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Supervisor(s)	Dr.Sc. & Ph.D. Kari Liuhto and M.Sc. Teemu Itälinna		

**Abstract**

China has become the second most popular destination in the world for international assignments and the third most important location for Finnish subsidiaries. Despite its seeming popularity as a foreign assignment destination, China ranks first in the countries with the greatest challenges in adaptation for expatriates and the greatest percentage of expatriate failures during the assignment. It is also reported to be the country with the greatest challenges for the expatriate spouses and children. The adjustment of the expatriate family, especially the spouse has been found to be one of the most crucial factors that determine whether the international assignment is successful. In fact, the failure of the spouse to adjust is reported to be the number one reason for the failure of the foreign assignment, whereas successful spousal adjustment has a significant positive impact on the adjustment of the expatriate. For effective adjustment of the expatriate, it is important to understand the factors affecting spousal adjustment so that the expatriate family can adjust to the new environment and tasks quickly and effectively to minimize any further costs.

The objective of this study was to find out how spousal adjustment affects the adjustment of the expatriate and their performance during an assignment in China. More closely, the study seeks to find out what the components that facilitate and hinder spousal cross-cultural adjustment are, as well as what kind of spillover effects exist between home life and expatriate work life. The data was collected by interviewing five Finnish expatriate couples, two of which were accompanied with young children, and who had previously completed a foreign assignment in China and since then returned to Finland.

The results for the most part support earlier empirical research on the topic of spousal adjustment. More closely, the findings indicate that the most important factors toward spousal adjustment include language fluency, expatriate adjustment, parental demands, support from non-HCNs and favourable living conditions. Furthermore, this study found that spouses can have a major influence on the adjustment of the expatriates, mainly in a positive way. Including the spouse seems to be one of the most important factors towards successful adjustment of the expatriate and thus successful international working experience. The findings also point out some areas of improvement that would ensure more successful international assignments in the future.

Key words	Spousal adjustment, expatriate adjustment, international assignment
Further information	







**UNIVERSITY  
OF TURKU**

Turku School of  
Economics

**SPOUSAL CROSS-CULTURAL  
ADJUSTMENT IN INTERNATIONAL  
ASSIGNMENTS**

Master's Thesis  
in International Business

Author:  
Hanna Mänty

Supervisors:  
Dr.Sc. & Ph.D. Kari Liuhto  
M.Sc. Teemu Itälina

29.10.2018  
Turku

The originality of this thesis has been checked in accordance with the University of Turku quality assurance system using the Turnitin OriginalityCheck service.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

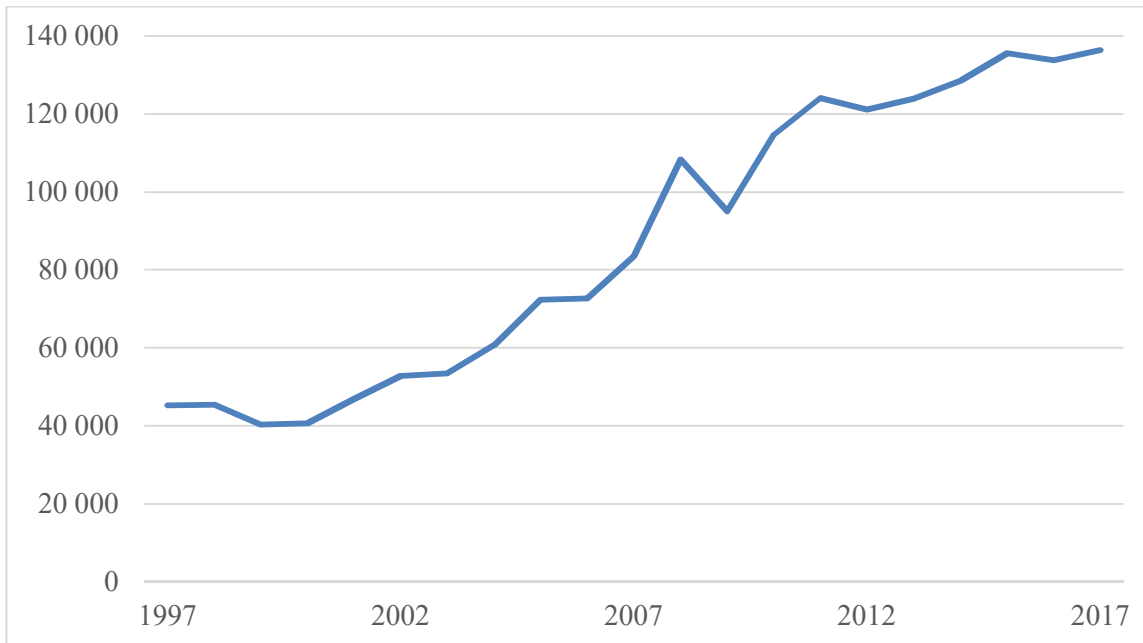
## 1.1 The growing number of expatriate families in China

Since the late 1970's, China has been reformed from a centrally planned economy to an economy that is more market-driven. During these 40 years, China's economy has grown enormously, becoming the second largest economy in the world with a trend to continue expanding. The fast and continuous growth has been enabled by for instance the large population and growing middle class. (Zhang & Liu 2009.) In 2017 the GDP in China grew 6.9%, which is an increase of 0.2 percent from the previous year (BOFIT 2018). It is estimated that if the Chinese economy will continue growing at the speed it has during the last decade, it will catch up with the United States by the end of 2025. Despite this, the GDP per capita remains at a relatively low level. (Zhang & Liu 2009.)

One of the drivers of China's fast economic growth during the last four decades has been foreign direct investment (FDI). In 1978 China began an economic renewal process that opened up the country for integration into the world's market economy (Sutela & Vartia 2005). The initial step in the process was the devaluation of the Chinese currency Renminbi (RMB) followed by the introduction of FDI. These stages were a solid foundation for increased growth in exports, which in turn enabled China to maintain a stable foreign exchange market. The export promotion renewal included liberating the foreign exchange market, boosting foreign direct investments and industrial restructuring to take advantage of China's comparative advantages in international trade (Yao 2006). This was done to create more jobs in the country, to meet the shortage of domestic capital and foreign currencies, and to present new, advanced technology and management experiences to replace the previously traditional practices (Zhang & Liu 2009). In the 1980's China established special economic zones which obtained more favourable terms for foreign investments than other areas in the country. Because regulations continue to vary from one area to another, the environment for investments has not been perceived as transparent. (Kaitila 2017.)

The amount of FDI relative to GDP was at its highest point in 1993 and has since decreased. The main reasons for the decrease are the fast growth of GDP and the increase in demobilisation of profits by foreign companies. Despite the relative decrease, the actual amount of FDI has increased rapidly. (Kaitila 2017.) Today, China is the third largest host economy of FDI in the world, after the United States and Great Britain. (UNCTAD 2017.) As seen in Figure 1, FDI inflow to China was more than US \$130 billion in 2017 (UNCTADstat 2018).

Figure 1 Annual FDI inflow to China – in millions of US\$



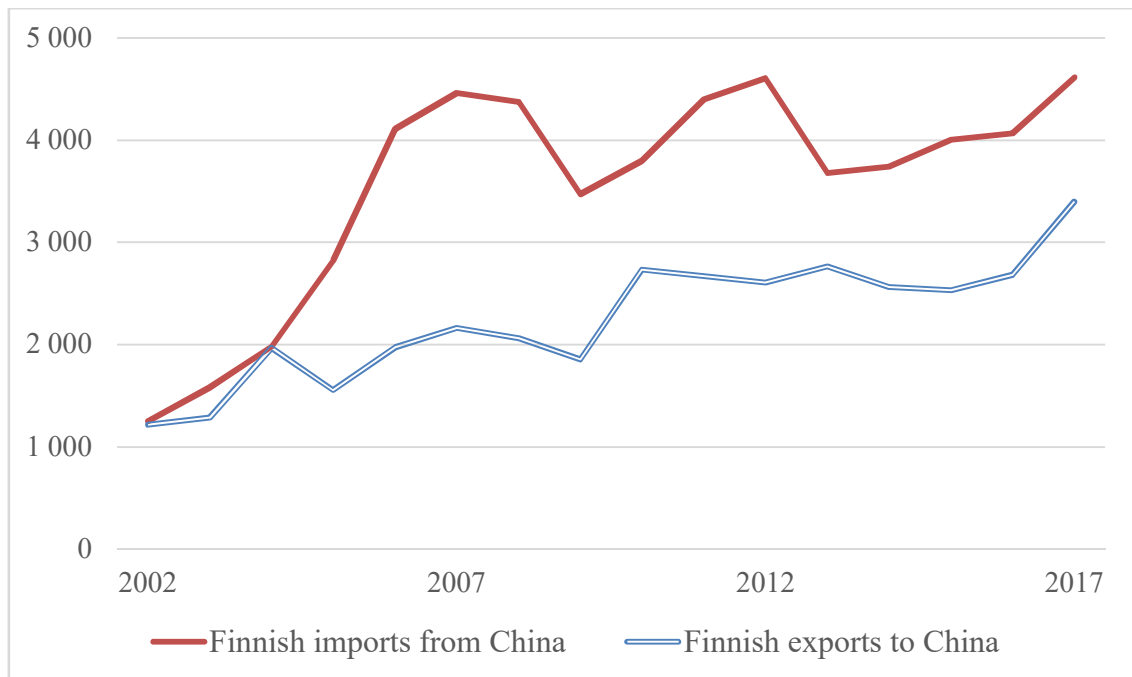
Source: UNCTADstat (2018).

As the FDI inflows are growing, also Finnish companies are increasingly aware of the business possibilities in the Chinese market. In 2017 Finnish exports to China were valued at nearly 3,000 million euros which accounts for 5.2% of the total value of Finnish exports (Finnish Customs 2018). As seen in Figure 2, the value of exports to China have gradually increased since 1996 but in recent years there has not been considerable growth. This is partially explained by the economic recession during 2009–2016 that caused the growth of GDP to slow down (Kaitila 2017).

According to the Global Relocation Trends survey for 2016, China is the second most popular destination after the United States for international assignments and the most popular amongst emerging markets (GMAC 2016). According to Statistics Finland (2017), by revenue, China was the third most important location for Finnish subsidiaries in 2015. The same year there were 228 Finnish subsidiaries operating in China (Statistics Finland 2017). Most Finnish expatriates are located in major cities, such as Shanghai and Beijing, where these subsidiaries are located (Finnish Business Council 2017).

Despite its seeming popularity as a foreign assignment destination, China ranks first in the countries with the greatest challenges in adaptation for expatriates and the greatest percentage of expatriate failures during the assignment. It is also reported to be the country with the greatest challenges for the expatriate spouses and children. (GMAC 2016.) This has been found to cause several issues for the expatriate assignment.

Figure 2 The value of the Finnish trade with China – in millions of €



Source: Finnish Customs (2018).

The adjustment of the expatriate family, especially the spouse has been found to be one of the most crucial factors that determine whether the international assignment is successful (Tung 1981). In fact, the failure of the spouse to adjust is reported to be the number one reason for the failure of the foreign assignment, whereas successful spousal adjustment has a significant positive impact on the adjustment of the expatriate (Black & Stephens 1989).

According to a Black et al. (1990, for reference see Ali et al. 2003), about 80% of expatriates worldwide are married, and about 70% bring their family on the international assignment. This kind of transition can be extremely difficult for the whole family. They must start anew in a foreign environment, often in a cultural environment that is strongly different from their own familiar culture. The expatriate family must leave their friends, extended family and other support groups behind, thus having to build an entirely new social support network.

According to the Global Relocation Trends survey, challenges in expatriate adaptation to China were caused by cultural differences, language, pollution, public transportation, family adjustment and quality of food (GMAC 2016). The cultural differences between Finland and China are tremendous, as seen in Appendix 1.

It has been evaluated that sending an expatriate on an international assignment costs the company on average two to three times more than hiring a local employee (Kauppinen 1994). On top of this, the expatriate's failure to adjust leads to direct costs in relocation

as well as indirect costs that are more difficult to quantify such as damaged reputation of the company, lost business opportunities and a weaker ability to attract best candidates for overseas positions in the future. (Black & Gregersen 1991a; Dowling et al. 2008.) For effective adjustment of the expatriate, it is important to understand the factors affecting spousal adjustment so that the expatriate family can adjust to the new environment and tasks quickly and effectively to minimise any further costs.

## **1.2 Earlier empirical research on expatriate spouse adjustment**

To have a more profound understanding of the existing knowledge on spousal adjustment and its effect on expatriate adjustment, this chapter aims to discuss the methodology and key findings on earlier empirical studies on this topic. The earlier research is further demonstrated in Appendix 2. Compared to the amount of research on expatriate cross-cultural adjustment process, efforts on understanding the spousal adjustment and the factors relating to it have been minimal. This is despite the fact that it has been recognised that spousal adjustment has an essential role in determining the success of the foreign assignment. (Shaffer & Harrison 2001.)

The theoretical foundation of cross-cultural adjustment research has to a large extent been based on Oberg's (1960) research about cultural shock. Oberg conceptualised cultural shock as a result of the stress and anxiety occurring from contact with a foreign culture – as well as the feelings of loss and confusion resulting from losing many of the familiar cultural cues and social rules (Black & Gregersen, 1991b).

Research by Black and Stephens (1989) followed by Black and Gregersen (1991a; 1991b) found a significant positive relationship between expatriate and spouse adjustment. The study of Black and Stephens (1989) was conducted by surveying 220 American expatriate managers in Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong, finding that the spouse's willingness to go on the international assignment has a positive impact on spousal adjustment. The latter study by Black and Gregersen (1991b) was conducted by surveying 321 American expatriate managers registered with the American Chambers of Commerce in England, France, Germany, Japan, Korea, the Netherlands, Taiwan and Hong Kong. The study found pre-departure training initiated by the spouse and support from family and host-country-nationals during the assignment have a positive effect on spouse interaction adjustment.

The study of Punnett (1997) categorised expatriate spouses into three categories based on their needs: (1) female spouses who do not expect to work during the international assignment, (2) female spouses who expect to work and (3) male spouses who expect to work during the international assignment. The study consisted of a survey sent to 111 expatriates and 89 spouses as well as a smaller scale focus group interview and in-depth

interviews. All of the categories specified above were identified to have specific needs and antecedents to adjustment.

The empirical study of Caligiuri et al. (1998) which consisted of 110 expatriates found that family characteristics and family adjustment have a spillover effect on expatriate adjustment. The study also supported the spillover of the expatriate's work adjustment into the family's adjustment, thus suggesting that the relationship is reciprocal. The study of Takeuchi et al. (2002) also supported the spillover theory by suggesting that there are possibilities for both negative and positive synergy in the adjustment process.

Shaffer and Harrison (2001) developed a model for the determinants of expatriate spouse adjustment. The model was based on the empirical study of 221 expatriates and spouses around the world. The model identifies three sources of adjustment: individual, interpersonal relationships and environmental. The study concludes that some skills that might have served the spouses well in the home country, in reality had a null or a negative effect on their adjustment in the host-culture. These skills include social and general self-efficacy (i.e. self-confidence), extended family support and prior work experience. In addition, the study found that developing local language skills and building social networks with the locals are helpful for the adjustment.

Copeland and Norell (2002) found that support networks consisting of host-country nationals rather than support from the home country facilitated adjustment of the spouse. The study consisted of surveying 194 women who had temporarily moved to a foreign location because of their spouse's jobs. The study supports the importance of social support for the relocated women. In addition, the study found that family characteristics were an antecedent to adjustment and that adjustment was facilitated by cohesive family structure and spousal involvement in the decision about the relocation. Accordingly, Ali et al. (2003) conducted an empirical study with 275 expatriate spouses and found that certain family characteristics including cohesion and family adaptability had an effect on adjustment. In addition, personality traits, especially open-mindedness and emotional stability had an impact on spousal adjustment.

Takeuchi et al. (2007) studied the effect of parental demands and perceived cultural novelty on the adjustment of the expatriate and the expatriate spouse. The research was conducted by surveying 170 Japanese expatriates and their spouses during a foreign assignment in the United States. The findings highlight the role of parental demands, cultural novelty, and the necessity to pay attention to the dyadic relationships between expatriates and their spouses to be able to ensure a successful foreign assignment.

Lauring and Selmer (2010) investigated the positive impact and involvement of female spouses on the expatriate's career during the international assignment. The study was conducted by interviewing and observing expatriates and their spouses in Saudi Arabia. The findings suggest that spouses were active in trying to support the expatriate's career by being socially involved and creating networks in the host culture. In addition, the

spouses were active in trying to get involved in the company's decision-making regarding holidays, pay and working schedules of the expatriates.

McNulty (2012) found, after having studied 264 expatriate spouses in 54 host-locations, that professional and social support, addressing the dual-career subject, and alleviating marital stress, were perceived by expatriate spouses as the most important for identity re-construction and their cross-cultural adjustment. In addition, the study suggests that in most expatriate assignment, both types of support for the spouse were lacking.

The research of van Erp et al. (2013) studied the role of three cross-cultural personality characteristics, which included: (1) emotional stability, (2) social initiative, and (3) open-mindedness as coping resources for the adjustment of expatriate couples. The findings revealed that these three traits are each related to certain facets of adjustment. Emotional stability was found to be positively associated with the psychological adjustment of both parties. In addition, a discovery of a resource compensation effect was made. This means that in the compensatory process one partner's lack of adequately high levels of a certain personality characteristic can be compensated for by the other partner's high(er) levels of this characteristic. For instance, the spouse's high(er) levels of emotional stability for job performance can compensate for the negative consequences of the expatriate's low levels of this characteristic.

The research of Collins and Bertone (2017) concludes that the global relocation challenges the trailing spouse's central identities. The degree to which this challenge affects the spouse, will determine their ability to redefine their social roles and personal identities, which are important for successful adjustment. Men were more prone to experience challenges relating to their work identity, whereas for women the challenges were more complex, ranging from threats to their work identity to challenges in their role as a mother or wife.

In regard with earlier research on the topic of spousal adjustment, it is clear that there is a link between spousal adjustment and expatriate adjustment. Furthermore, it seems evident that spousal adjustment can have a major effect on the adjustment of the expatriate.

### **1.3 Objective and structure of the study**

The focus of this study is on the expatriate couple and more specifically on the influence of the spouse's adjustment on the expatriate. The objective is to find out how spousal adjustment affects the adjustment of the expatriate during assignment in China. The main research question is defined as follows:

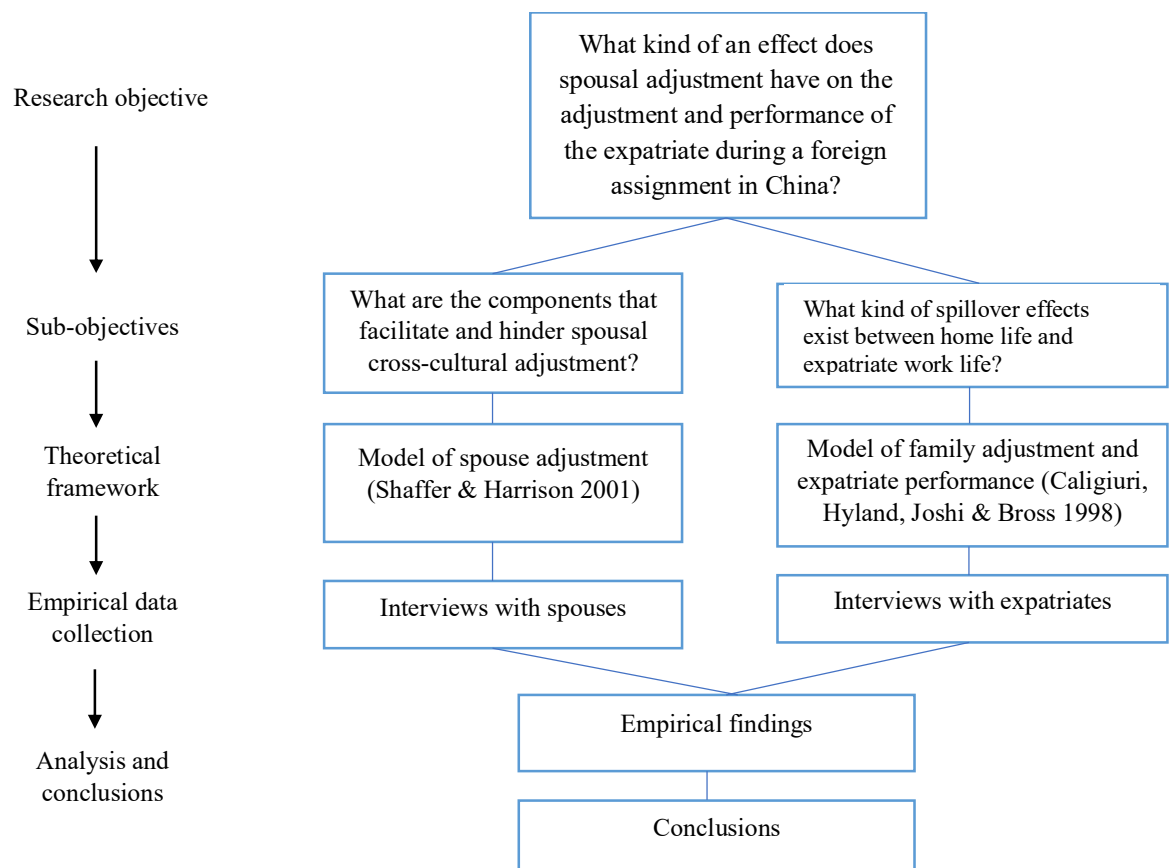
What kind of an effect does spousal adjustment have on the adjustment and performance of the expatriate during a foreign assignment in China?

To answer the main research question, there are two supporting research questions:

- What are the components that facilitate and hinder spousal cross-cultural adjustment?
- What kind of spillover effects exist between home life and expatriate work life?

The study will focus on adjustment in the host culture and therefore expatriate selection and pre-departure training will be left out of the scope of the study. The study will neither include the adjustment back to the home country, after the assignment is completed. Figure 3 presents the structure of this study and linkages to theory.

Figure 3 Structure of the study



The topic of spousal adjustment spillover on the expatriate is important because, as previously mentioned, China is the most difficult country for expatriates and expatriate families to adjust to, but still a very popular location for overseas assignments (GMAC 2016). As is seen in Appendix 1, Finnish and Chinese cultures are very distant, which might cause additional difficulties in adjustment. As spousal adjustment is one of the most

important factors that determine the success of the overseas assignment, to minimise unnecessary costs related to sending the expatriate abroad, it is important to understand the factors facilitating and hindering the adjustment of the expatriate spouse.

Chapter 2 will begin by introducing the concept and earlier research of cross-cultural adjustment. The chapter discusses the various stages in adjustment that individuals often go through during their time abroad as well as culture shock, which is in most cases the most dramatic of these stages. The first supporting research question, ‘What are the components that facilitate and hinder spousal cross-cultural adjustment’ will be covered in Chapter 2.2, by presenting a model of spousal adjustment that includes different factors that affect the adjustment of the spouse in the host environment. The chapter will also present the different facets that adjustment can be divided to, and that are affected by the different adjustment factors. The aim of Chapter 2.2 is to provide a framework that seeks to explain what kind of effects the host culture usually has on the expatriate spouse.

The second supporting research question, ‘What kind of spillover effects exist between home life and expatriate work life?’ will be investigated in Chapter 2.3 which presents a model of the spillover effect and explains the influence the spouses have on each other. This chapter aims to provide insight to the reciprocal relationship in adjustment influence between the expatriate and the spouse based on previous research. Furthermore, the aim is to discuss the ways in which the expatriate and spouse affect each other’s adjustment through the home and work environments.

The empirical evidence will be gathered through two rounds of interviews with both spouses and expatriates using a semi-structured interview style. This data will then be analysed thoroughly to find key materials that support the research objectives.

## **1.4 Key definitions**

The term ‘expatriate’ has been defined as a voluntary and temporary migrant, who is usually from an affluent country, and who is residing abroad for purposes of business, a mission, teaching or leisure (Cohen 1977). In the past expatriates were sent abroad to solve specific issues and carry out tasks that the management felt the local talent was not able to accomplish. This tactical approach leads to neglecting the strategic implications of the assignment, for both the company and the expatriate. Today on the other hand, expatriate assignments have strategic value in many functions: in succession planning and leadership development; in technology and innovation; in coordination and control as well as information exchange and diffusion. (Stroh et al. 2005.) Multinational companies also justify the use of expatriates by developing their global management skill, protecting technological know-how, preventing undisclosed information from leaking and transferring the company’s core competencies to its foreign subsidiaries (Vance & Paik



2006) Strategic value is added especially in leadership development, as managers are increasingly seen as assets worth developing and investing in. (Stroh et al. 2005.)

Vast majority of expatriates are married and about 70% bring their family on the international assignment (Ali et al. 2003). Thus, the ‘expatriate family’ consists of the expatriate, the spouse and in many cases the children. In most cases, the spouse must give up their career or academic pursuits to be able to follow the expatriate on the foreign mission. Compared to the expatriates, spouses are generally more directly involved with the general environment in the host-culture and commonly have completely different responsibilities as in the home country. Furthermore, being isolated from the support group of friends and family back home and dealing with the new foreign environment adds to the stress of the spouse. (Shaffer & Harrison 2001.)

‘International assignments’ are typically divided into two groups based on the motive of the assignment. The assignments can be either based on a need – for example to solve a specific issue, or they can be based on learning and personal development of the expatriate. (Sinkkonen 2009.) Assignments can also be classified according to the length of the assignment. Short-term assignments can typically last up to three months. And the motive is commonly to fix a certain problem or to supervise a project. Extended assignments can last up to a year and typically have similar motives as short-term assignments. Long-term assignments last typically from one year to five years and they are carried out to fill more permanent, clearly defined positions. (Dowling et al. 2008.)

‘Culture’ has been defined in numerous ways throughout the years. One of the most widely accepted of these definitions is by Hofstede (2001, 9) who defines culture as “*the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another*”. In general, people are seen to be from different cultures if their ways of life as a group vary significantly from the ways of other groups (Adler 2002).

‘Cross-cultural adjustment’ can be defined as the degree to which the individual is comfortable with the various aspects of the new host culture (Oberg 1960; Black 1988). Furthermore, cross-cultural adjustment is the process that an individual goes through to integrate in the host country. The greater the difference between the familiar at home culture and the new host culture, the more difficult is the adjustment process. (Sinkkonen 2009.) The definition and process of cross-cultural adjustment will be further explained in Chapter 2.1.

‘Culture shock’ can be defined as the clash of home culture with the local culture (Sinkkonen 2009). Oberg (1960) states that culture shock is derived from anxiety resulting from losing all of the previously familiar symbols, signs and habits of social interaction.

## **2 CROSS-CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT OF EXPATRIATE SPOUSES**

### **2.1 Introduction to cross-cultural adjustment**

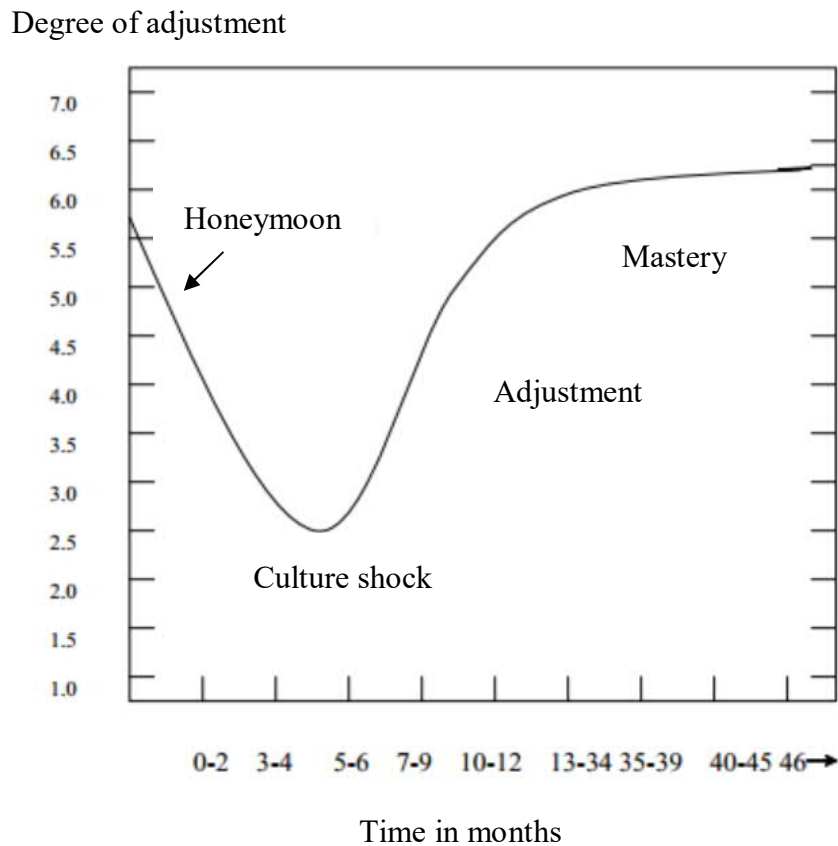
Adjustment is needed when expatriate families arrive in the new host country and realise that behaviours appropriate in the home country are no longer applied in the new country (Black & Gregersen 1991a). Because of this, initially, when companies send expatriate families overseas, many of them do not know how to correctly and efficiently behave in the new host culture (Black & Mendenhall 1991). Thus, in order to cope in the new environment, individuals should develop an in-depth understanding of cross-cultural matters. Factors that lessen the uncertainty of what kind of behaviour is culturally acceptable enable adjustment (Black & Gregersen 1991a).

Cross-cultural adjustment includes adjusting to work, to interacting with host-country nationals as well as to the general non-work environment (Adler 2002). Several different factors affect these three facets, and they can be divided to individual factors, job factors, organisational factors and non-work factors (Stroh et al. 2005). However, as many expatriate spouses do not have a job during the international assignment, their adjustment is generally not affected by the work environment.

The process of adjusting in regard to time passed on the foreign mission is referred to as the degree of adjustment. It can be viewed both subjectively and objectively. Subjectively speaking it refers to the degree of comfort felt by the individual in the role, as well as the degree to which they feel that they are adjusted to the requirements of that role. Objectively, it refers to the degree that the individual has mastered the requirements of the role and is able to validate their adjustment through their performance. (Black 1988.)

The degree of cross-cultural adjustment is generally perceived to follow a U-shaped curve. The U-curve model was originally introduced by Lysgaard (1955, for reference see Black & Mendenhall 1991) and it describes the curvilinear relationship between adjustment and the time passed on the assignment. The study of Norwegian Fulbright students in the United States found that adjustment can be described in form of a U-curve. The degree of adjustment consists of various stages of adjustment: as seen in Figure 4, the curve includes four different phases: (1) honeymoon, (2) culture shock, (3) adjustment and (4) mastery (Black 1988). The most impactful and difficult phase is the culture shock stage, which was notably studied by Oberg (1960).

Figure 4 The U-curve of cross-cultural adjustment



Source: Black & Mendenhall (1991, 227).

As Figure 4 shows, in the beginning of the international assignment, expatriate families are typically excited and interested in experiencing the new culture, keeping their spirits up (Adler 2002). Black and Mendenhall (1991) call this phase the ‘honeymoon’, which is explained to be caused by three factors. First, there is a lack of time for a significant number of negative incidents to accumulate during the initial phase of adjustment. Second, the individual may not recognise the feedback given as negative since it may be given differently as in the home country and finally the individual’s willingness to protect their self-concept may cause them to ignore negative cues and feedback. The individuals do not know enough about the culture they are in to be aware of the negative signals they receive from locals (Stroh et al. 2005).

The initial phase of excitement is typically followed by a stage of discouragement, also referred to as a ‘culture shock’, in which differences that before felt exciting and fun, are no longer that but rather stressful (Adler 2002). Culture shock can be defined as the clash of home culture with the local culture (Sinkkonen 2009). Oberg (1960) states that culture

shock is derived from anxiety resulting from losing all of the previously familiar symbols, signs and habits of communication.

*“Culture shock tends to be an occupational disease of people who have been suddenly transplanted abroad. Like most ailments, it has its own symptoms, cause, and cure.”* (Oberg 1960, 177.)

In this phase the number of negative cues has become so great that the individual cannot ignore or deny them any longer (Stroh et al. 2005). The feeling of disillusionment is accompanied by anxiety and frustration from too many new and uninterpretable cues. Communication with the locals seems to become more difficult and the individual might experience signs of an identity crisis. The identity crisis is especially common for expatriate spouses, as they in most cases are not working during the assignment but have had to leave their work in the home country. (Adler 2002.)

In the third phase of the adjustment process, the ‘adjustment’ phase, the individuals begin to adapt to the culture feeling more positive and less frustrated. In this phase, incremental learning and adjustment is minimal as the individual’s adjustment is generally complete, although some difficulties might still occur. (Black & Mendenhall 1991.) In this phase the individual will start feeling ‘at home’ in the new culture, understanding the ways of life and having few issues in communication (Sinkkonen 2009).

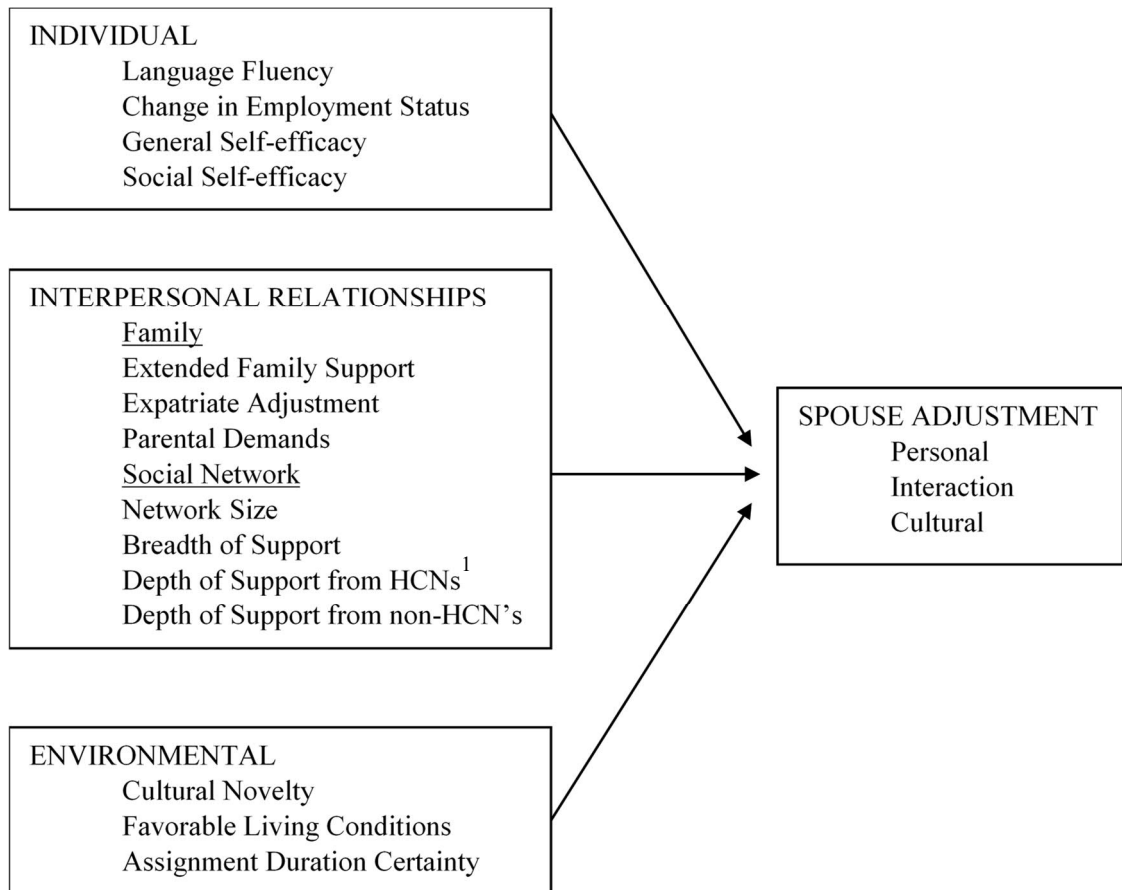
In the final phase, the ‘mastery’, the individuals are able to perform their tasks and function properly and effectively without anxiety due to cultural differences. This means that after a certain point, the amount of time spent in the host-culture, will not correspond to the level of adjustment. It should also be noted that the lengths of the phases differ between people, depending on for example personal characteristics and previous experience. The U-curve model acts as a simplified and generalised representation of the adjustment process. (Black & Mendenhall 1991.)

## **2.2 Determinants of spousal adjustment**

Cross-cultural adjustment from the expatriate’s point of view has generally been viewed as having three different facets or determinants. These are adjustment to work, social environment and general environment. These facets are affected by several different factors that influence the level of adjustment. (Stroh et al. 2005.) In the perspective of the spouse there can be found three similar facets of adjustment, which are: personal adjustment, interaction adjustment and cultural adjustment. These facets of adjustment

are affected by individual factors, factors related to personal relationships and environmental factors, which are laid out in Figure 5. (Shaffer & Harrison 2001.)

Figure 5 Model of spouse adjustment



Source: Shaffer & Harrison (2001, 245).

The model seen in Figure 5 combines the two dimensions of cross-cultural adjustment presented by Black et al. (1991), interaction and cultural. Interaction adjustment refers to adjusting to relationships or interactions with the locals on the foreign assignment whereas cultural adjustment refers to adjustment to various environmental settings including local customs, habits, and transportation. During the process of categorizing the spousal experiences, it was noted that a large fraction of responses did not fit into either of the facets. This fraction of responses was characterised by a more inward-looking type of adaption that was felt deeper and more on an individual level as part of becoming more ‘at-home’ in the foreign culture. This led to identifying a third facet, personal adjustment. (Shaffer & Harrison 2001.) In the following chapters each of these dimensions is presented in more detail.

<sup>1</sup> HCN refers to host-country nationals i.e. locals.

### **2.2.1 Individual factors**

Individual factors affecting the facets of adjustment, according to Shaffer and Harrison (2001) include language fluency, changed employment status as well as general and social self-efficacy. Zhang and Peltokorpi (2016) found that language fluency has great implications on expatriate adjustment. As the findings suggested that language fluency has an impact on both work and non-work adjustment, it can be assumed that issues in non-work adjustment are similar for the spouse. Often firms offer language training only for the expatriates, not the spouses even though in many cases the spouses are the ones in more immediate contact with the locals (Adler 1997).

Because of a lack of a shared language, individuals in a foreign environment with insufficient language skills were able to develop fewer interactions with the locals than those who were fluent. They also were not able to develop extensive social networks with the locals, which is found to facilitate interaction adjustment. Language fluency also plays an important role adjusting to the cultural environment, as individuals with poor language skills had difficulties in terms of food, restaurants, recreation and other non-work-related matters. (Zhang & Peltokorpi 2016.) Mohr and Klein (2004) have also suggested that knowledge of the host-country language is especially crucial for general and interaction adjustment, and not as much on personal adjustment. Shaffer and Harrison (2001) propose that all of the spouses taking part in the study that had a positive international experience had acquired at least an elementary level in the local language prior to the move. Accordingly, Takeuchi et al. (2007) argue that spousal language proficiency is a positive predictor of general adjustment

Change in employment status represents a shift in the role of the expatriate spouse, in most cases from being employed to being unemployed (Shaffer & Harrison 2001). Spouses tend to feel bored with a great amount of time and no meaningful role to fulfil in the foreign environment (Adler 1997). Often the spouse has had to leave a significant career behind in order to accompany the expatriate abroad and thus it is critical for the adjustment that the spouse is offered involvement in the assignment beyond shopping and tourist excursions (Fish & Wood 1996).

Lauring and Selmer (2010), in their study of expatriate spouses in Saudi Arabia, argue that an important determinant of the outcome of the international assignment is the change in gender roles. The expatriate wives in many cases had to leave their own careers behind in the home country. In addition, the wives that were used to being an active and equal participants in the labour market, felt uncomfortable being unproductive and lacking freedom in Saudi Arabia, where they could not work. Consequently, the expatriate wives were involved in social activities that they felt gave them meaning, value and challenges to their everyday life.

Self-efficacy or self-confidence has been found to play a crucial role in cross-cultural adjustment. Individuals with high self-efficacy tend to persist longer in trying out new behaviours that are being learned, even if those attempts are not successful. This process of learning by successful and failed attempts facilitates adjustment by reducing uncertainty. (Black et al. 1991.) The model of spouse adjustment in Figure 5 divides self-efficacy in two parts: (1) general self-efficacy and (2) social self-efficacy. General self-efficacy refers to performance while social self-efficacy deals with confidence in building relationships and networks (Shaffer & Harrison 2001). The effect of self-efficacy on adjustment is also questioned, as it is compared to the other factors, the most stable characteristic that is less influenced by external events (De Cieri et al. 1991).

### **2.2.2 *Interpersonal factors***

According to the model of spousal adjustment by Shaffer and Harrison (2001) factors related to interpersonal relationships are divided into two categories: (1) family factors include extended family support, expatriate adjustment and parental demands whereas (2) social network factors include network size, breadth of support, depth of support from host-country nationals and depth of support from non-host-country nationals.

Extended family support is especially important for the spouse's adjustment, as they typically lack face-to-face contact with the extended family members and often do not have a work-related support group (Shaffer & Harrison 2001). Despite this, Copeland and Norell (2002) argue that spouses with more local sources of support adjust better than those who rely on extended family support. In addition, friends have a much greater impact on the spouse's adjustment than any other social group – children, spouse or extended family.

During the international assignment the immediate family is often the main source of social support for the spouse (Caligiuri et al. 1998). In addition, Black and Gregersen (1991b) argue that social support from the immediate family improves the adjustment of the spouse as it reduces uncertainty and can provide social and mental comfort. They further argue that the most important source of support for the spouse during the assignment could be the expatriate employee. The expatriate family might feel isolated after losing much of the existing support groups from home. Because of this the spouse and the expatriate tend to become more dependent on each other for interaction and support. (Harvey & Buckley 1998.) In this type of a situation it is likely that the impact the spouse and the expatriate have on each other's cross-cultural adjustment is especially prominent (Takeuchi et al. 2002). The following quote by one of the expatriates interviewed for the study of Shaffer and Harrison (2001, 250–251) exemplifies the situation that expatriates, and their spouses often face abroad:

*“It’s difficult to make close friends. So many expats have their guard up, not wanting to become too close . . . Although I have many acquaintances, I have nowhere near the close friends I had in the States. My spouse, therefore, has become my rock.”*

Because the expatriate and the spouse are so vital for each other’s coping during the assignment, the lack of support between the spouses can have significant negative effects. McNulty (2012) states that excessive travelling for work for the expatriate, which leads to the isolation of the spouse will escalate the negative impact of the expatriate experience. The negative effect is further strengthened by the lack of support networks and extended family.

Besides the expatriate, also children can have a significant impact on spouses’ commitment to the international assignment as well as their emotional stability. The international assignment places a specific parental demand especially on the spouse that has the potential chance of breaking the family. (Kupka & Cathro 2007.) The effect of children on the adjustment of the spouse can be twofold; on one hand the families with young children might be more exposed to the everyday difficulties of living in a foreign environment in terms of for example food and healthcare. On the other hand, children may force the family to go out and interact more with the locals, as the children will need to go to a local kindergarten or school. This will consequently help the whole family to develop social networks in the host culture, enhancing their adjustment. (Mohr & Klein 2004.)

The study of Shaffer and Harrison (2001) found that spousal adjustment can be facilitated by accompanying pre-school-aged children on the assignment. This allows the spouse to maintain a familiar role and their identity due to the strong dependence the children in this age have on their parents. Having the role and familiar routines provides the expatriate spouse with value and identity. The children also provide the parents an opportunity to meet and get involved with the local community through the social activities of the children. Hence, parental demand can in the best case decrease the effects of spousal identity problems and help build social networks in the host country.

Takeuchi et al. (2007) claim that parental demands have an effect only on the spouse’s general adjustment, not on that of the expatriate. Furthermore, the relationship between parental demands and spousal adjustment to the general environment is seen to follow a U-shaped curve. Low parental demands lead to greater spousal adjustment, and as parental demands grow, the level of spousal adjustment decreases, until it starts increasing again with high parental demands. The lack of a relationship between parental demands and expatriate adjustment can be partly explained by the strong gender rules in many countries. Takeuchi et al. (2007) studied expatriates and their spouses in Japan, where it



is generally accepted that the role of the wife is to take care of the kids. This is supported by the study of Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) in which Japan ranks very high on the Masculinity Index.

Social networks with the locals have found to be an important facilitator in cross-cultural adjustment. Similarly, as expatriates, spouses also need to build their social networks in the new environment, but in most cases without support from the company. (De Cieri et al. 1991.) According to Black and Gregersen (1991b), the spouse's self-initiated cultural training had a positive effect on interaction adjustment. It can be assumed that spouses that express interest to learn about the host culture will also be more likely to try to develop relationships with the local people. The social networks that spouses build in the host culture can be thought to have three dimensions that influence adjustment: size, breadth and depth. The first dimension is simple; the larger the social network of the spouse is, the more support they are potentially able to receive. Breadth of support refers to the number of different social resources that are provided for the spouse. Depth of support refers to the quality of relationships with the members of the social network. (Shaffer & Harrison 2001.)

Support from host-country nationals is important for the spouse for several reasons: (1) host-country nationals understand and know the host culture, (2) they can provide information about the host culture, (3) they can provide feedback on appropriate and inappropriate behaviours and (4) this type of information that host-country nationals can provide has the ability to lessen the uncertainty and stress of the spouse, regarding the general culture (Black & Gregersen 1991b). Copeland and Norell (2002, 255) identify social support as a *"buffer against stress and a positive associate of emotional well-being"*.

The social network of the expatriate spouses generally consists of both non-host-country nationals, such as other expatriate spouses, and host-country nationals. (Shaffer & Harrison 2001.) Without the organisational support, expatriate spouses do not have as many opportunities to engage in social relationships with locals as their partners. This is especially true in a case where the expatriate family lives in company-provided housing amongst other expatriate families, isolated from the locals. This style of living increases the risk of the expatriate spouse to become socially isolated in the foreign culture thus hindering adjustment. (De Cieri et al. 1991.) However, it has also been shown that the nationality of the people in the social network does not necessarily have an impact on the adjustment. Women who spent more of their time with others of the same nationality did not differ in adjustment from those whose social network mainly consisted of host-country nationals. This finding challenges the view that living in an 'expat bubble' would be harmful for adjustment. (Copeland & Norell 2002.)

### 2.2.3 *Environmental factors*

According to Shaffer and Harrison (2001), the environmental factors which have an effect on the adjustment of the expatriate spouse include culture novelty, favourable living conditions and assignment duration certainty.

Cultural novelty refers to the differences in the customs and habits between cultures. Several studies (Black & Stephens 1989; Black & Gregersen 1991b) have found cultural novelty to have a significant negative impact on spousal adjustment. Cultural novelty and cultural differences have been notably studied by Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) as well as Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997). Cultural novelty is most strongly related to general adjustment. The lack of significant relationship between cultural novelty and interaction adjustment can be explained by two reasons: (1) culture novelty is most directly perceived in terms of food and living conditions, and (2) it is possible that spouses do not interact with host-country nationals enough to perceive the cultural differences. (Black & Stephens 1989)

The effects of cultural novelty on the adjustment can be lessened with cultural training. Black and Gregersen (1991b) argue that company-provided cultural training had a positive impact general adjustment, although it did not affect the spouse's interaction adjustment. On the other hand, it was found that after a certain point, the greater the number of hours of cross-cultural training provided by the company, the worse was the spouse's general adjustment. In addition, firm-provided training has not been a common practice for spouses. In the study of Black and Gregersen (1991b) only 10% of the spouses who took part in the study had received pre-departure training. The percentage was slightly larger for the expatriates, of whom 25% took part in company-provided cross-cultural training before the departure.

Even though the practice of cultural training for spouses is not very common, many of the spouses that were studied by Mohr and Klein (2004) emphasised the necessity of receiving cultural training before going on the assignment. They felt that the training forces the spouses to deal with potential issues that might arise during the time abroad, beforehand. Therefore, the level of uncertainty caused by these possible issues would be reduced and the level of comfort increased, improving the conditions for adjustment.

De Cieri et al. (1991) did not find cultural novelty and perceived cultural distance to be a strong predictor of adjustment for expatriates and their families. They argue that this may be due to two factors. First, the home and host culture in the study were both advanced societies socially and economically, which can lead the spouses to view the cultures as quite similar. Second, previous international experience might have influenced the expatriate spouses in dealing with different cultures.

Favourable living conditions refer to the degree of how well the accommodations match the living standards to which the expatriate family is accustomed to in the home

country (Shaffer & Harrison 2001). This is especially challenging in countries that are less developed than the expatriate family's home country. Black and Gregersen (1991b) suggest that different and inadequate living conditions may be a source of uncertainty and stress concerning for example cleaning, shopping and food storage.

A specified duration of the assignment is preferred by most expatriate spouses, as it allows them to feel more in control of what is happening on the assignment, as well as allows them to better establish a role of behaviour (Shaffer & Harrison 2001).

#### **2.2.4 Facets of spousal adjustment**

Cross-cultural adjustment from the expatriate's point of view has generally been viewed as having three different facets or determinants. These are adjustment to work, social environment and general environment. These facets are affected by factors including individual, job, organisation and non-work factors. (Stroh et al. 2005.) In the perspective of the spouse there can be found three similar facets of adjustment that were presented in Figure 5, in the beginning of Chapter 2.2. These three facets include (1) personal adjustment, (2) interaction adjustment and (3) cultural adjustment. The factors that were specified in Chapters 2.2.1, 2.2.2 and 2.2.3 all affect these different facets of adjustment. Personal adjustment was added as a third dimension to the model of spousal adjustment, after the original two facets, interaction and cultural adjustment, presented by Black et al. in 1991. It was found that some of the identified spousal experiences did not fit the dimensions of interaction and cultural adjustment. These experiences were felt as more 'inward-looking' type of adaptation and reflected a personal change in the spouse. (Shaffer & Harrison 2001.)

Interaction adjustment refers to relationships and interpersonal associations with host-country nationals (Shaffer & Harrison 2001). It is typically the most difficult dimension for individuals to adjust to, because it is likely that differences in values, assumptions and cultural contexts will come up in these interactions (Stroh et al. 2005). In addition to cultural differences, difficulties in social adjustment in a cross-cultural environment arise from communications misunderstandings. Especially in occasions where the difference between the cultures is great, the greater is also the possibility of miscommunication. This is because different cultures are accustomed to coding and decoding messages differently. (Adler 2002.) One of the greatest effects on the spouse interaction adjustment is on the social support from host-country nationals. In addition, family support has a facilitating effect on interaction adjustment. (Black & Gregersen 1991b.)

Cultural adjustment refers to adjustment to specific environmental and situational conditions in the new host culture, such as local customs (Shaffer & Harrison 2001). Spousal cultural adjustment is significantly affected by cultural novelty and favourable

living conditions, but it was discovered that social support from host-country nationals or from the family does not affect spousal cultural adjustment. (Black & Gregersen 1991b.)

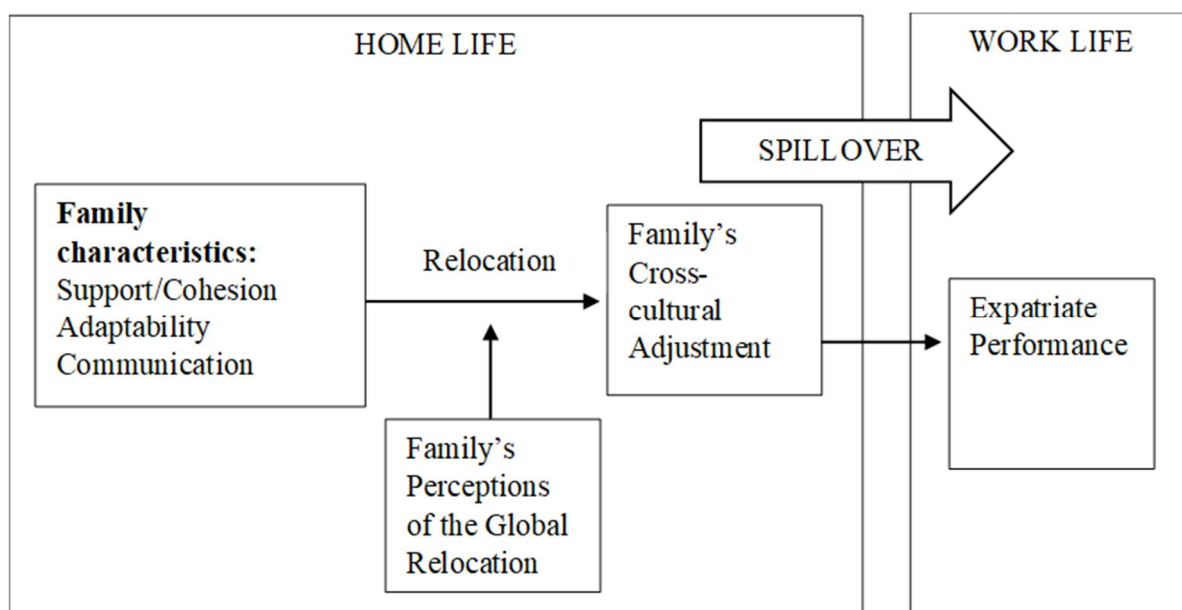
The factors that influence adjustment can affect more than one of these facets on some level or another, some more, some less. For example, according to Zhang and Peltokorpi (2016), language fluency can affect both interaction and cultural adjustment, but it is difficult to say whether it is more impactful for one of the facets. For the sake of clarity, in this study each set of factors will be seen to affect one facet. Therefore, individual factors will be assessed in affecting personal adjustment, interpersonal factors affecting social adjustment and environmental factors affecting cultural adjustment.

### **2.3 Effect of spousal adjustment on expatriate performance**

Apart from knowing what determinants affect the expatriate spouse's or family's adjustment, it is necessary to understand the effect that this adjustment has on the adjustment of the expatriate. Caligiuri et al. (1998) examine the role of the family in determining the outcomes of the international assignment. As seen in Figure 6, the adjustment of the whole family, including the expatriate in the home life 'spills over' to the expatriate's work life affecting expatriate performance. Thus, to be able to understand the influencers of expatriate performance, one should look at the determinants of adjustment in the home life.

The model presented in Figure 6 consists of 4 primary components. The first two, 'family systems theory' and 'double ABCX theory' are related to the family's adjustment. In Figure 6, family systems theory includes family characteristics that seek to explain how the family adjusts to the new environment. On the other hand, the double ABCX theory deals with how the family's perceptions about the relocation affect the adjustment. These two components make up the third box in Figure 6: the family's overall cross-cultural adjustment. The third component is based on the 'spillover theory' which is found in between the home life and work life sections of the model. It presents the effects the family life of the expatriate that are passed on to the work environment. The final component is the component that is predicted in the model, expatriate performance during the assignment.

Figure 6 Family adjustment and expatriate performance



Source: Caligiuri, Hyland, Joshi & Bross (1998, 600).

Family's cross-cultural adjustment, which is the result of family characteristics and family perceptions about the assignment, as well as the spillover theory will be presented more closely in the following subchapters.

### 2.3.1 *Family systems theory*

Family systems theory suggests that the causal direction of experiences affecting adjustment of the expatriate and the spouse are reciprocal. The family system is a set of elements, relationships that exist in an equilibrium which is dynamically balanced. Each member of the family reciprocally affects the psychological state of the others. It is further suggested that the spouse's intentions to relocate internationally were generally independent from the expatriate's views, while the expatriate's intentions were highly dependent on the spouse's opinion. (Brett & Stroh 1995.)

The family system is affected by pressures both from inside and outside. Inside the family system pressure can be generated from presence of children and outside pressure can lead from the expatriate's career in the foreign location. (Brett & Stroh 1995.) Hence, things that can affect an individual family member, for example the children's maladjustment to school or insufficient living conditions leads to affecting the whole family system through the equilibrium (Caligiuri et al. 1998).

The model in Figure 6 identifies three different family characteristics that are found to be important in relation to family's ability to adjust to a stressful situation such as a

foreign assignment. These characteristics include family support, family adaptability and family communication (Olson 2000). Caligiuri et al. (1998) found that these three dimensions are related to the cross-cultural adjustment of the expatriate family during an international assignment.

Family support or cohesion is defined as the “*emotional bonding that family members have towards one another*” (Olson 2000, 145). Too high levels of cohesion lead to the family members’ inability to form social networks outside of the family unit. During global relocations an appropriate level of cohesion is crucial in order to re-establish social networks in the new culture hence being able to adjust better. On the other hand, cohesion levels that are too low might cause emotional stress for the family members as they are not able to recognise and react to each other’s needs. (Caligiuri et al. 1998.) Supporting this, Copeland and Norell (2002) argue that spouses who described their families as cohesive adjusted better to the host country.

Family flexibility or adaptability has been defined as the “*amount of change in its leadership, role relationships and relationship rules*” (Olson 2000, 147). The family’s ability to adapt in situations of stress is critical in order to adjust during the foreign assignment (Caligiuri et al. 1998). To support this, Rosenbusch and Cseh (2012) argue that the greater the family flexibility is, the lower is the need for psychological adaptation. Furthermore, the change in family roles was seen to have the greatest impact on the adjustment of the expatriate family. Many of the spouses included in the study of Rosenbusch and Cseh (2012) stated that they felt lost because they lacked a professional identity and a specific clarification of their family identity and consequently the feeling of being lost had a negative effect on the atmosphere at home. Also, the children who took part in the study were confused about the adjustment to their new school and new gender role expectations. Rosenbusch and Cseh (2012) argue that the difficulty in ‘understanding the new role’ could have major implications for the family system. According to Copeland and Norell (2002), however, family adaptability is not related to adjustment of the expatriate spouse. It was found that change in leader roles and family rules did not affect individual adjustment of the spouses.

According to Olson (2000), family communication is a facilitating dimension for family cohesion and family adaptability. Having good communication skills allows family members to better express themselves on topics such as how to evolve the cohesion or flexibility of the family unit. Assertiveness within the family can be a learned skill. Families that share their emotions and feelings with one another are found to adjust better to the foreign environment. Therefore, it is important to stay connected as a family during the international assignment. The key is to help and communicate with one another. The members of the family need to be understood within the family before they can be understood outside of the home environment. (Rosenbusch & Cseh 2012)

### 2.3.2 *Double ABCX theory*

Black and Stephens (1989) claim that spouse opinion about the international assignment has a great positive impact on their own adjustment. Similarly, the study of Caligiuri et al. (1998) found, using the double ABCX theory, that the moderator between the family's cross-cultural adjustment and family characteristics, is the perception of the relocation that the family possesses. Earlier research (Black et al. 1991) has shown that an overly optimistic opinion about going on the assignment which is not fulfilled when arriving in the new culture, will lead to a disappointment by the spouse who feels cheated and will lose motivation to adjust to the new country.

The studies by McCubbin and Patterson (1982, for reference see Caligiuri et al. 1998), based on the original ABCX theory by Hill (1949), propose that three factors, A, B and C interact to create base for the family's cross-cultural adjustment. These three factors consist of (A) the stressor, (B) the family's resources to be able to deal with the stressor and (C) the family's perceptions about the stressor. McCubbin and Patterson further propose that in addition to having to cope with a major stressor, for example the international assignment, families have to deal with several pile-up stressors. Many of these pile-up stressors can be found in the model of spouse adjustment introduced in Chapter 2.2. The stressors can relate to for example poor language fluency, parental demands, difficulties in networking or inadequate living conditions.

Brown (2008) claims that the most anxiety-causing stressors for the expatriates and their spouses during the assignment were: (1) not spending enough time with the spouse, (2) not having close friends in the new culture, (3) uncertainty about the future after the relocation, (4) feeling isolated and cut-off in the new environment and (5) coping with too many conflicting demands.

Not spending enough time with the partner was found to be especially stressful for the expatriates, but it did cause issues for the spouse as well, by for example lowering their self-esteem. Uncertainty about the future after the relocation was identified to cause stress for both the expatriate and the spouse. The expatriate is concerned about gaining career benefit from their international assignment and to know the next step, whereas the spouse is more concerned about his/her future career prospects after the assignment. Any uncertainty about what might happen in the future and whether the spouse can re-employ themselves after the assignment, is likely to cause stress for the spouse. In addition, Frame and Shehan (1994) found that spouses had significantly greater pile-up of stressors and far fewer resources to cope with them, as opposed to the expatriates.

The double ABCX theory suggests that the amount of emotional stress that the family must cope with is derived from two sources. It is a combination of family characteristics that facilitate or hinder adjustment and the perception of the family about the international assignment that determine the adjustment, not the stressor alone. (Caligiuri et al. 1998.)

The perception about the stressor is important in determining how well the family and the spouse can cope with stressful event. The spouse might perceive the change as negative for several reasons beyond the mere altered financial state of the spouse: (1) the spouse may lose their social support system of extended family and friends back home, (2) the spouse might experience adjustment difficulties due to loss of professional identity, (3) have problems within the family due to the children's reluctance to relocate, (4) experience difficulty in finding a job for the duration of the international assignment and (5) experience stress caused by professional isolation and losing a career. (Frame & Shehan 1994.)

However, if the international assignment is perceived as a positive change, the coping behaviours the family displays will be more positive. Copeland and Norell (2002) argue that pre-move family discussions about the relocation were not related to the spouse's individual adjustment. However, the spouses' perceived involvement in the decisions about going on the relocation was positively related to their adjustment. Thus, it seems that it is important for the spouses to feel in control and of mattering in the decision-making. Supporting this, Black and Stephens (1989) argue that the spouse's opinion about the relocation is positively related to spousal interaction adjustment. According to Brett and Stroh (1995), families most willing to relocate consist of a spouse who is highly educated, older and include no children living at home.

According to Ali et al. (2003), the view about accepting the international assignment had been found to be dependent on the view the spouses have on whether they can receive adequate support from the expatriate's company. Support received from the company had an effect on both individual and social adjustment of expatriate spouses. It also directly contributed to the amount of intercultural interaction they engaged in. The support that companies offer can range from intercultural training and providing information sources about the location. It was discovered that effective support prior and during the assignment is of central importance to the adjustment of the spouse. Ali et al. (2003) point out however, that although an increasing number of companies accept the value of supporting expatriate spouses, the participating spouses in their study reported that they were not happy with the amount of support they received from their partners' international companies. These findings are supported by the research of Harvey (1997) which studied dual-career expatriates and their adjustment during and after a relocation. It was found that company provided support for the spouse is extremely important for spousal adjustment.



### 2.3.3 *Spillover of adjustment*

The most prevalent view of the relationship between work and family interfaces is that their effects spill over from one to the other (Lambert 1990). Spillover theory suggests that the expatriate's work experiences can affect the spouse's psychological state and vice versa (Brett & Stroh 1995; Caligiuri et al. 1998; Takeuchi et al. 2002). Spillover theory examines this reciprocal relationship that can be found between the home and work domains (Crouter 1984). Rosenbusch and Cseh (2012) found that some of the expatriates involved in the study felt unease about their job stability and personal value within the company, which influenced their view of adjustment at home heavily. Many spouses observed the stress felt by their partners, which exposed the spillover effects of expatriate work life on the home environment.

On the other hand, the spillover theory suggests that spouses can have a significant consequence on the adjustment and performance of the expatriate. The theory further suggests that, as the causal direction can be from the spouse to the expatriate, firms developing programmes to improve expatriate adjustment should direct these programmes towards the spouses (Brett & Stroh 1995). Crouter (1984) argues that the extent to which the employee's family life affects the work life is determined by the individual's role in the family. Women tend to be more impacted by family demands, and the stress caused by the demands then spill over to the work environment.

Spillover effects can be either positive or negative (Lambert 1990). Positive spillover effects focus on the supportive nature of the family and those skills that prove useful in work life, that are learned at home. In contrast, spillover effects can also be negative. Family demands might inhibit the worker from working longer hours or being flexible on the hours. Negative spillover effects from home to work are more common for families with young children that need extra attention and caring at home. (Crouter 1984.)

Lambert (1990) argues that spillover effects between the family and workplace can be either direct or indirect. Work can affect family life indirectly through the impact on the expatriate's behaviours and attitudes at work, which are then carried into the family environment. Similarly, certain family characteristics can spill over to affect the worker's behaviour at the workplace. Directly, the effect is clearer. Job demands might directly affect the worker's ability to maintain close ties and communication within the family. In the same way family demands, such as taking care of children, can directly affect the worker's energy levels and motivation at the workplace. There is an important difference in whether the spillover effect is perceived as direct or indirect, in terms of defining the problems these effects might cause. Direct spillover effects call attention on the objective conditions of the home environment or the workplace, whereas indirect effects focus on the subjective experience of the individuals. (Lambert 1990.)

Especially the spouses tend to feel isolated from social interactions with their support group of friends and family and dealing with the new foreign environment adds to the stress. (Shaffer & Harrison 2001) Because of this feeling of isolation and the loss of existing support groups the spouse and the expatriate tend to become more dependent on each other for interaction and support (Harvey & Buckley 1998). In this type of a situation it is likely that the influence the spouse and the expatriate have on each other's cross-cultural adjustment is especially prominent (Takeuchi et al. 2002).

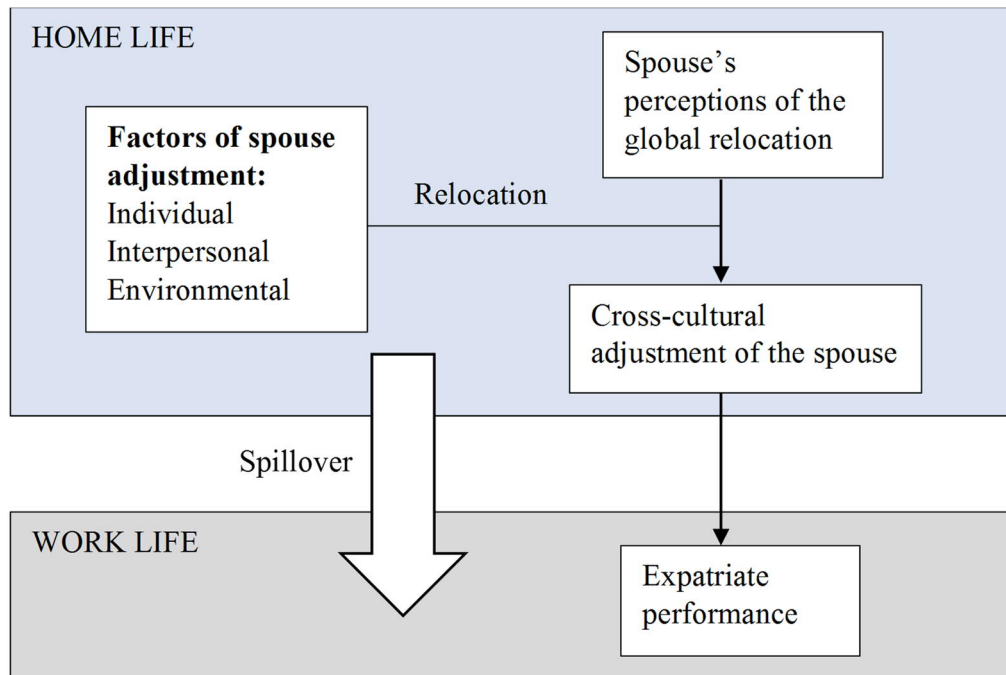
When spouses become more adjusted to the general environment in the new culture, they acquire psychological and emotional resources that can be passed over to the expatriate. For example, spouses may have valuable information about the environment, such as how to acquire social networks or efficiently use public transportation. The help of the spouse in the best scenario can help the expatriate socialise to the host culture. (Takeuchi et al. 2002.) Caligiuri et al. (1998) suggest that the overall adjustment of the expatriate family has a mediating effect between family characteristics and the expatriate's work adjustment.

## **2.4 Spillover of spousal adjustment on expatriate performance**

To be able to examine the effect of spousal adjustment on the adjustment of the expatriate, this study combines the models presented in Section 2.2 and Section 2.3 (see Figure 5 and Figure 6). This combined model of spousal adjustment spillover is seen in Figure 7. The models are combined in a way that the family systems theory and family characteristics included in the 'Family adjustment and expatriate performance' model (Figure 6) are replaced by the determinants of spousal adjustment presented in the 'Model of Spouse Adjustment' (Figure 5).

The change was done to better target the scope of the study, which is on the adjustment of the spouse, rather than on the whole expatriate family. Children in the family are included in the study, but rather than trying to find out how they affect the expatriate's adjustment directly, the study seeks to find out how the children affect the spouse's adjustment, which in turn affects the adjustment of the expatriate. As the effect of the family on spousal adjustment is one of the determinants on spousal interpersonal adjustment, it will be included in the study in this way. This change is clarified in Figure 7 which shows the two models combined.

Figure 7 Model of spousal adjustment spillover



Source: Modified from Caligiuri, Hyland, Joshi & Bross (1998, 600) and Shaffer & Harrison (2001, 245).

First, the model in Figure 7 includes the factors of spousal adjustment introduced in Chapter 2.2. Second, the model includes the Double ABCX theory, which proposes that various stressors can influence the adjustment of the expatriate family, or in this occasion, the spouse. Another key finding in the theory is that the perception of the family and especially the spouse has a significant effect on the stressor, hence influencing the ease of adjustment on the foreign assignment. Finally, the model includes the spillover theory introduced in Chapter 2.3, which suggests that the adjustment of the spouse has a strong, direct impact on the adjustment of the expatriate. Although it has been found that spillover effects are reciprocal (Brett & Stroh 1995; Caligiuri et al. 1998; Takeuchi et al. 2002) this study will mainly focus on the spillover effects from spouse to expatriate, i.e. from home life to work life.

## **3 METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Research approach**

Research can be defined as a systematic process which allows us to know more about a topic than we did before engaging in the process (Merriam 2014). Cross-cultural adjustment consists of several different dimensions and is based on subjective, unique experiences. As each individual, to a certain extent, adjusts to a new environment and culture differently, reflecting expectations and previous experiences, it was found appropriate to conduct the research as qualitative. Furthermore, qualitative approach was seemed suitable for this study, as it was expected that the spouses and expatriates would have various different opinions and details related to their personal experiences. It was important to choose a flexible approach that would enable the topics to be studied comprehensively.

The key difference between qualitative and quantitative approach is not the quality of the research, but the procedure. Qualitative research has long been compared with quantitative research and defined by what it is not (Eskola & Suoranta 1998). Qualitative research is not about finding facts by statistical methods or other quantitative ways, but rather reflecting different perspectives on research objectives and knowledge to get a more holistic understanding of the issue (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2002). Furthermore, qualitative research often deals with understanding and interpreting issues, whereas quantitative approaches focus on explaining, testing hypotheses and analysing statistics (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008).

A typical example of a qualitative research is focusing on understanding a person's experience or behaviour in a certain scenario (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2002). Flick (2009) argues that a solution to separating qualitative research from quantitative is by looking at the research problem. If the researcher is interested in the frequency and distribution of a certain scenario, quantitative approach should be chosen. If the researcher on the other hand is looking to find out more about the subjective experiences of the people in this scenario, qualitative approach is more viable. In qualitative research the research plan lives and develops with the research. At best qualitative methods make it possible to study the process in a certain phenomenon (Eskola & Suoranta 1998).

Qualitative methods are often planned as open and adaptive to changes that might happen in the field when collecting data. The openness enables the approach in data collection to be comprehensive rather than clearly focused and limited as in quantitative research. (Flick 2009.)

## 3.2 Methods used

### 3.2.1 *Interview model*

A popular method for collecting data in qualitative research is the use of interviews. In most cases interviews take place face-to-face, but it is also possible for them to be conducted over the phone or online. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008) As the objective of the study is to gain a deeper understanding of the issues affecting adjustment of expatriate spouses on a personal level as well as how the expatriate is affected by the changes in the home environment, the interview method is seen as most suitable. In all methods of qualitative research, some and in occasion all data are collected by interviewing. Interviews are needed when it is not possible to observe behaviour, feelings, or how people understand the world around them. (Merriam 2014.)

Generally, research is aimed to be generalizable and this is achieved by sampling. In a case study however, sampling in many cases is not possible or preferred. Often in case studies, the cases are selected to allow access to the data, not by random sampling. (Silverman 2009.) The interviewees chosen for this study are therefore not called a sample, but more of a discretionary selection of interviewees, as there was no statistical generalisation done in the selection process. The aim is to find new, deeper information on the phenomenon of adjustment.

The method chosen for gathering data for this study is a semi-structured interview. Semi-structured interviews differ from both structured and unstructured interviews. In semi-structured interviews the topics to be covered, people to be interviewed, and a general list of questions to be asked are determined before the interview. (Ghuri & Grønhaug 2002) Compared to structured interviews, semi-structured interviews often require more skill from the interviewer as the information collected is generally more personal, attitudinal and value-laden (Jancowicz 1995). Furthermore, as opposed to structured interviews, the interviewees can answer to the questions freely, not using pre-determined answer alternatives (Eskola & Suoranta 1998). One of the main disadvantages of structured interviews is the lack of flexibility. According to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008), structured interviews might be too restraining to be used as a main source of data in qualitative research. Therefore, semi-structured interview method was deemed the most appropriate for the study, as it allows the interviewee to answer freely and bring about notions not directly asked.

### 3.2.2 *Formulation of interview questions*

Interview questions should provide material to help answer the research questions. The research questions should be related to the interview questions, but not equal. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008.) The questions were derived straightforwardly from the theory. The theoretical background can therefore be seen in the questions that are divided into categories based on the themes. The interviews were however not limited to these questions formulated beforehand. As the interview model was semi-structured, the researcher was free to ask questions related to these topics whenever there could be additional interesting information. The full list of pre-determined questions for both parts of the interviews can be found in Appendix 3.

The first part of the interview was aiming to collect material to support the first sub-objective. This interview was held with the spouse, without the expatriate's presence. The questions were derived from the theoretical framework, more specifically the model presented in Chapter 2.2. The interviewee could then freely talk about the themes with the help of questions provided by the researcher. It was deemed necessary to ask more questions about certain topics that were thought to be more complex, such as social support and fewer questions about straightforward topics, such as assignment duration certainty.

The second part of the interviews were conducted interviewing the expatriate. The questions were again straightforwardly derived from the theoretical background but this time the researcher added many questions to better provide data to support the research question. The questions were mostly connected to the spillover theory, as that was more closely connected to the research question. The questions were therefore formulated in a way that they would provide adequate support and material for the analysis. The researcher was again not limited to the pre-determined questions but whenever deemed necessary could ask more questions about an important topic. Some of the interview questions were similar to the questions that had been asked to the spouse already – about the spouse's adjustment. These questions were aimed to find out how well their views matched and also to unravel some information the spouse might not have mentioned. The interview themes based on the theoretical framework for both parts of the interviews are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Operationalisation chart

Objective	Sub-objectives	Theoretical framework		Interview themes
What kind of an effect does spousal adjustment have on expatriate adjustment and performance during a foreign assignment?	What are the components of spousal cross-cultural adjustment?	Determinants of spousal adjustment	Individual	-Language fluency -Change in employment -Self-efficacy
			Interpersonal	-Family support and adjustment -Social networks -Support from host-country-nationals and non-host-country-nationals
			Environmental	-Cultural novelty -Favourable living conditions -Assignment duration certainty
	What kind of spillover effects exist between the home life and expatriate work life?	Family adjustment spillover on expatriate performance	Spousal adjustment	-Themes above
			Spouse's perceptions about the relocation and ABCX theory	-How did the spouse feel about the relocation -Spouse's involvement in decision-making
			Spillover theory	-Positive spillover effects -Negative spillover effects

The operationalisation chart seen in Table 1 presents the objective of this study and the linkages between the main objective, the sub-objectives, and the theoretical background. As can be seen in the operationalisation chart, the interview themes are derived directly from their respective theoretical backgrounds.

### 3.2.3 Selection of interviewees

In the first phase of the selection process some important considerations were made in order to make sure the selection was done properly, and it would result in a reliable group of interviewees. Before reaching out to potential interviewees, several questions were considered:

1. Should the group of expatriates and spouses from which the interviewees are chosen, be limited by certain criteria?
2. If yes, what would these criteria be?
3. How will the pool of potential interviewees be chosen and contacted?
4. How many interviewees should be chosen?

For the first question it was deemed necessary to set a limit on time passed after completing the assignment. To minimise any glamorisation of memories it was chosen that the interviewees should either currently be on the assignment or returned in the past five years. Another criterion that was chosen was that both the expatriate and the spouse should be available for the study, not just one of them. This was found to be a major limitation, as the researcher was contacted by many spouses currently living in China, but whose husbands were not available for interviewing because of tight work schedules.

The researcher contacted the embassy of Finland in Beijing to request a list of Finnish expatriates currently on assignment in China. This was however not possible, as the embassy does not distribute this sort of information to third parties. The best way to contact the potential pool of interviewees was after some consideration, chosen to be through social media. The researcher left a brief message explaining what the study was about and the criteria for interviewees in two Facebook groups. The group 'Finns in Beijing' (Pekingin suomalaiset) consists of about 500 members and the group 'Finns in Shanghai' (Shanghai suomalaiset) of about 850 members. These two were chosen as they were the only social media groups that could be found that were related to Finnish people living in China.

The researcher was contacted by 19 expatriates or expatriate spouses of which 5 were deemed suitable for the study as they had returned to Finland no more than 5 years ago, were accompanied by a spouse during the assignment and also the spouse was willing to participate in the study. It should be noted that all of the interviewees had already completed the international assignment and returned to Finland. Five couples was deemed to be a good amount as the researcher was planning to conduct thorough and detailed interviews.

### **3.3 Conducting the research**

#### ***3.3.1 Interview process***

The interviews were conducted in April 2018 by phone or by the communication tool Skype. To ensure there was no background noise that might lessen the quality of the recordings, the researcher was conducting the interviews from home. The interviewee could choose which method suited them better – phone call or Skype. The difference in the methods was that in Skype call the interviewer and interviewee can see each other. The researcher did not however notice that seeing or not seeing each other would have an effect on the interview. The interviews were recorded, and the quality of the recordings was good for the most part. Some small parts of the recording were inaudible, but the



researcher could still fill in the blanks as the transcriptions were made shortly after the interviews.

The interviews were conducted separately for the expatriate and the spouse and therefore were not present in each other's interviews in order to minimise any effect they might have on each other's answers. The duration of the interviews ranged from approximately 30 to 60 minutes depending on how detailed the interviewees were in their answers. Generally, the interviews with the spouses took a longer time as there were more questions. Information about the interviewed expatriates and their spouses is included in the following table:

Table 2 Interviews

Interviewee	Date of interview	Duration of interview	Location of assignment	Accompanied by children
Expatriate 1	6.4.2018	00:40:47	Shanghai	No
Spouse 1	9.4.2018	00:37:14		
Expatriate 2	18.4.2018	00:43:57	Shanghai	No
Spouse 2	9.4.2018	01:01:15		
Expatriate 3	10.4.2018	00:30:24	Shanghai	Yes
Spouse 3	10.4.2019	00:44:25		
Expatriate 4	11.4.2018	00:30:38	Chongqing	Yes
Spouse 4	11.4.2018	00:42:49		
Expatriate 5	23.4.2018	00:29:14	Shanghai	No
Spouse 5	23.4.2018	00:30:14		

As seen in Table 2, four out of five couples were living in Shanghai during the assignment. According to Finnish Business Council (2017), most Finnish expatriates are clustered in large cities such as Shanghai and Beijing, most importantly in Shanghai.

### 3.3.2 Analysis of the material

According to Merriam (2014), data analysis is the process where the researcher finds answers to the established research questions by making sense of the collected data. The analysis part generally consists of two different phases; the analysis and the interpretation (Eskola & Suoranta 1998). However, often the analysis is already started during the collection of the data during the interviews, which can make the division into the two stages unclear (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008).

To enable analysing the material, the interview recordings were transcribed into transcripts. Eskola and Suoranta (1998) point out the importance of transcribing the

materials soon, approximately one or two weeks after the interview. Therefore, the transcripts were written shortly after each interview, while the interviews were still fresh in memory. This was beneficial to the study as it was easier to remember all the small gestures and tone of voice of the interviewees and take them into account when interpreting the answers.

Next phase of the analysis process was to divide the answers into categories based on the themes. As the interviews had been well planned out and the questions were already part of certain themes, this was relatively easy to do. For spousal adjustment, the researched decided to categorise the answers in the same themes as found in Figure 5 as well as the operationalisation chart in Table 1. The second part of the interviews was also categorised in 4 parts, according to the plan in Table 1: (1) spouse's opinion about the relocation, (2) spouse's involvement in decision-making, (3) positive spillover effects, and (4) negative spillover effects. After dividing the material into categories, it was read again more thoroughly, pointing attention to reoccurring themes and answers. During this process, some quotes were also picked out, that were found to shed light on these reoccurring answers and that supported the material well. Because the emphasis on this study was on the content of the materials, rather than the way the answers were expressed, coding the materials into specific themes was seen as the most suitable analysis method.

### **3.4 Evaluation of the study**

Academic research has traditionally been evaluated based on three criteria: (1) internal validity, (2) external validity, (3) reliability, and (4) objectivity (Shenton 2004; Merriam 2014).

Internal validity deals with the topic of how the study results reflect reality. However, as the hypothesis in qualitative research is that the reality is a holistic, multidimensional and changing concept, not a single, objective phenomenon to be measured as in quantitative research, projecting collected data to the 'reality' is not always self-evident. (Merriam 2014.) Inspection of previous studies can be seen as a consistent way of enhancing the credibility of a research, as the only way to compare qualitative research is through its theoretical background (Shenton 2004).

To add to the internal validity of this study, a thorough research of earlier empirical studies on similar topics was done, to determine the best way of conducting this research. In addition, going through earlier studies offered a glance on the current view of the topic and what the focus has been on thus far, when studying spousal adjustment and its effect on expatriate adjustment.

External validity refers to the generalisability of the research – how well the findings can be applied to other situations? Traditionally, external validity is achieved by

controlling the sample size and using random sampling, which is often difficult in qualitative research. (Merriam 2014.) As there was no database or list of possible interviewees, a random sampling was not possible in this study. It can be viewed as an external validity risk that the expatriates and spouses contacted the researcher themselves, showing eagerness to take part in the study. However, to increase external validity, interview questions were derived straight from the theory and the linkages are illustrated in the operationalisation chart.

As the interviewees were not selected by random sampling, but rather from a pool of people who volunteered to be interviewed, there is a risk for loss of external validity. It could be judged that the views of these volunteers might be especially strong or different from the average view, as they were keen to share their experience. Furthermore, as all of the interviewed spouses were female, it might be that the findings cannot be generalised to apply also in the case of male trailing spouses.

During the interviews it became evident that some interviewees were more open about their experiences and were able to describe their feelings in a clearer way. Others, on the other hand answered to the questions in short, shallow answers that did not provide additional information for the researcher. Therefore, for example there are more quotes included from those who were able to express themselves more, compared to the others.

Merriam (2014) defines reliability as the extent to which research findings can be replicated. In other words, if the same research were to be conducted again, the findings should still be the same. Because replicating a qualitative study cannot produce the exact same findings, the more important issue when assessing qualitative research is whether the results are consistent with the data that was gathered. (Merriam 2014.) Another side of reliability is the question of whether the obtained data can be relied on to be truthful. In order to improve the dependability of a study, all the aspects of the process should be documented in detail, so that it is possible for future academics to repeat the study if needed. (Shenton 2004.)

To enhance the reliability of this study, all the interviews were recorded so that no information would be missed or forgotten during the process. The recordings were done from the beginning to the end of the interviews, without pauses. Furthermore, the research process has been described carefully, in order to make it logical and traceable for any future researcher.

A possible problem in reliability can be that the interviewee might not be completely truthful about some personal details related to the relationship between the two interviewees. For example, the spouses can show their adjustment in a positive light and not express all the difficulties they went through, to portray themselves in a more favourable way towards the interviewer. It is also possible, that as the interviews were done after each expatriate couple had already returned back to the home country, they might perceive the assignment in a more positive light than they actually felt during the

time. The researcher tried to minimise these effects by only selecting interviewees that had completed the assignment no more than five years prior.

Another risk for reliability is that the quotes included in this study are translated from Finnish to English. As the interviews were conducted in Finnish, to ensure it was as easy as possible for the interviewees to share their experiences, the researcher translated the selected quotes in English. The translations were done carefully, with the help of a dictionary, but risk remains that some nuances might not have been translated in the same way the interviewee meant them.

Objectivity in qualitative research is often referred to as confirmability. The role of triangulation has been regarded as important for weakening the opportunities for human bias in the research. Moreover, confirmability can be improved for example by a detailed documentation of the research process, as in the case of dependability. Objectivity can be secured when the decisions of the researcher are displayed in detail in the study. (Shenton 2004.) The risk for human bias was quite inevitably included to a certain extent in the study. The interpretations of the researcher about which comments and themes should be more relevant towards the research objective were more or less subjective. Besides, the quotes selected to support the analysis can also be thought to be quite subjective, as it is difficult to determine which opinions are actually portraying the issue in the most appropriate and truthful way.

## **4 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS**

### **4.1 Determinants of spousal adjustment**

This section presents and discusses the empirical evidence gathered by interviewing the five expatriate spouses. Section 4.1 is divided into three more detailed sections, each presenting one facet of spousal adjustment: (1) personal adjustment, (2) interaction adjustment and (3) cultural adjustment. Each section will seek to explain what factors were influential for the facet in question, and how the spouses perceived them.

#### ***4.1.1 Personal adjustment***

This chapter will concentrate on factors of personal adjustment and will explain in detail which of these factors were found to be impactful. Personal adjustment consists of factors that are related to the individual's personal traits and qualities. The factors that affect this facet include language fluency, change in employment status and self-efficacy. The findings are elaborated in Table 3, which shows the number of spouses who reported a specific factor to be relevant for their adjustment.

One of the major factors affecting personal adjustment in the host culture is the level of language skills. All of the spouses interviewed for the study reported that they did not receive company provided language training prior to the move to China. One expatriate family had requested training, but the company felt it was unnecessary to know Chinese while on the assignment. This was to a large extent because the company did not have previous experience on sending expatriates from Finland to China and therefore did not have an understanding of the language requirements. One of the interviewed spouses had however independently taken some basic level Chinese courses before departure. The common view amongst the interviewees was that language training would have been necessary prior to the move. However, this was realised only after having already moved to China.

All of the spouses reported that not knowing the language caused difficulties in daily life in for example getting around the city and communicating with locals. Eating out was seen as a good way to spend time for the spouses during the day when the expatriate husband was at work. Communicating in restaurants without Chinese skills was found to be extremely difficult, as the menus were for the most part in Chinese, and even if an English translation was provided, it could not be trusted. The expatriate families were also surprised how little the locals spoke English even in a large city such as Shanghai. One of the spouses described her efforts with communicating in local restaurants:

*“You basically could communicate only by using gestures. Actually, not even that way, as their gestures are completely different.” (Spouse 2)*

Despite not being supportive in offering language training prior to the leave, the spouses did feel that the company in most cases provided language support when they asked for it. The companies were helpful in translating documents and other important things connected to living in China. In addition, language training was provided by the company, but only once the expatriate families were in China. The spouses felt however, that it was already too late. As Mandarin Chinese is a very difficult language to learn, companies should provide language training that covers at minimum the basics to survive in daily interactions, before sending the expatriate family abroad. In addition, as the expatriate was working long hours, it was not possible to study enough of the language to become fluent. Thus, it would have been helpful for the expatriate as well to have started studying prior to the leave.

The second factor influencing personal adjustment is the change in employment when moving to the host culture. Change in employment was seen as a hindering factor for adjustment for many of the spouses. The spouses described how they felt about not having a job:

*“It was a difficult situation for an independent Nordic woman. You are used to having your own job and own things to do.” (Spouse 1)*

*“It was fun for a while but it’s not so easy for a Finnish woman to not have a career.” (Spouse 3)*

Interestingly, as seen in the quotes, the importance of having a job was explained through a cultural view – employment was important because they were from Finland. This is perhaps because of the predominant importance of equality in the Finnish culture, which is stronger than in many other European cultures. Therefore, the spouses were perhaps comparing themselves to the other expatriate spouses that they had met during the assignment. In addition to feeling unequal, some the interviewed spouses felt that not being able to be employed made them feel less independent. They felt that back home it was important to have their own job and own hobbies, independent from their husbands. Despite the apparent importance of having a career independently, only one of the spouses interviewed tried to find employment for the time on the assignment. The other four spouses interviewed for this study viewed it as virtually impossible for a Western woman to get a job. This idea originated from hearing stories from other expatriate

families previously located to China, and from talking with the company. It was seen that getting a work visa was very difficult, and finding a job was even more difficult.

The companies did not offer assistance in finding a job for the spouse, and the spouses did not mind this because they thought it was the norm. Even the one spouse that was actively trying to find a job did not manage to, due to lack of Chinese skills and previous job experience. Having to leave their jobs behind caused anxiousness about the future for both the spouse and the expatriate. The spouse who was trying to find employment pointed out how the unsuccessful job search affected her adjustment:

*“It did cause stress in the beginning because I was contacting so many people and many Finnish companies and I got no replies. It was a bad start and made me homesick. But I knew it was only for a short time. If we had stayed in China longer, then I really would have needed to find work. I couldn’t stay unemployed forever.”* (Spouse 5)

However, not all of the interviewed spouses felt negatively about the change in employment. One spouse pointed out that it was a welcome change for her to have a “*year off*” after working for 20 years. She felt it was exciting and relaxing not to have a job for a change. This was a case of a relatively short assignment and perhaps if the duration had been longer – 3 or even 4 years – the spouse would have not felt the same way.

To fill the excess free time caused by not having a full-time job, some spouses took up voluntary work for example in the Finnish expatriate community. The voluntary work included arranging events and get-togethers for Finns living in the area. Having meaningful tasks was found to be an important positive factor for adjustment. Lack of these tasks seemed to have been especially difficult for those spouses that had to leave a meaningful career behind in order to move with the expatriate. For example, voluntary work was seen as a very important way to not only spend excess time but also to make valuable social connections and learn more about the environment. The spouses felt that especially in the beginning of the assignment when they had not yet established social networks, the amount of free time caused them to feel bored. Having too much free time often resulted in stress and irritation that would often be directed at the expatriate who spent most of their time at work, away from the spouse.

It was difficult for the interviewed spouses to determine how their self-efficacy had played a role in their adjustment. In this context, self-efficacy towards coping and living in China seemed to consist of their self-trust in knowing the language enough to communicate and going out of their comfort zone to meet locals and socialise with them.

As an outsider, the researcher was able to conclude that some signs of determination the spouses showed were a result of their strong self-efficacy. For example, the spouses felt that dealing in the everyday life, especially because of the language barrier with the

local people required persistence. The most common way the spouses showed their self-efficacy was by trying to learn how to communicate despite the setbacks and the occasional feeling of defeat by the difficulty of the language. One of the spouses describes her difficulty with communication:

*“I felt encouraged by my Chinese class and I thought I knew the language, so I ordered coffee in a café. The waiter brought me watermelon juice instead. I felt like all my studying had gone to waste and I knew nothing. But the following week I continued studying.”* (Spouse 4)

Another way in which the spouses showed self-efficacy – as well as lack of it – was in trying to build their social networks with the locals. Forming meaningful relationships was found to be very difficult and it required a lot of work to start with. Therefore, some believed it was easier to just make friends with other expatriate families since they were all in the same situation trying to establish their social networks and looking for new friends. They gave up on trying to make connections with the locals and focused on other foreigners instead. It might be that if the spouses had been more persistent in trying to make friends with locals, it would have made their adjustment easier and their stay more in-depth culture wise.

#### **4.1.2 Interaction adjustment**

Interaction adjustment has been found to be affected by extended family support, expatriate adjustment, parental demands as well as the size and breadth of social support from both host country nationals and non-host country nationals.

Support from extended family was found to be a facilitating factor for adjustment, although it was in most cases not a crucial source of support. As the spouses did not have a work-related support group while living in China, they felt it was more important for them than the expatriate, to contact the extended family back home for support. The spouses that were interviewed for this study contacted their family back home frequently. It was seen as a way to have some familiarity in the new environment. One of the couples had high-school-aged children that had stayed home in Finland while the parents went on the assignment. In this case frequent contact with the children back home was extremely important, for their adjustment, and also peace of mind. The spouses also felt that it was important that they could talk about the cultural differences with people from the same culture, who would understand how they felt and to whom they could talk freely. The support of the extended family was therefore important, but more important was deemed



the support from the immediate family that was there during the assignment, as well as the newly established social networks in China.

The interviewed spouses felt that their husbands were a crucial source of support during the assignment. Because of the time difference it was difficult to stay in contact with friends and family back home frequently, so the immediate family that was in China became extremely important for their well-being and stress relief. Especially important for the spouses were daily conversations that they could have with their partners at the end of the day, talking about the difficulties they both endured in the new culture and also small things that brought them joy during the day.

Overall though, the spouses did not feel that they were dependent on the expatriate for social support. According to the spouses, in the beginning finding meaningful ways to spend the day without the company of the expatriate was difficult, as they had not had time to build relationships with locals or other expatriate families yet. But after the initial difficulties, once they had managed to establish some social networks, it was easy to find company from other expatriate spouses. They felt it was easy to be outgoing as there were so many things to do and so many places to see in the city. One of the spouses described her experience:

*“I wasn’t at all socially dependent on my husband. I made 200% more acquaintances than at home.” (Spouse 2)*

One of the reasons why the spouses seemed not to have felt dependent on their husbands for social support, was that they were used to them working long hours and travelling. Additionally, they were aware that this – staying at the apartment alone for much of the time – was going to be the reality. Having had conversations about what their daily life was going to be like during the assignment, the spouses felt prepared that they would have to spend a lot of time on their own especially in the beginning. Had they not been so mentally prepared for this, they might have had more issues with the lack of support. The spouses even felt that it was probably more important for the expatriate to be accompanied by the spouse, than vice versa. They felt that their partner needed someone to take care of daily tasks concerned with living in China and someone to arrange activities for them for the evenings and weekends.

The adjustment of the spouses seemed to be facilitated by accompanying young children on the assignment. This was to a large extent because the children allowed the spouse to maintain a familiar role and their identity due to the strong dependence the children in this age have on their parents. The familiar role of motherhood and the feeling of being needed by someone was comforting when everything else around them was new. In addition, having the children in a local school or kindergarten gave the parents an opportunity to interact with locals and other expatriate families through the school’s

activities. One spouse mentioned they had made most of their friends during the assignment through the school their child attended. The school was organising a lot of activities in which also the parents could be involved, which enabled the spouse to form social networks with the other parents.

*“It was so much easier to adjust with a child. I had specific tasks every day because the child needs to go outside and eat at certain times. It provides a schedule for everyday life.”* (Spouse 4)

Furthermore, the spouses felt that their children provided them an opportunity to build relationships with the locals in the daily life. The spouses with children noticed that the locals were very fond of children and approached them much easier than the parents. It served as a bridge to connect with the people in the streets, restaurants, playgrounds and where ever they went. Therefore, the child helped the whole family to develop social networks in the host culture, enhancing their adjustment. One of the interviewed spouses concluded:

*“Even though we did not have a common language, I could get a contact with people through my child. The locals loved children and approached easily.”* (Spouse 4)

Having children on the assignment did however also cause stress for the expatriate families. The spouses agreed that they were worried about the safety and hygiene of the surroundings because of the young child they were living with. Both of the spouses that were accompanied by children were worried about the quality of food for infants and preferred to buy imports rather than local food. Thus, being on the assignment with children can have a two-sided impact on the interaction adjustment of the spouse and therefore on the overall experience of the relocation. This depends on the age of the children and also on how well they adjust to the environment and for example the new school.

The spouses felt the international communities provided adequate social relationships to fill the need for socializing. It was found that making connections with the Chinese locals was very difficult. Therefore, two of the spouses stated they had become friends with their Chinese tutor during their time in China. As the tutors' English skills were good it was easier to get to know them and get to know more about the culture. They further reported that the reason why they did not make more local friends was mainly because of lack of a shared language and overall cultural differences. One spouse described her difficulties in building relationships with the locals:

*“I can’t say that I would have formed any meaningful relationships with the local Chinese.” (Spouse 2)*

The spouses felt that because it was so difficult to form relationships with the locals, relationships with other foreigners were more important to help their adjustment. Especially important were social ties with other Finns through the Finnish communities. The spouses felt they could more easily and naturally bond with people from the same nationality and that their company was very helpful for their adjustment. To be able to form these networks better, the spouses spent a lot of time in the events hosted by the Finnish community and people working at the Finnish embassy. It should however be noted, that as none of the interviewed spouses had extensive social networks with the locals, it cannot be estimated whether they would have adjusted better with more local contacts. Still, for some, other foreigners were very useful in learning about the local culture and the language:

*“The company did not provide us with language training but an expat wife who lived in the same building with us taught me some basic Chinese to survive in the everyday life. She also showed me a taxi app that translates addresses, so I could just show my phone to the driver when I needed to go somewhere.” (Spouse 4)*

These are the kind of helpful things usually locals can teach and show expatriates and spouses. For the spouses interviewed, it was clear that as they lacked meaningful relationships with the locals, other foreigners were used as a source of support and information about China.

#### **4.1.3 Cultural adjustment**

Cultural adjustment refers to a facet influenced by certain factors that affect the individual from the outside. Therefore, these factors are not influenced by the individual’s subjective skills or personality traits. According to the model of spousal adjustment by Shaffer and Harrison (2001), cultural adjustment is affected by cultural novelty, favourable living conditions and assignment duration certainty, and it is the third and final facet of adjustment for expatriate spouses.

Cultural novelty turned out to be a complex and difficult concept for the spouses to grasp. When asked directly, most of the spouses answered that they had not experienced culture shock during their stay. They had however experienced signs that resemble culture shock. For example, one of the spouses had a period of a few weeks when she was feeling

down and felt more negative about the surroundings. In this case the explanation may be that the spouses experienced culture shock unknowingly, as they were not completely aware of the definition. Another reason for some of these answers might be that they were downplaying their experienced difficulties. During one of the interviews with the expatriates, it was discovered that the spouse had had serious difficulties in adjustment, resulting in her going home for a few months. The spouse herself however, did not mention this when talking about her initial difficulties in the new culture.

Many of the spouses as well as expatriates that were interviewed pointed out that they found the cultural differences between them and the local Chinese irritating. Rudeness, staring, spitting on the street, pushing, touching children without permission and skipping line were viewed annoying, as the interviewees were not used to such behaviour in Finland. These differences in culture caused the spouses to feel uncomfortable and seek the company of people from similar cultures. Some of the interviewees noted however, that they had started to unconsciously behave in similar ways as the locals after spending a longer time in China. This irritation and distress could have been lessened with company-provided cultural training where these differences are explained, and the families know what to expect. However, the spouses stated that neither they nor the expatriate had been offered any cultural training by the company.

Aspects of general living conditions that the interviewed spouses felt were important for their adjustment included for instance quality of housing, food safety, the level of health care and air pollution, which was regarded as especially relevant.

The spouses agreed that they were satisfied with the quality of the apartments they lived in during the assignment. The common view was that the apartments were spacious and had everything they needed. Some even stated the living conditions, just in terms of housing, were better than what they were used to in Finland. This was because housing for expatriates is usually on a much higher level compared to the conditions the locals live in. The apartment buildings for foreigners were often in a gated community area with own recreational spaces and hotel-style lobbies with a concierge to take care of the residents' needs. In addition, all of the expatriate families had a company provided housemaid who took care of cleaning the house, doing laundry and even cooking if wanted. One of the spouses explained:

*“It was luxurious life for me. I didn't have to worry about the every-day tasks around the house.”* (Spouse 2)

Despite these high-end areas, as the majority of available apartments cannot be considered luxurious, the spouses felt, that finding suitable housing was difficult. This was, however, only an issue for those families who did not receive help from the company in the search for an apartment. One of the spouses considered finding a comfortable house

a great source of stress, as the only help the company offered was a list of websites that showed available apartments. The issues with the apartments the family visited, prior to finding a suitable one, usually included lack of cleanliness, lack of space and Chinese-style toilets. Finding an appropriate place to live was especially important for those couples that had small children, as they felt they had a more substantial need for space, cleanliness and recreational space.

Food was also found to be a common difficulty for the expatriate families. The spouses did not trust the quality of the Chinese markets, and therefore did their grocery shopping at international markets that offer imported food. Some of the families also brought food from Finland to be sure about the quality. They reported it was difficult to find Western food and when they could, it was expensive.

*“The food was questionable. The meat was full of hormones and you can’t really know what it is that you’re eating. I didn’t buy food from local markets.”* (Spouse 2)

The general hygiene of food was a concern that all of the spouses shared. They were initially surprised how meat was often stored in room temperature in the grocery stores and often the stores looked dirty. One of the spouses reported she experienced food poisoning three times during her stay even though she actively tried to only visit restaurants that were popular amongst the locals. It caused a lot of stress and distrust about the food and the whole country. She described having felt completely shocked after the third time, and contemplating whether it was even safe to stay in the country.

Food allergies caused some difficulties for the expatriate families. Without adequate language skills the families were not able to properly communicate about the allergies, to be sure the food was safe to eat. This was an issue in restaurants, but also in grocery stores, as it was difficult to determine what the ingredients were in the foods. Another issue was that the locals in many cases did not know of certain types of allergies that are relatively well known in Western countries, such as a gluten allergy.

Finding good quality and safe-to-consume food was especially important and stress-causing for those expatriate couples who were accompanied with young children. All of them had brought milk supplements from Finland, as they felt it was crucial to be sure it was of good quality. They also tended to buy more imported food and eat in restaurants that they thought were more hygienic and safer. Some spouses on the other hand were not as worried about restaurant hygiene and stated that their child loved eating in small restaurants on the street.

The interviewed spouses had varying opinions about the level of healthcare. Some thought the quality was very high and that they felt safe when visiting a hospital. Some of the spouses on the other hand felt that the level of the hospitals was adequate at best. The

availability of Western style healthcare and doctors who spoke fluent English was the most important determinant in the quality of healthcare. Understanding and being able to trust the doctors and the medications was clearly important and valued by the expatriate families. The spouses that perceived the healthcare as high quality were perhaps more accustomed to foreign hospitals, whereas the spouses who found the level to be below average, only compared it to the level of healthcare back home in Finland.

The most negative aspect of living in China for the expatriate families was found to be the high levels of pollution and the stress caused by it. The pollution was not only seen as a hindering factor for adjustment but also an important factor in deciding whether to go on the assignment or not. One of the spouses stated that if the assignment would have taken place when the children of the family were still young, the family would not have accepted the assignment because of the health risks for young children caused by pollution. Additionally, one of the interviewed expatriates considered pollution to be so dangerous for children that he would not even visit Shanghai with young children. The pollution restricted some everyday activities that the families were used to doing at home, such as jogging outside or going for a walk with children.

Duration of the assignment was not set in stone for any of the expatriate families. They knew that they would spend a few years in China, but they were also told they might have to return early or be asked to extend their stay. Thus, in reality the duration was a mystery. This was however not a problem for most of the spouses. They felt that not knowing when they would return did not cause them stress nor did they express that they would have wanted to know a date when they would return. Only one spouse stated that it was comforting for her to know during the first difficult months, that she would only be there for a few years. Knowing a date, even when it was not set in stone, helped her fight through the difficult times she experienced in the beginning of the assignment.

The findings that were presented in Chapter 4.1 are shown in a summarised form in Table 3. The table presents the frequency of spouses who either directly referred to a certain factor as relevant to their adjustment, or the researcher could clearly notice the relevance from the answers. The factors are categorised into the three facets of adjustment, in the same way as in the model of spouse adjustment (see Figure 5).

Table 3 Key findings in spousal adjustment

Facet of adjustment	Factor	Affected adjustment positively (FRQ) (n=5)	Affected adjustment negatively (FRQ) (n=5)
Individual	Lack of language fluency	–	5
	Change in employment	1	3
	Self-efficacy	1	–
Interpersonal	Extended family support	3	–
	Expatriate adjustment	5	–
	Parental demands <sup>2</sup>	2	–
	Social networks with HCNs	2	–
	Social networks with non HCNs	5	–
Environmental	Cultural novelty	1	3
	Living conditions	–	5
	Assignment duration certainty	1	–

FRQ = Frequency of interviewees who described the factor as relevant to their adjustment

HCN = Host-country national i.e. local

As seen in Table 3, some factors of adjustment seemed to affect the spouses more than others. The strongest effect was found to be on lack of language skills, expatriate adjustment, parental demands and living conditions. Least relevant to their adjustment were self-efficacy and assignment duration certainty, which were only relevant for one of the interviewees. These factors and their importance will be further discussed in Chapter 4.3 which concludes a summary of the empirical research findings.

<sup>2</sup> Only two spouses were accompanied by children.

## 4.2 Effect of spousal adjustment on expatriate performance

### 4.2.1 *The spouse's perceptions of the relocation*

Of both spouses and expatriates, most agreed that the spouse felt positive about the move to China. However, three of the expatriates stated that their spouses had initially been reluctant about the move. The reluctance was rooting from fear of pollution-caused health problems, negative stories they had read about China concerning their laws, use of social media and human rights and lastly one spouse was hesitant because she felt the company would not adequately support her needs, only those of the expatriate. The last issue mentioned, inadequate support, was the result of previous experience of a global relocation. One of the expatriates revealed that he might have pressured the spouse slightly, as he felt the assignment was a great opportunity for his career and he needed to take it and he wanted his spouse to be there with him. Therefore, the spouse might have felt like she needed to make a sacrifice in order for the partner to succeed. Throughout the assignment the expatriates noticed that the feelings the spouses had about living in China got more positive as time passed and they got more adjusted to the environment.

Spouse's perception about the relocation was not only important for the spouses themselves, but also to the expatriates. Overall, spouse opinion was very important for the expatriates in terms of taking the assignment or not. They felt that making the decision was something that they needed to do as a couple and not by themselves. For some expatriates the spouse's opinion was so important that if the spouse would not have wanted to go, the expatriate would have stayed home as well.

*"I was ready to let [the assignment] go if [Spouse 2] would not have wanted to go with me. I didn't want to be there alone."* (Expatriate 2)

Overall, it seems that it is important for the spouses to feel in control and of mattering in the decision-making, when planning the possibility of accepting an international relocation. The study found that the companies did not involve the spouses in making the decision about taking the assignment. The process started with the company suggesting the assignment to the expatriate, followed by some time the expatriate could take to think about the possibility. After the decision was made, the expatriate would talk through the details with the company, without the spouse present.

Furthermore, it was discovered that for the expatriates as well as the spouses, it was natural and self-evident that the spouse would not be involved in the discussions with the company at all. As the expatriates saw it, this was the normal protocol. Despite this the spouses found it very important to be involved in the decision-making at home. For the



most part, they felt that they were an equal part in the decision-making, even if the company did not include them in the discussions. These discussions, they felt, were something that needed to be done between the expatriate and the spouse.

*“The company didn’t involve me. My husband told me at home. If I had said that I’m not going he probably would have left without me.” (Spouse 2)*

Only one of the spouses noted that she would have liked to be part of the decision-making also with the company, as it was a major life change not only for the expatriate but for them as well. As the relocation affects so many aspects of the spouse’s lives, she felt it would be beneficial to address some issues the spouse might have in terms of possibly losing a career, finding adequate living arrangements for the family and making sure all of the family members are thought of in the process.

Leaving a career behind and uncertainty about the possibility of a future career was the most important reason the spouses had mixed feelings and hesitated to take the assignment. One of the spouses reported she was lucky that her employer allowed her to take a year off and still keep her job waiting. She further noted that her employer also allowed her to extend the period by another year when the expatriate found out his relocation would be extended. However, not all of the spouses were so lucky with their employment. Another spouse commented she was just about to go back to work life after staying home with her kids for a few years. Going on the assignment therefore meant that she had to again push her career forward, which was not an easy decision to make.

#### **4.2.2 Spillover of adjustment**

The study found that the adjustment of the spouse is a very important influencer for the adjustment and performance of expatriate. This relationship can be reciprocal, meaning the expatriate’s adjustment in the local culture and work may also affect the adjustment of the spouse. Thus, the spillover effects can be negative or positive, and they can affect both the spouse and the expatriate. This section seeks to explain positive and negative spillover effects that affect expatriate adjustment and performance, through the home environment.

This study identified five positive spillover effects which included (1) overall social and emotional support from the spouse, (2) more meaningful life, (3) language skills of the spouse, (4) the spouse’s better knowledge of the general environment and (5) wider social networks that were built to a large extent by the spouse during her free time.

The most important positive spillover effect according to the expatriates that were interviewed, was the overall social and emotional support that the family accompanying

the expatriate was able to offer. Several of the expatriates claimed that had the spouse not been willing to go on the assignment, they would have not gone either. The expatriates agreed unanimously that it was valuable to have family there for support; to have someone to live through the same experiences and expose themselves to the same cultural differences. When asked about the single most important thing that facilitated his adjustment, one expatriate stated the following:

*“Having my family there. I can’t even imagine what it would have been like without them.” (Expatriate 4)*

When asked more specifically about the support they felt they received in the home environment, one expatriate described that just the fact that the family was ‘physically there’ was extremely important for him in terms of coping during the assignment. Besides the presence, it was found comforting that some of the spouses tried to keep a positive attitude despite challenges, to encourage the expatriate to keep working and stay on the assignment. Some of the expatriates felt that their job was more stressful than what it had previously been. They stated it was a good way to get their mind off the stressful work to spend time with their spouses and for instance go out to eat in restaurants.

Moreover, also some of the spouses felt it was important for the expatriate that the spouse was there for support. For the most part, for all the couples interviewed, the spouses were in charge of keeping the household in order and dealing with the everyday tasks around the house, such as cooking and making doctor’s appointments. The expatriates felt that it helped their adjustment in terms of reducing stress, as the daily tasks were lifted off their shoulders.

On top of the social and emotional support the expatriates received in the home environment, the expatriates felt their life was simply better with the presence of their family. The expatriates agreed that having the spouse with them on the assignment provided them with more meaningful everyday life and a break from work. Meaningful life refers to the type of living the expatriates felt content with and what they thought was valuable. Spouses were often the ones that were planning out activities for the free hours after work. They also motivated the expatriates to have new experiences after the long day, instead of only relaxing around the house – which they reported they would have done frequently without their spouses. One of the expatriates stated that it would have been difficult to figure out what to do there alone, as it was difficult to do sports outside because of the pollution. With the family however, it was always easy to think of activities to do. The presence of the spouse provided them with a positive pressure to go out to the city and explore.

Interestingly, the expatriates shared very similar views on how their lives would be different if they had moved to China without their spouses. They all agreed that the

spouses brought meaningful content to an otherwise very work-oriented life. Additionally, the expatriates felt that the short times they were in China by themselves – as the spouse had to visit Finland for one reason or another – was boring and meaningless. Three expatriates commented:

*“When [Spouse 2] was visiting Finland for a while I ended up just going straight home from work where I went through work emails, ordered food and didn’t leave the house until the next morning to go to work again. I realised that’s not a good life.”* (Expatriate 2)

*“When my family had to return to Finland for a while I noticed how strenuous it was to be there alone. My life was revolving around work and I didn’t do anything on my free time.”* (Expatriate 3)

*“My life was quite boring when [Spouse 5] wasn’t there. I went home from work, ate, maybe exercised a little and skyped home.”* (Expatriate 5)

It can be seen in these quotes that the expatriates shared very parallel views on this matter. Perhaps this was due to hearing stories and seeing how other single expatriates were spending their time off work.

The spouses’ language skills were also found to be very helpful for the expatriates’ adjustment and performance. As none of the expatriates had received language training prior to the assignment, they agreed that communicating with the locals caused issues. In addition, even though most of the expatriates were offered language training during the assignment with a private tutor, in reality it was not possible for them to study intensively on top of the long work days and commutes. One of the expatriates stated he tried studying with the private tutor but quickly noticed that it was taking up all his free time that he would rather spend with his spouse. Therefore, the spouse’s language skills became valuable for both them and the expatriates in their daily lives:

*“It helped [Expatriate 4] that I was studying Chinese. I taught him how to say good morning to his driver and how to select the right bus to go where he needed to go.”* (Spouse 4)

*“It was so helpful that [Spouse 5] was studying the language. She could read signs on the street, communicate, and make sense of the restaurant menus. I couldn’t do any of that.”* (Expatriate 5)

The spouse's language skills were not only helpful for the expatriates during their free time, but it also supported them in the work life. Even though most of the expatriates stated that at work they could survive with English, it was a nice addition to know some phrases in Chinese. This built trust and enabled social ties with the local colleagues. One expatriate also mentioned that his spouse had helped him in communicating with his driver who drove the expatriate to work daily.

The general knowledge about the culture and environment that the spouses had acquired was found to have a facilitating effect on the adjustment of the expatriates. As the spouses generally had much more free time as the expatriates, they were able to acquire information about the surrounding areas and culture by walking around and talking with other expatriate spouses to share experiences. Having acquired this information, they could help the expatriates in simple everyday things that could cause a lot of difficulties for foreigners, such as efficient using of public transportation and taxis, how to behave in certain situations like the locals, what are the best places to buy food and so forth.

One of the expatriates stated his spouse was much deeper in the culture and knew much more about the surroundings than he did. Therefore, she could assist the expatriate in for example selecting the right bus to take to the office. Another expatriate expressed it was nice that his spouse always knew good restaurants to visit, having talked with the other expatriate spouses that were sharing their experiences. In addition to restaurants, two of the expatriates mentioned the help their spouses could offer in maintaining the household. If something needed fixing or taking care of, the spouses would figure out with the help of their networks who to call and the expatriates did not need to worry about these sort of things.

In addition to helping with navigating in the environment and speaking the language, spouses were found to be helpful in creating social networks during the assignment, which were useful for the expatriate as well. Many of the expatriates reported that they spent their free time with expatriate couples that the wife had met. Moreover, one expatriate explained that the wives were the ones planning all of the social gatherings in their social communities. Therefore, it was easy for the expatriates to just join the gatherings and meet people. This study identified both direct and indirect spillover effects when it came to social networks. Namely, the expatriate gains direct social support in the home environment, as well as indirect in terms of making new acquaintances with the help of the spouse. It was discovered that also the children that were on the assignment, were indirectly helping the expatriates to socialise in the new environment. As they attended local schools the parents were able to meet other parents and make connections. The expatriates felt it was more difficult to build relationships with their Chinese colleagues than the other expatriates they met mainly through the spouse's networks. One expatriate stated the following:

*“I had a few friends from work but mostly we spent time with other expatriates my wife had met. It really helped that we had good friends that we could socialise with and share experiences.” (Expatriate 4)*

In contrast, spillover effects can also be negative. The four negative effects that were discovered in the interviews with expatriates included (1) worrying about the adjustment and safety of the spouse, (2) worrying about the adjustment and health of the children, (3) stress about working long hours and thus not spending enough time with the family and (4) stress about the changed employment status of the spouse.

Especially in the beginning, each one of the expatriates was slightly concerned about the spouse’s adjustment in the foreign environment. They stated that they felt worried because the spouse had to spend a long time alone each day, when the expatriate went to work. One expatriate felt guilty that he had – as he saw it – put the spouse in that difficult situation. He felt that he was to blame for the difficulties his spouse went through in the beginning, as he was the reason they were there. Furthermore, one expatriate stated he felt the need to check in on the spouse during the time when he was working to provide some company when he was away.

Occasionally the expatriates had to travel within China and they expressed that during those times it was sometimes difficult to be in contact with their family, because of bad phone service and lack of Wi-Fi connectivity. One expatriate said this caused him to worry as it was difficult to know how the family was doing.

Safety of the spouse was another issue for the expatriates. Traffic was found to be very different than what the couples had been used to in Finland, and some of the expatriates felt especially initially, that it was unsafe to move around in the streets, as they had heard of accidents happening to foreigners that were not used to the traffic. In general, though, all of the expatriates described China as extremely safe in terms of pickpocketing, robberies and violence. They felt that the areas where they lived and moved around in daily were – excluding the problems with traffic – safe to walk around in at any time of day.

The study did not find considerable positive or negative spillover effects towards expatriate adjustment and performance from the adjustment of the children. The two expatriates that were accompanied by their children on the assignment reported that they did feel nervous about their health, but it did not affect their work in any way / at least not directly. Therefore, it can be assumed that the adjustment of the children affects the spouse much more than the expatriate. This can be due to change in parental roles, as the spouses were generally more responsible for taking care of the children while the expatriate was working. However, one expatriate stated the following about his worry over the child:

*“I wasn’t worried initially, but then we found out that there was only one English-speaking doctor in the city, who was used by all the expatriate families. So you couldn’t just drop in. With a young child it made me nervous.”* (Expatriate 4)

In some cases, family demands inhibited the worker from working longer hours or being flexible on the hours. Some of the spouses commented that it was frustrating that they could not plan activities for week nights as they never knew when their husbands would come home from work. On the other hand, the often-inflexible work schedules caused stress for the expatriates as well. Some of the expatriates felt that it was their “fault” that the spouse was in the foreign environment, and therefore felt guilty about the difficulties in adjustment that the spouses experienced. In addition, they felt stressed if they needed to stay at work for longer than expected, as they knew the spouse was home alone. One expatriate explained:

*“It put a lot of pressure on me at work if we had a long meeting or if it took longer than usual on the way home. I was frustrated to be late when [my spouse] was alone at home waiting. I don’t think she minded, but I did.”*  
(Expatriate 5)

In addition, some of the expatriates tried to be flexible during the work days and take a longer lunch break in order to spend some time with the spouse also during the day. One of them commented it was a nice break during the day to recharge and talk about subjects that were not related to work. Although the expatriate found this to be relaxing, and something he needed to do to help the spouse, it was a sacrifice from work, as then he had less time for the work tasks for the day. Therefore, the spouse’s conflicting needs were found to decrease expatriate performance.

Finding a job for the spouse during the assignment was not only a source of stress for the spouse, but also for the expatriate. One expatriate explained he was contacting several people through his own connections in order to find some kind of employment for his spouse in China. Furthermore, he tried to negotiate with his superiors at work, if the spouse might find a job at the company. He felt that this put him in an awkward position at the company, although as it became clear that the company would not offer the spouse a job, the uncomfortable situation was solved. Inability to find employment for the duration of the assignment was thus seen as a hindering, although mildly, factor towards the expatriate adjustment and performance at work.

Table 4 displays the positive and negative spillover effects in a summarised form. As seen in the table, positive spillover effects consisted of two categories: (1) physical and

mental support as well as (2) knowledge transfer, while negative spillover effects were also divided into two categories: (1) issues in family adjustment or (2) conflicting demands of spouse and employer. The right column refers to the number of expatriates who either directly mentioned the effect as relevant towards their overall adjustment and performance during the assignment or the researcher could clearly notice the relevance from the answers that the expatriates gave.

Table 4 Key findings in adjustment spillover

<b>Positive spillover effects</b>		<b>Frequency (n=5)</b>
Physical and mental support	Social and emotional support	5
	More meaningful life	5
	Social networks	4
Knowledge transfer	Environmental knowledge	4
	Language skills	4
<b>Negative spillover effects</b>		<b>Frequency (n=5)</b>
Issues in family adjustment	Adjustment of the spouse	3
	Adjustment, health and safety of the child	1
	Change in employment of the spouse	2
Work and family demands	Conflicting needs of the spouse and work	4

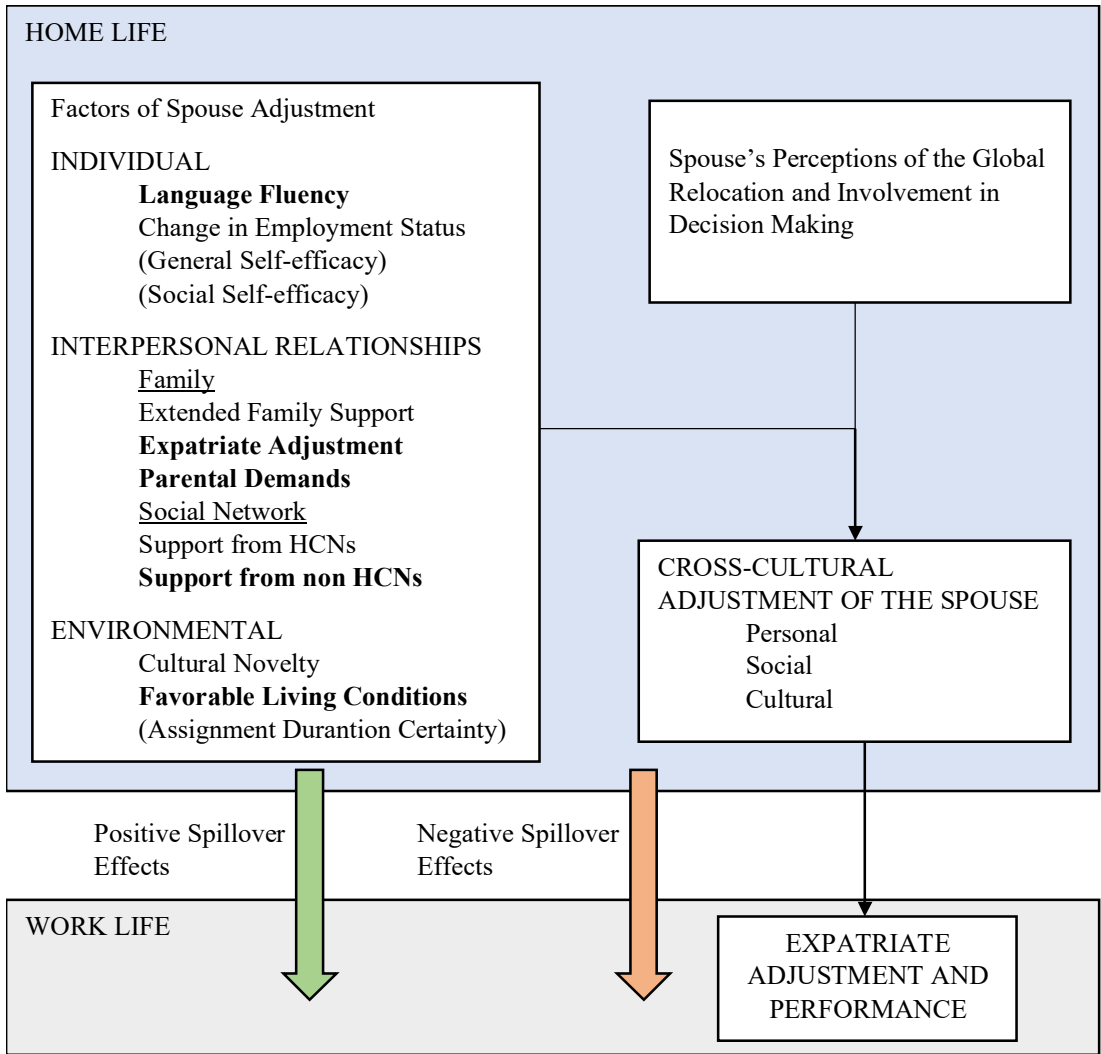
From the responses given by the expatriates it was clear that the most notable spillover effects out of all were physical and mental support from the spouse and children. As seen in Table 4 this category includes social and emotional support, more meaningful life and social networks. It could be noticed that the support the spouses could offer had a direct effect on both expatriate adjustment and performance at work, by reducing stress. These effects were also referred to the most when asked about the most important factors towards the expatriates' adjustment, performance and overall well-being during the relocation.

### 4.3 A summary of the main empirical research findings

In order to review the various results of the research, a summary of the findings will be presented in this chapter. More closely, this chapter will aim to provide insight on the most important factors for spousal adjustment, as well as the most crucial spillover effects that were spilled over from the home life to affect expatriate adjustment and performance.

The findings are illustrated in Figure 8, which is modified from the model of spousal adjustment spillover (see Figure 7), based on the results of the study. As Figure 8 shows, factors of spouse adjustment, spouse opinion about the relocation and involvement in the decision-making make up the overall spouse adjustment in the home life. From the home life, several positive and negative spillover effects were found affecting the expatriate in his adjustment and performance.

Figure 8 A summary of the empirical findings



Source: Modified from Shaffer & Harrison (2001, 245) and Caligiuri, Hyland, Joshi  
 Bross (1998, 600).



The factors of spouse adjustment that are written in bold in Figure 8 were found to have the strongest influence. They include language fluency, expatriate adjustment, parental demands, support from non-HCN and favourable living conditions. These bolded factors were named by all of the interviewed spouses as relevant towards their adjustment. Especially the social ties formed with other expatriates and expatriate spouses were found to be crucial in terms of social adjustment.

On the other hand, change in employment status, support from HCNs and cultural novelty were found to have an intermediate effect on spousal adjustment. Out of the five interviewed spouses, two to four mentioned these factors as relevant for their adjustment. Interestingly, support from locals was not seen as an important factor towards adjustment, despite the common belief. As making friends with the locals was perceived difficult, the spouses found it more enjoyable to spend time with other foreigners.

Finally, the factors that were found to have little effect on adjustment are shown in Figure 8 in brackets. These include general and social self-efficacy and assignment duration certainty. These factors were mentioned by only one spouse as relevant for their adjustment. The concept of self-efficacy was difficult for the interviewed spouses to understand, which might have influenced their feeling that it was not important in their adjustment.

The cross-cultural adjustment of the expatriate spouse is a result of not only the factors listed above, but also the perception that the spouse has about the relocation, as well as involvement in decision-making. The findings suggest that feeling involved in the decision-making before leaving for the assignment was very important for the spouses. Even though they were not involved by the company, they felt that they were an equal part of making the final decision at home. Furthermore, it was found to be important for the expatriates to include the spouse in the discussions instead of making the decision privately with the employer.

Both positive and negative spillover effects from the home life to the expatriate's work life were found. Physical and mental support, which includes social and emotional support from the spouse, more meaningful life and support from social networks built by the spouse were regarded as most relevant positive influencers. This category was mentioned by all five expatriates that were interviewed and it was found to have both direct and indirect effects on the adjustment and performance of the expatriate during the foreign relocation. All of the interviewed expatriates described their life on the assignment dull or boring for those times they had to be there without their families. It was found important for the adjustment and performance of the expatriates, that the spouses were there to fill the life with more excitement, broader social networks and activities.

The most notable negative spillover effects were due to difficulties in spouse adjustment, which caused stress for the expatriates and also made them make some

compromises at work to better facilitate the needs of the spouse. These sacrifices included negotiating work travel to consider the needs of the spouse, leaving work earlier or taking longer breaks in order to meet with the spouse during the day. These compromises had a twofold effect on the expatriates, as on one hand they helped the expatriate alleviate stress and get through the days, but on the other hand the expatriates then had less time to finish their work tasks. Furthermore, conflicting needs of the spouse and work was found to have a negative effect on the expatriates.

Overall, the two models that this study relied upon in the theoretical background were supported to a large extent. It was found that spouses are affected by different factors but more or less their adjustment was affected by the same factors. It was also discovered that spouses and children have a great impact on the adjustment of the expatriate, as well as their performance at work during the assignment. The impact was found to be positive for the most part, although negative spillover effects were also revealed.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

### 5.1 Theoretical implications

The objective of this study was to find out how the adjustment of the expatriate spouse can affect the adjustment of the expatriate through the home life during the foreign assignment. This research question was approached by dividing it to two sub-objectives that helped outline the structure of the study. By researching and collecting data to find answers to the sub-objectives, the researcher was able to describe first what kind of factors were relevant to spousal adjustment and second, what were the most relevant positive and negative spillover effects that affected the expatriate from the home life. The data was collected by interviewing five Finnish expatriate couples, two of which were accompanied with young children, and who had previously completed a foreign assignment in China and since then returned to Finland.

The findings in this study support the model of spouse adjustment by Shaffer and Harrison (2001) to a large extent (see Figure 5). As Zhang and Peltokorpi (2016) argued in their study, individuals in a foreign environment who possess insufficient language skills were able to develop fewer social connections with locals, thus hindering their adjustment. The results of this study agree that the spouses were unable to build social networks with the locals as their language skills were insufficient but cannot conclude whether the lack of local contacts hindered their adjustment.

The change in employment made the spouses initially uncomfortable with the amount of free time and lack of meaningful activities. This lack of meaningful activities and feeling unproductive was resolved by taking up voluntary work, supporting the findings of Lauring and Selmer (2010).

The effect of children on the adjustment of the spouse was found to be twofold, supporting the findings of Mohr and Klein (2004). On one hand, the spouses felt more concerned about the cleanliness and safety of their living conditions and food, because of their children. On the other hand, their enabled the spouse to go out and interact more with the locals and other foreigners, as the children will need to go to a local kindergarten or school. This had a positive effect on the spouses' interaction adjustment, as they felt it was easier to connect with especially locals, with the help of their children.

The results contradict the view of Black and Gregersen (1991b) claiming that the spouse might feel dependent on the expatriate for social support and mental stability, after losing much of their existing support system. The findings of this study reveal that spouses were not dependent on the expatriate for support, but rather relied on their new social networks consisting of other expatriates and spouses.

In addition, this study questions the common argument that living in an 'expat bubble' would be harmful for the adjustment and cautiously supports the findings of Copeland and Norell (2002) who found that the spouses who spent more time with other foreigners did not differ in adjustment from those who spent more time with locals. This is supported in a limited way to the extent that the spouses did feel they adjusted well even though they spent most of their time in this 'expat bubble'. None of the spouses had however developed notable friendships with the locals so it cannot be assessed whether they might have adjusted even better if they had spent more time with the locals.

The empirical evidence gathered for this study supports the findings of Copeland and Norell (2002), who argue that the spouses' perceived involvement in the decisions about going on the relocation was positively related to their adjustment. Thus, it seems that it is important for the spouses to feel in control and of mattering in the decision-making. Supporting this, Black and Stephens (1989) argue that the spouse's opinion about the relocation is positively related to spousal interaction adjustment. In this study, it was found to be important for the spouses to be in control in the decision-making, even if they were not involved by the company. It was important for both the spouses as well as the expatriates that the spouse was an equal voice in making the decision at home.

The interviewed spouses felt that it was important to receive adequate support from the expatriate company. This supports the findings of Ali et al. (2003), who point out that the view about accepting the international assignment had been found to be dependent on the view the spouses have on whether they can receive adequate support from the expatriate's company. Thus, the more support the spouses feel they are given, the better they feel about the relocation.

Support received from the company had an effect on both individual and social adjustment of expatriate spouses in the study of Ali et al. (2003). It also directly contributed to the amount of intercultural interaction they engaged in. The same study found however, that although an increasing number of companies accept the importance of providing support to the expatriate families, the participating spouses in their study reported that they were not happy with the amount of support they received from the company. This is largely supported by the findings of this study, which reveal that spouses were unsatisfied with the support the international companies provided.

This study identified both negative and positive spillover effects from the home life to the work life, supporting the findings of Caligiuri, Hyland and Joshi (1998) and Lambert (1990). The findings of this study agree with Lambert (1990) that the spillover effects between the family and workplace can be either direct or indirect and further argue that the indirect effects can be as meaningful as the direct effects.

The most notable positive spillover effects included physical and mental support that the spouse provided for the expatriate during the assignment. The empirical findings support the earlier research findings of Crouter (1984), who suggests that in the case

where the expatriate and spouse are cut off from much of their previous support system at home, the support they can provide each other becomes more important.

Crouter (1984) suggests that negative spillover effects on the other hand can result from family demands inhibiting the worker to for example work longer hours or being flexible on hours. This is largely supported by the empirical evidence gathered for this study. The expatriates often felt unease about working late knowing that the spouse was home alone and tried to balance their work with home life.

## **5.2 Managerial recommendations**

In addition to the theoretical implications discussed above, this study further offers some insights that can prove useful for international companies sending their employees on international assignments with their spouse or entire family. Six managerial recommendations can be presented based on the empirical evidence gathered for the study: (1) cultural training is needed for both the expatriate and the spouse, (2) language training is needed prior the assignment for both the expatriate and the spouse, (3) the spouse should be included in the initial discussions about the terms of the assignment, (4) company should provide assistance in finding employment for the spouse during the assignment, (5) company should provide adequate assistance in finding suitable accommodation for the duration of the stay, and (6) companies should encourage spouses to accompany expatriates on the assignments.

The empirical findings showed that both the spouses and expatriates were uncomfortable and annoyed with some Chinese manners that were different than what they were used to in their home culture. These manners included spitting, pushing, cutting in line and staring. This kind of irritations based on cultural differences could be lessened with cultural training offered to the expatriate families prior to the move. The training could include learning how to behave in basic social interactions with the locals, what to expect in terms of their behaviour and manners and some information about the surroundings.

It was quite surprising that none of the expatriate couples included in the study were offered language training prior to the assignment. Based on the empirical evidence, language training is crucial for especially the spouse's adjustment and it should be offered much earlier than when the family has already arrived in the location. This is of course only applicable in locations where the locals do not have strong English skills, such as China. It was discovered that the language training offered in China was extremely helpful for the expatriate couple, but the timing was too late. Language training was deemed to be most useful for spouses, as they are more in contact with the locals in the

everyday life, but it would also be useful for the expatriates, especially as they do not usually have adequate time to learn the language during the relocation.

The research findings revealed that it is very important for the spouse to feel mattering and in control of decision-making prior to the assignment. Furthermore, it was discovered that spouse opinion is very important for the expatriates when making the initial decision about whether to accept the relocation or not. Therefore, it seems necessary that the company would involve the spouse already in the initial discussions about the relocation. This way the company would get a more wholesome image of the relocating family and their needs, and the spouse would get to have an opinion on the matter.

Finding employment for the duration of the assignment was found to be a difficult subject for the expatriate spouses as many of them felt there was no point to even try to look for a job. The international companies should consider options to find employment options for the spouse for the duration of the stay. This employment could be full-time or part-time, but it seems important that at least something is offered for the spouses to have meaningful tasks. Furthermore, international companies should evaluate options to offer remote working possibilities for spouses that are following their family abroad – in those lines of work where it is possible. Companies are increasingly encouraging their employees to work from home from time to time. This would provide an opportunity for spouses to continue their career from abroad, and also the company would benefit from not needing to go through a recruiting process to find a replacement for the duration of the relocation.

The research findings suggest that the companies did not offer adequate help in finding suitable apartments for the expatriate families. This was found to be a considerable source of stress for both the spouses and the expatriates, as without language skills finding housing was very difficult. Companies should make sure that this process of finding a house is easy and fast, to alleviate any extra stress formed in the already difficult beginning of the relocation. For international companies that frequently send their employees to the same locations, it would be beneficial to use established realtors to efficiently find an apartment already approved by a prior expatriate.

The final recommendation is a general notion based on the research findings. As the findings suggest that spouses have a mainly positive effect on the lives of the expatriates during the assignment, by reducing stress and providing physical and mental support, companies have a way of benefitting from the accompanying spouse. When the expatriates feel less stressed and more comfortable in the foreign environment, they most likely perform better at work. Therefore, companies should make the assignments as easy as possible for the spouses to go on as well. This can include the previously mentioned spouse inclusion in decision-making, offering employment options for spouses and providing the spouse the same benefits that the expatriate receives.

### 5.3 Suggestions for further research

This chapter will focus on presenting possible directions for future research on similar topics that the researcher realised during the process of writing this thesis. Firstly, as all of the expatriates that took part in the interviews were male, and all of the spouses were female, it would be interesting to study the situation reversed – female expatriate with a trailing spouse in China. The research of Punnett 1997 showed that male spouses adjust differently to a foreign environment and different factors are more important in regard to their adjustment, when compared to females. Therefore, the results might vary significantly compared to the findings in this study. Besides, as China is a relatively masculine culture (see Appendix 1), it can be argued that female expatriates would also adjust differently to the work environment and have different challenges in China, compared to male expatriates. This would perhaps mostly affect adjustment at work, but it might also influence overall adjustment during the relocation. The challenge in this topic might turn out to be the scarceness of Finnish female expatriates in China, which therefore might require the research to include expatriates from all nationalities.

Second, more research on the impact of spousal adjustment on the expatriate conducted with a longitudinal approach could be recommended as this study was done with limited time and could not include some interesting elements. On top of including the adjustment in the host culture, the study could include repatriation and adjustment of the spouse back in the home culture. Returning home is a major change for those spouses who were not employed during the assignment and must return to work after the assignment is over. Repatriation has been researched relatively widely from the expatriate's point of view, but not much research has been conducted thus far about the 'repatriation' of the expatriate spouses. Therefore, this would be a fascinating topic to research further.

Third, as many spouses leave their careers behind in order to follow the expatriate on the relocation, one possible direction for future research could be exploring how the relocation affected their career in the long term – were they able to continue their career after returning or possibly start a new career. This would offer valuable insight for the spouses considering following expatriates on assignment, as well as for managers in international companies. The study would create knowledge about how the international experience affects the spouses' careers and whether it adds value to that career in some way.

To sum up, this study found that spouses can have a major influence on the adjustment of the expatriates, mainly in a positive way. Including the spouse seems to be one of the most important factors towards successful adjustment of the expatriate and thus successful international working experience. International companies should take steps in order to take full advantage of the benefits the spouse can offer towards the success of

the relocation. By supporting the expatriate as well as the spouse, companies can encourage spouses to come along on the assignment, and therefore make the expatriate's adjustment easier. The findings of this study largely support earlier empirical research on this topic, with some interesting exceptions. This leaves space for additional research to be done, focusing on areas that have been less researched or which have gathered conflicting results. Thus, although the topic of spouse adjustment has been relatively widely researched, interesting topics still remain to be studied in this field.



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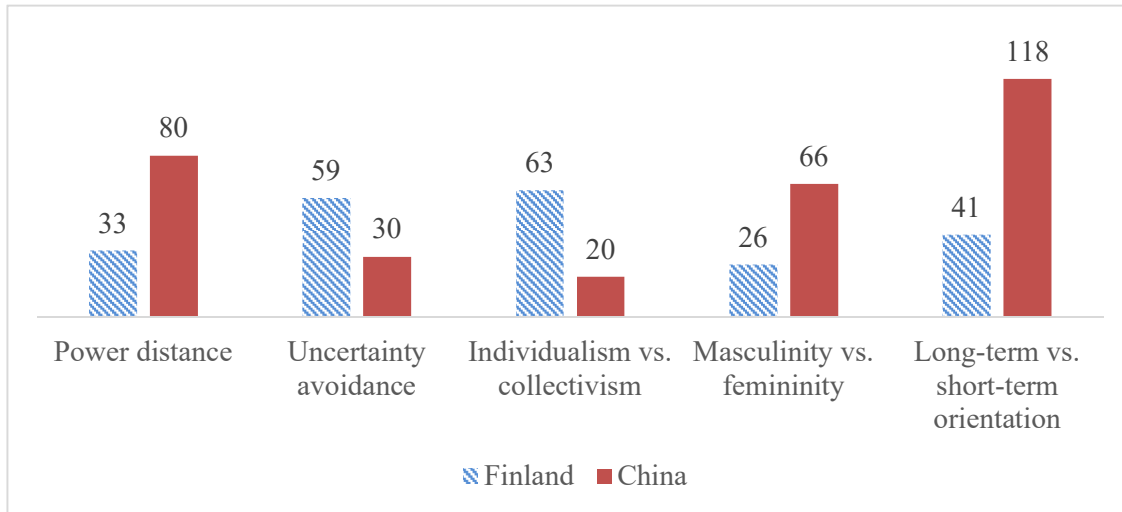
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## APPENDICES

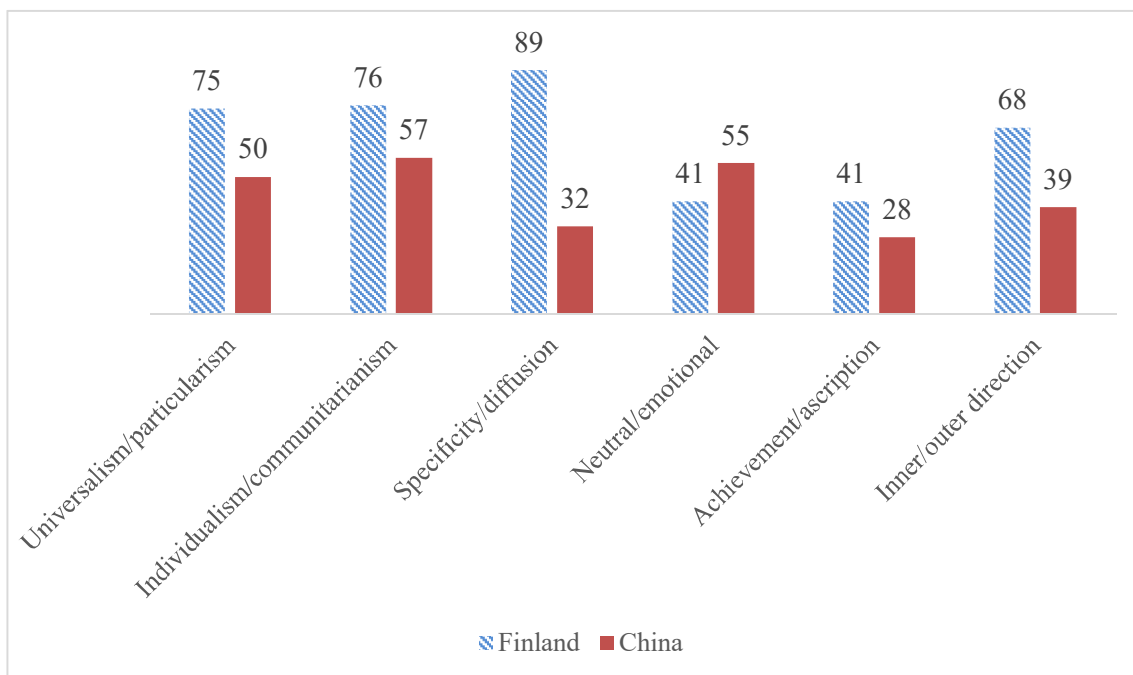
### Appendix 1 Cultural dimensions between Finland and China

Hofstede's cultural dimensions – Finland and China compared



Source: Hofstede & Hofstede (2005, 43, 78–79, 120–121, 168–169, 211).

Cultural dimensions by Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner – Finland and China compared



Source: Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner (1997, 37, 55, 70, 88, 105, 144).

## Appendix 2 Earlier empirical research on cross-cultural adjustment of expatriate spouses (in chronological order – oldest first)

Author(s) (year)	Objective	Method	Findings
Black & Stephens (1989)	Empirical verification of the relationship between the spouse's adjustment and the adjustment and intentions to stay or leave of the expatriate manager.	Questionnaire to American expatriate managers in Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong (n=220).	The spouse's willingness to go on the international assignment has a positive impact on spousal adjustment whereas culture novelty has a negative impact. Additionally, the adjustment of the spouse is highly correlated to the adjustment of the expatriate and the intention to stay on the overseas assignment.
Black & Gregersen (1991a)	Empirical verification of the relationship between the spouse's inability to adjust and expatriates' early return from the international assignment.	Questionnaire including expatriates (n=220) and their spouses (n=157) in Pacific Rim countries.	The spouse's favourable opinion about the assignment is positively related to adjustment whereas culture novelty has a negative effect. Spouse's adjustment is highly correlated to the expatriate's adjustment and positively related to the expatriate's intention to stay on the assignment.
Black & Gregersen (1991b)	Systematic examination of antecedents of spouse adjustment to social and general environment.	Questionnaire that included expatriates in the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, the Netherlands and Taiwan (n=321).	Firms taking into account the spouse's opinion about the assignment, the spouse's self-initiated pre-departure training and support from family and host-country nationals during the assignment have a positive relationship with spouse interaction adjustment. Additionally, firms taking into account the spouse's opinion about the international assignment and the standard of living have a positive relationship with general adjustment. Training provided by the firm and culture novelty have a negative relationship with general adjustment.
Fish & Wood (1996)	To examine effective spouse preparation and adjustment factors to enhance the experience of international assignments.	Interview followed by a questionnaire distributed to five foreign businesses operating in Australia (n=122).	Lack of attention by the firm for spousal adjustment can lead to culture shock which often effectively results in premature return from the assignment. Skills learned in the preparatory stage can be reinforced during the assignment.

Author(s) (year)	Objective	Method	Findings
Harvey (1997)	Exploring the key dimensions of dual-career international relocation. Identifying issues that impact adjustment, satisfaction and support provided by the firm during the assignment.	Survey consisting of 332 dual-career couples on international assignments (n=332).	Dual-career couples have relatively consistent concerns and expectations prior to expatriation and upon repatriation. Furthermore, the expatriates and their spouses did not feel that the multinational company that sent them on the assignment provided enough support or training during the assignment.
Punnett (1997)	Examination of the expatriate process from the spouse's viewpoint.	3 parts: in-depth interviews (n=45), focus group (n=11) and mail survey to expatriates (n=111) and spouses (n=89).	Spouses' needs are dependent on the gender and work expectations. Spouses fall in three categories based on their needs: 1. Female spouses not expecting to work in the foreign location 2. Female spouses expecting to work 3. Male spouses expecting to work.
Caligiuri, Hyland & Joshi (1998)	To test a model for examining expatriate family adjustment during an international assignment as an antecedent to expatriate work adjustment.	Archival database and a follow-up interview (n=110).	Family characteristics are related to their cross-cultural adjustment. Positive expectations about the foreign assignment is also positively related to adjustment. As spillover theory suggests, family adjustment was positively influenced by the expatriates' work adjustment.
Shaffer & Harrison (2001)	Developing a model for spousal adjustment.	Model created from interviews and tested by questionnaire data from assignee couples in 37 countries (n=221).	A model of spouse adjustment developed from in depth interviews with expatriate spouses that identifies several sources of adjustment. The model also revealed relationships between individual, interpersonal relationship and environmental sources of identity and the adjustment.
Copeland & Norell (2002)	Examining the role of social support in spousal adjustment in international assignments.	Questionnaire including female expatriate spouses in 19 European countries (n=194).	Spousal adjustment is facilitated by cohesive families, involvement in the decision to move, fewer lost relationships because of the move, more functions of social support, more support from local sources rather than long-distance sources.
Takeuchi, Yun & Tesluk (2002)	Testing a model of spillover and crossover effects on expatriate adjustment and whether the relationship is reciprocal.	Survey to expatriates (n=215) and spouses (n=169).	Data collected strongly supported spillover and crossover effects between expatriate and spousal adjustment. There are possibilities for both negative and positive synergy in the adjustment process.



Author(s) (year)	Objective	Method	Findings
Ali, van der Zee & Sanders (2003)	To examine the characteristics of personality, family and work life as determinants of cross-cultural adjustment for expatriate spouses.	Questionnaire for expatriate spouses worldwide (n=275).	The findings conclude, that among personality traits, open-mindedness and emotional stability were correlated with adjustment. In addition, family cohesion and adaptability affected adjustment of the spouse positively. Of the work-related variables, support from the company and work satisfaction were found to impact spousal adjustment positively.
Takeuchi, Lepak, Marinova & Yun (2007)	Examining the effect of parental demands and perceived cultural novelty on the adjustment of the expatriate and the expatriate spouse.	A survey of Japanese expatriates and spouses on a foreign assignment in the United States (n=170).	The study highlights the role of parental demands, cultural novelty, and the importance of paying attention to dyadic interactions between expatriates and their spouses in ensuring successful international assignment.
Lauring & Selmer (2010)	The study investigated female spouses' involvement and positive impact in the career of Danish business expatriates living in the same compound in Saudi Arabia.	Semi-structured, in-depth interviews and participant observation with expatriates and spouses (n=26).	Partners were found to be active in trying to support and further their expatriate husbands' careers and repatriation opportunities by using social strategies, such as creating alliances and establishing social networks with influential others through social contacts.
McNulty (2012)	Examination of three types of organizational support provided for the expatriate spouse and their importance in relation to spousal adjustment.	Questionnaire (n=264).	Professional and social support to trailing spouse were perceived to having the greatest impact on adjustment. However, the study found that both types of support during the assignment were lacking.
Rosenbusch & Cseh (2012)	The study examines the relationship between family flexibility of expatriates and their cross-cultural adjustment, as well as the stressors experienced by the expatriate, spouse, and children during the international transition.	Total of 275 expatriates in 40 different countries were surveyed for the research (n=275).	The findings conclude that family flexibility was negatively correlated with expatriates' cross-cultural adjustment. All five cross-cultural adjustment dimensions (cultural, psychological, organizational, personal and relational) had a statistically significant relationship with family flexibility. Expatriate families identified cultural, relational, and psychological stressors as having the greatest impact on their cross-cultural adjustment.

Author(s) (year)	Objective	Method	Findings
van Erp, van der Zee, Giebels & van Duijn (2013)	The research explores the role of three intercultural personality traits—emotional stability, social initiative, and open-mindedness—as coping resources for expatriate couples' adjustment.	Questionnaire to total of 98 expatriate couples of mainly Dutch nationalities (n=196).	The findings revealed that the three dimensions are each associated with specific facets of adjustment. Furthermore, we obtained evidence for a resource compensation effect, that is, the compensatory process whereby one partner's lack of sufficiently high levels of a certain personality trait is compensated for by the other partner's high(er) levels of this traits.
Collins & Bertone (2017)	The study explores changes in the identity construction of expatriate spouses during their first year of adjustment in the host culture.	Interview data collected longitudinally throughout the first year (n=10).	When going on an assignment, the central identities of expatriate spouses are met with challenges that determine the redefinition of social roles and personal identities, which are required for successful adjustment.

## Appendix 3 Interview questions

### ADJUSTMENT OF THE SPOUSE

#### Background:

1. Length of stay and location?
2. Were you accompanied by children?
3. Was this your first experience of an international assignment?

#### Individual factors:

1. Language fluency
  - a. How would you describe your fluency in the local language?
  - b. Did you receive language training from the company? Did the expatriate?
  - c. How did knowing/not knowing the language affect your stay? How did it help? What kind of problems did it cause?
  - d. Did not knowing the language limit your possibilities in everyday life? How?
2. Change in employment
  - a. How did your employment status change when going on the assignment? How did you feel about it?
  - b. If you were not employed during the assignment was the decision voluntary or because there were no available jobs?
  - c. Did the company assist in finding a job for during the time abroad?
  - d. How did you spend your time?
3. Self-efficacy
  - a. Did you try to modify your behaviour to fit in the environment better? Did you experience setbacks? What did you learn from these setbacks?

#### Interpersonal factors:

1. Extended family support
  - a. How did you maintain contact with the extended family? How often?
  - b. Were you more in contact with extended family or with friends from home? Why?
2. Expatriate adjustment
  - a. Did you receive support from the expatriate?
  - b. Did you feel dependent on the expatriate for support? i.e. felt like it was difficult to receive social support from host-country nationals or extended family.
  - c. How were you affected by the adjustment of the expatriate? Did the expatriate's work affect the home life?
  - d. How do you feel your adjustment affected the expatriate?
  - e. What were important factors at home that facilitated the adjustment of the expatriate/ their success at work?
  - f. What factors/issues at home complicated the adjustment/work of the expatriate?
3. Parental demands
  - a. How did having children on the assignment affect your stay?

- b. Were you more/the same/ less in charge of taking care of the children than before?
  - c. Did having a familiar role (as a parent) help with being in a new environment?
  - d. Did you feel your gender affected your responsibility on taking care of the children? i.e. Did you feel it was more/less your duty and not the expatriate's compared to the situation in Finland?
4. Social networks
- a. Who did they consist of (HCN, other expatriates and spouses)?
  - b. Did you feel you received more support from HCNs or other foreigners?
  - c. How did you meet people?
  - d. Did you feel that you could build meaningful relationships with HCN?
  - e. How did it help you to have social connections with HCNs? Did they help you with understanding the local culture?
  - f. Did you live in an area with lots of other expats or mostly locals? How did the area where you lived affect in developing social networks?

**Environmental factors:**

- 1. Cultural novelty
  - a. Did you receive cultural training from the company? Did the expatriate?
  - b. Did you experience culture shock? In what situation or what caused it?
  - c. What did you feel were the biggest cultural differences that were difficult to adjust to?
  - d. In what kind of situations did you notice the cultural differences?
- 2. Living conditions
  - a. Were your living conditions worse/the same/ better than in Finland? How did this affect the adjustment?
  - b. Were you able to trust the quality of the food, food products, healthcare? Something else?
- 3. Duration of assignment
  - a. When did you find out the duration of the assignment? Before or during?
  - b. How did you feel about knowing/not knowing the duration?

**Additional questions:**

- 1. Did you feel that you were involved in making the decision about the relocation? Did the company involve you in some way? How? Was it important to you to be involved?
- 2. Did your adjustment follow the U-curve? How did it differ?
- 3. What issues caused the most stress during the assignment? What were the most difficult factors to deal with?
- 4. What factors helped your adjustment the most?
- 5. How would you describe your adjustment on a scale from 1 to 5?
  - 1 – Poorly adjusted
  - 2 – Somewhat adjusted
  - 3 – Adjusted
  - 4 – Well adjusted
  - 5 – Extremely well adjusted

## ADJUSTMENT OF THE EXPATRIATE

### **Background:**

1. Company, how long have you worked there?
2. Was this your first international assignment?
  - a. If not, where were the earlier relocations to?
3. Who was involved in making the decision about the relocation?
  - a. Who made the ultimate decision?
  - b. What factors were important in the decision?

### **Adjustment (spillover to) at home:**

1. What was the most important source of social support during the assignment?
2. Did the family feel positive about the relocation?
  - a. Did the perception change during the assignment? Why?
  - b. How did the positive/negative perception appear at home?
3. Were you able to spend less/the same amount/more time with your family than before the relocation?
  - a. How did this affect you?
  - b. How do you feel this affected the family?
4. Did you receive support from your spouse (family)?
5. Did you feel that the demands of the company and the demands of the spouse were sometimes in conflict?
  - a. How did you deal with this?
6. Did you feel that the needs of the family and the needs of the company were in conflict? (issues that were not demanded but you felt obligated to do)
7. Did you feel that your work affected your mood/behaviour at home?
  - a. More than before the assignment?

### **Adjustment (spillover to) at work:**

1. What issues/factors at home made your adjustment/work more difficult?
  - a. In what way?
2. Did you worry about the adjustment of your spouse?
  - a. How did it affect your work?
3. Did you feel that your spouse had to rely on you for social support?
  - a. How did you feel about this?
4. How did you feel about the change in employment status of your spouse?
  - a. How did you deal with this (try to find employment within the company etc.)?
  - b. Did it affect your work?
5. What issues/factors at home made your adjustment/work easier?
  - a. In what way?
6. Did you learn something about the host culture from your family that positively affected your adjustment?
7. How much were you involved in taking care of the children?
  - a. Compared to before the assignment?

- b. Did this influence your work (energy levels etc.)?
- 8. Social networks
  - a. Did your spouse influence your social network building? (spouse's existing networks)

**Additional questions:**

1. What were the issues that caused the most stress during the assignment?
2. What were the most important issues that helped in coping during the assignment?
3. Did your adjustment follow the U-curve? How did it differ?
4. How would you describe your adjustment on a scale from 1 to 5?
  - 1 – Poorly adjusted
  - 2 – Somewhat adjusted
  - 3 – Adjusted
  - 4 – Well adjusted
  - 5 – Extremely well adjusted