Work Engagement and Cultural Adjustment for relocated employees
- An empirical study on assisted employee relocation

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ABSTRACT

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Research question: How do support activities impact an employee’s international relocation experience, in the form of cultural adjustment and employee engagement?  
Purpose: The study aims to explore the organization's perspective on pre-departure and post-arrival activities they provide for internationally relocated employees and to draw comparisons and delve into the relocated employees' experience of what support measures they received, and utilized and how it impacted their cultural adjustment and engagement.  
Method: The study was conducted through qualitative data collection in the form of semi-structured interviews. The sample size was 15 interviews in which five different organizations and international relocations in four continents were represented. The data was analyzed using thematic coding.  
Conclusion: The research found that support activities provided by organizations do have a positive impact on relocated employees’ cultural adjustment as well as their engagement in their work. The results suggest the support provided needs to hold a certain level of quality and be adjusted to the specific host location, employee, and assignment, in order to be effective. The findings indicate that because of the diversity found in perceptions and needs, adopting a more personalized approach to providing international relocation support could be beneficial for both relocated employees and their organizations.
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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

In the previous decades, careers have shifted from within a single organization towards lines of work that encourage free movement between different career contexts, such as transfers within an organization, nationally and internationally (Dickman et al., 2020).

The reasons for international relocation from a company’s perspective include many factors, for instance, cost saving and business expansion, which can take many different forms. It can be just a plant relocation and stretch all the way up to headquarter relocation (Pennings & Sleuwaegen, 2000). Many companies choose to relocate parts of their business to for example job exporting to low-cost labor-abundant destinations (Pennings & Sleuwaegen, 2000). As companies choose to move parts of their operations, the need for developing employees with global competencies becomes a high priority. Global competencies can be defined as being able to effectively interact with people who have different cultural backgrounds as well as different political environments. It also includes being able to identify rapid changes and see uncertainty as an opportunity. An international career is a major tool to develop these competencies (Bieman & Andresen, 2009). Transferring employees within the company can be considered an effective way of knowledge transfer within the firm, as employees are assumed to hold much knowledge regarding the firm's specific advantages (Forsgren, 2017). For the purpose of this study, relocated employees are defined as individuals who relocate from one country to another for at least one year, which is consistent with the Cendant Mobility (2004) definition of traditional long-term expatriation (Litrell et al., 2006).

International relocation from the company's interest differs from the employees’ interest. In many organizations, international relocation mobility is an important part of the employee’s career, especially within the management field (Andresen & Margenfeld, 2015). Previous research has shown that employees decide to pursue an international career, or as it is defined in the article as “international relocation mobility readiness”. Where employees invoke their international careers with the willingness to change their main place of residence due to work reasons. As this can result in stress factors for the employee, they should have a stronger will to be internationally mobile, especially considering long-term relocations.

However, relocating employees is a process that rarely pans out without encountering various hurdles along the way. Relocated employees are often faced with stress-inducing situations and challenges that arise from the geographical and cultural distance of their host location (Ang et al., 2007; Black & Mendenhall, 1989; Hua et al., 2019; Rosenbusch et al., 2015). Furthermore, the chance of employees having to confront or endure challenges in their acclimatization process is likely higher the greater the geographical and cultural distance is to the country they are relocating to. With the
continuous zealous escalation in multinational enterprises establishing or transferring parts of their operations to emerging markets and developing countries, the challenges faced by relocated employees may not only increase in number but also in severity (Karam, 2016). As noted during a study on relocated employees' encounters with authoritarianism, emerging economies often mean a less democratic and more authoritarian regime with a greater presence of inequality, social and political intolerance, and corruption which can significantly impede and inhibit adjustment (Fitzpatrick, 2019).

Other challenges that can pose risks to internationally relocated employees’ experiences are unfamiliar, complex, and extensive processes and tasks required when relocating, the mental and physical demands of finding housing, employee and accompanying family integration in local communities, health care and access to essential resources, family members’ occupation, a degree of uncertainty and potential for social isolation (Copeland & Norell, 2002; Elliot, 2020; Guo et al., 2021; Rosenbusch et al., 2015; Sander, 2016; Shen et al., 2021; Vijayakumar & Cunningham, 2020). Furthermore, relocated employees may need to overcome and adapt to cultural differences and local norms, potential language barriers, and often a considerable lifestyle change (Barner-Rasmussen & Aarnio, 2011; Elliot, 2020; Wilczewski et al., 2018).

The inability to overcome these different challenges can cause the assignment of the relocated employee to fail or make them underperform at work, which is very costly to the company sending them. Therefore it is very important for the company to optimize the resources provided for the employee to overcome these challenges since it is of high importance for the company's overall strategies that the assignment is a success (Kumarika Perera et al., 2017).

Cultural adjustment and employee engagement are concepts frequently used in international business management research for analyzing and measuring assignments success and employee experience during an international employee relocation (Koo Moon et al., 2012; Lin et al., 2019; Okpara, 2016; Shih et al., 2010; Van Thac & Ying-Chyi, 2018).

Cultural adjustment intends to analyze relocated employees' integration into work as well as the general lifestyle in the host country (Chen, 2015) and was by Black and Stephens (1989) defined as depicted by adjustment in the three dimensions general, interaction, and work. General adjustment relates to factors the extra-cultural employee encounters in their everyday life, including accommodation, climate, food, and health care, that would affect the individual's perception of quality of place (Kim, & Cocks, 2017). Interaction adjustment refers to an employee experiencing or achieving comfort and gratification when engaging in social and societal exchange with host country nationals, in the workplace as well as in day-to-day interactions. Lastly, work adjustment aims to describe how quickly or successfully the relocated employee adjusts and grows accustomed to their new work environment, role, and responsibilities.
Employee engagement describes the employees’ psychological identification with their work (Khan, 1990), and their participation in decision-making in the assignment environment (Boselie, 2010). The most widely used definition of employee engagement in modern research is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Vigor describes the individual's resilience, persistence, and effort invested in their assigned tasks and performance. Dedication describes the extent to which the employee experiences and displays enthusiasm and involvement in their work and its challenges. Absorption concerns the level of concentration, immersion, and captivation exhibited by the relocated employee.

1.2 Problem Statement

While international employee relocation has been a researched phenomenon, there is room for further studies on the impact that organizational support activities have on employee engagement and cultural adjustment in the international assignment environment.

From a broad perspective, previous literature as a whole agrees with support activities being an effective way of avoiding, or at least mitigating when unavoidable, risks in international relocation assignments (Black & Mendenhall, 1989; Celaya & Swift, 2006; Shih et al, 2010; Van Thac & Ying-Chyi, 2018). Former research has furthermore been able to showcase an interrelation between cultural adjustment and employee engagement and has made comprehensive explorations on the effect of cultural adjustment and employee engagement in relation to employee retention, assignment success, and employee performance (Arokiasamy, 2021; Chen, 2015; Davies et al., 2019; Gutermann et al., 2017; Ren et al., 2014; Selmer & Lauring, 2016; Setti et al., 2022).

However, there appears to be a lack of coverage on the direct effects organizational support activities have on employees' cultural adjustment and engagement from the perspective of the personal experience of relocated employees. The majority of existing research ultimately assumes an organizational perspective exclusively where examinations of international relocation processes primarily consider hard values such as cost, productivity, financial gain, and performance. By adopting a multi-perspective approach and redirecting attention to the subjective soft values that are an individual's personal experience it is possible to draw comparisons from what resources the organization claims to offer as part of their relocation procedure and routine, to the relocated employees’ perception of what they received and what they actually found helpful regarding their cultural adjustment and work engagement in their host country. This way, aspects that may not be covered or considered when designing relocation support procedures can be identified. In combination with examining perceived effectiveness among relocated employees, this could reduce organizations’ spendings on unnecessary and ineffective support measures and identify gaps for which supportive
resources should be developed in order to ensure assignment fulfillment and to improve employees’
international relocation experience.

1.3 Purpose

The study aims to explore the organization’s perspective on the pre-departure and post-arrival
support activities they provide for internationally relocating employees and to subsequently draw
comparisons and delve into the employees’ experience of what support measures were available, what
resources did they accept or utilize, and how this impacted their cultural adjustment and engagement.

1.4 Research Question

This leads us to the following research question:

*RQ: How do support activities impact an employee's international relocation experience, in the form
of cultural adjustment and employee engagement?*
2. Literature Review

Internationally relocated employees have been discussed extensively in previous literature, especially from the human resources (HR) and multinational corporations’ point of view. A literature review was conducted to identify what has been discussed and gain a deeper knowledge of the field.

2.1 Internationally relocating an employee - The employee’s perspective

The three main reasons why employees choose to relocate are vocation, greater financial reward, or uncongenial home surroundings (Hippler, 2009). An increase in workforce mobility comes with challenges. The employees that change countries often find challenges in the diverse cultural environment and are challenged to adjust to their new work environment (Chen, 2015). Some of these challenges include different social cultures, non-native languages, and a change in climate conditions (Chen, 2015). It is further explained that cultural intelligence (CQ) has been shown by several empirical studies to play an important role in adapting to a new cultural context and in cross-cultural communication (Chen, 2015; Vlajčić et al., 2019).

To stay relevant in rapidly changing markets, individuals need to develop something called career capital (Oleškevičiūtė et al., 2022). International transfer of individual career capital was explored in previous studies in which career capital has been defined as individual competencies collected through one's career, including career-relevant skills and knowledge (Defilippi & Arthur, 1994; Oleškevičiūtė et al., 2022). It has therefore been suggested that career capital transfer can be a basis for an international career.

The quality of the place has been a concern in regard to attracting and retaining relocated employees. When it comes to living conditions and career-related factors such as career development are considered major factors for relocated employees to choose to stay longer at their relocated destination (Kim & Cocks, 2017). Relocation can have a certain stress factor for the relocated employee (Kim & Cocks, 2017). However, the quality of place can ease this, and the success rate for relocated employees staying longer can be defined by how their personal environment changes during the relocation period (Andresen & Margenfeld, 2015). In the case study by Rothe et al. (2015), the employee experience in a short-distance relocation is discussed. After studying four different cases, the authors saw that most relocated employees were unsatisfied with the relocation-related communication. The employees also mentioned that they did not fully understand the decision-making process at the firm.
2.2 Cultural Adjustment

As presented in the introduction, cultural adjustment can be defined under three categories.

General adjustment

In the case of cultural adjustment, a study on multinational corporations showed that 16% to 40% of all the managers that relocated would not successfully fulfill their assignments due to not being able to adjust properly to the new environment (Black & Stephens 1989; Chen, 2015). Chen (2019) describes four different parts of cultural adjustment: self-adjustment, other adjustment, cognitive feeling, and cultural toughness. This shows different parts where the relocated employee has to adjust in order to reduce the work stress they can experience when relocating.

Several articles have discussed cultural intelligence together with cultural adjustment. It has been shown that cultural adjustment can have a mediating effect on cultural intelligence and job performance from the relocated employee perspective (Jyoti & Kour, 2015) as well as from the country perspective (Lee & Sukoco, 2010; Ramalu et al., 2012). However, other literature has argued that the opposite is the case and that cultural intelligence can help with cultural adjustment (Chen et al., 2010; Froese & Peltokorpi, 2013).

Interaction adjustment

Much of the research conducted on interaction adjustment describes what parts lie underneath that term but fails to describe exactly how they impact cultural adjustment (Waxin, 2004). Since it has been mentioned in literature that the lack of cultural adjustment can lead to assignment failure, many different factors have been found to help prevent this from happening (Dang & Chou, 2020). Some of these factors are employer trust, self-efficacy, extrinsic learning, and workplace learning. These factors can help the relocated employee better adjust to their new environment (Dang & Chou, 2020).

Work adjustment

Breiden et al. (2006) describe work adjustment as the most important factor for assignment success. The similarities between the work assignment in the home country and the one in the host country can be a crucial part of how well a relocated employee can adjust to their new work (Black & Gregersen, 1991; Mcevoy & Parker, 1995). If there is clarity of what the work assignment is supposed to entail, the relocated employees have greater success in adjusting themselves than when the assignment is unclear (Kittler et al., 2011).

Previous literature has discussed how the spillover effect, i.e. the effect of how one adjustment factor can influence the other, might disturb the way relocated employees adjust to their
work (Selmer & Fenner Jr, 2009). It was found that the spillover effect mainly occurs in employees relocated within the private sector and that a general adjustment to the culture might not affect the work adjustment (Selmer & Fenner Jr, 2009).

2.3 Employee engagement

There have been significant associations between employee engagement and employee task performance, workplace behavior, work satisfaction, and commitment to the organization as well as innovative behavior (Singh, 2021). Employee engagement is considered to be important for the relocated employee to gather global skills and to successfully gain international strategies for cross-cultural organizations (Shen et al., 2021).

In a study performed on relocated employees residing in China, it was found that the dimensions of employee engagement have a positive relationship with interaction and general adjustment (Selmer & Lauring, 2016). Showing that a work attitude like employee engagement can have an overall positive effect on the relocation experience. In other studies based on 102 relocated employees in Singapore, however, it was found that physical performance can predict employee engagement (Lauring & Selmer, 2015). Employee engagement has been shown to give a deeper affective commitment in relocated employees, as well as career satisfaction (Singh, 2021).

Absorption

Cultural adjustment has been shown to have a positive effect on employee engagement (Selmer & Lauring, 2015). However, it has also shown that employee engagement can have a negative effect on cultural adjustment. Absorption has been found to have a negative impact on work adjustment as it is not uncommon for relocated employees to continue to work from their home country during their relocation, and therefore, the adjustment into the new environment can become neglected (Selmer & Lauring 2015).

Dedication

Cavazotte et al., (2021) take another angle on looking at employee engagement in relocated employees. They argue that employee engagement does not only come from the employee themselves but from the leadership. For this reason, the leader needs to be a person capable of bridging cultural differences (Cavazotte et al., 2021). As it is likely that there will be cultural differences between the relocated employees and the host organization, it has been discussed how employees who seek or accept an international assignment rather than being forced to go have a higher dedication to their assignment at their relocation destination (Lee, 2010). This is an important part of assignment success in the sense that the employee does not only need to be willing to transfer but also accept the conditions that come with it (Lee, 2010).
Vigor

Employees with high vigor have been found to have greater influence over other events that affect their lives (Lauring & Selmer, 2015). This is related to their activity level which leads to positive feedback, and can for relocated employees help overcome obstacles in adjusting to their life in their host country more quicker (Lauring & Selmer, 2015)

2.4 Challenges in international relocations

2.4.1 Health, well-being, and health care

Previous studies have found employees’ health and well-being to be a common challenge for internationally relocated employees, particularly during the initial months following arrival, for which the heightened psychological and physical stress of relocation has been identified as a contributing factor (Rosenbusch et al., 2015). Historically, a significant increase in demand for healthcare access for employees on international assignments was observed in 2001 as a result of the September 11 terrorist attacks (Bradford, 2002). Multiple chief executives of multinational organizations described a surge in interest and concern regarding access to health care services, travel and health insurance, employee benefit plans, and availability of a central communication reference point such as all-hours service centers. Employers’ subsequent increases in investments were motivated by a prioritization of the health and safety of internationally relocated employees as well as a way of reducing the risk of severe illness or injury that could lead to the requirement of costly medical evacuation.

Increases in health concerns, including illnesses and other ailments, have repeatedly been reported by relocated employees, and a deprioritization or general disregard for personal self-care appears prevalent (Rosenbusch et al., 2015). Furthermore, health concerns are found to likely be of greater severity and frequency in cases of cross-continental relocations, especially in regards to disease and physical illness, as well as among employees on assignments that are unaccompanied and live alone, where particularly psychological symptoms have been observed (Decuypere et al., 2019; Elliott, 2020; Fonseca et al., 2017; Imbert et al., 2022). Consequently, access to health care services may be a more apparent concern when employees relocate to a host country where the availability of facilities and services may be more limited, fewer, of less quality, further away, as well as unfamiliar and dissimilar to what they are used to in their home country (Elliott, 2020). Additionally, potential presence of a language barrier has been recognized as a possible cause of interference with comfort levels and communication efficiency in critical or sensitive medical situations (Elliott, 2020).

Recent research largely concludes in agreement with suggestions that relocated employees and their families should be provided with comprehensive medical surveillance with additional
emphasize on preparatory briefings, risk assessments, and ensuring access to quality health care and medical interventions (Decuyper et al., 2019; Fonseca et al., 2017; Imbert et al., 2022).

2.4.2 Burden of unfamiliar processes and housing

A physical relocation or move to another country can be an intense and draining process, largely by virtue of inevitable planning and preparation requirements. As a result, the relocation process can be daunting for employees and their families, particularly when relocating to a host country of which they may have no experience and where they presumably will encounter unfamiliar procedures, language barriers, and foreign conditions (Elliott, 2020). When evaluating their experiences, studies have observed frustrations and overwhelm in relation to extensive practical preparations and accrued financial costs of facilitating the transition. This includes migration processes, moving services, management of property in the home country, economic procedures, and family matters, for instance, animal air travel and children’s education that needs to be sorted upon arrival (Elliott, 2020). Previous findings indicate obtaining the appropriate documents for passports and visas is commonly perceived as a lengthy elaborate process that not seldom requires permits, certificates, records, additional paperwork on employment and qualifications, residency, criminal history, health status, and finances in addition to various business licenses (Cai et al., 2010).

Literature suggests housing to be a critical issue in an international employee relocation as accommodation options that meet their demands and expectations often have limited availability and long waiting lists (Redfern, 2010). Preferences are often attributed to applicant nationalities and cultures that differ from that of the host country nationals. For example, studies have found varying preferences for specific locations such as downtown, suburban, waterfront, and family neighborhoods, as well as villas versus apartments depending on lifestyle and origin (Ibrahim et al., 2021). Furthermore, it is not rare for international employees on assignment to have higher income levels than host country regional averages, and they may be both accustomed to and expect higher living standards than that of their host country national counterparts, especially when relocating to a less developed economy (Kim, 2018). As a result, host country real estate markets have attempted adaptations to accommodate diverse preferences. In many locations, this has led to a demographic imbalance which many host countries have entered into consideration for urban planning and policymaking in efforts to remedy housing dispersal (Ibrahim et al., 2021). Meanwhile, other locations appear to embrace segregation through commodity housing where foreign housing is built in the form of gated communities, often promoted with an emphasis on the relocated employees and their families’ status and safety (Wu & Webber, 2004). While findings do show tendencies for foreign nationals to form ethnic communities, this is further upheld by housing planning in many locations (Kim, 2018; Wu & Webber, 2004).
The choice of residing in suburban gated communities has repeatedly been attributed to employees being accompanied by their families and most notably, children. Research shows that community living can ease a family's transition and adjustment by assuming habitation in an environment where neighbors are more likely to share comparable experiences, cultures, and languages than in other areas (Sander, 2016). Shared experiences and family situations further enable family and spousal networking and alliance formation, which can be used for influence and mediation in employers’ policies, support, and resources (Lauring & Selmer, 2010). When examining the children's perceptions of gated living, younger children have expressed appreciation and a sense of freedom from being allowed to roam and explore the area more (Sander, 2016). While older children have described associating the gated community with safety and a home, there are instances where they instead related it to boredom, borders, and a desire to escape and explore what is beyond the gates. Thereby, this form of segregated housing has the potential to limit socialization, exchange, and satiation from surroundings and available entertainment.

2.4.3 Social isolation and family

Delving deeper into the social challenges of international relocations, while social support is identified as an essential factor in relocated employees’ adjustment and assignment experience, a plenitude of research describes the relocation process as a disruptor of social support networks (Copeland & Norell, 2002). Following the initial excitement and expectations alluded to travel and independence, the sudden absence of networks and difficulties establishing new ones can produce stress and social isolation (Elliott, 2020; Copeland & Norell, 2002). Difficulties in developing new connections and networks are largely perceived to be a result of concern for the ability to bypass language barriers as well as unfamiliarity with regional and cultural norms (Elliott, 2020).

From a more external point of view, relocated employees often become socially isolated as a consequence of separation and exclusion by host country nationals (Shen et al., 2021). According to social identity theory, individuals are typically perceived as insiders or outsiders by which social categorizations i.e., associations and group or community inclusion and exclusion develop (Guo et al., 2021). Outgroup social categorization by host country nationals occurs due to perceived distance in culture and origin which has been found to negatively impact employees' cultural adjustment and employee retention on assignment (Shen et al., 2021). However, social identification, which relies on individuals' self-perception regarding their insider or outsider status, has found that self-social identification as a holder of insider categorization increases relocated employees' engagement with host country national employees which by interaction and social support improves cross-cultural adjustment (Guo et al., 2021). Furthermore, the outgroup perception, social exclusion, and isolation can be reduced through social learning theory, by which employees' efforts to
learn and adopt local culture and behaviors provide a greater chance of recategorization and acceptance by host country nationals (Shen et al., 2021).

Social isolation can also be caused by a lack or loss of routine and difficulties making new friends for both the employee and accompanying family in the host location (Elliott, 2020). Moreover, stress and isolation are likely to arise from the relocation's impact on a spouse's occupation and eventual role and employment changes in cases where a partner may need to leave their career to accompany the relocated employee (Elliott, 2020). A spouse's work and employment can also be restricted due to visa regulations (Vijayakumar & Cunningham, 2020). In addition to social isolation, restrictions to the partner’s occupation have been linked to concerns regarding financial issues, boredom, skills wasted, relationship tension, and worry regarding employability as a result of interruptions to their professional career upon return to their home country (Elliott, 2020; Vijayakumar & Cunningham, 2020).

While the processes for international relocations of employees have likely changed over time, literature does appear unified historically in regard to the positive association between family support and employees’ international assignment experience (Dang et al., 2022). Family support has been linked to lower levels of cultural stress, and families support as well as the families’ capability to adapt, has been found to positively impact relocated employees' cultural adjustment (Dang et al., 2022; Rosenbusch et al., 2015). Even when the family has not been able to accompany the relocated employee and has instead had to remain in the home country, family support has been found to facilitate cultural adjustment, engagement, and integration by helping the employees manage their psychological stress and building their confidence (Mohd Yusuf et al., 2021).

Despite family accompaniment having a positive influence on relocated employees through the means of psychological, practical, and professional support, their presence on-site can also contribute to complications, stress, and tension stemming from the sociopolitical environment, safety, and work-life balance (Dang et al., 2022). Previous research, therefore, concludes that relocated employees accompanying families may require more organizational support than those without and advocate for companies implementing and providing family programs with the intention of ensuring sufficient information flows, clarity on expectations, the inclusion of the family in the relocation process, facilitating the family's cultural adjustment and easing the transition experience (Dang et al., 2022; Rosenbusch et al., 2015).

2.4.4 Language and interaction

Most modern multinational enterprises have an established corporate language that is predominantly adhered to in most of the companies operations. However, multinational organizations have been found to be inherently multilingual (Barner-Rasmussen & Aarnio, 2011). This has been
explained by observations of variations in language usage, preference as well as language fluency across different levels and departments in the organization.

Previous international business research has been fairly consistent in its support of multinational and multicultural teams as significant contributors and resources in organizations’ internationalization processes (Forsgren, 2017). Diversity in this form is encouraged as part of business network theory and has been identified as an empirical part of multinational organizations’ success, most notably through the facilitation of knowledge exchange and boosting effect on knowledge creation and identification (Forsgren, 2017; Kogut & Zander, 1993; Perri & Andersson, 2014).

However, the presence of multilingualism has been connected to implications and complications for communication and knowledge exchange and interpretation, particularly in more lateral interactions, but also in the management of an international linguistically diverse team or project (Barner-Rasmussen & Aarnio, 2011). Language barriers can produce stressors for relocated employees in the professional environment as well as in day-to-day life (Barner-Rasmussen & Aarnio, 2011). Language and culture are known determinants for social categorization by which individuals may separate themselves or be excluded from interactions with host country nationals (Sander, 2016; Shen et al., 2021; Wilczewski et al., 2018). When facing situations that require communication in a non-native language it is common to experience cognitive challenges in the form of difficulties with understanding and producing messages as well as psychological challenges such as discomfort and lack of confidence when attempting to override language and cultural barriers when interacting with host country nationals (Aichhorn & Puck, 2017; Elliott, 2020).

However, relocated employees’ language attitudes and willingness to learn can be a way to remedy social identification and enable recategorization (Shen et al., 2021). Studies show that relocated employees who exhibit greater host country language proficiency possess an advantage in their cultural adjustment (Sargent & Matthews, 2001; Selmer & Lauring, 2015). Furthermore, willingness to learn and use the host country’s language not only provides benefits for interacting over linguistic barriers but also enables better formation of connections, relationships, and trust with host country nationals which have a positive impact on relocated employees’ integration, engagement, and adjustment (Shen et al., 2023; Zhang & Harzing, 2016).

Unfortunately, shared languages and relocated employees’ language competencies do not guarantee flawless communication and integration (Peltokorpi, 2010). Employees working on their host country language learning has been found to increase perceived pressure to adopt and adapt to local cultural norms which helps adjustment, however, too high of pressure can have the opposite effect (Peltokorpi, 2010). Differences in cross-cultural intelligence, experience, and language skills between relocated employees and host national employees can affect employee or team dynamics (Zhang & Harzing, 2016; Sargent & Matthews, 2001). In addition to being sources of conflict, these dynamics have the potential to become problematic through the development of inferiority-superiority
relationships (Sargent & Matthews, 2001; Zhang & Harzing, 2016). Even in cases of employees’ practical language skills, e.g. spoken and written, being deemed quite high and considered adequate for their professional communication needs, native language and cultural associations influence the interpretation and formulation of messages (Peltokorpi, 2010). While the organizations’ corporate language may be English, researchers have found that lines and flows of communication can be obstructed when the common language is not one or both of the parties’ native due to contrast in cultural values and communication styles which affect the decoding and interpretation process of explicit and implicit messages (Peltokorpi, 2010). When speaking a non-native language, employees are found to make changes to both their behavior and the content of their communication (Aichhorn & Puck, 2017). The ‘foreign language anxiety’ associated with speaking a second language has, regardless of proficiency, been found to induce withdrawal tendencies and communication avoidance. In addition to hindering communicative and interactive initiative, second language speakers display lesser engagement in their work where they will contribute fewer ideas, engage less with their surroundings and simplify, change, or avoid subjects they presume could be difficult to explain in a language they themselves or the intended recipient may have limited or imperfect comprehension in (Peltokorpi, 2010).

Across the board, existing research appears to conclude that encountering a certain level of stress and misunderstandings is to be expected in an international and intercultural relocation process. However, literature repeatedly suggests that difficulties, challenges, and frustrations experienced by the relocated employee can largely be mitigated or alleviated through means of organizational support and intervention (Rosenbusch et al., 2015). The general consensus observed in this area of research supports the notion that when assisting international assignments, it is crucial for supervisors to possess sufficient cross-cultural training and experience to facilitate optimal conditions for communication and cooperation.

2.5 Organizational support - Supportive activities and resources

2.5.1 Practical assistance

Dowling et al., (2017) describe practical assistance as a pre-departure training program that provides information regarding the relocation process. The program is described to consist of all matters of support both before and during the assignment, including visa application, accommodation, shipping, and out-of-pocket expenses. This form of pre-departure training has been shown to help ease the cultural adjustment for relocated employees (AlMazrouei & Pech, 2014; Vance & Paik, 2002).

Practical assistance is considered one of the key elements to why employees choose to relocate (Shortland, 2018). The Shortland (2018) study examining relocated employees in the oil and
gas industry found that employees find practical assistance to be the most important part for them to sign off and stay on the assignment.

Furthermore, McNulty et al. (2013) conducted a study on 31 relocated employees based in Asia. The study found that the lack of practical assistance resulted in a short-term negative impact on the relocation's success. The study also showed that poor human resource support in the home country, as well as poor attitude towards the relocated host country by HR in the host country, turned out to be problematic, especially in the first months of the assignment as that is when the stress levels are considered to be the highest and the relocated employee focuses more on getting settled rather than the work assignment (McNulty et al., 2013). It is not uncommon that the host countries neglect relocated employees, specifically when it comes to training them for the assignment (Vance & Paik, 2002). The HR department should also be responsible for the visa applications for the relocated employee as well as any clearance that they or their family may need to successfully migrate to the host country (Frazee, 1998). HR must do this in advance so that there will be no rush close to the departure date. (Frazee, 1998)

When looking for housing for the relocated employees, neighborhoods located close to city centers are the most attractive (Yun & Ho, 2022). The neighborhood should be safe and close to schools for families, which in some cases could mean residing in gated communities (Yun & Ho, 2022). This may look different depending on the host country. Leder (2019) describes that humanitarian relocated employees in Sudan might require more safety measures when it comes to their stay due to uncertainty in their host country.

Wakeford (1989) describes how practical assistance, specifically the accommodation part for employees can be provided in different packages. Wakeford describes how exceptions can be made to include more safety measures in cases they are needed. The literature agrees that the measures taken must take the host country's environment into account.

2.5.2 Family-specific support

According to Rosenbusch et al., (2015) it is of big importance to involve the spouse and family early on in the interview procedures when taking on this form of assignment. The divorce rate has been seen to be 40% higher for relocated employees than those working domestically so making sure to support the couples, and that they know what to expect is important to decrease the risk of family relationships being a cause for stress and/or project failure. The company can assist with basic support such as help with finding childcare, schooling, and other societal connections for the family to acclimatize faster.
2.5.3 Cross-cultural training

Cross-cultural training has been shown to significantly help relocated employees adapt to their new location both at work and privately, and the further the cultural distance the more important these preparatory training activities are (Waxin & Panaccio 2005). According to Morris et al. (2014), many companies offer classroom lessons about culture and differences for people preparing to go take on a relocated employee assignment. Lessons about history, culture, and legal systems are seen to be a good place to start learning about a new culture.

However, learning social norms about the culture is a big part of adapting to a new country and work and this can be quite difficult to learn through classroom lessons (Morris et al., 2014). Some cultures have greater cultural distances which need to be considered. “Behavioral training” is appropriate to do by learning routine interactions and social norms that are accepted by an experienced relocated employee preferably of the same age and gender. In some cultures breaching morals and customs can have a catastrophic impact on the relocated employee’s integration (AlMazrouei & Pech 2014). Pre-departure cultural training in these instances would help the employee get acclimatized upon arrival in the host country by being aware of the customs and traditions and acting accordingly to not upset the host country's national employees. Failing to integrate might lower the relocated employee’s self-esteem and confidence which not only affects them but may also affect their performance and end up costly for the company in turn.

Waxin and Panaccio (2005) suggest that experimental training is more effective. In contrast, the research by Budworth and Degana (2012) shows that adapting the training to the situation and individual is a big factor for successful adjustment. Taking the relocating employee’s learning style and needs into consideration is important such as what areas and detail are needed for the country and culture they are moving to.

2.5.4 Language training and learning

Local language learning before relocating can be one type of training that is carried out by organizations to prepare their employees. What language is used is different between organizations; some use a designated corporate language while others use the local language, but often in today's organization the use of both a corporate language and the local language is common (Barner-Rasmussen & Aarnio, 2011).

Language training can be of use to help the relocated employee interact more efficiently with host country nationals. Employees who had language training have also been seen to have an easier time asking for help and connecting with the local employees (Wang & Tran, 2012). In some cases, the language can be very difficult to learn, and in those cases not wasting too much time going deeper than the basis of the language is suggested by AlMazrouei and Pech (2014).
2.5.5 Communication, interaction, and Socialization

According to Waxin and Panaccio (2005), their research shows that cross-cultural training improves communication and interaction for relocated employees. However, it is much more distinctly seen in private matters than in work-related situations. This is according to them because work-related situations are likely to be much more similar between different locations of a company than social situations between different cultures.

There are different methods and types of support activities to help relocated employees adjust to their relocations when looking at previous research, it is more important the further the cultural distance is, the further the distance the more thorough preparation is needed (Waxin & Panaccio 2005). According to Okpara and Kabongo (2017) and Li (2021), the two main types of training are split into didactic (conventional) training and experimental training. The first is classified as being e.g. classroom lectures, discussion, and case studies while the latter is more simulation-like, acting to imitate possible situations that the relocated employees might experience in their exchange or field trips to prepare for the relocation. In some cases, AlMazrouei and Pech (2014) suggest that language is such an extensive and difficult challenge to overcome that comes with less gain in adjustment than other pre-departure training would give. They suggest that cultural training is of extreme importance in certain cultures and that it not only helps adjustment to the interaction with host country nationals but also helps the individual to understand situations and communication that not just learning the language would help with.

Since relocated employee success depends on not only cultural adjustment in work situations, social training and support are also needed for successful relocations of employees to new locations (Canhilal et al., 2020). There can be support for social life both virtually and conventionally.

3. Method

3.1 Methodological Approach

To answer the research question, a study was conducted gathering qualitative data through semi-structured interviews with people that have experiences related to international work relocations, both by hosting or sending relocated employees or by having been the relocated employee. This form of primary data collection was chosen because it gives the subjects more space to be able to speak freely regarding their experience than for example a survey would do.

Since the data was gathered only from interviews, meaning the data was collected verbally, the study became a mono-method qualitative study (Saunders et al., 2019). As the ambition was to learn as much about the experience as possible, this was the most effective way to gain as much data
as possible considering the time frame. Since the interview subjects were geographically dispersed around the globe it was decided that the best way of gathering data was to conduct the interviews through web conference software with both video and sound, which was not as personal as face-to-face interviews but at least let the participants see each other in real-time while staying in safe familiar locations where they were comfortable. (Saunders et al., 2019). In one instance it was not possible to facilitate a video meeting. Therefore, the interview had to be conducted over the telephone instead which had some drawbacks compared to the internet-mediated interviews performed. Personal contact could be lacking in phone interviews, and the lack of visual cues could also affect communication.

3.2 Semi-structured interviews

For gathering the data, the method chosen was semi-structured interviews with both relocated employees that have been or still are on assignment in different countries, as well as employees at organizations who were part of the relocation process from the organizational point, to gain insight from both perspectives. The interviews were conducted with employees from 5 different organizations, 13 from the employee perspective and 3 from the organizational perspective. One of the interview subjects had both experiences as a relocated employee and in the relocation process. Because of this, they were included in both perspectives. Therefore the sample size turned out to become 15 interviews that were found from personal contacts. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because it was understood that each assignment looks different and therefore that structure allowed asking follow-up questions to the subjects regarding their specific experience. As many of the interview subjects were managers, interviews were the way to go as managers are more inclined to respond to interviews than surveys (Saunders et al., 2019). However, since questions were given about topics on which subjects might not have shared their full experience, it was necessary to also be aware of the subject bias that could occur during the interviews. Because of this, only some key questions were prepared so that the interview would be flexible.

3.2.1 Organization perspective

For the semi-structured interviews from the organization's perspective, managers were interviewed that have a role in sending relocated employees, for example, HR-manager or global mobility. The interviews were conducted with organizations from different industries to gain a deeper knowledge of how different industries choose to support their employees in their international relocation, what kind of processes they have in place and why they chose those processes, and how effective they are perceived to be for the employee. These organizations were labeled with letters to keep anonymity.
Figure 1

Figure 1 presents the companies from which subjects were interviewed, and provides a description of the industry, number of employees, and areas of operation.

The data was later analyzed with the help of the employee interviews to identify gaps and opportunities for improvement for the organizations in their processes and support measures that are in place to support the relocated employees in their assignments. The answers given by the organizations and the employee were later compared, to strengthen the evaluative study (Saunders et al., 2019) and to see how effective the support measures from the organizations were in practice.

The interviews were conducted with individuals from five different organizations as it was believed this would cover many support measures and build a sample size big enough to be able to investigate how the support measures can be different at different organizations.

3.2.2 Employee perspective

Interviews were conducted with relocated employees of different roles and organizations who were moved to a new location outside of their home country. In these interviews the focus was on gathering information about how these employees perceived the support they received pre-departure or post-arrival helped them to adapt to the new culture and how it impacted their adjustment and engagement.

In some cases, the interviewee had experience with both assignments of relocating other employees as well as being relocated themselves. In those cases, a set of questions was designed to explore their experiences of both situations. Due to their role, they also had insights to compare their perceived experiences to other relocated employees whom they have worked with from a management role and what they thought about the support activities and how it affected adjustment and engagement in their relocations.
3.3 Interview question development

The interview questions were split into five sections based on the support activity category. In each category, a number of challenges were presented based on the themes identified in the literature review. The challenges were connected to the support activity categories by reference to how certain activities were in previous research found to carry the potential for avoiding or reducing the risk or severity of that specific challenge. However, slight variation does occur throughout the interview question structure as some activity categories could be related to multiple distinct challenges, while in some other categories, the questions developed were able to cover a considerably wider perspective that could represent a multitude of challenging circumstances. The latter was particularly the case for the section titled “Language training”.

All five support activity category sections were developed following the same structure. This structure was similarly followed in the development of the interview questions for both the organization perspective interview subjects as well as for the employee relocation experience perspective. The interview question templates were shared with the interview subjects, along with an informational brief regarding the aims of the study and definitions for key concepts, before the interviews. As an insight into theory, concept perception, and wording typically used when analyzing or evaluating certain occurrences can vary depending on the industry, location, profession, or organizational culture and identity, it was deemed necessary to take proactive action to ensure applicability and transferability in the research findings. By providing a background briefing on the theoretical concepts and terminology that would be referenced in the question material and during the interview, it was ensured that interview subjects were adequately informed on the exact aspects and experience perceptions the researchers were investigating and searching for and that the relevance and applicability of the data collected were maximized. The shared interview questions included some specific examples of ways the support activities may have been received. This was done to aid in data categorization, to encourage recollection, and to reduce any potential presence of halo effect or availability bias regarding their relocation experience (Gilovich et al., 2009). The structure template for the interviews was designed to begin the interviews with some introductory questions, e.g. defining the interview subject's position in the organization, followed by general questions regarding their overall relocation experience. The first part of the interview was followed by a structure that was divided into five categories developed based on the support measures and the corresponding challenges defined in the literature review. The interviews were finalized with some concluding questions about the perceived helpfulness and sufficiency of the support activities they were provided during the assignment.

Two sets of interview questions were developed to examine the subject's part of the relocation process. The employee relocation experience perspective set was sent to subjects who had previously been or still were on international assignments and consisted of 49 questions. The organization
**perspective** set was shared with the subjects whose work in their organization is to assist and provide support for relocated employees. The **organization perspective** set included 47 questions. A hybrid version was created for one of the interview subjects who had been sent on assignment but also had a company role where their primary task was to provide and organize assistance for relocated employees. The questions asked in this interview remained in line with those of the **organization perspective** and the **employee relocation experience perspective** and the questions were merged to achieve a multi-perspective perception.

The interviews were all estimated to take approximately an hour, which matched the time when the interviews were conducted. The interview questions were designed that way to allow for elaboration and follow-up questions based on answers given by the subjects. Some sections were relevant only for certain subjects and were therefore skipped when deemed irrelevant, e.g., the family-specific support section was skipped for those who went on their assignments unaccompanied.

### 3.3.1 Interview question purpose

**Introduction questions**
The introduction question section aims to establish an initial understanding of the interview subject's experience that makes them relevant to the research topic. This section also aims to determine factors such as role, home or sending country, host country, duration of assignment, and previous experience, that could potentially have an influence on the study's findings.

**General**
The general question section introduces the concept of international relocations and the people involved in it. By beginning with more ambiguous questions regarding experiences, involvement, and sources of stress in international relocation processes, the answers provided are likely to be aspects that stood out most or were of the greatest significance for the interview subjects. It thereby serves to gain a general assessment of recollections given upon initial reflection.

**Concluding questions**
The final questions of the interviews determine if organizational support activities are helpful and do improve an international assignment experience. Additionally, the section inquires about the perceived sufficiency of support provided in international relocations and how it is evaluated, any assistance that may have been offered but declined, areas of improvement, and support measures that would have been appreciated and beneficial in the employee relocation process.
Support activity section

All of the five support activity sections’ questions were developed based on the same structure for better interpretability and transferability of data collected. The following key questions were used as templates for each support activity category.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Template - Relocated employee perspective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did you receive X support activity?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you encounter any challenges or difficulties in this process?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you find the support provided to be helpful or to make this process easier?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you find [X] support activity to have an impact on your cultural adjustment*?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
  * i.e. everyday life, interactions with HC nationals, your assignment, role and work environment |
| Did you find [X] support activity to have an impact on your engagement* in your work? |
  * i.e. your concentration, enthusiasm and performance in your work |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Template - Organizational support provider perspective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does the organization provide support or assistance in this process?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you perceive relocated employees to commonly encounter challenges or difficulties in this process?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do employees appear to find the organization's assistance helpful when encountering these challenges?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you find that providing [X] support activity has an effect on relocated employees' cultural adjustment* in HC?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
  * i.e. their everyday life, interactions with HC nationals and their assignment, role and work environment |
| Do you find that providing [X] support activity has an effect on relocated employees' engagement* in their assignment? |
  * i.e. their concentration, enthusiasm and performance in their work |

Figure 2

The figure above shows the template for the structure of the interview questions, for both the employee perspective and the organizational perspective.
For the key questions of each section, the following section illustrates the interview questions' purpose and intentions, using examples from the section Practical Assistance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1.1</td>
<td>Aims to describe if they received assistance from the organization for the migration requirements and processes, and if so what assistance and how or in what way did they receive it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1.2</td>
<td>Aims to describe if the relocated employee received the same assistance for their accompanying family, or if it was limited to the employee only.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2.1</td>
<td>Aims to answer if the support activities were perceived to be of actual help or assistance in the process, to describe perceived effectiveness and to identify any gaps or wasted resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2.2</td>
<td>Aims to describe if the relocated employee perceives that the practical assistance support activities they received had an impact on or contributed to their cultural adjustment to life in the host country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q7</td>
<td>Aims to describe if the relocated employee perceives that the practical assistance support activities they received had an impact on or contributed to their engagement in their work during the international assignment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q8</td>
<td>Aims to describe if the organization identifies if the organization provides employees assistance in regards to the migration process when going on an international assignment, and if so what assistance they provide and how it is organized.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1.1</td>
<td>Aims to identify if the organization provides the same assistance for the relocated employee as well as their accompanying family, or if the assistance only extends to the employee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1.2</td>
<td>Aims to find what those who work with providing assistance perceive to be the general experience of relocated employees they have supported, and what challenges they commonly encounter in the migration process. As the organization representative interview subjects all work in HR and mobility-support, they have been part of providing assistance for many individuals and in multiple assignments and are likely to have a broader insight into complaints and hurdles they may have met.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2.1</td>
<td>Aims to describe if those who provide the assistance perceive the relocated employees to actually find the support activity helpful and effective in combating complexity or frustrations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2.2</td>
<td>Aims to describe if those who provide practical assistance perceive that particular support to impact or contribute to relocated employees' cultural adjustment in the host country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q7</td>
<td>Aims to describe if those who provide practical assistance perceive that particular support to impact or contribute to relocated employees' engagement in their work, in an international assignment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3 shows examples of the purpose of the interview questions. The column on the left shows the purpose of the question for the employee experience (Appendix B) and the column on the right shows the purpose of the questions for the organization perspective (Appendix A).
3.4 Analysis

To develop an understanding of the subject. An in-depth literature review was done, consisting of previous research and articles regarding the areas of interest for the study to understand the environment and what to expect from the research findings. This knowledge and concepts were used to analyze the findings from the interviews and to build and structure the interviews to get the results and findings to analyze. (Zikmund et al., 2010). For the analysis, the thematic analysis approach was chosen (Saunders et al., 2019). Where the starting point was gathering the verbal data via the interviews and putting them into transcripts based on the records made during the interviews using the transcription tool in the Microsoft Teams application. Since there was a rather large set of qualitative data with a lot of contexts, this was seen to be the most effective approach to use for the research. The data was then processed into code in a program called MAXQDA where the initial analysis had a deductive approach based on the key themes identified in the literature review and the interview questions (Saunders et al., 2019). Each code was based on the interview questions and was color-coded. Under each theme, subcodes were created for inductive analysis of the emerging data to sort identified challenges, support received, and perceived impact on cultural adjustment and work engagement (Saunders et al., 2019). Since the analysis combined a deductive and inductive approach, the study was abductive. Each subject’s experience was then connected to the codes to identify what support measures were received or not received and how this impacted the subject’s cultural adjustment and work engagement (Appendix C). From these findings, relationships were identified between the support received and the cultural adjustment and work engagement of the relocated employee.

3.5 Ethics

With the permission of the participants, the calls were recorded and transcribed to include for the readers to see the questions and the answers received. All possible ethical issues needed to be explored to guarantee that the data collected would not be used to any disadvantage towards the participants interviewed in the study or future studies that could reference this one. For example, keeping disclosed information secret and how the companies may not want to be recognizable in the work when published (Saunders et al., 2019). The aim was to make sure to not leak anything private while remaining trustworthy which according to Vetenskapsrådet (2017) is a difficult task since the data becomes more difficult to investigate for others when removing details that can showcase the legitimacy of the data.
3.6 Limitations

Reading previous research regarding this topic critically helps to find gaps to explore and gives a better idea of what the limitations of the study are since it forms a deeper understanding of the limitations of the studies published in the area (Saunders et al., 2019). Questioning the findings of other studies is of utmost importance to be able to critically review one's thoughts as well as findings to not make assumptions from perceived understanding. There is a need to understand the topic and be able to make clear justified arguments with references from previous literature and not just own ideas to make the work trustworthy (Saunders et al., 2019).

4. Results

4.1 Organizational point of view - Interviews with Organization representatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Subject</th>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subject 6</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>International Mobility Manager</td>
<td>10+ years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject 10</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Sweden/Germany</td>
<td>People Culture Leader</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject 13</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>HR Manager</td>
<td>7.5 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The figure above presents the different interview subjects from the organization's perspective. The table includes the country where they work, their role in the company, and the time they have had that role.

Subject 6 and Subject 10 had some personal experience with international relocations. Subject 6 had accompanied their partner on an international relocation before starting their career in Company B working in this area. They perceive their personal experience to help deal with relocating employees and understand their needs and feelings. Subject 10 has just relocated within Company D and states that it has been a valuable experience to be on the relocating employees’ side of the process.

4.1.1 Practical assistance

Migration

All organizational representatives noted that they provide support regarding the migration process for their relocated employees. This assistance included support such as help with applications
for residence and work permits if needed. They noted that they do this in a guiding way as most of the papers need to be submitted by the employees themselves. Subject 13 noted that they often perceive their employees to find the process of migrating challenging due to long waiting times and plenty of paperwork to fill out which can be overwhelming for the relocating employees.

All organizational representatives interviewed said that they perceive their support to be helpful to the relocated employees in their migration process.

**Housing**

A common theme throughout the interviews was that the organizations also assist in regards to moving or storing furniture from the employee's homes in their home country. Assistance regarding the accommodation of the worker includes connections with local brokers that showcase options of housing, budget for housing as well as temporary housing upon arrival before more permanent housing is arranged for the employee. Subject 13 mentioned that there were some challenges regarding the accommodation for the employees they sent regarding noise and furniture.

“Yes, but the big challenge was in the beginning when we had decided in advance that it would be a furnished apartment just so that you wouldn’t have to start by buying a lot of furniture. The challenge was in the beginning when Swedes who came to the US thought what the hell is this shit. That's it. It was a challenge then, it has been a challenge in that as I said that in some places I know that in the US there were very new fresh apartments. It was a residential area that was under construction so it was a bit disturbing with new construction. So there were some people there who had to find other accommodation for a period.” (Subject 13)

**Health care**

The organizational representatives stated that they all in some way support their relocated employees regarding health care. As some of their support is outsourced they could not name specifics, however they did mention that they do provide health insurance for their employees if needed. They also get to go through medical check-ups before their departure. Subject 10 mentioned that they provide support regarding mental health, however, this applied to all the employees at their company.

Regarding the challenges of these procedures, two subjects claimed that they have not perceived the employees to have encountered challenges regarding accessing health care in their host country. Subject 10 perceives employees to not encounter any challenges in accessing it, understanding it might be a challenge though.
From the organizational representatives’ perception, the support provided has been helpful for the relocated employees. Subjects 13 and 6 perceive the practical assistance provided, has a positive impact on employees' cultural adjustment in the host country. Subject 10 found that their organization's corporate culture is so strong that relocated employees are more or less fully adjusted before going on their assignment. Subjects 13 and 10 perceive the support to also impact the relocated employee's work engagement. Subject 6 stated that the relocated employees do not come to them with these kinds of comments.

The organizational representatives share the thought that the support the organizations offer is of help for the relocated employees and perceive it to make a difference in their relocations in a positive way. Subject 10 believes that their support makes a difference for the employees and states that “...when you can outsource and have stakeholders that are experts on the matter. I think it's the best.” (Subject 10). Subject 6 shares the thought that it impacts the relocation positively and says that just knowing where to turn when questions arise brings a sense of safety for the relocated employees. Subject 10 believes these activities improve the performance of the relocated employees as well through creating a good experience from the start and a sense of belonging for the individual.

4.1.2 Family-specific support

Partner occupation

The perception that partner occupation was a stressor for the relocated employee was shared by the organizational representatives. Subject 10 stated that they do assist the partners, in the form of a meeting with them regarding their occupation in the host country.

Subject 13 found that most partners do not work while on assignment and that it is nothing that the organization provides support for, as their main focus is the employee that is sent to do work for the organization. Subject 6 noted that they do not provide support regarding the partner occupation, however, they did mention that it has been discussed in the organization and that they might implement it through a partnership with an organization working on the topic.

Children

The organizational representatives noted that when they send a relocated employee on assignment who chooses to travel with their children, they help with finding education for the child in the host country as well as finance the education if needed.

Subject 13 stated that the company does not provide any financial support regarding recreational activities but that the receiving company typically does arrange some activities available for families to attend. Subject 6 noted that they used to budget money for recreational activities but that now the salary of the relocated employee is instead intended to be sufficient to provide these
types of activities therefore they do not provide a specific budget for it anymore. However, they do provide home trips for the employees.

“What we do offer is a home trip every 12 months if the assignee remains for another 12 months. Or if you're a long-term assignee on the regular contract which doesn't allow family, then you can go home every 3rd month.” (Subject 6)

The organizational representatives said that they perceive this support regarding the relocated employees' families to impact their engagement at work and cultural adjustment as it becomes easier for the relocated employees to focus on themselves and their work tasks if they know their families are taken care of by these support measures.

4.1.3 Language

In the interviews, it was found that all of the organizations used English, however, in some instances, the local language was also used depending on the situation and setting. Even though the corporate language was English, language courses and support for the employees to learn the local language were offered by the organization both for the employee as well as accompanying family or partner, according to the organizational representatives.

In some instances the challenges in language are mostly present outside of the workplace and instead rather in the local bureaucracy where the local language might be needed. Subject 6 states that employees relocating to Sweden rather struggle to learn Swedish since the people are so fluent in English and instead hesitate to talk Swedish with relocated employees. From what the interview subjects have seen from their organizational perspective, language is not certainly crucial for relocating employees within these organizations since their corporate language should cover the aspects of work, however, support is there if the employee wants to learn the local language.

Subject 10 believes that language is a key element of adjusting to a new culture and that at least trying to learn and use the local language helps the individual at the workplace in many situations and helps the whole family adjust to the new culture. However subject 6 rather emphasizes that the more important things for adjusting in the beginning are the practical parts like moving, and that language is more of an afterthought that often comes naturally as their children learn the local languages through kindergarten, school, or other education. Subject 13 did not have any insights in this area since their role mainly was aimed toward the US where language training was not needed.
4.1.4 Cross-cultural training

Two of the subjects stated that they do provide cultural training. Subject 13 stated that they provide cultural training but not for the corporate culture, however, they brought up that there have been talks of implementing this. Subject 10 shared that they provide training regarding culture for all their employees through an online platform and that they conduct business the same way in every country. Subject 6 acknowledged that they do not provide culture training and that is something that is handled by the host country. Subject 13 perceived the relocated employees to struggle because they assume that the culture in the host country is similar to the one in their home country and therefore they do not acknowledge that there are differences. The other two subjects had not perceived their relocated employees to struggle in adapting to the culture. None of the organizational representatives perceived their relocated employees to struggle with workplace interactions or communicating with their peers, nor felt excluded in their workplace.

Subjects 13 and 10 perceived the relocated employees to feel as if the culture training provided by the organization does impact their cultural adjustment to their new host country because it makes them understand the culture more and there they also become more engaged in work as they settle well in the country. Subject 6 noted that they had not received any comments regarding either the cultural adjustment or their engagement in their work.

4.1.5 Communication, interaction and socialization

The organizational representatives noted that each relocated employee does receive a contact person but in a different form. Subject 13 mentioned that their relocated employees receive a contact person in the chamber of commerce, while Subjects 6 and 10 stated that the facilitated contact would be HR in the host country. The organizational representatives explained that they do not put the relocated employees in contact with other employees that have relocation experience, as they feel that the employees either already have these contacts or can find them easily themselves. Subject 6 shared that the relocated employees have difficulty forming social connections outside of work unless they have a special interest. Challenges were not acknowledged by the other subjects. All of the subjects stated that they do provide networking activities, but that these are not exclusive to the relocated employees. Subject 6 mentioned that they have different clubs such as a garden club that the employees can join. Subject 13 explained that the host country does offer activities such as attending concerts and basketball games and Subject 10 stated that they have activities about once a quarter.

Two of the subjects expressed that they perceived the socialization opportunities to have an impact on the relocated employees' cultural adjustment to the host country, as well as on their work engagement. Subject 6 explained that they could reflect this, as that is an area in which they lack
insight, noting that it is not the mobility department, but rather the receiving unit that is involved in organizing these activities.

4.2 The relocation experience - Personal recounts of relocated employees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject no.</th>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Home/Sending Country</th>
<th>Host Country</th>
<th>Role in Home Country</th>
<th>Role in Host Country</th>
<th>Previous Experience</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subject 1</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Brasil</td>
<td>Technical International Leader</td>
<td>Site/ Project Manager</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2017-2023 6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject 2</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>Technical Coordinator</td>
<td>Technical Coordinator</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2011-2014 2,7 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject 3</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>Line Manager</td>
<td>Department Manager</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2014-2016 1,5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject 4</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Head of Merger &amp; Acquisition</td>
<td>Managing Director</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2009-2014 5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject 5</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Corporate Controller</td>
<td>Project Manager</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2010-2014 4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject 7</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Brasil</td>
<td>Project Manager</td>
<td>Site Manager</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2020-2022 2,5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject 8</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Brasil</td>
<td>HR Business Partner</td>
<td>Site Manager</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2016-2018 2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject 9</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Head of Corporate</td>
<td>MD in Sweden</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2014-2018 3,5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject 10</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>People &amp; Culture Generalist</td>
<td>People &amp; Culture Leader</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2021-in progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject 11</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Software developer</td>
<td>Software developer</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2021-in progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject 12</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>India/USA</td>
<td>Logistics manager</td>
<td>Logistics manager</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2009-2015 6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject 14</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Sweden, Hong Kong, Singapore, Australia, India</td>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>Multiple, including roles in sales and supply</td>
<td>CEO &amp; CSO Switzerland</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>15 years Current 4 years in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject 15</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Marketing manager</td>
<td>Sales manager</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2003-2009 6 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5

Describes the interview subjects representing the personal employee relocation perspective. The table shows which country they were sent from, where they were relocated to, their role during the assignment, and how long they stayed in the host country.
Figure 6 shows the support activities and resources received by each of the interview subjects.

![Table](image)

**Table:** View of the support activities and resources received by each interview subject.

**Figure 7**

Shows the interview subjects' perceptions of whether the support activities had an impact on their cultural adjustment and engagement in their work. The abbreviation PA stands for practical assistance, CCT stands for cross-cultural training, CIS stands for communication, interaction, and socialization, CA stands for cultural adjustment and EE stands for employee engagement.

### 4.2.1 Practical assistance

**Migration**

Out of the thirteen subjects interviewed, eleven perceived having received helpful migration support (Figure 6). This included assistance related to visa applications, residential permits, and other requirements for entering their host country. Out of these eleven subjects, six recalled that they got support regarding visa applications, as well as six subjects explained that they had received guidance on where to go and what to sign upon their arrival in the host country. The key challenge in the migration process was by the subjects emphasized to be unfamiliar complicated processes and extensive paperwork in addition to language barriers. Subjects 2 and 7 noted specifically that the migration process was challenging because they got sent around a lot in their host country to get all
their documents signed. While Subjects 5 and 9 mentioned that there were some problems with the tax paperwork. Subject 12 admitted that they even had someone who stood in line for them during the paperwork process.

**Housing**

All of the subjects felt that they had received some form of accommodation-related support (Figure 6), with types of assistance mentioned including moving costs, being provided options of housing, and financing of housing. Eight of the subjects stated that their organization covered payment for the accommodation during their assignment. However, Subject 1 perceived to only have received limited support as they had to find accommodation by themselves in the host country without assistance from their organization. Eleven subjects shared that they had received options to choose from provided by the organization. Eleven subjects mentioned having received support in the form of moving services. Nine subjects recalled having found this process challenging and noted that support from the organization was very much needed. Subject 1 who described having received very limited support from the organization expressed that the lack of assistance for finding accommodation made the processes related to housing some of the most challenging parts of their relocation.

Six subjects stated that it was challenging because there were no housing options available upon their arrival in their host country, and that the organization then placed them in temporary housing until permanent accommodation could be provided. Subject 3 mentioned that they had a very limited budget regarding housing which made the process challenging.

Two subjects recognized that the support from the organization gave them the opportunity for better housing opportunities. Such as being able to bypass local rental queues which was the case for Subject 5 and Subject 2 being able to stay in high-end housing due to the organization's willingness to pay.

**Health care**

Ten subjects reported receiving health care support (Figure 6), including mentions of medical insurance, vaccines, and preparatory briefings. Subject 1 felt that they received very limited support for the area, while Subjects 5 and 9 stated that they did not receive any support regarding health care. Five of the subjects disclosed that they received vaccines before they arrived in their host country and medical insurance was also stated by eight. Four also received check-ups before departing on their assignment. Subject 12 also had the opportunity to go for a check-up once a year on-site. Six of the subjects shared that they had received preparatory briefings regarding health care. Subject 1 recalled from their experience that the support they received was very poor and that they did not get any contact with a hospital close to them. They also mentioned that the consultant company hired did not provide useful or effective support. While Subject 2 noted that they had received sufficient support
even when their child was born during their assignment, Subject 2 did mention that there was a language barrier in accessing healthcare, which was also mentioned by Subject 3.

Seven of the thirteen subjects that received the support regarding the practical assistance felt that this helped them in their adjustment to their new environment (Figure 7) as it was one less thing to think about and made the transition into their host country easier. Subjects 2 and 10 did not perceive the support to impact their cultural adjustment and Subjects 7 and 15 acknowledged that they thought it may have affected it to some extent. Subject 7 noted that they had received support during the COVID-19 crisis in the form of special evacuation plans, private ambulance access, and an apartment in a bigger city.

"Yeah. I think the less you get the practical issues, the more positive your mindset towards the new country and the culture gets." (Subject 8)

Nine of the thirteen subjects stated that they felt that the support regarding practical assistance helped them with their engagement at work (Figure 7) due to being able to get to work right upon arrival since everything else was taken care of in their moving process. Subjects 2 and 15 acknowledged that it affected them to some extent.

4.2.2 Family-specific support

Partner occupation

Out of the thirteen subjects eleven went on assignment with a partner accompanying them (Figure 6).

Two of the subjects (Subjects 1 and 8) mentioned that their partners were not allowed to work during their stay in the host country due to strict visa and work permit regulations. One brought up that it was recommended by the company for their partner to not work while in the host country, and five subjects stated that their partner did not work during their stay in the host country. Six stated that their partners did work however this had not been facilitated by the organization even though for both Subjects 4 and 5 their partner did get a role within their organization, they recognized that it was on their initiative. Subject 3 disclosed that their reasoning for departure from the host country was due to their partner's career. Four subjects mentioned that their partner did not work during their stay in the host country but did have other occupations. Subjects 10 and 15 mentioned that their partner did receive support regarding occupation during their stay in the host country.

“I think what made us go home after 1.5 years was that my wife's career possibilities were kind of coming to an end, so she wanted to go home to continue her career and not get cold. So to say so. So
if we could have gotten better support for my wife to find a part-time job or something that would have helped.” (Subject 3).

Children

Out of the thirteen subjects, ten were accompanied by children. Eight of these ten subjects received support from the organization regarding their children's education, meaning finding either kindergartens or schools, which was the case for six subjects as well as financing the education for their children had been noted by five of the subjects. Seven subjects stated that they put their children in international schools. Subjects 5 and 15 noted that they did not get any support regarding their children's education, however, they also mentioned that they had the knowledge regarding the schooling themselves and therefore support was not needed, furthermore subject 15 explained that upon arrival to their host country, their child was too young to receive support regarding education. Subject 12 mentioned that they encountered challenges regarding finding the correct schooling for one of their children with special needs, which was a challenge mainly due to the country. They stated that it took them between six months to a year to find the right school and that the child could not go to an international school since they did not provide education for children with special needs.

“But then we had a special situation to find a suitable school for her, and there were a lot of trials before we came into a school where I would say upper-class Indians had their special needs kids, but it took a little bit time to find that school. And when we did that during this journey, it took maybe up to six months, one year before we actually found the right position for our daughter and some other schools were not so good examples of how they treated the students and so on.” (Subject 12)

Out of the subjects that arrived with family seven pointed out that their partner also received language training. Subjects 2 and 12 mentioned that their children received language lessons in English as preparation for attending an international school in the host country.

Eight subjects that were accompanied by family noted that the support they received had a positive impact on their cultural adjustment (Figure 7) as they found that they could focus more on their own adjustment when they saw that their family was settled. Subjects 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, and 15 recalled that it did impact their work engagement as there was no stress regarding their family’s situation (Figure 7).

“Definitely, the support actions behind that if your family has issues you could redirect that to someone else, then it is easier for yourself to concentrate on work.” (Subject 15)
4.2.3 Language

Twelve of the thirteen interview subjects noted that their corporate language was English. Subject 15 noted that their corporate language was the host country’s language. All subjects noted that they did not have any previous knowledge of the language before their departure to the host country. Twelve interview subjects stated that they got some sort of language training provided by the company (Figure 6). Four noted that they received language training both before departure as well as following arrival, while eight received it in the host country during the assignment only. Eleven subjects shared that they received language courses in the local language of their Host Country. Subject 12 noted that they did not receive any language courses. However, Subject 12 as well as Subject 3 mentioned having had access to a translator service during their assignment. Subject 11 claimed that they had been offered language training following their arrival but that they had not yet come very far in their language learning, largely attributed to time constraints and limited need for host language skills. The language training received looked different for the subjects. Two subjects stated that they got money to spend on language training from their organization. Subject 15 mentioned that they were forced to know the local language because it was also the corporate language, they also brought up that since they were working in sales it was important for them to know the local language to be able to talk to the customers.

Eight subjects describe that the language support helped them adjust to the culture in the host country (Figure 7). Subject 11 explained that they think the support would have, or will have a positive impact on their adjustment once they invest more time and energy into it. Six subjects claimed that they did feel that the language training had an impact on their engagement at work. Three stated that they did not feel that it had an impact. Subject 5 noted that it would have been impossible to do their job without language courses and learn the local language as their assignment role shifted to include an area where employees were less proficient in English, hindering communication.

“Yeah, I mean, otherwise I couldn't have done the production job. English was not the solver.”
(Subject 5)

4.2.4 Cross-cultural training

In regards to Cross-Cultural Training, five subjects stated that they received support regarding cultural training before their departure to the host country (Figure 6). Subject 1 mentioned having received books and training covering many cultures and that it was not specific to their host country. Subject 2 disclosed having received limited support regarding customer relations and the work culture in their host unit. Twelve subjects stated that they had encountered challenges regarding the cultural differences in Host countries. Subjects 7 and 8 brought up a challenge regarding the security in their Host Country, for which they received intensive training that included defense, crisis aversion, and
diversion, as well as medical emergency training. Subject 2 described that they had received training in corporate culture and customer relations.

In regards to interactions with peers and corporate culture, two subjects stated they had received some form of support and four stated that they received very limited support, mostly in the form of having a manager to guide them and answer questions. Six subjects received no support. When describing challenges encountered related to their work and workplace interactions, nine subjects mentioned encountering clashes in corporate culture, five mentioned language barriers that would occasionally interfere with professional communication, and four mentioned that hierarchical differences could be challenging at times. Subject 1 described the hierarchical differences encountered particularly in management were so severe at times that a colleague was asked to leave the company after asking for help, due to it being viewed as a sign of incompetence among the local managers, and that several other relocated employees had chosen to end leave their assignment early due to the high stress, partially attributed to the cultural differences in the workplace. Subject 1 also described that while the company would organize an exchange where some of the employees from the host country unit were temporarily relocated to their home unit to learn their systems and understand the corporate culture of Company A, these exchanges never included the managers and that managerial exchange would have been more needed. Subject 2 noted they encountered challenges regarding the culture, and described how the sense of pride was so strong in the host country's culture that host nationals would rather give the wrong directions or provide incorrect information than admit to not knowing the answer to a question. They explained this was of course a source of confusion in both day-to-day life as well as in the workplace.

Two subjects claimed that they did not feel that the training regarding culture impacted their cultural adjustment in the host country (Figure 7). Two of the subjects stated that it was helpful in regards to having a starting point. However, most found they could handle it independently and did not feel that the support impacted their cultural adjustment. Two of the subjects found the cultural training they received to have impacted their engagement in their work (Figure 7). One subject stated they did not perceive the support to have impacted their engagement.

4.2.5 Communication, interaction and socialization

Seven subjects stated that they were provided some form of contact facilitated by the organization in the host country (Figure 6). The presence of a “buddy system” in the relocation process was shared by five subjects, Subjects 1, 7, 8, and 14. The buddy system is described as the facilitation of contacts through the organizations by which relocated employees and their families were put in contact with host country national families. These local contacts were intended to be an entry point for socialization upon arrival in a foreign
location and to be able to provide some guidance and answer general questions regarding local amenities, facilities, institutions, and other sources of confusion or concern during their assignment. While Subjects 1, 8, and 14 described having engaged with their buddy families, the pandemic prevented Subject 7 from being connected with a buddy as promised, due to the program being put on hold.

Four of the subjects stated that they already knew some of the employees in their host country due to for example work visits there before moving, one went in a group with other relocated employees and through that knew some of their coworkers in the host country. The social circle of the subjects was very different from subject to subject. All of the subjects stated that they made connections with people from their home countries while on assignment, three that went with family mentioned that they made connections through their children and partners. Three of the thirteen subjects acknowledged that they did not interact with host nationals that much. They also experienced difficulties connecting to host nationals as a result of their residence, due to often residing in communities with high density of internationals, and in other areas separate from where most locals live.

Two subjects did not perceive the support regarding communication, interaction, and socialization to affect their impact on their cultural adjustment as they did feel like they needed any support, to begin with. Seven on the other hand felt that it did impact their cultural adjustment (Figure 7). However, nine subjects stated that they perceived the support to have impacted their engagement in work (Figure 7) because the more socially involved you are, the better you perform at work.

4.2.6 Concluding question section

_Declined support_

The subjects found the support from their different organizations to have been helpful. Only four out of the thirteen interview subjects claimed to have declined some of the support they were offered. Subject 3 stated that they did not take any of the language training provided, but looking back, they should have and would have liked to learn more of the local language as they did not take the time during their stay and now think it would have benefitted them in their assignment. Similar testimony was provided by Subject 7 who did see the benefit of language training but chose to decline the pre-departure training offered due to the short and stressful preparation time before the assignment, and still found it challenging at times to attend language classes in the host country during their assignment. Subject 14 had participated in language training during their many international assignments. They stated that they found language learning quite difficult in addition to time-consuming and often not too critical, which had caused the language training to occasionally be
deprioritized or put on hold. Subject 5 was offered a tax consultant but decided not to accept it because they had the education needed themselves.

**Support promised but not received**

Subject 7 noted that they were promised a “buddy” upon arrival in their host country but did not receive it as the program was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Support sufficient**

The interview subjects found that they in general had received sufficient support and assistance in their international relocation process. Subjects 3, 5, 7, 10, and 14 expressed that they had no significant complaints at all about the support they received.

Subjects 12 and 14 stated that they thought the support received in preparation for and during their assignment was sufficient. However, Subject 14 recalled having encountered some challenges when returning to their home country after some time, that it was difficult to properly adjust back to the culture, and that more support in this phase would have been beneficial. Subject 12 gave similar recounts about their own experience in about encountering bureaucratic problems upon their return back home, which they thought could have been prevented if the company had notified them about these things in advance. They spoke of a colleague who had been on the same assignment, who also struggled after returning home and eventually they both quit the company altogether.

Subject 3 mentioned feeling that the budget they received was too limited for the assignment, a point that was also noted by Subject 7. Out of the thirteen subjects, eight shared that their motivation to go on assignment was because they wanted to work abroad, experience different cultures, and develop new skills.

**5. Discussion**

**Practical assistance**

In Company A, the organizational representative (Subject 13) stated that they do provide support for their relocating employees regarding the migration process, accommodation, and health care. Subjects 7 and 8 shared the perception of having received these support measures. However, the assistance was only partially acknowledged by Subject 1. While they confirmed being provided the support for migration, which was also provided for the accompanying partner, Subject 1 did not perceive to have received sufficient or very effective support regarding the practical assistance related to accommodation and health care, which became a challenge for Subject 1 in their new environment, in line with the description of these areas as stress-inducing factors by Cai et al (2010). Furthermore, while Subject 13 claimed that relocated employees should be provided support in all fields, attention is drawn to the findings that indicate such contrast in the perceptions of Subject 1 and Subject 8, who
in the same organization relocated to the same host country very close in time. Subject 1 appeared to have had too limited assistance to identify its effect on their cultural adjustment and engagement. On the other hand, Subject 8 described having received quite broad and extensive support in all areas related to the practical assistance activities and described how the support they received did have a positive impact on both their cultural adjustment and work engagement in the host country.

The subjects appeared to be in agreement regarding the helpfulness of housing support, with Subject 5 stating that finding housing in their host country would have been impossible without the support of the organization.

Subject 13 saw that even though they tried to make the transition as smooth as possible for their employees by providing furnished housing options, the employees who relocated to the unit in the United States did not appreciate the design and furniture in place, an unanticipated challenge that required intervention. This perception lies in contrast to that of the relocated employees interviewed in Company A who in reference to their relocation to Brazil listed the unavailability of furnished housing as a factor for frustration and inconvenience. While this does support the variation in preferences identified by Ibrahim et al. (2021), the shared origin among employees of discussion would contradict employees' nationality and culture imputed as determining factors.

Two subjects explained that they gained a great advantage in the housing market compared to local nationals. Subject 2 acknowledged being able to stay in a luxury apartment in Tokyo and Subject 5 could bypass local rental queues, all because of organizational financing. This supports Kim (2018) suggestion that international employees often have higher budgets and incomes and may be used to higher living standards than most host country nationals. Considering the quality of place has been found to influence employee adjustment (Andresen & Margenfeld, 2015), organizations willing to pay more might have worked in favor of the subjects’ cultural adjustment. However, it should be noted that Subject 3, who relocated within the same organization as Subject 2, directly contradicts this perception by presenting limited budgeting for housing as a significant challenge for their accommodation.

All interview subjects confirmed being provided healthcare-related support in some aspect except for Subjects 5 and 9. Both subjects relocated within the EU and to Sweden and expressed no need for it. Which supports (Elliot, 2020) in recognizing health-related assistance to be a more prominent concern for those who relocate to locations farther from home where medical services may be limited and less familiar.

In line with previous studies that established employees' well-being to be especially at risk due to heightened physical and psychological stress (Rosenbusch et al., 2015), the multi-dimensional approach to employee health described by Subject 10 shows this aspect is considered. The literature's recommendation of comprehensive medical monitoring is further displayed by Subject 12’s mention of receiving regular checkups on-site (Decuypere et al., 2019; Fonseca et al., 2017; Imbert et al., 2022).
Subjects 2 and 3 described access to high-quality health care during their assignment, but both recalled the language barrier to be challenging at times, which by Elliot (2020) was proposed to potentially hinder efficient communication in critical medical situations. Subjects 7 and 8 mentioned participation in security training before departure, which was motivated by high crime rates in their host country. Subject 7 also disclosed that special evacuation plans, private ambulance access, and an apartment in a bigger city were implemented for risk mitigation during the COVID-19 pandemic. These cases describe a development similar to that described by Bradford (2002) regarding organizations' increased investments in health care, as a result of encounters with a crisis or emergency.

*Family-specific support*

Subjects from all perspectives agreed with the positive impact of family support on relocated employees' cultural adjustment, as suggested by Rosenbusch et al., (2015) and Dang et al., (2022). Moreover, they also confirmed accompanying partners' occupation as a key challenge and stressor in international assignments, with Subject 3 identifying their partner's career as one of the main reasons for returning home and not considering assignment extension. Subject 3 described their partner's limited ability for finding a job in Korea, lack of occupation support, subsequent restlessness, and concern regarding how a lengthy career interruption could affect employability upon return home, directly in line with previous findings from Elliot (2020) and Vijayakumar and Cunningham (2020). Subjects 1 and 8 stated that their partners had not been allowed to work during their assignments due to strict visa and work permit regulations, as described by (Vijayakumar & Cunningham, 2020) to be a fairly common problem.

Despite the shared perception of this critical element, the only organization that claimed to provide direct partner occupation support was Company D where Subject 10 described access to supportive meetings in which partners’ needs are assessed and they would be provided guidance in regards to how they should approach their position and search for occupation in the local job market. While the accompanying partners of Subject 4 and 5 in Company C had started work in the same company as their relocated partners some time into the planned assignment duration, both noted that their partners still went through the same employment process as any other applicant, with the usual interviews and other formalities, there could be speculation regarding some form of connection. Meanwhile, Subject 15 who relocated to and from the same countries but in a different organization did receive support regarding their partner's occupation when they started working in the same company and felt that the support did impact their engagement in their work as well as adjustment to the new environment.

A common theme within the findings of the interviews was the presence of assistance related to children's education. The organization's children's education support was observed to vary in what it entailed, with mentions of daycare, preschool, and higher level school option lists, financing,
international school, and preparatory English training for two of the children going into international school upon arrival in the host country. Some of the organizations were described to have restrictions on children’s age within which the company would assist and pay for their education. However, this was not found to be a challenge among the subjects as they were content with their ability to handle it independently.

Subject 12 described having great trouble finding a suitable school for one of their children with special needs. Subject 6, the organizational representative, stated that the company should be providing assistance schooling adapted to the specific needs of the employee’s children, but this did not seem to match Subject 12’s experience. However, in this particular case, the findings do not provide enough insight to determine the source of these difficulties, and the question remains of whether this was the result of insufficient support provided by the organization, or if the resources needed were not available or especially limited in the particular host location. Subject 3 noted that one of the highlights of their relocation experience was the international school that they placed their children in during their assignment.

The challenges identified and perceived impacts of family support measures are found to align with Dang et al., (2022) and Rosenbusch et al., (2015) and their suggested proposition that more organizational support may be needed when family accompanies employees on an international assignment.

Language

All but one interview subject confirmed English as the corporate language for their organization, the exception being Subject 15 whose organization and sales role in Sweden required some local language proficiency. Despite the great majority having a common corporate language and no subject claiming any form of local language knowledge before their international assignment, local language training support was highly present among interview subjects’ relocation packages. The findings appear positive regarding the impact of language training on both cultural adjustment and employee engagement, from both the organizational and the relocated employees’ personal perspective. The perception of local language learning on engagement in the workplace where language barriers was confirmed to be a challenge in communication due to varying levels of corporate language skills and contextual translations, which aligns with Barner-Rasmussen and Aarnio’s (2011) suggestion of multinational organizations being inherently multilingual, despite established corporate languages.

Although they claimed to provide language training, Company B stands out for having less participation in language training in comparison to the other organizations and appears to perceive local language training to have little impact on cultural adjustment and employee engagement. The motivation largely lay in English being the corporate language and local language therefore not being
necessary for relocated employees' work assignments. This perception shares similarities with the testimony of Subject 1 in Company A, who while agreeing with impact on general adjustment, stated that language had no effect on their engagement at work as interactions at work were typically exclusively in English. Among other subjects who declined or did not fully commit to the language learning (Subjects 3, 7, 11, and 14) time constraint and general stress of international assignments was the common reasoning, which generally agrees with the notion of language being a large and challenging obstacle with little reward, as claimed by AlMazrouei and Pech (2014) who suggested one rather focus on cross-cultural training.

However, with the language barrier identified as a great force of misunderstandings and communication difficulties in the workplace, the majority perspective found displaying perceived positive impacts, supports the existing theory of host country local language learning and proficiency being contributors to relocated employees integration, adjustment, and engagement (Sargent & Matthews, 2001; Selmer & Lauring, 2015; Shen et al., 2023; Zhang & Harzing, 2016).

Cross-cultural training

With the presence of cultural differences between home or sending units, and host countries, many subjects described encountering challenges. Subject 1 described difficulties adapting to the Brazilian corporate culture, where hierarchy was strong and the local management did not permit subordinates to ask for help as it was perceived as a display of incompetence. It was further mentioned how colleagues had been asked to or had willingly chosen to terminate their assignments prematurely. Based on the description given for the lack of cultural understanding appearing mutual, these challenges support Cavazotte et al (2020) in their argument for leadership as a source of employee engagement, holding the leaders responsible for managing and bridging cultural differences in international assignments.

Corporate culture clashes were further reported by Subject 2 who faced a seemingly drastic contrast in pride as locals would not admit to not knowing something, and would rather give less truthful answers to save face. The organizational representative interviewed (Subject 6) noted that while they do not provide cultural training before departure, this could be provided by the host unit on site. While Subject 2 was the only subject in Company B to describe receiving brief training regarding customer relations and corporate culture upon arrival in Japan, they would stay encountering these situations in their day-to-day life as well as in the workplace. Subjects 5 and 9 claimed to not have received much support concerning culture but also did not find they needed it. Considering the cultural distance between Sweden and their home country Germany was perceived to be quite short and insignificant, cultural training might not be deemed as essential as when relocating to countries with greater distance, supporting the suggestions of Waxin and Panaccio (2005).
However, other subjects share the perception of how personality and individual characteristics play a large role in adapting to the host country’s culture. With Subject 7 and 8 accounts of candidates for international assignments being required to go through intensive interviews before potential relocations to determine whether they would be a good fit, there is support for the depictions by Lauring and Selmer (2014) that illustrated employees with higher vigor possess the ability to better overcome challenges and adjust faster.

Communication, interaction, and socialization

Almost all subjects found socialization opportunities to have had an impact on cultural adjustment and engagement in international assignments, yet fewer found that they actually received it. While all organizational representatives stated that their organization does provide networking and socialization support, multiple subjects did not share the perception but noted that they found community and contacts elsewhere through previous social connections, international communities, and their children’s school and other recreational activities, from which they still found a similar effect. All relocated employees were also found to connect with home country nationals to some extent and three subjects described limited interaction with host country nationals, primarily attributed to segregated international communities and residential areas such as gated communities which restricted their exchange with locals and caused them to often stay among their own. This is found to align with historical suggestions of families often finding connection and comfort in community living with others of similar experiences, languages, and cultures having a soothing effect on relocated families’ transition and adjustment while avoiding the risk factors of language barriers, culture contrast and unfamiliarity that have been connected to social isolation (Sander, 2016; Elliot, 2020). This also appears to confirm the reasoning the organizations had regarding not putting relocated employees in contact with others of similar experience as they were perceived to already have these connections or to make them easily independent from the organization's intervention.

All subjects agreed regarding the impact on engagement and a majority identified the impact on cultural adjustment. Two subjects perceived it to not have had any impact on their cultural adjustment, primarily due to the explanation that they felt they did not need it, perhaps due to a less geographically distant relocation.

Subject 13, the organizational representative for Company A, attributed the effect on employee engagement to essentially forcing interaction, cooperation, and thereby commitment, which would be in line with Canhilal et al., (2020) description of how relocated employees forming social networks and interacting with others in their social life improves their engagement and performance in their work life.

While Subject 6 representing international mobility support in Company B described providing facilitated contacts and networking opportunities, the organization's employees' perception of receiving it was limited. Subject 6 explained how this support should be in place and described
regular hosting of events for employees, however, the only employee who shared the perception in full was the one who was relocated to Sweden (Subject 11). It could therefore be likely that Subject 11 received this support from the same unit, or a unit closely related to, the one in which the mobility teams Subject 6 would be most connected to operate.

The subjects in the same organization who participated in relocations to units in other countries did not express having had the same experience. In addition to the host country, other factors that differentiate these assignments include the point in time when the assignment was done, where Subject 11’s assignment is very recent. Subject 11 was also the only interview subject from Company B who relocated unaccompanied. With consideration to previous research that has claimed social isolation by consequence of separation and exclusion to be a common challenge (Shen et al., 2021), it raises the question of whether any of these differentiating factors could have been a cause for this variation in the findings.

6. Conclusion

The study concludes that support activities provided by organizations do have a positive impact on relocated employees' cultural adjustment as well as their engagement in their work. Firstly, partner occupation was confirmed as a key challenge by recounts from both relocated employees and organizational support providers. The personal experiences of accompanying partners and relocated employees themselves further identified social isolation as a high-risk stressor in international assignments, where multiple subjects described depending on connections to adapt to the new environment. With the additional consideration of difficulties found in the cultural element, the areas where employees were perceived to encounter the most severe and frequent challenges, having caused assignments to be interrupted and aborted in advance, were also the areas in which the employees received the least support.

With insufficient or lacking support in regards to communication, interaction, and socialization, as well as partner occupation and cross-cultural training having been detected to make relocations more challenging than necessary for certain subjects, we find that organizational investment and development of more extensive support in these areas would be beneficial for assignment outcome and improving relocated employees experience. We also find that expanding this support would help employees adjust better culturally and engage in their work faster, increasing performance.

Furthermore, while organizational support was shown to have a positive impact on the employee's cultural adjustment and work engagement, receiving support in areas is not enough for the employee to properly adjust to a foreign culture and work environment.
For the support activities to in fact be effective and to have the intended impact, they must hold a certain level of quality and include the necessary steps, adjusted to the different host countries and the specific assignments.

In conjunction with subjects having occasionally reported feeling that the support they received was unnecessary, the findings of this research conclude that organizations would benefit from adopting a more personal and individualized approach to providing international relocation support, which could save on financial expenditure for unnecessary resources while simultaneously providing an opportunity to identify case-specific areas that may require more support.

7. Future Research

The research contributed to the literature by establishing a relationship between organizational support activities and relocated employees' cultural adjustment and engagement from the perspective of employees' personal experiences, but also identifies areas commonly overlooked in international relocation processes. Furthermore, with the extensive variation discovered in the perceived needs and experiences of relocated employees, future research should investigate to what extent the implementation of personalized support procedures could impact the employees' adjustment to their new environments.

While conducting the study, the presence of a male majority among subjects interviewed became apparent, whereby accompanying partners were found to often be wives who would stay home with children during the assignments. This impression was further entrenched by references made to the subjects' peers in the interviews. A study on the matter with a greater sample size could help distinguish whether less diversity is a trend in international assignments if it could be specific to the industries that were covered, or if it is simply an unfortunate or random occurrence in the particular sample of this study.

Finally, challenges encountered when assignments end and relocated employees return to their home country were declared on several occasions in the research process, portraying a perception of little to no support activities being provided for their adjustment back. While this was not found to lie within the scope of the research purpose in this study, we suggest this area be explored in both kinds of research as well as in organizations evaluations of their mobility support processes.
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Appendix A

Interview Questions - Organizational point of view

Introduction questions
- I1: What is your role in the company?
- I2: How long have you had this role?
- I3: What part do you play in the relocation process of employees?

General
● G1: Who is involved in an international employee relocation process?
  *i.e. what departments, areas of management and others are involved?*
● G2.1: What unit is responsible for what?
  ○ G2.2: Would you say the majority of support activities are facilitated by the sending/home country unit or by the host country unit?
  ○ G2.3: Do most of the support activities take place pre-departure or post arrival in the host country?
  ○ G2.4: Which unit is primarily responsible for the pre-departure support?
  ○ G2.5: Which unit is primarily responsible for the post arrival support?
● G.3: What do you perceive to be the most common challenges encountered by employees when going on international assignments?
● G.4: What do you perceive are the most significant or impactful challenges encountered by employees when going on international assignments?

Abbreviations:
- HC = host country

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Practical assistance

Migration process
● Q.1.1: Does the organization provide employees assistance regarding acquiring visas, residential permits, and other requirements for entering the host country?
  ○ Q.1.2: In cases where employees are accompanied by their partner or family, does the family/partner receive the same assistance?
● Q.2.1: Do you perceive the relocated employees commonly find this process difficult or complicated?
  ○ Q.2.2: Do you perceive the assistance provided makes employees find this process easier or smoother?

Housing
● Q3: Does the organization provide assistance regarding employees' accommodation and housing while on assignment? *E.g. ...*
  ○ *suggestions for housing areas*
  ○ *housing provided*
○ gated communities or other commodity housing for international employees (and families)
○ management of property in home country such as house and car
○ pets

● Q4.1: Do you perceive relocated employees often experience challenges in this process?
○ Q4.2: Do employees find the housing assistance provided to be helpful in this process?

Health care

● Q5: Does the organization provide any support or assistance related to relocated employees health and well-being?
  E.g. medical insurance, vaccines, preparatory briefings, contact/service centers, routine health checks or translation services.
● Q6.1: Do you perceive relocated employees to commonly encounter challenges in regards to accessing health care in the host country?
  E.g. limited access, far away, language barrier, unfamiliar procedure ...
  ○ Q6.2: Do employees appear to find the organization's assistance to be helpful when encountering these challenges?

● Q7: Do you find that providing practical assistance in the form of migration process, health care and accommodation has an effect on relocated employees' cultural adjustment* in HC?
  ○ * i.e. their everyday life, interactions with HC nationals and their assignment, role and work environment
● Q8: Do you find that providing practical assistance in the form of migration process, health care and accommodation has an effect on relocated employees' engagement* in their assignment?
  ○ * i.e. their concentration, enthusiasm and performance in their work

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Family-specific support

Partner occupation

● Relocated employees’ partners occupation is found to be a common stressor in research on international relocations.
  Do you share this perception from working with employee relocations?
● Q10.1: Does the organization provide any support regarding relocated employees' partner's occupations during the assignment?
  ○ Q.10.2: If yes, do you perceive this support to improve the employees’ and their partners' experience while staying in HC?

Children

● Q11: Does the organization offer assistance regarding the employees' children's education?
● Q12: Does the organization offer any support regarding employees' children's recreational activities, socialization or other family activities?
  ○ E.g. sports, community events or resources, family events ...
- Q13: Do you perceive this assistance and support to be helpful and to improve the relocated employees and their families experience while staying in HC?

- Q14: Do you find that family support related to partner occupation and children's education has an effect on relocated employees' cultural adjustment* in HC?
  - * i.e. their everyday life, interactions with HC nationals and their assignment, role and work environment

- Q15: Do you find that family support related to partner occupation and children's education has an effect on relocated employees' engagement* in their assignment?
  - * i.e. their concentration, enthusiasm and performance in their work

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Language

- Q16: What is the corporate language in your organization?

- Q18.1: Does the organization provide language courses prior to and/or during their stay in HC?
  - Q18.2: Does language learning focus on casual language for day to day interactions, business language relating to the work assignment, or standard educational language studies?
  - Q18.3: Are language learning opportunities offered to relocated employees' families?

- Q19.1: Have you encountered situations where relocated employees perceived the corporate language to not be sufficient in their assignment and that local language skills were needed?
  - Q19.2: Do you perceive relocated employees to find the language courses to reduce the frequency of these situations and/or to be helpful in those instances?

- Q20: Do you find that the support activities provided related to language learning have an effect on relocated employees' cultural adjustment* in HC?
  - * i.e. their everyday life, interactions with HC nationals and their assignment, role and work environment

- Q21: Do you find that the support activities provided related to language learning have an effect on relocated employees' engagement* in their assignment?
  - * i.e. their concentration, enthusiasm and performance in their work

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Cross-cultural training

Cross-cultural interaction

- Q22: Does the organization provide any cross-cultural training prior to or during relocated employees' stay in HC?
  - E.g. history, legal systems, cultural differences between home and HC, traditions, local/cultural norms ...

- Q23.1: Do you perceive internationally relocated employees commonly encounter challenges related to local culture, understanding it and adjusting to it?
○ Q23.2: Have you found cross-cultural training to be helpful for employees in overcoming these challenges?

Workplace interpersonal relationships
● Q24: Does the organization provide guidance or other support regarding workplace interactions in HC?
  ○ *E.g. regarding unit hierarchy, procedure, employees involvement in decision making, expectations, behavior, how to address people...*
● Q25: Do you perceive relocated employees to encounter challenges related to communication and interaction with their peers during their stay?
  ○ *E.g. misunderstandings due to local values, norms, language interpretations or general expectations.*
● Q26.1: Have you found there to be instances where relocated employees have felt (or appeared to feel) excluded from casual conversations in the workplace or other general interactions due to their HC language skill level, nationality or cultural identity?
  ○ Q26.2: Do you perceive providing guidance regarding these types of interactions is found to be helpful according to the employees for overcoming or managing these challenges?

● Q27: Do you find that cross-cultural training and other support provided related to cross-cultural interaction has an effect on relocated employees' cultural adjustment* in HC?
  ○ *i.e. their everyday life, interactions with HC nationals and their assignment, role and work environment*
● Q28: Do you find that cross-cultural training and other support provided related to cross-cultural interaction has an effect on relocated employees' engagement* in their assignment?
  ○ *i.e. their concentration, enthusiasm and performance in their work*

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Communication, interaction and socialization
● Q30: Does the organization organize or put employees with upcoming international assignments in contact with host country nationals (employees/future coworkers or other) before their arrival in HC?
● Q31: Does the organization put employees in contact with others with international relocation experience, prior to or during the assignment?
● Q32.1: Do you provide a contact person for the employee during their stay in HC?
  ○ Q32.2: If yes, are contact persons usually host country nationals, home country nationals or other internationals?
● Q33: Do you perceive relocated employees to commonly find it challenging to form social connections while in HC?
● Q39: Does the organization provide any support or resources related to socialization opportunities following their arrival in HC?
E.g. networking activities such as sports/training, hobby-related communities, practice of religion, or other social events.

- Q40.1: Do you perceive relocated employees commonly encounter challenges or difficulties in finding social settings, community, recreational- or leisure activities of their interest?
  - Q40.2: Do you perceive employees find this support to make this easier and to improve their international assignment experience?

- Q41: Do you find that the support related to communication, interaction and socialization has an effect on relocated employees' cultural adjustment* in HC?
  - *i.e. their everyday life, interactions with HC nationals and their assignment, role and work environment

- Q42: Do you find that the support related to communication, interaction and socialization has an effect on relocated employees' engagement* in their assignment?
  - *i.e. their concentration, enthusiasm and performance in their work

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Concluding questions

- C1: Do you perceive the support activities and resources that the organization provides employees to be effective and sufficient for the international relocation process?
- C2: Do you have routines in place for evaluating employees' experience of the organization's support procedures?
  - C2.1: How involved are employees in evaluating the support activities and resources effectiveness and perceived helpfulness?
  - C2.2: Are evaluations conducted during the assignment and/or following employees return to the home country?
  - C2.3: Do you involve employees with international relocation experience when improving or developing new support activities for future relocations?
- C3: Have you been able to identify any gaps or specific areas with opportunities for improvement in the organization's international relocation processes and support?
Appendix B

Interview Questions - The relocation experience

Introduction questions
- I1: What was your role in the company in your home country?
- I2: Did your role change when you relocated to your host country?
- I3: Where were you relocated to?
- I4: How long was the assignment?
- I5: Did you go by yourself or were you accompanied by family, partner or other?
- I6: Was this your first international assignment or did you have previous experience?

General
- G1.1: What was your general experience of the relocation process?
  ○ G1.2: Were there parts you found to be particularly challenging or difficult?

Abbreviations:
- HC = host country

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Practical assistance

Migration process
- Q1.1: Did you receive any assistance regarding acquiring visas, residential permits, and other requirements for entering HC?
  ○ Q1.2: If accompanied, did you receive the same assistance for family/partner?
- Q2.1: Did you experience any difficulties or challenges in this process?
  ○ Q2.2: Did you find the organization's assistance to make the process easier or smoother?

Housing
- Q3: Did the organization provide you assistance in regards to accommodation and housing?
  E.g. ...
  ○ suggestions for housing areas
  ○ organization providing housing
  ○ organization finances housing
  ○ gated communities or other commodity housing for international employees (and families)
  ○ management of property in home country such as house and car
  ○ air travel for pets
- Q4.1: Did you experience any difficulties in this process?
  ○ Q4.2: Did you find the assistance provided by the organization to be helpful and make this process easier?

Health care
- Q5: Did you receive any support or assistance regarding health and well-being?
E.g. medical insurance, vaccines, preparatory briefings, contact/service centers, routine health checks or translation services.

- Q6.1: Did you encounter any challenges regarding accessing health care in the host country? *E.g. limited access, far away, language barrier, unfamiliar procedure ...*
  - Q6.2: Did the assistance from the organization help you when encountering these challenges?

- Q7: Did you find the practical assistance related to the migration process, housing and health care to have an impact on your cultural adjustment*?
  - *i.e. everyday life, interactions with HC nationals, your assignment, role and work environment*

- Q8: Did you find the practical assistance related to the migration process, housing and health care to have an impact on your engagement* in your work?
  - *i.e. concentration, enthusiasm and performance in your work*

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**IF** accompanied by partner and/or other family members:

**Family-specific support**

**Partner occupation**

- Relocated employees’ partners occupation is found to be a common stressor in research on international relocations.
  - Q9.1: Did your partner work while staying in HC?
  - Q9.2: If no, did your partner partake in any other “outside” occupation during the stay? *E.g. studies, projects, community work ...*

- Q10.1: Did the organization provide any support regarding your partner's occupations during the assignment?
  - Q.10.2: If yes, did you find this support to improve your partners experience while staying in HC?

**Children**

- Q11: Did the organization offer assistance regarding your children's education? *E.g. ...*
  - offer placement in schools and/or kindergarden/preschools
  - provide information about options for schools/kindergarten/preschools
  - Was access to schools or other child care facilities considered when selecting accommodation?

- Q12: Did the organization offer any support regarding children's recreational activities, socialization or other family activities?
  - *E.g. sports, community events or resources, family events ...*

- Q13: Did you find this assistance and support to be helpful and to improve your family's experience while staying in HC?
Q14: Did you find family support related to partner occupation and children's education to have an impact on your cultural adjustment*?
   ○ * i.e. everyday life, interactions with HC nationals, your assignment, role and work environment

Q15: Did you find family support related to partner occupation and children's education to have an impact on your engagement* in your work?
   ○ * i.e. concentration, enthusiasm and performance in your work

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Language

- Q16: What is the corporate language in your organization?
- Q17: Did you (and/or accompanying family/partner) know the host country local language before an assignment in HC was considered?

Q18.1: Did you receive language courses prior to and/or during your stay in HC?
   ○ Q18.2: Was this casual language for day to day interactions, business language relating to the work assignment, or standard educational language studies?
   ○ Q18.3: Were language learning opportunities offered to your family?

Q19.1: Did you encounter any situations in your assignment where the corporate language was not sufficient and local language was needed?
   ○ Q19.2: Did you find language courses to help in those instances?

Q20: Did you find support activities related to language to have an impact on your cultural adjustment*?
   ○ * i.e. everyday life, interactions with HC nationals, your assignment, role and work environment

Q21: Did you find support activities related to language to have an impact on your engagement* in your work?
   ○ * i.e. concentration, enthusiasm and performance in your work

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Cross-cultural training

Cross-cultural interaction

- Q22: Did you receive any cross-cultural training prior to or during your stay in HC?
   ○ E.g. history, legal systems, cultural differences between home and HC, traditions, local/cultural norms ...

- Q23.1: Did you encounter any challenges regarding adjusting to the culture and understanding it?
○ Q23.2: Did you find that cross-cultural training helped you in overcoming these challenges?

Workplace interpersonal relationships

- Q24: Did you receive guidance or other support regarding workplace interactions in HC?
  ○ E.g. regarding unit hierarchy, procedure, employees involvement in decision making, expectations, behavior; how to address people...

- Q25: Did you encounter any challenges regarding communication and interaction with your peers during your stay?
  ○ E.g. misunderstandings due to local values, norms, language interpretations or general expectations.

- Q26.1: Were there instances where you found yourself excluded from casual conversation in the workplace or general interactions due to your host country language skill level, nationality or cultural identity?
  ○ Q26.2: Did you find the organization's guidance regarding these interactions to be helpful in overcoming or managing these challenges?

- Q27: Did you find cross-cultural training and other support related to cross-cultural interaction to have an impact on your cultural adjustment*?
  ○ * i.e. everyday life, interactions with HC nationals, your assignment, role and work environment

- Q28: Did you find cross-cultural training and other support related to cross-cultural interaction to have an impact on your engagement* in your work?
  ○ * i.e. concentration, enthusiasm and performance in your work

Communication, interaction and socialization

- Q30: Did the organization put you in contact with HC nationals (employees/future coworkers or other) before your arrival in HC?
- Q31: Were you put in contact with others with international relocation experience prior to ‘or during the assignment?
- Q32.1: Were you provided a contact person while in HC?
  ○ Q32.2: If yes, was this person a host country national, home country national or other international?

- Q33: Did you ever find it challenging to form social connections while in HC?
- Q34: For the new social connections you did form in HC, did you meet them in your workplace or externally?
- Q35.1: Did you find yourself interacting more with home country nationals, host country nationals or other international migrants while staying in HC?
  ○ Q36.2: Did you experience any difficulties connecting with host country nationals while staying in HC?
• Q37: Did you find the resources or support related to communication and interaction to help or improve your experience while in HC?

Socialization
• Q39: Did the organization provide any support or resources related to socialization opportunities while in HC?
  ○ E.g. networking activities such as sports/training, hobby-related communities, practice of religion, or other social events to partake in.
• Q40.1: Did you experience any challenges or difficulties in finding social settings, community, recreational- or leisure activities of your interest?
  ○ Q40.2: If yes, did you find the support helped you in finding social groups?

• Q41: Did you find support activities related to communication, interaction and socialization to have an impact on your cultural adjustment*?
  ○ *i.e. everyday life, interactions with HC nationals, your assignment, role and work environment
• Q42: Did you find support activities related to communication, interaction and socialization to have an impact on your engagement* in your work?
  ○ *i.e. concentration, enthusiasm and performance in your work

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Concluding the experience

- C.1: Do you feel that you received helpful support or access to supportive resources from the organization in preparation for and during your international assignment?
- C.2.1: Were there any support activities or resources that you were offered by the organization but chose to decline?
  - C.2.2: or perhaps support activities you were promised but did not receive?
- C.3.1: Do you think the support you received was sufficient for your assignment?
  - C.3.2: Were you missing something? Could something have been done better?
## Appendix C

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<tr>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>Subject mentioned that they received support regarding their partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>occupation in Host Country</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Subject mentioned that they received support regarding their childrens</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>education in Host Country</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Subject mentioned that the support they received improved their family's</td>
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<tr>
<td>improve Family</td>
<td>experience in Host Country</td>
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<tr>
<td>FS impact CA</td>
<td>Subject mentioned that the support regarding their family impacted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>their Cultural Adjustment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FS impact EE</td>
<td>Subject mentioned that the support regarding their family impacted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>their Work Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>Subject mentioned that their corporate language was English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>Subject mentioned that they had previous knowledge in the language in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Host Country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges</td>
<td>Subject mentioned that they received language courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Subject mentioned that they encountered challenges regarding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges</td>
<td>the language in Host Country</td>
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<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Subject mentioned that the language courses where helpful in Host</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpful</td>
<td>Country</td>
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<tr>
<td>L impact CA</td>
<td>Subject mentioned that the language courses impacted their Cultural</td>
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<td>Adjustment in Host Country</td>
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<td>L impact EE</td>
<td>Subject mentioned that the language lessons impacted their Work</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCT General</td>
<td>Subject mentioned that they received Cross-Cultural Training regarding</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the culture in Host Country</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCT Differences</td>
<td>Subject mentioned that there were cultural difference between Home and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Host Country</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCT Workplace</td>
<td>Subject mentioned that they received Cross-Cultural Training regarding</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interactions</td>
<td>the Work Culture in Host Country</td>
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<td>Workplace</td>
<td>Subject mentioned that they encountered challenges regarding</td>
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<td>Challenges</td>
<td>their Corporative Culture</td>
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<td>Exclusion</td>
<td>Subject mentioned that they at times felt excluded during workplace</td>
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<td></td>
<td>interactions</td>
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<td>Socialization</td>
<td>Subject mentioned that they found socialization opportunities in Host</td>
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<td>Networking and</td>
<td>Country</td>
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<td>Socialization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Opportunities</td>
<td>opportunities in Host Country</td>
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<tr>
<td>Facilitated</td>
<td>Subject mentioned that they received a contact person in Host Country</td>
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<td>Contact</td>
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<td>Where meet</td>
<td>Subject mentioned where they met most of their social connections in</td>
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<td>Social</td>
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<td>Interactions</td>
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<td>Subject mentioned interactions with Host Country nationals</td>
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<td>IST impact CA</td>
<td>Subject mentioned that the support regarding Communication, Interaction</td>
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<td></td>
<td>and Socialization impacted their Cultural Adjustement in Host Country</td>
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<td>IST impact EE</td>
<td>Subject mentioned that the support regarding Communication, interaction</td>
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<td>and Socialization impacted their Work Engagement</td>
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<td>Support</td>
<td>Subject mentioned that the support they received was helpful</td>
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<td>Helpful</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Subject mentioned that there was support that they declined or were</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Declined/</td>
<td>promised and was not recieved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promised</td>
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<td>Support</td>
<td>Subject mentioned that the support they received was sufficient</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sufficient/</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Enough/</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Motivator/Why</td>
<td>Subject mentioned why they chose to relocate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>