CONTEXT AND GLOBAL MOBILITY: DIVERSE GLOBAL WORK ARRANGEMENTS

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1   Introduction

Due to the continuous growth of global business, an increasing number of people are taking on roles and responsibilities that reach beyond the domestic work context. Even the global crisis of 2008 and its aftermath do not seem to have changed this trend (e.g., Brookfield Global Relocation Services 2012). On the contrary, recent industry surveys expect international assignments to increase by 50% until 2020 (PWC, 2010). As a result, a growing number of people are directly collaborating cross-nationally (Hinds, Liu, & Lyon, 2011). At the same time, the context in which this global work occurs is becoming more and more complex and the forms through which people engage in global work increasingly fragmented (Tharenou, 2005).

Regarding increasing complexity, while it has been common to view an international relocation as a single career event, more and more employees engage in repeated staff transfers, thereby increasing the intensity of global mobility over the course of employees' careers (Shaffer, Kraimer, Chen, & Bolino, 2012). Global work hence does not only enhance demands for physical mobility but also requires individuals to demonstrate higher levels of cognitive flexibility and deal with a wider range of non-work disruptions. Similarly, scholars have pointed to the increased environmental complexity, boundary spanning requirements and geographically distributed work that leaders face as part of their global roles and responsibilities (Mendenhall, Reiche, Bird, & Osland, 2012).

In terms of fragmentation, whereas the traditional expatriation of HQ personnel to foreign subsidiary continues to serve an important global staffing strategy, organizations have also diversified their pool of global employees (Mayrhofer, Reichel, & Sparrow, 2012; Reiche & Harzing, 2010). Among the alternative forms of international assignments are short-term transfers (Tahvanainen, Welch, & Worm, 2005), inpatriation (Reiche, 2006), international business travel (Welch, Welch, & Worm, 2007), virtual assignments (Maznevski, Davison, & Jonsen, 2006) and commuter or rotational assignments (Collings, Scullion, & Morley, 2007). Research on emerging forms of global work has also gone far beyond flexible expatriation. For example, scholars have examined phenomena such as self-initiated international transfers (Andresen, Al Ariss, & Walther, 2012), skilled individuals working in geographically remote centres of excellence serving global operations (Mayrhofer, Sparrow, & Zimmermann, 2008), or immigrants actively attracted to national labour markets (Van Hoven & Meijering, 2005).

Despite the recent advances in our understanding of the shifts in and alternative forms of global work arrangements we still know very little about their relative differences, the extent to which they can complement or substitute each other, the specific role of the contexts in which they occur, how they impact individuals and by extension their families, or how organizations can effectively manage the growing pool of global staffing options. Accordingly, for the purposes of this special issue we define global work arrangements broadly to entail any professional, job-related activities that involve mobility between countries. To that end, this special issue intends to provide a platform to draw together scholarly research that contributes to our knowledge about the context in which global mobility occurs, the drivers and impact of the alternative forms through which global work is

experienced, and how the growing fragmentation of global staff can be effectively managed.

2 Articles in the Special Issue

The number of submissions for the special issue reflect a strong current interest in studying the context and forms of global work arrangements. We received 18 submissions, two of which were desk rejected given a lack of fit with the scope of our special issue. The remaining 16 manuscripts were sent out for blind review by two expert reviewers. Ultimately, we accepted 5 articles, representing a 27.8% overall acceptance rate.

Table 1 gives an overview of the papers in this special issue by highlighting the type of global work arrangement, research focus, chosen sample and methods, and main findings.

Table 1: Synopsis of articles

Author and title	Global work arrangement	Research focus	Sample and methods	Main findings
Feitosa/Kreutzer/Krampert/ Kramer/Salas Expatriate adjustment: Considerations for selection and Training	Traditional expatriation	Develop a conceptual framework that examines the role of expatriate characteristics, aspects of training design, and environmental moderators for expatriate learning and adjustment	Conceptual article	Key employee characteristics that have been shown to help expatriate adjustment are synthesized into best practices that can aid in expatriate selection; expatriate learning is conceptualized to mediate the relationship between these characteristics and expatriate adjustment; the mediated relationship is contingent upon aspects related to training design and contextual factors
Lirio Taming travel for work-life balance in global careers	International business travel	Examine the tensions between demands of international business travel and desires for family involvement by global managers in dual-career families from Generation X	25 global managers from U.S. and Canada; in-depth interviews	Travel discretion is essential for experiencing "work-life balance", i.e. executing personal discretion over travel and substituting in technology; mutual flexibility by global managers and organizations helps coping with demands from work spanning divergent locations and time zones
Näsholm A comparison of intra- and inter-organizational global careers	International itinerants and expatriation in long term global careers	Identify similarities and differences between repeat expatriates and international itinerants in their career paths, subjective experiences, and narratives of how they relate to their context	10 repeat expats from engineering company, 10 international itinerants living abroad, all from Sweden; narrative interviews	International itinerants and repeat expatriates differ in their subjective experiences and how they narrate them; the differences occur across three broad domains: organization and career; country and culture; and family, communities, and networks
Valk/Velde/Engen/Godbole International career mobility of Indian female scientists	Females' international careers	Study the international career choices, repatriation and career success of Indian women in Science and Technology	30 women from Bangalore and New Delhi, India; semi-structured face-to-face and telephonic interviews	International careers are primarily driven by personal interests in cross-cultural exposure, exposure to state-of-the-art science and collaborative international research; they are also shaped by relationships with and roles in family and society; the meaning attributed to career success related to economic independence but also included the acquisition of skills and knowledge, contribution to science, and to the welfare of families and Indian society upon repatriation
Muir/Wallace/McMurray Women on the move: The self-initiated expatriate in China	Self-initiated expatriation	Examine the factors influencing female professionals to self-initiate expatriation; description and self-reconstructions of their careers	25 Western professional women living and working in Beijing, China; narrative in-depth, semi-structured interviews	Complex set of factors influencing the decision to self-expatriate, in particular: adventure, the desire to experience other cultures, and location; participants' careers represent a unique interaction between self and social experiences and participants shaped their careers to fit their life in accordance with prevailing circumstances; four career orientations emerged along the dimensions of physical mobility and psychological mobility: reinventors, reinvigorators, reversers, rejecters.

The papers pick up on a variety of different work arrangements ranging from self-initiated expatriation to the more traditional international careers and the travel linked to it. Similarly, the sample of the studies covers a broad range of different people and groups from a variety of world regions. Methodologically, 'soft' approaches dominate, with a focus on different types of interviews and qualitative analytical techniques when dealing with the resulting texts. Given the specific research questions and the state of the field, this is hardly surprising since such approaches are especially adequate if a field is in its early stages and/or the questions researched require a more in-depth look into personal histories, motives, or problems.

In the remainder of this editorial we identify major themes that help integrate the research findings across the contributions in this special issue, and conclude with recommendations for how future research can advance the study of the context and form of global work arrangements.

3 Contributions to the Discourse

Looking at the topics and results of the contributions in this special issue, four major themes emerge.

3.1 Growing importance of gender and the work/non-work interface in the study of global work

The gender perspective in organization studies has arguably been one of the major new developments in this field over the past three decades. For a long time a classical 'control variable' or, at best, a way of differentiating individuals according to their sex, gender has become an overall theoretical, methodological and sometimes ideological perspective. This opens up a number of new perspectives for career research at the global level. Two of the papers in this special issue build on the idea of looking at women as a special group with specific issues. *Muir* et al.'s work on professional women living in Beijing explores the complex set of factors influencing the decision to self-expatriate. *Valk* et al.'s analysis of Indian women in science and technology identifies major drivers for embarking on an international career, which include personal interests in cross-cultural exposure, exposure to state-of-the-art science and collaborative international research. While neither of the two studies contrasts the findings with a male comparison group, the results allow an in-depth view of women in international careers.

While women were rare in the early times of expatriation, their proportion has increased over the years (e.g., Caligiuri, Joshi, & Lazarova, 1999) and the mentioned papers reflect this increasing importance. In addition, the analyses point towards the gender angle and invite "career research to take a broader look at the societal and institutional conditions that produce current career patterns characterized by inequities between men and women [and] propose theoretical angles that explicitly go beyond the individuals and their intentions and include institutional and contextual elements" (Mayrhofer, Meyer, & Steyrer, 2007: 226). For example 'doing gender' (West & Zimmerman, 1987) "involves a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities" (126). When viewing "gender as an accomplishment, an achieved property of situated conduct, our attention shifts from matters internal to the individual and focuses on interactional and, ultimately, institutional arenas"

(ibidem). This points, among others, to questions of inequality, power, and institutional change (Fenstermaker & West, 2002) which are clearly underrepresented in current research on global careers.

Another theme that comes through in the contributions to this special issue is the importance of the work/non-work interface and the variety of its facets. This is a very traditional topic within career research (e.g. Derr, 1980; Burke, 1988). It has become salient in recent years, arguably because of the increased participation of women in the workforce, the rise of dual-career couples, and the colonization of private life by the economic logic of the world of work (Polanyi, 1944; Kasper, Scheer, & Schmid, 2002). Consequently, a number of conceptual frameworks (e.g. Lazarova, Westman, & Shaffer, 2010; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), methodological work (e.g., Chen et al., 2014) and empirical studies (e.g. Westman, Etzion, & Gattenio, 2008; Nikandrou, Panayotopoulou, & Apospori, 2008; Rothbard, Phillips, & Dumas, 2005) have emerged helping to better understand this issues with regard to domestic and international work. In particular the papers by *Lirio*, *Näsholm*, and *Valk* et al. touch on this issue. *Lirio* argues that travel discretion is essential for experiencing "work-life balance" and it requires flexibility by both global managers and organizations to handle the demands from working internationally. In fact, the relatively larger share of female participants in her sample may point to the role of short-term business travel as an alternative form of global work that may address issues such as dual-career couples, which may have previously prevented potential female candidates from taking up global work assignments. *Näsholm* underscores that the social fabric in which international itinerants and repeat expatriates are embedded and which includes families is a major source for how they experience and narrate their work abroad. *Valk* et al. point out that the welfare of families is not only a major driver for taking up international careers, but that the latter are also shaped by the relationships within the family and the roles that people working abroad take in the family.

3.2 A shift from single international transfers to a focus on global careers

Traditionally, analyses of working abroad meant looking at the classical expatriation cycle of selection-preparation-assignment-repatriation with focus on a specific country (Reiche & Harzing, 2010). While single-country assignments still play an important role, the past decades have seen global careers on the rise. Beyond a single international transfer, careers that cover more than one assignment to more than a single country have become more prominent (Shaffer et al., 2012). The reasons for this are manifold and include a rise in the amount of business transactions across borders or the increase in individuals with a highly international upbringing. The paper by *Näsholm* on repeated global work experiences as well as the paper by *Valk* et al. on females' international career choices in the area of science and technology indicate the shift from single to multiple international moves.

This additional facet of working abroad has a number of consequences for both research and practice. Taking the classical insight from expatriation research, some of the major issues have to be rethought and modified. Two brief examples may suffice here. Take the issue of cross-cultural training and preparation, a major theme for both academia and practice (e.g., Reiche, Lee, & Quintanilla, in press). Elaborate concepts exist to prepare individuals for the encounter with one foreign country/culture. Similarly, companies have developed sophisticated schemes to deal with their traditional expatriates in terms of monetary incentives, shadow schemes with regard to promotion, or return arrangements. However, the picture changes once a more global and long-term view is taken. Traditional preparatory

concepts which work with the home/host-country difference cannot be applied in the same way if a more global, multi-country perspective underlies the work assignment. Similarly, if longer assignments, frequent business travelling and home-country time is mixed in rapid succession, existing incentive schemes need some rethinking to avoid becoming administratively burdensome and jeopardizing the attraction and placement of suitable talent for some time abroad. At the same time, increased flexibility and repeatability of international transfers might also alleviate well-known problems of repatriation (e.g., Lazarova & Cerdin, 2007), especially if a more tailored combination of consecutive international and domestic postings opens up additional opportunities for identifying the most suitable position upon completion of a particular transfer.

In itself, the increasingly global orientation towards working abroad constitutes an interesting research field wide open for additional studies. We are far from sufficiently understanding the determinants for offering such career paths at the organizational level and actively choosing or at least accepting such career options at the individual level. Similarly, it is largely unclear to what extent such career options are the result of an emerging or a deliberately chosen strategy both at the organizational and individual levels. These are just two examples illustrating the richness of this area, calling for analyses comparable to those conducted for the classical case of a single-country, one-off international relocation.

3.3   Broader scope of national contexts relevant for global work

One effect of globalization and the increase in business transactions across national borders is the growing diversity of countries and regions as arenas for global work. Industry surveys indicate that MNCs are sending more and more staff to new locations (e.g., Brookfield Global Relocation Services 2012), thereby broadening the global footprint of global work destinations. This increases the scope of national contexts which are potentially relevant for international careers. The papers submitted for and the ones finally included in this special issue reflect a great diversity of countries across various continents. *Näsholm*'s study on repeat expatriates and international itinerants is a case in point: Among themselves, the study respondents covered more than 30 countries over the course of their international careers. By comparison, the studies by *Valk* et al. and *Muir* et al. highlight the importance of emerging countries such as China and India as key recipients of international staff, thereby reflecting broader tendencies of MNC staff transfers (Brookfield Global Relocation Services 2012).

At the same time, the growing diversity of assignment locations also explains a recent resurgence of research interest in the area of expatriate adjustment. While adjustment has arguably received the most research attention in the expatriate literature to date (e.g., Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer, & Luk, 2005), recent conceptual (Takeuchi, 2010) and empirical (Ren, Shaffer, Harrison, Fu, & Fodchuk, 2014) studies have pointed to thus far overlooked issues related to adjustment such as the relevance of multiple stakeholders and expatriate-initiated resource acquisition. In this regard, the paper by *Feitosa* et al. highlights the role of learning as a key variable that connects favorable expatriate characteristics to actual adjustment, as well as the contextual conditions that facilitate the transfer of learned content to a new environment. The latter point opens an interesting question as to the extent to which successful learning and adjustment in one cultural environment can leverage future adjustment in other assignment contexts. Thus far, research evidence for the relationship between previous international experience and various dimensions of assignment success is rather ambiguous (Thomas, 1998). Given the growing scope of global work destinations, we

would encourage future research to look in greater depth at this relationship and the conditions under which it may indeed hold.

3.4 Less clear cut distinction between 'organizational' and 'individual' careers

The variety of different work arrangements and in particular the strong role that individuals play when making some of these arrangements happen, for example in the case of self-initiated expatriates or international itinerants, draws our attention to the relationship between the individual and the organization with regard to careers and career paths. In the traditional sense, organizations were responsible for offering career paths to their employees and for accompanying and supporting them during their actual careers. Over the past decades, career research has witnessed considerable debate about boundaryless and protean careers (e.g., Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). The fundamental idea underlying these concepts is that traditional boundaries related to organizations are playing a less salient role or are even disappearing, and that individuals are the primary drivers of their careers. There is some empirical support for these ideas (e.g., Stahl, Miller, & Tung, 2002), although considerable criticism has been voiced both at the conceptual and the empirical levels (e.g. Rodrigues & Guest, 2010; Inkson, Gunz, Ganesh, & Roper, 2012; Kattenbach et al., 2014).

Overall, it seems fair to say that compared to a few decades ago, we see a greater variety of forms of careers in which individuals have a greater voice. Major reasons include their own choice, the circumstances of a volatile and dynamic business and societal environment, and the refusal of organizations to make long-term commitments to their employees' careers. All empirical papers in the special issue cover this theme in one way or another. It is most obvious in the paper by *Muir* et al. looking at self-initiated expatriation. In this kind of work arrangement, there is no or only a very weak link between individual and organizational views of career and career development. Less visible, but maybe even more telling are the empirical accounts in the papers by *Lirio*, *Näsholm*, and *Valk* et al., which deal with international work arrangements where organizations play a significant role. Arguably, the importance of the work/non-work interface greatly contributes to the increasing voice that individuals give to their own career concerns.

4 Recommendations for Future Research

In this section, based on our reading of the contributions to this special issue, we derive recommendations for future research that aims to examine the context and form of global work arrangements.

4.1 Theoretical grounding of studies

Whereas early research on international assignments has been criticized for a lack of theory development (e.g., Thomas, 1998), more recently scholars have made important advances in introducing novel theoretical perspectives, including the job-demands resources model (Ren et al., 2014), social capital theory (Reiche, Harzing, & Kraimer, 2009), identity theory (Kraimer, Shaffer, Harrison, & Ren, 2012), and process theoretical approaches (Farh, Bartol, Shapiro, & Shin, 2010). At the same time, we would argue that novel theoretical insights would also benefit the study of global work arrangements more broadly.

The exploratory findings from contributions in our special issue serve as a starting point for further theorizing. For example, the study by *Näsholm* suggests that repeat expatriates and international itinerants differ in how they relate to and identify with different contexts, providing further impetus to the use of identity theory as a lens to study global work experiences. Similarly, *Feitosa* et al. highlight the importance of more explicitly examining the role of learning to ensure that both individual characteristics and various dimensions of organizational support can translate into positive assignment outcomes. Thus far, little research has explicitly studied learning as a substantive variable for adjustment and other expatriate-related outcomes (for notable exceptions see Maertz, Hassan, & Magnusson, 2009; Porter & Tansky, 1999) and we would encourage future research to draw in greater depth on individual learning theories.

At the other end of the spectrum, we currently have a number of elaborate theoretical frameworks which explicitly address the core of this special issue: the role of various facets of the broader context for careers. The theory of practice (Bourdieu, 1977) emphasizes the interplay of capital, habitus, and field to describe and explain the moves of individual actors in a field (for its use in career studies see, e.g. Iellatchitch, Mayrhofer, & Meyer, 2003). The concept of strategic action fields (Fligstein & McAdam, 2011) focuses on these mesolevel forms of social order and how they guide individual and collective action. They are embedded in and related to a number of other more distal or proximate strategic action fields. The concept specifically tackles the issue of change. Structuration theory views agency and structure as mutually dependent and transcends the dualism between individual agency and structure. The contextualities of interaction provide the background and condition for individual action. Such context-sensitive theoretical concepts provide a good conceptual starting point for a comprehensive view on international careers (for possible forms of use in career studies see Mayrhofer et al., 2007).

4.2 Methodological considerations

The contributions in our special issue also point to the need to more carefully distinguish between different types of global work arrangements in order for future research to advance in a meaningful way. We acknowledge the methodological difficulties of collecting sufficiently large samples of global staff. However, simply lumping together individuals with different global work arrangements risks disguising important underlying differences. We therefore strongly recommend scholars to more explicitly explain and situate their own research samples within the broader domain. Further, accounting for global employees within their broader social context will also require multi-level theorizing and multi-level statistical tools to model and analyze the nested nature of research samples. Similarly, given the increasingly repeated nature of global work scholars will need to make use of longitudinal study designs.

A fruitful way to give a more prominent role to the context in which global work arrangements occur is to more explicitly consider relevant stakeholders with whom global employees deal and interact. These stakeholders include, among others, family members (e.g., Lazarova et al., 2010), host country nationals (Toh & DeNisi, 2007) and the wider organization (Kraimer, Wayne, & Jaworski, 2001). Initial empirical research has demonstrated how these constituents can help global employees achieve greater levels of adjustment (Caligiuri, Hyland, Joshi, & Bross, 1998), commitment (Guzzo, Noonan, & Elron, 1994), intentions to stay (van der Heijden, van Engen, & Paauwe, 2009) and knowledge sharing (Reiche et al., 2009). The papers by *Lirio*, *Näsholm*, and *Valk* et al. in this special

issue similarly highlight the importance of family members and global employees' social environment more broadly.

At the same time, the domain of global work and global staffing continues to be rather individual-centric (Takeuchi, 2010), without sufficiently considering the distinct role, influence and support of various relevant stakeholders that can facilitate the experience of the employee. Further, of those studies that do account for the role of other stakeholders the majority tends to focus on a single stakeholder group rather than integrating different actors. We still know little about the obstacles that global employees face when developing relationships with various stakeholders, whether relationships with one group of actors may come at the expense of developing relationships with other actors, the extent to which different global work arrangements require relatively more support from particular stakeholders, or the extent to which stakeholder experiences can spill over to global employees themselves. Accounting for the role of different stakeholders will require future research to design studies that carefully match global employees with different constituents. To assess the relative importance

5 Conclusion

In line with our integration of and reflection on the contributions to this special issue, we believe there are several avenues for future research that can advance and refine our understanding of both the different forms of global work arrangements and the contexts in which they occur. Valuable research would entail studies that explicitly compare different global work arrangements, consider the global employee vis-à-vis his or her social environment, especially concerning the work/non-work interface, account for the repeated nature of global relocations over the course of individuals' careers, examine the relative roles of individual agency and organizational drivers in managing these careers, introduce novel theoretical perspectives or borrow from related disciplines to conceptualize relevant relationships and focus on so far under-researched regions in which global work takes place. We hope that the set of articles included in this special provide a much needed impetus to motivate further research in this domain.

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