MOTIVATIONS OF GLOBAL CAREERS AMONG EXPATRIATES IN GERMAN COMPANIES: A COMPARISON WITH THE YEAR 2002

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the motives of expatriates to go abroad, replicating and extending the part on expatriate motives of a study originally published by Stahl et. al (2002). Doing so, it allows to account for the change of motives between 2002 and 2015 of expatriates in German companies to accept an international assignment. Findings indicate that while the originally most important motives, “personal challenge” and “opportunities for professional development” are still the most important ones, there was some interesting development leading to the notion that boundaryless and protean careers gained in importance. Moreover, an analysis distinguishing between different age cohorts gives additional insights in the motivation and reasons to go abroad depending on the generation people belong to. Finally, all findings are discussed in the light of recent research and implications for future research are derived.

INTRODUCTION

With increasing globalization and a decentralization of value chains, the working environment of managers has changed dramatically. Employees are assigned abroad for different reasons, from developing international competencies over knowledge transfer to controlling foreign subsidiaries (Edström & Galbraith, 1977; Harzing, 2001). In response to this development, research on expatriate management has received extensive attention, especially in the last two decades (e.g., Harzing, 2001; Mayrhofer & Scullion, 2002; Shay & Baack, 2006; Stahl, Miller, & Tung, 2002; Takeuchi, 2010). Among the different subjects for analysis, some research has

also addressed the question of why an individual agreed to go abroad and accept an international assignment (e.g., Andresen, Biemann, & Pattie, 2015; Stahl et al., 2002). Expatriate management is an important field of research because in times of a “global war for talent”, many companies are struggling to attract qualified staff (Beechler & Woodward, 2009), which may also affect the context of global mobility. However, to successfully operate in foreign countries, it is crucial for companies to ensure that they have a highly motivated and skilled workforce. Although research on expatriate selection is very established and addresses the process of a company’s selection of the appropriate person for the job (e.g., Anderson, 2005; Caligiuri, Tarique, & Jacobs, 2009; Hays, 1974), accounting for the reasons why an individual chooses to accept (or decline) a job abroad is also essential to avoid later disappointments and expatriate failure. The latter is a global phenomenon that affects companies from all countries.

However, the vast majority of research on expatriate management remains very US-centered, and the academic discussion is often limited to North America (e.g., Benson, Pérez-Nordtvedt, & Datta, 2009; Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991; Daniels & Insch, 1998; Harrison, Shaffer, & Bhaskar-Shrinivas, 2004; Hays, 1974). Only a few studies focus on non-US samples (e.g., Bader & Schuster, 2014; Bader, 2014; Fee & Gray, 2011; Stahl & Cerdin, 2004). With regard to the relevance that international assignments have for multinational corporations (MNCs) outside the US, these studies were previously underrepresented (Scullion & Brewster, 2001) and continue to be. In addition, many studies often postulate their findings for “Western Expatriates”, claiming the generalizability of the results from North American studies (Selmer, 2006; Takeuchi, Wang, & Marinova, 2005). Nonetheless, this generalization is prone to not meet expectations because there are not only differences between US and European expatriates but also a variety of differences concerning socialization and national culture within Europe (Hofstede, 2001). For instance, the career paths and motivations behind going abroad differ significantly, even between France and Germany (Stahl & Cerdin, 2004).

Thus, it is reasonable to narrow the range of home countries. In this case, the goal is to examine German companies to gain a better understanding of what the **reason to go abroad** is for this group of expatriates. In economic terms, **Germany** is the most powerful nation in Europe. Germany's connectedness with the world regarding foreign direct investments (FDI) and revenues generated abroad is continuously among the highest within the European Union (Eurostat, 2015). Since 2011, German exports have continuously been above the level of € 1,000 bn; the foreign trade balance has not been negative since 1951, and in 2014, Germany showed a surplus of € 216 billion (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2015b). The globalization indicators published annually confirm this notion (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2015a). In the Global Fortune 500 list in 2015, there were 30 German companies represented, with Volkswagen on the verge of becoming the largest automaker in the world. Therefore, selecting **Germany** as the focus of an analysis regarding its expatriate workforce is a logical step.

In the early 2000s, Stahl et al. (2002) tackled these issues with a large empirical study, exploring the nature of the expatriate **career concept** among German expatriates. By asking individuals on overseas assignments to choose and rank five of twelve motives for the acceptance of their assignment, Stahl and his colleagues were able to derive a precise order and determine the relative importance of these motives. At that time, most expatriates viewed their international assignment as an opportunity for personal as well as professional development and career advancement. Stahl et al. (2002) reported the first signs of "**boundaryless careers**" (that is, a career that is independent from traditional career arrangements, typically a vertical progression within one firm), stating that their findings clearly support the "conclusion that **boundaryless careers** are indeed becoming the pattern for international assignees" (p. 223). Research on **motives to go abroad** is a crucial element because this provides answers to a fundamental question: what makes expatriates accept an **international assignment** and what does not?

However, some time has passed since Stahl et al.'s (2002) observation, and the world has changed in the interim. Not only did airfares decrease significantly, allowing more regular visits home, but new technologies also became available, now making video calls possible from virtually any smart phone. The number of international assignments has increased substantially since 2002, and new and innovative **assignment types** have evolved, such as “soft-landing packages”, which are designed to ease expatriates’ entry into certain countries (Brookfield Global Relocation Services, 2013). However, it is unclear whether the personal motives to go abroad have changed as well. In the late 1990s, the **expatriate career concept** experienced much change, moving towards more self-determined careers across organizational boundaries (Cagliuri, 2000; Harzing, 2001; Tung, 1998). It is reasonable to assume that this change has not yet ceased but has continued in the first decade and a half of the new millennium.

Against this backdrop, this article seeks to answer three major research questions. First, to gain a better idea of the current situation of expatriates in German companies today, it **replicates a part of the study** by Stahl et al. (2002), drawing on a sample of 335 individuals who are on or recently returned from international assignments. The aim is to analyze the expatriation motives of the current German expatriate generation. Second, the findings of Stahl et al. (2002) are compared with the findings of this study and then discussed in light of recent societal and organizational changes. Finally, with regard to **demographic changes** and differences between generations, data are additionally analyzed to compare the motives of three age cohorts. With an aging workforce and, at the same time, a shortage of skilled labor, German companies need to address issues that are related to the age of employees (e.g., Fraccaroli & Deller, 2015). Moreover, age cohorts are an index for factors influencing the attitudes and behavior of people belonging to different “generations” (Rhodes, 1983). Connected to these research questions is

the goal of showing avenues for future research and providing an underlying perspective regarding the reasons people may have offered in the studies presented in the remainder of this book.

Replication Study – Expatriation Motives by Stahl et al. (2002) Revisited

Hubbard & Armstrong (1994) define the **replication of a study** as “a duplication of a previously published empirical study that is concerned with assessing whether similar findings can be obtained upon repeating the study” (p. 236). The reasons why such duplication is useful are multifold. In a workforce context, for instance, Tulgan (2004) highlights the tremendous changes over time, for example, Baby Boomers becoming an aging group, which leads to a quickly aging workforce overall. Although these reasons may hold true in an expatriate context as well, other changes, such as new technologies and a more globalized world, suggest that it is reasonable to re-evaluate whether the motives identified by Stahl et al. (2002) remain current. **Replication studies** can either duplicate the original study as closely as possible, that is, performing a “straight” replication, or they can alter it (Hubbard & Armstrong, 1994). The latter can either extend certain parts or focus on specific details of the original study. Because this study is particularly interested in the motives for traveling abroad, instead of completely duplicating the entire survey from 2002, our focus is on one part only, that is, the different reasons why international assignees accept an international assignment and the respective relative importance of each motive. Stahl et al. (2002) grounded their study in older literature that indicated a change in global careers until 2002. For instance, twelve years before their study, Tung & Miller (1990) found that 93 percent of executives did not consider international assignments among their top priorities in terms of career advancement to senior management. In the early 2000s, it appeared that this conclusion was already outdated. This study focuses on these de-

velopments and revisits the motives of managers to accept an international assignment to consider the changes in expatriation since 2002. Similar to Stahl et al. (2002), this study does not explicitly formulate hypotheses. Instead, it examines the impact of various changes in recent years. First, individual **career development** and leadership development have become increasingly important (Brookfield Global Relocation Services, 2015), both for companies and staff. Second, new generations in the workforce develop new and different types of values that may lead to changes in motives. For instance, Smola & Sutton (2002) state that in contrast to previous generations, individuals of **Generation X** are “less loyal to the company and more ‘me’ oriented” (p. 378). Third, technological advancements and decreasing travel times at reasonable airfares make international mobility easier and more convenient than in the past. Therefore, in the following, the results of this study will be presented in the light of the changes since 2002 and also extended by an analysis of the different age groups.

Methodology

Data Collection and Measures

Data collection was part of a larger research project, in which the respective measures used by Stahl et al. (2002) were included in a **survey**. An online questionnaire was developed in early 2015 and distributed among potential respondents. E-Mail invitations were sent to individuals who were on or had recently returned from an international assignment, followed by a reminder two weeks after the initial invitation. Because there is no directory of German expatriates abroad, HR managers in several German companies were approached and requested to distribute the link leading to the online survey to their expatriates and recently returned workforce. Overall, this yielded a response of 335 usable data sets. As in the original study, respondents were provided with twelve different motives (see Table **1.2**) that potentially influenced their decision to accept an international assignment. They were then asked to select five of these

motives and rank order them, beginning with the most important motive when making the decision to travel abroad down to the fifth most important motive. Moreover, some demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, and the company's industry, were queried as well. All respondents were assured full anonymity with regard to their results, and no (financial) incentive was provided to motivate them to participate.

Sample and Comparison with Stahl et al. (2002)

As depicted in Table 1.1, the demographic characteristics are relatively similar to those of Stahl et al.'s (2002) sample. However, the share of female expatriates is higher, which appears to account for the increasing willingness of women to accept international assignments. Stahl et al. (2002) described such a development with regard to their own sample (p. 219), and it appears that this trend continues. In their annual reports, Brookfield Global Relocation Services (2013, 2015) observe this development as well. For instance, although in their first reports in the 1990's, the share of female expatriates was at approximately 10 percent, and in 2011, at 18 percent, the 2013 report states that this number has reached 23 percent. In terms of age, the majority is between 30 and 40 years old, works in a managerial position, and is assigned to South East Asia. Although age and managerial position are relatively similar in both samples, in this study, the percentage of assignments in South East Asia was higher, replacing North America as the No. 1 destination in 2002. In addition to Stahl et al. (2002), the respective nationality of the respondents is reported. Not surprisingly, with 81.3 percent, most expatriates are German citizens; 14.2 percent are citizens of another European country, with the majority being from Austria and Switzerland, although less than five percent hold a passport from the rest of the world, mainly from the US or Canada. Although there are certain differences in the

samples (mainly regarding gender and host country distribution), overall, the group of respondents is a solid basis on which to base comparisons with the study from 2002 and to draw conclusions regarding possible changes in the motivation to go abroad.

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Results and Discussion

In this section, all three research questions will be answered, and the results be discussed. First, with regard to the first research question, the descriptive analysis of expatriation motives will be presented. Thereafter, the second research question, that is, how the motives and their relative importance have changed compared with the study by Stahl et al. (2002), will be discussed in light of recent literature, after which opportunities for future research are outlined. Finally, extending beyond a replication of the analysis by Stahl et al. (2002), the results are analyzed independently for three different age cohorts to account for the challenges of an increasingly aging workforce, which represents several generations (Fraccaroli & Deller, 2015).

The most important reason to accept an international assignment is “personal challenge”, which is closely followed by “opportunities for professional development”. Almost nine in ten employees noted personal challenge among their Top 5, although half of all respondents made it No. 1. Therefore, the intrinsic motivation to go abroad appears not to have changed in the first 15 years of the new millennium. Although the results for rank 2 have also not changed, in 2002, the “importance of the job itself” and “monetary considerations” were named in the Top 5 by at least 50 percent of all respondents. Both motives appear to be much less important today, with 42.8 and 32 percent, respectively. In particular, “monetary considerations”, which Stahl et al. (2002) previously stressed as “only moderately important to the

decision to go abroad” (p. 220), have less influence on the decision to go abroad. In contrast, the “geographic location of the assignment” experienced an increase in relative importance, which indicates that expatriates today appear to be more particular regarding the place to go. Interestingly, “opportunities for future advancement”, which in 2002 was ranked No. 4, was passed by “anticipated positive career outcomes”, which in 2002 was ranked No. 7. This indicates that the actual outcomes directly related to career in any company are more important now than the potential opportunities of future advancement in the same company. When examining the bottom three, there has been only limited change, except that “family considerations”, which were No. 9 in 2002, now are at the end of the ranking and are included in the Top 5 by 10.5 percent of respondents. The respective rankings, both in terms of the Top 5 and No. 1, are depicted in Table 1.2.

In the following, the most remarkable changes will be analyzed in more detail, and the findings, discussed. These changes occurred, in particular, in the family domain (family considerations), the work domain (importance of the job itself and monetary considerations), and the career domain (opportunities for future advancement and anticipated positive career outcomes). Figure 1.1 illustrates the change in the relative importance of the motives between 2002 and 2015.

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Importance of the Job Itself and Monetary Considerations

Both the importance of the job itself and monetary considerations have experienced a tremendous decline in their ranking. However, the most notable change from 2002 to 2015 could be detected regarding the importance of the job itself. Although Stahl and his colleagues listed it

as No. 3, with more than two thirds of the respondents including it in their Top 5, it is now ranked No. 6 and is included by only approximately 42 percent of respondents. Two main explanations can be provided. One is related to the next section, which refers to the importance of career-related motives, which have greatly increased in importance. This may be the case because more and more MNCs consider international experience to be a prerequisite for career advancement (Brookfield Global Relocation Services, 2015). Thus, it appears plausible that some expatriates do not necessarily care about *what* they do abroad but rather *that* they can do something abroad to foster their individual careers. This notion was previously stressed by Tung (1998), who stated that most expatriates in her sample “appeared to place an intrinsic value on international assignments; that is, they value an overseas posting for the experience and the opportunities it brings for personal development and career enhancement” (p. 138). The other reason for this decrease may be that a job abroad is considered to be “interesting” because it involves a new working environment. Tasks are usually highly responsible and autonomous, providing opportunities for acquiring and using new **knowledge and skills** (Shaffer, Kraimer, Chen, & Bolino, 2012), irrespective of the actual content. Therefore, it may be that expatriates now consider “the importance of the job itself” as a given and thus incorporate other motives in their decision to go abroad because they appear more relevant.

Ten years ago, Bonache (2005) found that in contrast to domestic employees, expatriates “value more positively the extent to which their jobs have task variety and autonomy, provide opportunities for learning, allow them to apply their knowledge and give them enough responsibility” (p. 120). This finding may suggest choosing intrinsic over extrinsic motives. Interestingly, such systematic replacement of extrinsic motives with intrinsic motives did not occur in our sample. The importance of the job itself is an intrinsic motive, which is something that is inherently interesting and enjoyable, whereas monetary considerations clearly reflect an extrinsic motive, which is doing something because it leads to a separable outcome (Deci &

Ryan, 1985). Thus, a simple increase in the importance of intrinsic motives, that is, expatriates today simply prefer to do what they inherently like to do, cannot be the reason.

In terms of monetary considerations, the reason for the decrease may be rooted in the in general generous compensation packages expatriates have. A typical compensation package for a long-term assignment today contains a mobility premium, home leave allowance, cost of living allowance, and host housing allowance (RES Forum, 2015). This package should provide sufficient financial independence; thus, an expatriate does not have to worry about *if* he or she decides to go abroad. Therefore, the compensation package may have lost importance in the decision making process. In addition, Dickmann, Doherty, Mills, & Brewster (2008) found that MNCs tend to overestimate the financial imperative while underestimating career-related factors.

Family Considerations

Family considerations as a motive addresses the question regarding how much an expatriate was accounting for needs and demands of his or her family when deciding whether to accept an international assignment. Although not among the most important motives in the original study, the family domain appears to decrease in importance. In 2002, only one of five expatriates mentioned family considerations to be among the Top 5 motives to accept an international assignment. Today, this value decreased to one of ten. This finding is somewhat surprising because research found that the family is of great importance for global mobility, and greater awareness for the family can contribute to family adaption on international assignments (Haslberger & Brewster, 2008). Moreover, tensions within the family, for instance, regarding the safety of a host country, can have a negative impact on expatriate work performance (Bader,

Berg, & Holtbrügge, 2015). Therefore, there is an indication that this motive receives less attention in the decision making processes of people who are about to accept an international assignment.

It appears that family considerations are outweighed in their importance by other, more individual-centered motives. When examining the bare figures, it could be derived that expatriates do not care about their families when making a decision to go abroad. However, this would fall short of reality when considering two other things: first, the questionnaire design allowed the selection of only five of twelve motives, which were to be rank ordered. Therefore, for each respondent, seven motives remain unnoted, and it is not possible to derive whether family considerations would have been No. 6 or No. 12. However, from all respondents, nine of ten decided to not include this motive in the Top 5. Second, and partially related to the first point, the world has changed, and international assignments are sometimes considered to be mandatory or at least highly recommended to move up the ranks (RES Forum, 2015). This finding may explain the development in the Top 5, especially the rise in anticipated positive career outcomes. Finally, it must be noted that only people with actual international experience have been included in the sample, whereas Brookfield Global Relocation Services (2015) state that family concerns were “the single most noted reason for assignment refusal” (p. 13). Therefore, it is possible that a self-selection bias exists regarding people who accept an international assignment and those who do not. However, the goal of this research was to compare the importance in the motives of accepting an international assignment in 2015 with those in 2002, and the data show that family considerations experienced a decrease.

Opportunities for Future Advancement and Anticipated Positive Career Outcomes

Finally, when examining the career domain, an interesting pattern appears. Although “anticipated positive career outcomes” were ranked in their Top 5 by 39 percent in 2002, in the recent survey, almost 53 percent of the respondents rank this motive in their Top 5, accounting for an increase in rank from 7 to 4. Conversely, “opportunities for future advancement” decreased from 61 percent in 2002 to 51 percent. Both motives are related to the future career of an expatriate. However, whereas “opportunities for future advancement” are mainly limited to the assigning firm, “anticipated positive career outcomes” primarily target the individual career of the expatriate, regardless of his or her employer. Building on this finding, it can be speculated that this became a more important motive to accept an international assignment to invest in one’s own **human capital** that can be applied anywhere, rather than examining the advancement within the current employer-employee relationship.

This finding is in line with the increasing importance of the **boundaryless career** (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2001; Tung, 1998). Instead of aligning his or her career towards lifetime employment in one single company, the individual’s career “moves across the boundaries of several employers” (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996, p. 8). International experience is considered to be a competitive asset, which is beneficial for the external labor market (Stahl et al., 2002); in addition, it is something that is interesting (Tung, 1998). Although in 2002, this development could also be observed, the trend appears to continue. The switch in the importance of the abovementioned motives confirms two things. First, expatriates seem to have become managers of their own careers. Second, the danger for companies having invested in expatriates and their assignments are increasingly at risk for losing the **return of investment** in case the expatriates leave the company. Caligiuri & Lazarova (2001) previously warned that failed retention could lead to a loss of valuable **human capital** to a competitor. In light of this finding, this concern is more acute than ever, highlighting the importance of being aware to successfully retain expatriates in the company.

Differences in Age Cohorts

Although the results show a clear pattern in the (relative) importance of motives to go abroad, with regard to the different career and life stages of people of different ages, it is useful to more deeply examine the distributions of these motives for the three **age cohorts** in the sample.

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Rhodes (1983) argued that age cohorts are “not actually a variable but serve as an index for the underlying environmental factors that affect the attitudes and behaviors of a given cohort” (p. 330). Therefore, it is also likely that people in different age cohorts have a different perception of the importance of motives to accept an international assignment. As Table 1.3 illustrates, there are indeed differences in the responses between people younger than 30 years, those between 30 and 40, and those older than 40. However, they are not as strong as one might expect. The most interesting results are those concerning geographic assignment and monetary considerations, which were ranked as the No. 1 motive. None of the younger participants ranked these motives as No. 1, and inclusion in the Top 5 was smallest for this group. In particular, location becomes more important with increasing age, which can be considered an indicator of greater emphasis on the destination for older cohorts. Not surprisingly, the expected positive career outcome played a more important role for younger expatriates, with 69 percent of the below 30 and more than 87 percent of the 30 to 40 cohort including this motive in their Top 5. However, of the oldest cohort, almost 44 percent included this motive in their Top 5. Regarding the importance of the job itself, results are u-shaped, with 44.8 and 50 percent, respectively. The youngest and the oldest cohort appear to view this motive as being of greater importance than the middle cohort (35.8 percent). An opposite distribution, which is an inverted u-shape, can

be observed for anticipated positive career outcomes. Although 69 and 43.6 percent of the youngest and oldest generation, respectively, include this in their Top 5, it is noted by almost nine of ten respondents in the middle cohort. In combination with the previous result, it could be that in the 30 to 40 age group, what you are doing abroad is less important, as long as it is driving your career forward.

Overall, differentiating by age cohorts provides initial insights to disentangle this otherwise heterogeneously treated sample. However, without further variables testing causal relationships, the interpretation of the results needs to be performed with care. Therefore, despite revealing that there are potential differences, future research needs to address this and other topics, which will be addressed in the next section.

Contributions and Future Research

The goals of this study were to replicate the part on expatriation motives of the survey by Stahl et al. (2002) to obtain a recent overview of why expatriates of German companies decide to accept an international assignment and to detect whether there were any changes in the almost 15 years after the original study. Data confirm that some trends detected in 2002, especially the increasing importance of **boundaryless careers**, continued and caused some changes in the meaning of some motives. Conversely, the two most important motives, “personal challenge” and “professional development”, remained constant.

This study contributes to literature in various ways. First, by focusing on international assignees from German companies, it extends the view on “**Western expatriates**” by distinguishing between different groups of these expatriates from a European perspective in addition to the often applied US perspective; thus, it contributes to the often criticized issues of generalizability (Selmer, 2006). Considering that in the recent Brookfield Global Relocation Trends Survey, 43 percent of the companies assigning expatriates are from Europe and the Middle

East (Brookfield Global Relocation Services, 2015), this importance is confirmed. Therefore, future research should follow this path and distinguish specifically between the origin of the expatriates and their employers. Despite an increasingly international workforce and labor world, there are still important differences between countries and cultures that need to be accounted for. An important step could be to conduct future expatriate studies on a global level within one survey and then test whether there are significant differences between the nationalities of expatriates.

Second, by investigating different motives for the decision to go abroad, building on the work of Stahl et al. (2002), it allows the analysis of the development of the relative and absolute importance of the motives over time. In particular, although Stahl and colleagues refer to previous works and detect changes, this study continues to do so and allows the outlining of trends and patterns in global mobility. For instance, with regard to talent management, Festing and Schäfer (2014) state that because different generations have their own values and attitudes because of events shaping their lives, the corporate HR strategy needs to take these differences into account. From a practical global mobility point of view, this development is confirmed. The RES Forum (2015) states in its annual report that the “impact of global experiences is different from person to person (...) there may also be some trends in relation to age groups” (p. 43). In Stahl et al.’s (2002) study, 10 percent of the respondents were in the group younger than 30 years, and 62 percent were between 30 and 40. In this study, almost 10 percent are in the group below 30, and 47 per cent are in the group between 30 and 40. Hence, approximately 15 years later, according to birth year, there was a shift. Expatriates previously represented in the 30 to 40 group have now shifted to older than 40; most of the people below 30 should now either be between 30 and 40 or even above 40. Although they are not the same people who answered the questions, they still belong to the same age cohorts and generations, with older

generations gradually moving out of the sample and new ones (in particular, Millennials) entering.

The respondents' characteristics, goals, and values are represented in their answering behavior when ranking the motives. This is the third contribution of this study. By using the original age cohorts and analyzing the results for each group independently, it represents a starting point, which attempts to account for the importance of age for this type of research. Therefore, future studies should not only include age as a control variable but also focus heavily on different age groups and generational cohorts. In particular, in terms of **career development** and future advancement, this can be a valuable additional predictor. Moreover, it is necessary to do such follow-up studies periodically to detect and empirically corroborate this change. Finally, although the original study by Stahl et al. (2002) was a very suitable starting point, it investigated expatriate motives among many other variables and thus only briefly addressed this phenomenon in the discussion. This study assesses the motives in more detail and thus provides a valuable basis for both future research and practitioners, especially in terms of international staff selection. It is widely accepted that companies assign expatriates on international assignments for various reasons, such as developing managerial skills, controlling the subsidiary, or merely filling a vacant position (e.g., Collings, Scullion, & Dowling, 2009; Collings, Scullion, & Morley, 2007; Edström & Galbraith, 1977; Gong, 2003). However, it is crucial to assure a match between the job abroad and the person willing to go, that is, the individual motive. It appears logical that with a higher congruency between the expatriate's motive and the company's goals, the chances for a **successful assignment** increase. Regardless, many studies show that there remains minimal awareness regarding individual motives. Collings et al. (2009), for instance, note that although expatriate careers have emerged as another important

topic in research, the knowledge regarding individual motives for accepting international assignments and expatriates' perceptions remains very limited. This observation has not changed much since then, and further research is necessary.

Avenues for Future Research

Future studies can build on the findings of this study and analyze the antecedents as well as consequences of several motives and their respective importance with regard to the expatriation and repatriation process. This suggestion is particularly interesting when examining the motives referring to the expatriate's career, that is, what happens when he or she returns from the assignment after a couple of years. Doing so would allow observation of whether the expectations, which clearly accompany the rank-ordering the motives, are actually met.

Moreover, it would be valuable to analyze the differences between the importance of motives and the respective outcomes with regard to gender. The ratio of female expatriates continues to rise (Brookfield Global Relocation Services, 2013, 2015). In addition, because research suggests substantial differences between men and women, for instance, concerning career success and family responsibilities (Mayrhofer, Meyer, Schiffinger, & Schmidt, 2008), it would be worthwhile to analyze this from a global mobility perspective. Although there are some attempts to account for gender in expatriation (e.g., Cole & McNulty, 2011; Hearn, Jyrkinen, Piekkari, & Oinonen, 2008; Sinangil & Ones, 2003), considering the fact that more than half of the world's population is female and that increasingly more countries and companies are fostering female careers, research on this topic remains in its infancy.

Limitations

As with every study, this one has some limitations. First, despite its comparison between the years, 2002 and 2015, which illustrate several important changes in the motives of expatriation,

it is not a longitudinal study. Although both studies apply large-scale samples of an important target group, the individuals answering the questions are different. Therefore, it cannot be stated with certainty whether changes in the importance of motives are caused by a real change in the mindset of the population or whether they are rooted in the fact that the questions have been answered by different individuals in the respective years. However, with regard to the long interval between the two measurement waves, it is reasonable to assume that the change is due to a change in the mindset of the population.

Second, because this study replicates the survey by Stahl et al. (2002), the same items were used as in 2002. Therefore, respondents could choose from the twelve different motives that they were provided. However, it is possible that some new motives have arisen within the last fifteen years that this study cannot account for. Future research should continue to use these motives and, perhaps by using qualitative methods, determine whether there are new motives that have been neglected thus far. Additionally, the actual relation between motives and the decision to go abroad could not be tested, and there may also be a self-selection bias in this study because only those people who have accepted the assignment are included. Accordingly, future research can survey people before they make their decision and then compare the motives of those who went abroad and those who decided to remain in their home country.

Third, the range of target countries is very large. The majority of respondents were assigned to South East Asia; the remainder were spread all over the world. Although, this is a suitable approach because it captures virtually any possible assignment destination and accounts for the increased variety of current expatriation destinations, it does not allow for comparisons between the different sub-regions due to the uneven distribution. Therefore, it is not possible to analyze whether there are systematic differences in the motives to go abroad between, for example, expatriates on assignments in Africa versus in other countries of Europe.

Regardless of these limitations, this study has made some valuable contributions and will hopefully encourage future research on the motives of expatriates.

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