	Strong Intensity
Host Community Support	11	8	3	4	3	4
Lack of Informal Interaction	23	8	15	4	8	11
Cultural Differences	5	4	1	0	3	2

In the heatmap in Figure 12 (displayed on the next page) *Lack of Informal Interaction* showed the highest number of mentions overall, being most frequently raised by younger expats (15) compared to older expats (7). It was also equally prevalent among first-time assignees (13), female expats (13), and those with low assignment experience (13), compared to their respective counterparts, all showing 9 mentions. Across participant groups, it was mentioned most often by traditional expats (9), followed by virtual expats (7), while HR professionals referred to it only once. *Frequent Visits to Host Country*, in contrast, was predominantly mentioned by younger expats (9) compared to older expats (1), and by first-time assignees, male expats, and those with low assignment experience (each with 8 mentions), whereas their counterparts only mentioned it twice. Within participant groups, the factor appeared most prominently among expats with experience in both assignment types. Finally, *Cultural Differences* showed relatively few mentions in the virtual context. It appeared exclusively among first-time assignees, male expats, low-experience expatriates, and younger expats (3 mentions each), while their counterparts did not mention it at all. Similarly, across participant groups, mentions were sparse and notably absent among traditional expats.

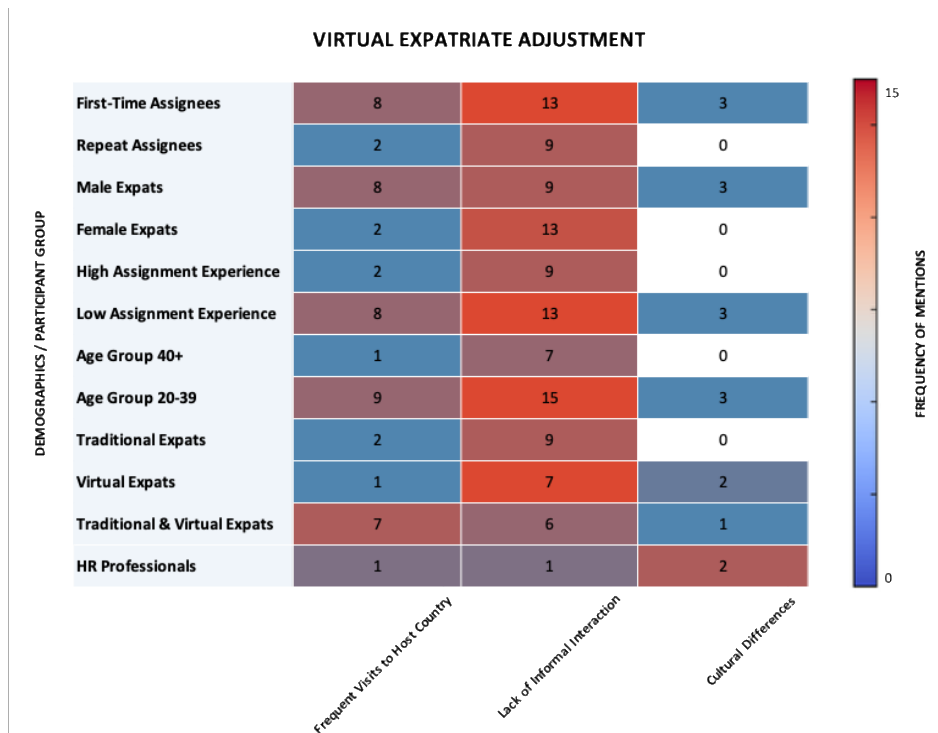


Figure 12: Heatmap of Host Culture Factors in Virtual Expatriate Adjustment

Source: Created by the author in Excel and MAXQDA

Proposition Evaluation

The interview data provide partial support for Proposition 4. Traditional expatriates emphasized in-person interactions, local communities, and lived immersion as key enablers of cultural adjustment, while virtual expatriates attempted to compensate for these experiences through structured online exchanges and occasional visits. Nevertheless, the interview data consistently indicated that cultural learning and integration were more *limited* in virtual settings due to reduced informal contact and fewer exposure opportunities. The patterns from the frequency and intensity analysis align with these findings. *Lack of Informal Interaction* emerged as the most frequently mentioned barrier in virtual assignments, especially among younger, first-time, and female expats. *Frequent Visits to the Host Country* was also mainly discussed by these younger and less experienced groups, as a way to compensate for the absence of local immersion, as mentioned in the interviews. Finally, *Cultural Differences* remained a dominant theme in traditional adjustment, particularly among experienced and older expatriates, but was rarely raised in virtual contexts.

4.5 Proposition 5: HR Policies & Strategies

Proposition 5. *HR support is essential throughout the expatriation process. Traditional expatriates benefit more from pre-assignment preparation, including cultural and logistical training. In contrast, virtual expatriates, due to their physical distance, require more continuous HR engagement during the assignment, making a supportive virtual work environment crucial for successful adjustment.*

Proposition 5 addresses the second research question of this thesis, focusing on the role of HR policies and strategies in supporting expatriates effectively in their adjustment:

How can HR strategies and policies be optimized to address the distinct adjustment needs of expatriates in traditional versus virtual assignments?

Although this thesis primarily focuses on the on-assignment phase of expatriation, the data analysis includes codes for both pre- and on-assignment support strategies. This is because several interviewees emphasized that effective adjustment during the assignment phase is often influenced by the preparation and support received beforehand. Pre-assignment measures, such as administrative support, logistical arrangements and cultural training, were described as laying the foundation for a smoother transition. This enables HR's on-assignment interventions to be more targeted and effective. The interviews revealed a set of support strategies that were subsequently used as codes in MAXQDA to structure the analysis:

Traditional Assignments – HR Policies & Strategies

- **Pre-Assignment Support**
 - *Administrative & Legal Support* (e.g., assistance with visas, work permits, and legal documentation)
 - *Logistical & Financial Support* (e.g., relocation services, housing arrangements, cost-of-living adjustments)
 - *Cross-Cultural Training* (e.g., cultural awareness workshops, language courses)
- **On-Assignment Support**
 - *Supportive Work Environment* (e.g., inclusive workplace culture)

Virtual Assignments – HR Policies & Strategies

- **Pre-Assignment Support**

- *Administrative & Legal Support* (e.g., equipment provision, compliance with local regulations for remote work)
- *Cross-Cultural Training* (e.g., virtual collaboration across cultures training)
- **On-Assignment Support**
 - *Supportive Work Environment* (e.g., inclusive workplace culture)
 - *Virtual Work Norms* (e.g., guidelines on working hours, digital etiquette)

The following section will provide a code-by-code analysis, taking a closer look at what the interviews revealed.

Interview Results

Pre-Assignment Support: Administrative & Legal Support

For both traditional and virtual assignments, HR professionals described extensive pre-assignment involvement, though the focus varied by assignment type. In traditional expatriations, support cantered on contracts, compliance and relocation formalities: *"A large portion of the tasks for HR are during the offer stage up until the actual hire date... whether with work visa, with just settling in, with some information to our social security works, our payroll works"* (HR1, Pos. 5). Similarly, another interviewee emphasized the breadth of responsibilities: *"It was such a diverse work. It's not only about getting a person from A to B, but it's really the whole surrounding topics that cover this"* (HR3, Pos. 3). This included ensuring compliance, gathering personal details such as family status and assignment duration, and managing country-specific requirements. One HR professional further highlighted the importance of global frameworks to ensure fairness and consistency: *"We were faced with a lot of country-specific requirements as well and you learn a lot from that"* (HR3, Pos. 3). This individual also highlighted: *"It's crucial for every global company to have a global mobility framework in place ... if two people are getting assigned and one person gets on top compensation items that the other person doesn't get, a discussion would start"* (HR3, Pos. 33). For clarity and expectation-setting, one individual added: *"It's a no-go to send people out of a country without having cleared the assignment details, to meet expectations from both sides"* (HR3, Pos. 33). In addition, planning beyond the assignment was underscored: *"What's really important is... what happens after the expatriate returns to the home country?... The post expatriation phase is also very important to be cleared beforehand"* (HR3, Pos. 37).

In virtual assignments, administrative and legal support shifted away from relocation issues toward employment setup, payroll and taxation: *"Most of the virtual expatriates are not leaving their own environment... All the explanation about the location and the documents for the work visa might be different. It's a lot of organization around social security, taxing, payroll"* (HR1, Pos. 13). The burden

often lay more on the organization than on the individual: *"The effort would be less towards the employee but more organizational, how we handle it, how we reflect it in payroll, if there are any legal topics that we should consider beforehand"* (HR1, Pos. 13). For assignees, the rationale for virtual arrangements often related to personal circumstances: *"It's a very good opportunity for people to continue professionally ... It's a specific environment or bubble where you do your work and then you live elsewhere. It's a good opportunity for some people who cannot move"* (TE3, Pos. 33). In this context, technical enablement became crucial: *"I received a virtual assignment allowance for Home Office and tech setup ... It was crucial that I have a proper technical set up at home as well"* (VE1, Pos. 37).

Pre-Assignment Support: Logistical & Financial Support

The level of logistical and financial assistance varied from company to company. One HR professional noted limits in one setting: *"Most expatriates have organized housing themselves. This is a large portion where some companies might offer more support, being very transparent, we are very weak when it comes to the actual relocation support"* (HR1, Pos. 11). By contrast, broader practices were described elsewhere: *"What I know from other companies, they offer also services to support in helping finding an apartment, school for kids, monetary helping them with their rent"* (HR2, Pos. 9). Within the same organization, one individual explained monetary support and expectations management: *"A lot of people get a relocation bonus to cover some of the cost of the relocation, but it will never cover all of the costs in my current company. You get a small bonus because we know that you are relocating just for that job. A big topic is of course salary, that's a legal topic"* (HR2, Pos. 29). Another interviewee pointed to outsourcing of the soft logistics: *"the company would hire an external, a real relocation provider. All the housing, finding schools for kids or all the soft topics were outsourced"* (HR3, Pos. 5). From the assignee side, one individual reported a bundled package: *"It includes the relocation itself, a serviced apartment and an expat allowance, an additional sum for the time there, and the Italian course"* (TE2, Pos. 13). Another individual added: *"They had my apartment ready... They paid for my flights and to some point for food"* (VE2, Pos. 31).

This code only emerged in the context of traditional assignments, as logistical and financial relocation support did not appear as relevant in virtual assignments during the interviews.

Pre-Assignment Support: Cross-Cultural Training

Cross-cultural and preparatory training played different roles in traditional and virtual contexts. For traditional expatriates, structured cultural and language training depending on destination were described: *"If someone goes from continental Europe to Asia or to South America, where really*

completely different cultures exist,... they really used up to six months to prepare for that trip, only on that cultural level" (HR3, Pos. 25). One expatriate highlighted the gap between entitlement and practice: *"Based on the expat package I was entitled to have two-hour Italian courses per week, but at the end I had no time to proceed with it"* (TE2, Pos. 11).

For virtual assignments, preparation needs focused less on host-country culture and more on digital collaboration and communication skills. One interviewee cautioned against assuming universal digital fluency: *"We assume that it's completely normal that you can find your way through Teams meetings and Slack messages, but ... it's not that easy for people who are from a different generation. The technical topic, we should not underestimate"* (HR2, Pos. 27). One expatriate suggested the value of soft-skill preparation: *"Having training in communication conflicts and problem solving would be definitely very good to increase your sensitivity"* (TE3, Pos. 29). In some cases, language sufficed as the main preparation: *"The company language with head office is always English, everyone speaks English there since they need to manage a whole lot of countries. I knew that with English everything would work fine"* (VE2, Pos. 29).

On-Assignment Support: Supportive Work Environment

Both traditional and virtual expatriates emphasized the importance of a *Supportive Work Environment*. In traditional assignments, HR professionals stressed that support did not end with the hire date, but became more diffuse after arrival: *"The most difficult part is the actual time when they are here and want to integrate ... At the end it's also their personal life that you don't really want to interfere as HR and as a company"* (HR1, Pos. 9). Workplace culture and connection points were also highlighted repeatedly: *"having a culture that reinforces people connecting,... giving them an opportunity to get to know each other, to build areas where people can meet and connect. This is the main contribution a company can make in that stage... This is a large factor that could affect the success of the integration"* (HR1, Pos. 15). In addition, the contact quality between HR and expatriates was also emphasized: *"it makes a difference how HR is in contact with those people. If employees have the feeling that there is somebody I can talk to, I can go to and they are willing and want to support me"* (HR2, Pos. 33). Organizations sought to foster integration through events, visibility, and informal spaces. One HR professional described initiatives such as company parties and environments where employees could *"meet, exchange"* (HR1, Pos. 23). One virtual expatriate highlighted the role of global announcements for newcomers: *"Everyone around the world... will receive a short summary of the person... This really helps also new employees to connect quicker and easier in the first couple of weeks"* (HR1, Pos. 23). Another individual described sensing *"a lot of trust and a lot of willingness from the company to actually make this [the assignment] work"* (VTE2, Pos. 43).

In virtual assignments, supportive environments had to be cultivated through digital practices and inclusion: *“in a context of a virtual expatriate, the culture has to be even stronger, so you can feel it ... virtually”* (HR1, Pos. 17). Meeting etiquette, managerial attention and inclusiveness were highlighted as well: *“It’s the etiquette of having virtual meetings,... how you plan as a people manager gatherings of the team, fostering team culture... it’s very difficult because all the time you need to think about how this is experienced from the person who is not sitting in the location. Inclusiveness is the biggest topic that is necessary in the culture”* (HR2, Pos. 13). Meeting practices were also singled out: *“Virtual meetings are not virtual meetings, it really depends on how you handle them. Do all employees turn on their camera? How interactive are calls? This would be the large contribution of culture for a virtual expatriate”* (HR1, Pos. 17). Concrete mechanisms included virtual coffee roulettes, informal chats, and invitations to in-person events. One traditional expatriate recalled initiatives like *“virtual lunches”* and a *“christmas celebration”* held virtually (TE1, Pos. 17). A virtual expatriate also emphasized structured onboarding and personal touchpoints: *“We had virtual coffee talks where you would talk also about your personal life... They had a welcome meeting for me, we celebrated my birthday with Teams backgrounds, I was very welcomed”* (VE2, Pos. 17). Another expatriate added: *“that’s very, very important... that you have also informal meetings provided by the structure with the colleagues, not only formal meetings”* (TE3, Pos. 11). For organizational enablers: *“organizational culture can do here a lot, providing structures, encouraging people, giving time and providing time slots”* (TE3, Pos. 11). One participant also suggested organizational ownership: *“There should be someone who is in charge of that topic [virtual assignments] in HR, who has a close feedback loop with the people who are virtual expatriates and are in exchange what they need, what would help and are also in exchange with the people manager of the person”* (HR2, Pos. 21).

On-Assignment Support: Virtual Work Norms

Policies and shared expectations were cited as part of ongoing support: *“We are currently working on a remote work policy which might even open up the opportunities for virtual expatriates”* (HR1, Pos. 37). However, awareness gaps were also highlighted *“If you have a virtual expatriate, the company is not even aware to have a look on that, as the person is not relocating in person to a different location, it’s not the big topic. Honestly,... they should be aware”* (HR2, Pos. 19). In one compliance-oriented context, one HR professional stated: *“the scope of work is defined very accurately and also the working hours”* (HR3, Pos. 9). From the assignee side, time-zone coordination and mutuality were described: *“We also had clear rules about overlapped hours for meetings because otherwise it would get way too late sometimes for me”* and *“it was more a mutual agreement with me and the local colleagues”* (VE1, Pos. 33, Pos. 35).

This code only emerged in the context of *Virtual Expatriate Adjustment*, reflecting the central role of structured *Virtual Work Norms* in enabling adjustment at a distance.

Frequency and Intensity Analysis

Traditional Expatriate Adjustment

Table 16 shows that among traditional expatriates, *Administrative & Legal Support* received 19 mentions, of which 18 were positive, reflecting its strong relevance. Similarly, *Logistical & Financial Support* (12 mentions, 10 positive), *Cross-Cultural Training* (7 mentions, 6 positive) and a *Supportive Work Environment* (14 mentions, 11 positive) were highlighted as important, with strong intensity ratings particularly for the work environment (8 strong mentions).

Table 16: Frequency and Intensity of HR Policies & Strategies in Traditional Expatriate Adjustment

Source: Created by the author

Factor	Total Mentions	Positive Mentions	Negative Mentions	Weak Intensity	Medium Intensity	Strong Intensity
Administrative & Legal Support	19	18	1	8	7	4
Logistical & Financial Support	12	10	2	2	5	5
Cross-Cultural Training	7	6	1	1	3	3
Supportive Work Environment	14	11	3	3	3	8

The heatmap in Figure 13 illustrates that mentions were relatively few across most groups, yet *Administrative & Legal Support* and *Supportive Work Environment* stood out with notably higher frequencies among HR professionals. Specifically, *Administrative & Legal Support* was mentioned 17 times by HR professionals, while most other participant groups referred to it only once or not at all. Across demographic groups, mentions remained minimal (ranging from 0 to 2). A similar pattern emerged for the *Supportive Work Environment*, which received 11 mentions by HR professionals, whereas mentions from other participant groups were sparse or absent. Among demographic groups, references to this factor ranged from none to at most three. *Logistical & Financial Support* displayed slightly more even distribution across demographics, though overall mentions remained limited (0–4 per group). The younger age group stood out marginally with 4 mentions. Within the participant groups, HR professionals again led with 8 mentions. Lastly, *Cross-Cultural Training* was mentioned only sporadically across demographic groups (1–2 mentions each) and was again most often referenced by HR professionals (4 mentions). Notably, virtual expatriates did not mention this factor at all, which aligns with the perception that structured pre-departure preparation remains primarily associated with traditional assignments.

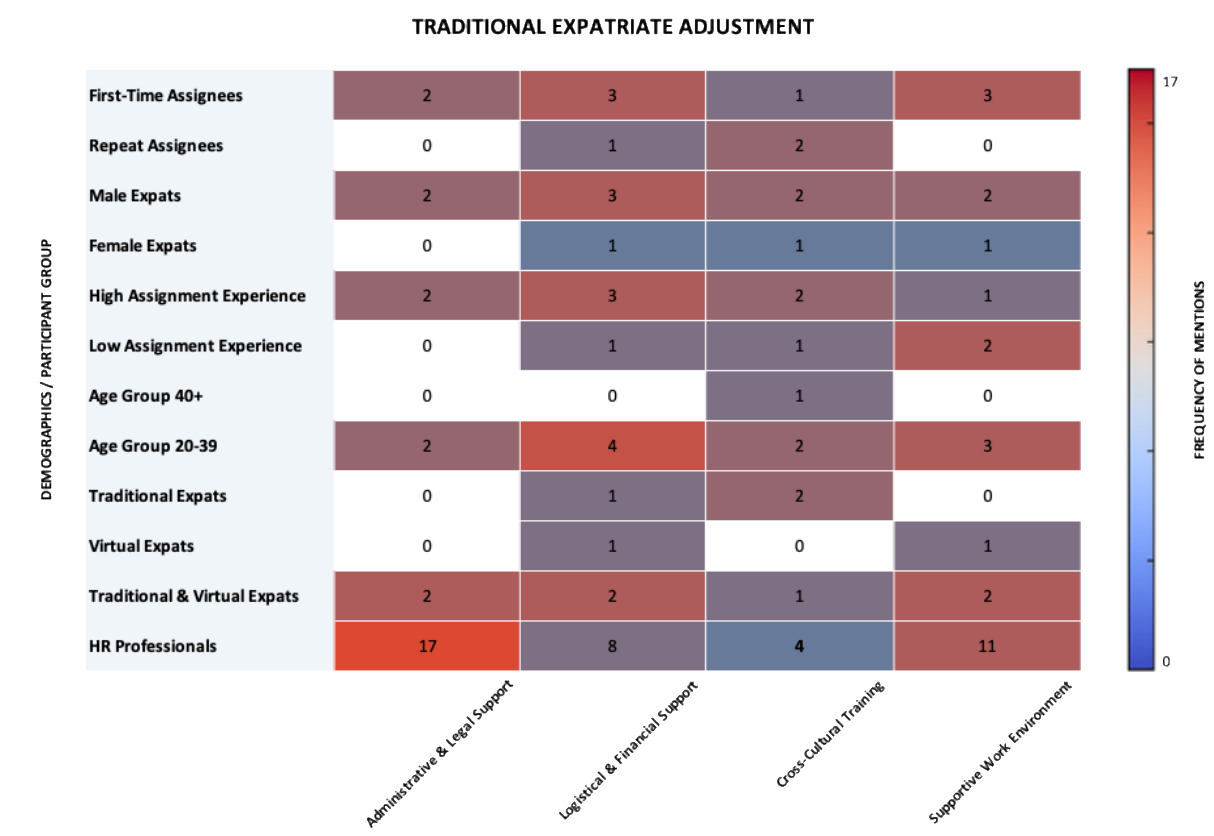


Figure 13: Heatmap of HR Policies & Strategies in Traditional Expatriate Adjustment

Source: Created by the author in Excel and MAXQDA

Virtual Expatriate Adjustment

The data for virtual expatriates indicate a different pattern (see Table 17): while *Administrative & Legal Support* (6 mentions, 5 positive) and *Cross-Cultural Training* (5 mentions, 4 positive) were acknowledged, they played a relatively minor role compared to the *Supportive Work Environment*, which received 20 mentions, all of them positive, with 10 strong intensity ratings. Moreover, the factor of *Virtual Work Norms*, specific to the virtual context, emerged with 8 mentions (7 positive).

Table 17: Frequency and Intensity of HR Policies & Strategies in Virtual Expatriate Adjustment

Source: Created by the author

Factor	Total Mentions	Positive Mentions	Negative Mentions	Weak Intensity	Medium Intensity	Strong Intensity
Administrative & Legal Support	6	5	1	1	1	4
Cross-Cultural Training	5	4	1	2	1	2
Supportive Work Environment	20	20	0	2	8	10
Virtual Work Norms	8	7	1	2	4	2

The heatmap in Figure 14 illustrates that patterns closely mirrored those of the traditional setting, with HR professionals again mentioning nearly all factors most frequently. Among all factors, *Supportive Work Environment* showed the highest number of mentions. It was cited exclusively by female expatriates (6 mentions) and not at all by males. Similarly, more experienced expatriates — repeat assignees, older participants, and those with high assignment experience — each recorded four mentions, compared to only two for less experienced assignees. Within the participant groups, HR professionals (14 mentions) overwhelmingly dominated references to this factor, while expats with experience in both assignment types did not mention it at all. *Cross-Cultural Training* and *Administrative & Legal Support* appeared only sporadically, with mentions across demographic groups ranging from none to two. Within participant groups, HR professionals again led the discussion (4 mentions for Administrative & Legal Support and 2 for Cross-Cultural Training), while other groups referred to these factors rarely or not at all. Finally, *Virtual Work Norms* was only occasionally mentioned (0–2 mentions across most demographics). However, among participant groups, HR professionals again led with 6 mentions, while traditional expatriates and expats with experience in both assignment types did not mention this factor at all.

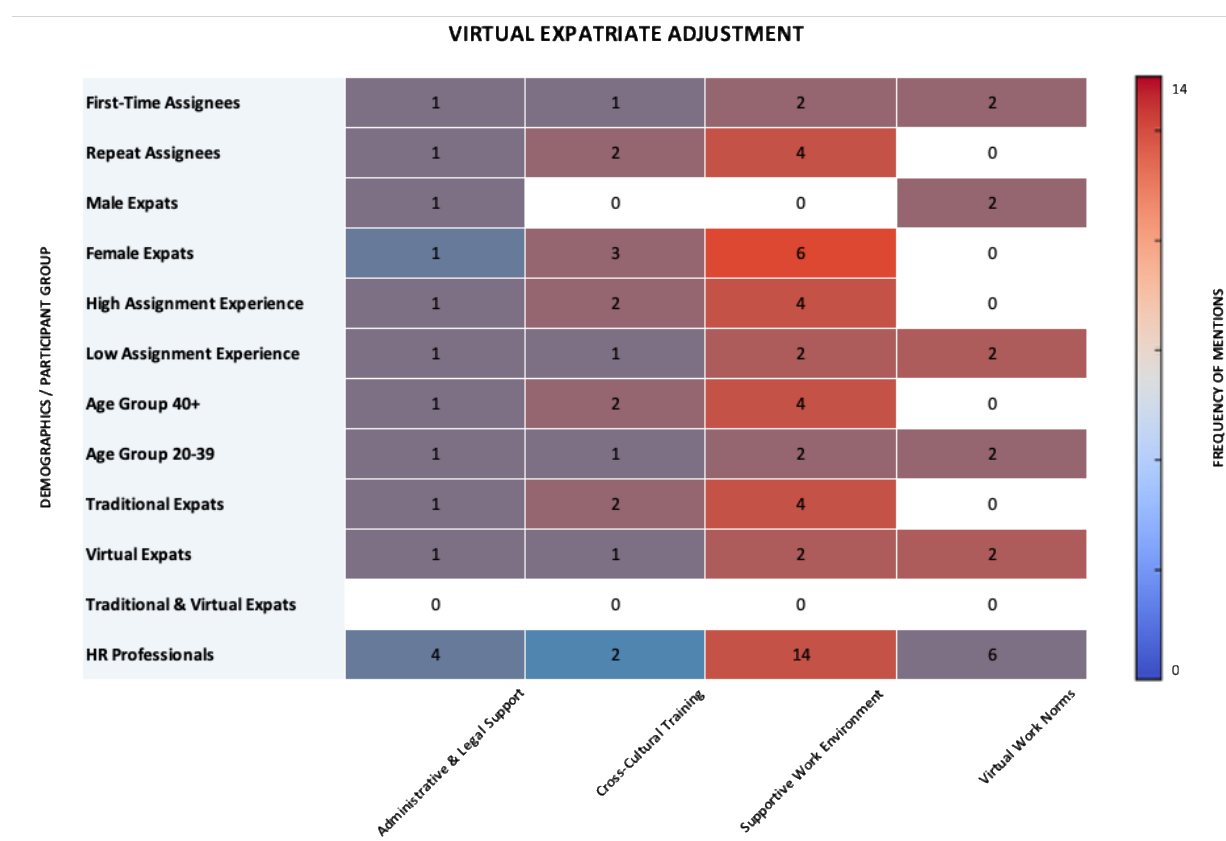


Figure 14: Heatmap of HR Policies & Strategies in Virtual Expatriate Adjustment

Source: Created by the author in Excel and MAXQDA

Proposition Evaluation

The interview data support Proposition 5, highlighting a clear distinction in the timing and nature of HR support across assignment types. Traditional assignees received concentrated assistance before departure, primarily covering administrative and legal procedures, logistical and financial arrangements, and pre-assignment preparation such as cross-cultural and language training. Virtual assignees, in contrast, emphasized continuous, embedded support throughout their assignment, centered on maintaining a supportive virtual work environment through inclusive communication norms, structured virtual routines, and organizational enablement (e.g., policies, technology, overlap hours). The results from the frequency and intensity analysis reinforce this differentiation. *Administrative & Legal Support* and *Supportive Work Environment* were mentioned predominantly by HR professionals. Among demographic groups, mentions were minimal, though *Supportive Work Environment* appeared slightly more often among female and experienced assignees. *Logistical & Financial Support* and *Cross-Cultural Training* were raised mainly by HR and traditional expatriates, confirming that structured preparation remains concentrated in traditional assignments. Overall, the findings confirm that HR's role in traditional assignments is front-loaded and administratively focused, while in virtual assignments it is continuous, relational and digitally mediated.

5 Discussion

This thesis explores the dynamics of expatriate adjustment in the evolving context of international work. Across all five propositions, the findings highlight clear differences in how adjustment unfolds in traditional and virtual international assignments and the role HR and organizations play in enabling it. Traditional expatriates emphasized challenges tied to relocation, cultural integration and family adjustment, while virtual assignees faced issues of isolation, digital collaboration and establishing virtual work routines. HR's involvement differed accordingly: in traditional assignments, support was concentrated more in the pre-assignment stage through administrative, logistical, financial and cultural preparation; in virtual assignments, it was more continuous, focusing on fostering a supportive work environment, inclusive practices and clear virtual work norms. These distinctions align with the structural contrasts summarized in Table 1, which help explain why the adjustment processes—and the forms of HR support required—diverge between the two assignment types.

In terms of the propositions, the evidence only partially supports Proposition 1, as not all Big Five traits were equally predictive of adjustment — openness, and to some extent emotional stability, stood out as most critical. Proposition 2, however, is supported. Traditional expatriates relied more on external sources of support, whereas virtual expatriates depended more on internal coping mechanisms. Proposition 3 is also supported: traditional assignees depend more on cultural integration, while virtual assignees rely more on structured roles and norms. Proposition 4 is only partially supported: cultural adjustment remains important in both contexts, but structural constraints limit immersion for virtual assignees. Finally, Proposition 5 is supported: HR plays a more concentrated role in the pre-assignment stage for traditional expatriates, while virtual expatriates rely more on ongoing organizational support embedded in the virtual work environment. Taken together, the results show that while both assignment types require structured support, their timing, focus and mechanisms differ significantly.

The analysis of the empirical findings revealed a clear pattern: expatriate adjustment is shaped by *Internal Drivers* and *External Drivers*, which interact dynamically and are further moderated by *HR Policies & Strategies*. Internal Drivers refer to personal resources that originate within the individual, such as personality traits and personal mindset, which enable expatriates to manage challenges and adapt effectively. External Drivers, by contrast, include contextual influences arising from the work and non-work environment—such as organizational culture or host community support—that shape adjustment opportunities and constraints. This distinction emerged inductively from the interviews and subsequent analyses and is also represented in the two adjustment models (see Figure 15 and Figure 16) in subchapter 5.4. It offers a useful analytical lens because it clarifies which factors are intrinsic to the expatriate and which depend on organizational or social context. These insights lay the

groundwork for the subsequent discussion, in which the findings are integrated with existing theory from the Literature Review to provide a deeper understanding of expatriate adjustment. The Discussion first examines internal drivers of adjustment, followed by external drivers, and then considers the moderating role of HR policies and strategies. Together, these three sections establish the conceptual basis for the presentation of the two final adjustment models—one for traditional and one for virtual assignments. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the limitations of this thesis and a future outlook, outlining directions for further research.

5.1 Internal Drivers of Adjustment

The following discussion addresses the findings and existing literature regarding Proposition 1 and, to some extent, Proposition 2, which together capture the internal drivers of adjustment. These internal factors—rooted in the individual rather than the surrounding context— correspond to *individual factors* and emerged as a consistent foundation across the interviews.

Personality Traits

Personality is the most enduring set of internal drivers, providing the psychological foundation upon which other adjustment mechanisms build. The expatriation literature has consistently emphasized the Big Five as central predictors of adjustment (e.g. Harari et al., 2018; Shaffer et al., 2006), the results of this thesis nuance that assumption. In particular, openness emerged as the most consistent and universal facilitator across both traditional and virtual assignments, confirming earlier research on its role in fostering adaptability and cultural curiosity (Erez et al., 2013; Huang et al., 2005). The frequency–intensity analysis revealed that openness was emphasized most often by younger and first-time assignees, suggesting that those early in their global careers rely heavily on openness to navigate novelty and uncertainty. Likewise, HR professionals frequently referred to openness when describing the ideal expatriate profile, reinforcing that organizations also perceive this trait as a predictor of success. By contrast, neuroticism (emotional stability) appeared more prominently among experienced expatriates and male assignees, implying that self-awareness and emotional regulation become more salient with professional maturity. This nuanced pattern suggests that while openness facilitates exploration and learning, emotional stability underpins resilience once initial novelty fades.

Other traits proved more context-dependent: Conscientiousness appeared more critical in virtual assignments, aligning with literature on self-discipline and independence in remote work (Adamovic et al., 2022). Extraversion traditionally associated with sociocultural adjustment (e.g. Harari et al., 2018; Wilmot et al., 2019) played a more nuanced role in the interviews: in traditional contexts it related to inherent sociability and ease of networking, whereas in virtual settings it manifested as

proactive outreach—a willingness to initiate and sustain digital connections despite limited informal cues. This differentiation illustrates that the same personality dimension can take on distinct behavioral expressions depending on structural context. Finally, agreeableness, while absent in traditional assignments, emerged only among a few first-time and less experienced virtual expatriates, highlighting its growing importance for sustaining empathy and collaboration across distance. Hence, while the Big Five remain a useful starting point, they can be complemented by virtual work-specific constructs such as virtual self-efficacy (Adamovic et al., 2022) or segmentor–integrator preferences (Kniffin et al., 2021; Rothbard et al., 2005) to fully capture adjustment in digital settings.

Mindset, Motivation and Coping Strategies

Building on these more stable factors, the findings suggest that expatriate adjustment also depends on *how* they apply their traits, meaning an expatriate’s internal orientation toward the assignment. This aligns with the understanding that the adjustment process is *dynamic* and *interactionist* in character, shaped by both static elements such as personality and dynamic factors such as proactive behaviors (Dimitrova et al., 2023). During the interviews, several participants emphasized that clarity of purpose—whether seeking career growth, intercultural learning, or personal renewal—was more decisive than specific traits. This aligns with research suggesting that personality interacts with motivational orientation (Wu & Ang, 2011). In traditional contexts, a constructive personal mindset—marked by openness, patience, and curiosity—proved central to navigating ambiguity and cultural difference. Such mindset orientation was most frequently emphasized by younger, first-time assignees, reflecting that early-career expatriates rely heavily on personal adaptability when navigating relocation. However, in virtual contexts, where opportunities for spontaneous interaction are limited, adjustment hinged even more strongly on internal coping mechanisms. Proactive behavior, self-regulation, and intentional communication aimed to compensate for the lack of physical proximity, confirming prior observations that virtual assignees rely on self-driven rather than situational resources (Makarius & Larson, 2017). Notably, proactive behavior was mentioned almost exclusively by less experienced and first-time assignees in virtual settings, suggesting that these individuals compensate for their limited experience through active engagement. Meanwhile, communication and language skills were frequently discussed across assignment types, though they were framed differently. In traditional contexts, these skills enabled integration and mutual understanding, as confirmed repeatedly throughout the literature (Dimitrova et al., 2023; Selmer, 2006; Selmer & Luring, 2015). However, virtual expatriates framed them as symbols of cultural respect and professional courtesy rather than a daily necessity.

Mindset thus operates as a cross-cutting enabler bridging internal and external domains. Expatriates who approached their assignment as an opportunity for growth displayed higher resilience and engagement. Importantly, such mindset-driven behavior also underpins intercultural learning. CQ was primarily emphasized in traditional assignments, as cultural immersion requires sensitivity to norms and behaviors (Ang et al., 2007). For virtual expatriates, EQ became crucial in coping with the absence of informal cues, as they described the importance of empathy, active listening and careful questioning to avoid misunderstandings. Although not labelled as EQ in the coding, these skills strongly align with established EQ dimensions of emotional regulation, empathy and relational awareness (Lii & Wong, 2008). Similarly, although the interviewees did not explicitly mention VI, it became evident in their stories about navigating time zones, establishing communication norms and filtering distractions — core elements of Makarius & Larson's (2017) conceptualization of VI. PQ was also indirectly relevant when expatriates described adapting leadership styles to local cultural expectations.

In summary, the analysis of Propositions 1 and partially Proposition 2 demonstrates that internal drivers—personality traits, mindset and coping strategies—form the psychological foundation of adjustment. They determine how expatriates interpret, respond to and ultimately shape their experiences abroad or remote.

5.2 External Drivers of Adjustment

While internal drivers capture the personal resources that expatriates bring to an assignment, external drivers refer to the contextual and relational conditions that shape their adjustment from the outside. These encompass both *work* and *non-work factors*, determining how effectively expatriates can apply their internal capacities within the systems and networks surrounding them. The following discussion integrates the second part of Proposition 2 (focusing on external support sources) with Propositions 3 and 4, which address organizational and cultural influences on adjustment. The findings reveal that social, organizational, and cultural contexts jointly construct the environment in which expatriates operate, and that their impact varies systematically between traditional and virtual assignment types.

Social Support and Interpersonal Resources

A core finding of this thesis, and a longstanding theme in expatriation literature, is that external social support is one of the most immediate buffers against adjustment stress (e.g. Wu & Ang, 2011). In the interviews, traditional expatriates frequently described how mentoring, coworker assistance, and host-country friendships helped them navigate both professional and personal transitions. These relationships provided not only instrumental knowledge about the host culture but also emotional

reassurance, confirming prior work on the importance of cultural and social support networks (Chen, 2015; Chew et al., 2021). The frequency–intensity analysis confirmed that such support was especially valued by younger, first-time assignees, who typically lack prior international experience, and by highly experienced expatriates, who recognized mentoring as a mechanism to transfer their knowledge to newcomers.

However, access to support was not evenly distributed. A mentoring gap at higher hierarchical levels emerged during one interview: while expatriates recognized mentoring as crucial, one individual in a C-level position reported little access to it, even though their adjustment challenges were comparable to lower-level assignees. This shows that mentoring support might not be equally distributed across organizational hierarchies. While hierarchical level was mentioned only once by an interviewee, it nonetheless is worth noting. Traditional expatriates who assume leadership roles abroad face the dual challenge of adapting as cultural newcomers while also managing new teams. For virtual expatriates, leadership difficulties appear more closely linked to role clarity and the effectiveness of digital communication routines. Although less prominent in the interview data, this observation aligns with earlier work on positional job factors (Shaffer et al., 1999). The heatmap data reinforce this, showing that mentoring and coworker support were particularly salient among female virtual expatriates, reflecting the greater relational dependence of those working across physical distance.

Family and friends, too, played an evolving role in the adjustment process. For traditional expatriates, family support was crucial during the initial relocation phase, aligning with prior research (Van Der Laken et al., 2019). Yet as integration progressed, reliance shifted toward local friendships and professional networks, signaling a dynamic adjustment trajectory. For virtual expatriates, the role of family and friends was more ambivalent—sometimes serving as emotional anchors but occasionally deepening a sense of detachment from the host environment. This polarity was particularly evident among repeat and experienced assignees, who may already possess stable personal networks that mitigate, yet also distance them from, host engagement.

Organizational Structure and Culture

Beyond interpersonal ties, the organizational context emerged as a crucial external driver of adjustment. Previous research has highlighted the importance of role clarity, support and performance evaluation for expatriates (Black et al., 1991; Shaffer et al., 1999), and the present findings build on and extend this understanding. In the interviews, organizational culture was especially salient among younger, first-time expatriates and those with extensive assignment experience, indicating that both newcomers and seasoned professionals rely on cultural inclusivity for orientation and belonging.

Conversely, job structure emerged as a more ambivalent factor in traditional settings: while clear processes and expectations reduced uncertainty, rigid systems could also limit autonomy and adaptation. This duality was most frequently discussed by older and highly experienced expatriates, who may be more sensitive to organizational rigidity after years of international work. In virtual assignments, the pattern inverted. Job structure became the central adjustment enabler. Virtual expatriates described role clarity, defined deliverables and structured communication as essential foundations for functioning remotely. Mentions were particularly high among younger and first-time virtual assignees, reflecting their reliance on formalized routines to offset the absence of informal learning opportunities. This aligns with the existing literature, describing that physical distance from the host country can reduce role clarity and trust when collaborating virtually (Lauring et al., 2022). At the same time, some participants noted that overly tight structures could stifle flexibility, suggesting that successful virtual work depends on a balance between clarity and autonomy.

A particularly noteworthy finding concerns performance management and compensation. Across both traditional and virtual expatriates, performance evaluation and rewards were largely indistinguishable from those of regular employees. Expatriates were assessed on the same job-specific responsibilities, milestones and deliverables, and compensation packages did not differ substantially, aside from occasional performance-based bonuses. This challenges assumptions in prior research that expatriate assignments—particularly international postings—necessitate differentiated evaluation or reward structures (Aycan, 1997; Kniffin et al., 2021). Instead, the data suggest that organizations tend to standardize performance management systems across employee groups, regardless of whether assignments are traditional or virtual. This not only reduces complexity for HR but also signals fairness and comparability across the workforce. For virtual expatriates, however, consistency alone is insufficient: while evaluation systems mirrored those of their on-site colleagues, interviewees emphasized the need for clear role definitions, structured processes and coordinated communication to prevent ambiguity and overload in remote environments. Similarly, the literature confirms, that role overload and time zone differences can complicate the evaluation process (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999).

Finally, organizational culture took on a context-dependent form. For traditional expatriates, inclusive and globally minded cultures provided a sense of belonging and psychological safety—an observation widely supported in prior research (Hitt et al., 2001; Lii & Wong, 2008). For virtual expatriates, by contrast, culture was less tied to local integration and more to how well the company's values and norms were transmitted through digital channels. HR professionals, in particular, highlighted that in virtual settings, culture must be *actively projected* through communication practices and leadership

behavior to be experienced and felt across technological boundaries. This adds a new perspective to existing theory: in virtual assignments, organizational culture cannot remain implicit but must be actively promoted and reinforced through digital practices and communication.

Cultural Context and Host Environment

The cultural and community environment is the third major layer of external drivers. It links workplace experiences to the broader social context in which expatriates live and work. The literature has consistently emphasized cultural adjustment as a cornerstone of expatriate success, particularly for those physically relocating (e.g. Black et al., 1991). Traditional expatriates benefit from immersion in the host culture, where daily interactions, informal encounters and local community engagement provide continuous opportunities for cultural learning. In contrast, the literature on virtual collaboration suggests that digital communication offers fewer cues and more room for misinterpretation, limiting cultural learning opportunities (Van Vianen et al., 2004; Wicht & Holtbrügge, 2023). The findings of this thesis strongly confirm the importance of cultural adjustment for traditional expatriates. Proposition 4, addressing cultural and community influences highlights substantial differences between assignment types. For traditional expatriates, adjustment was deeply intertwined with host community support and cultural learning. Interviewees described how being welcomed by locals, engaging in daily interactions and participating in community activities provided both practical guidance and emotional grounding. Yet this factor was not uniformly positive. Some expatriates reported exclusion or limited local contact, revealing that host support can function as both a facilitator and a barrier depending on access and openness. Notably, male and highly experienced expatriates mentioned cultural differences more frequently, suggesting that extended exposure sharpens both sensitivity to and appreciation of cultural diversity. While female expatriates, older assignees, and repeat expatriates were most likely to highlight the host community—perhaps because accumulated experience heightens awareness of local dynamics and social acceptance.

Several interviewees also highlighted the importance of being welcomed by colleagues and receiving support from the host community, all of which smoothed their adjustment. The immersive experience of living abroad extended well beyond the workplace and shaped adjustment in the broader non-work domain. This aligns with existing literature, which confirms that perceived acceptance from HCNs can significantly facilitate expatriate adjustment (Florkowski & Fogel, 1999). For virtual expatriates, however, the adjustment process was fundamentally different. While they acknowledged the need for intercultural sensitivity in digital interactions, they rarely described experiences of broader cultural learning. Instead, they reported that their engagement with the host culture was mostly confined to structured work-related exchanges. The most salient obstacle was the lack of informal interaction,

which limited spontaneous learning and relationship-building. This challenge was particularly emphasized by younger and less experienced assignees. However, some interviewees noted that regular short-term visits to the host country provided partial exposure, but these remained limited substitutes for the kind of sustained immersion traditional expatriates experienced. Similarly, Luring et al. (2024) suggested that virtual assignments may require occasional visits to the host country. Interestingly, the interview data revealed that virtual relationships established before relocation were of little help once an assignee transitioned to a traditional assignment. However, prior in-person connections proved highly valuable when maintained virtually later on, a finding also confirmed by the literature, which highlights the role of early face-to-face interactions in building trust, cohesion and reducing stereotyping in virtual teams (Adamovic, 2018; Jimenez et al., 2017).

In summary, these findings demonstrate that external drivers—spanning social networks, organizational conditions, and cultural environments—define the structural and relational context within which internal drivers operate. Mentoring, communication, organizational culture and community engagement shape the boundaries of what expatriates can experience and learn. Importantly, these factors are not static but evolve across time and context.

In the conceptual models developed in this thesis (see Figure 15 and Figure 16), HR policies and strategies are positioned as moderators—mechanisms that strengthen, weaken, or reshape the relationship between internal and external drivers and the overall adjustment outcome. The following section therefore explores how HR can intentionally design, coordinate, and reinforce these adjustment dynamics across both traditional and virtual international assignments.

5.3 HR Policies & Strategies as Moderators of Expatriate Adjustment

While internal and external drivers determine *what* facilitates adjustment, HR policies and strategies define *how* these mechanisms interact. The findings of this thesis show that organizational support acts less as a direct driver and more as a moderating mechanism between individual and environmental factors. In other words, HR practices shape the extent to which internal drivers (e.g., mindset and coping strategies) can align with external drivers (e.g., cultural aspects and social support) to foster successful adjustment. This distinction mirrors the differing realities of traditional and virtual assignments. In traditional expatriation, HR's influence is more concentrated at the beginning, focusing on pre-departure and early-stage structural support to enable on-site adaptation. In contrast, in virtual assignments where no relocation occurs, HR must maintain connection, fairness, and inclusion throughout the entire assignment.

Traditional Assignments: Foundational Support and Local Integration

For traditional expatriates, the findings confirm that HR's strongest moderating role occurs in the pre-assignment and early adjustment phases. Administrative, legal and logistical support — including relocation assistance, visa and compliance management, housing, and education support — remain fundamental for establishing stability and confidence (Guzzo et al., 1994; Shaffer et al., 1999; Van Der Laken et al., 2019; Wu & Ang, 2011). The frequency–intensity analysis revealed that these supports were discussed overwhelmingly by HR professionals, suggesting that they are perceived primarily as organizational rather than experiential interventions. Beyond logistics, supportive work environments emerged as a vital ongoing form of HR moderation. Interviewees described how inclusive climates, responsive management, and access to stress-management resources enhanced psychological safety and mitigated culture shock. These findings align with Wurtz (2018) and Sher et al. (2019), who highlight the importance of open leader–member relationships in expatriate well-being. Thus, HR's role in traditional expatriation extends beyond relocation logistics to facilitating host-country integration. Also the literature suggests that structured programs that connect expatriates and their families with local networks — such as community introduction initiatives — can reduce reliance on ad hoc community support and accelerate adjustment (Dimitrova et al., 2023; Harari et al., 2018).

Notably, cross-cultural training, although valued in theory, appeared only sporadically in the interviews and was again mainly mentioned by HR professionals. This reflects the broader literature's mixed evidence on participation and impact of cross-cultural training explained earlier (Jenkins & Mockaitis, 2010; Selmer, 2005). Nevertheless, targeted and context-specific training — for example, pairing expatriates with host-country mentors — can still strengthen social integration and accelerate adjustment (Florkowski & Fogel, 1999; Mahajan & Toh, 2014).

Virtual Assignments: Continuous Organizational Support

Virtual expatriates represent a more recent phenomenon and theoretical perspectives on their adjustment needs remain underdeveloped. Without host-country immersion, virtual expatriates depend on continuous organizational support structures rather than single, initial interventions. This support is not limited to technical or administrative issues but extends to the creation of inclusive work environments and clear HR policies and norms for digital collaboration. These findings reinforce and refine existing frameworks, such as those of Adamovic (2018). A supportive work environment emerged as the most frequently and intensely mentioned HR factor across all groups in virtual settings. This reflects that relational and procedural support — not location-based assistance — is central to adjustment at a distance. Virtual expatriates emphasized the value of inclusive team practices, accessible managers, and recognition systems that make them feel “seen” across geographical divides.

Notably, the findings show that these factors were most often discussed by female and experienced expatriates, suggesting that such relational stability gains importance with tenure.

A second critical moderator unique to virtual assignments is virtual work norms. Clear expectations around availability, communication tools and time-zone overlap were repeatedly cited as enabling fair and efficient collaboration. This finding echoes Adamovic's (2018) framework, which stresses the need for transparent rules and shared behavioral standards in GVTs. Establishing and enforcing such norms reduces ambiguity, fosters trust, and ensures that collaboration feels equitable across locations (Lauring et al., 2022).

Compared to other factors, cross-cultural training and administrative or legal support played a minor role for virtual expatriates and were mentioned infrequently. However, this does not imply irrelevance. Rather, it underscores that, in virtual settings, front-loaded preparation is replaced by process-oriented HR mechanisms that continually reinforce collaboration and cultural awareness. In short, HR's role shifts from preparing employees for mobility to sustaining engagement without it.

Notably, most HR support themes were voiced predominantly by HR professionals. Thus, many of these mechanisms might be invisible to expatriates but shape their experiences indirectly. Additionally, the same HR factors function differently across contexts: a supportive work environment helps traditional expatriates integrate locally, but for virtual expatriates, it becomes the primary medium of connection. These findings clarify the moderating role of HR policies and strategies within the broader expatriate adjustment process. Thus, the conceptual models that follow make this moderating function explicit, mapping how HR practices interact with internal and external drivers to shape adjustment in both traditional and virtual expatriation.

5.4 Comparative Models of Expatriate Adjustment

After conducting an in-depth review of the literature and analyzing my own empirical findings, I was able to develop two distinct *expatriate adjustment models*: one for traditional assignments (see Figure 15) and one for virtual assignments (see Figure 16). These models build on Black et al.'s (1991) foundational framework of expatriate adjustment but adapt and extend it to reflect the differentiated realities of contemporary international work. Together, they provide a consolidated view of the internal and external drivers of adjustment, as well as the moderating role of HR policies and strategies.

Both models are structured in the same way to ensure comparability: On the left side, all influencing factors are shown. These are divided into internal drivers (i.e., individual factors such as personality traits, coping strategies and mindset) and external drivers (i.e., work factors such as job structure and

organizational culture, as well as non-work factors such as family support and host community integration). Internal drivers originate from the expatriate him- or herself, whereas external drivers stem from the organizational or private environment in which the expatriate operates. At the center of the model, HR Policies & Strategies are depicted. They function as moderators that shape and strengthen (or weaken) the relationship between influencing factors and the overall outcome. Their role is illustrated by a dashed arrow (--->), which shows the moderating influence of HR practices on the adjustment process. Thus, HR policies & strategies do not directly influence adjustment, but rather moderate the impact of the other factors on it. On the right side of the figures, the dependent variable — expatriate adjustment — is placed. The direct influence of the independent variables (internal and external drivers) on adjustment is illustrated by solid arrows (—>). To further increase clarity, the models also distinguish the nature of the influence, similar to Black et al.'s (1991) framework: facilitators of adjustment are marked with a + sign, barriers to adjustment are marked with a – sign and conditional factors, which can either support or hinder adjustment depending on the context, are marked with a ± sign. Furthermore, *italicized* factors indicate elements unique to the respective model. A legend is included in the bottom right corner of the figures, explaining all symbols.

Traditional Expatriate Adjustment Model

The *Traditional Expatriate Adjustment Model* presented in Figure 15 illustrates that adjustment is shaped by a balanced interplay of individual, work, non-work and HR-related factors.

Individual Drivers include *Personality Traits* (Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Emotional Stability), which consistently act as facilitators of adjustment, as well as *Coping Strategies* such as *Proactive Behavior*, *Communication Skills* and *Cultural Intelligence*. Importantly, *Personal Mindset* emerges as a conditional factor: while openness, patience and flexibility foster adjustment, a passive or misaligned mindset can significantly hinder it. *Work Factors* such as *Job Structure* and *Organizational Culture* also function conditionally, depending on the extent to which they provide clarity, stability and inclusivity. *Mentoring & Coworker Support* are identified as facilitators. *Non-Work Factors* play a central role in traditional expatriation, with *Family & Friends Support* and *Host Community Support* identified as strong facilitators, while *Cultural Differences* may act as barriers. *HR Policies & Strategies* operate as moderators, with *Pre-Assignment Support* (*Administrative & Legal Support*, *Logistical & Financial Support* and *Cross-Cultural Training*) and *On-Assignment Support* (*Supportive Work Environment*) strengthening the adjustment process.

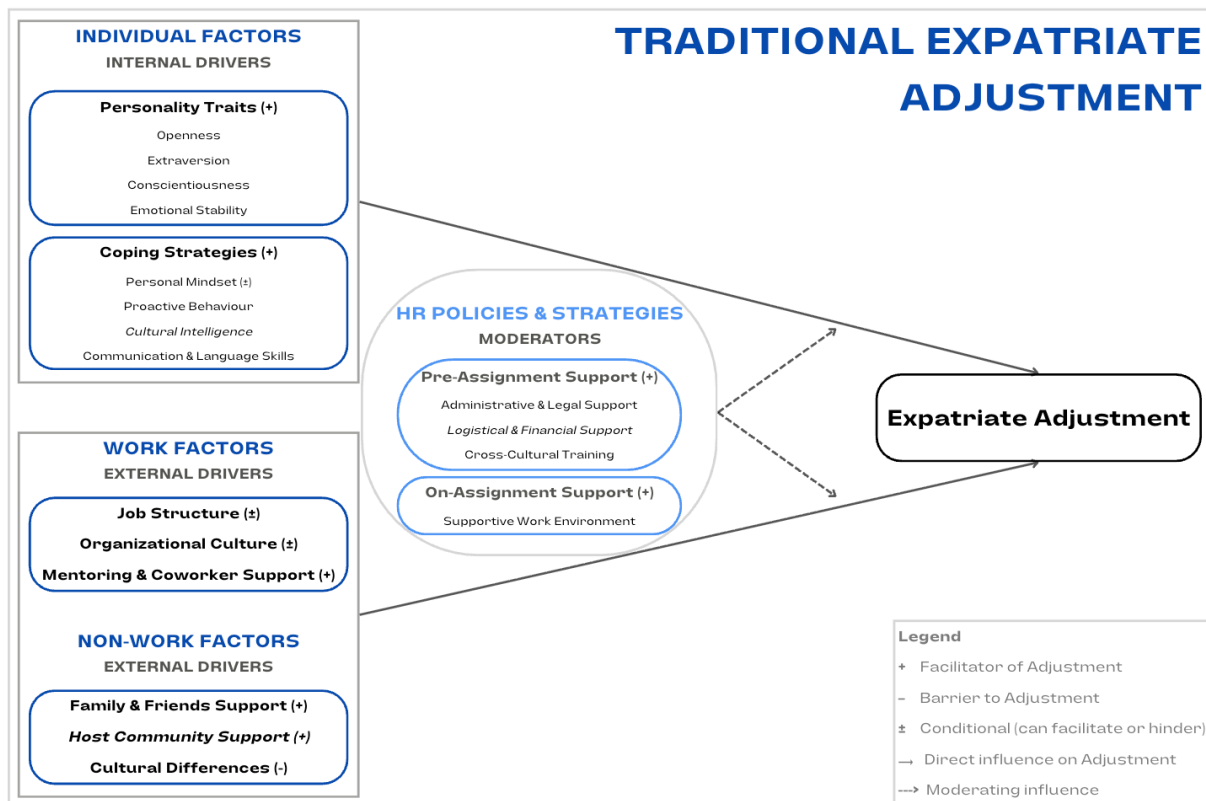


Figure 15: Traditional Expatriate Adjustment Model

Source: Created by the author

To clarify how the *Traditional Expatriate Adjustment Model* developed in this study refines and extends the seminal framework of Black et al. (1991), Table 18 provides a comparative overview of the main conceptual differences. While the overall structure of Black et al.'s (1991) model (see Table 1) remains foundational, the present framework reorganizes its dimensions, integrates newly identified factors from the empirical data and introduces moderating relationships through HR policies and strategies. The table summarizes which elements were retained from the original model, which were modified or reconceptualized and which represent new additions derived from the current study.

Table 18: Comparison of Black et al.'s Model and the Traditional Expatriate Adjustment Model

Source: Created by the author

Dimensions	Black et al. (1991)	Present Thesis (Traditional Model)	Main Conceptual Refinements
Assignment Phase	Focus on <i>Anticipatory Adjustment</i> and <i>In-Country Adjustment</i>	Focus on <i>On-Assignment Adjustment</i> (preceded by a redefined <i>Pre-Assignment Phase</i>)	Retains the two-phase logic but redefines terminology to reflect modern assignments and focus on the On-Assignment Phase
Core Categories	Individual, Job, Organization Culture, Nonwork	Individual, Work, Non-Work Factors	Merges Job and Organizational Culture into one category called <i>Work Factors</i> ; categorizes factors into internal (individual) and external (work and non-work) drivers for clearer analytical distinction

Dimensions	Black et al. (1991)	Present Thesis (Traditional Model)	Main Conceptual Refinements
Individual Factors	Self-Efficacy, Relation Skills, Perception Skills	Personality traits (Big Five), personal mindset, proactive behavior, communication skills, cultural intelligence	Expands psychological dimension by integrating personality traits; redefines perception skills within personal mindset; adds proactive behavior, communication skills and CQ
Work Factors	Job: Role Clarity, Role Discretion, Role Novelty, Role Conflict Organization Culture: Organization Culture Novelty, Social Support, Logistical Support	Job Structure, Organizational Culture, Mentoring & Coworker Support	Summarizes multiple job- related factors (role clarity, discretion, novelty, conflict) into the broader construct <i>Job Structure</i> ; adds Mentoring & Coworker Support as key facilitators; moves Logistical Support to HR dimension
Non-Work Factors	Culture Novelty, Family- Spouse Adjustment	Family & friends support, host community support, cultural differences	Retains the original family focus but expands it to include friends as part of the expatriate's social support network; distinguishes cultural differences as potential barriers
HR Policies & Strategies	Selection Mechanisms and Criteria (anticipatory adjustment)	Pre-Assignment Support, On- Assignment Support	Makes HR support an explicit moderating mechanism that strengthens or weakens the relationship between influencing factors and adjustment; distinguishes between pre-assignment and on-assignment HR support
Scope of Application	Traditional assignments only	Traditional and virtual assignments (separate models)	Expands theoretical scope to include new international work forms (virtual assignments)

Virtual Expatriate Adjustment Model

In contrast, the *Virtual Expatriate Adjustment Model* presented in Figure 16 captures the distinct dynamics of cross-border work without relocation.

As described in previous sections, *Work Factors* dominate the adjustment process in virtual assignments. *Organizational Culture* and *Job Structure* again function as conditional factors, but they are particularly important in virtual contexts where the absence of face-to-face contact amplifies their importance. *Mentoring & Coworker Support* remain key facilitators, while *Lack of Informal Interaction* is highlighted as a strong barrier. However, *Frequent Visits to Host Country* can act as a facilitator. *Individual Factors* continue to matter, especially *Personality Traits* and *Coping Strategies* such as *Proactive Behavior* and *Communication Skills*. Similar to the traditional model in Figure 15, *Personal Mindset* operates as a conditional factor, highlighting the importance of openness and resilience in navigating remote challenges. *Non-Work Factors* play a less prominent role in virtual assignments. While *Family & Friends Support* remain relevant, *Cultural Differences* and the absence of host

community integration opportunities reduce the influence of the non-work sphere. Finally, *HR Policies & Strategies* again act as moderators. In virtual assignments, their importance lies in providing *Pre-Assignment Support* through *Administrative & Legal Support*, and particularly *On-Assignment Support* such as clear *Virtual Work Norms* and a *Supportive Work Environment*.

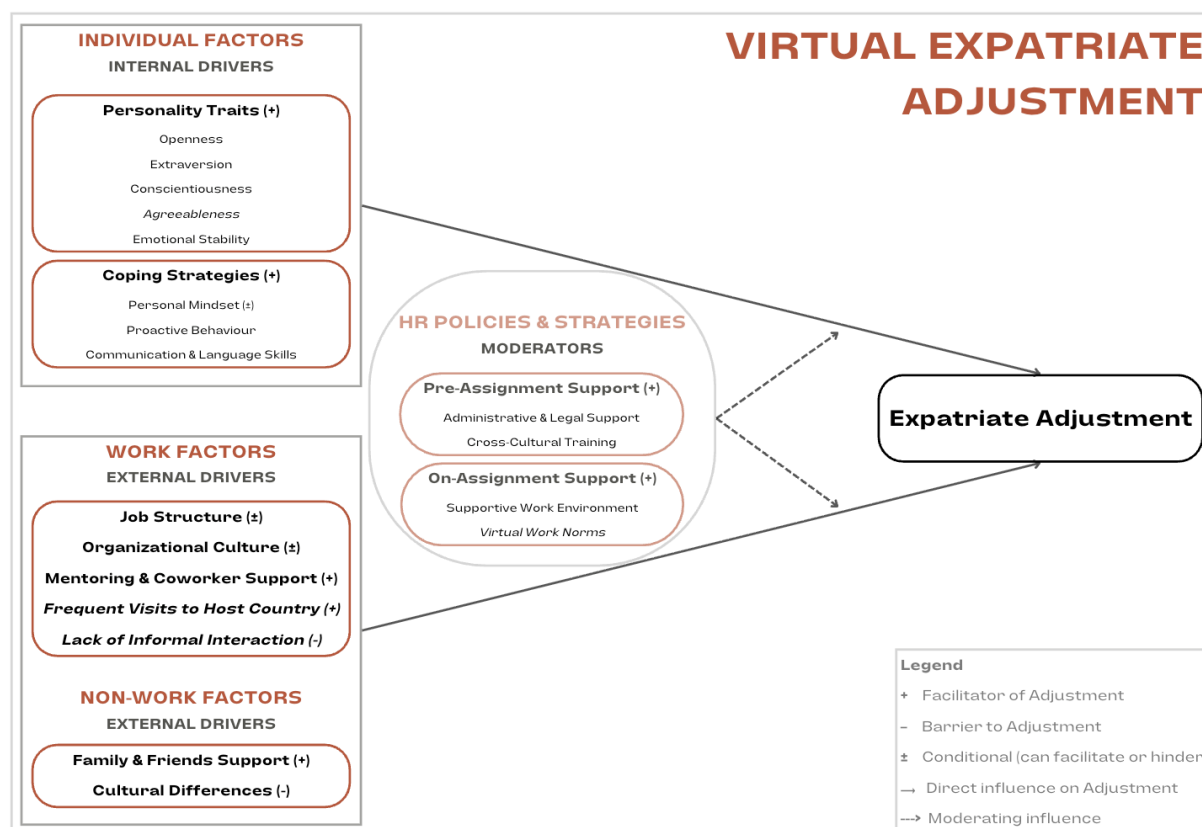


Figure 16: Virtual Expatriate Adjustment Model

Source: Created by the author

The italicized elements in Figure 15 and Figure 16 highlight factors that are unique to each model. In the Traditional Expatriate Adjustment Model, *Cultural Intelligence* (Individual Factor), *Host Community Support* (Non-Work Factor), and *Logistical & Financial Support* (HR Policy & Strategy) emerged as distinct drivers. Conversely, the Virtual Expatriate Adjustment Model introduced *Agreeableness* (Individual Factor), *Frequent Visits to the Host Country* and *Lack of Informal Interaction* (both Work Factors), and *Virtual Work Norms* (HR Policy & Strategy) as unique components. While most factors appear in both models, their roles and expressions differ depending on the assignment type. For instance, extraversion was interpreted differently across contexts. As interviewees noted, traditional expatriates viewed sociability and eagerness to meet people as naturally supporting adjustment (*"being communicative and sociable... open minded in terms of meeting people from any cultural background,"* TE3, Pos. 23). Whereas for virtual expatriates, extraversion was less about inherent

outgoingness and more about proactive outreach — the willingness to initiate virtual contact and maintain online relationships despite physical distance (*“proactively reaches out to people, checks in with them on a regular basis,”* HR1, Pos. 31). These nuances demonstrate that even overlapping factors acquire different meanings depending on the mode of international work. Rather than simple extensions of the same adjustment mechanisms, virtual and traditional expatriation represent distinct experiential processes, each shaped by the presence or absence of physical immersion, informal interaction and organizational embeddedness.

Theoretical Contributions

From a practical perspective, these models offer organizations a clear tool for identifying where and how to intervene. By distinguishing between internal and external drivers and highlighting conditional factors, they show which areas can be shaped directly through HR policies and which require individual-level support. Thus, the models serve not only as theoretical contributions but also as actionable frameworks to guide global mobility practices. Taken together, these contributions underscore that the proposed models not only build on but also extend Black et al.'s (1991) original framework, particularly by providing the first structured approach to virtual expatriate adjustment.

This thesis makes several other theoretical contributions to the expatriation and IHRM literature. It confirms established insights on the importance of openness, cross-cultural competence and host-country support for traditional expatriate adjustment, reinforcing the robustness of classic models such as Black et al.'s (1991). Furthermore, it extends these models by differentiating between internal and external drivers of adjustment, providing a more integrated understanding of how personal and contextual resources interact across assignment types. Also, the findings refine the understanding of virtual expatriate adjustment, identifying proactive behavior, communication competence and virtual work norms as distinctive mechanisms in the absence of physical relocation. Finally, the present thesis advances theory by conceptualizing HR policies and strategies as moderating mechanisms—not direct predictors—linking internal and external drivers to adjustment outcomes. This reconceptualization emphasizes the dynamic and assignment-contingent role of HR, establishing a foundation for future theorizing on global mobility in digital work environments.

5.5 Limitations of this Thesis and Future Outlook

As with any qualitative research, this thesis is subject to several limitations that must be acknowledged. Firstly, the small sample size of seven expatriates and three HR professionals restrict the generalizability of the findings. While the goal of the thesis was to provide in-depth insights rather than broad statistical representation, a larger, more diverse sample would have permitted a wider range of perspectives. Secondly, due to limited resources, direct HR–expatriate pairings within the same organization could not be included in the sample. Consequently, the interplay between HR policies and expatriate experiences could only be examined indirectly, which limits the ability to identify potential mismatches or alignments between organizational intentions and the lived experiences of expatriates. Thirdly, relying on self-reported data can introduce subjectivity and the retrospective reinterpretation of experiences. Finally, despite efforts to ensure rigor and transparency, methodological constraints inherent to qualitative interview research, such as limited comparability across cases and the researcher’s interpretive role, may have influenced the findings.

These limitations present opportunities for future research. A first step would be to extend to a larger and more diverse sample, including expatriates across industries, countries and career stages. Particularly, a stronger representation of experienced virtual assignees would provide more robust insights into this emerging form of international mobility. Future studies should also consider including currently assigned expatriates, as real-time experiences may differ from retrospective reports. Another promising direction is to examine the HR–expatriate relationship more directly by collecting paired data from expatriates and their HR representatives within the same organization. Such an approach could reveal alignment gaps or best practices in supporting adjustment. Additionally, group discussions or focus groups bringing together both expatriates and HR professionals could generate richer, more dialogical insights into adjustment dynamics and support strategies. Following these guidelines will enable future research to deepen the understanding of expatriate adjustment and further refine conceptual models for traditional and virtual assignments.

6 Conclusion

The present thesis aims to examine how expatriates adjust to international assignments across two distinct formats: traditional in-person assignments and emerging virtual assignments. Guided by two central research questions—first, identifying the key factors that influence successful expatriate adjustment and how they differ between assignment types, and second, determining how HR strategies and policies can best address these distinct adjustment needs—the thesis contributes to both theory and practice in global mobility management. To achieve these aims, a primarily qualitative research design was adopted. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with HR professionals as well as traditional and virtual expatriates across multinational organizations, supplemented by a pre-interview questionnaire that included a personality self-assessment. This approach ensured that both individual experiences and organizational practices were captured. The findings address the three primary goals of this thesis. First, key factors influencing successful adjustment in virtual assignments were identified. Second, by comparing virtual and traditional expatriates, the thesis demonstrated that while traditional adjustment is distributed more evenly across individual, work and non-work domains, virtual adjustment relies heavily on work-related factors as a substitute for local integration. Third, and most critically, the thesis makes an original contribution by developing two structured and comparable adjustment models: one for traditional expatriates, refined from Black et al.'s (1991) framework, and one for virtual expatriates. The models conceptualize adjustment as the outcome of internal drivers (individual factors) and external drivers (work and non-work factors), moderated by HR policies and strategies. Facilitators, barriers and conditional factors were distinguished, with the latter emerging as context-dependent influences. By bridging theory and practice, the thesis makes two key contributions to the literature. On the one hand, it reconfirms and advances established knowledge on traditional expatriate adjustment by offering an updated and more differentiated model. On the other hand, it provides the first structured and directly comparable model of virtual expatriate adjustment, thereby extending Black et al.'s (1991) influential framework into new mobility contexts and enabling systematic cross-assignment comparison for the first time. In doing so, this thesis not only connects theory with practice but also bridges tradition with innovation and physical with virtual global work—laying the groundwork for a deeper understanding of how expatriates can thrive in an increasingly digital international environment.

References

- Adamovic, M. (2018). An employee-focused human resource management perspective for the management of global virtual teams. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 29(14), 2159–2187. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2017.1323227>
- Adamovic, M., Gahan, P., Olsen, J., Gulyas, A., Shallcross, D., & Mendoza, A. (2022). Exploring the adoption of virtual work: The role of virtual work self-efficacy and virtual work climate. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 33(17), 3492–3525. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2021.1913623>
- Alexandra, V. (2023). Optimizing cultural intelligence development by considering different types of change. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 34(12), 2404–2428. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2022.2081060>
- Alfes, K., Avgoustaki, A., Beauregard, T. A., Cañibano, A., & Muratbekova-Touron, M. (2022). New ways of working and the implications for employees: A systematic framework and suggestions for future research. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 33(22), 4361–4385. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2022.2149151>
- Allen, Eby, L. T., & Lentz, E. (2006). THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FORMAL MENTORING PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS AND PERCEIVED PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS. *Personnel Psychology*, 59(1), 125–153. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.2006.00747.x>
- Allen, Golden, & Shockley. (2015). How Effective Is Telecommuting? Assessing the Status of Our Scientific Findings. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 16(2), 40–68. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1529100615593273>
- Allen, Shore, L. M., & Griffeth, R. W. (2003). The Role of Perceived Organizational Support and Supportive Human Resource Practices in the Turnover Process. *Journal of Management*, 29(1), 99–118. <https://doi.org/10.1177/014920630302900107>
- Ang, S., Van Dyne, L., Koh, C., Ng, K. Y., Templer, K. J., Tay, C., & Chandrasekar, N. A. (2007). Cultural Intelligence: Its Measurement and Effects on Cultural Judgment and Decision Making, *Cultural*

- Adaptation and Task Performance. *Management and Organization Review*, 3(3), 335–371.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1740-8784.2007.00082.x>
- Asatiani, A., & Penttinen, E. (2019). Constructing continuities in virtual work environments: A multiple case study of two firms with differing degrees of virtuality. *Information Systems Journal*, 29(2), 484–513. <https://doi.org/10.1111/isj.12217>
- Ashford, S. J., & Black, J. S. (1996). Proactivity during organizational entry: The role of desire for control. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 81(2), 199–214. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.81.2.199>
- Aycan, Z. (1997). Expatriate adjustment as a multifaceted phenomenon: Individual and organizational level predictors. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 8(4), 434–456.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/095851997341540>
- Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2007). The Job Demands-Resources model: State of the art. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 22(3), 309–328. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02683940710733115>
- Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2014). Job Demands–Resources Theory. In C. L. Cooper (Ed.), *Wellbeing* (1st ed., pp. 1–28). Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118539415.wbwell019>
- Berry, J. W. (1997). Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation. *Applied Psychology*, 46(1), 5–34.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.1997.tb01087.x>
- Bhaskar-Shrinivas, P., Harrison, D. A., Shaffer, M. A., & Luk, D. M. (2005). Input-Based and Time-Based Models of International Adjustment: Meta-Analytic Evidence and Theoretical Extensions. *Academy of Management Journal*, 48(2), 257–281. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2005.16928400>
- Bjørnstad, A., & Lichacz, F. (2013). Organizational flexibility from a network organizational perspective: A study of central predictors and moderating factors in military contexts. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 34(8), 763–783. <https://doi.org/10.1108/LODJ-02-2012-0021>
- Black, J. S., & Gregersen, H. B. (1991). Antecedents to Cross-Cultural Adjustment for Expatriates in Pacific Rim Assignments. *Human Relations*, 44(5), 497–515.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/001872679104400505>

Black, J. S., Mendenhall, M., & Oddou, G. (1991). Toward a comprehensive model of international adjustment: An integration of multiple theoretical perspectives. *Academy of Management Review*, 16(2), 291–317.

Breuer, C., Hüffmeier, J., & Hertel, G. (2016). Does trust matter more in virtual teams? A meta-analysis of trust and team effectiveness considering virtuality and documentation as moderators. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 101(8), 1151.

Bücker, J., Poutsma, E., & Monster, H. (2016). How and why does expatriation management influence expatriates' employability? *Journal of Global Mobility: The Home of Expatriate Management Research*, 4(4), 432–452.

Bücker, J., Poutsma, E., Schouteten, R., & Nies, C. (2020). The development of HR support for alternative international assignments. From liminal position to institutional support for short-term assignments, international business travel and virtual assignments. *Journal of Global Mobility: The Home of Expatriate Management Research*, 8(2), 249–270. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JGM-02-2020-0011>

Bülow, A. M., Lee, J. Y. H., & Panteli, N. (2019). Distant Relations: The Affordances of Email in Interorganizational Conflict. *International Journal of Business Communication*, 56(3), 393–413. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2329488416633847>

Burmeister, A., & Deller, J. (2016). A practical perspective on repatriate knowledge transfer: The influence of organizational support practices. *Journal of Global Mobility*, 4(1), 68–87. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JGM-09-2015-0041>

Butler, C. L., Zander, L., Mockaitis, A., & Sutton, C. (2012). The Global Leader as Boundary Spanner, Bridge Maker, and Blender. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, 5(2), 240–243. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1754-9434.2012.01439.x>

Caldwell, H., Donnelly, R., & Yang, H. (2024). Reviewing and revising Black et al's adjustment model(s). *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 35(5), 932–963. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2023.2297827>

- Caligiuri, P., & Bonache, J. (2016). Evolving and enduring challenges in global mobility. *Journal of World Business*, 51(1), 127–141. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jwb.2015.10.001>
- Canhilal, S. K., Canboy, B., & Bakici, T. (2022). Social support for expatriates through virtual platforms: Exploring the role of online and offline participation. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 33(5), 1005–1036. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2020.1752283>
- Cao, J., Galinsky, A. D., & Maddux, W. W. (2014). Does Travel Broaden the Mind? Breadth of Foreign Experiences Increases Generalized Trust. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 5(5), 517–525. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550613514456>
- Caplan, R. D. (1987). Person-environment fit theory and organizations: Commensurate dimensions, time perspectives, and mechanisms. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 31(3), 248–267. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0001-8791\(87\)90042-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/0001-8791(87)90042-X)
- Carte, T. A., Chidambaram, L., & Becker, A. (2006). Emergent Leadership in Self-Managed Virtual Teams: A Longitudinal Study of Concentrated and Shared Leadership Behaviors. *Group Decision and Negotiation*, 15(4), 323–343. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10726-006-9045-7>
- Cerdin, J., & Pargneux, M. L. (2009). Career and international assignment fit: Toward an integrative model of success. *Human Resource Management*, 48(1), 5–25. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.20264>
- Charlier, S. D., Stewart, G. L., Greco, L. M., & Reeves, C. J. (2016). Emergent leadership in virtual teams: A multilevel investigation of individual communication and team dispersion antecedents. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 27(5), 745–764. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2016.05.002>
- Chen. (2015). CQ at work and the impact of intercultural training: An empirical test among foreign laborers. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 47, 101–112. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2015.03.029>
- Chen, H.-F. (2010). The relationships of organizational justice, social exchange, psychological contract, and expatriate adjustment: An example of Taiwanese business expatriates. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 21(7), 1090–1107. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585191003783520>

- Chew, E. Y. T., Ghurburn, A., Terspstra-Tong, J. L. Y., & Perera, H. K. (2021). Multiple intelligence and expatriate effectiveness: The mediating roles of cross-cultural adjustment. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 32(13), 2856–2888. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2019.1616591>
- Chiaburu, D. S., & Harrison, D. A. (2008). Do peers make the place? Conceptual synthesis and meta-analysis of coworker effects on perceptions, attitudes, OCBs, and performance. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 93(5), 1082–1103. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.93.5.1082>
- Clark, L. A., Karau, S. J., & Michalisin, M. D. (2012). Telecommuting attitudes and the ‘big five’ personality dimensions. *Journal of Management Policy and Practice*, 13(3), 31–46.
- Claus, L., Maletz, S., Casoinic, D., & Pierson, K. (2015). Social capital and cultural adjustment of international assignees in NGOs: Do support networks really matter? *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 26(20), 2523–2542. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2014.1003083>
- Colazo, J., & Fang, Y. (2009). Impact of license choice on Open Source Software development activity. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 60(5), 997–1011. <https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.21039>
- Colbert, A., Yee, N., & George, G. (2016). The Digital Workforce and the Workplace of the Future. *Academy of Management Journal*, 59(3), 731–739. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2016.4003>
- Collins, N., Chou, Y.-M., Warner, M., & Rowley, C. (2017). Human factors in East Asian virtual teamwork: A comparative study of Indonesia, Taiwan and Vietnam. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 28(10), 1475–1498. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2015.1089064>
- Cooke, F. L., Dickmann, M., & Parry, E. (2021). IJHRM after 30 years: Taking stock in times of COVID-19 and looking towards the future of HR research. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 32(1), 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2020.1833070>
- Cooper, Russell, M., Skinner, J. B., Frone, M. R., & Mudar, P. (1992). Stress and alcohol use: Moderating effects of gender, coping, and alcohol expectancies. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 101(1), 139.
- Dabic, M., González-Loureiro, M., & Harvey, M. (2015). Evolving research on expatriates: What is ‘known’ after four decades (1970–2012). *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 26(3), 316–337. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2013.845238>

- Davies, S., Kraeh, A., & Froese, F. (2015). Burden or support? The influence of partner nationality on expatriate cross-cultural adjustment. *Journal of Global Mobility*, 3(2), 169–182. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JGM-06-2014-0029>
- Demerouti, E., Bakker, A. B., Nachreiner, F., & Schaufeli, W. B. (2001). The job demands-resources model of burnout. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86(3), 499–512. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.86.3.499>
- Dickmann, M., & Müller-Camen, M. (2006). A typology of international human resource management strategies and processes. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 17(4), 580–601. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585190600581337>
- Dimitrova, M., Kammeyer-Mueller, J., Shaffer, M. A., & Gruber, M. (2023). Escaping the rut: Bridging research on expatriate and organizational newcomer adjustment. *Journal of World Business*, 58(6), 101486. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jwb.2023.101486>
- Donnelly, R., & Johns, J. (2021). Recontextualising remote working and its HRM in the digital economy: An integrated framework for theory and practice. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 32(1), 84–105. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2020.1737834>
- Earley, P. C., & Ang, S. (2007). *Cultural intelligence: Individual interactions across cultures* (Nachdr.). Stanford University Press.
- Earley, P. C., Ang, S., & Tan, J. S. (2010). *CQ: Developing cultural intelligence at work* (Nachdr.). Stanford Business Books.
- Engle, R. L., & Crowne, K. A. (2014). The impact of international experience on cultural intelligence: An application of contact theory in a structured short-term programme. *Human Resource Development International*, 17(1), 30–46. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13678868.2013.856206>
- Erez, M., Lisak, A., Harush, R., Glikson, E., Nouri, R., & Shokef, E. (2013). Going Global: Developing Management Students' Cultural Intelligence and Global Identity in Culturally Diverse Virtual Teams. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 12(3), 330–355. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amle.2012.0200>

- Espinosa, J. A., & Carmel, E. (2003). The impact of time separation on coordination in global software teams: A conceptual foundation. *Software Process: Improvement and Practice*, 8(4), 249–266. <https://doi.org/10.1002/spip.185>
- Faeth, P. C., & Kittler, M. G. (2017). How do you fear? Examining expatriates' perception of danger and its consequences. *Journal of Global Mobility: The Home of Expatriate Management Research*, 5(4), 391–417. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JGM-11-2016-0063>
- Feitosa, J., Kreutzer, C., Kramperth, A., S. Kramer, W., & Salas, E. (2014). Expatriate adjustment: Considerations for selection and training. *Journal of Global Mobility*, 2(2), 134–159. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JGM-06-2013-0042>
- Feldman, D. C. (1976). *A contingency theory of socialization*. Yale University. <https://search.proquest.com/openview/3717b4bc70abcef438df73264756a084/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>
- Feldman, D. C., & Bolino, M. C. (1999). The impact of on-site mentoring on expatriate socialization: A structural equation modelling approach. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 10(1), 54–71. <https://doi.org/10.1080/095851999340639>
- Feldman, D. C., & Thomas, D. C. (1992). Career Management Issues Facing Expatriates. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 23(2), 271–293. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.jibs.8490268>
- Ferris, G. R., Treadway, D. C., Perrewé, P. L., Brouer, R. L., Douglas, C., & Lux, S. (2007). Political Skill in Organizations. *Journal of Management*, 33(3), 290–320. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206307300813>
- Fisher, C. D. (1986). Organizational socialization: An integrative review. *Res Pers Hum Res Manag*, 4, 101–145.
- Florkowski, G. W., & Fogel, D. S. (1999). Expatriate adjustment and commitment: The role of host-unit treatment. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 10(5), 783–807. <https://doi.org/10.1080/095851999340152>
- French, Rodgers, & Cobb. (1974). Adjustment as person-environment fit. In *Coping and Adaptation* (pp. 316–333). Basic Books.

- Friedman, P.-A., Dyke, L. S., & Murphy, S. A. (2009). Expatriate adjustment from the inside out: An autoethnographic account. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 20(2), 252–268. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585190802670524>
- Fuchs, A., & Primecz, H. (2025). From expatriates to homecoming heroes – balancing organizational interests and support for a facilitated repatriation. *Journal of Global Mobility*, 13(2), 179–197. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JGM-09-2024-0097>
- Glatzer, W. (1991). Quality of life in advanced industrialized countries: The case of West Germany. *Subjective Well-Being: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*. Oxford: Pergamon, 261–279.
- Goldberg, L. R. (1993). The structure of phenotypic personality traits. *American Psychologist*, 48(1), 26.
- Granovetter, M. S. (1973). The Strength of Weak Ties. *American Journal of Sociology*, 78(6), 1360–1380. <https://doi.org/10.1086/225469>
- Guðmundsdóttir, S. (2015). Nordic expatriates in the US: The relationship between cultural intelligence and adjustment. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 47, 175–186. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2015.05.001>
- Guzzo, R. A. (1996). The expatriate employee. *Journal of Organizational Behavior (1986-1998)*, 123.
- Guzzo, R. A., Noonan, K. A., & Elron, E. (1994). Expatriate managers and the psychological contract. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 79(4), 617.
- Hahn, M., & Semrau, T. (2023). Virtual interaction and failure learning—The crucial role of team LMX composition. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 34(15), 2991–3022. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2022.2151846>
- Hall, P. H., & Gudykunst, W. B. (1989). The relationship of perceived ethnocentrism in corporate cultures to the selection, training, and success of international employees. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 13(2), 183–201.
- Harari, M. B., Reaves, A. C., Beane, D. A., Laginess, A. J., & Viswesvaran, C. (2018). Personality and expatriate adjustment: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 91(3), 486–517. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.12215>

- Harrison, D. A., & Shaffer, M. A. (2005). Mapping the criterion space for expatriate success: Task- and relationship-based performance, effort and adaptation. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 16(8), 1454–1474. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585190500220648>
- Harvey, M. G., & Richey, R. G. (2001). Global supply chain management. *Journal of International Management*, 7(2), 105–128. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1075-4253\(01\)00040-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1075-4253(01)00040-0)
- Harzing. (1995). The persistent myth of high expatriate failure rates. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 6(2), 457–474. <https://doi.org/10.1080/095851995000000028>
- Harzing. (2001). Of bears, bumble-bees, and spiders: The role of expatriates in controlling foreign subsidiaries. *Journal of World Business*, 36(4), 366–379.
- Harzing, & Van Ruysseveldt, J. (2004). *International human resource management* (Second ed). Sage Publications.
- Haslberger, A., Brewster, C., & Hippler, T. (2013). The Dimensions of Expatriate Adjustment. *Human Resource Management*, 52(3), 333–351. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.21531>
- Henry, J. E., & Hartzler, M. (1998). Tools for virtual teams: A team fitness companion. *The Journal for Healthcare Quality (JHQ)*, 20(5), 38.
- Hesselbarth, Y., Alfes, K., & Festing, M. (2024). Understanding technology-driven work arrangements from a complexity perspective: A systematic literature review and an agenda for future research. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 1–43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2023.2298244>
- Hippler, T., Brewster, C., & Haslberger, A. (2015). The elephant in the room: The role of time in expatriate adjustment. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 26(15), 1920–1935. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2015.1041762>
- Hippler, T., Caligiuri, P., & Johnson, J. (2014). Revisiting the Construct of Expatriate Adjustment: Implications for Theory and Measurement. *International Studies of Management & Organization*, 44(3), 8–24. <https://doi.org/10.2753/IMO0020-8825440301>

- Hippler, T., Caligiuri, P. M., Johnson, J. E., & Baytalskaya, N. (2014). The development and validation of a theory-based expatriate adjustment scale. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 25(14), 1938–1959. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2013.870286>
- Hitt, M. A., Ireland, R. D., Camp, S. M., & Sexton, D. L. (2001). Strategic entrepreneurship: Entrepreneurial strategies for wealth creation. *Strategic Management Journal*, 22(6–7), 479–491. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.196>
- Hofstede, G. (1984). *Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values* (Vol. 5). sage. [https://books.google.com/books?hl=de&lr=&id=Cayp_Um4O9gC&oi=fnd&pg=PA13&dq=Hofstede,+G.+\(1980\)+Culture%E2%80%99s+Consequences:+International+Differences+in+Work-Related+Values.+Beverly+Hills,+CA:+Sage.&ots=V6DzGzOOM3&sig=Itah7rjyATaYexALxMuzzds76NM](https://books.google.com/books?hl=de&lr=&id=Cayp_Um4O9gC&oi=fnd&pg=PA13&dq=Hofstede,+G.+(1980)+Culture%E2%80%99s+Consequences:+International+Differences+in+Work-Related+Values.+Beverly+Hills,+CA:+Sage.&ots=V6DzGzOOM3&sig=Itah7rjyATaYexALxMuzzds76NM)
- Holtbrügge, D., & Schillo, K. (2008). Intercultural training requirements for virtual assignments: Results of an explorative empirical study. *Human Resource Development International*, 11(3), 271–286. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13678860802102575>
- Howe-Walsh, L., & Torka, N. (2017). Repatriation and (perceived) organisational support (POS): The role of and interaction between repatriation supporters. *Journal of Global Mobility: The Home of Expatriate Management Research*, 5(1), 60–77. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JGM-09-2016-0040>
- Huang, T.-J., Chi, S.-C., & Lawler, J. J. (2005). The relationship between expatriates' personality traits and their adjustment to international assignments. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 16(9), 1656–1670. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585190500239325>
- International Labour Organization (ILO). (2020). *COVID-19: Guidance for labour statistics data collection: Defining and measuring remote work, telework, work at home and home-based work*. <https://www.ilo.org/publications/defining-and-measuring-remote-work-telework-work-home-and-home-based-work>
- Jarvenpaa, S. L., & Leidner, D. E. (1999). Communication and Trust in Global Virtual Teams. *Organization Science*, 10(6), 791–815. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.10.6.791>

- Jenkins, E. M., & Mockaitis, A. I. (2010). You're from where? The influence of distance factors on New Zealand expatriates' cross-cultural adjustment. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 21(15), 2694–2715. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2010.528653>
- Jimenez, A., Boehe, D. M., Taras, V., & Caprar, D. V. (2017). Working Across Boundaries: Current and Future Perspectives on Global Virtual Teams. *Journal of International Management*, 23(4), 341–349. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intman.2017.05.001>
- Johnson. (2020). Developing qualitative propositions in sales research: Existing approaches and a new multiphasic technique. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 40(1), 19–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08853134.2019.1604143>
- Johnson, Kristof-brown, A. L., Van Vianen, A. E. M., De Pater, I. E., & Klein, M. R. (2003). Expatriate Social Ties: Personality Antecedents and Consequences for Adjustment. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment*, 11(4), 277–288. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0965-075X.2003.00251.x>
- Jones, I., Faulconbridge, J., Marsden, G., & Anable, J. (2018). Demanding Business Travel: The Evolution of the Timespaces of Business Practice. In A. Hui, R. Day, & G. Walker (Eds.), *Demanding Energy: Space, Time and Change* (pp. 257–277). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-61991-0_12
- Jooss, S., McDonnell, A., & Conroy, K. (2021). Flexible global working arrangements: An integrative review and future research agenda. *Human Resource Management Review*, 31(4), 100780. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2020.100780>
- Karin Andreassi, J., Lawter, L., Brockerhoff, M., & J. Rutigliano, P. (2014). Cultural impact of human resource practices on job satisfaction: A global study across 48 countries. *Cross Cultural Management*, 21(1), 55–77.
- Kaufman-Scarborough, C. (2017). Monochronic and Polychronic Time. In Y. Y. Kim (Ed.), *The International Encyclopedia of Intercultural Communication* (1st ed., pp. 1–5). Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118783665.ieicc0110>

Kniffin, K. M., Narayanan, J., Anseel, F., Antonakis, J., Ashford, S. P., Bakker, A. B., Bamberger, P., Bapuji, H., Bhawe, D. P., & Choi, V. K. (2021). COVID-19 and the workplace: Implications, issues, and insights for future research and action. *American Psychologist*, 76(1), 63.

Koveshnikov, A., & Wechtler, H. (2017). Do You Have What It Takes? Political Skills and Adjustment of Self-initiated Expatriates. *Academy of Management Proceedings*, 2017(1), 16222. <https://doi.org/10.5465/AMBPP.2017.16222abstract>

KPMG International. (2023). *Global Assignment Policies and Practices Survey*. <https://kpmg.com/xx/en/our-insights/operations/global-assignment-policies-and-practices-survey-report.html>

Kraimer, M. L., & Wayne, S. J. (2004). An examination of perceived organizational support as a multidimensional construct in the context of an expatriate assignment. *Journal of Management*, 30(2), 209–237.

Lauring, J., Drogendijk, R., & Kubovcikova, A. (2022). The role of context in overcoming distance-related problems in global virtual teams: An organizational discontinuity theory perspective. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 33(21), 4251–4283. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2021.1960584>

Lauring, J., Jonasson, C., & Stoermer, S. (2024). Virtual expatriate assignments and host country national support: The role of higher-level construals in social categorization processes. *International Business Review*, 33(6), 102341. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2024.102341>

Lee, & Ashforth, B. E. (1996). A meta-analytic examination of the correlates of the three dimensions of job burnout. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 81(2), 123.

Lee, H.-J., Yoshikawa, K., & Harzing, A.-W. (2022). Cultures and Institutions: Dispositional and contextual explanations for country-of-origin effects in MNC ‘ethnocentric’ staffing practices. *Organization Studies*, 43(4), 497–519. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01708406211006247>

Leiba-O’Sullivan, S. (1999). The Distinction between Stable and Dynamic Cross-cultural Competencies: Implications for Expatriate Trainability. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 30(4), 709–725. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.jibs.8490835>

- Lenartowicz, T., Johnson, J. P., & Konopaske, R. (2014). The application of learning theories to improve cross-cultural training programs in MNCs. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 25(12), 1697–1719. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2013.860384>
- Liden, R. C., Erdogan, B., Wayne, S. J., & Sparrowe, R. T. (2006). Leader-member exchange, differentiation, and task interdependence: Implications for individual and group performance. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 27(6), 723–746. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.409>
- Lii, S.-Y., & Wong, S.-Y. (2008). The antecedents of overseas adjustment and commitment of expatriates. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 19(2), 296–313. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585190701799861>
- Liu, T., Shen, Y. X., Zhao, S., & Sekiguchi, T. (2023). Approaching or avoiding? Mechanisms of host-country language proficiency in affecting virtual work adaptivity during COVID-19. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 34(21), 4046–4073. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2023.2169075>
- Lu, J. G., Quoidbach, J., Gino, F., Chakroff, A., Maddux, W. W., & Galinsky, A. D. (2017). The dark side of going abroad: How broad foreign experiences increase immoral behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 112(1), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspa0000068>
- Luse, A., McElroy, J. C., Townsend, A. M., & DeMarie, S. (2013). Personality and cognitive style as predictors of preference for working in virtual teams. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 29(4), 1825–1832. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2013.02.007>
- Maak, T., & Pless, N. M. (2006). Responsible Leadership in a Stakeholder Society – A Relational Perspective. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 66(1), 99–115. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-006-9047-z>
- Mahajan, A., & Toh, S. M. (2014). Facilitating expatriate adjustment: The role of advice-seeking from host country nationals. *Journal of World Business*, 49(4), 476–487. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jwb.2013.10.003>
- Makarius, E. E., & Larson, B. Z. (2017). Changing the Perspective of Virtual Work: Building Virtual Intelligence at the Individual Level. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 31(2), 159–178. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amp.2014.0120>

- Mäkelä, L., & Kinnunen, U. (2018). International business travelers' psychological well-being: The role of supportive HR practices. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 29(7), 1285–1306. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2016.1194872>
- Marques, T. M. G., & Miska, C. (2021). Responsible Leadership. In A. Farazmand (Ed.), *Global Encyclopedia of Public Administration, Public Policy, and Governance* (pp. 1–4). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-31816-5_4125-1
- Marques, T. M. G., Miska, C., Crespo, C. F., & Branco, M. M. (2023). Responsible leadership during international assignments: A novel approach toward expatriation success. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 34(2), 253–285. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2021.1964571>
- Martin, R., Thomas, G., Legood, A., & Dello Russo, S. (2018). Leader–member exchange (LMX) differentiation and work outcomes: Conceptual clarification and critical review. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 39(2), 151–168. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2202>
- Maruping, L. M., & Agarwal, R. (2004). Managing team interpersonal processes through technology: A task-technology fit perspective. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 89(6), 975–990. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.89.6.975>
- Maslach, C., & Jackson, S. E. (1984). Burnout in organizational settings. *Applied Social Psychology Annual*. <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1985-24012-001>
- McCrae, R. R., Costa, Jr., P. T., & Martin, T. A. (2005). The NEO–PI–3: A More Readable Revised NEO Personality Inventory. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 84(3), 261–270. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327752jpa8403_05
- McNulty, Y., & Brewster, C. (2017). Theorizing the meaning(s) of 'expatriate': Establishing boundary conditions for business expatriates. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 28(1), 27–61. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2016.1243567>
- McNulty, Y., & Brewster, C. (2020). The changing context of expatriation and its impact on crosscultural management. *The SAGE Handbook of Contemporary Cross-Cultural Management*, 424–436.
- McPhail, R., Chan, X. W. (Carys), May, R., & Wilkinson, A. (2024). Post-COVID remote working and its impact on people, productivity, and the planet: An exploratory scoping review. *The International*

Journal of Human Resource Management, 35(1), 154–182.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2023.2221385>

McSweeney, B. (2002). Hofstede's Model of National Cultural Differences and their Consequences: A Triumph of Faith - a Failure of Analysis. *Human Relations*, 55(1), 89–118.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726702551004>

Mendenhall, M., & Oddou, G. (1985). The dimensions of expatriate acculturation: A review. *Academy of Management Review*, 10(1), 39–47.

Meyer, J. P., & Allen, N. J. (1991). A three-component conceptualization of organizational commitment.

Human Resource Management Review, 1(1), 61–89. [https://doi.org/10.1016/1053-4822\(91\)90011-Z](https://doi.org/10.1016/1053-4822(91)90011-Z)

Mezias, J. M., & Scandura, T. A. (2005). A needs-driven approach to expatriate adjustment and career development: A multiple mentoring perspective. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 36(5), 519–

538. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.jibs.8400159>

Morris, M. H., Davis, D. L., & Allen, J. W. (1994). Fostering Corporate Entrepreneurship: Cross-Cultural Comparisons of the Importance of Individualism Versus Collectivism. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 25(1), 65–89.

<https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.jibs.8490849>

Morrison, E. W. (1993). Longitudinal study of the effects of information seeking on newcomer socialization. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 78(2), 173.

Myers, K. K., & Sadaghiani, K. (2010). Millennials in the Workplace: A Communication Perspective on Millennials' Organizational Relationships and Performance. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 25(2),

225–238. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-010-9172-7>

Navas, M., García, M. C., Sánchez, J., Rojas, A. J., Pumares, P., & Fernández, J. S. (2005). Relative Acculturation Extended Model (RAEM): New contributions with regard to the study of acculturation.

International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 29(1), 21–37.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2005.04.001>

Neirotti, P., Raguseo, E., & Paolucci, E. (2017). Flexible work practices and the firm's need for external orientation: An empirical study of SMEs. *Journal of Enterprise Information Management*, 30(6), 922–

943. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEIM-04-2016-0090>

- Nurmi, N. (2011). Coping with coping strategies: How distributed teams and their members deal with the stress of distance, time zones and culture. *Stress and Health*, 27(2), 123–143. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smi.1327>
- Ozcelik, H., & Barsade, S. G. (2018). No Employee an Island: Workplace Loneliness and Job Performance. *Academy of Management Journal*, 61(6), 2343–2366. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2015.1066>
- Panteli, N., Yalabik, Z. Y., & Rapti, A. (2019). Fostering work engagement in geographically-dispersed and asynchronous virtual teams. *Information Technology & People*, 32(1), 2–17. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ITP-04-2017-0133>
- Parry, E., & Tyson, S. (2011). Desired goals and actual outcomes of e-HRM: E-HRM goals and outcomes. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 21(3), 335–354. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1748-8583.2010.00149.x>
- Paulus, P., & Muehlfeld, K. (2017). Host country language skills and expatriates' cross-cultural adjustment in the presence of fear of terror. *Journal of Global Mobility: The Home of Expatriate Management Research*, 5(4), 418–442. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JGM-11-2016-0062>
- Perlmutter, H. V. (1969). The tortuous evolution of the multinational corporation. In *International Business* (pp. 117–126). Routledge. <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781315199689-7/tortuous-evolution-multinational-corporation-howard-perlmutter>
- Petison, P., & Johri, L. (2008). Managing local employees: Expatriate roles in a subsidiary. *Management Decision*, 46(5), 743–760.
- Piekkari, R., Tietze, S., Angouri, J., Meyer, R., & Vaara, E. (2021). Can you Speak Covid-19? Languages and Social Inequality in Management Studies. *Journal of Management Studies*, 58(2), 587–591. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12657>
- PricewaterhouseCoopers. (2000). *Managing a Virtual World: International Non-standard Assignments, Policy and Practice*. PricewaterhouseCoopers Europe.

- Pritchard, R. D., Harrell, M. M., DiazGranados, D., & Guzman, M. J. (2008). The productivity measurement and enhancement system: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 93(3), 540–567. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.93.3.540>
- Rahim, A. (1983). A model for developing key expatriate executives. *Personnel Journal*. <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1983-26851-001>
- Ramalingam, S., & Mahalingam, A. (2011). Enabling conditions for the emergence and effective performance of technical and cultural boundary spanners in global virtual teams. *Engineering Project Organization Journal*, 1(2), 121–141. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21573727.2011.572964>
- Ren, H., Shaffer, M. A., Harrison, D. A., Fu, C., & Fodchuk, K. M. (2014). Reactive Adjustment or Proactive Embedding? Multistudy, Multiwave Evidence for Dual Pathways to Expatriate Retention. *Personnel Psychology*, 67(1), 203–239. <https://doi.org/10.1111/peps.12034>
- Richter, N. F., Martin, J., Hansen, S. V., Taras, V., & Alon, I. (2021). Motivational configurations of cultural intelligence, social integration, and performance in global virtual teams. *Journal of Business Research*, 129, 351–367. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.03.012>
- Rothbard, N. P., Phillips, K. W., & Dumas, T. L. (2005). Managing Multiple Roles: Work-Family Policies and Individuals' Desires for Segmentation. *Organization Science*, 16(3), 243–258. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1050.0124>
- Salovey, P., & Mayer, J. D. (1990). Emotional Intelligence. *Imagination, Cognition and Personality*, 9(3), 185–211. <https://doi.org/10.2190/DUGG-P24E-52WK-6CDG>
- Sarker, S., & Sahay, S. (2004). Implications of space and time for distributed work: An interpretive study of US–Norwegian systems development teams. *European Journal of Information Systems*, 13(1), 3–20. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.ejis.3000485>
- Schaufeli, W. B., & Bakker, A. B. (2004). Job demands, job resources, and their relationship with burnout and engagement: A multi-sample study. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 25(3), 293–315. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.248>

Searle, W., & Ward, C. (1990). The prediction of psychological and sociocultural adjustment during cross-cultural transitions. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 14(4), 449–464.

[https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767\(90\)90030-Z](https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767(90)90030-Z)

Seeber, I., Waizenegger, L., Seidel, S., Morana, S., Benbasat, I., & Lowry, P. B. (2020). Collaborating with technology-based autonomous agents: Issues and research opportunities. *Internet Research*, 30(1), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1108/INTR-12-2019-0503>

Selmer, J. (2002). Practice makes perfect? International experience and expatriate adjustment. *MIR: Management International Review*, 71–87.

Selmer, J. (2005). Cross-cultural training and expatriate adjustment in China: Western joint venture managers. *Personnel Review*, 34(1), 68–84. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00483480510571888>

Selmer, J. (2006). Language ability and adjustment: Western expatriates in China. *Thunderbird International Business Review*, 48(3), 347–368. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tie.20099>

Selmer, J., Dickmann, M., Froese, F. J., Luring, J., Reiche, B. S., & Shaffer, M. (2022). The potential of virtual global mobility: Implications for practice and future research. *Journal of Global Mobility: The Home of Expatriate Management Research*, 10(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JGM-07-2021-0074>

Selmer, J., & Fenner, Jr., C. R. (2009). Job factors and work outcomes of public sector expatriates. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 19(1), 75–90. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1748-8583.2008.00084.x>

Selmer, J., & Luring, J. (2015). Host country language ability and expatriate adjustment: The moderating effect of language difficulty. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 26(3), 401–420. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2011.561238>

28/10/2025 20:14:00Shaffer, M. A., Harrison, D. A., & Gilley, K. M. (1999). Dimensions, determinants, and differences in the expatriate adjustment process. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 30, 557–581.

Shaffer, M. A., Harrison, D. A., Gregersen, H., Black, J. S., & Ferzandi, L. A. (2006). You can take it with you: Individual differences and expatriate effectiveness. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 91(1), 109–125. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.91.1.109>

Shaffer, M. A., Kraimer, M. L., Chen, Y.-P., & Bolino, M. C. (2012). Choices, Challenges, and Career Consequences of Global Work Experiences: A Review and Future Agenda. *Journal of Management*, 38(4), 1282–1327. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206312441834>

Sher, P. J.-H., Zhuang, W.-L., Wang, M.-C., Peng, C.-J., & Lee, C.-H. (2019). Moderating effect of perceived organizational support on the relationship between leader–member exchange and expatriate voice in multinational banks. *Employee Relations: The International Journal*, 41(5), 898–913. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ER-08-2018-0211>

Sommerlad, A., Marston, L., Huntley, J., Livingston, G., Lewis, G., Steptoe, A., & Fancourt, D. (2022). Social relationships and depression during the COVID-19 lockdown: Longitudinal analysis of the COVID-19 Social Study. *Psychological Medicine*, 52(15), 3381–3390. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033291721000039>

Sparrow, P., Brewster, C., & Chung, C. (2016). *Globalizing human resource management*. Routledge.

Stahl, G. K., Maznevski, M. L., Voigt, A., & Jonsen, K. (2010). Unraveling the effects of cultural diversity in teams: A meta-analysis of research on multicultural work groups. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 41(4), 690–709. <https://doi.org/10.1057/jibs.2009.85>

Stoermer, S., Davies, S., & Froese, F. J. (2021). The influence of expatriate cultural intelligence on organizational embeddedness and knowledge sharing: The moderating effects of host country context. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 52(3), 432–453. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41267-020-00349-3>

Strauss, A. L. (1995). *Qualitative analysis for social scientists*. Cambridge university press.

Stroppa, C., & Spieß, E. (2010). Expatriates social networks: The role of company size. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 21(13), 2306–2322. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2010.516586>

Suche. (n.d.). Retrieved December 16, 2024, from <https://www.billa.at/suche/veganz>

Suutari, V., Brewster, C., Riusala, K., & Syrjäkäri, S. (2013). Managing non-standard international experience: Evidence from a Finnish company. *Journal of Global Mobility*, 1(2), 118–138. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JGM-10-2012-0014>

Tadmor, C. T., Galinsky, A. D., & Maddux, W. W. (2012). Getting the most out of living abroad: Biculturalism and integrative complexity as key drivers of creative and professional success. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 103(3), 520.

Takeuchi, R., Tesluk, P. E., Yun, S., & Lepak, D. P. (2005). An Integrative View of International Experience. *Academy of Management Journal*, 48(1), 85–100.
<https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2005.15993143>

Takeuchi, R., Yun, S., & Tesluk, P. E. (2002). An examination of crossover and spillover effects of spousal and expatriate cross-cultural adjustment on expatriate outcomes. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 87(4), 655.

Tarique, I., Schuler, R., & Gong, Y. (2006). A model of multinational enterprise subsidiary staffing composition. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 17(2), 207–224.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09585190500404424>

Taylor, S., Beechler, S., & Napier, N. (1996). Toward an Integrative Model of Strategic International Human Resource Management. *The Academy of Management Review*, 21(4), 959.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/259160>

Te'eni, D. (2001). Review: A Cognitive-Affective Model of Organizational Communication for Designing IT. *MIS Quarterly*, 25(2), 251. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3250931>

Thomas, D. C. (2006). Domain and Development of Cultural Intelligence: The Importance of Mindfulness. *Group & Organization Management*, 31(1), 78–99.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1059601105275266>

Tims, M., Derks, D., & Bakker, A. B. (2016). Job crafting and its relationships with person–job fit and meaningfulness: A three-wave study. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 92, 44–53.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2015.11.007>

Toh, S. M., & DeNisi, A. S. (2007). Host country nationals as socializing agents: A social identity approach. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 28(3), 281–301. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.421>

Triandis, H. C. (2004). The many dimensions of culture. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 18(1), 88–93. <https://doi.org/10.5465/ame.2004.12689599>

- Tung, R. L. (2004). The model global manager? *Organizational Dynamics*.
<https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2004-18879-003>
- Turban, D. B., & Dougherty, T. W. (1994). ROLE OF PROT+G+ PERSONALITY IN RECEIPT OF MENTORING AND CAREER SUCCESS. *Academy of Management Journal*, 37(3), 688–702.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/256706>
- US Government Accountability Office. (2017). *Federal Telework—Additional Controls Could Strengthen Telework Program Compliance and Data Reporting*. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-17-247.pdf>
- Valenzuela, M. A., & Rogers, S. E. (2021). Strategizing personality traits: An acculturation approach to person–environment fit and expatriate adjustment. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 32(7), 1591–1619. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2018.1526201>
- Van, A. E. M., De Pater, I. E., Kristof-Brown, A. L., & Johnson, E. C. (2004). Fitting in: Surface- and Deep-Level Cultural Differences and Expatriates' Adjustment. *Academy of Management Journal*, 47(5), 697–709. <https://doi.org/10.5465/20159612>
- Van Bakel, M., Van Oudenhoven, J. P., & Gerritsen, M. (2017). Expatriate contact with a local host: An intervention to increase social support. *Human Resource Development International*, 20(3), 215–235. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13678868.2016.1248720>
- Van Der Laken, P. A., Van Engen, M. L., Van Veldhoven, M. J. P. M., & Paauwe, J. (2019). Fostering expatriate success: A meta-analysis of the differential benefits of social support. *Human Resource Management Review*, 29(4), 100679. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2018.12.003>
- Van Knippenberg, D., & Van Ginkel, W. P. (2022). A Diversity Mindset Perspective on Inclusive Leadership. *Group & Organization Management*, 47(4), 779–797. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1059601121997229>
- Van Vianen, A. E., De Pater, I. E., Kristof-Brown, A. L., & Johnson, E. C. (2004). Fitting in: Surface-and deep-level cultural differences and expatriates' adjustment. *Academy of Management Journal*, 47(5), 697–709.

- Vandenberghe, C., Landry, G., Bentein, K., Anseel, F., Mignonac, K., & Roussel, P. (2021). A Dynamic Model of the Effects of Feedback-Seeking Behavior and Organizational Commitment on Newcomer Turnover. *Journal of Management*, 47(2), 519–544. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206319850621>
- Varma, A., Budhwar, P., Katou, A., & Matthew, J. (2016). Interpersonal affect and host country national support of expatriates: An investigation in China. *Journal of Global Mobility: The Home of Expatriate Management Research*, 4(4), 476–495. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JGM-02-2016-0007>
- Varma, A., & Russell, L. (2016). Women and expatriate assignments: Exploring the role of perceived organizational support. *Employee Relations*, 38(2), 200–223. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ER-02-2015-0019>
- Vaux, A., Riedel, S., & Stewart, D. (1987). Modes of social support: The social support behaviors (SS-B) scale. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 15(2), 209–232. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00919279>
- Vega, R. P., Anderson, A. J., & Kaplan, S. A. (2015). A Within-Person Examination of the Effects of Telework. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 30(2), 313–323. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-014-9359-4>
- Wang, C.-H. (2023). Expatriation and repatriation as one integrated process: The roles of developmental assignments, repatriate turnover, employee willingness for expatriation and repatriation support practices. *Cross Cultural & Strategic Management*, 30(3), 507–526. <https://doi.org/10.1108/CCSM-08-2021-0142>
- Wang, C.-H., & Fang, M. (2014). The effects of personality on host country nationals' helping behaviors toward expatriates. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 42, 140–145. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2014.06.001>
- Wayne, S. J., Shore, L. M., & Liden, R. C. (1997). PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT AND LEADER-MEMBER EXCHANGE: A SOCIAL EXCHANGE PERSPECTIVE. *Academy of Management Journal*, 40(1), 82–111. <https://doi.org/10.2307/257021>

- Wellman, B., & Hiscott, R. (1985). From Social Support to Social Network. In I. G. Sarason & B. R. Sarason (Eds.), *Social Support: Theory, Research and Applications* (pp. 205–222). Springer Netherlands.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-009-5115-0_12
- Wicht, L., & Holtbrügge, D. (2023). Bridging distance through zooming? The use of virtual assignments in multinational corporations. *Journal of Global Mobility: The Home of Expatriate Management Research*, 11(2), 179–199. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JGM-10-2022-0056>
- Wilmot, M. P., & Ones, D. S. (2019). A century of research on conscientiousness at work. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 116(46), 23004–23010.
<https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1908430116>
- Wilmot, M. P., Wanberg, C. R., Kammeyer-Mueller, J. D., & Ones, D. S. (2019). Extraversion advantages at work: A quantitative review and synthesis of the meta-analytic evidence. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 104(12), 1447–1470. <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000415>
- Wilson, Boyer O’Leary, M., Metiu, A., & Jett, Q. R. (2008). Perceived Proximity in Virtual Work: Explaining the Paradox of Far-but-Close. *Organization Studies*, 29(7), 979–1002.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840607083105>
- Wilson, J., Crisp, C. B., & Mortensen, M. (2013). Extending Construal-Level Theory to Distributed Groups: Understanding the Effects of Virtuality. *Organization Science*, 24(2), 629–644.
<https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1120.0750>
- Wu, P.-C., & Ang, S. H. (2011). The impact of expatriate supporting practices and cultural intelligence on cross-cultural adjustment and performance of expatriates in Singapore. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 22(13), 2683–2702.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2011.599956>
- Wurtz, O. (2018). Expatriation, alcohol and drugs: Antecedents and consequences of substance use in expatriation. *Journal of Global Mobility: The Home of Expatriate Management Research*, 6(3/4), 316–334. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JGM-08-2017-0035>
- Zander, L., Mockaitis, A. I., & Butler, C. L. (2012). Leading global teams. *Journal of World Business*, 47(4), 592–603. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jwb.2012.01.012>

Zhang, L. E., & Harzing, A.-W. (2016). From dilemmatic struggle to legitimized indifference: Expatriates' host country language learning and its impact on the expatriate-HCE relationship. *Journal of World Business*, 51(5), 774–786. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jwb.2016.06.001>

Zheng, Y., Zheng, X., Wu, C.-H., Yao, X., & Wang, Y. (2021). Newcomers' relationship-building behavior, mentor information sharing and newcomer adjustment: The moderating effects of perceived mentor and newcomer deep similarity. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 125, 103519. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2020.103519>

Zhuang, W.-L., Wu, M., & Wen, S.-L. (2013). Relationship of mentoring functions to expatriate adjustments: Comparing home country mentorship and host country mentorship. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 24(1), 35–49. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2012.669784>

Appendices

Appendix A: Pre-Interview Questionnaire for Expatriates

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to participate in the research for my master's thesis, which focuses on expatriate adjustment in both traditional and virtual assignments. Specifically, I am exploring the key factors that influence successful adjustment and how these factors differ between traditional and virtual assignments. I am also investigating how HR strategies and policies can be adapted to better meet the distinct needs of expatriates in these two types of assignments. This short questionnaire is designed to gather basic information about your experiences, personality traits and demographics. Collecting this information beforehand will allow me to tailor the interview and focus more deeply on the key topics during our conversation.

All responses will remain strictly confidential and your anonymity is fully guaranteed. Your support is greatly appreciated!

To ensure clarity and a shared understanding, here are some key terms used in this study:

A traditional expatriate is an employee who temporarily relocates to a foreign country for work. This thesis focuses specifically on employees sent abroad by their company for medium- to long-term assignments (1–5 years).

A virtual expatriate is similar to a traditional expatriate in that they handle international job tasks for a host country. However, instead of relocating, they work remotely from their home country while collaborating with foreign subsidiaries, interacting with colleagues from different cultures and occasionally visiting the host country.

Expatriate adjustment refers to how well an expatriate (traditional or virtual) adapts to the work environment, social interactions and living conditions in a new cultural environment.

Section 1: Prior International Assignment Experience

Have you been on any virtual assignments?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

Have you been on any traditional assignments?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

How many international assignments have you completed or are currently on? (including both traditional and virtual assignments, past and present)

Number of assignments: _____

How many years of international experience do you have in total? (including both traditional and virtual assignments)

Total years: _____

Section 2: Personality Traits (Big Five)

Using the scale below, rate the extent to which each statement describes your personality:

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<i>"I have a vivid imagination."</i>					
<i>"I love to think up new ways of doing things."</i>					
<i>"I am always prepared."</i>					
<i>"I pay attention to details."</i>					
<i>"I don't mind being the center of attention."</i>					
<i>"I feel comfortable around people."</i>					
<i>"I sympathize with others' feelings."</i>					
<i>"I make people feel at ease."</i>					
<i>"I get stressed out easily."</i>					
<i>"I have frequent mood swings."</i>					

Section 3: Job Role & Demographic Information

Job Role

- **Current job title/role** (*Open-ended response*): _____

Demographic Information

- **Gender** (*Select one*): ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Non-binary ☐ Prefer not to say
- **Nationality** (*Open-ended response*): _____
- **Current country of residence** (*Open-ended response*): _____
- **Age group** (*Select one*): ☐ 20–29 ☐ 30–39 ☐ 40–49 ☐ 50+

Appendix B: Interview Guidelines

B1 Traditional Expatriates

Introduction

Thank you again for taking the time to participate in my interviews!

In my thesis I am exploring the key factors that influence successful expatriate adjustment and how these factors differ between traditional and virtual assignments. The interview will consist of a series of questions asking you to reflect on your past and current assignments. After each question, I will also ask a scenario-based question to encourage you to think about how your experience might apply to a virtual assignment.

Q0: *To begin, could you briefly describe your most recent traditional assignments? Where were you located and for how long? What was the reason for the assignment?*

Section 1: Work Factors

Q1: *How would you describe the organizational culture of the firm where you were on assignment?*

Q1-A - Scenario Question: *How might organizational culture influence the experience of a virtual expatriate?*

Q2: *What role did mentors or supervisors play during your assignments?*

Q2-A - Scenario Question: *How might having a mentor influence the experience of a virtual expatriate?*

Section 2: Non-Work Factors

Q3: *How did you integrate into the local culture during your assignment? In what ways was the host culture different or similar to your own?*

Q3-A - Scenario Question: *As a virtual expatriate, how would you integrate into the host culture while working from a distance?*

Q4: *What role did family, friends or other social networks play during your assignment?*

Q4-A - Scenario Question: *In what ways might family and friends provide support during a virtual assignment?*

Section 3: Individual Factors

Q5: *Can you describe any personal characteristics that you found helpful or challenging during your assignment?*

Q5-A - Scenario Question: *How might personal characteristics differ for virtual assignments?*

Q6: *Can you describe any skills you have found useful in adjusting to a new environment?*

Q6-A - Scenario Question: *How might the skills differ in a virtual work environment?*

Additional questions to ask if not already addressed freely by the interviewee:

Q7: *How did language impact your assignment?*

Q8: *Did you feel welcomed by host-country nationals or did you experience any resistance?*

B2 Virtual Expatriates

Introduction

In my thesis I am exploring the key factors that influence successful expatriate adjustment and how these factors differ between traditional and virtual assignments. The interview will consist of a series of questions asking you to reflect on your past and current assignments. After each question, I will also ask a scenario-based question to encourage you to think about how your experience might apply to a traditional assignment.

Q0: *To begin, could you briefly describe your most recent virtual assignment? How long did it last and what was the reason for the assignment?*

Section 1: Work Factors

Q1: *How would you describe the organizational culture of the firm where you were on assignment?*

Q1-A - Scenario Question: *How might organizational culture influence the experience of a traditional expatriate?*

Q2: *What role did mentors or supervisors play during your assignments?*

Q2-A - Scenario Question: *How might having a mentor influence the experience of a traditional expatriate?*

Section 2: Non-Work Factors

Q3: *How did you integrate into the local culture during your assignment? In what ways was the host culture different or similar to your own?*

Q3-A - Scenario Question: *As a traditional expatriate, how would you integrate into the host culture during your assignment?*

Q4: *What role did family, friends or other social networks play during your assignment?*

Q4-A - Scenario Question: *In what ways might family and friends provide support during a traditional assignment?*

Section 3: Individual Factors

Q5: *Can you describe any personal characteristics that you found helpful or challenging during your assignment?*

Q5-A - Scenario Question: *How might personal characteristics differ for traditional assignments?*

Q6: *Can you describe any skills you have found useful in adjusting to a new environment?*

Q6-A - Scenario Question: *How might the skills differ in a traditional work environment?*

Additional questions to ask if not already addressed freely by the interviewee:

Q7: *How did language impact your assignment despite the distance?*

Q8: *Were you affected by time zone differences? If so, how did you manage them?*

Q9: *In what ways was your performance evaluated and compensated in comparison to on-site colleagues?*

Q10: *Can you describe the feedback you received from your supervisor?*

Q11: *How did you go about building social connections with people in the host country outside of work?*

Q12: *Did you use any technological tools to connect with others, if so, how did you use them?*

B3 Expatriates with Virtual & Traditional Assignment Experience

Introduction

In my thesis I am exploring the key factors that influence successful expatriate adjustment and how these factors differ between traditional and virtual assignments. The interview will consist of a series of questions asking you to reflect on your past and current assignments and to compare your traditional and virtual assignments.

Q0: *To begin, could you briefly describe your most recent virtual and traditional assignments? How long did they last and what was the reason for the assignments?*

Section 1: Work Factors

Q1: *How would you describe the culture of the companies you worked at when you were relocated, compared to when you were working remotely?*

Q2: *How would you describe the role of mentors or supervisors in your traditional assignments compared to your virtual assignments?*

Section 2: Non-Work Factors

Q3: *How did you integrate into the local culture during your traditional assignments compared to your virtual assignments? In what ways was the host culture different or similar to your own?*

Q4: *What role did family, friends or other social networks play during your assignments? How would you compare their role between your traditional and virtual assignments?*

Section 3: Individual Factors

Q5: *Can you describe any personal characteristics that you found helpful or challenging during your assignments? How did these compare between your traditional and virtual assignments?*

Q6: *Can you describe any skills you have found useful in adjusting to new environments? How did these compare between your traditional and virtual assignments?*

Additional questions to ask if not already addressed freely by the interviewee:

Q7: *How did language impact your assignments in traditional compared to virtual settings?*

Q8: *How was your performance evaluated and compensated when working remotely compared to on-site?*

Q9: *Did you feel welcomed by host-country nationals or did you experience any resistance during your traditional assignments in comparison to your virtual assignments?*

Q10: *Were you affected by time zone differences during your assignments? If so, how did you manage them?*

Q11: *Did you use any technological tools to connect with others during your assignments, if so, how did you use them?*

B4 HR Professionals

Introduction

In my thesis I am investigating how HR strategies and policies can be adapted to better meet the distinct needs of expatriates in traditional and virtual assignments. The interview will consist of a series of questions asking you to reflect on your experience of managing expatriates. If you have experience of managing both virtual and traditional expatriates, please compare the two types of assignment in each question. If you only have experience with one type of assignment, I will ask you scenario-based questions to encourage you to think about how your experience might apply to the other type of assignment.

Q0: *To begin, could you briefly describe your experience in managing expatriates? What types of international assignments have you been involved in and what were your main responsibilities?*

Q1: *What role does HR play during an expatriate assignment?*

Q1-A - Scenario Question: *What role might HR play during a virtual/traditional assignment?*

Q2: *In your experience, what role does corporate culture play for expatriates during their assignment?*

Q2-A - Scenario Question: *What role might corporate culture play for the experience of a virtual/traditional expatriate?*

Q3: *How does your organization evaluate and compensate the performance of expatriates?*

Q3-A - Scenario Question: *How would you evaluate and compensate the performance of a virtual/traditional expatriate?*

Q4: *What role does the firm play in integrating a traditional expatriate into the local culture compared to someone working from a distance?*

Q4-A - Scenario Question: *For virtual/traditional expatriates, what role would the firm play in integrating them into the local culture?*

Q5: *In your experience, what role does an expatriate's personality play during an assignment?*

Q5-A - Scenario Question: *For virtual/traditional expatriates, what role could the expatriate's personality play during an assignment?*

Q6: *In your experience, what skills have you seen expatriates use to adjust to a new work environment?*

Q6-A - Scenario Question: *What skills could virtual/traditional expatriates use to adjust to a new work environment?*

Additional questions to ask if not already addressed freely by the interviewee:

Q7: *Can you describe policies and strategies your organization has in place for traditional and virtual expatriates?*

Q8: *Can you describe any technological tools your organization provides to expatriates during their assignment?*

Q9: *What role do mentors or supervisors play during expatriate assignments?*

Appendix C: Interview Transcripts

C1 TE1

1	Interview date: 07.04.2025
2	Interviewer: Thank you again, for participating in my interviews.
3	TE1: Very welcome.
4	Interviewer: The interview will consist of a series of questions asking you to reflect on your past and current assignments. After each question, I will ask a scenario based question to encourage you to think about how your experience might apply to a virtual assignment. A virtual assignment is essentially the same as a traditional assignment, with the only exception that you don't relocate to another location. Let's begin with the first question. Could you briefly describe your most recent traditional assignment? Where were you located? For how long?
5	TE1: I am based usually in Austria, I used to work in Austria before and I am Austrian and I was expatriated to France Mitry-Mory, close to Paris next to the airport for four years when I took over a new role inside my current company. I took over a new team which was at this time based the 100% in this French location, so that was just before the COVID pandemic started. Virtual working was not yet so common as it is today, and I decided to relocate to be with my team and to work more efficiently with my team at the time. I was based there, I lived there for four years. Initially it was planned for one, then extended to a second and extended to four years in total. I was always holding the same role and the same job title during that assignment, being the quality and sustainability director for my company.
6	Interviewer: How would you describe the organizational culture of the firm where you were on assignment?
7	TE1: The overall organization is pretty big and international. We are part of a bigger group which is headquartered in Austria and our division is the most international part of it. We have 25 locations on all five different continents. We really find our colleagues everywhere and therefore we are also quite used to working in different cultures and in a very diverse environment of people. Compared to Austria and compared to the way of working I was used to, arriving in France was a bit surprising to me because the French ways of working and culture was still a bit more traditional, more hierarchic than the one I experienced in Austria, despite the fact that in Austria it's already pretty hierarchic. This is sometimes more, sometimes less overall in our company, depending really on the country and location we're based in, but overall I would describe the structure as rather hierarchy-driven and not very much flat hierarchy, but rather realistic hierarchy.
8	Interviewer: How might organizational culture influence the experience of a virtual expatriate?
9	TE1: If I had done that whole assignment virtually and not in person, I would have realized that slower and not to the same extent than when I was living there and discussing with people day in, day out and also with people outside of my own team. Of course you can have discussions virtually every day with the people you are assigned to work with, speaking with others casual around lunch or around the coffee will also give a lot of insight into how a company works or how a culture is set up. In a virtual assignment, it would have been much more difficult to dive into this culture.
10	Interviewer: What role did mentors or supervisors play during your assignment?

11	TE1: Supervisors did not play much of a role, because I was pretty much left alone and on my own during the assignment as I was reporting already to C-level and C-level cannot take so much care about mentoring each and every employee. From that perspective, less of a role mentorship. I didn't have a formal mentor during my assignment, but I had a colleague who was also in a higher management role like myself, who somehow turned into my natural mentor. He is very much experienced and he was also based in the same French location where I was assigned to. Putting things in perspective and explaining to me some things that I didn't get at the first moment, reading between the lines of some things that happened, as well as sometimes trying to work on some topics that were really frustrating, helped quite a lot. It was nice because our relationship started off as a professional one, but turned into a friendship more than that.
12	Interviewer: How do you think might having a mentor influence the experience of a virtual expatriate?
13	TE1: Very, very much, because if you are left alone with a team that you don't see and in a distant location, just having someone who can help you somehow balance your thoughts or put your thoughts into perspective is much more relevant. Be it a mentor or be it a an experienced colleague who is not formally assigned as a mentor, but just as I had it would be also very beneficial in a virtual setup.
14	Interviewer: How did you integrate into the local culture during your assignment? In what ways was the culture different or similar to your own? You talked about the hierarchy of the company, can you think about other ways?
15	TE1: It's very specific to the differences between Austrian and French culture. The French culture is more pleasure-driven than the Austrian one, whereas the Austrian one is much more efficiency- and output-focused and work-focused. There is a stronger element, at least in our company, inside the French community for colleagues, friendship, even among colleagues and for also having a good chat together, for having good time together. Our colleagues in France spent not much more time, but more quality time. Going to lunch together, having a very dedicated time for a coffee break they would spend together, which is also happening in Austria, but there's less emphasis for that. If you miss it, well then you miss it or if you don't join, then you don't join. In France it was more important and more relevant compared to other things that were happening around work. In the beginning I had a hard time with that, because I thought go again for coffee? Really? Seriously? Well, I go to work now. Understanding it a bit better, I realized how important it is also for the social network inside the company. If I had been in a virtual assignment, I would probably never have understood that to the same extent.
16	Interviewer: How would you integrate into the local culture while working from a distance, if you were a virtual expatriate?
17	TE1: Probably not much, due to my personality. I would be focusing on work. I would not easily set up a conversation just to chat. That's just not my personality to do that. I would not really integrate into the culture only in a virtual assignment. My assignment time was between 2019 and 2022, that means I landed in France and after one year Covid started and then we did a lot of virtual work. Obviously everyone was in lockdown, working from home. There were team members who I didn't see for many, many months. It is not exactly the same situation as if I had been on a virtual assignment right away, because I had the chance to already integrate for one year, a bit more than one year. However, it really completely changed to virtual, more or less. At the time we tried, as everybody did, to set up informal conversations, informal coffee-breaks, we had virtual lunches or christmas celebration. That was fun, but it would have been very hard if I had been with that team only in a virtual set up without knowing them. Without

	having a bit of their background, I don't know if I would have integrated into anything. Getting to know them in person helped.
18	Interviewer: What role did family, friends or other social networks play during your assignment?
19	TE1: Very important one. I had the luxury to being able to go with my husband. He was there, which was certainly very important, in particular in the beginning. When I studied I was always very easily finding new people, getting in contact and immediately making friends, going out, studying together. In work environment, that's a different thing, because people are just in another situation. People will have kids, people will have other things to do after work and will not hang out with their new colleague from abroad who has just arrived, this is just not happening. I always knew, if I am not making an effort, nobody will make an effort. I knew it was my turn to organize it. I realized how much more difficult it was, than when everything is easy while you are studying and you have just more flexibility in your private life. Particular in the beginning, it was important to not be all alone and on my own. After a while, once I had the chance to settle and I had the chance to meet some people, those became very important people which they still are and not only while I was there, but they became very close friends. Only very few at work, but also in my private setting, which I was then able to build as well around work, being there all the time, on the weekends, in the evenings. That really helped integration into the different culture outside of work.
20	Interviewer: In what ways might family and friends provide support during a virtual assignment?
21	TE1: You always need friends and family for your mental sanity and when work ends your life starts, that is always a very, very important factor. For the assignment, if this is all virtual, less of a role to play. Unless, you have troubles, you have some concerns, you want to exchange a little bit after work also with your friends, just to get some advise or some different points of view, but that is not so different from what I have today. Being back in Austria in my regular environment with my friends and family around me, if I have a thing to discuss, I can still go do it. If I were to work virtually all day long and then I go out and I am with my friends and family I wouldn't say there is much of a difference. It plays a bigger role, a more important role if your relocating physically.
22	Interviewer: Can you describe any personal characteristics that you found helpful or challenging during your assignment?
23	TE1: What I found not very helpful or rather challenging is that I was very used to a way of working that I learned in Austria. Coming back to this notion of hierarchy. I'm not fond of working in a very directive manner as a manager or as a team leader, and that's why I arrived there and I thought, with my team that is completely different culture, completely different nationality, I can do the same. I'm not directive. I am rather asking people to bring up their suggestions and that was a clash of cultures when they were there, expecting me to tell them what to do. They were used to that from their prior superior and I said, it's up to you to tell me what you're going to do next time, it's your job. Until the moment when every one of us, myself and my team, figured out that this is really different. It took us some time, to be honest. That was a challenge in the beginning, we overcame that. From a personality standpoint, what was more helpful was that I'm very curious. I love learning and getting to know new people. This is the prerequisite for enjoying an assignment because otherwise it's going to be difficult. I like to learn or know how a new, different culture works. I enjoy it very much to find out how different the French culture can be from the Austrian, although I never believed that before. I thought, it's not so far away from home in the end, what should be so different? In fact, it was very, very different in the details. That was helpful. I'm a resilient person. I cannot be easily

	kicked out of my balance, that helps, because sometimes things are not going smoothly. It's a hard start, although it's the same company. It's a restart and that can always be a little bit challenging. There are certain standards and there are certain norms in which we all move inside this company, but then real life on the ground is different.
24	Interviewer: How do you think personal characteristics differ for virtual assignments?
25	TE1: You would need a lot, lot of empathy for a virtual assignment, for a purely virtual one, because if you are not in front of a person, a real person, there are signals you miss. I'm not seeing everything here now from you. I don't know what you're doing with your hands. I don't know if you're nervous, you might be playing around with your pen all the time, but here you are just straight and smiling at me. I'm not the most empathic person in the world, I would struggle trying to read people only from a virtual interaction, that's why you can be unsure. You will be more successful if you are empathic or if you are at least trying to fully focus on the fact that you also should read people's feelings, not just jump into a meeting and go for it and work and then cut it without having spent a little time trying to understand how the person feels. That is the key that you need a little bit less when you are on site, because it's just easier.
26	Interviewer: Can you describe any skills that you found useful in adjusting to a new environment?
27	TE1: It's amazing, but if you have no idea of the language, it's difficult. I wasn't super strong in French when I started. I made fortunately very good progress and I had a good basis as well. In the first year it was so-so, but when I got more mature in my French, that started to become also easier, because people feel more at ease to speak in their own language after all. I underestimated that effect really. Communication, both in a virtual setup as well as in the real one. A key to help me overcome the challenge of these hierarchy questions was to speak with my people about it and to really express what's going on here, to try and to explain to everyone why this was not working well or what I was really expecting from them to do. Only when we spoke it out, people were starting to realise that this is not just because she wants to annoy us, but this is what she's actually expecting. Relevant in any assignment, communication. I'm by principle a very structured and a very organized person, that wouldn't be too specific to any assignments, but more to work in general.
28	Interviewer: For a virtual work environment, how would the skills differ in that context?
29	TE1: Communication is very important and in that case even more written communication and clear documentation would be important. It is just a different thing if you forget something, just walk over to this other office and say, what did he say again? You will not so easily do that in a virtual assignment, because then your colleague is already occupied and in another call, I can't ask now, I need to send another e-mail, but he has already received 100 emails from me today or I do it later and then later I forget what I wanted to ask. It's about structure and also documentation that would still be important, if we speak of skills.
30	Interviewer: Before you talked about the fact, that becoming more fluent in French helped you to integrate more. Would you say you felt welcomed by your host colleagues or did you experience any resistance?
31	TE1: I've felt welcomed. It depends also on the role. I arrived in a new team, I was a new boss also to the team, of course there's not only this, "it's a foreigner, she's a newcomer, who we never met before and on top, she's our boss." That's a mix of different criteria that came into existence at the same time. When I look at all my peers and my colleagues on site who had not really something to do with me but who just welcomed me as a new colleague by coincidence from Austria, not from France, they were really welcoming and open and the more I spoke French, the better it got. Some of them had a bit of a reluctance to express themselves in

English. I can only recommend to speak as much of the language as possible. If it's only to make a start, then people see that at least you try. Your friend is also not perfect, they can be more at ease to react in their English or in their German, might also not be so perfect.

C2 VE1

1	Interview date: 18.04.2025
2	Interviewer: Thank you for taking part in my interviews. The interview will essentially consist of a series of questions asking you to reflect on your past and current assignments, after each question, I will also ask a scenario based question to encourage you to think about how your experience might apply to a traditional assignment. Let's start right away with the first question. Could you briefly describe your most recent virtual assignment?
3	VE1: My most recent virtual assignment was with our partner organization or affiliate in Brazil. The project was focused on implementing a new ERP system in SAP, it is called S4HANA. It's one of the most updated versions. It lasted for 1 1/2 years. I was selected due to my previous experience with similar projects in my previous company and because of personal reasons and company flexibility we or I decided it would be conducted virtually rather than through a physical relocation.
4	Interviewer: You never visited the location? You only worked virtually?
5	VE1: Exactly. Actually it was planned and it was under discussion, but there were some personal decisions afterwards why I decided to rather do it virtually.
6	Interviewer: How would you describe the organizational culture of the firm where you were on assignment?
7	VE1: The culture was very collaborative and relationship-oriented. Even if it was in virtual settings, the team in Brazil plays a lot of importance on building trust and maintaining a regular informal communication, compared to the more structured and punctual style we are used to in Austria, or the biggest part of Europe. Their approach was more fluid, flexible and a bit more chaotic.
8	Interviewer: How might organizational culture influence the experience of a traditional expatriate?
9	VE1: For a traditional expatriate to adapt to a relationship-orientated culture as it is in South America, in Brazil, might be even more crucial, because daily interactions would be face-to-face and constant. If someone doesn't take the time to understand the local dynamic and the dynamic is completely different as it is here, they could risk being seen as either distant or ineffective. It's not something you see in their culture the same way as you do it here.
10	Interviewer: What role did mentors or supervisors play during your assignment?
11	VE1: I had a supervisor both in Austria and also a local contact person in Brazil who acted as informal mentor. They were instrumental in helping me understand how decisions were made locally and who the key influences or influencers are where. I had regular check-ins helping me feel aligned and supported and being part of the team.
12	Interviewer: How might having a mentor influence the experience of a traditional expatriate?
13	VE1: For traditional expatriate a mentor could really make or break the adjustment period. A good mentor can provide first cultural insights, which is super important at the beginning, and help with navigating office politics, offer emotional support in a new environment and also how to understand how the entire team set up is working.
14	Interviewer: How did you integrate into the local culture during your assignment while working virtually?

15	VE1: Virtual integration was limited, but not impossible. I participated in online classes, in online language classes and joined some informal virtual coffee chats with local colleagues. The time difference between Brazil and here is a little bit different, it was rather a late coffee for me than an early coffee. Brazilian culture is very warm and expressive, which I was used to from Italian culture, but they're even more warm and expressive, which is different, completely different from our often reserved Austrian style. It was quite refreshing in that sense.
16	Interviewer: As a traditional expatriate, how would you integrate into the local culture being actually there?
17	VE1: I would definitely try to include myself by attending local events, either joining some social events or clubs, or a hobby group or even doing a short homestay and community project to build connections faster. What also helps quite a lot, at least in the office, is drinking a lot of coffee with the other employees. Especially at the beginning and in the morning to light up to mood a little bit.
18	Interviewer: What role did family, friends or other social networks play during your assignment?
19	VE1: They were quite important to me and since I wasn't physically abroad, I could still spend time with family and maintain my local friendships, which helped me manage stress. However, this also meant I didn't fully engage in the host country's social life. What really was a little bit tricky sometimes with social networks, was the time difference again. I quite often worked rather late than starting early as my entire team in Brazil started around lunchtime. For me to have the same day and being available for them the entire day, I had to work quite late. That was quite limiting my social life, but my family and friends were quite supportive and I'm happy about them.
20	Interviewer: In what ways might family and friends provide support during a traditional assignment?
21	VE1: It can be a double-edged sword. While emotional support is sometimes crucial, being physically apart can make it hard to maintain relationships. If they are supportive of the move, they can also encourage resilience and adaptation. Also here, time difference might influence it as well.
22	Interviewer: Can you describe any personal characteristics that you found helpful or challenging during your assignment?
23	VE1: I am quite adaptable and curious which helped me navigate the difference in communication styles and expectations. On the flip side, I tend to sometimes overthink which made me second guessing my tone or word choice in a virtual meeting.
24	Interviewer: How might personal characteristics differ for traditional assignments? Do you think different characteristics play a role for traditional expatriates compared to a virtual expatriate?
25	VE1: Resilience and openness and emotional intelligence are even more essential in traditional settings. You face more immediate cultural challenges, being able to stay calm and flexible helps a lot. A lot of expatriates are rather extroverted than introverted. The ones I met, I would categorize as extroverts, rather than introverts. Introverts would go on an assignment, but I think an extrovert is more likely to go there, traditional as well as virtual. What you need as an expat is a lot of, and really a lot of flexibility, you need to be spontaneous. It's not like an expatriation is usually planned years upfront, if it's coming from the company, they see the need and they need it quite urgently, you don't have much time to prepare. Also, younger people are more likely going to be expatriates. They're traveling to a new country, visiting a

	new country, working there as they don't have a family yet or not so much fixed family structure. Younger people are more likely to go for change, than if you are used to something.
26	Interviewer: Can you also describe any skills that you have found useful in adjusting to a new environment, even if it's only a virtual environment?
27	VE1: Communication was key, especially being able to express myself clearly in writing. Time management with time difference and self-discipline were also crucial, vital since I was working remotely across time zones. Also, getting used to having some frustration with technical issues during meetings.
28	Interviewer: How might skills differ in a traditional work environment?
29	VE1: In traditional settings impersonal and observational skills take even more part, reading body language, adapting to local customs in real time and networking with people becomes important and also crucial.
30	Interviewer: How did language impact your assignment despite the distance?
31	VE1: It played a big role. While most colleagues spoke English, I still made an effort to learn their native language, which was appreciated. Of course it's not so fast that I can learn a language, but it had built rapport and showed respect for the culture, it helped me to integrate. It also helped me to understand some English sentence they used in the other way. Portuguese is the first language, they also speak Spanish. It was also quite tricky at the beginning, because not everyone was speaking English properly and I needed to find out who those colleagues are with whom I can communicate in proper English.
32	Interviewer: You talked about time zone differences before, how did you manage them? You said you started at lunchtime or your colleagues in Brazil started at lunchtime?
33	VE1: It was around 5 hours difference and I adapted my schedule, starting later in the day and working into the evening. We also had clear rules about overlapped hours for meetings because otherwise it would get way too late sometimes for me.
34	Interviewer: The company provided some rules that you can't work overtime?
35	VE1: Not really, it was more a mutual agreement with me and the local colleagues. They could very well understand that it's not in my interest to stay quite late up just to attend some meetings.
36	Interviewer: In what ways was your performance evaluated and compensated? You heard from other colleagues working on site that it was different?
37	VE1: My performance was evaluated through projects, through milestones and deliverables, just like my local counterparts. Conversation was aligned with my Austrian contract. I received a virtual assignment allowance for Home Office and tech setup etc. I worked in the evenings quite often, a little bit longer as the usual Austrian due to meetings. It was crucial that I have a proper technical set up at home as well.
38	Interviewer: You said you had two mentors, one in the home country and one in the host country. Can you describe the feedback you received from your supervisor?
39	VE1: From both the feedback was quite regular and constructive and I appreciated the structured monthly reviews which helped track progress and resolve issues quite early.
40	Interviewer: You had with both mentors monthly check-ins?
41	VE1: With both, but more regularly with the local supervisor.

42	Interviewer: How did you go about building social connections with the people in the host country outside of work?
43	VE1: That was quite difficult, but I found a couple of online forums and groups for expats in Brazil and I followed local news and culture blogs to stay connected with what was happening socially. I tried to be a little bit more involved in Brazilian social life. I also read sometimes Brazilian news.
44	Interviewer: Did you use any technological tools to connect with others? If so, how did you use them?
45	VE1: Yes, Slack and Teams, as we are using it right now for work. Also WhatsApp for informal chats and in LinkedIn I found some helpful networking and even attended some virtual conferences hosted in Brazil. I used quite a lot of technological tools.

C3 HR1

1	Interview date: 13.05.2025
2	Interviewer: The interview will consist of a series of questions asking you to reflect on your experience of managing expatriates. If you have experience of managing both virtual and traditional expatriates, please compare the two types in each question, and if you have only experience with one type, I will ask a scenario based question to encourage you to think about how your experience might apply to the other type. To clarify again, a virtual expatriate does not relocate to another location, like another subsidiary. He or she only works virtually, but for the other subsidiary and a traditional expatriate actually moves to the other location. All clear?
3	HR1: All clear.
4	Interviewer: Could you briefly describe your experience in managing expatriates?
5	HR1: I work as an HR manager and since our company language is English in most of our recruiting processes, we do not require German skills and therefore are also open for people from other countries to come join. Some of them might already be in Vienna, some might need to relocate. In the past I have accompanied two or three processes where we could actually have somebody move to Austria to start working for us. I have tried my best to support them along the way, whether with work visa, with just settling in, with some information to our social security works, our payroll works.
6	Interviewer: You don't have experience with virtual expatriates?
7	HR1: Exactly. I've only accompanied those that actually relocated to Vienna.
8	Interviewer: What role does HR play during an expatriate assignment?
9	HR1: I think a very significant role. We as HR are also the ambassadors to keep a neutral perspective during the recruiting process, really to consider all applicants from all locations to the process. Of course in some cases it might be easier. It might be easier to hire somebody that is already available, that is already in Vienna. I think HR first acts as an ambassador to really consider all people from no matter where they are located at and really consider all their skills. A large portion of the tasks for HR are during the offer stage up until the actual hire date. First of all of course explain the contract, for most of them, it's their first time seeing an Austrian work contract, understanding the 13th, 14th salary, understanding how the payroll works, how social security works, on some clauses that might be in the work contract that they're not used to. They of course require more attention than anyone that is already located in the country when it comes to the offer and the actual documents. If they require work visa you need to be in close contact to receive all documents to make sure they have the appointments registered. It does not end with a hire date, I think the most difficult part is the actual time when they are here and want to integrate because there's only so much you can support them with. At the end it's also their personal life that you don't really want to interfere as HR and as a company. You want to support them the best way you can, but the part where they are actually here and already integrated is probably the most difficult one to really support in an effective way and to add value. The part before the actual hire date, the offer to hire date, would be the one that requires the most attention from HR.
10	Interviewer: How does HR support the expatriates once they are settled and once those first initial steps were taken?
11	HR1: Most expatriates have organised housing themselves. This is a large portion where some companies might offer more support, being very transparent, we are very weak when it comes to the actual relocation support or to the housing support. In my experience this has not been

	so relevant, but we could help them find platforms where they can find apartments, housing, get in contact with realtors, maybe even go to appointments. I've heard from colleagues that are actually very invested in the search for housing. How we do it currently in the company is very limited, we try our best to support but at the end it's still their responsibility to find housing. The rest is very virtual when it comes to document collection, social security, all that are either phone calls, emails back and forth. These are the most important pillars when it comes to the support from HR.
12	Interviewer: What role might HR play during a virtual assignment? Would it be different or the same?
13	HR1: I think it would be different, just because most of the virtual expatriates are not leaving their own environment, or at least they have actively picked an environment that they would like to stay in. All the explanation about the location and the documents for the work visa might be different. It's a lot of organization around social security, taxing, payroll. There's just a lot of thought that has to go into somebody that works at a different location, than where the company's actually located at. The effort would be less towards the employee but more organizational, how we handle it, how we reflect it in payroll, if there are any legal topics that we should consider beforehand. A lot of attention would probably go more in that and it seems to be more case by case, whereas the regular expatriate, the one relocating, is very straightforward. You need either a work visa, there's so many or very exact steps that you need to take and that are not very special to each case, but are to be expected and can be replicated for next cases again.
14	Interviewer: What role does corporate culture play for expatriates during the assignment?
15	HR1: It plays a very large role in the part where it's the most difficult part for HR to contribute, in the actual integration phase when the people are hired, when they are starting, when they are integrating into a team. I have seen from experience and from our current company that the culture and also the environment of having people that have gone through similar things that might also be expatriates, that might also not speak the local language, that want to reconnect, want to build connections also in a private scope. This plays a very large role and having a culture that reinforces people connecting, that reinforces giving them an opportunity to get to know each other, to build areas where people can meet and connect. This is the main contribution a company can make in that stage, where the person is responsible or is by himself. Creating a culture and an environment, connecting them to people that you know they might be interested in connecting with. This is a large factor that could affect the success of the integration.
16	Interviewer: What role might a corporate culture play for the experience of a virtual expatriate?
17	HR1: It's difficult because in a context of a virtual expatriate, the culture has to be even stronger, so you can feel it not only in a physical environment in the office, but also virtually. Providing the same opportunities, but in a virtual context is even more difficult because when you're at the office, you meet them at the coffee machine, you have lunch together. It's easier to build connections without actually needing to schedule a time or needing to reach out to people. The culture is probably even more important for a virtual expatriate, that it even reaches the virtual level. It might be a bit different or different interests, it's not about reconnecting in a private scope to meet up on weekends, but more to get to know the people, to really find time to also have virtual coffee breaks, to meet everyone. Also in Teams to activate your camera, each company handles it differently. Virtual meetings are not virtual meetings, it really depends on how you handle them. Do all employees turn on their camera?

	How interactive are calls? This would be the large contribution of culture for a virtual expatriate.
18	Interviewer: How does your organization evaluate and compensate the performance of expatriates?
19	HR1: Not differently than any other employee. They are still given the same performance indicators, as any other employee would. Of course, they might need some time to settle in. As anyone else might also have private issues or things going on, I think this is not really something you could consider so much in a performance evaluation, but still being considerate and knowing it might need some time for them to really settle in. Overall our performance evaluation is really focused on the actual job. What we do is to sit down together with the manager within the first month or six weeks to set some goals that are still realistic for the very first time. In the first year they won't be so difficult to meet. It's really about settling in, about learning about your task, getting to know the people, getting a good feeling about the company. Not too difficult, very considerate, but not different than any other employee would be given as a performance indicator.
20	Interviewer: For virtual expatriates, how would you evaluate and compensate the performance?
21	HR1: Same, it would not differ. It might be a different approach to get to know the people, the onboarding might be a little different. Performance indicators would be the same, would be very focused on the actual job and the scope of the job, the responsibilities. We also mentioned the compensation, this doesn't differ from any other employee's. Usually there might be a variable bonus, some compensation that comes connected to your performance, but otherwise it's the same for all employees, no matter if they're expatriates, virtual expatriates or not.
22	Interviewer: What role does the firm play in integrating the expatriate into the local culture compared to someone working from a distance? Also outside of the workplace?
23	HR1: Company parties, events can really support them connecting. Especially for us, this is usually also the occasion where people from other locations might even come in and celebrate with us. To also not meet the ones that are anyway at the office, but to really get together with all of them that might be working with you. To build an environment where they can meet, exchange, where they have space to also sit down together, get to know each other, have coffee together. Company events could be very helpful. I've done that in my previous company, I know also other companies that do it, a coffee roulette or a lunch roulette, something that connects people. This is not totally only for expatriates, but overall a good opportunity where the firm can really reinforce people to exchange. What I've appreciated a lot is we also send out global announcements for people that join the company. No matter if they're expatriates or not, if somebody joins here in the headquarter, everyone around the world, and we're talking about 8000 people, will receive a short summary of the person. What has the person done previously? What has been their education? A picture of them that just gets the name out and then there's some connection, people welcoming you, reaching out to you. This is already a very appreciative step. I have liked it very much when I joined, that I had a chance, I'm not just one employee that just joined, but felt like with my name and my face out there, people are starting to build a connection already and this really helped out and also gave a lot of appreciation to me as an employee. It's also easier when you see them again at the coffee machine, you already know a face. During my first week I was approached and people say, you're the new one, right? People actually already knew my face and whereas if there was somebody they don't know, they would probably approach them differently, but since they had already seen my face and could connect it, it was easier to get into a conversation. This really helps also new employees to connect quicker and easier in the first couple of weeks.

24	Interviewer: For virtual expatriates, what role would the firm play in integrating them into the local culture?
25	HR1: The culture would have to be even stronger that it also reaches the virtual level, so you can really feel the culture in a virtual set up. It's very important, the company events, to invite them also on those occasions. Of course, it's not easy for them to go back and forth all the time, but for those special occasions, once a year, twice a year, it would be very cool if the person could really join in person, meet the people that they have been working with virtually in person for a change. Even the announcement could be very helpful to get your name and your face out there and people might start reaching out to you. These are both effective measures that could work for the virtual as well as the regular expatriate.
26	Interviewer: What role does an expatriate's personality play during an assignment?
27	HR1: It's difficult for HR to support the expatriate once they have actually started, to really not force yourself into pushing them, you know to build connections, meet people in a private scope as well. It really depends on what the person wants to get out of this. Some might not look for so many personal connections and might be happy with the connections at work, but enjoy their free time on the weekends without having to see anyone from the office. Others might be super interested in really building friendships at the office, that's completely fine and there is no one way and no one expectation you can set to an expatriate. The personality plays a big role in how it turns out. For those that are looking for those friendships, those connections, it also depends on the company culture and the environment, whether it's also received and if people are open to this, if there may be at a similar age, might have similar interests, might also be expatriates and have been in the same situations a while back. The personality of an expatriate plays a big role, but I would not say there's a certain personality an expatriate must have in order to be successful.
28	Interviewer: Did you observe specific traits where you thought that there's a pattern, that maybe not all expatriates, but some have?
29	HR1: When you're relocating and when you're open to living in a place, especially when you're coming by yourself, don't have any friends and family here, it really takes a lot of courage. This is one trait that combines and connects all of the expatriates that I have been in touch with. It's easiest when you're outgoing, when you want to meet people, when you want to connect with people. We have actually an expatriate or a person that joined a year ago from Mexico and he's more on the quiet side. Not in a bad way, not in he doesn't want to speak to people or connect to people, but not as outgoing as some of the other expatriates might be. It really depends on what you want to get out of the experience, what you're interested in. The trait of being open, having courage to learn new things, to be open to new things, to also step out of your comfort zone, there's not more personality traits that the person needs to have in order for it to be successful. It can really work with any kind of personality and might look differently and that's completely fine.
30	Interviewer: What about virtual expatriates, can you think of different or similar traits?
31	HR1: This would be a little different given that for virtual expatriates it's not so natural to meet new people. It might not be automatic that you meet people on site and at the coffee machine. This person would need to be more on the outgoing side and really actively looking for connections because it's easy to lean back and wait for it to come. Especially in a virtual environment, it's probably easier if the person already has a very outgoing personality, proactively reaches out to people, checks in with them on a regular basis. For virtual expatriates, it would be more successful if the person was already outgoing naturally.

32	Interviewer: Can you think of specific skills that you have seen expatriate use to adjust to a new environment?
33	HR1: From a very recent situation what was unexpectedly helpful for them was to speak many languages. We have now a little community of Spanish speakers and of course they connect on a different level when they speak in a native language. Really having a lot of language skills, even though the company culture is English, might be helpful to connect with people on a deeper level. When we talk about skills, language and communication are probably the most important ones. Communication, being open, having the skill to also listen and ask questions, to really show interest is also important for an expatriate to have.
34	Interviewer: What about virtual expatriates?
35	HR1: Same answer. It can also be a skill to get into conversations easily, to be proactive, to reach out to people proactively. That would be a very helpful skills to have to connect with the people that are on site.
36	Interviewer: Can you describe any policies or strategies that the organization has specifically in place for expatriates? Either virtual or traditional?
37	HR1: Policies not in particular for expatriates, but we do have an onboarding booklet, an information collection that is even more helpful for expatriates, but it's also valid for those that are joining the company, that are already here. We are currently working on a remote work policy which might even open up the opportunities for virtual expatriates and other forms of remote work. It can also be inbound as regular expatriates and services we might be able to offer. As of right now, we don't have any specific policies.
38	Interviewer: Does the company provide any technological tools for expatriates?
39	HR1: No, nothing that other employees would not receive also.
40	Interviewer: What role do mentors and supervisors play during the assignment of both expatriates?
41	HR1: A large role, a mentor and supervisor and manager needs to have also some feeling, some empathy about people. The expectations or the onboarding might be different to people that already live here. To show a high level of understanding, to show a high level of empathy is very crucial for this to work, because if expectations don't match, it cannot be a success. If you have a mentor, somebody that you can also reach out on less professional or really task-oriented, but also on a more personal level, this can really contribute to anyone, not only expatriates. To have somebody, might even be a role model, that has gone through similar things, this is super crucial. If a company can provide the right environment, provide even a mentor or somebody that person can connect with on those topics, this would improve the success rate of an expatriate.
42	Interviewer: Is there a final comment or advice that you would give to expats or something that we didn't talk about that you want to address?
43	HR1: I always admire people that are so brave to do it. Advice would only be that to be patient. It might be very frustrating at the very beginning, feeling lonely, feeling overwhelmed with all the new information, new environment, having to organize all these things. It will get better after a while, just as in any other situation. It's a big change, just be patient with yourself, with the situation. Just go for it, there is not really much you can lose.

C4 VTE1

1	Interview date: 05.05.2025
2	Interviewer: Thank you for taking the time to participate in my interviews. The interview will consist of a series of questions asking you to reflect on your past and current assignments. After each question, I will also ask a scenario based question to encourage you to think about how your experience might apply to a traditional assignment. To begin, could you briefly describe your most recent virtual assignment?
3	VTE1: I moved to Portugal in 2022 and I'm stationed here now. I work with people across the globe, Portugal, Spain, Germany, Austria. I've been working in international environments my whole life, 15 years basically.
4	Interviewer: You first worked in Vienna and then you moved to Porto, right?
5	VTE1: Exactly. I worked in Vienna - same company, same team members, same area of expertise - just moved to Porto and then still working with the same people. It's actually four years. I started with already working with other countries already back then in the same company.
6	Interviewer: Did you always plan to stay in Porto or was it a spontaneous decision?
7	VTE1: No. First, it was like I'm gonna move there for a year. It was directly after Corona. After living in Austria for 30 years it was like, OK, let's try something new. It was limited to one year, then after one year I was like, OK actually I'm not fully here yet. It took some time to actually adjust to the new culture, all the new standards a bit. Then second year started, second year was already getting better, third year came was like, OK, cool and then fourth year. Kind of go from there.
8	Interviewer: Is the team also in Porto or is it in Vienna?
9	VTE1: It's distributed, I'm actually from the team alone in Porto. I have some team members in Spain, some team members in Austria, we had some team members in Germany, it's very distributed.
10	Interviewer: How would you describe the organizational culture?
11	VTE1: Good, friendly and very welcoming and supportive. The move from myself, from Austria to Porto, it's nothing that you take for granted. Very supportive to actually get the chance to move and work from here, you see it through the whole working life. No matter what, also the team level, organization level, doesn't matter. You get support and you're heard for sure.
12	Interviewer: How do you think organizational culture might influence the experience of a traditional expatriate?
13	VTE1: Can you define traditional expat for me?
14	Interviewer: It's what you were in the beginning when you actually moved from Austria to Porto for this one year that you first wanted to stay there. That would be a traditional assignment and virtual would be if you don't relocate, but still work with team members virtually.
15	VTE1: OK, what exactly do you wanna know?
16	Interviewer: The differences how organizational culture influences the experience of a traditional expatriate compared to someone who doesn't relocate?

17	VTE1: For me there was no real difference. It was pretty much the same. The only difference was regular check-ins, insurance and questions like hey, are you gonna stay longer? Locally I was accepted immediately, also in the traditional one. Even though I wasn't going to the office regularly and I'm still not going, because I'm the only person. You immediately got included and felt included and that's definitely due to the company culture like the events they're doing, some workshops, leadership programs. You actually get to know people. That didn't make a difference, if I'm still here for a year or for longer, maybe some people don't even know me yet.
18	Interviewer: You always work from home, right?
19	VTE1: Pretty much.
20	Interviewer: What role did mentors or supervisors play during your assignment?
21	VTE1: Very important one. Mentoring, that was actually fine, but definitely supervisors, managers they did a big role. If I would have had a different manager, when I think in the past working experiences, wouldn't have been possible so easily to actually do this. The people around me and those are the managers, they actually do everything possible or in their power to make something possible. That's how I actually got to do it, without them, wouldn't be here for sure.
22	Interviewer: What kind of support did they provide?
23	VTE1: Different levels. First getting me into contact with people to actually make the move, figuring out what's actually the legal requirements we have to do, what's the best way. It's not only legally, but also compensation, for example. Different country, different salary ranges, different taxes. Definitely also emotionally, you move somewhere, something new completely from scratch and you kind of get lost. They gave me the time to also go here and start the department to life, everything here and trying to actually compensate a bit when there was a bit less work done or I had to do paperwork. In the beginning you have to do a lot of certificates, go to government offices. Flexibility as well definitely helps.
24	Interviewer: Do you think that there is a difference of the influence that a mentor has for a traditional or for virtual expatriate?
25	VTE1: They will be more open for traditional one. If it's limited and you know the person comes back and that's what we actually expected, that I will be back after a year. It definitely made it easier to be like, OK, let's go and not like, OK, that's forever. Which it might not be anyway, but I think it opens the door easier if it's limited to a certain period of time. Then you check in and from that you already have one foot in the door, and for us it was OK, let's extend for another year and then after two years, should we make it permanently? Probably that's the difference.
26	Interviewer: How did you integrate into the local culture during your assignment?
27	VTE1: For one, I had some Portuguese friends already, so that made it a bit easier taking along for local events and getting there. Then obviously the workshops and the events that we had at work, because that's basically local, but still handled in English, which is nice. Learning some basic language, just saying hello, thank you, goodbye and a few numbers. Then just being open. That's an important thing, as an expat you feel a bit the odd one out. Also on the other side people are like OK, who's that? That definitely helped and I see it now over the years that it's getting better and better.
28	Interviewer: In what ways is the host culture different or similar to your own?
29	VTE1: I think similar in a sense of a bit of a distance in the beginning. I have friends that actually moved from different countries to Vienna and Austria and from them I already knew that, but

	I didn't believe it obviously. Then it happened to me in Portugal, you have the distance and that always stays the same. Even though I had Portuguese friends, they already have their friend groups. Same also in Austria, would happen to these people as well. You feel you're getting a bit integrated, but you still have a bit of a closed group as well. The differences where I'm living here, it's a bit more laid back than Vienna, definitely. It's more going with the flow. In the blackout the other week, when we couldn't work and people are like, let's go to the beach, we cannot work anyway. Thinking in Vienna, I always have the feeling that it's more strict, straight forward thinking and people here are just grateful. Even though they don't have the best life compared to somewhere else, they are grateful. Once I came back to Vienna and arrived at the airport and people immediately you heard them complaining about anything. I was like, wow. I think, because the Bim was late for 5 minutes and didn't come. That's crazy difference. I love that there's a lot of traditions here. I would say more conservative as well.
30	Interviewer: You mean in Porto, right?
31	VTE1: In Porto. I think the main thing that struck me is the difference in a supermarket open on Sundays and the eating culture is different. In Spain and all the more southern countries they eat later and heavier foods also in the evening. You get used to it or you take it to your advantage.
32	Interviewer: How would it be different to integrate into the host culture as a traditional expatriate compared to someone working from a distance?
33	VTE1: I would have said it's for a year, probably wouldn't have tried so hard. I would have known it's just limited for this period and I'm gonna be fine anyway and I'm just gonna focus on other things, on life and not just integrating here locally. I think that's the main difference. You still spend more time because you know already it's gonna be probably minimum five years, even though we started with one. I was going into already with a bit of a different mindset.
34	Interviewer: What role did family, friends or other social networks play during your assignment?
35	VTE1: Big one. I moved here with a partner four years ago. You saw basically the difference. I have a very closed and tight social group, friends, family for sure and we communicate everyday. I see them every month / every one and a half months. That plays a big role because you have the support, even though it might be digital or distance, but you hop on a call and you talk and you have that. Without this, probably wouldn't have done it. I was talking to friends before moving, they were obviously OK, don't go. The family was more, OK, if you don't do it now, you will never do it. That was the last push where I was like, let's go. Even though sometimes they are now sad that I'm not here all the time or I'm not that close but in the end, doesn't really matter. Every time I come, I try to visit all the friends, family.
36	Interviewer: In what ways might family and friends provide support during a traditional assignment? What would be the differences?
37	VTE1: It's pretty similar to the support of mentors and managers or supervisors. If they know it's gonna be limited for a year, difference would have been, OK let's go. You will be back in a year and it's gonna be cool experience for you and most of my friends already did something just the other way, just coming to Vienna. For them it was a decision to actually do it for longer already. Compared to when I was talking to them and I decided and I already knew it's gonna be five years, at least, it was more like, we gonna miss you and we don't see you anymore and you don't know when you see each other anymore. I think that's the difference. For me, it's the same if you compare work and private life, because the people in Org2 are supportive. Even

	though I wouldn't call them family, because it's something that's getting thrown around quite a bit, still they're supportive in that sense.
38	Interviewer: Can you describe any personal characteristics that you found helpful or also maybe challenging during your assignment?
39	VTE1: Helpful, definitely that I am self-sufficient and I can be on my own so I might be alone, but I don't feel lonely and I always feel connected. That definitely helps. With friends, I didn't have to invest a lot of time to find friends locally and build a new group because I was still connected. On the other side, the partner moved here, they needed the social interaction, that was the complete difference. That helped me quite a bit, definitely being open and also working with international people for 15 years. Even though it might not have been remote in the beginning, definitely helps you. You already see different cultures, different backgrounds, and makes it easier to kind of see their point of view also in the new countries. That's the main thing that helps.
40	Interviewer: There's a time difference, right? In Porto?
41	VTE1: It's one hour.
42	Interviewer: Does it play a role this one hour?
43	VTE1: People always think no, but even this one hour makes a huge difference. For example today we had the call and it's nine, that's fine. In day-to-day, people sometimes forget. It's for them eight but for me it's seven or something like this. It's played down a bit when there's company meetings and people also obviously invite Portuguese people and they don't realize or they don't care, it's just one hour. Funny thing is, it happened in February a couple months ago, my manager came here because he got a second team here as well. The first time he was here, he realized immediately the first day, it's only one hour difference but it makes such a huge difference in your life. You can go with the flow and take the advantages. I start pretty much the same time as everybody else in different countries, like Austria. It also means I end one hour early, which is good because you have time and can enjoy life. Small number, but definitely makes an impact.
44	Interviewer: To come back to the personal characteristics, do you see any differences again for virtual expatriates and traditional expatriates? What could be helpful or challenging?
45	VTE1: Staying connected and being good alone is probably good for the traditional one, because it's again limited to a specific time period and you might not feel the need to actually have somebody local. It might not play a role if you want to stay forever, then you're definitely gonna build a social group around yourself. The rest of the characteristics may be pretty similar. You have to be open even though it's limited. Probably not so many differences.
46	Interviewer: What about skills? Can you describe any skills that you found useful in adjusting to a new environment?
47	VTE1: Resilience for sure, that's something that you need. You will hit some roadblocks moving to a different country, to a different culture. Even if it's just a language barrier, you have to go with it. For example, language barrier I hit probably once, maybe twice since I live here, so four years. At the beginning, you're like, what I'm gonna do? In the end on the long run, it doesn't really matter.
48	Interviewer: Can you make a comparison from virtual to traditional expatriate?.
49	VTE1: Traditionally it would be easier, if you have the set time and the mindset, OK, it's gonna be for X time. I don't know if there's specifics, usually it's one year, two years, I guess it depends on the company. You would probably manage even if you're not resilient or if you are not too

	open. Even though you have to be at least show a bit of openness because otherwise you probably wouldn't do it, going to different country, even if it's for a year.
50	Interviewer: You said traditional is easier. Do you mean adjusting to the environment is easier or what exactly?
51	VTE1: You won't try so hard to adjust because you know it's for a year. It will be different if you don't already say it's for five years. You will definitely feel different. It's not only knowing it's limited and traditional versus virtual, but most of the time different time frames require different skills and that probably makes the biggest difference. If I'm gonna do it for a year it's different, if I do it for two years, three years, five years.
52	Interviewer: In what ways was your performance evaluated and compensated in comparison to onsite colleagues?
53	VTE1: Same, there's no difference. I think it has to do with the culture that we already work in distributed teams. There's no difference between traditional or virtual in this sense because we already were working across countries, different cultures, different backgrounds. Obviously it got adjusted to the local market, that's for sure. It didn't change, same criteria for everyone.
54	Interviewer: Did you use any technological tools to connect with others?
55	VTE1: I did. There's couple of apps that popped up. For example, Timeleft where you just meet strangers for dinner and you connect. Some of them are local and some of them are expats, some of them are travelers that just come to the country for a week or two. That was definitely a cool experience. Then definitely did the classics, like Meet Up app where you just go to some event, go to a meet up, go to a talk and then meet there people. Another thing is Facebook groups and WhatsApp groups as well. There's different things for expats, also on Reddit where expats help expats, definitely helpful.
56	Interviewer: Did you use many of the platforms specifically for expats?
57	VTE1: Specifically for expats, no. I tried one, but I didn't like it. I was going back to the other things that I just mentioned, Reddit, forums, Facebook groups, WhatsApp and Timeleft. Which is not specific specifically for expats, but just meeting people.
58	Interviewer: Do you have any advice or suggestions that you would give either to virtual or to a traditional expatriate?
59	VTE1: Give yourself time. Even though I had the luxury of already knowing friends that moved to Vienna from a different country and knew their struggles, I was still going here and I was like, it's easy, but you will hit roadblocks. Take your time and after a period of time it's gonna get better but you have to be invested for sure. If you're not invested and you're just like, whatever, that doesn't really work. That's the most important thing, don't give up.
60	Interviewer: Do you have any final comments or do you want to talk about something that we didn't mention regarding your experience?
61	VTE1: No, I underestimated it for sure the whole move. I was going in here and being like, gonna be easy because you know Europe, it's just a different country, it's gonna be fine. You just then see actually the roadblocks that you're gonna hit, even though it might not be a lot. You might not see the different culture before, even though I visited and I knew Portuguese people. It's a lot of things that you might not consider beforehand. That's fine as long as you stay on it and you actually take your time and you don't freak out, it's gonna be fine. I can only encourage everybody to actually do it at least once in a lifetime. You make a lot of new experiences, and it also expands your perspective on life in general. Also, it's comparing a bit Austria versus, in

my case, Portugal. What's the differences? What's good? What's bad? What could I take from each country or bring from each country?

C5 VTE2

1	Interview date: 16.05.2025
2	Interviewer: The interview will consist of a series of questions asking you to reflect on your past and current assignments. After each question, I will also ask a scenario based question to encourage you to think about how your experience might apply to the other type of assignment. To begin, could you briefly describe your most recent assignment?
3	VTE2: My most recent assignment and working abroad was almost two years ago, I came back two years ago. I moved to the Netherlands in September 2021 out of family reasons. I moved there, I basically kept the same job, which is working remote from that location. I'm currently based in Vienna, before that I was based in Vienna. I flew back to Vienna roughly once a month to check in with the team. I'm a team lead as well. There was a request the company had, to come back to Vienna on a regular basis. The role stayed the same, I was just working remotely from a different location.
4	Interviewer: How would you describe the organizational culture of the firm when you were on assignment?
5	VTE2: There's so many, many words. Open, willing to adapt to circumstances. At the time there was no remote work. Remote work was possible obviously because I could do it, but there was not one solution that fit it all, that came later. I was like a weird person requesting this. I know there were more people, but it was not a fixed solution for all that everyone could do remote work once a month or three times a year. This was an interesting thing for the company, because I knew they got some requests, they were very open. They were very transparent in their communication and they were very willing to help my circumstances as well. I really sensed the trust in me that I could do the same job from abroad for the company as well. Trust, openness, willingness to adapt.
6	Interviewer: How do you think might organizational culture influence the experience of a virtual expatriate, if you compared the two?
7	VTE2: If you work for the same company, but instead of moving, for example, from Austria to Netherlands, you stay in Austria but you would work for the part in the Netherlands?
8	Interviewer: Exactly.
9	VTE2: I think it would influence not so much the company. It depends if there are team members there. If you work with the team locally, of course it's better to see them once in a while, at least if it's necessary to be there, but once in a while would be better also for company culture. It's probably more how it affects you personally, because it depends on a company. How traditional is the company? How modern is the company? Is remote work a thing or is Home Office a thing that you can do 2-3 times a week or even more? Is that normal in the company? Then a lot of people are used to remote work anyway and it doesn't then really matter if you're sitting in Germany or Austria or the Netherlands. It's virtual anyway. Most of the time or a lot of the times. It affects you probably more personally than the company. If you would work in the team there and everybody is there and you're the only person not there, that might be a challenge.
10	Interviewer: In what ways a challenge?
11	VTE2: It also depends on the company, but in our company a lot of talks are done informally, just in the office or you go for lunch and you kind of miss out on that stuff and on the team experience. At Org2 I think that's one of the most important aspects why people work for Org2, because the team culture is very friendly, very open, very willing to help and if you are never

	there, you're never gonna experience that. You might lose a little bit of a touch towards a possible local team. What's also important, that's also why I came back to Vienna quite regularly, to just check in with the team, go for lunch, see how they're doing in person. Although virtual is great, it's sometimes also difficult to read body language or what happens informally. Once you see them, you can finally sense how they're doing. Especially as a team lead, I think it's important to check in with the local team.
12	Interviewer: You came back once a month approximately?
13	VTE2: Once a month, roughly.
14	Interviewer: What role did mentors or other supervisors play during your assignment?
15	VTE2: Not much. I had my boss, who stayed the same. They enabled me to do it, but they didn't have that experience, was not really any help in this regards. I have family there as well, it was quite easy for me to go move there.
16	Interviewer: How might having a mentor influence the experience of a virtual assignment? If you compare again.
17	VTE2: You have things like local culture, language barriers, which I didn't have. Here I had a huge advantage. Even in a virtual setup it might be helpful, if you're not accustomed to the language, to the culture, to how things are being done in the expat country where you're moving to. That will definitely help or just a person that had the experience might also help. But from my perspective, because I also moved to Austria at some point, language and culture are the main things why somebody is feeling well in a country. Even within teams, I also have Germans in my team, I have Austrians in my team. In the overall team there's a person from India and even within this setup you can see changes, or not changes, but you can see different behaviors although it's so close and the culture is so related. You have these little details and if you know them and if you are aware, it helps you, definitely. Even in a virtual setup it could be helpful.
18	Interviewer: Cultural awareness?
19	VTE2: Cultural awareness, language. Dutch people are quite direct and they could be even seen as a little bit of arrogant, but that's just the way how to communicate. It's very direct, very open, but if you don't know this, you might say they're so rude. If you are aware about this and you know this, you have a better time to integrate and maybe do your job even better within your expat experience.
20	Interviewer: You didn't really have to integrate into the local culture, but in what ways are the two cultures different or similar? Before you talked about the more direct ways, can you come up with other ways?
21	VTE2: The language and the communication style is more direct, it's more open. Talking to random people, compared to Austria, is easier. Small talk is being done even if you are on the street or in the shop. It's like, oh, hey! It's just a random comment sometimes. In Austria, it's much more reserved. At least in Vienna, but also in different parts of the country, much more reserved, more conservative. I think that's the main things work-wise on a general level for the country. Work-wise, in Austria there are more hierarchies within a company. Org2 is a little bit different, but I worked at a big Austrian company before, like years ago. There were a lot of hierarchies and decision making was not super fast. That's also a difference between a smaller company and a big company, because a bigger company is always slower. I think the Dutch people are more willing to take a risk. There is then a talk and everybody gets a chair on the table and everybody gets to say, but then decision making is quicker and with more risk than, for example, in Austria. Sometimes decision making takes a long time, or they're not willing to

	take all they know, what to know, even more details to make the right (...) “the right” decision. You never know if it's right, you always know afterwards, right? It moves a little bit faster in the Netherlands, the discussions take place. The decision process is quicker than in Austria. Work-wise, like working hours, it's roughly the same. Netherlands is a little bit more international, English is not an issue, like everybody speaks English. I know a lot of people there that work in Dutch companies, but there's always some expat or some person from another country. It's quite normal to have that set up. Not everywhere, but in general it's not very uncommon.
22	Interviewer: For a virtual expatriate, how do you think one would integrate into the local culture while working from a distance?
23	VTE2: It's really tough, because if you're not there, you don't hear the language on the street, you don't see what's happening in the city. It's really tough to adapt to the local team, their circumstances. What you can do is of course have informal coffee talks or do an informal round or remote afterworks. But to be honest, this is what we tried at Org2 during the COVID times. Oh, let's hang out after work altogether, do a coffee talk. You're sitting the whole day behind your laptop, do you really want to spend more time there? The first few months were new and everybody was like, oh, yeah, let's do something. After 2-3 months these remote talks in private or after a full day of remote meetings, it's not something that really stuck around. It's even tougher to be integrated well when you're virtual, but it also depends on the role, because if it's just for a project and it's one of multiple things you do, that could work. We have people in Hamburg, we have people in Porto, we have people in Munich. It works. We don't have any issues with projects. If you're the only person out and the rest is local, that's much tougher than some are remote and some are local.
24	Interviewer: What role did family, friends or other social networks play during your assignment?
25	VTE2: That was heavily influenced by it. Of course I didn't have to integrate that much because I have family there, friends there. But, it was a new city, that's a little bit different. We moved to a city, my wife moved with me, and that was different. We also had to integrate into the city and we got to know some people, neighbors for example, they were super open and helpful and very interested what we're doing here. That played a huge role, having friends, having nice neighbors, having family there. Yeah, definitely. For a real expat, that's the most difficult thing. If you don't have that connection, then you have your work life and there you have your colleagues and that's great. You stay in your family bubble and you stay in your work bubble. If your local team also consists of a lot of expats, it will probably be very difficult to integrate. And you really have to put the effort in to learn the language, to do some sport, to do some courses or whatever to really integrate. Otherwise - this is what I've also seen, I was at Sony before, it is not my own experience - we had some Japanese people, we had people from the UK. Especially the Japanese, it was very hard for them. It was just their work, like their work was life, basically. That's also a little bit of a Japanese working culture mindset, but they weren't integrated at all. They just stuck with the work bubble. They had their work and they had their family there and that's it. The rest didn't really, I mean you could sit on the moon and it wouldn't be really a difference, basically. And that was interesting to see from an expat perspective, because the culture differences are even much, much bigger.
26	Interviewer: In what ways might family and friends provide support for a virtual expatriate? Do you think that there are differences or similarities?
27	VTE2: The role that they can play is less for virtual. How do they know that country? They're probably there for you if you want to say, hey, my day was crap, this of course exists. For example, you move to Brazil for an assignment and you don't have any family or friends there. How can they help? If you do an assignment in Brazil, but you're staying in Austria, for example.

	How does your Austrian family can help in that situation? They don't know anything about Brazil. They don't know the language, don't know the culture. They support with coping and talking about it, but there's no tips and tricks. There's no, let's do something together. That's quite different, you always stay a little bit disconnected. I've worked partly remote, because I was in the Netherlands and working remote a lot, but then came back roughly four to five days every month. I had a traditional assignment, I moved somewhere, but then I worked also quite virtually the other way around. This is what I meant, you lose touch with the team almost, even if you talk every day, even if you do stand ups or whatever. But you don't have a stand up, you don't know what happens a certain day or how they're doing. It's very hard to read the room if you only meet virtually. It's possible, it worked out. Even if I'm in Vienna I work mostly two days remote and three days in the office. I just like to be in the office, see the people and see how they're doing, also have a laugh together and have a little bit of fun at work as well.
28	Interviewer: Can you describe any personal characteristics that you found helpful or challenging during your assignment?
29	VTE2: I'm an open person, open to meet new people. I wouldn't say I'm super extroverted, but I'm also definitely not introverted. Meeting new people, being open for new situations. A personal thing that's important or not important, I moved around quiet a lot when I was little. Not too much, but every three to four years. Which is for a lot of people quite a lot, but that made me quite adaptable to new situations, especially when it's about new living situations or new areas. I learned quite quickly to meet new people or know what to do. I think that helps in such situations. Being able to adapt, being able to go out and just meet people. Was there anything that didn't help? To be honest, this flying every month after a while it became a little bit of a burden. That's also why I decided instead of two years to come back after one and a half years, because it was a little bit too much. At one point, I felt a little bit like, oh, I'm not living there. I'm not living in Vienna, I'm just somewhere in between. I know a lot of people do it and I know there are people that fly on Monday, come back on Thursday and they're totally fine. That's a personal decision, for me after sixteen/seventeen months of flying back and forth, it was a little bit too much.
30	Interviewer: When you visited Vienna, did you stay for a week or a couple of days?
31	VTE2: Roughly, usually at least three days, but sometimes five days. Sometimes the whole week, even with the weekend.
32	Interviewer: If you compare traditional and virtual expatriates, would the personal characteristics that could be helpful or challenging differ or would they be the same?
33	VTE2: I think open and being able to adapt always helps in such situations, because if you have a new assignment, it doesn't matter if it's virtual or traditional but even more so for virtual, I think you need to put in a little bit more effort to get to know the people because remote you just have this distance. You cannot do a handshake. I've seen it work, a lot of companies do virtual stuff. If you really want to be integrated or maybe even have the project running better, I would definitely recommend also visiting local countries. Even if you do virtual assignment, at least get to know the people personally once or in a time span, let's say if it's a year assignment, I would personally still fly there every quarter or every second month just to have this face-to-face contact. You need to put in a little bit more effort. Characteristics, willing to learn, but it's the same, roughly the same. Probably, if you really want to be integrated well, you need to put in more effort, because if you're locally there, it's gonna happen anyway, you go for lunch, you're there, you live there, you hear the language, you see the culture, you feel the culture, you experience it. It goes way quicker.
34	Interviewer: We talked about personal characteristics, if you think about skills, can you describe any skills that you found useful that helped you adapt to the new situation?

35	VTE2: You mean actual work skills?
36	Interviewer: For work or personal, any skills.
37	VTE2: I wouldn't say anything. I think it's more personality than skill related.
38	Interviewer: Were you affected by time zone differences?
39	VTE2: No. As I said, we had some colleagues in my past company that came from Japan or came from the UK. In that regards, I saw people struggling with time sometimes. Some of them had to go to Japan and then you have eight hour time difference and then flying back and forth. Some were quite tired, but it depended on how often they flew back and forth.
40	Interviewer: In what ways was your performance evaluated and compensated different to other colleagues or was it the same?
41	VTE2: It was the same, nothing changed. Evaluation didn't matter if I was there or in Vienna, that also stayed the same. Again, I think my situation was a little bit different than a normal assignment. Normally you get the salary where you work from. There was no extra bonus, no adjustments or no different work. It was the same, basically.
42	Interviewer: In what ways did the company support you during your move?
43	VTE2: We moved in September 2021 still during COVID. I said I want to spend time with my family or I need to spend time with my family in the Netherlands as well. I was willing to quit the job. I never communicated that, if you cannot give me this, I will quit my job. This is never what I said, but of course if I started this conversation that was a possible outcome of the outcomes that I was looking for. It was, OK, I really want to do this, I really need to do this. Family goes above the job. At that timeframe it was more important and then I will find another job in the Netherlands. I've been at Org2 for eight years and I would like to stay here, but at some point, some things are more important than a job. I never communicate that, but that was in my mindset before I went into the conversations and the company was like, whoa, whoa, what is this? It took some time to actually make it work, because there are a lot of legal implications, salaries, big implications, insurance implications. How do you communicate to the teams? It's just an exception or can others do it? It even went to the board, my case went to our still CEO and she had to approve it because it was such a special situation. That's what I meant with, I sensed a lot of trust and a lot of willingness from the company to actually make this work. It's also not normal because there are 1700 at the time, 2800 people at the company and I'm the crazy one saying I want to do this. I didn't feel special, I'm just a normal person, but I felt really great willingness from the company to make it work and to have an honest discussion and honest setup about it and luckily we found a solution that worked for both sides, which also meant me flying back once a month. That was one of the things that the company mentioned. Hey, I need you to spend time in Austria, even if you go there, you need to come back quite often, which is helpful for staying connected with the team. This was one of the things they said, we want that you are not half a year there and then you come back once after six months for a week and then you're again gone for six months. It was an ongoing discussion, but I really sensed the willingness to make it work and to adjust to my personal circumstances. Basically it was great, but I also think it was one of the only ones within the company, I heard there were some other cases but not a whole lot. I don't think at the moment it would be possible anymore, because I think in 2022ish they came up with this new solution, everybody can do a workation or FTEs can do a workation three times a year, maximum a month. I think if I would now request the same thing, they would say we have the workation, you can go for a month, but that's it. I don't think they would do such a special case anymore unless it's something pushed from the company to investigate the market.

44	Interviewer: It was a company requirement that you come back every month to visit rather than in your personal interest?
45	VTE2: Yes. It was a good thing, but when I started it wasn't in my thinking that I would come back every month. In the end, it also became a little bit too much to travel that much just to spend time with the team. Once a month is fine and people do it and people do it more often. Flying for me would have been fine every six, seven weeks, to stay in touch.
46	Interviewer: Once the company prepared everything, before the move, did you also receive some other support when you were abroad?
47	VTE2: It was just you do you, but no extra support. I think this is also different. If you have an assignment and the company asks you to do something, they would give you some language course that you can do or integrational course. There is this company which also belongs to Org2. Maybe a membership here? Stuff like that and adjust the salary or a bonus. For example, the Japanese colleagues from Sony, their family could come over to visit or the other way around for a free flight.
48	Interviewer: When you came back were there preparations in place, did you receive any other kind of support? Onboarding?
49	VTE2: No, because I basically had the same job. It was just come back and let's continue.
50	Interviewer: Do you have any advice, suggestions that you would give to a virtual or traditional expatriate?
51	VTE2: It's tougher than might seem from the outside. It depends on how you want to go about it. Are you just focused on work and does your local country matter to you if you get sent for an assignment? If not, then why? How willing are you to integrate and how long is the assignment for? That's a very personal decision. A lot of expats stay in their expat bubble, which is fine, that's your personal decision. There is this study about who's the most welcoming country and Austria always ranks bottom second or third. I compare Austrians always with a coconut. They are hard from the outside, but once you've cracked the coconut, they're super welcoming and super warm and very super friendly and willing to give food, drinks, have a nice time and share experiences. They're very reserved so it's very hard to reach this inner Austrian. If you're not willing to put in the time and the effort, it might seem that they're quite harsh or quite difficult to reach, but it's the case in any country. If you go there and you're not a local, everybody that lives there, grew up there, they have their own bubble anyway. They have their friends, they have their family. It's always a little bit tougher to get into that circle. To come back to your question, it's a very personal decision. Any tips, for me it is important learn the language as fast as possible, try to integrate, understand a culture, because if you understand the language and understand the culture, you understand the people better. That makes your team work better and the experience you're gonna have in that assignment time as well. You have to put in the work and some cannot because their work is already taking up so much time and they don't have the energy to then follow up with things, which is also understandable. I don't want to blame anybody who doesn't do that. It's just a personal energy and a personal decision, how you want to go about your expat experience.

C6 HR2

1	Interview date: 27.05.2025
2	Interviewer: Thank you for taking the time to participate in my interview. The interview will consist of a series of questions asking you to reflect on your experience of managing expatriates. If you have experience of managing both virtual and traditional expatriates, please compare the two types of assignment in each question, and if you have experience with only one type, then I will ask a scenario based question to encourage you to think about how your experience might apply to the other type of assignment. A virtual expatriate is someone who doesn't relocate to a different country for the assignment, but stays within the same country, but works virtually for another subsidiary, for example. The virtual expatriate is the only one from the team who is working virtually. To begin, could you briefly describe your experience in managing expatriates?
3	HR2: I never worked for companies who offer that, that's nothing what was part of my job. I didn't think of those people as expatriates. In my head, expatriates are only when they are relocated and moving with their family to a different city, to a different state and relocate for work. If you say that virtual expatriate is someone who is the only one of the team sitting in a different location, that's something I had in my work life a couple of times.
4	Interviewer: What were your main responsibilities when you were working with them or managing them?
5	HR2: It was mainly the consulting of the people manager, not even the person him or herself, but the people manager. How can the people manager support the person? What is also from a legal or compliance perspective necessary to do? Only once I also consulted the employee who was relocated himself because he also was a people manager.
6	Interviewer: Could you describe exactly what role HR does play during an expatriate assignment?
7	HR2: In the companies I've worked so far was no professional expatriate management, because it was not the strategy of the company to send someone to different locations. I've also worked in hospitality industry where it's completely normal that people work in summer season in Croatia and in winter season in Austria. It's not really seen as an expatriate, it's their normal life in hospitality industry. There was not a professional way that HR was conducting or helping or supporting, it was like a normal hire of a former employee in a different country.
8	Interviewer: Would you say that HR plays a different role for virtual and traditional expatriates? Traditional being someone who is relocating, virtual someone who is not relocating.
9	HR2: In traditional topics they are more involved and they have a broader responsibility. On the one hand, the legal and administrative part, but on the other hand, also providing services to the employee that was relocated and that differs from company to company. How much budget do they have? What kind of services do they offer? What I know from other companies, they offer also services to support in helping finding an apartment, school for kids, monetary helping them with their rent. This is a bigger part if it's traditionally. If it's virtually, it's more a consulting part, but you do not offer any support system that's based on finding an apartment, finding school for kids.
10	Interviewer: What role does corporate culture play during an assignment?
11	HR2: Massively, especially if it's a virtual topic. It's a difference if you work for a company where it's completely normal that you have teams spread in different locations or the team is sitting in one location, just one person who's sitting in a different location. It's part of the culture and

	completely normal to hold meetings, to hold workshops also virtually or if it's a company where it's not common and not normal. It plays a massive role how the culture is.
12	Interviewer: How would you describe a culture that positively or negatively influences the experience of an expatriate?
13	HR2: What's positive is, if it's an inclusive culture, inclusive in all manners. In terms of if you are having a meeting and someone is the only one who is hybrid or virtually in the meeting, that you are aware that you do not talk with each other during your on mute. It's the etiquette of having virtual meetings. Also inclusive in terms of, how you plan as a people manager gatherings of the team, fostering team culture. As a people manager it's very difficult because all the time you need to think about how this is experienced from the person who is not sitting in the location. Inclusiveness is the biggest topic that is necessary in the culture.
14	Interviewer: For both types of assignment or mainly for virtual?
15	HR2: For both, because when someone is relocated, you need to be aware that for this person it's a completely new life chapter, in a completely new environment, new culture, maybe new language.
16	Interviewer: How does your organization evaluate and compensate the performance of expatriates?
17	HR2: Not different than not expatriate. It's not really a topic when it comes to performance management.
18	Interviewer: What role does the firm play in integrating a traditional expatriate into the local culture compared to someone working from a distance?
19	HR2: If you have a virtual expatriate, the company is not even aware to have a look on that, as the person is not relocating in person to a different location, it's not the big topic. Honestly, there are some topics they should be aware and should have a look on. If someone is traditionally relocated, most companies already have an eye on that topic and also invest in it.
20	Interviewer: What would be topics for the virtual scenario that should be addressed more?
21	HR2: There should be someone who is in charge of that topic in HR, who has a close feedback loop with the people who are virtual expatriates and are in exchange what they need, what would help and are also in exchange with the people manager of the person. The people manager is the most relevant factor, who is in charge and who can make a difference.
22	Interviewer: What role does a mentor or supervisor play during an assignment for virtual and traditional expatriates?
23	HR2: That's not that different between virtual and traditional. There's a different role between people manager and mentor or buddy. In the onboarding phase, I would see the buddy or the mentor more for unofficial questions, unofficial ways of working, unofficial ways of communicating. If it's a traditional relocation, also explaining how specific topics work in that country or in that city. The people manager more on work-related content. There is not one or two characteristics that's crucial to have a successful expatriate, because the expectations will be different from one expat to the other. It's crucial that the expatriate very well thinks about it and knows what to expect and has the right expectation going somewhere else. It's completely different from person to person, because also expectations may vary from person to person. One person has the expectation of two years in Spain and wants to inhale everything living abroad and the other person just sees it as a job working in a different office, in a different city, but is not interested that much in the other culture. It's very important that the people

	don't take it too low weighted and just do it without thinking. Preparation and expectation beforehand are important.
24	Interviewer: Do you think that there's a difference between a virtual and a traditional expatriate personality wise? That different traits would be important?
25	HR2: Yes, because if you're thinking about a virtual expatriate, the person is sitting mostly in Home Office or alone in an office. When the whole team is sitting in a different location, it makes something with you. These should be personalities that do not need that face-to-face contact everyday in work life. There are a lot of people who need that, want to go to the office, who want to see other people and need those personal interactions to also have energy throughout the day. Probably those people do not need that, otherwise they will not be that happy.
26	Interviewer: Can you think of any skills that could be helpful or challenging for an expatriate to adjust?
27	HR2: For traditional ones, the skill of adapting, adapting to new situations, adapting to new languages, to new tools, to new everything. The skill of adapting is crucial. Of course, language skill will be a topic. For a virtual one I would definitely see the technical part. We are working in a very modern environment and we assume that it's completely normal that you can find your way through Teams meetings and Slack messages, but outside of this work environment, it's not that normal. People who are from a different generation, it's not that easy for them. The technical topic, we should not underestimate.
28	Interviewer: Can you describe any policies or strategies that the organization has in place or that should be in place for expatriates?
29	HR2: Currently there is not an official guideline. What is in place is if someone is relocating for the job, how much budget does the company have to support monetarily? A lot of people get a relocation bonus to cover some of the cost of the relocation, but it will never cover all of the costs in my current company. You get a small bonus because we know that you are relocating just for that job. A big topic is of course salary, that's a legal topic. If you're currently employed in Austria and you go to Porto or you go to Spain it's a different salary range there. This is a huge topic, because on the one hand you want to have a comparison in Spain and in Portugal, there's just no reason why the person next to you earns much more just because they are coming from Austria. It's also a topic of expectations of people, because they don't wanna earn less than they are currently earning.
30	Interviewer: It doesn't matter if traditional or virtual expatriate, but the whole move of becoming an expat, do you think that HR helps more with the preparations or that they can or could do more for the part where the expatriate is then actually working?
31	HR2: Probably yes. In most companies is still the focus on administration, but it should be more than that.
32	Interviewer: Do you have something that you want to mention that we didn't talk about or any suggestions for virtual or traditional expatriates? Something that HR could do differently either in this company or another?
33	HR2: Even if the company does not provide that much budget for supporting an expatriate, it makes a difference how HR is in contact with those people. If employees have the feeling that there is somebody I can talk to, I can go to and they are willing and want to support me, it's OK that there is not that big budget and that there's no official support for kids. If they have a good feeling of support.

C7 TE2

1	Interview date: 15.04.2025
2	Interviewer: Thank you for taking the time to participate in the interview. The interview will consist of a series of questions asking you to reflect on your past and current assignments, and after each question I will ask a scenario based question to encourage you to think about how your experience might apply to a virtual assignment. So a virtual assignment again is where you don't relocate compared to a traditional one. Let's start right away with the first question. To begin, could you briefly describe your most recent traditional assignment? Where were you located and for how long?
3	TE2: The most recent assignment was in Germany with a full relocation. It was for a bit more than one year 2019-2020, it was during COVID time. I started the assignment in Munich in October without any restrictions and then COVID appeared, but I stayed in Munich and didn't move back to Austria. The reason for the assignment was the assignment before. I was on an international assignment in our head office in Milan and at a certain point I was asked if I would like to stay permanently in Milan. I was also wondering, going back to Austria because initially the plan was going back. It was something to think about, but then Germany appeared. I was collaborating with them and they asked me if I would like to join them for a year. It was a great occasion to experience also another business unit. It was based on some project I had to take care about in Germany.
4	Interviewer: How would you describe the organizational culture of the firm where you were on assignment?
5	TE2: It was always the same company, but it's another company. If I compare the Austrian organizational culture with the German or with the Italian, it's a totally different game, a totally different working style. It's also from a political perspective another game.
6	Interviewer: How might organizational culture influence the experience of a virtual expatriate? You were working virtually, maybe you have some insights.
7	TE2: I haven't experienced any regular virtual assignment yet, but I was working closely with international colleagues virtually. It makes a real impact if you are relocated or not. To get in touch with the organizational culture with all those implicit things, you cannot hear, you can't feel, it's crucial to be there in the offices. Also in the country, if it's a foreign country, it makes an impact.
8	Interviewer: What role did mentors or supervisors play during your assignment?
9	TE2: No specific role than the other colleagues. Of course different leaders have different styles. You need to adapt to it as well as to the cultural things.
10	Interviewer: How did you integrate into the local culture during your assignment?
11	TE2: In Germany it was a bit easier because we have a shared language. In Italy it was much more difficult because I was not used to speaking that much English. The corporate language in the head office is English, but most of the colleagues were Italian, they continued, of course, also speaking Italian. I didn't feel that confident in speaking English at the beginning, it was a hard time. How did I integrate? Learning, I'm learning fast, adopting things fast. Based on the expat package I was entitled to have 2 hour Italian courses per week, but at the end I had no time to proceed with it. I learned Italian and I listened to the things they were speaking and I could understand, but it was all basically in English.
12	Interviewer: You talked about the expat package, what did that include?

13	TE2: It includes the relocation itself, a serviced apartment and an expat allowance, an additional sum for the time there, and the Italian course.
14	Interviewer: As a virtual expatriate, how would you integrate into the local culture working from a distance?
15	TE2: I'm not sure if it's possible to fully integrate. In our company we have virtual assignments, but sometimes they are part-time assignments, you're split between your local role and the international role. In this case it's even harder to integrate because on the one hand you are working locally and on the other hand, it's a glimpse, you're just partially part of the project internationally. To be honest, I'm not sure if it's really properly possible to integrate in a culture. It might depend if the whole team is a virtual team, but if the majority of the team is located somewhere and is gathering together somewhere and you are the only one virtually joining them, then I'm not sure if it's possible.
16	Interviewer: In your company some people make part-time assignments, have you also been on a part-time assignment or just full time?
17	TE2: Full-time.
18	Interviewer: What role did family, friends or other social networks play during your assignment?
19	TE2: My assignments were about working, working hard. I had not that much time to socialize or to enjoy private things, but it was OK. My first assignment changed a lot in my private area when it comes to friends, I wasn't able anymore to meet them that often and also the relationship at the end broke up due to the fact that it was abroad. If I would make something different and this is also advise I give to all my colleagues who are going on an assignment: Yes you are tired, yes you might be lazy being abroad, but take every single occasion to meet people and make friends you get. They will ask you once or twice, but not a third time and it's important for you.
20	Interviewer: In what ways might family and friends provide support during a virtual assignment?
21	TE2: I'm not sure if it would make a huge difference for them. If you're working on a virtual assignment, working with other colleagues from abroad or working with local people, from a family or friends perspective, nothing has changed. You are still there, you're going out, you're meeting them. There might be challenges due to a higher workload or due to another working style you might experience, but at the end it's not that big topic.
22	Interviewer: Can you describe any personal characteristics that you found helpful or challenging during your assignment?
23	TE2: For me the change from Austrian culture to Italian culture was for sure much bigger than between the German culture and the Austrian culture. The Austrian culture is in between the Italian and the German. In Italy I had the challenge that also my manager was quite new, she was also not properly aware about political and cultural things. We were both newbies, this was a challenge. My secret was to accept every situation as it is and being fully flexible. The shift, the mindset shift, to full adaptation to every single situation. I always was telling myself, I'm a fish in the sea. The fish in the sea is super flexible and is swimming. This was something which calmed me down in this mess I was sometimes experiencing.
24	Interviewer: How might personal characteristics differ for virtual assignments? Do you think that different personal characteristics would be helpful for a virtual assignment or challenging compared to a traditional?

25	TE2: The virtual assignments I observed in our company were in a way that I'm not sure if there is really such a clash you're experiencing that you really need to adapt to new things.
26	Interviewer: Can you describe any skills that you found useful in adjusting to the new environment?
27	TE2: Openness, curiosity, willingness, going the extra mile and staying positive. Openness to new things and to new cultures was important. A colleague of mine in Italy always told me, I know that you can see a lot which can be changed, which can be made better, but don't forget we are working in that style. We are doing it, because we are feeling comfortable with it, don't change us. That was important to understand. I need to adapt, not they need to adapt.
28	Interviewer: How might these skills differ for a virtual assignment?
29	TE2: In a virtual assignment, it can also apply that from one day to another different additional skills are needed from you. It's about the working style, handling with deadlines. From a skill and technical perspective, there might be changes also in a virtual assignment.
30	Interviewer: When you were on your assignment, either for Italy or Germany, did you feel welcomed by the host nationals or did you experience resistance?
31	TE2: Absolutely welcomed. It's an international company. The guys in Italy were always striving for being an international company with an international team, they were really inclusive. It was absolutely clear that if I'm the only one not speaking Italian that they will change the meeting to English. Sometimes it was not that great for me because I don't want to be the only reason, but it was absolutely clear. The same also in Germany. Of course, in Italy when they were going out for lunch, the Italians, and they wanted to speak in Italian, because it's easier also for them, but it wasn't a problem. I was feeling welcomed, really.
32	Interviewer: Do you have anything else to add that helped you with adjusting or a challenge that we didn't talk about?
33	TE2: It's about the differences between a virtual assignment and a traditional assignment. If you're there, you are able to bond much more with the people than having a virtual assignment. If you bond with them, if you're sharing the same experiences, if you're sitting as long as the others are sitting in the offices, you're becoming one team. You can also talk with them about your problems and your experiences or your solutions. Having a virtual assignment, I'm not sure if it's possible if it's not a virtual assignment for all exclusively. If you are combining different people from different countries in one virtual assignment and they are all virtually, it might be a difference. If not, then I don't know. A combination could be good, but it would be important to start on a traditional, on a relocated assignment, to get in touch with them, to get in touch with the culture and then moving to a virtual assignment, could be a good solution. What I've also seen while observing other assignments: if it's just three months, your entering and leaving at the same time, three months are nothing. It could be interesting to get a flavor, but really immersing in this culture thing, it's hard in three months. At least six months are important in order to foster this global international mindset, which is sometimes the reason for assignments or for global mobility programs.
34	Interviewer: Any advice that you would give to an expatriate or someone who wants to go on an assignment?
35	TE2: Strive for a traditional assignment with relocation and trust in yourself.

C8 VE2

1	Interview date: 28.04.2025
2	Interviewer: The interview will consist of a series of questions asking you to reflect on your past and current assignments. After each question, I will ask a scenario-based question to encourage you to think about how your experience might apply to a traditional assignment. Let's begin. Could you briefly describe your most recent virtual assignment? How long did it last and what was the reason for the assignment?
3	VE2: The reason for the assignment was that I was part of a talent program at Org3. We were encouraged to all do a virtual project assignment. It was during COVID, that's why it was virtual. It was 11 months that were virtual and then I actually had the possibility to go to Milan and spend 3 months of my assignment also there. The project was about performance management. We were talking about how to change performance management during the COVID time. Since everything was virtual, it was a lot harder to see when employees are working, what exactly they're working on and the managers also don't really have control over them. That's what actually made us change the whole performance management. I was in head office, Milan is our head office. They started talking to all the different countries to see what performance management is right now at their country. We tried to find one standard that all countries needed to implement. Everyone can do more than just the standards, but not less. We wanted to have one process for everyone.
4	Interviewer: How would you describe the organizational culture of the firm during your assignment?
5	VE2: Every country is a bit different and also the group thinking is a bit different. In head office, it was very Italian based culture. People were very open, but also hardworking. Since it was the head office they had a lot to do. They were used to having to talk to different people, they were very open also about me. On the virtual side, since everyone was at home, we tried to have all the little celebrations online, like birthday celebrations or my first week there. When I was there in presence it was even more welcoming because they organized some afterworks and we got to know each other a bit different. For me the advantage was that everyone was working virtually at that moment, everyone was working remotely. I didn't have the feeling of missing out on something. The longer the assignment took and people started going back to the office and I couldn't, not to their office, I felt a little bit left out. They had all those little moments where they could talk about anything and everything. We had a formal call online, it would be just about work or mostly about work. That's when I started to miss out a little bit on something culturally. They were really open, very welcoming. They like to talk a lot, it was a good time.
6	Interviewer: Everyone from the team was working virtually and by the end you were the only one before you then went there?
7	VE2: Exactly, they started going back to the office at least once or twice a week. For me it was too far away. That's why at the end, we decided to have me be in Milan too, that I get to experience what it was like.
8	Interviewer: How might organization and culture influence the experience of a traditional expatriate if you compare it?
9	VE2: It depends a lot on the people, they need to be open minded. They also need to be able to speak the language. That was something that was important, because whenever it is hard for someone to speak in your language, a lot of things get missing. One thing that's really important, to have someone who is actually committed to make the best out of this experience for the person that is doing the traditional assignment. It's actually about everything, from organization to being there for this person if there are questions. Taking him or her to

	afterworks or doing something also outside of work. That is something that a lot of people don't think about. If you move abroad, you get to know people that already have their friend group, that already are settled in life, maybe have their family. You get there by yourself, maybe you don't have a partner or family that is coming with you and it's really hard to then get to know other people. It's not like in the first years when you're at college, everyone is in the same situation, but later on it gets more difficult. It's important for the organization to plan those moments where you can do something informally and outside of work too. For the person him or herself it's the same, also needs to be very open to try new things, do the experiment. Something that is really important for the person doing the traditional assignment is that you don't think about coming back. Even if you know it's just one year, you can have it in the back of your mind all the time. You can think in one year I'll be gone, so I won't actually take the effort to meet someone else. That will limit your experience. You'll always miss out on some things if you think it's not worth doing it, since I will be gone anyway. That is really important, the mindset of the person doing the traditional assignment.
10	Interviewer: What role did mentors or supervisors play during your assignment?
11	VE2: My manager was my mentor. She really tried to be there for me, even on a personal note. I was still very young, I experienced bias. I started in Org3 three years ago when I did my assignment and was also young age-wise. Finished university and then started working. I had some troubles doing presentations in front of top management, in front of people that are really important. I talked to her about it and that's when she was a real mentor too. She told me that she had the same things when she was my age and with my experience. She gave me actual tips on how to do it, not just mind-wise, but also, if we're doing those meetings you will start, you will talk about what the topic is and if there's question and you feel like you cannot answer, do this in that sign and I will be there. She was a real mentor personally, but also in terms of experience and work. She always tried to make the best out of it and I was able to learn a lot from her.
12	Interviewer: Your manager was based in Milan?
13	VE2: Yes.
14	Interviewer: How might having a mentor influence the experience of a traditional expatriate?
15	VE2: It's the same as for a virtual assignment. I don't think there are any differences except that if you actually see the person, your mentor, you probably have more moments of informally get to know each other too or body-language-wise get to know the person. In a virtual assignment you need to plan those moments. You need to take the time to not just talk about work, but also get to know each other personally, which happens a lot easier if you see each other in person. Both assignments it's really important and I don't think there will be a difference in experience.
16	Interviewer: How did you integrate into the local culture during your assignment? In what ways was it different or similar even though you worked from a distance?
17	VE2: Since everyone was working online, remotely, it was really easy to get to know other people. I could set some meetings and get to know them. If everyone is in the office there's a lot more to do, you move around a lot more or someone gets up to your table and starts talking to you. It's harder to reach someone if you are not there, if you're the only person that is virtual. My experience was not different than it would have been in any other case, since everyone was working virtually. When they went back to the office, it changed a bit, I felt left out, because I missed on those moments. At the beginning we had a lot of calls where I was able to get to know everyone. We had virtual coffee talks where you would talk also about your personal life. They had a welcome meeting for me, we celebrated my birthday with Teams backgrounds, I

	was very welcomed. I cannot say what it would have been like if everyone else would be in the office and not me, people would feel left out.
18	Interviewer: When everyone started going back to the office, did those informal coffee talks continue to happen?
19	VE2: No, most of them stopped. We had some even after they went back to the office, but less and less people started showing up, then they cancelled it totally. We didn't have any coffee talks. We had formal calls, since not everyone can be at the office or we were too many people, some are connected online, others are there. That was just about work, it was really topic-related, nothing very personal anymore.
20	Interviewer: What role did family, friends or other social networks play during your assignment?
21	VE2: If you go there by yourself it's really hard to connect to everyone else in work life, since everyone is already settled with their family and their friends. I was really lucky that there were a few people my age, who were very welcoming. One colleague even invited me on vacation to go with her, we went to Sardinia, did Home Office from there. She was my colleague, she was in the same team, we got to know each other a lot since we were working together a lot. Otherwise, it was hard for me, even though I knew the people for a year, but only online. It was still different to actually be there and spend time with them. That is also what I meant language-wise. It was really important for me that I understood Italian, at least to some extent, because if you're with 10 people on an afterwork, then a group of three people starts talking and they will not speak English if everyone else knows how to speak Italian. At some point they would be like, sorry we forgot, we'll switch to English. It was important for me to know what they were talking about, because I would just say, don't worry about it, I understood you were talking about this and that and then I could ask any question in English and we could continue on the topic. Family-wise, my partner came to Italy every second or third week, and that was also important, especially because what I said about not being able to find connection in the country where everyone else is settled. That was also important and a few friends came to visit me, also my parents. It is important to have also family and friends there and to be able to see what my life is like for them. It might have been easier if I wouldn't have moved there by myself, because you go home to someone and you can do whatever with the person, go to restaurants. It was nice to also learn to do that by myself. I've never been to a cinema or a restaurant or anywhere just by myself and it was a nice experience also to try that. I was nervous at the beginning, but now I do it even in Vienna sometimes because it's something you learn to do. It's a lot easier if you have family and friends with you, it's also easier when you know the language to find friends there. If you don't, if you go by yourself, you need to be open to try new things, maybe even sign up for some sports clubs. For me, it was only three months. I was like, I'm not going to sign up for anything because time-wise it's not worth it, I will not really get to know someone in three months. That could limit the experience.
22	Interviewer: Can you describe other personal characteristics that you found helpful or challenging during your assignment?
23	VE2: Being spontaneous, if someone comes up and says, have you planned anything? If not, let's do this and that together. To be able to say yes, which is also about being open minded. The most of it is really about trying to be in this experience and doing whatever that means. If it means learning the language, to do that. If it means going out with people spontaneously, you try to do that. Also, being comfortable being by yourself. Accepting the way other people are, because every culture is different. I had my moments where I was like, this is so Italian. You just laugh about it and go on with life. Not to judge, just because something is different, is very important. Try out whatever happens to open every door.

24	Interviewer: How might personal characteristics differ for traditional assignments?
25	VE2: For traditional, it's easier if you're actually there. For virtual assignments, it needs more planning, you need to actually plan those moments. In traditional assignments you need to be more spontaneous. That is the biggest difference between those two.
26	Interviewer: Can you think about any skills that you have found useful in adjusting to a new virtual environment?
27	VE2: I come back to planning. Really think about, who are the people you have to work with? Who are the people you want to get to know? To plan meeting them, also to plan in your head, what can we talk about? It's sometimes more difficult if you're in an online setting to build a connection. It helps to think about who is this person? What might that person be interested in? Have some questions prepared in case you don't know what to talk about. That is more difficult virtually, because if you're in presence and you see the person moving around all day, you hear they talk to someone else about their children and you can find a topic to talk about easier than virtually. That and asking questions, to really be able to listen, also to the small things. Be able to ask questions, but also to talk about yourself. It's for both, but it's more difficult in a virtual assignment. You need to have those skills. They're more important to have those skills in a virtual assignment. In presence, it's easier because you see the people and, even if you are not in a conversation with them, you still know what they're interested about.
28	Interviewer: Did the firm offer a language course or anything in Italian to prepare you?
29	VE2: No, I actually never asked if I could have a language course. I don't know if they would have provided one. The company language with head office is always English, everyone speaks English there since they need to manage a whole lot of countries. I knew that with English everything would work fine. I underestimated how important language is at the beginning. I really noticed it when it was not virtual, but when I was in Milan. I noticed how important it is to be able to understand the language. I had Italian when I was at university, I had one year of Italian, which is nothing. When you live there and you hear the language all day, it comes to your mind easier. Language is more important in the traditional assignment. In the virtual, you can just learn a few words. You can start with saying good morning in Italian and everyone will laugh and if you can even say how are you and what was the day like, you already won. Sometimes people would switch to English anyways, but they will really appreciate the effort you took. In a traditional assignment, they want to be inclusive, but they don't think about you not understanding the language. It's harder to speak to everyone always in English, if you're just talking to one person. There it would be important to at least understand a few basics, so you know what the topic is about and then you can join in the conversation more easily.
30	Interviewer: In what ways was your performance evaluated or compensated compared to onsite colleagues? Was it different or the same?
31	VE2: It was different, because I talked to both my managers and they both evaluated me. I still had my manager in Austria and he was actually responsible for me on paper. He got to know my manager, we had a call. The three of us talked about how I was working on her assignments, on the project and they discussed it and together they talked about my performance. Compensation during my virtual assignment didn't change. When I was there, I was paid for normal expenses. They had my apartment ready, they paid for my apartment. They paid for my flights and to some point for food. I had to keep all the receipts and send them in and they would give me back whatever they think would be good. Otherwise, compensation didn't change.
32	Interviewer: Can you describe the feedback you received from both your supervisors or managers?

33	VE2: My manager in Vienna was very excited to see how much I grew in just international context. I didn't have anything to do with head office before that, this was the first time. I really tried to get to know the people and build the connection. I was able to really find friends there, go on vacation with. He thought that was really nice. On the other side, for him it was a lot of effort that he had because me not being there. No one came to replace me or to do the work that I wasn't able to do. He had to take on all the assignments that I couldn't. For him, it was a lot more work and he was ready for that. I know that there's a lot of managers that might be like, I can't time-wise do that too. I was really grateful that that was his view on the assignment. My manager in Italy had a meeting with me every month, maybe even every two weeks. Discussing, what is the project like? What was my experience like? Which was really important, asking me how I'm feeling, if there's something she can change or the team should change or in general should change about the situation. Feedback-wise, she was really happy with me too, that there was someone helping her on this assignment. She appreciated that I didn't only think about what head office wants, but also told her regularly that I understand what the logic is behind this, but working in Austria I can also tell you that this and that will not be done the same way. She really appreciated that too. She gave me feedback on the presentation skills and the confidence. Even during the year, she said, she saw a lot change from the beginning to the end. That was really nice feedback. I was really lucky that I had two managers that were very understanding, invested, helpful and were also willing to take on more work, including me in the project or doing the work themselves.
34	Interviewer: How did you go about building social connections with people in the host country outside of work?
35	VE2: When I was actually there or doing the virtual assignment?
36	Interviewer: During your virtual.
37	VE2: We had a lot of calls, I was in calls all day long. We tried to talk about personal stuff too. How was your weekend? What did you do? What is something you're excited about this week? It was a lot easier for me since everyone was working remotely, because we were in front of our laptops all day and we did the project work together. The brainstorming, everything basically, we did a lot of work together, especially me and that one colleague that also started. We tried to figure everything out by ourselves and had a lot of calls, just a lot of calls. That's how we got to know each other, spending all day and sometimes nights together trying to get the topic done, the assignment done. My manager, she was really interested. She kept on asking me how I'm doing and if there's something she could change. We also had some colleagues there that did the same thing I did, also a virtual assignment, someone from Argentina for example, we were also in the same boat. We talked to each other and tried to find this connection. The meetings that we had were built differently, not like now. Everyone is back in the office and you don't need to have those moments of having some games at the beginning that we can do together or some sharing. That's why it was easy for me. You need to plan to get to know others, because calls now are just, let's talk about the topic and that's it.
38	Interviewer: Do you have any final suggestions or advice that you would give to another virtual expatriate?
39	VE2: Really try and build that connection, even if it might seem a bit annoying to set a coffee talk with someone. Those are the moments that you really need to get to know each other. Try and make the best out of it and even learn a bit of the language to make people laugh and use that. Think about what you want your experience to be like and how you want to reach that. Connection-wise, the best thing is to set a lot of meetings and discuss also personal things. Just little things, how was your weekend for example.

C9 TE3

1	Interview date: 26.03.2025
2	Interviewer: The interview will consist of a series of questions asking you to reflect on past and current assignments, each question will be followed with a scenario based question to encourage you to think about how your experience might apply to a virtual assignment, where you don't relocate compared to a traditional assignment. To begin, could you briefly describe your most recent traditional assignment please?
3	TE3: My assignment time is a long time ago. Most recently I was in China, it was only for two weeks, it was a short-term assignment for teaching at the University in South China. I have the example of Finland where I spent five years. This is a bit long ago, but still it's a very vivid experience and still in my memory. That was a long-term assignment with my family. I was working at the International School, it was a good experience even though I struggled the first two years with the language, not English but Finnish language. I thought that it might have been easier to learn, but it was not. This was a disappointment, which had an impact on the adaptation process as a whole, even though my work at the International School was very good. My expectation was that I learn Finnish quite well, but this was not the case, it was a disappointment. Otherwise, the climate was a challenge, but we got used to that, it was overall a very positive experience.
4	Interviewer: Did you mean that you were confronted with the Finnish language outside the workplace or with colleagues?
5	TE3: It was outside the workplace. It was at International School, so this was English.
6	Interviewer: The reason for the assignment, could you please explain that shortly?
7	TE3: It was of course curiosity. We spent many years abroad as a family, with my former husband. Definitely curiosity, to be in a very different place, to explore Europe, to explore the northern part of Europe. The living conditions in Finland are very good. This was the major attitude, the major decision to go to Finland.
8	Interviewer: How would you describe the organizational culture of your workplace when you were on assignment?
9	TE3: It was a very international setting, it was an educational environment. In Finland at that time, the school was small, about 300 students. It was really a very small place, which was an advantage because we had very good contact among the teachers. I was not a teacher primarily, I was more in the administration. We were not so many people, very international and only very few Finnish people because international schools are always very internationally employed. It was a very nice environment, very helpful, very familiar environment. It was a very nice atmosphere and we became friends very easily.
10	Interviewer: How do you think the organizational culture could influence your experience as a virtual expatriate?
11	TE3: You never meet the people in person or once in a while, but the majority you are not there in presence. In this respect it would not work with teaching, but it works with administration work more or less. It is much more important that the organizational culture is very supportive, that there's a very good communication and information flow. That's very, very important when you work remotely and that you feel integrated, that you have also informal meetings provided by the structure with the colleagues, not only formal meetings. Communication and information flow is very crucial in such a setting. That you are able to set up also personal relationships with your colleagues, either on WhatsApp or any other tool, that you can

	communicate easily on an informal level. That's the most important thing. Organizational culture can do here a lot, providing structures, encouraging people, giving time and providing time slots.
12	Interviewer: What role did mentors or supervisors play during your assignment?
13	TE3: Not much, in the beginning there was somebody who guided me through, kind of a mentor. It wasn't a very complicated working environment. It was just in the very beginning. I strongly believe in mentors. During the onboarding process, mentors have a very crucial function. In another working environment it would be very, very helpful for new assignees, either virtually or face-to-face, but virtually it might be a much more important role that mentors can play.
14	Interviewer: How did you integrate into the local culture during your assignment? In what ways was the host culture different from the one you were used to?
15	TE3: In Finland at that time it was easy because my children also attended International School and there's an international community. There were also families who were former expatriates, Finnish people coming back to Finland and then put their children to the International School. All mixed couples, Finnish-French, Finnish-German. With these people it was easy to relate as expatriates ourselves, because we had much in common. From that point of view, it was easy to get in contact with the locals in this context. Otherwise, if you are alone, if you are working as an expat in an international company where not so many are employed, it's probably very difficult to get in touch with the locals. You have to be definitely very active. On the professional level, to get professional contacts and also become friends is easy, but on a private level it's very difficult. Through associations and sports clubs is a very good way. In Finland, people are very sporty, it's a very good way to connect. You have to be very active to get to the locals, otherwise you won't. There's an expat community or international community, you get in contact with friends who just came back from an assignment or who are mixed couples and are very sociable. That's the only way you can get to the locals, connect to the locals and it takes a lot of effort.
16	Interviewer: If you were a virtual expatriate, how would you integrate into the host culture while working from a distance?
17	TE3: As a virtual expat it's only possible in the professional context, not private, because you don't spend your private life there. It's totally different, it's only your colleagues that you can connect to and this is only probably related to your work. I can't imagine on the private level. You can develop some more deeper friendships or contacts within the professional context, but that's difficult, it's very difficult. It's not the purpose of a virtual assignment, because you have your private life at home and your professional life in the virtual context, this is strongly restricted to the professional purpose.
18	Interviewer: What role do you think would family, friends or maybe other social networks play during your assignment?
19	TE3: Very big, very crucial role. I had children in primary school and older. With children it's easy, you connect easily. You find small networks to make it easier to pick up the children and send them to school. On the private level, social networks are very important. There is always an expatriate network that's very easy to connect to, get in touch with. People are very supportive in this international network. With locals, that's a different story as I said before. That's absolutely crucial, without, you are very lonely. You have to connect, you have to meet people. Of course, some people choose not to be active, but it's much more fun to connect with international networks and any other associations that are available, it's easy to get in.

20	Interviewer: For a virtual expatriate, what role would family, friends or other social networks play?
21	TE3: For virtual expats, as you don't move physically there, you stay at home, there you have your social life. This will not change, you are only for your profession and mentally elsewhere. You would not need the expatriate community for your work. It's strongly work related, your life and your contacts. You don't need any more contacts because once you switch off your computer, you are with your family and you're at home with your contacts, that's very different.
22	Interviewer: Can you describe any personal characteristics that you found helpful or challenging during your assignment?
23	TE3: To be communicative and sociable. It's important and it helps if you're not afraid to get in contact with people, if you like people, if you'd like to be with new people, if you are not afraid of people of very diverse cultural backgrounds. This openness is very helpful, which is not obvious. Not all expatriates do have this willingness or are more afraid or more hesitant to get in contact with people, it happens. That are helpful skills, to be communicative and open minded in terms of meeting people from any cultural background. When you reflect your experiences with people who you do not know, you become aware that specifically expatriate communities are strong, very, very helpful and solidaric. The mutual support is very big, that's what I learned and because we were before in other places. I learned really when I lived abroad that you can come with any questions, with any concern, there is somebody who will help with the family, with children, we are invited, any support. Of course you also provide support to the others. It's a wonderful giving and taking. Relying on that experiences is helpful, because wherever you go, you find a very helpful community. It means also that you are open, that you are also ready to give back, this is very important. Depending on the place where you live, where you are assigned to, Finland was a very safe place to live. We lived also in India, which was not a safe place, people were much more afraid of travelling or going around doing, shopping. People react to their environment and develop intercultural competencies, which is not so obvious that people develop it. It helps a lot to reflect your own reactions and your own adaptation process. In this regards, it would be helpful that people have support, intercultural trainings or coaching, to get through adaptation difficulties. If you have some weaknesses in this regard, these would be the most important skills. Communication, being supportive and offering help. I experienced it very positively.
24	Interviewer: You talked a lot about expatriate networks. Was that through LinkedIn or was there a website?
25	TE3: There is a website, but normally as an expatriate you meet people easily from the international community. At that time it was easy through recommendation or through specific activities, events. Nowadays, you connect easily via LinkedIn or there is an official website of the local international community. Normally, when you move today you do some research, What are the networks at that location? Where can I meet beforehand people, get some tips for moving? It is some years ago that I was in Finland, at that time LinkedIn was not developed as today. Today, much goes through social media and it's much, much easier to find associations and networks to connect with, but it was easy also at that time.
26	Interviewer: Before you moved, you already used those platforms to gather information?
27	TE3: Exactly. It's easy, you can meet online people, ask them beforehand any question and then you get good answers.
28	Interviewer: How might personal characteristics differ for a virtual assignment?

29	TE3: As you do not move, but work virtually at another place, communication skills, good communication skills. If you have doubt that you feel misunderstood or that the message did not come across, mention it. Really having this sensitivity to communication processes, how messages get across, where are the challenges. That's very important, because to communicate virtually is a challenge. You are lacking most of the time nonverbal signals, which is a strong part in communication. You might see the face, which is helpful, but when you have a meeting with 15 other team members, you don't see so well the face. It's very limited, your perception of nonverbal signals, and that's a big challenge. It's only the voice. Sometimes it's not possible to have the camera on, because the connection is bad. That's why communication skills are so important and that you persist on clear communication, that you can build up trust in this situation with your team, which means many informal channels of communicating. It's more or less limited on this professional setting, but it needs a high communicative awareness or sensibility, how to communicate best in such situations. Maybe it needs a training beforehand of what is important, what is helpful, where are the challenges, that you can really design how you create, how you communicate best with your colleagues. It demands a lot more of awareness. When conflicts arise or misunderstandings, you need to be very aware, very alert and a good listener or feel what's going wrong, where are misunderstandings, tensions and address it immediately. Having training in communication conflicts and problem solving would be definitely very good to increase your sensitivity. It needs openness and basic communicative skills, so you are not afraid. It needs, with traditional expatriates, also an emotional stability as a strong trait in your personality. That you overcome easier challenges, in both roles you would need that.
30	Interviewer: Would you say that you felt welcomed by the host country nationals, by the Finnish people, or did you experience any resistance?
31	TE3: I felt very welcomed, for sure related to my work, the family and the connections through the children. I did not learn the language so well. I would have had many more connections to the locals, if I would have learned the language. I know some Finnish, but it was not enough. Language learning is definitely crucial. Finnish is a challenge, very difficult language. You feel welcomed easier when you know the language, that's crucial. In your expatriate community people are very open. For people on the street or your neighbors, who maybe not speak so well English, it's always good to invest in learning the language, learning local habits, that's crucial. You might feel much more welcomed, because you are able to connect to average people. I had a very good time, but it was in a bubble, that happens very often with expatriates. It's due to the circumstances at that time. It's different when you go alone abroad, when you are single, when you're with your family or when you're a couple. Those are very different situations, where you set up different relationships to the people here. When you're all alone, you are much more exposed. You have to set up various relationships to feel welcomed, but as a family you are more in your immediate environment and context, that's definitely different. I had very positive experiences and still love Finland, even though it was a challenge. I could say now that I overcame the challenges that were in the beginning.
32	Interviewer: Do you have anything else that you would like to add to the conversation?
33	TE3: A virtual assignment and the traditional assignment are very, very different. Nowadays I know that they exist, virtual assignments, and I think it's a wonderful opportunity for people to work abroad, but only virtually. You might not feel being an expatriate when you are virtual, even though you are formally, of course one. It emerged probably with COVID this possibility to have a virtual assignment, because before it was not that common. Maybe it existed at that time. It's a very good opportunity for people to continue professionally, continue with the company when you have a family or when you like to be at a different place, there are various reasons. It's a specific environment or bubble where you do your work and then you live elsewhere. It's a good opportunity for some people who cannot move, very often due to family

reasons and with this, it's taken into account. It depends also on the company, what do they offer for virtual expats? There's games or team building activities, which can be done virtually or you go there from time to time, once, twice a year show up there at the target country. Honestly, I do not know so much about virtual expatriates. I do a lot of expatriates trainings, people going abroad or coming to Austria. Once you got in contact on a personal level, it's always different, it's easier than afterwards.

C10 HR3

1	Interview date: 18.04.2025
2	Interviewer: Thank you for taking the time to participate in my interviews. The interview will consist of a series of questions asking you to reflect on your experience of managing expatriates. If you have experience of managing both virtual and traditional expatriates, please compare both types of assignment in each question. If you only have experience with one type, I will ask a scenario-based question to encourage you to think about how your experience might apply to the other type. Let's begin with the first question. Could you briefly describe your experience in managing expatriates?
3	HR3: I really liked it, because it was such a diverse work. It's not only about getting a person from A to B, but it's really the whole surrounding topics that cover this. We were mainly consulting the expatriates around topics like social security, immigration, labor law, tax. The soft topics, the move itself, was not covered by us. It was really around making sure everything is within compliance and within local regulations. When we were hired to prepare the tax returns, it was a really nice experience, because we used to set up joint calls with the home country and the host country. For preparing the tax return, we had to gather personal information, we would really get to know the person, whether that person is going alone, whether she or he has family that is accompanying them to the host country and how long they are going. It was interesting to see how some people with small kids just move from one corner of the world to the other. This whole spectrum of having this personal touch with the expatriate, but also work on the content and on making sure that everything is done within rules. I had clients that I served for a lot of countries, people would go from Vienna to Malaysia or they would go from Italy to Canada, having a stop in Austria. Every case was special, every case was different. We were faced with a lot of country-specific requirements as well and you learn a lot from that.
4	Interviewer: You were not concerned with the relocating topic, that was another team or a colleague?
5	HR3: That was not done by Org5, the company would hire an external, a real relocation provider. All the housing, finding schools for kids or all the soft topics were outsourced.
6	Interviewer: What types of international assignments have you been involved with? Did you mainly work with traditional expatriates or also someone working virtually, not relocating?
7	HR3: It was all non-virtual relocations, it was in-person. Prior to COVID virtual assignments were not really a thing. People were moving from A to B without having any restrictions. After COVID, Home Office and remote work topics popped up very extensively, but before that it was just in-person, physical moves.
8	Interviewer: What role might HR play during a virtual assignment?
9	HR3: At Org5 I didn't have that experience. What comes on top of my head is making sure that, even though that person is virtually assigned, he's well integrated in the virtual team and that the scope of work is defined very accurately and also the working hours. In the world we have different time zones, if the main team sits in Europe and that person is sitting somewhere else working remotely, they would need to find a way to communicate with each other. Making sure that the workplace itself, where that person is doing the work, has all the equipment available and everything is as if it was in an office space.
10	Interviewer: What role does the firm play in integrating a traditional expatriate into the local culture compared to someone working from a distance?

11	HR3: I was not involved in the integration phase. I learned from the expatriate himself, what the company outside is doing to make him or her stay better and gather together or find also connections. We were not in charge of that.
12	Interviewer: The expatriates told you a little bit about their experience, can you remember some insights?
13	HR3: The biggest issue was, if a person was relocated to a country where English would not be the first language. Language issues if the company itself had a working language as English, but outside, social life and people would talk in a different language. Also cultural norms, if you don't know them beforehand, if you're not trained on that, that might be a challenge as well.
14	Interviewer: What role does corporate culture play for expatriates during their assignment?
15	HR3: It plays a big role. The company sets the tone for having topics like diversity on their table and inclusion and empowerment. It starts from the company itself and what is lived there. It makes it easier if you move to a foreign location, working for that same company, because hopefully that culture will also be lived there, that the corporate culture teaches them.
16	Interviewer: What role might corporate culture play for the experience of a virtual expatriate?
17	HR3: I really don't have any experience in virtual assignments, I can't comment on that.
18	Interviewer: Let's move on to the next question. How does the organization evaluate and compensate the performance of expatriates? Were you involved in that?
19	HR3: Even if you go on an assignment you're always part of a team and you have a direct manager that you're reporting to. Usually the expats that we consulted were really integrated into the host country's entity. They would switch like it would be a different job scope. They would have their immediate team in the host location, they would have their immediate manager there and the performance management itself would happen locally in the host country. It would not really be anything related to the home country anymore. It's really separate cases, they would cut ties from the home entity, otherwise it would not be considered an expatriation. There are also project-based assignments, where a person goes there for supporting the local team on a project, but they're still organized in the structure of the home entity. In case of an expatriation, everything, in most cases, is cut from the home entity and transfers fully to the host location.
20	Interviewer: What role does an expatriate's personality play during an assignment?
21	HR3: Anyone who relocates has to have an open mind, has to know English very well, because in most countries English is a spoken language. Also has to have an interest in getting to know a different culture, it's a non-negotiable. You cannot move to a different country without knowing local nuances. If people are not open enough for new customs, new traditions, new people, new ways of living then they're not the right fit for going onto an expatriation project. It plays a very, very high role.
22	Interviewer: Do you think that for a virtual expatriate the personality would play a different role compared to a traditional?
23	HR3: It would play the same role. Even though physically that person is not there, he or she would still have to deal with local people as well. For example in Asia, people when they eat food or if they like something they slurp and in Europe that's considered a no go. In our company we have virtual coffee dates or we do virtual lunches and if that person is not aware of these traditions or customs in that region, it would offend people. Also in virtual settings, it's crucial to know who you're talking to, from where this person is, what their values are and what their tradition is.

24	Interviewer: Did you see expatriates use specific skills to adjust to a new environment?
25	HR3: We had many cases where the expatriates would even tell us that they had cultural training before going to that country. It really depended on the country, if you're traveling within Europe or expatriating within Europe or western culture, it's not necessarily always the case that you have to go through that. If someone goes from continental Europe to Asia or to South America, where really completely different cultures exist, a lot of expatriates told us that they really used up to six months to prepare for that trip, only on that cultural level. Some of them even got language training. Some of them were really keen on being able to have basic conversations in the local language. All of them were very, very interested in learning about the local customs.
26	Interviewer: For a virtual expatriate, do you think skills might differ?
27	HR3: It would be as important as physically going somewhere, but still it could be a really nice icebreaker if you start a call and have basic conversations in the local language that the person speaks. It would be a good sign that the person shows interest in the other counterparts. Not a necessity, but you're never wrong to learn a little bit more about the other person.
28	Interviewer: Can you describe any technological tools that the company provided for expatriates?
29	HR3: At that time, most of the people were using Gmail - the chat in Gmail, video conferencing in Gmail - and also Teams was used quite widely. It was quite advanced at that time. Before the expatriate physically went on expatriation, we always had this joint, a briefing call, where the home country consultant, the host country consultant and the expatriate would be at the same time in the call. We did it via some kind of communication channel with video. We always insisted on doing a video conference, because it does make a difference if you see the person that you're talking to and understand then more of their interest, just by the facial expression and how they would talk about certain topics, you would grasp what's important for them and what not.
30	Interviewer: Did you see that mentors played a role during assignments?
31	HR3: We were not involved in the team structure, how much involvement comes from the manager. We would be directly in touch with the expatriate. Sometimes expatriates wanted to have answers right away and it's not possible to send answers on the same day sometimes. They would push it and if we wouldn't respond, they would even include their managers in that conversation or the HR department of that company. Other than that, we were not involved with the managers or the supervisors of that person.
32	Interviewer: Can you think of any policies or strategies that the organization had in place for expatriates, that we didn't talk about yet?
33	HR3: It's crucial for every global company to have a global mobility framework in place to make sure that not every case is being treated individually. People talk in an organization with each other and if two people are getting assigned and one person gets on top compensation items that the other person doesn't get, a discussion would start. Having a framework in place makes it easier for the organization and for the HR department to handle expat cases. Now after COVID, it's a necessity to have Home Office policies in place, to have remote work policies in place. Some companies even offer workation policies, where people combine vacation and work together in a different country. All of these expat topics need to be written down and stipulated. It's a no-go to send people out of a country without having cleared the assignment details, to meet expectations from both sides.

34	Interviewer: Was that the case for the company you worked for? Was there this proper framework in place?
35	HR3: No, the company I've worked for, while in this field, I was only the consulting counterpart. We used to consult the people, but all of the clients that we had were either on the way of finalizing this global mobility policy or they already had something in place, it was on everyone's table. Even here at Org1 we are currently working on finalizing these frameworks.
36	Interviewer: Is there something else that you would like to add to the conversation that we didn't address or any suggestions or advice that you would give to an expat?
37	HR3: To an expat, be open minded, get to know the country that you're going to, get to know at least a little bit of the culture beforehand, get a training and seek language trainings. Make sure to handle everything beforehand, especially if you're moving with family. Get everything in place, communicate your expectations and check what expectations the company has to be aligned. What's really important is that expat contracts are always for a limited amount of time, what happens after the expatriate returns to the home country? Is there a position available for him to be reintegrated into? Talk about these things before you go, because when you come back, you might get disappointed, there might be your position not available anymore. The HR department would have an idea to place you somewhere else, where you would not be happy. The post expatriation phase is also very important to be cleared beforehand.