



From Support to Performance: Organizational Mechanisms and the Experience of Expatriate Managers

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I. Abstract in English

This research focused on the core dimensions of organizational support offered by both parent and host firms to expatriate managers, and on how the perceived support influences their self-assessed job performance. In order to investigate this topic, an analysis of previous studies was conducted, followed by qualitative and in-depth interviews of managers who have undertaken or are still covering an international role. Results showed that companies usually focus only on specific types of organizational support, and there are, therefore, still multiple areas to improve. No specific kinds of aid could be identified between parent and host companies, and informal support always played a central role, also showing the importance of employee perceptions. Lastly, performance was usually positively influenced when help was provided, but it was also not affected with limited support. This study is relevant because it highlighted mechanisms that can be implemented by companies for expatriates, improving their success.

Title: “From support to performance: organizational mechanisms and the experience of expatriate managers”

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Key words: Perceived organizational support (POS), Expatriates, Parent and host companies, Types of support, Informal support, Integration, Perception

II. Abstract in Portuguese

Esta investigação centrou-se nas dimensões centrais do apoio organizacional oferecido tanto pelas empresas-mãe como pelas empresas de acolhimento aos gestores expatriados, bem como na forma como o apoio percebido influencia a sua autoavaliação de desempenho profissional. Para explorar este tema, foi realizada uma análise de estudos anteriores, complementada por entrevistas qualitativas e aprofundadas com gestores que já exerceram ou que ainda exercem funções internacionais. Os resultados demonstraram que as empresas tendem a concentrar-se apenas em determinados tipos de apoio organizacional, permanecendo, assim, diversas áreas suscetíveis de melhoria. Não foi possível identificar diferenças específicas entre os auxílios prestados pelas empresas-mãe e pelas de acolhimento, sendo o apoio informal um elemento central em todos os casos, o que reforça a importância da perceção dos colaboradores. Verificou-se ainda que o desempenho profissional era, em geral, positivamente influenciado quando o apoio era disponibilizado, embora, em alguns casos, se tenha mantido estável mesmo perante um suporte limitado. Este estudo assume relevância por evidenciar mecanismos que as organizações podem implementar para apoiar gestores expatriados, aumentando a probabilidade do seu sucesso.

Título: “Do suporte ao desempenho: mecanismos organizacionais e a experiência de gestores expatriados”

Autor: Alida Primerano

Palavras-chave: Perceção de suporte organizacional (POS), Expatriados, Empresas de origem e de acolhimento, Tipos de suporte, Suporte informal, Integração, Perceção

III. Abstract in French

Cette recherche s'est concentrée sur les dimensions essentielles du soutien organisationnel offertes tant par les entreprises d'origine que par les entreprises d'accueil aux cadres expatriés, ainsi que sur l'influence du soutien perçu sur l'autoévaluation de leurs performances professionnelles. Afin d'examiner cette question, une analyse des études antérieures a été réalisée, suivie d'entretiens qualitatifs et approfondis auprès de cadres ayant exercé ou exerçant encore une fonction internationale. Les résultats ont montré que les organisations ont tendance à se focaliser uniquement sur certains types de soutien organisationnel, laissant ainsi subsister de nombreux domaines susceptibles d'être améliorés. Aucune distinction claire n'a pu être identifiée entre les formes d'aide apportées par les entreprises d'origine et celles fournies par les entreprises d'accueil, le soutien informel occupant systématiquement une place centrale, ce qui souligne l'importance des perceptions individuelles. Enfin, les performances sont généralement influencées positivement lorsqu'une aide est apportée, mais elles ne le sont pas non plus lorsqu'elle est limitée. Cette étude est pertinente car elle met en évidence les mécanismes qui peuvent être mis en œuvre par les entreprises pour les expatriés, améliorant ainsi leur réussite.

Titre: “Du soutien à la performance: les mécanismes organisationnels et l'expérience des managers expatriés”

Auteur: Alida Primerano

Mots clés: Soutien organisationnel perçu (POS), Expatriés, Compagnies mère et hôte, Types de soutien, Soutien informel, Intégration, Perception

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To my Mum and Dad, the only people I can always count on and who have supported me and never left me alone.

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1. Introduction

Organizational support theory (OST) suggests that employees tend to personify a company and develop perceptions about how organizations care about their well-being and work. This is called perceived organizational support or POS, and is important because it is associated with organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Kurtessis et al., 2015).

OST is also related to social exchange theory which conceptualizes employment as a trade-off between the benefits that the organization provides and the effort that the employees put into the job (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). The more employees perceive favorable treatment from the company, the more perceived organizational support will be enhanced and the employees will feel obligated to reciprocate and contribute to the company success, thereby enhancing their performance (Eisenberger et al., 2001).

In addition to social exchange, organizational support theory is also associated with the self-enhancement process, which specifies how perceived organizational support is related to emotional needs, such as approval and esteem, leading to the employee identifying with the company, creating a distinctive relationship and shared values between the two entities (Meyer et al., 2006).

Considering the association between perceived organizational support and employee commitment, one could infer that this could also be transmitted and used when analyzing performance of expatriate managers, hires who are sent to work in another country by the parent company. However scant research has been conducted on this topic (Kawai & Strange, 2014).

To contextualize the growing relevance of expatriate assignments, it is relevant to consider data from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Statistic Division (UNSD). The two associations created the Multinational Enterprise Information Platform (MEIP) to provide detailed information about the structure and the digital and physical presence of the world's largest Multinational Enterprises (MNEs). At the end of 2023 the 500 largest MNEs had around 130 000 subsidiaries around the world (OECD, 2023).

Thus, the continued expansion and globalization of companies points to the growing importance of giving extended international assignments to employees (Bolino, 2007) and highlights the critical role of expatriate management.

The aim of this study is to answer the following research question:

RQ: How perceived organizational support affects self-assessed job performance of expatriate managers during international assignments?

Furthermore, two objectives linked to the research questions have been identified:

Objective 1: To identify and analyze the core dimensions of perceived organizational support and their influence on self-perceived expatriate managers' job performance

Objective 2: To analyze and compare the organizational support mechanisms offered by the parent company versus the host company

Understanding how perceived organizational support influences expatriate managers is not only relevant from a theoretical perspective but also carries substantial practical managerial implications. As international assignments become more common and critical to multinational global strategies, ensuring the success of expatriates is essential. This study analyzes how companies support expatriate managers during different stages of their assignments, highlighting the pre-departure, post-arrival and repatriation assistance, and how this support helped in enhancing the manager's well-being and performance.

To answer the RQ, this paper will be divided into six main sections. The Literature Review explains the key topics and themes analyzing previous studies. Next, the Methodology part highlights data collection methods utilized. The following section, Results, plays out the data collected, which is then analyzed in the Discussion part. Then, the Limitations of this study are pointed out together with possible future research directions, and lastly, in the Conclusion, a summary of the findings is presented.

2. Literature review

2.1 Organizational Support Theory

2.1.1 Development of Organizational Support Theory

The first examination of existing empirical research on Organizational Support Theory was developed by Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002), who argue that OST addresses the evolution, characteristics and effects on perceived organizational support. Their analysis shows that there are three main aspects associated with POS which are fairness, supervisor support and favorableness of job conditions and organizational rewards. Moreover, three processes need to be considered to understand the relationship between POS and its consequences. These are employees' felt obligation to reciprocate when they receive support from the organization, the fulfillment of socio-emotional needs (e.g. affiliation, esteem) that are associated with the development of an identity with the company, and the attribution of rewards based on performance. Outcomes of these are enhanced commitment, higher performance, organizational citizenship behavior and job-related affect, and reduced withdrawal behavior and strain (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

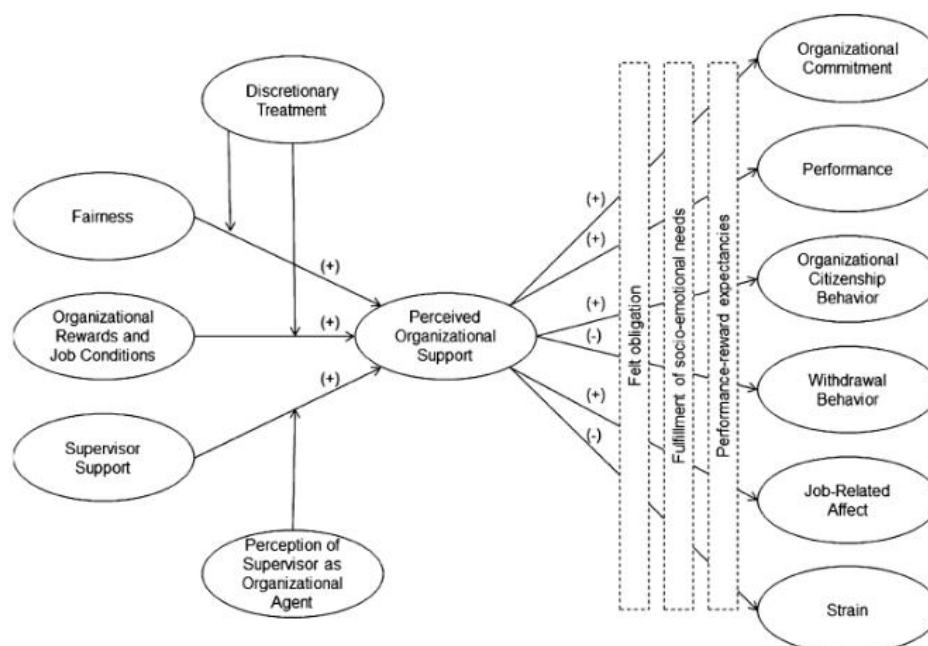


Figure 1: Theoretical model of antecedents and consequences of POS in conformity with Rhoades and Eisenberger study

Source: Baran et al. (2012); JOURNAL OF BUSINESS AND PSYCHOLOGY

Subsequent research conducted by Baran et al. (2012) provides a narrative synthesis of previous studies on OST, pointing out other relevant aspects related to it. Firstly, they studied employee well-being, finding out that POS acts as a buffer between employee stressors and welfare, but it can also directly influence well-being providing informational and instrumental support. This is relevant given that informational support represents help understanding and overcoming difficult experiences or events, while instrumental support is the financial and material help from the organization (Cohen & Willis, 1985), depicting an overall support.

The second analysis regards non-traditional work arrangements, which include flexible, contract and temporary employees (Kalleberg, 2000). In this case, employees may have dual employment relationships and POS from one organization can influence commitment to the other.

The third result of the analysis conducted by Baran et al. (2012) regards the possibility for people coming from different cultures to experience different outcomes as a result of POS, highlighting the need for additional research in this area, especially considering that organizations are promoting a more diverse employee base.

Lastly, the study points out how the perceived organizational support that supervisors receive from the company influences the way they provide it to subordinates, showing the multilevel nature of organizational relationships.

A more recent study from Eisenberger, Shanock et al. (2020), points out three contemporary factors to take into consideration in relation to Organizational Support Theory. The first is the perception of organizational support at a group-level instead of from an individual-level point of view. If this perception is positive, it contributes to enhanced team performance and well-being.

The second factor is represented by the fact that jobs are changing with part-time or independent work acquiring a more important role. However, the majority of jobs are long-term and full-time, affirming that POS is still significant and has improved in recent times probably in tandem with increased importance attributed to ethical values. On the other hand,

the social exchange relationship between employees and companies has been replaced with the short-term economic relationship, according to which employees no longer expect rewards for their efforts (Clarke & Patrickson, 2008). Therefore, it is not possible to understand if the increase in POS is due to a better treatment of the employees or to the fact that they expect less from the company.

The third aspect examined by Eisenberger, Shanock et al. (2020) is POS across cultures. The authors explore the concept of culture introduced by Baran et al. (2012) mentioned above. The fact that OST and POS were developed in a Western cultural context, usually associated with horizontal individualism, fosters independence and the importance of the single individual with low emphasis on hierarchical structures. On the other hand, Eastern cultural contexts are associated with vertical collectivism, emphasizing group importance and hierarchies (Singelis et al., 1995).

Considering these aspects, the implication is that POS is stronger in vertical collectivist cultures even though it was developed in a Western context given that it fosters identification and membership in a group.

Kohont and Ignjatović (2022) highlighted important changes in the role of Organizational Support that were seen after the Covid-19 pandemic when working from home was introduced. Employees were not trained to work and collaborate with colleagues remotely and it was difficult to be in contact with the human resource team, the main unit responsible for providing support. Leaders began covering significant roles as a means of organizational support. A major challenge was sustaining motivation, particularly in contexts of stress, anxiety and mental fatigue. The main aspect of providing support was through constant communication trying to find individual solutions for each employee.

According to the study another relevant source of support during the pandemic was the IT team, responsible for the digitization of archives and for providing a smooth functioning of programs and communication tools. This help in developing new competencies was extremely important, and when employees did not receive the support needed from their firms, they relied on family members and people outside the organization to mitigate challenges (Kohont & Ignjatović, 2022).

2.2 Concepts related to Organizational Support Theory

2.2.1 Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory describes how interactions between people are characterized by the exchange of tangible or intangible resources, creating a rewarding relationship between them (Homans, 1958). This concept is applied in business-to-business (BTB) exchanges where relational exchange needs to be developed without formal written contracts involved in this process (Goetz & Scott, 1981).

According to the Social Exchange Theory, to develop a BTB relational exchange, the first interactions are critical, as their outcomes determine whether the relationship will continue or come to an end. If individuals believe that the level of the interaction is acceptable compared to other alternatives and to what they think they deserve, then it is possible for future exchanges to happen, increasing commitment and trust between the parties (Lambe et al., 2001).

Relating Social Exchange Theory to POS we can see how reciprocity assumes value and encourages employees to repay the company for benefits received. However, the obligation to reciprocate alone is insufficient, given that people need the ability to do it, ultimately improving performance. On the other hand, if individuals do not have the right capabilities, they may experience discomfort and a reduction of trust in the relationship (Sungu et al., 2019).

2.2.2 Self-enhancement Process

According to Dufner et al. (2019), self-enhancement is the process of continuously having a positive view of the self, which may lead to misinterpretations, biased judgements and inaccurate recollections (Gecas, 1982).

Templer (2020) examined how self-enhancement relates to expatriate adjustment in cross-cultural situations. He found that people who perceive themselves as self-enhancers feel confident and well-adjusted, enhancing their well-being. On the other hand, leaders perceive lower adjustment and performance, even if the expatriates themselves are unaware of this

discrepancy. These findings highlight the need for additional information when evaluating people’s success based on self-enhancement (Templer, 2020).

Relating this process to organizational support, it becomes important for organizations to strengthen support and care towards employees. For individuals who prioritize self-enhancement, companies can provide challenging tasks to boost their sense of personal success and prestige, fostering engagement (Kurniawan & Indrayanti, 2023).

2.2.3 Job Demands-Resources Model

The Job Demands-Resources model suggests that for every working setting there are aspects which can be classified as either demands or resources, where the former represent all the conditions for which physical or mental efforts are needed, and the latter are the tools used to achieve work goals (Lesener et al., 2018). Maintaining an appropriate balance between the two aspects is essential because if there are many job demands, employees may feel exhausted or experience burnout, while not being provided with enough resources to achieve work goals leads to disengagement (Demerouti et al., 2001). According to Schaufeli’s model (2017), excessive demands impact health, while the right job resources create motivation and commitment, as depicted in the figure below.

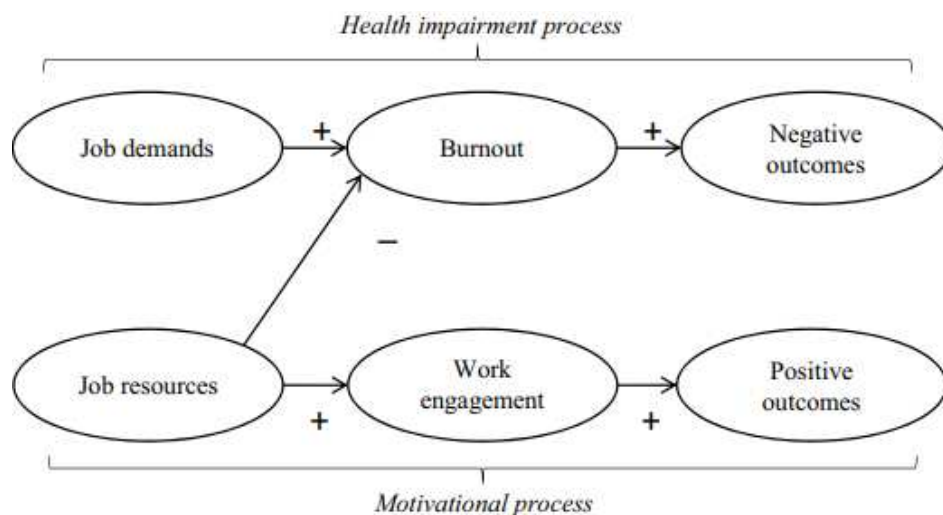


Figure 2: The job demands-resources model
 Source: Schaufeli (2017); ORGANIZATIONAL DYNAMICS

Relating the job demands-resources model to POS, Ramaci et al. (2024) point out that there is an interaction between the two models, suggesting that POS can act as a moderator that mitigates negative effects of high job demands, helping employee well-being.

2.2.4 Resource-Based Theory and Dynamic Capabilities Theory

According to the Resource-Based Theory, companies are a mix of resources and capabilities which lead to the creation of value. Resources and capabilities refer to all the assets, tangible and intangible, that organizations use to implement strategies (Barney et al., 2021). The bundle of resources and capabilities should be valuable, creating a situation where either customers are willing to pay more for the product or the company is able to reduce the production costs; rare, when their value is higher compared to the alternatives present in the market; costly to imitate, being unique; and non substitutable, meaning that the other options are not able to generate the same value (Barney, 1991).

Dynamic Capabilities describe the firm's ability to adapt to changing environments, formed by its capacity to sense opportunities and threats, make timely decisions, make market-oriented decisions, and change its resource base in appropriate ways (Barreto, 2010). Dynamic capabilities are significant for the way that they position the firm to respond to the external environment, and the manner in which firms reconfigure organizational elements in a timely manner to address exogenous factors including opportunities and threats (Teece, 2018).

Both theories are relevant for this study because companies can use expatriate managers and mechanisms as significant resources and capabilities to increase value around the world. Moreover, companies develop a competitive advantage when capabilities, resources and strategy are in alignment with each other (Teece, 2018).

2.2.5 Contingency Theory

Contingency Theory posits there is no single optimal manner to manage organizations so leadership and management styles must adapt to fit specific situations, or contingencies as they

arise. Thus, the effectiveness of an organization does not depend only on its internal characteristics but also on factors associated with the environment. These act as moderators between the attributes of a firm and its performance. In order to be successful, companies must use the optimal, rather than the maximum, amount of resources according to the contingencies they have to face (Donaldson, 2001). This means that there is not a single strategy that will always work and that it is necessary for companies to organize in different ways (Betts, 2003).

This underscores the importance of accounting for both internal and external factors when developing a strategy that benefits the company. As a result, organizations may adopt different support mechanisms and management practices for expatriates, depending on the specific context of their international assignments.

2.3 Expatriate managers

2.3.1 HRM process

The selection and oversight of expatriate managers is the responsibility of the Human Resource Management (HRM) department, responsible for supervising policies and practices related to the management of people within the organization (Rasool et al., 2019). HRM is typically divided into eight stages: identification, selection, compensation, training and development, performance appraisal, retention and turnover, succession planning and repatriation (Harvey & Moeller, 2009).

Starting with the identification phase, the authors highlight the importance of defining the candidate pool and considering the fit for operating abroad. Moreover, attention should be given to the willingness of people to be relocated and to cultural gender biases of the relocation country, where the acceptance of women could present problems. Candidates need to have competencies suitable for the position, including cross-cultural skills, emotional intelligence, psychological maturity and a global perspective (Black & Stephens, 1989).

Having identified these traits, in the selection phase, it can be difficult to understand which characteristics are more suitable according to the different assignments and to how the manager is able to interact with another environment (Harvey & Moeller, 2009).

The authors also mention compensation, the need to attract talent for global assignments, ensuring equitable treatment of local employees and expatriates, maintaining cost efficiency and supporting the organization's strategic goals. Compensation usually includes a base salary, allowances and benefits.

Moving on to training, companies usually provide a pre-departure development for teaching the foreign culture and language starting the process of adaptation before being immersed in a new reality, and a post arrival course for job-related abilities with the aim to help the expatriate to learn about the local work environment (Rabby, 2023). However, there are still high rates of failure, probably indicating that more attention should be given to training and that the manager's family should be included as well in this process.

The performance appraisal stage plays an important role in designing a fair process that builds employee trust. Appraisals should come in the form of direct feedback to promote development. Moreover, special attention should be given to the way communication takes into account both company culture and the employee's country norms (Al-Baidhani & Alsaqqaf, 2022).

Employee retention represents measures taken by the company to maintain a stable workforce with a low employee turnover rate where workers leave their positions before the completion of their contractual terms (Alamoudi, 2024). Cox et al. (2013) address the importance of POS as a causal factor contributing to lower turnover and higher retention rates. When employees perceive that the company values their international experience and offers them a meaningful repatriation process with reorientation programs and assistance, they are more inclined to remain with the company.

Succession planning in the HRM process, points to the fact that expatriate successions are rarely planned, regardless of a company's location or size. However, planning can be implemented by analyzing the stages of the expatriate's development and the company's strategic plans for the future (Selmer & Luk, 1995). The authors highlight also the importance of the duration of the period of handing over, also called overlap period, pointing out that employees perceive it to be too short even if the predecessors usually do not leave the subsidiary before the successor arrives.

Jassawalla et al. (2004), propose a repatriation model composed of three steps: pre-departure, during assignment and post-return. Before the departure, it is important to communicate clearly on the task assigned, to provide career counseling to tell employees about their valuable contribution to the firm's objectives and to establish policies for repatriation. During the assignment, the firm should communicate constantly with managers, providing support and improving their willingness to find a fit with the company upon their return. Lastly, when managers are reinserted in the company, they should be valued as much as they were valued abroad and they should receive a sponsor who acts as a contact person (Jassawalla et al., 2004).

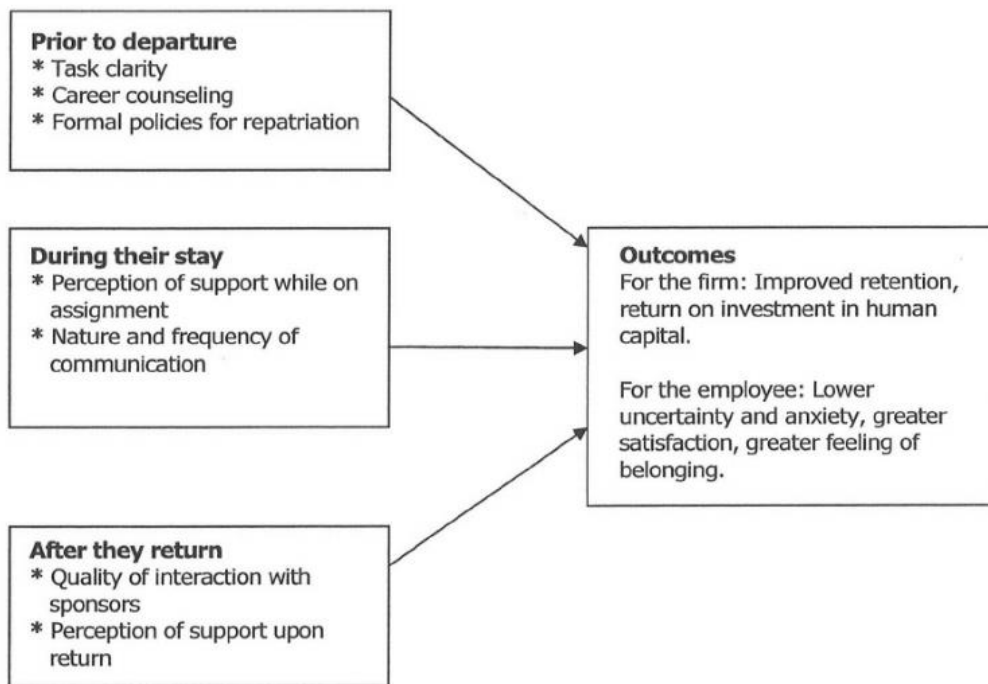


Figure 3: Effective repatriation model

Source: Jawassalla et al. (2004); S.A.M. ADVANCED MANAGEMENT JOURNAL

2.3.2 Cultural differences in the HRM process

Analyzing the Human Resources Management process for expatriates, it is possible to notice some cultural differences between the East and the West, and a study conducted by Lin et al., (2012) points out some of these dissimilarities.

In the selection process, distinctive criteria are taken into consideration, given that Eastern countries value patience, professional skills and willingness to work because of the belief that expatriates have to start working immediately in the host organization and they cannot learn by doing. On the other hand, for Western countries, adaptability and past performance are more important because they are more goal oriented. In addition to this, Eastern companies take into consideration the political environment of the host country when making a decision, while Western organizations focus more on cultural distance and international strategy.

When selecting expatriates, there are also some differences related to gender. Eastern countries are usually less likely to assign international roles to females because of the belief of their

inferior social status (Tung, 2000, as cited in Lin et al., 2012), while Western societies are more keen to involve females given that they are treated more as equal to men (Shortland & Altman, 2008).

Regarding training, it has been discovered that Western countries offer training sessions with the aim to improve managers' skills and work satisfaction (Caligiuri et al., 2001), while Eastern countries prefer to focus on adjustment and organizational involvement (Chu, 2003, as cited in Lin et al., 2012).

Another dissimilarity can be found in the development and adjustment process of the expatriate. For Eastern countries trust and personal connections play a decisive role in relationship-building, while Western societies focus more on formal relationships within the organization (Fei, 1948, as cited in Lin et al., 2012).

These cultural differences could be partly explained by looking at two cultural dimensions presented by Hofstede (2011). The first aspect to consider is uncertainty avoidance, which represents the extent to which a culture feels comfortable or not when facing ambiguous situations. This dimension is high for the majority of Eastern countries, illustrating the fact that they prefer to have already skilled expatriates without the need to train them, while the opposite is true for Western countries, which are usually low in uncertainty avoidance. However, it is important to consider that there are some exceptions. The second dimension is individualism/collectivism, where the former represents the fact that people are supposed to look after themselves, while the latter means that individuals value the group and protect each other. Therefore, Western countries, which are more individualistic, tend to create formal relationships at work, while Eastern countries, more collectivistic, care about personal connections.

2.3.3 Female expatriates

Females are usually less involved in international assignments for three reasons: at an individual level, they are perceived to be less interested in working abroad compared to men, from an organizational perspective for women there are both stricter requirements like more managerial expertise and higher level of education and biases in the selection process, and from

a cultural standpoint there can be prejudices towards women in the host country (Bastida, 2018). However, according to Andresen et al. (2015), women are actually interested in expatriate roles and they are also self-initiating international careers when looking for a job.

Another important discovery is that females are able to adjust better to the new society and work environment compared to men because of their ability to interact and create relationships with locals, with the outcome of performing well (Selmer & Leung, 2003).

Lastly, Bastida (2018), did not find significant differences between men and women when analyzing premature return and job satisfaction, but relevant distinctions were evident in self-assessed performance, where men scored higher, testifying that females tend to perceive themselves as less efficient (Fischlmayr, 2002).

2.3.4 Challenges faced by expatriates

When working abroad in a cross-cultural environment, expatriate managers face multiple challenges which can hinder their adaptation and success.

The main problem identified by the study of Shiva (2016) is the cultural gap which indicates the divergence in cultural values between the home and host environments. The findings of the research suggest that when employees fail to adapt to the local business practices, customs, language and political/economic environment, it is likely that the relocation assignment is unsuccessful. The author also suggests ways in which this challenge can be overcome, including understanding if employees are ready to be sent abroad and if they have the necessary psychological traits to adapt to a new culture, providing adequate training and support, and considering the importance of family members who may follow the manager in the host country (Shiva, 2016).

Another study suggests other three challenges that expatriate managers may face. The first is the pressure of performing flawlessly. When learning something new, it is common to make mistakes at the beginning, meaning that resilience and motivation are extremely important to overcome failures. The second problem is represented by working relationships, meaning that

expatriates need to build trust and cooperate with new colleagues, supervisors and clients, and this is not always easy to do. Therefore, intercultural competencies are significant in this context. The last challenge identified in the paper is miscommunication, considering that people from different cultures have distinct ways of using verbal and non-verbal language, creating difficulties for interpretation (Lanucha, 2024). This last concept can be better understood considering Hall's contexting model, according to which there are high context and low context cultures. The first ones communicate in a more subtle way, using gestures and implicit information, while the second ones use specific and direct communication (Cardon, 2008).

Sterle et al. (2018) identified that another challenge faced by expatriates is family adjustment. It is common that both partners and children do not receive the necessary preparation to move to another country and they are not sufficiently accustomed with the local culture, resulting in higher stress compared to managers. Moreover, they can experience feelings of isolation due to the absence of their social group. Adults may suffer due to insufficient time spent with their spouse, and they may also lose their professional identity, while children may lose the sense of belonging to a specific culture and they can have problems fitting in the new environment. All these factors can lead to emotional distress, making expatriates feel concerned about their partners and kids and resulting in assignment failure (Sterle et al., 2018).

2.3.5 Expatriates work adjustment

As already pointed out in the challenges section, it is essential for expatriate managers to adapt to the host country culture and work environment. For this reason, in this section, the model of expatriate work adjustment presented by Breiden et al. (2004) will be presented.

According to the study, work adjustment depends on task and emotional satisfaction, where the former represents the fact that there is a match between the characteristics of the job and the manager's skills, while the latter is related not only to financial rewards, but especially to how these incentives help employees achieve their aspirations, including aspects such recognition, achievement and career advancement (Breiden et al., 2004).

While task and emotional satisfaction have direct effects on expatriate work adjustment, there are also indirect effects related to the non-work environment to take into consideration. The first is the general adjustment, which represents the managers' satisfaction with the new environment in which they live and their integration with it (Torbiörn, 1982). The second indirect aspect is the interaction and social contacts of managers with locals, with the consequence of getting to know more about the host country cultures and reducing the risk of conflicts (Caligiuri, 2000). The third and last indirect effect is the expatriate's family adjustment (Winfred & Winston, 1995).

Lastly, the model proposes a relation between work adjustment and organizational commitment for the job abroad. Organizational commitment encompasses three factors which are a sustained intention to maintain membership within the organization, a proactive willingness to invest effort in pursuit of organizational objectives and the alignment with the organization's mission and values (Porter et al., 1974).

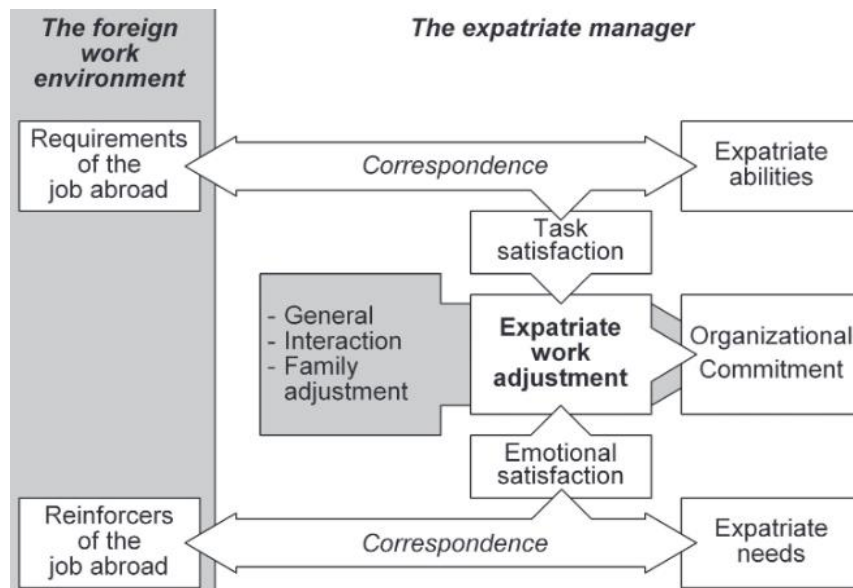


Figure 4: Model of expatriate work adjustment

Source: Breiden et al. (2004); INTERNATIONAL STUDIES OF MANAGEMENT & ORGANIZATION

2.3.6 Relation between expatriates and subsidiaries

Subsidiary performance is usually associated with two factors which are financial outcomes and operational results, including productivity and improvements, and this performance can be

affected by expatriate's adjustment (Harzing et al., 2016). The authors point out that if managers are able to adapt to the new environment of both the organization and the host country, they will help the subsidiary to obtain more information and to manage them better, improving the overall performance. Moreover, they can better transfer knowledge to the new company, increasing efficiency and enhancing the decision-making process.

Subsequent research conducted by Wu et al. (2023) confirmed the positive relationship between expatriate adjustment and subsidiary performance, demonstrating that managers embedded in the host society are able to use their competencies to reduce operational uncertainties and increase the presence of the company in the local market.

Fang et al. (2010), also suggests that expatriates play a significant role in knowledge transfer to the subsidiary company, however there are some differences according to the type of knowledge and the temporal dimension considered. The study highlights the fact that managers help in transferring technological knowledge in the short-run with a decrease in the long-run. In addition to this, they are negatively associated with marketing knowledge transfer in the long-run because of their limited knowledge about the local market, while they are positively associated with it for the short-run scenario. In the research, technological knowledge represents all the activities related to the products like production and R&D, while marketing knowledge symbolises the ability to market products and analyze trends.

In addition to the impact that expatriates may exert on subsidiary operations, an equally important dimension to consider is the concept of knowledge flow, which serves as a critical linkage between expatriate assignments and subsidiary development. Knowledge flow highlights the interconnectedness of multinational companies as networks between the headquarters and the subsidiaries, where information can be spread from one location to another (Monteiro et al., 2008). Taking into consideration the concept of knowledge flow, Cheong et al. (2019) point out in their research that companies send employees abroad for different purposes, including to provide developmental opportunities for the single individuals, a process also called expatriate learning. In this way, expatriates are not the only ones to transfer knowledge to the subsidiaries, but they can also receive professional and global development from them, making the experience rewarding for both.

2.4 POS influence on expatriate performance

2.4.1 Overview of the relation between organizational support for expatriates and performance

El Amine & Cascón-Pereira (2024) state that expatriate success depends on three factors, which are the individual, interpersonal and organizational dimensions. The first level includes satisfaction, work-life balance and career success; the second aspect takes into consideration knowledge transfer and expatriate relationships; and the third one represents achievement of goals, commitment and performance. As previously highlighted in this research, the majority of these sub-factors are a consequence of perceived organizational support (in line with the model of antecedents and consequences of POS developed by Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002).

There are several ways in which companies can assist expatriates, and according to the methods used, managers can perceive higher or lower support, leading to different performance outcomes. The three main types of support considered by Van der Laken et al. (2016) are career POS or how the firm cares about career's needs, adjustment POS which represents the degree to which the organization support the expatriates and their families in their integration with the host country, and financial POS, meaning the extent to which multinationals consider the financial needs of the employee providing rewards, compensation and benefits. The authors discovered that career POS has an indirect outcome on expatriates' performance, while adjustment POS has a negative effect. On the other hand, financial POS is the only one directly and positively related to performance.

Another aspect that needs to be acknowledged is the dual employment relationship of expatriates, who are simultaneously linked to the parent and the host company. There is a gap in research when trying to understand if support comes more from one of these units or from both of them indistinctly, and the studies conducted on the topic show that assistance provided by the two organizations has different values for expatriates (Liu & Ipe, 2010). Therefore, this research paper will try to understand how support is given from the two institutions and possible differences between practices.

An additional factor related to POS is the context in which the support is given. It enhanced expatriates' performance in high demand or high stress jobs (Van der Laken et al., 2016).

Moreover, results improved more for expatriates who identified with the company, testifying the presence of individual differences (Showail et al., 2013).

2.4.2 Types of organizational support and their link to performance

The aim of this part of the research will be to provide an overview of all the different types of organizational support provided by companies to help expatriates, trying to understand their impact on managers' performance.

The first study considered was conducted by Idrees et al. (2011) on cross-cultural training. The authors point out the vital importance of pre-departure training to equip expatriates with a general knowledge about traditions, customs and language they will need in the new country upon arrival, but also to prepare them about uncertain situations they might experience. However, they also suggest that training should continue once managers settle in the new environment in order to explain to them more specific topics, such as opening a bank account or filing taxes. Finally, they highlight the relevance of providing training also to the expatriate's family to ensure the success of the experience abroad.

Waxin & Panaccio (2005) explain the existence of three types of training: cognitive, to spread information with non-participative sessions, behavioral, to help managers with their communication skills, and affective, teaching employees to deal with difficult cultural situations. Moreover, they provide another classification of the types of training with a model created by Gertsen (1990). The model is a matrix where two types of training and two different orientations are presented. These are: conventional training which is unilateral, experimental training where the trainee gets to participate, general cultural orientation and specific cultural orientation.

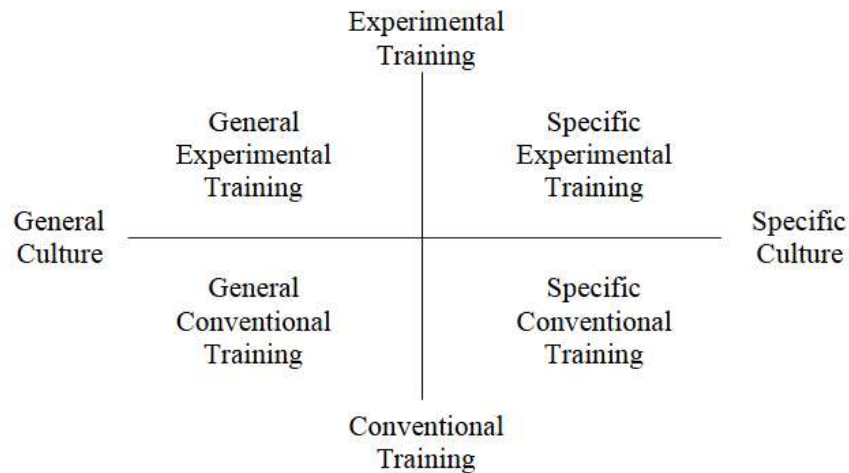


Figure 5: Gertsen's cross-cultural training methods
 Source: Waxin & Panaccio (2005); PERSONNEL REVIEW

Using the right type of training tailored to the host country's culture will ensure a successful adaptation and improve expatriate's performance (Idrees et al., 2011).

Another study conducted by Kiti et al. (2024) highlighted other significant mechanisms used by companies to provide organizational support.

Knowledge-sharing programs and organizational digital support give access to digital platforms and online communication tools to enable employees to get information and use specific resources. These tools give the opportunity to expatriate to better and easily understand the work processes of the organization, improving effectiveness and enhancing performance.

A second type of support is the career development support, which has the aim to help expatriates to have a clear vision regarding their career path. As a consequence, managers will be able to keep their professional identity and ambition also during their international assignment, making them more productive and efficient in their jobs (Dickmann & Mello, 2023).

Mentorship and coaching support is another mechanism analyzed in the study. When expatriates are paired up with local coaches or mentors, they can get personalized guidance on eventual problems they might experience in the host country. This leads to relationship

building, transfer knowledge and well-being, strengthening performance (Van Bakel et al., 2022).

A fourth aspect discussed in the research is the repatriation support service which has the aim to reintegrate expatriates in their home country and with their local culture while being able to keep their unique identity developed abroad. If this process is successful, satisfaction, retention and performance will be enhanced (Chiang et al., 2017).

Family support is an additional mechanism implemented by companies in different ways. Health and psychological support represent one of the types of aid, and it can happen through wellness sessions, counseling and telemedicine. This initiative will help expatriates to address mental health difficulties and to familiarize with the host country health system, with the consequence of reducing burnout and improving efficiency (Gao & Park, 2022).

Work-life balance support is another important aspect, which provides flexible work arrangements to reduce stress and enhance performance (Giauque et al., 2017).

Lastly, it is relevant to mention the dual career support that companies provide to the expatriates' partners to help them in their career search and networking processes. In this way, spouses will also have the possibility to integrate in the new environment, creating satisfaction and mental well-being for managers and improving their job performance (Mutter & Kallane, 2023).

In addition to the support of the organization itself, there is another type of assistance given by organizational members, which is called social support. It represents the resources given by a provider to a receiver with the aim to make the person who obtains them to feel valued and loved (Hupcey, 1998). Stroppa & Spieß (2011) point out in their study that receiving social support is usually associated with well-being given that being part of a group is one of the primary needs of the individual. Moreover, it can decrease conflicts and enhance self-confidence, representing a significant aspect when working abroad.

According to Van der Laken et al. (2016), social support in the organization can happen from supervisors, co-workers and mentors. Support given by supervisors is not always positively linked to performance, and this is due to three factors: managers have several supervisors in

different geographical areas, the context in which the help is provided might have an impact on its perception, and affective relationship between employee and supervisor plays a role. There are mixed results also about support given by co-workers, influenced by personal characteristics of expatriates and the proximity of the individuals involved with face-to-face interactions being more efficient (Claus et al., 2015). When analyzing support given by mentors, it was found out that perceived mentoring is often more impactful compared to the formal attribution of a mentor. Moreover, mentors in the host country were able to provide more emotional support compared to the ones in the parent company (Littrel, 2007).

An additional type of aid provided by the company is the financial support. According to Suutari & Tornikoski (2001), compensation should address the expatriates' needs while facilitating their transfer abroad, and it should provide stability in the managers' life, helping them in their adaptation process, and assisting them in their repatriation. In addition to the salary, other typical forms of financial support are education, housing, transportation and insurance benefits. A good compensation package will increase managers' level of satisfaction, leading to a more successful performance.

Based on the general overview of the various forms of support that organizations can offer to expatriates, it becomes evident that, while training has received more scholarly attention, other types of assistance remain comparatively under-researched. Therefore, the objective of this research is to examine the specific support mechanisms actually implemented by companies and explore their relationship with expatriates' self-perceived performance.

Research methodology

As shown by the literature, numerous studies have been conducted on expatriate managers and the organizational support provided by companies. Some focused more precisely on how the company's aid influenced the expatriates' performance, however each study analyzed only one type of support, making it difficult to construct a comprehensive picture of the topic. Moreover, it has been previously highlighted how there is a lack of research regarding the comparative extent of support offered by parent and host companies.

In order to explore these subjects in a deeper way, primary data collection was conducted by interviewing managers who have been sent abroad for an international assignment by their companies, trying to assess the different types of organizational support provided to them, and how they perceived that their performance was affected by them.

Data collection

The target of the interviews included managers who are still working in the host country or who have already returned from their assignment. However, the two groups were not differentiated given that this factor was not expected to significantly influence the purpose of this study. In addition to this, the employees who prepare the support packages for expatriates and that are responsible for their coordination were not included in the interviews. This decision was taken because the scope of this research is to analyze expatriates first-hand experiences and their perceptions, eliminating any form of bias from people external to the assignment who may perceive the help provided by the firm more positively.

The questions of the qualitative interviews have been divided in several sections, with each of them covering a specific topic.

At first it was important to understand the managers' role during their international assignments and the amount of time spent in the host country, in order to have a general perspective of their experiences.

In the second section, specific questions about perceived organizational support were asked. A variety of topics were addressed, including the managers' perception of support by both the parent and the host company, the different types of aid provided from a financial, professional and personal point of view, and the level of involvement of the expatriates' family for the assistance given, if applicable.

The third and fourth parts aimed to understand the cultural, emotional and social support, both internally to the company, such as the work culture and the integration within the job community, and externally to the firm, including adjustment to new customs and traditions. These topics were not only examined from a formal perspective, but also considering informal support from peers and colleagues, in order to understand if the perception of aid came solely from the firm or if also other points influenced it.

Subsequently, the repatriation support was considered only for the managers who had already ended their assignment.

In the sixth section, the questions focused on the managers' self-evaluation of their performance, analyzing it considering the support received by the organization.

Lastly, suggestions to improve the support program offered by the company were asked.

The three most important questions in the interview script (in the Appendix) were the following:

- What types of support have you received from both the parent and the host company?
- Do you feel that one company (parent vs. host) has been more supportive than the other?
- In what ways do you think the support you received (or didn't receive) affected your job performance?

These were considered critical questions because of their direct link with the objectives of this research, however all the inquiries were needed in order to understand the situation from a deeper perspective and to have a general picture of the experience. In some cases, additional questions were also required.

Moreover, to better analyze how organizational support influenced performance evaluation, interviews from 27 to 30, as well as 31 and 32, were conducted with managers from the same company. On the other hand, the previous ones were administered to people from different firms. This design enabled comparisons of perceptions within the same organizational context, thereby providing insight into whether perceptions diverge despite similar support mechanisms.

An overview of the interview data is presented in the table below, whereas a more comprehensive analysis is provided in the appendix, which contains the detailed interview summaries and the characteristics of the sample.

Expert	Gender	Origin Country	Destination(s)	Duration	Position	Age Group	Industry
Expert A	Male	Italy	Spain	1.5 years (ongoing)	Country Manager	50+	Automobile
Expert B	Male	Italy	Spain, Brazil	5 years total	Area Manager	30-50	Metal
Expert C	Male	Italy	Netherlands	2 years (ongoing)	Operations Manager	30-50	Real Estate Consulting
Expert D	Male	Switzerland	Germany	Less than 1 year	Senior Commercial Manager	20-30	Consumer Goods
Expert E	Male	Italy	UAE (Dubai)	Less than 1 year	Business Analyst Manager	30-50	Consulting
Expert F	Male	Germany	Switzerland, Austria	4 years total	CFO	50+	Consumer Goods
Expert G	Male	Italy	Slovenia, Greece	2 years total	Area Manager	50+	Automobile
Expert H	Male	Italy	UK	Less than 1 year	Sales Manager	30-50	Health
Expert I	Male	Italy	Spain, USA	9 years total (ongoing)	General Manager	30-50	Eyewear
Expert J	Male	Italy	USA, Greece, India	3 years total	Brand Manager	50+	Automobile
Expert K	Male	Italy	Brazil	3 years	Operations Manager	50+	Consulting
Expert L	Male	Germany	UAE (Dubai)	Less than 1 year	Finance Manager	20-30	Technology
Expert M	Male	Germany	China	Less than 1 year	Project Manager	20-30	Automobile
Expert N	Female	China	Ghana, Tanzania	3 years total	Product Manager	20-30	Consumer Goods
Expert O	Male	Switzerland	India	Less than 1 year	Financial Controller Manager	30-50	Food
Expert P	Female	USA	East Africa	1 year	Project Manager	30-50	Humanitarian
Expert Q	Male	Brazil	Germany	1 year	Purchase Manager	20-30	Consumer Goods
Expert R	Female	USA	Sudan, Kenya, Iraq	3 years (ongoing)	Research Manager	30-50	Humanitarian
Expert S	Female	Italy	Spain (Ibiza)	Less than 1 year	Security Manager	20-30	Security
Expert T	Male	Germany	Tanzania	3 years (ongoing)	Development & Cooperation Manager	30-50	Humanitarian
Expert U	Male	USA	Italy	5 years (ongoing)	Logistics Director	50+	Technology
Expert V	Male	Portugal	Angola	3 years	Consulting Manager	50+	Consulting
Expert W	Male	Germany	USA	Less than 1 year	Product Manager	20-30	Manufacturing
Expert X	Male	France	Brazil, USA	2 years (ongoing)	Consulting Manager	30-50	Banking
Expert Y	Female	France	UK	2 years	Project Manager	30-50	Metal
Expert Z	Male	Switzerland	China, Singapore	13 years (ongoing)	Consulting Manager	50+	Consulting
Expert AA	Female	Italy	Spain, Germany	4 years total	HR Manager	30-50	Hearing Care
Expert AB	Male	Italy	UK, Germany	3 years total	Planning & Control Manager	20-30	Hearing Care
Expert AC	Male	Italy	UK, Spain	3 years total	Digital Manager	20-30	Hearing Care
Expert AD	Female	Italy	Germany	3 years	Specialist Manager	20-30	Hearing Care
Expert AE	Female	Italy	USA (Boston)	1.5 years	Audit Manager	30-50	Consulting
Expert AF	Male	Italy	USA (Boston)	1.5 years	Audit Manager	30-50	Consulting

Figure 6: Overview of the interview data

Data analysis

Thematic analysis was used to understand the results of the interviews. It represents a way to analyze qualitative data by following a six steps process. It starts with familiarization with the data, separating important sections and concepts. It continues with the selection of keywords,

which are then transformed into codes in the third step, used to identify recurring patterns and core messages. Codes are consequently grouped together into themes, thanks to which it is possible to connect the data with the research question, giving a more abstract interpretation to the information collected. Then, conceptualization of the data is done to find relationships between concepts, and lastly, a unique representation of the data is created (Naeem et al., 2023). For this research paper, keywords and codes were generated using an AI-powered analytics software called Atlas.ti.

In addition to it, another software called Leximancer was used to analyze the interviews with the aim of generating a concept map. This helped to have a visual representation of the most important and recurrent topics pointed out by managers, and to better understand their interrelationships, thereby enhancing the depth of the analysis.

3. Results

This section will present all the themes generated with the process described in the data analysis part, highlighting similarities, differences and relationships between concepts. A part regarding managers who are part of the same company will also be presented.

3.1 Similarities

3.1.1 The problems of adaptation

The first theme analyzed, the problems of adaptation, came from the following codes: "cultural and work adaptation," "training needs," and "language barriers."

All the respondents emphasized that knowing the local language and culture, considered both from a job and external life perspective, is essential in order to work and live in a foreign country. This is because managers need to understand the way of working of their new colleagues to collaborate with them and they have to partly modify their job habits according to the new environment in which they are. Beyond the workplace these concepts are also important because if people are able to communicate with locals and appreciate their traditions, then it is easier to build friendships and adapt in the host country.

Even if these aspects are extremely important, the majority of the interviewees highlighted the fact that their companies did not provide them with training and language courses. In the worst case scenario, managers did not receive any of them, while other times only one of them was available. Other scenarios pointed out that training focused either on cultural adjustment or on work adaptation, meaning that only partial preparation to face challenges in the host country was offered. For language courses the situation was similar, given that when available, only a few hours of learning were provided, being almost useless.

For these reasons, multiple managers suggested improving training activities, and offering more and longer language courses. This last aspect was particularly important for respondents and represented one of the main points of pain for them, being mentioned in about half of the interviews as a recommendation to ameliorate organizational support.

3.1.2 The role of informal networks

Another similar aspect between the interviews was the value attributed to social support. Therefore, the theme analyzed in this part is the role of informal networks, deduced from “informal and peer relationships,” “integration,” and “informal support.”

As previously highlighted in the literature review section, social support is one of the types of aid already analyzed in other studies, where it was discovered that it enhances well-being for expatriates, making them feel part of a group and valued. These results were strongly confirmed by the interviews.

All the managers talked positively about social support, and some of them stressed that it was fundamental for their integration and adaptation to the new environment. Interviewees who focused more on work-related aspects said that informal support helped them to better understand their new jobs and to navigate challenges with professional procedures and documents. In addition to this, everyone attested that relationships with colleagues and peers benefited them in their personal life, either improving language skills or feeling integrated in the new society, enjoying the international experience better.

Some differences in interacting with expatriates were found for different host cultures, however all the managers perceived a welcoming environment. Informal support from supervisors and mentors was not that common, contrary to what has been found out by previous research. On the other hand, a major form of social support reported was from peers of the same nationality who had started the assignment in a previous moment. This testifies how peers with shared experiences are especially willing to assist newcomers.

Lastly, many interviewees attested that informal support was key for them when formal help was lacking, aiding them in overcoming daily problems.

3.1.3 Layers of support

The next theme taken into consideration is about similarities regarding the layers of support offered to expatriates, and it was found from the following codes: “expatriate experience,” “support resources,” and “relocation experience.”

In the literature review, several types of organizational support have been pointed out, and thanks to the interviews it was possible to understand what is actually implemented by companies.

As noted earlier, there is a general lack of support regarding language courses and training. Psychological and repatriation support also seem to be lacking, given that they were not mentioned by the majority of managers. On the other hand, the major form of aid identified was the financial one, which was mentioned by all the interviewees. This usually included housing, transportation, insurance and schools for children when applicable, and the coverage of relocation costs. Another similar aspect is represented by the provision of bureaucratic and family support if needed.

Other types of support were provided differently by companies, and will be therefore analyzed in the next section of this study.

3.1.4 Positive self-perception about performance

The final theme of this section is the positive self-perception about performance that managers have, and it was identified looking at four codes, which are “job satisfaction,” “efficiency,” “success,” and “performance enhancement.”

One objective of this research paper is to identify how perceived organizational support affects self-assessed job performance, therefore a direct question about this concept was asked during the interviews.

With the exception of one outlier, all interviewees perceived their performance as successful, and some of them enhanced this aspect by referring to positive feedback received or satisfaction

reported from their team. This perception did not even change for different genders, contrary to what was found in previous studies. It is however important to take into consideration that not everyone was provided with enough organizational assistance, and that in some cases help was lacking for several aspects.

From this, it can be deducted that self-assessed good performance is not always dependent on the support received. However, managers lacking support said that additional aid could have been beneficial for their performance, making procedures easier and quicker. Interviewees who were given support, highlighted instead that they had a positive performance thanks to it, because it gave them the time and peace of mind to focus on their job, without having any external preoccupation.

Only four managers said that performance depended more on personal motivation and individual skills, and that organizational support or the lack of it did not have a big influence. From these results, it can be concluded that even if managers usually perceive their performance to be positive, POS plays a role in helping them to be even more efficient, enabling stronger outcomes.

3.2 Dissimilarities

3.2.1 Navigating the challenges of integration

The first theme that will be analyzed regarding differences found in the interviews is about navigating the challenges of integration, and was created by putting together the codes “organizational support,” “informal support,” “peer support,” and “support resources.”

As pointed out in the similarities section, informal support had a much higher value for expatriates compared to expectations, however it is also important to understand to which extent managers received more formal or social help, and which type was associated with performance. When approaching the topic from this point of view, some differences can be identified between the interviewees.

Some managers attested that the main form of support received was from the company itself, and that social assistance played a more marginal role, helping them especially in their personal life external to the firm. On the other hand, other interviewees mentioned the opposite situation, with informal support playing a critical role and formal help being marginal. Only a few received both types of support strongly.

When asking about the link between assistance received and performance, it is interesting to notice that people attribute success to the type of aid received. This means that the ones provided with formal support said that it was essential for performance, while the ones who received social aid viewed it as decisive for their work. Managers who had both types of support valued them as equally important. These findings probably show that people tend to interpret the support available, regardless of type, instrumental to their success. Only three interviewees mentioned that support, independently from its type, did not influence performance. They can be considered as outliers for the purpose of this study.

3.2.2 The uneven presence of guidance

The second theme that will be discussed in this part of the paper was created from the codes “mentorship,” “integration,” and “mentorship absence,” and it is about the uneven availability of guidance during assignments.

The literature review highlighted the fact that mentors can be beneficial for managers during international roles because they can help them to adapt and to overcome both professional and personal challenges, ensuring well-being and performance.

These positive aspects were actually reported by the interviewees who were assigned a mentor, however many managers did not have access to one. In these cases, they had to rely on informal or peer support to help them during the transition with the new job and the new environment. Some managers also underlined the need to have a designated contact person to help them. This testifies how mentorship can be beneficial for expatriates and shows the necessity of incorporating it more systematically into expatriates support programs.

3.2.3 Split support systems

Another difference between the interviewees is linked to the second objective of this study, which has the aim to understand if support is provided more from the parent or the host company. The theme about split support systems was found with the following codes: “relocation experiences,” “communication,” and “organization.”

The literature review highlighted the fact that there is a gap about this topic in previous research, also when trying to understand if support given by the two institutions has a different value for expatriates.

Some managers attested that the majority of support came from the parent company being the one responsible to establish and manage expatriates’ assistance packages and coordination, while others expressed how aid was lacking from the main firm, and it was provided more by the host company, which played a fundamental role. Other times, support was given by both the parent and the host company. In this last case, the former helped with more bureaucratic

and financial practices, while the latter was essential for integration and adaptation purposes. This happened especially when communication was efficient and ran smoothly within the entire company's network.

Whichever the situation, both types of aid were seen as useful, without attributing any particular value to one of them. As a consequence, it is possible to see how expatriates probably need support from their entire firm's system.

3.2.4 Career impact of global roles

The last theme that will be discussed is the career impact of global roles, and it was identified with the codes "professional development," "career perspective," and "career advancement."

As explained in the literature review section, international assignments are usually considered to be beneficial for managers because they can acquire new and different skills, which can be used to progress in their career. However, the interviews showed that this is not always the case.

A lot of the managers stated that the experience abroad helped them to broaden their perspective and to advance in their profession, being able to have more important roles inside their company. On the other hand, some interviewees mentioned that while the assignment was beneficial for them from a personal perspective, it did not help with their professional career. This was due to the fact that there was already an established progression path in the firm without the possibility to accelerate it, because the manager was already in a dominant role or because not enough value was attributed by the company for the global assignment.

Therefore, it can be concluded that companies and organizational support can play a role also when it comes to career progression.

and enjoy their life outside of the company. Ensuring the well-being of expatriates means also that they will be more motivated and better prepared to perform at work, reaching successful results. In this way, they will have better possibilities of advancing in their career, assuming more important positions. Looking at the map above, it is possible to notice that all these concepts are related given that the words “support,” “helped,” “colleagues,” “informal,” “personal,” “professional,” “performance,” and “career” are close to each other and are in between the two macro concept “support” and “career”.

Another aspect to take into consideration is the heightened perception of support when both formal and informal assistance were provided. In fact, only in those cases, few or no suggestions for improvement were mentioned. This is testified by the concept map given that the word “support” is situated in the middle between words that represent formal and informal aid. In the upper part, “helped,” “colleagues,” “informal,” and “environment” testify how social aid is beneficial for expatriates. In the lower part, “firm,” “organizational,” and “provided” are part of the formal mechanisms offered by the firm.

An additional aspect to notice is that the words “training,” “language,” and “offered” are situated in the map far away from the “support” and the “company” macro concepts, while they are closer to words such as “colleagues” and “informal”. This underlines how there is a lack of these types of support from the company, and how these aspects are more related to the single individuals, who usually learn new languages and adapt to the new society thanks to the help of peers.

Important to consider is also the word “information”. It can be found in between many other significant concepts like “offered,” “provided,” “process,” and “able”, showing the pivotal role of communication. In fact, without receiving and giving information, it would not be possible to organize support packages for expatriates and to ensure their performance and integration in their new job.

An additional aspect to point out regards the words “company,” “parent,” “host,” “assignment,” and “relocated”. They can be found all close to each other, showing that during international experiences, it is extremely important for expatriates to have a network to support them. This means that the main company and the subsidiary should not act as isolated entities to ensure a smooth transition, but rather as integrated parts of the system.

An important macro concept is the one called “suggested”, which is directly linked to support. This represents that managers are still not entirely satisfied with all the support received and they are aware that some improvements should be made. For this reason, it would be important for companies to listen to their feedback and suggestions regarding their assignments, in order to enhance the experience for other employees in the future.

Additionally, it is also important to consider the macro concept “housing”, where the words “financial” and “housing” show that the related types of aid are the ones provided the most by companies, as also previously mentioned.

Lastly, it is important to take into consideration the relationship between three of the macro concepts of the map, which are “support,” “career,” and “company”. The individual experience of the expatriate is tightly linked to the support received from the company, which also connects to career outcomes. This represents how perceived organizational support can shape both the self-assessed performance and the growth of managers during international assignments.

3.4 Expatriates' views from the same firms

In this part of the research an in-depth analysis of the last six interviews will be presented to gain some insights from expatriates working in the same corporate environment. They are divided in two groups: the first comprising four interviewees from one firm, and the second including two managers from another institution.

Starting with the first group of managers, it is possible to notice from their answers that they received a similar support package even if they were relocated to different countries. Financial, fiscal and bureaucratic help were always present and the same benefits were offered. From a more personal point of view, they all felt they were lacking language preparation and proper training. Even those who did receive some support in these areas perceived it as minimal and not fully effective. Moreover, all the managers stated that informal support was crucial for their adaptation in the new country.

On the other hand, it is possible to observe notable differences between the four interviewees. The first one is that two of them mentioned that the majority of support came from the parent company, while according to the other two it came solely from the host firm. In addition to this, communication was perceived as effective by some, and scarce by others. The same happened with the use of digital tools.

Continuing with the second group, the two expatriates took part in the same experience, meaning that in this case the relocation package provided was exactly the same, and they both received more support from the host company.

However, a striking difference emerged. The first interviewee felt that the international assignment was valued by the company, and upon the return in Italy, she continued her career path inside the same firm. On the other hand, the second manager perceived a lack of recognition for his experience, leading to frustration and exit from the company.

Looking at these answers, it is possible to understand that perceptions play a critical role, underscoring the subjective dimensions of expatriate experiences. Managers can receive the same benefits or they can take part in the same exact assignment and live the same experience, but some differences will always be present. These probably depend on the stage of the life in

which the manager is in or on personal characteristics. Moreover, perceptions may vary according to the level of difficulty of integration found in the host country, according to the host culture, which may be viewed as being more welcoming or less open minded. Another aspect to consider could be communication, given that some subsidiaries may have a better informational network compared to other ones. However, it is important to notice that every person has a different perception about the support received and the value attributed to them and their assignment by the company. For this reason, all the expatriates' experiences are somewhat different, leading to non-identical results.

4. Discussion

The interviews yielded several important insights that will be discussed in this section, with the aim to address the two objectives of this study.

One of the objectives of this research was to identify and analyze the core dimensions of perceived organizational support and their influence on self-perceived expatriate managers' job performance.

The first finding related to it is that between all the types of organizational support pointed out by managers, the main one given to everyone is the financial aid. This is not completely consistent with what was found in the literature review section, looking at which it can be thought that firms focus a lot on training programs. In fact, currently, there are numerous studies regarding different kinds of training, while not much research focuses on the various ways of providing financial help to expatriates. Therefore, there is a misalignment between theoretical aspects and reality, meaning that more space should be given to the study of financial support, and more attention should be paid by companies for training activities.

Another relevant support dimension worth including is psychological support. This was mentioned only by few of the interviewees, showing that it is not one of the main priorities of the firms. However, those who received it benefited from it, meaning that companies need to consider its inclusion in the expatriates' support packages. It can be helpful for them in overcoming challenges abroad and in adapting to the new environment, especially because some managers mentioned going through moments of discomfort and lack of motivation.

Repatriation is an additional aspect to consider. Even if this process went smoothly for some managers, the interviews revealed that not a lot of attention is given to this final stage of the expatriates' process, and executives often do not receive any information about what will happen upon their return or, if some details are provided, the process can be very disorganized and expatriates may experience it as "traumatic", as highlighted by some of the interviewees. This has shown that companies must consider the repatriation process more, informing employees about their options while they are still in the host country.

Overlap periods represent another noteworthy type of support not always provided by companies. Only two managers could benefit from such arrangement, but they still thought that it lasted a short period of time, and that it was therefore not completely effective. This highlights the expatriate's needs to have a transition time during which they can learn their new job with the help of the person leaving it.

In addition to the elements discussed above that were not explicitly emphasized by managers, but it is possible to understand they are needed from all the interviews conducted, there are other explicit forms of support that expatriates suggested as improvements. These are to provide more and longer language courses, to assign mentors, to improve communication in the entire network, to design a more structured program for expatriates and to have a specific contact person.

Therefore, analyzing the core dimensions of perceived organizational support, it is possible to attest that companies are providing expatriates with financial, bureaucratic, fiscal and family support (if needed) efficiently. All the other types of support already discussed are, on the other hand, still given but not effectively or to a limited extent. This means that support should still be implemented in a more structured way.

Continuing to analyze the second part of the first objective, it is important to point out that while managers mentioned that all the types of formal support presented above were beneficial for their performance, what actually made a difference was the informal or social support. This is because the former helped them to focus on their job by not thinking about external challenges, but only thanks to the latter they felt included in the new society, living in a state of well-being and performing successfully. One of the reasons why this happened is probably because informal support substituted the absence of mentors, training and language courses. This aspect shows how social support could be considered as a moderator between formal mechanisms and performance, making the link between the two aspects stronger or weaker. Therefore, both types of support should be implemented by companies. In this way, expatriates' performance will be influenced even more positively.

The second objective of this research was to analyze and compare the organizational support mechanisms offered by the parent company versus the host company.

As touched upon before, analyzing the interviews, it was found out that organizational support can come from both the parent and the host company. Usually, the main firm creates the expatriate's package, helps with the definition of the contract and provides more financial and technical help. On the other hand, the host company aids the employee in adapting to the new job and country. However, some managers pointed out that the host firm can be supportive also when it comes to housing search, documents in local languages and on-boarding activities. This shows that there is not a specific division of the types of support offered by the companies, but this can vary according to the situation.

Another finding related to this topic is that expatriates would like to have more cooperation and a better and connected network between the parent company and the subsidiary. This will ensure a smoother transition for them, improving their performance.

Lastly, there is a finding that relates to both objectives and it is the one about performance. Even if expatriates had different experiences and were provided with distinct types of support, they always valued their performance positively. Therefore, it is possible to notice the importance of perceptions. For this reason, while the self-assessed performance might be positive, it is not possible to say the same about actual effectiveness.

In light of the findings presented above, it can be concluded that expatriates need an integrated company network formed by the parent and the host companies, which could have different roles and provide formal and informal support respectively. Social help usually acts as a moderator variable, especially when formal aid is lacking, with the consequence of enhancing performance, when present. Together, the several types of support provided have an influence on expatriates' performance. This is shown below in the new model created with the results, which considers the different kinds of aid together for the first time, given that they were always analyzed separately in previous studies.

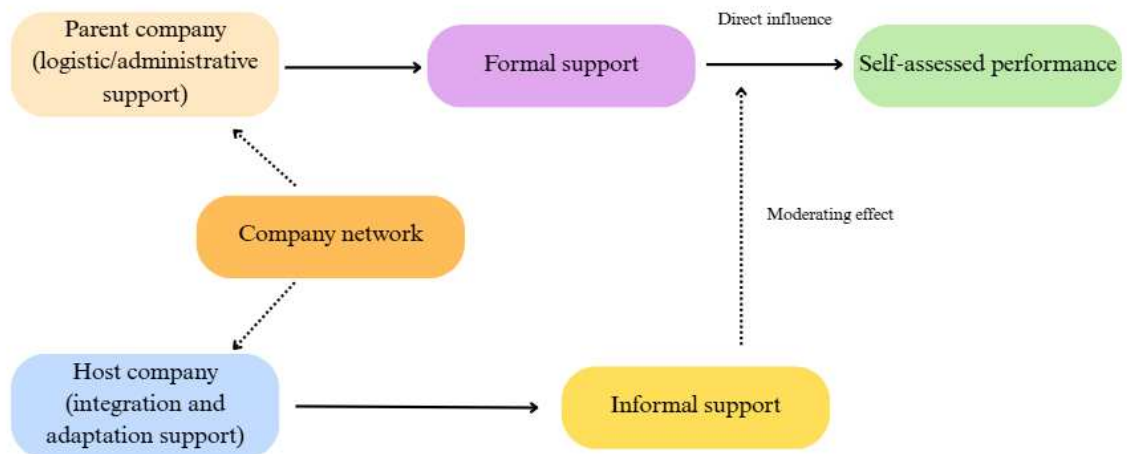


Figure 8: Proposed model integrating different types of organizational support

Finally, it is also important to point out that all the interviewees had the same notion about the definition of support. When asked a first general question regarding the types of aid received during their international assignment, they all talked about financial, cultural and professional aspects. This testifies that the nature of the topic was the same, even if experiences and perceptions were different. Moreover, no specific difference was found for interviewees having different cultures, both in terms of definition of support or for any other particular insight.

5. Limitations and future research

This research focused on discovering the actual types of organizational support that both parent and host companies offer to expatriates during international assignments, and how the perceived support influences self-assessed performance. Even though these elements have been identified looking at the experience of managers working for several companies, there are still other aspects that can be improved in order to arrive at a better understanding of the topic. Therefore, limitations must be acknowledged.

Firstly, even if more nationalities were considered in the study, a big part of the interviewees were Italian and the relocation happened from Italy to another country. Given that perceptions and habits can substantially diverge across societies, adopting a greater multicultural perspective in future research will help to have a deeper view of the topic, with the possibility of doing a comparative analysis.

Another aspect to take into consideration is about the companies of the managers interviewed. The interviewees are part of both small and big companies. While this aspect was beneficial for the purpose of this study because it gave the possibility to show some dissimilarities between experiences, it could be beneficial to divide the two groups to have a deeper understanding of actions implemented by firms and things to improve.

An additional detail that could require more attention is the difference between genders. This topic was out of the scope of this research, therefore it was not a primary focus of attention. However, it is possible to notice from the interviews that the majority of managers are males, given that it was not easy finding females who participated in an international assignment. Moreover, within this group of interviewees, only males mentioned their families, while all the females are quite young without children. This did not affect the aim of this research, and no big divergence was found in terms of organizational support or perceptions. However, the differences discussed above show that this topic requires more attention and future research should focus on it, highlighting its various characteristics.

Additionally, for the purpose of this research, performance was evaluated according to managers' perspectives, and for this reason it could be considered biased. Future studies may

analyze performance from a company's point of view, using evaluations and other specific measurements. This will help to validate self-assessed job effectiveness.

Lastly, it is relevant to point out that some of the expatriates interviewed talked about past experiences that happened some years ago. This aspect could have influenced some results, given that innovations could have happened inside the companies, meaning that support mechanisms could have been subjected to some changes. Therefore, this paper represents only the starting point of the research in this field, and the topic should be further explored in the future to account for more recent developments.

6. Conclusion

This study had the aim to explore how perceived organizational support influences the self-assessed job performance of expatriate managers during international assignments. Drawing from Organizational Support Theory and related frameworks, the research focused on the types of support received by expatriates, on how they vary between parent and host companies and on which mechanisms have the most impact on expatriates' performance.

The findings, derived from in-depth interviews with managers sent abroad by their companies, provide a comprehensive understanding of how support, both formal and informal, shapes the expatriate's experience, answering to the research question of this study. POS was found to reduce distractions caused by personal or logistic challenges, enabling expatriates to fully focus on their job, and to report high motivation and satisfaction. Conversely, a lack of support does not necessarily lead to negative performance outcomes, but it often increases stress and slows down adaptation, which managers themselves admit could hinder effectiveness.

One of the most important findings of this research is the critical role of informal support networks. While formal assistance is appreciated, it is often peer guidance, informal mentoring and social integration that make the difference between a difficult and satisfying experience for managers. Social support often bridges the gaps of institutional practices and plays a central role in shaping the expatriates' ability to adapt in a foreign environment.

In fact, several areas emerged as commonly underdeveloped in support programs. These include limited access to language courses, inconsistent or absent cultural and job training, a lack of psychological support, and poor repatriation planning. The absence of these elements does not prevent success, but reduces the expatriates' ability to perform at their best and to integrate quickly in the host country. On the other hand, when these forms of support are available, they are usually highly valued and linked to well-being.

Another major insight regards the division of support between parent and host companies. Usually the former handle logistics and compensation, while the latter are more involved in integration and adaptation practices. However, this is not always the case, resulting in

disorganization and confusion, especially when communication between the two entities is not efficient. Therefore, managers expressed a clear need for more coordination and cohesion.

It is also evident that while expatriates largely perceive their performance positively, their perception does not only depend on perceived support, but also on personal motivation. In fact, even managers who received limited support reported success. However, they also recognized that with better support, they could have performed even more efficiently and adapted more quickly. This finding highlights the relationship between support and performance, showing that POS enables expatriates to fully express their abilities during a challenging international assignment.

Theoretically, this research reinforces the applicability of Organizational Support Theory in international contexts, implements the Resource-based and Dynamic Capabilities Theories showing that expatriates can be used as resources to increase the value of the company around the world, and provides a new model integrating for the first time all the different types of organizational support together. Practically, it provides actionable insights for HR and global mobility teams on how to design better support systems.

In conclusion, it can be attested that the answer to the research question is that perceived organizational support positively shapes expatriates' self-assessed job performance by enhancing their sense of security, reducing stress, and providing deeper engagement with their work and host environment. Therefore, companies that invest in consistent support mechanisms are more likely to see their expatriate assignments succeed, obtaining long-term organizational benefits.

7. List of abbreviations used

- OST - Organizational Support Theory
- POS - Perceived Organizational Support
- OECD - Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
- UNSD - United Nations Statistic Division
- MEIP - Multinational Enterprise Information Platform
- MNEs - Multinational Enterprises
- RQ - Research Question
- BTB - Business-to-Business
- HRM - Human Resource Management

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9. Appendix

9.1 Base questions for interviews

General Background

1. Can you briefly describe your role during your international assignment?
2. How long have you been in your host country?

Perceived Organizational Support

3. How supported did you feel by your firm for this international assignment?
4. What types of support have you received from both the parent and the host company?
5. Do you feel that one company (parent vs. host) has been more supportive than the other? In what ways?
6. Did you receive any pre-departure training? If so, how helpful was it in preparing you for your assignment?
7. What kind of support did you receive in terms of integration and adaptation (from a personal and professional point of view)?
8. Were you offered financial assistance such as housing, travel, or health benefits? How did this impact your experience?
9. Were there any digital tools or platforms provided to help you with communication or information access?
10. How involved was your family in the relocation process, and what kind of family or partner support did the company offer? How did this make you feel?

Cultural & Work Adjustment

11. How challenging was it to adapt to the host country's work culture? Did the company help with this adjustment?

Social & Emotional Support

12. How would you describe the emotional or psychological support you received from the company?

13. Did you have access to mentors, either in the parent or host organization? How did this impact your adjustment and performance?
14. How important was informal support (from coworkers or peers) in helping you adapt and perform in your role?

Repatriation

15. Has the company communicated with you about your repatriation process or next career steps?

Performance & Career Impact

16. In what ways do you think the support you received (or didn't receive) affected your job performance?
17. How do you personally assess your own performance during this assignment?
18. How do you think this assignment has impacted your long-term career goals or identity?

Final Reflections

19. If you could suggest improvements to your company's support program for expatriates, what would they be?

9.2 Summary of the interviews

In this section a small summary of each interview will be presented. For privacy reasons and for the purpose of this study, the names of the managers and the names of the companies will be kept anonymous.

Interview n° 1

Position and age range of the interviewee: country manager, 50+ age group

Industry of the company: automobile industry

The interviewee was relocated from Italy to Spain a year and a half ago. He explained that he was the first employee of his parent company to be sent abroad, as the firm had only just begun its internationalization process. As a result, he did not receive any pre-departure support and had only minimal assistance during his international assignment. On a personal level, the company offered some financial resources, but provided no consideration for his psychological or physical well-being, nor for the needs of his wife. Professionally, he received some information through phone calls with colleagues, but there was no structured knowledge-sharing platform. He had to independently explore the Spanish market, learn how to import vehicles, understand local regulations, and establish a sales operation. He noted that the little support he did receive seemed focused only on ensuring the company's success rather than supporting him personally. Additionally, repatriation plans were never discussed, as he is expected to remain in Spain to continue overseeing the local market. Regarding cultural adaptation, he shared that integrating into Spanish society was not difficult, as Spain had always felt like a second home due to his Spanish wife. Therefore, he did not face major adjustment challenges despite the lack of formal support. He considered the international assignment beneficial to his current career, though he believed it will not impact his future professional path, as he is already in a senior position and does not think of pursuing other roles. Despite the lack of organizational support, the interviewee believed he is performing well, successfully entering the Spanish market and building a strong subsidiary. However, he emphasized that with better support, the process could have been even more efficient and quick. He highlighted the need for the presence of a dedicated company representative focused on supporting expatriates, from minor tasks like document translations to major responsibilities like

navigating import regulations. He also expressed a desire for clearer and more direct communication with the parent company throughout the assignment.

Interview n° 2

Position and age range of the interviewee: area manager, 30-50 age group

Industry of the company: metal industry

The interviewee was relocated from Italy to Spain for one year and then to Brazil where he stayed for four years. He attested that he received a lot of support from the company, which not only provided pre-departure training, but also gave him additional benefits during the assignment. These included housing, a car, a housekeeper, and help with local documentation. Informal support was also important considering that he built strong relationships with colleagues who helped him to adapt to a new environment and to learn both Spanish and Portuguese. He said that without them, the experience would not have been so positive. He didn't have a mentor during the assignment, but his director acted as one, and taught him a lot. From a technological point of view, he did not have access to specific platforms because he was relocated during the years of the technological transition, and online services were still in the development process. Moreover, the support came solely from the parent company. Regarding repatriation, he was not able to receive a lot of information from the company because he had to leave Brazil quickly after an economic crisis, meaning that the return was not planned. He highlighted the fact that the relocation was successful and that his performance got better thanks to the overall formal and informal support from the company. The experience helped him to progress both from a professional point of view, given that now he has his own company, and from a personal perspective, because he learned new languages and made long-lasting friendships. Moreover, he was young and ambitious when he was relocated, and this helped him to live positively his time abroad. Lastly, he suggested implementing more personalized organizational support according to the managers' needs and to offer language training before and after the departure, given that he believed that it helps with integration.

Interview n° 3

Position and age range of the interviewee: operations manager, 30-50 age group

Industry of the company: real estate consulting industry

The interviewee was relocated to the Netherlands in 2023 and he has been living in the host country since then. He said that he received support from the company only for the application process, the contract definition and the onboarding steps. The firm did not help him in finding accommodation, which was a very challenging task for him, and did not provide him with any financial help, apart from a salary negotiation process. He also did not receive any type of training. On the other hand, communication was managed well because it happened through digital platforms. He also had access to both mentorship and coaching programs on a voluntary basis. He found the informal support from colleagues and from his manager very helpful for adaptation and for overcoming work challenges. He did not find any difference between the support received from the parent and the host companies. At the moment, the manager said that he does not link his performance to the support received, because he views them as two separate things. He values his performance positively, and attests that the experience will certainly be beneficial for his future career. In order to improve organizational support, he suggested to offer a language course, to help expatriates with accommodation, and to provide an incentive to face the costs of relocation.

Interview n° 4

Position and age range of the interviewee: senior commercial manager, 20-30 age group

Industry of the company: consumer goods industry

The interviewee was relocated from Switzerland to Germany, going from a forecasting job to becoming a senior manager. He stayed in the host country only for a short period of time because he acted as a substitute for a local employee. The company provided him with conspicuous financial support, paying for housing, transportation, trips, and food. He went through a transition period, having the possibility to start working at the host company before the person he had to substitute needed to leave. This helped him to have a smoother adaptation. He had bureaucratic support, while he did not receive a cultural or language aid, given that both jobs were in English. For this reason, the informal support from colleagues was essential, and he was able to integrate quickly in the new environment thanks to the relationships built. The company's support helped him to navigate external challenges and, for this reason, he was able

to focus on the job and to perform well. He believed that the experience was beneficial for his career, but did not help him to progress quicker, given that usually inside the company people keep their role for two years and then they switch to another one. He did not mention any difference in the support received from the parent and the host company, because he said that he left Switzerland with a specific plan for his relocation experience, and everything was well coordinated, communicated and transparent. The only thing that he would improve is to have a specific point of contact to manage the various steps, because he had to communicate with several third-party agencies provided by the firm, and it would have been easier to discuss everything with one person.

Interview n° 5

Position and age range of the interviewee: business analyst manager, 30-50 age group

Industry of the company: consulting industry

The interviewee was transferred from Italy to Dubai for a project of digital transformation for a telephone company. He received all the support from the parent company, which provided him with housing, a car, and paid trips for him and for family members who wanted to go visit him. However, apart from these forms of financial aid, the firm did not offer any other type of support to him. Therefore, the informal support from peers was fundamental for his integration and adaptation to the new environment, especially when considering that he was part of a multicultural team and the work culture was very different from the Italian one. Colleagues also helped him with some documentation. He said that the experience was beneficial for his work career because he received a promotion, and that he perceived positively his performance. However, even though he did not face big problems, he could have performed better if he had been given additional support. Lastly, he mentioned the fact that the organizational support of the company could be improved by providing cultural training.

Interview n° 6

Position and age range of the interviewee: CFO, 50+ age group

Industry of the company: consumer goods industry

The manager started his career in the company in Germany, and he was then transferred to Switzerland and Austria for a total of four years, having a promotion for each relocation. A third-party company acted as a contact point for administrative purposes, helping him with authorizations and documentation. The firm also offered him housing support, reviewing leases and visiting properties with him and his family. From a financial point of view, the third-party agency fees, the moving costs and the school for the children were covered by the company. Cultural training was provided, but the interviewee's family decided to attend it only in Austria. However, they regretted the decision not to follow the course also in Switzerland because they found it very useful. In addition to this, language classes were provided. Informal support was also very important for him, given that some colleagues had already gone through the same process and they wanted to help him. The repatriation process was well organized. The interviewee attested that organizational support represented a fundamental part for him and for his performance, because given that his family was able to adapt and did not face many problems, he did not have other external concerns and could focus on his job, improving performance. Moreover, he did not notice differences between the support received from the parent and the host company, given that the two firms had a well connected network with mentors in each of them. He also said that these experiences helped him grow professionally. Lastly, he mentioned the fact that the companies are reducing their support for expatriates because it is very costly, therefore he suggested focusing on the most critical support mechanisms, leaving out the more superficial aspects.

Interview n° 7

Position and age range of the interviewee: area manager, 50+ age group

Industry of the company: automobile industry

The interviewee was relocated from Italy to Slovenia and Greece some years ago for two years, when he still did not have family on his own. From a financial point of view, the company paid for his apartment, food, and for a car, and on top of that, he also had a daily allowance and an organizational credit card. On the other hand, he was not provided with plane tickets because the destinations were not so far away from Italy. From a personal perspective, the firm did not offer cultural training and language courses for those specific countries. He mentioned the fact that the majority of the support came from the host companies, where also local employees

were welcoming and ready to help. However, when it came to sharing information and data, the parent company had a more important role, given that there was not a lot of transparency from the local firm because he was a “new” employee. Regarding the repatriation process, he never received precise information about it, so in this case there was a lack of support. He affirmed that organizational support is necessary in order to perform well, but he perceived his performance positively even if the support was not the best. Lastly, he suggested to improve the organizational aid by teaching the local language and creating a transition period between the expatriate and the person who is leaving the job to better adapt to the new environment.

Interview n° 8

Position and age range of the interviewee: sales manager, 30-50 age group

Industry of the company: health industry

The manager was transferred from Italy to the UK for a short period of time. He explained that the support came solely from the parent company, which was extremely prepared for this type of situation. He received training for the new work assignment and for cultural norms in the host country. He was also given a tracking app for safety and emergency support. From a financial point of view, he received insurance coverage and housing. The company did not assign him a mentor and did not provide any support for his family. Informal support was very important for him, given that colleagues helped him to integrate in the new country and made his life outside work more enjoyable. The repatriation process was also well organized and the company offered him psychological support upon arrival. The interviewee highlighted the fact that organizational support helped him to perform better, overcoming challenges and being confident and effective. However, he also recalled that the lack of support from the host company made him lose his motivation from time to time. He was satisfied with his work during the assignment because he contributed to the company’s goals and reached his objectives. In addition to this, he believes that this experience helped him to advance with his career and to broaden his perspectives. He suggested improving the support offered by the company, providing more detailed training tailored to the host country, additional family support and a mentor to be able to adapt quicker.

Interview n° 9

Position and age range of the interviewee: general manager, 30-50 age group

Industry of the company: eyewear industry

The interviewee was relocated from Italy to Spain for four years, and then from Spain to the US five years ago. Being still on the assignment, the manager said that he is very satisfied with all the support provided. Financially, the company covered the moving costs and it is paying the school for his children, the trips for the entire family to go back home once a year, an apartment and health insurance for everyone. The firm provided him with all the relevant information to understand the challenges to settle in the new countries, and gave the whole family the opportunity to arrange virtual meetings with locals to familiarize with the different cultural norms and traditions, to talk about the kids' education and to have support with taxation procedures. Cultural and linguistic courses were also provided on-site. A consultant was there to help the manager with all the procedures upon arrival at the host country, using a platform to share information. The firm also offered professional support for his wife and a coach for him. Psychological support was also given during Covid times. The interviewee mentioned that there was not a big difference between the support provided by the parent and the host company, because the former helped him in the execution of the contract and the latter focused on other services offered. Informal support was also extremely important for him to build trust with the other employees and to understand the new reality. The interviewee believed that the support received from the organization is key in his motivation and performance, helping him to overcome professional and personal challenges. Looking at both business results and his team's success, he said that he is satisfied with his performance even though he made some mistakes along the way. He believed that it was a way for him to learn and grow. He did not mention any suggestion to improve the support program because he received all the aid needed.

Interview n° 10

Position and age range of the interviewee: brand manager, 50+ age group

Industry of the company: automobile industry

The manager was transferred from Italy to the US, Greece and India in three different relocation programs with three different companies operating in the same industry, staying abroad for three years. His salary changed according to the cost of living and the safety of the host country,

and it always included an incentive. The interviewee attested that the majority of support came from the parent company. From a financial point of view, he was provided with housing, one trip per year to go back home, an allowance and health insurance for all the members of his family. From a personal perspective, they did not receive any cultural training, but they were offered language courses. Regarding the informal support, the manager said it was different according to the role he was covering in each of the countries. In some cases, local employees were more welcoming and ready to help, compared to other times. A similar situation happened with the repatriation process, which was not always easy and well organized. He mentioned that even though the support received was not always the same, he did not notice a big difference in his performance. According to him, personal motivation is more important compared to organizational support when it comes to performing well. On the other hand, he said that these experiences helped him to progress with his career. Lastly, he did not have any suggestion to improve the aid offered because, according to him, support packages for expatriates are already structured and tailored to the needs of the individual.

Interview n° 11

Position and age range of the interviewee: operations manager, 50+ age group

Industry of the company: consulting industry

The interviewee was transferred from Italy to Brazil for three years. The company provided him with housing, with a budget to furnish the new apartment, and with help with local documentation. At the time, he already had a wife and three children, but they did not follow him during the assignment. For this reason, he was given the possibility to work six weeks in the host country and two weeks in Italy doing smartworking. In addition to this, the firm paid for ten trips per year to go back home (six trips were for him, and four flights were for his family to visit him). The manager said that cultural training was not provided, while language courses were offered but they were not useful. Therefore, informal support was essential for integration and onboarding processes. Communication was good and done through the use of technology. Repatriation was also taken into consideration, providing clear information and ensuring a good work position once back home. According to him, all the help was given by the host company, and it was crucial for his performance, which was valued positively. He said that the experience helped him grow professionally and personally, however he still had some

suggestions for improvement. He would have liked to have a mentor and to have a more structured expatriate program.

Interview n° 12

Position and age range of the interviewee: finance manager, 20-30 age group

Industry of the company: technology industry

The interviewee was relocated from Germany to Dubai for four months, with the purpose to develop strategic financial models for the Middle East region. The firm provided him with housing, meals, help with documentation and visa application, and a bank representative. He was also assigned a buddy, who helped him a lot for integration. According to him, guidance was essential and without it, he would not have been able to work on the projects. Peer support was also important both professionally and personally to develop his social network. He attested that he did not have problems with the language because he was working in English, and everything was well translated when it was written in the local language. Communication was good, but sometimes it was difficult to get information from the parent company due to privacy concerns. He attested that help was provided more by the host company and that the experience was important for him for learning purposes, but it did not influence his career path. In addition to this, he said that the support helped him to perform, but he was not very satisfied with his performance, even if everyone in the company seemed happy about it. Moreover, the experience was beneficial for his career. He suggested improving communication and transparency in expatriates' programs.

Interview n° 13

Position and age range of the interviewee: project manager, 20-30 age group

Industry of the company: automobile industry

The manager was transferred from Germany to China for a period of four months. The company provided him with luxurious housing, a car, and a cash bonus. Moreover, he received help from a third-party firm to obtain his visa, and flights for his spouse to visit him were also paid. Even though he did not have a mentor, he was assigned a Chinese point of contact that he could reach

out in case of problems. The exchange of information occurred throughout the use of the intranet and everything was transparent and easy to access. Language courses were offered upon request, but no cultural training was provided. For this reason, informal support was essential, and locals helped the manager to form his social network. He did not receive any information about the repatriation process because he had already been assigned to another project in Germany before the departure. The interviewee attested that organizational support came from the parent company, while help for integration was provided by the host firm. The aid helped him to have a successful performance, of which he was satisfied, and the experience was beneficial for his career. He suggested to offer cultural training.

Interview n° 14

Position and age range of the interviewee: product manager, 20-30 age group

Industry of the company: consumer goods industry

The interviewee was relocated from China to Ghana for one year and a half and to Tanzania for another year and a half. She said that the support received was over her expectations. The company provided her with housing, transportation, help with visa and local documents, flights to go back home and meals. They assigned her a mentor, offered professional training and gave her the possibility to talk with local people before the departure. Cultural training was not provided, but she said that she did not have major problems because she had done a cross-cultural course on her own, and because her supervisor gave her some general and basic information for integration. She was also offered psychological support and every month she had to report to her country manager and to the parent company for feedback about the experience. Communication was also good, even though she had some problems while she was in Tanzania given that she did not speak the language and she was offered only a basic course. The repatriation process was well organized. Informal support was important and necessary for adaptation. The interviewee attested that before the departure, support came entirely from the parent company, while when she was on the assignment, it was provided by the host company. All the aid received helped her to perform well and to receive positive feedback, however she suggested offering more social activities to expatriates to help them even more with integration and with the creation of a network abroad. Finally, she said that the assignment was beneficial for her both from a personal and professional point of view.

Interview n° 15

Position and age range of the interviewee: financial controller manager, 30-50 age range

Industry of the company: food industry

The interviewee was transferred from Switzerland to India for some months. The company provided him with business class flight tickets, meals, a budget for housing, help to obtain a visa, and international insurance. He was not offered language courses but said that it was not a problem because he was able to work and to speak with everyone in English. No formal cultural training was provided, however his supervisor helped him to understand the local culture. This was done before the departure, after remote meetings with locals, discussing behaviors or reactions that Indian coworkers had had during the discussions. On the other hand, training on soft skills was offered. Communication was good and practical, and the repatriation process went smoothly. Informal support was also important, and the manager attested that it depended also on the company culture given that people were able to be professional while working and friends outside the job environment. The interviewee said that the majority of the help came from the parent company, and that it positively influenced his performance. However, he stated that his good performance depended more on his personal skills. He also highlighted the fact that the experience helped him personally, but did not accelerate his career, and he followed the normal growth path inside the company. He suggested offering specific training on how to be open minded and flexible, because these are vital aspects when working in a foreign environment.

Interview n° 16

Position and age range of the interviewee: project manager, 30-50 age range

Industry of the company: humanitarian industry

The interviewee was relocated for a year from the US to East Africa. The company took care of the travel, housing, meals and transportation costs. Everything was organized before the departure, including the scope of the experience and the repatriation process, which went smoothly. A mentor was not formally assigned, but her supervisor acted as one.

Communication was also good and done with the use of technology, even if the manager was sometimes located in remote places. She did not receive a formal cultural training, but her country manager provided her with generic and basic information, such as dress code and way of speaking with locals. She did not have problems with the language because she could use English. Informal support was essential for adaptation, and she found that everyone was ready to help her. The aid came especially from the parent company. The support received made her perceive the experience positively and helped her in her performance, considering that she did not have to think about external factors and she could focus on her job. She valued her results positively and said that the assignment had an impact on her career. Lastly, she mentioned that she would have liked the firm to implement a more structured program for expatriates, because everything was done from an informal point of view and having more guidelines could have been beneficial.

Interview n° 17

Position and age range of the interviewee: purchase manager, 20-30 age range

Industry of the company: consumer goods industry

The manager was transferred from Brazil to Germany for a year. The company covered the travel costs, giving him the possibility to choose direct flights (when possible) and comfortable times, even if the price of the tickets was higher. The firm also provided insurance, housing, help with visa and local documentation, assistance from other professionals, and a third-party agency for support during the experience. He said that communication was good, and the repatriation process went smoothly. He did not receive any formal cultural training or language course, therefore informal support was extremely important for him, and the company motivated him to spend time with colleagues and locals. Regarding the language, he did not have problems as everything was in English. Support was provided especially by the parent company, and it helped him to perform well, according to his own evaluation. However, the experience did not particularly boost his career perspective. He suggested to give more structure to the support package for expatriates and to organize activities to help managers to create a network.

Interview n° 18

Position and age range of the interviewee: research manager, 30-50 age range

Industry of the company: humanitarian industry

The manager was transferred from the US to Sudan, Kenya and Iraq for an ongoing assignment that has been lasting for three years. From a financial point of view, the company provided her with a budget to spend on flights and a monthly allowance for food, transportation and housing. Psychologically, not much has been offered, apart from the possibility to work remotely for some days. From a cultural perspective, no formal training has been provided and informal support from peers and colleagues was essential for adaptation and to understand the cultural differences, which were sometimes hard to overcome. Mentoring was informal, with calls scheduled every week. She attested that communication was good overall, however every time she was transferred to a new country, she found herself alone with the scope to establish a subsidiary, and she had a hard time sharing information with the parent company. The majority of help came from the parent firm. She sometimes felt alone at the beginning of a new assignment, therefore she suggested to organize bonding activities to create a community abroad. However, she attested that the support received helped her anyway to perform well, and that the assignment has been and will be beneficial for her personal and professional life.

Interview n° 19

Position and age range of the interviewee: security manager, 20-30 age range

Industry of the company: security industry

The interviewee was relocated from Italy to Ibiza for a period of three months for a project on tourism safety. The firm provided her with flights, housing and meals. She was assigned a mentor, however she was never able to get in contact with this person, making the arrival in the host country hard and chaotic. The company gave her the possibility to use a program for language exercises, but it was not enough and she had some problems with the language at the beginning of the assignment. Moreover, she did not receive any cultural training, and for this reason, support from Spanish colleagues was essential for her integration, to understand cultural norms and to create her social network. Being still on the assignment, she said that communication between companies is good and organized and she regularly sends updates to

her parent firm. She also pointed out that the majority of support was provided by the host company, especially in terms of integration, while the parent firm supported her to organize the trip. The repatriation process was well organized before the departure. The manager said that the aid received helped her to perform well, being satisfied with her results, however she would have liked to have a more structured support program and more time to organize before the assignment, given that the firm told her she was being transferred only two weeks before the departure.

Interview n° 20

Position and age range of the interviewee: development and cooperation manager, 30-50 age range

Industry of the company: humanitarian industry

The manager was transferred from Germany to Tanzania in March 2022 and he is still on the assignment. Before moving, the company gave him the possibility to have a meeting with real estate agents to choose an apartment. The firm provided and still provides an allowance for rent, food and transportation. Moreover, bureaucratic help for taxes, a 3-day briefing for information about dangerous situations in the country, cultural training and psychological assistance were also offered. The interviewee could also attend a language course, which was useful in his daily life, but was not enough from a professional point of view. Communication was good and informal support was essential for integration and to solve more practical problems. He had and still has no family. The manager attested that the parent company helped with organizational and administrative support, while the host company supported him for adaptation. He has always valued his performance positively, and said that with less help he could have performed worse. Moreover, he said that the assignment will be beneficial for his personal and professional life. He suggested being more organized for the administrative procedures which he found sometimes hard to manage.

Interview n° 21

Position and age range of the interviewee: logistics director, 50+ age range

Industry of the company: technology industry

The interviewee was relocated from the US to Italy after the COVID-19 pandemic, and he is still on the assignment. He attested that it is easier for people working abroad and being transferred to the headquarters because everything is well organized, while when the opposite happens, the situation is different and more complicated. He was assigned an HR representative, he had a website for general information, received onboarding and help with documentation. Apart from that, he had to do everything on its own. He also said that the company probably thought he did not need additional support because he was and still is working remotely or because he has an Italian wife. Informal support was also lacking because all his colleagues were from the US. On the other hand, communication was good. He did not speak Italian when he first arrived, but everyone was working in English making the language barrier not a problem. Support came entirely from the parent company, and the lack of it did not affect his performance a lot because he already had the necessary skills to do the job, being a senior manager inside the company, however he said that with additional help he could have performed even better. In addition to it, the interviewee attested that the assignment won't be beneficial for his future career given that he is already in a senior position inside the company. The manager suggested to have a specific contact person to support expatriates and to have a well-designed program in place to ensure more organization.

Interview n° 22

Position and age range of the interviewee: consulting manager, 50+ age range

Industry of the company: consulting industry

The manager was transferred from Portugal to Angola for three years. The company paid for housing, a housekeeper, school for his children, and flights. He was also provided with a mentor, but did not receive any cultural training or support for his wife. He did not need a language course because he could speak Portuguese in the host country. Communication was good because the company network was well organized. The repatriation process also went smoothly, and he received information about it while on the assignment. Informal support was extremely important to learn about cultural norms and for adaptation to the new environment, especially due to the lack of formal training. The interviewee said that the parent firm helped with administrative things, while the host company supported him with local procedures and

problems, and that thanks to the aid received he was able to perform well and to focus on the job, without external preoccupations. He believed to have already a good position inside the company, meaning that the experience abroad did not accelerate his career. He also said that the company allowed him to move with his family, so he was satisfied with the support program.

Interview n° 23

Position and age range of the interviewee: product manager, 20-30 age range

Industry of the company: manufacturing industry

The interviewee was transferred from Germany to the US for seven months. The firm covered the housing, the flight, the visa and the transportation expenses. He had some onboarding activities and had to follow an online training course about cultural and awareness aspects. The company also provided him with a consultant for bureaucratic things and gave him two mentors, one based in Germany and the other one based in America. Communication was also good because of the well-established company network. The repatriation process went smoothly because the company organized everything before the departure. He had informal support in the form of a friend who was already in the host country, making the adaptation process easier because he could already count on a social network in the new city. He did not notice any difference between support received from the parent and host company, but he said that the aid helped him to perform well. Moreover, he said that the experience aided him in his career receiving other important job offers. He suggested to offer more cultural training and social activities to learn about local norms from a deeper perspective.

Interview n° 24

Position and age range of the interviewee: consulting manager, 30-50 age range

Industry of the company: banking industry

The manager was relocated from France to Brazil for two years and then to New York, where he is still on the assignment. The company paid for his visa, housing, broker fees, movers and flights. It also provided him with a tax advisor, assistance lawyers and help with local

documentation for him and his spouse. A Portuguese language course was also offered with a duration of one year, six months before the departure and six months while in the host country. However, no cultural training was provided, and informal support was essential to overcome cultural barriers. Communication was good. The interviewee did not find any difference between the support received from the parent and the host company, and he said that the aid helped him in his good performance because he could focus on the job, and that the assignment was beneficial professionally and personally. He suggested providing more help at the end of the assignment given that he still has some administrative problems in Brazil. This could be done appointing a specific contact person.

Interview n° 25

Position and age range of the interviewee: project manager, 30-50 age range

Industry of the company: metal industry

The manager was relocated from France to England for two years. The company covered the housing and the flight expenses both for her and her spouse, and gave her an allowance. Moreover, she was provided with a consultant for bureaucratic and administrative help, and with a small cultural training, however these procedures were not very efficient. Informal support was extremely important to receive information about local procedures and for adaptation. Communication was good, and the majority of help was offered by the parent company. She said that the support received did not have a big influence on her performance, which she valued positively. Moreover, the repatriation process was described as a nightmare given that the consultant assigned to her did not handle some procedures well and she had to deal with administrative problems. Therefore, she suggested to improve the bureaucratic organization.

Interview n° 26

Position and age range of the interviewee: consulting manager, 50+ age range

Industry of the company: consulting industry

The interviewee talked about two experiences with two different companies. During the first assignment, he was transferred from Switzerland to Shanghai for six years, while for the second one, he was relocated from Shanghai to Singapore in 2013, and he is still in the host country. In both circumstances, the companies provided him with housing, flights coverage, meals, and bureaucratic help for visas, insurance and other local documents. He did not receive cultural training and no mentor was assigned, therefore informal support was essential to learn professional procedures and to adapt to the new environment. During the first experience, a semester-long language course was provided, and it was useful for daily life even if basic. Communication was good for both experiences, and the support came solely from the host companies. The only difference in terms of aid for the second assignment was about the expenses coverage for his children's school, given that he still did not have family while in Shanghai. The manager attested that the support received helped him to perform well focusing on the job. The experiences also aided him in his career. He suggested to offer cultural training and to give more information about the repatriation process with regular feedback from the expatriate to see where he/she stands and if it is time to go back home. This is because, even if he is still not thinking about going back, no one asked him anything nor gave him information about the process.

Interview n° 27

Position and age range of the interviewee: hr manager, 30-50 age group

Industry of the company: hearing care industry

The interviewee was relocated from Italy to Spain and then from Spain to Germany, going through three relocations in four years. She explained that for the first international assignment, there was a big disorganization from the company, while the situation got better for the other two. She received a relocation package, thanks to which the company paid for the moving process and for housing search. As for bureaucratic services, the company took care of taxes and other types of documents of the host country. In addition to this, the firm provided her with financial aid, which included a monthly allowance, transportation and restaurant tickets. A contact person was present for the entire period, but a mentor was not assigned. She was also given a digital platform to access information about the company and about housing options. Regarding the cultural adaptation, she mentioned that different activities were provided by the

company depending on the host country's culture, and in her case she did not receive any training because the cultural difference was not that big. Moreover, she was in the process of starting a family when she was relocated, therefore family support practices did not apply to her. She did not mention anything about the repatriation process as well. The majority of the support mentioned came from the host company, which helped her to better integrate and adapt to the new environment, while she felt more abandoned by the parent company. The manager also mentioned that informal support from colleagues was crucial for her, and she thinks that her performance improved during the assignment thanks to the relationships she was able to build with peers. She thinks that this experience helped her to advance in her career, and she suggested assigning a buddy to expatriates to better navigate the new environment, and to create a specific division inside the company to keep a stable communication with the parent firm.

Interview n° 28

Position and age range of the interviewee: planning and control manager, 20-30 age group

Industry of the company: hearing care industry

The interviewee was relocated from Italy to the UK for two years, and then to Germany for one year. Financially, the company offered him a wage increase and housing, and took care of the moving process. He also received fiscal help with taxes and other types of documents. He said that training was not offered, but that the communication between the entire company's network was very well structured. Even though he was in contact with the HR department of both the parent and the host company, he attested that the majority of aid came from the latter. What made the difference was the informal support from peers and colleagues. He described it as essential for his integration and adaptation in the new country both from a personal and a professional point of view, and thanks to it, he was able to have a successful performance and to learn new things, which gave him the possibility to progress in his career. According to him, informal support acted as a substitute for a mentor, given that the company did not provide him with one. In order to improve the support program, the manager suggested to offer cultural training and language courses, and to give the possibility of having a mentor and to talk with locals before leaving for the assignment, being able to better prepare for it.

Interview n° 29

Position and age range of the interviewee: digital manager, 20-30 age group

Industry of the company: hearing care industry

The interviewee has been transferred from Italy to the UK for a year, and then from the UK to Spain for two years. The company paid for his apartment, for the moving process and for four flight tickets per year. Moreover, it helped him with bureaucratic documents and to obtain a work visa. He was also given access to a digital platform to learn the new language, but with only a few hours offered, he had some problems at the beginning to adapt. He attested that the communication between companies was good, but not perfect, however he had a consulting team at his disposal, who could help him. He went through a short transition period with the person leaving the role, but he said that it was not enough. Therefore, he was able to integrate better thanks to the informal support received. The manager said that the majority of aid came from the parent company, and that it was fundamental for his performance, which he valued positively. The advice that he gave for the improvement of the support mechanism was to start the language course in advance to have more time to learn the new language better.

Interview n° 30

Position and age range of the interviewee: specialist manager, 20-30 age group

Industry of the company: hearing care industry

The manager was relocated to Germany from Italy for three years. She attested that she received a lot of support, even more than needed, and that the majority of it came from the parent company. From a financial point of view, she was given housing, a guarantor, four trips a year to go back home, and help with moving costs and transportation. From a personal perspective, she could follow a language course, but it only lasted thirty hours and it was not very useful. She did not receive any training both from a professional and a cultural point of view. For this reason, her integration and adaptation depended on informal support, especially from other Italian people who had arrived before her in Germany. However, she said that cultural training would have not been very helpful in her situation, because she believes that it was better to learn by doing. Communication sometimes was difficult to handle. The repatriation process went smoothly for her, and the company helped in the check-out process of the apartment. The

interviewee highlighted the fact that all this support received was critical for her, especially because she did not know German. Thanks to it, she was able to focus on her job, improving her performance and progressing in her career. The only suggestion given was to implement support for language courses given that more time is needed to learn a new language.

Interview n° 31

Position and age range of the interviewee: audit manager, 30-50 age group

Industry of the company: consulting industry

The interviewee participated in a program offered by the company, thanks to which employees are sent abroad to develop additional skills. She applied and she was sent to the US, to Boston, for 18 months. She highlighted the fact that she did not receive any type of support from the parent company, having a lot of difficulties to communicate with them and to receive information. On the other hand, the host company helped her plenty, being always available. It provided her with a legal immigration point of contact, who assisted her with bureaucratic processes, and with an accommodation team, which took care of the moving process and acted as a guarantor for housing purposes. From a financial point of view, the firm paid for accommodation before she was able to find an apartment, and helped her to get a bank loan to afford the housing costs. She had a mentor on the job, and she was offered training to adapt to the new work environment. She did not follow language courses, but she was able to improve her English skills and to adapt in a good way thanks to the informal support from her colleagues and the relationships she built with them. She thought that all this support helped her to perform well, but it did not aid her to accelerate her career, given that she followed the normal process of the company in terms of promotions. Regarding the repatriation process, she described it as traumatic. She did not receive any information and she had some bureaucratic problems. She suggested assigning the coordination of expatriates to a competent and passionate person, given that a team is already present but it does not perform very well. This will help the company to improve the communication process.

Interview n° 32

Position and age range of the interviewee: audit manager, 30-50 age group

Industry of the company: consulting industry

The interviewee is from the same company as the manager of the interview n° 31 and participated in the same experience, therefore the relocation and the types of support offered were completely the same. He also attested that he was able to perform well thanks to the support received by the host company and that the informal support was important to adapt to the new environment and to improve his language skills. He said that the experience was beneficial for his career, but he decided to change firm after his repatriation. This was done because he knew that the company did not value him a lot because they wanted to send someone else abroad for the assignment, but they could not because his application was better. For this reason, he mentioned that he was not happy with the support from the parent company, and that it should have been more transparent.

9.3 Sample characteristics

Table 1: Distribution of expatriates by age range

Age range	Number of expatriates
20-30	10
30-50	14
50+	8

Table 2: Distribution of expatriates by seniority

Seniority	Number of expatriates
Junior	9
Mid-level	11
Senior	12

Table 3: Distribution of expatriates by company industry

Company industry	Number of expatriates
Hearing care	4
Automobile	4
Metal	2
Eyewear	1
Health	1
Consulting	7
Consumer goods	4
Technology	2
Food	1
Humanitarian sector	3
Security	1
Manufacturing	1

Banking	1
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Table 4: Duration of the international assignment

Assignment length	Number of expatriates
Less than 1 year	8
Between 1 and 3 years	16
More than 3 years	8

Table 5: Country of origin of the expatriates

Country of origin	Number of expatriates
Italy	16
Germany	5
China	1
Switzerland	3
USA	3
Brazil	1
Portugal	1
France	2

Table 6: Expatriates accompanied by family members

With/without family	Number of expatriates
Yes	10
No	22

Table 7: Housing provision during assignment

Housing provided or not	Number of expatriates
Yes	29
No	3

Table 8: Language proficiency in the host country

Spoke the language or not	Number of expatriates
Yes	7
No	25