Aliisa Semi

Expatriate Adjustment and Work Performance during COVID-19: The Role of Organisational Support in Hostile Environments

UNIVERSITY OF VAASA
School of Management

Author:	Aliisa Semi
Title of the Thesis:	Expatriate Adjustment and Work Performance during COVID-19: The Role of Organisational Support in Hostile Environments
Degree:	Master of Science in Economics and Business Administration
Programme:	International Business
Supervisor:	Vesa Suutari
Year:	2021 **Pages:** 112

ABSTRACT:

Tämä tutkimus käsittelee haitallisissa toimintaympäristöissä ulkomaankomennuksilla olleiden ekspatriaattien sopeutumista ja työssä suoriutumista. Haitallisilla toimintaympäristöillä viitataan sellaisiin maantieteellisiin alueisiin, joita uhkaavat esimerkiksi terrorismi, luonnonkatastrofit, poliittinen epävakaus tai taudit. Tutkielma keskittyy erityisesti terveysuhkia sisältäviin ympäristöihin ja edelleen siihen, millainen vaikutus niillä on ulkomaankomennusten menestymiseen. Samalla tutkitaan myös organisaation tuen merkitystä näissä asiayhteyksissä. Aiemmat tutkimukset aiheeseen liittyen ovat tyypillisesti käsitelleet ihmisten aiheuttamia uhkia kuten väkivaltaisia tekoja tai niiden vaaraa. Kuitenkin terveyteen liittyvien uhkien kohdalla on huomattava tutkimusaukko. Tutkimusaiheen merkittävyyteen sekä ajankohtaisuuteen vaikuttaa läheisesti myös koronaviruspandemia. Koronavirustauti, viralliselta nimeltään COVID-19, on aiheuttanut maailmanlaajuisen hätätilan, joka on rajoittanut yritysten toimintaa globaalisti. Samalla se on myös muodostunut huomattavaksi stressinaiheeksi ekspatriaateille, jotka ovat joutuneet kohtaamaan pandemian hyvin omalaatuisissa olosuhteissa kaukana kotimaistaan. Tämä on tuonut poikkeuksellisia haasteita heidän sopeutumiseensa sekä työssä suoriutumiseensa ulkomailla. Tämä tutkimus pyrkii selvittämään näiden haasteiden ulottuvuuksia ja tuottamaan yrityksille ehdotuksia niiden ratkaisemiseksi.

Kuten edellä mainittiin, terveysuhkia käsittelevää kirjallisuutta ei juuri ole. Tämän takia tutkimuksen teoreettinen viitekehys perustuu pitkälti kirjallisuuteen, joka käsittelee väkivaltaa tai sen uhkaa sisältäviä toimintaympäristöjä. Lisäksi COVID-19:n ollessa erittäin tuore ilmiö, sen vaikutuksista ulkomaankomennuksiin ei luonnollisesti myöskään ole vielä julkaistu useita tutkimuksia. Siispä tässä yhteydessä ekspatriaattien kokemuksia on peilattu olemassa olevaan kirjallisuuteen, joka käsittelee pandemian seurauksia kotiorganisaatioiden työntekijöille. Työn empiirinen osuus puolestaan rakentuu puolistrukturoitujen haastattelujen avulla kerättyyn aineistoon. Haastatteluissa tarkasteltiin COVID-19:n aikana ulkomaankomennuksilla olevien työntekijöiden kokemuksia. Näiden haastatteluiden tulokset analysoitiin hyödyntäen abduktiivista analyysitapaa, eli yhdistämällä aikaisempaa teoriaa uudesta aineistosta tehtyihin löydöksiin.

Tutkimuksen löydökset osoittavat, että ulkomaankomennusten ympäristön haasteellisuus korreloi negatiivisesti ekspatriaattien työssä suoriutumisen kanssa. Tämän korrelaation vahvuuteen vaikuttaa kuitenkin ratkaisevasti työntekijän hierarkkinen asema yrityksessä. Tämän lisäksi sopeutumisen ja työssä suoriutumisen välillä voitiin todeta positiivinen yhteys. Sopeutumisen onnistumiseen vaikuttavat muun muassa yksilön henkilökohtaiset kyvyt ja kokemukset, koetun stressin määrä, ekspatriaatin perheen sopeutuminen ja organisaation tarjoaman tuen laajuus. Työssä suoriutumista tässä ympäristössä puolestaan säätelevät yrityksen kommunikaation selkeys, etätyöskentelyn määrä sekä työpäivien pituus.

KEYWORDS: International assignment, expatriate, adjustment, work performance, hostile environment, health threat, COVID-19

Contents

Figures

Tables

Abbreviations

ERM = expatriate risk management
HCN = host-country national
HE = hostile environment
HR = human resources
HRM = human resource management
IB = international business
IHRM = international human resource management
MNC = multinational corporation
POS = perceived organisational support
PTSD = posttraumatic stress disorder

1 Introduction

Global competition frequently compels firms to select designated expatriate managers to send on assignments abroad (Faeth & Kittler, 2020). However, expatriates are not merely assigned to industrialised countries that have secure environmental conditions, but also to locations that carry high social, political, and even terrorist risk (Bader et al., 2015). Especially individuals employed in, for example, engineering and construction companies, non-governmental organisations, multinational corporations (MNCs), and news agencies are likely to be assigned to hostile environments (HEs) purely due to the nature of their job (Nowlan, 2014). However, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has deviated these definitions as it has created an exceptionally far-reaching hostile environment that has menaced expatriates globally. The widely unforeseen crisis revealed the lack of adaptability and readiness of most organisations that for one contributed to the extensive consternation of the global workforce (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020).

Uncertainty is the magnitude to which one is able to predict the future with confidence. Thus, uncertainty is caused by a high level of unpredictability. (Bader et al., 2019.) Those external crises that cause uncertainty and pose threats to the performance and viability of the organisation are something that firms in today's world must remain alert to (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). As defined above, an example of a modern external crisis is the COVID-19 pandemic. Because the pandemic has had such great physical, socio-psychological, and technical repercussions for employees, its role can be identified as decidedly significant for international human resource management (IHRM) research (Ilie et al., 2020). Additionally, its effects on the global workforce are particularly exceptional because its negative repercussions have been faced by nearly every single organisation simultaneously (Ripamonti et al., 2020.) The Economist (2020) noted that the pandemic has specifically highlighted the role of chief human resources (HR) officers. Probably the greatest challenge for these human resource management (HRM) professionals that has stemmed from the pandemic has been the need to alter work conditions by suddenly

shifting employees to remote work and by creating new workplace procedures and policies to restrict human contact (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020).

Working in any hostile environment especially for long periods of time can have an effect on the physical and psychological well-being of the employee. Consequences of the stress caused by working in a hostile environment include relationship breakdown, addiction disorders, behavioural change, and poor performance. These are particularly highlighted when the organisation fails to adhere to duty of care protocols. This implies that the employer has a responsibility to prepare and support the expatriate before, during, and after their assignment. (Nowlan, 2014.) Therefore, examining the paramount practices for managing these employees is highly relevant. Faeth and Kittler (2020) also support this as they argue that investments made to better understand the expatriate are worthwhile as they will result in better-informed decision-making and advanced HR practices and policies for future assignments in hostile environments.

Even though research on all types of hostile environments is therefore integral, the particular delimitation on health threats was made because of the theme's topicality. Before this however, hostile environments with added risks of violent attacks were also considered. This decision was reached due to the prevalence of these threats in previous research on the topic. In fact, most research on expatriates in hostile environments focuses principally on human-made threats like acts of violence. Pointedly, terrorism was singularly further studied here as well because those violent attacks have become a noticeable worry in most western countries since the beginning of the 21st century. In 2019 Europol reported a total of 119 prevented, failed, and completed terrorist attacks in 13 European Union member states alone (Europol, 2020). Since this rise of terrorism can make working and living in a foreign country stressful and dangerous for expatriates, it is also an increasingly relevant international human resource management matter (Beutell et al., 2017).

1.1   Research questions and objective

This research empirically investigates expatriates' experiences in hostile environments with health-related threats. More specifically the examination concentrates on encounters with the COVID-19 pandemic. From studying these involvements, the aim is to create an understanding of its implications on managing expatriates in similar environments. Moreover, based on the study background and justification for the study the following research questions are formed:

How do hostile environments carrying risks of health-related threats influence the adjustment and thus work performance of expatriates situated in them?

What can the home and host organisations do to mitigate the negative effects of these environments and thereby further assignment success?

These two research questions are summarised in the research objective: to create practical suggestions for international human resource management professionals in charge of employees in hostile environments with health threats through the exploration of expatriate experiences in similar settings.

1.2   Definitions of key concepts

As the key concepts of this study are rather particular and reflect the peculiarity of the niche topic, it is valuable to define the most essential of those notions here.

Expatriate Hall (2007, pp. 618) defines an expatriate as *"a citizen of one country who is working abroad in one of the firm's subsidiaries".* Traditional expatriates are typically approached, chosen, and appointed abroad by their employers. They are most often "home" employees meaning that they share a nationality with their home organisation.

However, third-country nationals that originate from neither the home nor host countries can also be employed. (Baruch et al., 2013.) Lee and Sukoco (2008) characterise the role of expatriates as essential for maintaining foreign subsidiaries' competitiveness.

Expatriate adjustment As stated by Van Vianen et al. (2004) expatriate adjustment is *"the level of psychological comfort towards the various aspects of a host culture"*. The trisection of expatriate adjustment according to Black (1988) as well as Black and Stephens (1989) includes general adjustment, interaction adjustment, and work adjustment. Expatriates' abilities to adjust to foreign cultures vary greatly. The determinant factors of the deviations are highly researched, and they are defined divergently by most. (Tsegaye & Su, 2017.)

Expatriate work performance Adjustment is closely related to work performance in the expatriation context. The above-mentioned three dimensions of adjustment thus help build expatriate work performance abroad. The aspects that determine work performance are commonly categorised as organisational, individual, and social level factors. (Bhatti et al., 2013.) Harrison and Shaffer (2005) state that job performance is *"a function of the amount of time and energy (effort) resources that expatriates devote to their jobs"*.

Hostile environment Hostile environments faced domestically and by expatriates are extremely different. Domestic hostile work environments can carry for example risks of sexual harassment. In turn, expatriate's hostile environments are often external to their place of work and include threats of kidnapping, terrorism, disease, home invasion, street crime, and other perils. (Posthuma et al., 2019.) Nowlan (2014) adds natural disasters, violence, and general tragedy to the list.

Organisational support Organisational support refers to *"a variety of resources provided by the organization to the expatriate and family"* (Cole & Nesbeth, 2014). Kraimer and Wayne (2004) deem three kinds of organisational support to be the most beneficial for expatriates: general adjustment, financial, and career support. Furthermore, Shaffer et

al. (2001) claim that sufficient perceived organisational support increases expatriates' intentions to remain abroad.

1.3   Structure of the thesis

The thesis is divided into six chapters. This first one introduces the research topic while also presenting the research questions and definitions of key concepts. This is followed by the theoretical framework. There a division between expatriate adjustment and management of expatriates in hostile environments is made. Both of these topics are respectively discussed. After this the methodological choices of the study are validated, and the data collection and analysis procedures are explained. Additionally, considerations of research ethics and quality are reviewed. Hereafter, the findings of the research are presented. The design of this segment is based on the research questions. Lastly, these findings are complimented by the discussion. Here conclusions between the theoretical framework and the findings are drawn. The chapter also includes deliberations of managerial implications, limitations of the study, as well as suggestions for future research.

2 Expatriate adjustment

Expatriation is the term used to describe a foreign work assignment that takes place over a certain period of time. Expatriates are used among other things for their essential role in business development. They are also essential in guaranteeing that foreign subsidiaries stay competitive (Lee & Sukoco, 2008). Along, the separation between global markets is turning less apparent and MNCs influence on the world economy is growing rapidly. As the number of multinationals keeps on increasing, the role of expatriates in all of this becomes more and more important. (Wang, 2008.)

Opting for an expatriate is a useful choice also when a qualified professional cannot be found within the locals of the host country (Yeaton & Hall, 2008). However, it is a substantial investment to make. Nowak and Linder (2016) in their study estimated the cost of a two-year assignment to be over 430 thousand euros. Thereby, as the cost of expatriates is high, there is an immense pressure to manage them efficiently. In order for an expatriate to become productive and proficient in their new environment, they must adjust to it well. Proper and swift adjustment is also a prerequisite of expatriate well-being during the assignment. Therefore, mastering ways of advancing expatriate adjustment is a crucial task for any IHRM department utilising expatriates in their business development. (Haslberger et al., 2013.)

2.1 Defining expatriates and international assignments

Expatriation is a term that somewhat overlaps with the term migration. In general, these both can be categorised under the umbrella term international migration. (Andresen et al., 2014.) International migration can be defined as physical relocation of people from one place to another while simultaneously crossing a boarder of two nations (European Commission, 2021). According to the UN (United Nations, 1998, pp. 9) a migrant is more specifically a person who alters the country of their customary residence. Baruch et al.

(2013) determine the difference between migrants and expatriates by comparing the permanence of their residency; an expatriate's stay is commonly shorter than a migrant's. They further specify that an expatriate could however become a migrant if their residence is long enough, and they gain a permanent visa status or even citizenship of the country.

Expatriates can be roughly divided into assigned expatriates and self-initiated expatriates (Andresen et al., 2014). Assigned expatriates, originally referred to as expatriate assignments, are abroad because of the sending organisation's needs. The initiation for the assignment therefore comes from the company and the expatriate enjoys their support throughout the whole process. Self-initiated expatriates, originally referred to as overseas experiences, are completely independent. Everything from the initiation to the funding of the assignment is the expatriate's responsibility and they do not have the support of a sending organisation. (Inkson et al., 1997.) However, regardless of the context and circumstance, expatriation is a professional effort that does not only involve the expatriate and their home organisation, but also other stakeholders such as the expatriate's social networks (Faeth & Kittler, 2020). These stakeholders have been proven to play an important role on the quality of the outcomes of international assignments (Takeuchi, 2010).

2.2   IHRM's role in expatriation

According to Viitala (2004, pp. 12) human resource management is traditionally linked to two sub-areas: industrial relations and leadership. Thus, HRM is not only related to managing staff, but contemporary HRM is also linked with organising processes, strategy building, and the improvement of tools used to enforce the HR function in different organisations. This constant development is crucial since new challenges in the field are constantly rising from changes that are taking place in the world economy and the labour market. (Pocztowski, 2015.)

Further, IHRM refers to human resource management in an international context. Some of the most relevant factors influencing IHRM, that differ from the challenges HRM faces, are globalisation, political conflicts, modern information technology, "born global" enterprises, population movements, and global financial crises. Additionally, the multiplicity of the field is reinforced by the complications brought on by global talent management, diversity management, adding value for international markets' stakeholders and lastly, international assignments and expatriation. (Pocztowski, 2015.) Stroh and Caligiuri (1998) also state that the success of a multinational corporation is highly dependent on the quality of its human resources and their management. As this organisational prosperity is to a large degree reliant on the global orientation of the top managers, the company's affluence is often developed though international assignments.

Therefore, HRM also plays an imperative role in the successfulness of expatriations. If expatriates are being treated poorly, it results not only in job dissatisfaction, but also negative behaviours such as laziness in the job, absence, and finally resignation (Wang, 2008). Consequently, HRM professionals should strive to increase their understanding of expatriates' experiences, because through learning, development, and growth they would be able to support expatriates more effectively (Russell & Aquino-Russell, 2010). The importance of these organisational competences are only accentuated when the international assignments take place in a challenging environment. Fee and McGrath-Champ (2017) having studied the role of HRM in hostile environments found that in them assignment success can be best secured through the establishment of a strong organisational security and safety culture.

Lastly, as expatriation success is directly connected to expatriate adjustment and well-being, it can be argued that the most critical duty of IHR managers is ensuring the upkeep of this overall employee well-being. In the previously mentioned hostile environments this can entail battling the challenges caused by threats of psychological and physical danger. Thus, the extent of the HRM's skill set is further stressed, because the lack of

welfare in these demanding scenarios will inevitably cause lesser commitment, poor productivity, and weak citizenship behaviour. (Fee & McGrath-Champ, 2017.)

2.3   Sufficient adjustment at the centre of expatriate work performance

According to Black et al. (1999, pp. 108–109) there are three separate yet connected dimensions to cross-cultural adjustment: adjustment to the general nonwork environment, adjustment to interacting with host-country nationals (HCNs), and adjustment to work. Adjustment to the job is generally regarded as the most effortless dimension of adjustment for managers on international assignments. This is because the progression of work adjustment is supported by the similarities in policies, procedures, and requirements of the task in the home organisation and the host organisation. Contrastingly, the adjustment to interacting with host-country nationals is typically found to be the most demanding of the three. This difficulty is based on the contrasting mental maps and rules that the expatriate manager and the host-country nationals have. Lastly, adjustment to general nonwork environment falls somewhere between the two priors. The concept entails everything from adjustment to transportation, food, health care, entertainment, and other issues. (Black et al., 1999, pp. 109, 111.)

In more recent research Haslberger et al. (2013) define expatriate adjustment to have three dimensions: behaviour, feelings, and cognitions. Further, all three are considered to have external and internal aspects. Internal cognition is seen as the positive assurance of knowledge on the host environment which varies over time and is determined by the interactions with the hosts. External cognition refers to the expatriate's knowledge base which depends on the implicit or explicit feedback of the hosts. Feelings in turn are important because of the great extent to which the move abroad impacts them. The correlation between adjustment and affect is significant; a well-adjusted expatriate is in a positive affective state and thus also correctly portrays their feelings in consonance with the local rules. This requires the expatriate to be both externally and internally capable.

True to form, behaviour can also be internally sufficient, externally sufficient, or both. The internal aspect is concerned with the effectiveness of the behaviour and the external aspect with its appropriateness. Thereby, a behaviourally adjusted expatriate is capable of portraying both characteristics in their demeanour. Conclusively, for the expatriate to be regarded as sufficiently adjusted, the profundity of all three dimensions must be taken into consideration.

Zhu et al. (2015) in their research focus on the development of work adjustment over time and its trajectorial differences between individuals. In terms of temporality, it was found that work adjustment gradually increases over the first six months. The positive change in the initial adjustment is also greater for those that begin with low adjustment. This trajectory is additionally influenced by core-self evaluations and prior culture-specific work experience. Lastly, an intense increase in work adjustment during the assignment's first nine months has three positive associations. It typically results in superior career instrumentality evaluations, decreased intentions to leave the organisation, and a greater chance of receiving a job promotion in the future. Additionally, according to Huff et al. (2014) adjustment is further impacted positively by an increase in motivational cultural intelligence.

Adjustment is also at a key role when examining expatriation failure; expatriates that are well-adjusted are less likely to return prematurely and more likely to build up an understanding about challenges in business. This information is also further useful in the knowledge transfer from the host country to the parent company, or from the parent company onwards to the subsidiaries. It is also noteworthy that when expatriates are satisfied with their work and they adjust well, their innovative work behaviour increases. This will then result in enhanced work and organisational performance. (Lee & Kartika, 2014)

Furthermore, superior expatriate performance as a result of successful adjustment helps multinational corporations perform more effectively and ultimately results in

improvements in the host and home country economies. This is because prosperity in international operations through sufficient expatriate performance encourages other domestic corporations to also expand their operations globally. Additionally, only the successful completion of international assignments will attract more expatriates who wish to work for the organisation in their international business operations. This is why MNCs are increasingly investing resources to better their expatriates' performance (Bhatti et al., 2013.) The constituents of expatriate adjustment as presented by Bhatti et al. (2013) are seen in Figure 1 below. Here job performance is portrayed as being based on the three cross-cultural adjustment dimensions by Black et al. (1999), which is built upon five organisational and individual factors that eventually determine the success rate of the assignment.

Individual and Organisational Factors

Organisational factor
Direct and Indirect Support

Individual factors
Cultural Sensitivity
Social Network
Previous International Experience
Self-Efficacy

Cross-Cultural Adjustment
Work Adjustment
General Adjustment
Interaction Adjustment

Job Performance
Supervisor Rated
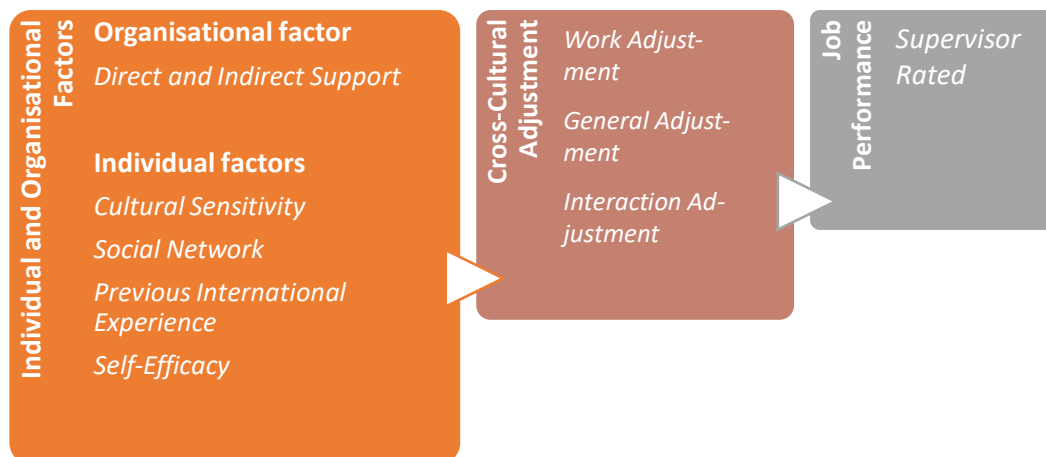
Figure 1 The influencing factors on expatriate work performance (Bhatti et al., 2013).

Finally, expressing the importance of their role to the expatriate is critical. When the expatriate thinks that the MNC appreciates their input, they are more likely to adjust to the host-country living and working environments. The justification for this stems from the expatriate's concern towards the organisation's performance, which makes them put more effort into assuring the achievement of the organisation's objectives. When the expatriate believes that their organisation has devoted resources into ensuring the success of the assignment, they have an increased chance of adjusting to the host country well. (Malek, Budhwar, & Reiche, 2015.) Furthermore, MNCs that provide high

organisational support also have more control over the magnitude and speed of the expatriate's adjustment and performance. In addition to organisational support, the psychological contract between the expatriate and their organisation is the most important moderating factor of expatriate adjustment. Thus, expatriates with a high level of psychological contracts adjust better to the host culture. (Lee & Kartika, 2014.)

2.3.1 The value of organisational support

Malek et al. (2015) state that expatriate perceived organisational support (POS) directly affects expatriate adjustment. The value of organisational support is particularly important for expatriates because it can be their only source of assistance as host country nationals typically fail to expedite the adjustment process. This need for organisational support further stems from the excessive amount of time that the expatriate inevitably ends up spending at their place of work. The more time spent, the more reliant the expatriate becomes on the company in terms of help in advancing adjustment to the host country. Due to the intense effect of POS on expatriate adjustment, it naturally also influences the work performance of the expatriate. When expatriates continuously rely on their organisation for support during the assignment, the issuing of such significant support simultaneously builds on improved work performance.

The relevance of organisational support is also backed by De Paul and Bikos (2015). Likewise, they found in their research that expatriates with low levels of difficulty in adapting to the host country enjoyed the support of both their host and home organisations. Here distinctions between host and home organisation support were also detected; high perceived host organisation support promotes the full completion of the assignment while high perceived home organisation support increases the chances of the expatriate returning to the organisation after the completion of the assignment.

In turn, career POS not only affects the expatriate adjustment but also their commitment to the organisation. Shortcomings in supporting the aspirations and career goals of the expatriate will negatively affect their adjustment. Thus, it can be concluded that supporting the expatriate in their career development needs is highly beneficial for both furthering the adjustment of the expatriate and also for creating emotional attachment and feelings of obligation towards the organisation. This is valuable as the increased level of attachment will then deepen the level of involvement that the expatriate has towards the company's activities, eventually leading to heightened work performance as well. (Kawai & Strange, 2014.)

Finally, even though general stress always lowers work performance in expatriates, its effects too can be diminished through organisational support. This will also help expatriates keep stress from transferring into their private life, which will again prevent tense intra-family situations. Here, high perceived organisational support benefits expatriate performance especially in situations of high general stress. (Bader et al., 2015.) In the light of all of this evidence, it can be concluded that the value of organisational support for expatriate adjustment and work performance is immense, and that is why investments made to ensure it are unquestionably worthwhile.

2.3.2 The impact of the expatriate family on adjustment

Due to the family being uprooted because of the job of the expatriate, the boundaries between family and work may blur causing complexity in the relationships (Lazarova et al., 2010). Two factors that help the expatriate and their family to better approve of the fact that they are moving abroad are their ability to quickly adjust to local cultural life as well as having a harmonious home environment to begin with. Sufficient communication between expatriates and their families is crucial for their adjustment to the new culture and environment. Thus, in order to reduce disagreement and conflict related to the international assignment, the home organisation should reinforce discussion of

expatriates with their families. This is because efficient communication between the members of the family reduces potential conflicts and helps expatriates to better adapt to the life and work abroad. (Wang, 2008.)

As Van Der Zee et al. (2007) have uncovered, family cohesion is essentially related to the sociocultural adjustment of the expatriate. This is supported by Lee and Kartika (2014) who have proven that the support and adaptability of the family have a positive influence on the expatriate's adjustment. Lazarova et al. (2010) report a reverse effect; the motivational state that successful adjustment brings to the expatriate in turn furthers their performance in both the family and the work domains. This family cohesion also has an influence on the experienced quality of life during the assignment. The children of these highly cohesive families additionally have a greater chance of successful intercultural adjustment. If the child perceives their expatriate parent as adjusting well and being satisfied with their work, it also affects the adjustment of the child positively. Contrary to this, if the child senses that their parent is not happy with their job, this could have a negative influence on the child's attitude towards the host country. Thereby, likewise having an unfavourable impact on the adaptation of the expatriate themselves. (Van Der Zee et al., 2007.)

Moreover, the effect that children have on the adjustment of the expatriate is noticeable. This is because expatriates with families encounter more demands than their single counterparts. However, the roles of individual family members within the families can differ substantially. The expatriate employee enjoys a very structured and supportive environment as they have the company to lean on. This is not the case with the spouse who is often left relatively disregarded in the process. Children that are school-aged, much like the expatriate, also have a fairly structured situation in the host country. The extent of this structure however relies on whether the school they attend is a local or an international one and on the language of instruction. This chance of possible difference creates a broader variety of demands for the child than either of the parents. The extent of these demands is of huge importance since they also affect the parents' readiness to

stay abroad. The organisation should therefore take the degree of involvement of families into consideration and expect different results depending on the difficulty of the assignment and its criticality for the business. (Haslberger & Brewster, 2008.)

Vice versa, the family of the expatriate can also positively affect their work performance in many ways. The spill over theory is useful here to explain this phenomenon as it describes the transfer of stressors deriving from one area to another. The spill over that occurs from home to work in expatriates' cases is remarkable and it is visible in at least five ways. First, if the expatriate feels respected at home, this is then transferred to their confidence in work. Second, the family helps the expatriate to reduce work related stress. Third, a functional home life relaxes the expatriate, thus helping them prepare for the next day's work. Fourth, expatriates who have a family are inclined to work longer days to provide for their family. And lastly, family is the number one resource for work-related advice for the expatriate. (Trompetter et al., 2016.)

To conclude, a strong connection can be seen between the adjustment of the family and the work performance of the expatriate. One of the most important influencing factors here are the child's ability to adjust to the location and to make friends. Shortcomings in these areas will inevitably have negative effects on the expatriate's work performance and thus the organisation as well. Therefore, providing organisational support for the entire family is essential to assure desired results. (Trompetter et al., 2016.) Lämsä et al. (2017) endorse this by stating that the expatriate family can be seen as a stakeholder for the organisation making them a strategically important part of the company that should be treated as such.

3 Managing expatriates in hostile environments

Expatriates who are assigned to hostile environments have a noticeably different experience working abroad than their colleagues do. These international assignments to hostile locations can have lasting, long-term impacts on the lives of the expatriate and their family. (Nowlan, 2014.) Withal, Faeth and Kittler (2020) argue, that in order to diminish these negative effects and thus support expatriate adjustment, expatriates should focus on specific actions. These actions include the utilisation of appropriate coping skills, the preservation of high motivation to work and life in the HE (which can be supported by rewards), and the application of functional adjustment. By doing so, the stress underwent by the expatriate will decline and assignment success will be endorsed.

Furthermore, an employer has two important roles in supporting an employee in their preparation for an assignment to an HE. First, they must plan and prepare for a crisis. Second, they have to plan a timely and appropriate response to any incident. Moreover, training is at the core of these preparations. This predeparture training should entail psychological preparation and pushing employees outside their comfort zones, which will help them brace for the challenging situations to come. Additionally, before all this, a detailed screening should take place so that only the most physically and mentally fit employees are chosen. Preparation for possible challenges to come is the key to creating a resilient expatriate. (Nowlan, 2014.)

In addition, Faeth and Kittler (2020) state that when harm can be prevented, expatriates feel less affected by the HE and their stress levels remain low. Thus, it is important that the organisation invests in these ways of prevention, as the expatriate's well-being is of interests to all stakeholders. However, this can be challenging, as expatriates often perceive achieving adjustment and comfort in HEs difficult. What also makes the equation demanding is the inter-relationism of the four dimensions of expatriation success; human-influenced environment, expatriate, organisation, and social network. These dimensions are discussed in more detail later.

Lastly, another burdening effect that HEs have relates to the uncertainty of these environments. Together with political instability, a major worry pinpointed by expatriates in traditional HEs is their fear of crime and theft. More specifically, risks of kidnap and abduction related to not only themselves but also their children are commonly named. Additionally, the fear of being wrongfully detained or extorted in the host country is mentioned by expatriates. Concerns about natural disasters, health and medical issues, and transport accidents are also common among expatriate organisations. (Gannon & Paraskevas, 2019.)

3.1　Defining a hostile environment

There is an important difference between the two kinds of hostile work environments: domestic hostile environments and expatriates' hostile environments. As Posthuma, et al. (2019) describe, domestic hostile environments have been researched extensively and refer to hostile situations caused for the individual solely at their place of work. These can be for example cases of sexual harassment. Conversely, the hostile environments faced by expatriates are often external from their workplace. Due to the nature of the employment, the work environment expands to any area of the foreign country where the expatriate and their family members reside. Therefore, risks are faced, among others, when shopping, travelling from and to work, and at the expatriate's children's school.

A further approach to defining expatriates' HEs by Faeth and Kittler (2020) is to focus on human-made threats. These are intentional acts of violence such as terrorism or other criminal activities. Human-made threats can also be connected to the lack of vital resources which can in turn cause an increase of criminal activity. Another definition by Fee et al. (2019) describes hostile environments as ones exposed to crises such as natural disasters or political upheaval. This is supported by Gannon and Paraskevas (2019) who have identified hostile environments to have risks connected to political instability like

terrorism, war, and civil disorder. Finally, forms of health threats are also regarded as hostile as mentioned by Dew (2012), Dropkin (2020), and Donà (2021).

Due to the presence of these threats, managing expatriates and their families successfully in hostile environments is an ongoing concern for human resources professionals. Violent crimes such as terrorism have become notable topics on a national security level and thus international organisations are also affected by them. Likewise, the emerge of COVID-19 has created a global hostile environment that has forced organisations to face novel, serious consequences. As a result, interest on studying the topic from an HR perspective has increased. (Faeth & Kittler, 2020.)

3.2   Motives to work in hostile environments

Generally, the motives for an international assignment can be categorised into individual factors, organisational factors, and location factors. Further, individual factors can be related to career and development interests, personal drivers and interests, personal dispositions, or family and partner considerations. In turn, organisational factors refer to financial rewards and non-financial support. Finally, location factors are mostly categorised as either national or specific location considerations. (Dickmann & Watson, 2017.)

What remains more unknown however, is the desire for expatriates to leave on international assignments to hostile environments. Naturally, a non-hostile environment can be turned into a hostile one during one's assignment for instance, in the event of a terrorist attack or as the result of a pandemic burst. However, what must be considered is the voluntary decision to enter an already hostile work environment. Examples of individual career and development factors that drive people to work in hostile environments include the possibility for divergent career capital gain patterns and divergent career capital application patterns. An encouraging organisational factor is the availability of travel and leave arrangements. Finally, specific location factors are highly affected by the level

or security and trust that the expatriate feels towards the host organisation in each given location. In the case that the expatriate perceives the host organisation to be reliable, the influence of the environment is diminished. (Dickmann & Watson, 2017.)

In addition, Dickmann et al. (2019) concluded in their study on expatriates located in Afghanistan that international assignees are also driven by the positive effects the expatriation has on the legitimacy of the organisation. Additionally, given competitive advantage to the home organisation is seen as a driver for some expatriates.

3.3 Human-made threats during expatriation

Previous studies on hostile environments have heavily focused on human-made threats. Therefore, these themes are discussed here to provide insight to the general field of research. More specifically the focus in this part will be kept on terrorism due to the recent era of violent threats and as an effort to confine the research topic.

Like described previously, human made threats refer to intentional acts of violence such as terrorism or other criminal activities (Faeth & Kittler, 2020). As defined by Beutell et al. (2017) terrorism can be domestic or international. Because international terrorism concerns expatriates more deeply, the focal point here will be kept on it. International terrorism has three defining characteristics. First, it involves dangerous or violent acts that are a threat to human life. Second, it is intended to do at least one of the following: create fear in the civilian population, influence the government's policymaking by intimidation, or disturb the conduct of a government by assassination, mass destruction, or kidnapping. And third, it must cross national lines in at least one way. This can be achieved by either the means of accomplishment, the person(s) targeted, or the location in which preparations are made. (Beutell et al., 2017.)

Intra-family tension and imbalances in the expatriate family caused by violent activity and safety concerns have a significant negative effect on expatriate work performance (Bader et al., 2015). Bader and Berg (2014) created a model that describes the further effects of terror caused stress on expatriate work performance. In this model situation-related stressors together with interaction-related stressors are argued to increase stress and strain. This then creates poor work attitudes which finally affect work performance.

The situation-related stressors include terrorist attacks, terrorist threat, restricted living conditions due to safety measures, and host-country threat level. The perceptions of stress caused by them are also amplified by the feeling of uncertainty and lack of control as well as the restricting nature of certain safety measures. The interaction-related stressors in turn stem from conflicts within the expatriate's family or with HCNs. Stressors in the intrafamily domain are the result of the expatriate's concern about the well-being and safety of their family members, which are only amplified due to the risk of terrorism. In order to diminish the effects of both situation-related and interaction related stressors, the home organisation must pay attention to selection criteria as well as social support and particular training. (Bader & Berg, 2014.)

Like mentioned, an outcome of the terrorism-related stressors is their negative effect on work attitudes, which can be categorised into three layers. The first attitudes relate to the organisation, second to the task itself, and the third to immediate team members. Because of these poor work attitudes, the expatriate will avoid all unnecessary efforts to achieve company objectives. Additionally, all efforts that would increase the well-being of the company are minimised and tasks are only fulfilled adequately. Therefore, work performance as a whole is weakened. (Bader & Berg, 2014.)

As can be concluded from the points above, when looking at expatriates located in countries with violent activity, the negative effects of the stress-levels caused by the hostile environment are clearly visible. Violent activity, the impeded living conditions caused by it, the host country threat level, and intra-family conflicts generated by safety-related

issues all increase the violence induced stress experienced by expatriates. Out of these four, family and spouse conflicts have the most notable impact on the amount of encountered stress. This indicates that even the actual violent activity does not result in as great of an amount of stress as its effects on the personal life of the expatriate does. (Bader & Berg, 2013.)

Furthermore, the stress from the threat violence caused by the four factors negatively affects work attitudes and relationships with HCNs. Both of these components then eventually lead to worse job performance. Therefore, MNCs should pay attention to not only the expatriates but also their local co-workers when implementing anti-stress measures. Investments in prevention and management will result in better individual performance and thus the increased performance of the entire foreign subsidiary. The cause and effect between these determinants can be viewed in Figure 2 below. (Bader & Berg, 2013.)
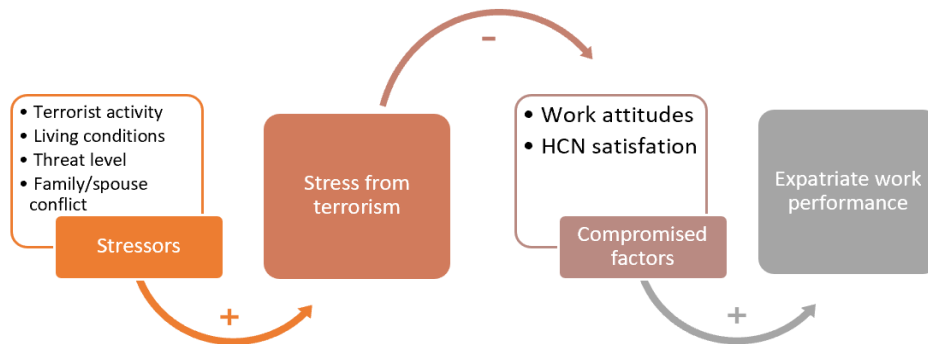
Figure 2 Terrorism caused stress and expatriate work performance (Bader & Berg, 2013).

Like discussed prior, the expatriate's spouse has the ability to affect the work performance of the expatriate. Therefore, the role of the expatriate's family must be considered when exploring the topic of expatriate performance in terrorism-endangered countries and other hostile environments. The ordinary challenges caused by international assignments are significant enough on their own to create an imbalance in the expatriate family structure. The additional problems and danger created by a hostile environment

only emphasise these negative effects. Thus, as the family's well-being affects the expatriate's work performance, disregarding the family will cause a decline of expatriate performance. An unsavoury situation for all stakeholders. (Bader et al., 2015.)

Faeth and Kittler (2020) support these findings as they note that the impact of the family on expatriate work-performance should not be disregarded. This impact is the most noticeable when the HE causes the need for the entire family to change their lifestyle considerably. However, by implementing appropriate training and guidance, the organisation can help diminish most negative effects. Additionally, contributing to the orderly upkeep of the family system can be done by enforcing regular home visits or creating virtual assignments.

Beutell et al. (2017) have created a model that represents the phases of coping at the different stages of expatriation. This model is presented in Figure 3 below.

Pre-Departure Training
• Proactive coping
• Exposure Therapies:
  • Virtual Reality
  • Systematic desensitisation

In-Country
• Emotional and problem focused coping
• Behavioural strategies
• Social support

Repatriation
• Adjustment
• Assessment
• Reintegration anxiety
• PTSD

Figure 3 Expatriate coping in countries with a highlighted risk of terrorism (Beutell et al., 2017).

Even before the first stage of pre-departure training, the environment of the country of expatriation must be considered already when choosing the expatriate. In order to ensure a successful assignment, the selected expatriate should possess advanced coping skills, and be well-adjusted as well as emotionally intelligent. These desired qualities should be clearly established before any decision-making. Nevertheless, what must be also noted even if the most mentally suitable employees are found, they might not always want to take on a high-risk deployment like this. (Beutell et al., 2017.)

In pre-departure training proactive coping skills should be taught to expatriates leaving to regions with threats of violence. This phase should also include stress inoculation therapy and virtual reality training. The latter is useful not only when exposing expatriates to the host country elements like values and day-to-day living conditions, but it also serves as a way of exposure therapy for violent threats and other high-risk situations. Furthermore, in the stage in-country strategies, the focus is on coping on an emotional and problem-solving level. These means of coping are crucial as they help the expatriate handle withdrawal behaviours and thus they also enhance their job performance. Additionally, if psychologists are not available in the case of a stressful event, the company should offer the expatriate psychological and social support to reinforce the initial coping efforts. (Beutell et al., 2017.)

Finally, repatriation strategies also play a critical role in the overall success of the international assignment. Therefore, the home organisation should take action to ensure a favourable outcome. For instance, the organisation should enable a psychological assessment for all returning expatriates right after their arrival that should also be upkept regularly over the next two years. In addition to this, repatriating expatriates should be assessed for potential signs of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as well as other adjustment issues. It is critical to understand this role of adjustment and psychological well-being as a part of repatriation, and not only focus on career issues and knowledge transfer. As repatriation includes a lot of uncertainty for the expatriate, coping strategies should be implemented to ease the readjustment experience. (Beutell et al., 2017.)

3.4   Health related threats during expatriation

European Medicines Agency (2021) defines public health threats to include among others falsified medicines, chemical and biological emergencies, antimicrobial resistance, and outbreaks or pandemics. Considering the severity of the consequences caused by the recent pandemic, it is critical that its future implications on business are

acknowledged. Moreover, recognising the vulnerable position of expatriates in the scenario is equally vital to lessen the negative bearings of similar issues in the future.

Suder et al. (2019) found that the lack of security is the most noticeable perceived challenge for expatriates in hostile environments. The fear of possible psychological damage caused by the restricted living conditions and the constant presence of threat in their environment often leads to diverse coping mechanisms. Restricted personal freedom to move from one place to another is also a distinctively identified stressor of HEs. No matter if movement restrictions are put to place to protect from immediate physical danger or a health threat, their significance for expatriate well-being is uniform. Expatriates find constrained living conditions of being forced to stay in one or two places confining and aggravating. Thereby, it can be concluded that the presence of a threat on an individual's life be it of any kind is a disturbance that disrupts the comfortable completion of an international assignment and should therefore be managed with great accuracy.

3.4.1 Impacts of COVID-19 on expatriation

Since the beginning of the 2020s, the most present health threat for expatriates all over the world has undoubtedly been the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, focus on this part shall be kept on it as its effects on expatriation can be evaluated to be of most importance for current IHRM research. COVID-19, also known as the coronavirus disease, is an infectious illness caused by the coronavirus. COVID-19 was first recognised by WHO on the 31st of December 2019 when the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission in China reported an array of cases of what was thought at the time to be pneumonia. These patients were later identified to having been carriers of the COVID-19 virus. Subsequently, the first recorded case outside China was confirmed on the 13th of January 2020. Since then, the virus kept on spreading globally, and was eventually announced as a pandemic by WHO on the 11th of March 2020 (World Health Organization, 2020.) Due to the

invasive nature of the pandemic and the restricted living conditions caused by it, the generated environment can be categorised as hostile.

COVID-19 has forced organisations all around the world to face an unforeseen challenge as they have had to manage unparalleled territory by altering their workforce in physically, technically, and socio-psychologically exceptional ways. Furthermore, it has created an especially demanding environment for HRM professionals. As mentioned by Caligiuri et al. (2020) COVID-19 forced managers to promptly make decisions regarding the priorities of the organisation, the relocation of employees, and the means of digital working. Thus, HR managers have had to venture into the unknown as they have tried to assist their workforce in coping with the relentless changes that the employees have had to face in their social and work environments. Additionally, even employees who are used to distant working have had to potentially change their habits as alternative workspaces such as libraries and cafés have been closed. And aside from all this, the closure of childcare services and schools has also expanded the parental demands of employees, causing further challenges. (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020.)

3.4.2 Challenges encountered by expatriates and their managers

The pandemic has created new challenges not only for the employees facing novel work environments, but also for their managers who are compelled to lead remote teams possibly for the first time ever. Leading and collaborating from a distance is a challenge already recognised by the international business (IB) field. However, the field of management practice has not been so familiar with it up until now. Therefore, suggestions for the management of workforce under these crisis circumstances can be drawn from the well-established IB literature. (Caligiuri et al., 2020.) The combination of IHRM and IB practices will then also provide an excellent guideline for expatriate management.

Expatriates and international business travellers alike have experienced a major shift in their ordinary working life. Progressive demands of virtual global work combined with the stress of job insecurity and economic uncertainty cause great stress for employees working in global environments. Thus, indicating that the expatriate work safety does not revolve around merely physical threats and dangers but also ones brought on by changing circumstances and fear of the unknown. Further, as a result of reduced international mobility and travel bans, the pandemic has created an increase in cross-border distance challenges. (Caligiuri et al., 2020.) These travel restrictions have also induced heightened levels of anxiety and depression in expatriates (Uvais et al., 2021).

In addition, the extensive unfavourable economic consequences caused by COVID-19 have spread to also affect expatriate employment as organisations universally have struggled financially and have therefore been unable to compensate their employees. This has resulted in unexpected resignations and many countries have had to handle not only local unemployment but also expatriate unemployment. Furthermore, even many of the expatriates that have been able to maintain employment have been challenged by a decline in remittances. (Aijaz, 2020.)

3.4.3 Implications of COVID-19 for managing expatriates

The pandemic has acted as a learning opportunity for expatriate managers worldwide. One of the main targets of HRM professionals operating during the pandemic has been to understand the combined effect that expanded family demands and an increased level of work independence have on an employee's well-being and productivity (Ilie et al., 2020). This newly faced challenge has proven the need for further forms of support used to assist employees who battle with these work-family roles. An example of this type of support is referred to as informational support. Ways of informational support include notifying employees of current developments regarding safety and health, of training and self-development opportunities that can ease the transition to the changing

requirements, and of the availability of elderly care and childcare options. These are all means of helping employees adjust to their new working conditions better while simultaneously maximising the effectiveness of initiatives directed at lessening family to work conflicts. (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020.)

Moreover, prior research in the IHRM field has emphasised the challenges presented by distance when it comes to employee selection, support, training, health, and safety as well as virtual collaboration and leadership. The established solutions to these problems are to a large extent applicable also to the solving of pandemic-related distance issues related to for example, virtual working. Likewise, studying the benefits of distance working is also fruitful because it is likely that the environment of today will have lasting effects on the post-COVID world and the manner in which work is conducted in the future. (Caligiuri et al., 2020.)

Additionally, the pandemic has shown that there are three specific criteria that multinational enterprises should look for in candidates working in multicultural environments to ensure a frictionless work climate. These three characteristics are resilience, curiosity, and tolerance for ambiguity. Employees with these characteristics are more effective in collaborating with colleagues, vendors, and clients from different cultures, whether it be face-to-face or through virtual collaboration. Furthermore, it has been discovered that training done to support relationship formation is extremely valuable in a situation like this where all employees share a similar stressor. The shared anxiety and stress can be used to create ties between global teams. This is a method that can further be utilised in the training of expatriates in hostile environments. Finally, in terms of support, stress-mitigating offerings should be provided with lower threshold than before (Caligiuri et al., 2020).

Even when eventually the pressing reality of the pandemic slowly starts to fade away, these routines and methods mentioned above should not be disregarded as they are still highly suitable for many future scenarios. This is the case, for instance, with virtual

working. Even though most organisations were recently confronted with the shift to virtual systems suddenly and unwillingly, potential benefits can still be uncovered from the arrangement. Virtual work can reduce misunderstandings caused by verbal language struggles and accents, weaken the effects of evident cultural differences in demeanours, save on meeting time, and create electronic trails for the documentation of the decision-making process. All meaningful outcomes for a global work environment. (Caligiuri et al., 2020.)

Furthermore, the key to dissolving tensions caused by health and safety concerns is coherent and consistent communication from HR. Communication also helps encourage safe and healthy working habits when employees are forced to work from home. Managing work expectations through clear communication will allow employees to preserve a work-life balance with healthy lifestyle habits. This will in turn have lasting effects on the well-being and thus effectiveness of globally mobile employees. (Caligiuri et al., 2020.) When employees are greatly strained by external factors, the organisation must take this into consideration during the allocation of tasks. The work performance of employees in hostile environments will only diminish more if the physical and psychological well-being of the individual is disregarded.

Knowledge sharing should also be implemented as a means of engaging employees. Ahmed et al. (2020) found in their research that employee engagement essentially positively affects organisational performance. Employee engagement is thereby important in ensuring an even performance level when facing an external threat to business. This is a valid finding for expatriates located in high health risk countries who are forced to work remotely. Remote working can have a negative effect on engagement levels as employees feel less connected to the workplace. However, it can in turn lead to positive effects such as higher productivity when the psychological pressure of working under direct "surveillance" of a superior is lessened. Additionally, acknowledging the employees' health and safety concerns is equally as important.

Finally, identifying the worries that employees have towards their psychological and physical safety in countries facing health threats is vital. Skilled managers alone will be able to detect changes in behaviour caused by present threats, and thus prevent many negative effects by addressing the problems early on. Signs of increased anxiety that these HR managers should pay attention to include, among others, resorting to addictive behaviours, withdrawing from team activities, and delivering insufficient work performance. Moreover, the role of well-being strategies and employer support are also significant here. For example, an around the clock phone support line, and online materials promoting stress awareness and self-care are useful resources. (Nowlan, 2014.) Similarly, limiting employees' fear is an equally critical task for these organisations. Management must take responsibility for handling fear by for example hiring specialised figures like psychologists to alleviate the situation. Psychological support systems established to diminish anxiety and anguish among expatriates can be extremely important in ensuring a sufficient work performance level. (Ripamonti et al., 2020.)

3.5   Risk management of expatriates in hostile environments

Like mentioned above, managing the fear and anxiety experienced by expatriates in hostile environments is a critical task for their host organisation. When expatriates perceive kidnapping, terrorism, civil unrest, other crimes, and health threats as risks, their work performance suffers. Therefore, primary focus should be on risk mitigation, which is an important task for the organisation to complete when dealing with expatriates in hostile locations. (Posthuma et al., 2019.)

However, due to the complexity of securing expatriate safety, many corporate HR departments believe that their knowledge on hostile environments is not broad enough to protect and prepare expatriates deployed in them. Therefore, they utilise specialist knowledge networks that are developed internally with the security and risk departments as well as externally with relocation service providers. For further protection,

specialists in political insurance cover are also included. These experts, the insurance brokers, can then help the organisation with, among others, hostage negotiations, ransom payments, and rehabilitation when necessary. (Gannon & Paraskevas, 2019.)

Likewise, Faeth and Kittler (2020) have studied expatriation success in hostile environments. Having done so, they have defined that it can be seen as a sum of four factors: the expatriate themselves, the assigning organisation, the social network, and the human-influenced environment. These four components are made up of factors that either positively or negatively affect the success of the expatriation. These aspects can be viewed in Figure 4 on page 35. Furthermore, their nature can be identified with *POS* meaning a constructive effect on expatriation success and *NEG* meaning a destructive one.

The human-influenced environment does not directly alter individual expatriation and its degree of success. However, it does present various work and non-work-related restraints that can induce disturbances of business and add stress resulting in lowered expatriate well-being. The constructive influencing factors of this environment include security, governmental, and general issues. In turn, the expatriate entirety is negatively impacted by increased stress, maladjustment, and diminished well-being, and their prevalence is only highlighted by contextual stressors. Contrastingly, personal success is made more likely if the individual is skilled, motivated, and well-adjusted. (Faeth & Kittler, 2020.)

In the organisational context assignment success is diminished through negative work attitudes, decreased performance, as well as job and country leave intentions. Vice versa, added POS, appropriate HR policies and practices, together with resources, capabilities and rare knowledge positively affect the expatriate. Finally, the detrimental aspects of the social network include intra-family conflicts and tensions with HCNs. This ensemble flourishes if the expatriate has a diversified and large network for support and enjoys the acceptance of HCNs. (Faeth & Kittler, 2020.)
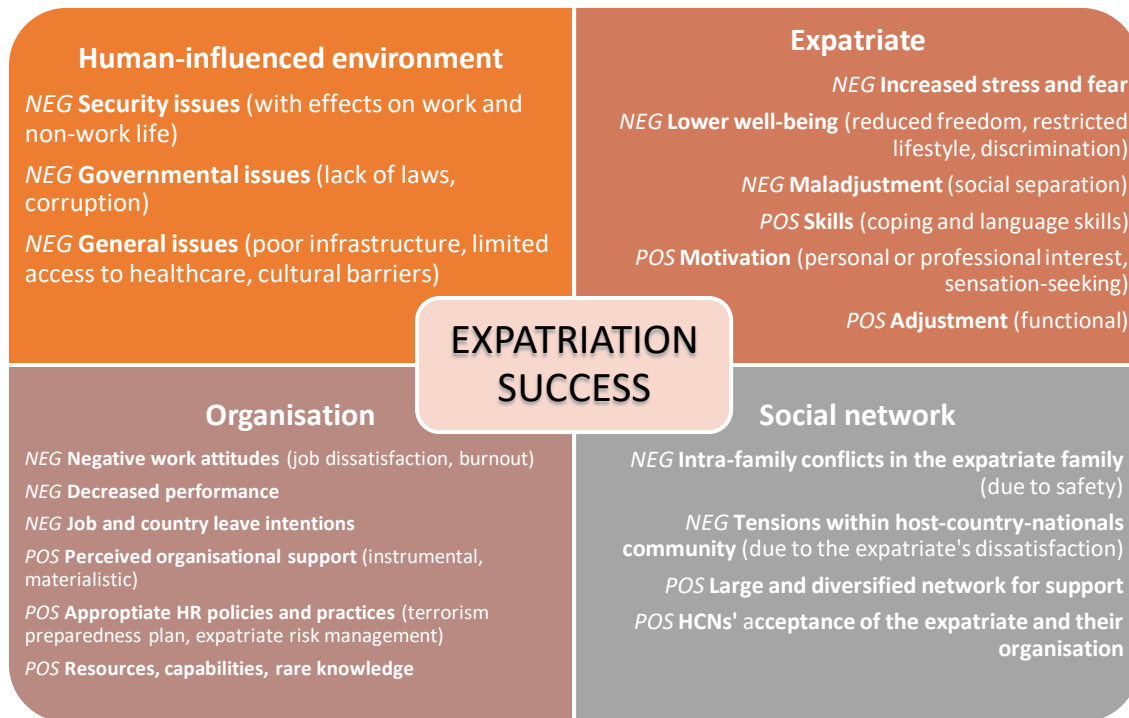
Figure 4 Expatriation success from the multiple stakeholder view (Faeth & Kittler, 2020).

Gannon and Paraskevas (2019) argue that HRM services provided for expatriates in hostile environments can be divided into four phases. The first is called the pre-expatriation planning and crisis prevention. In this phase the foundation for all other stages is created, thus making it critical. Here measures such as risk identification and assessment, threat landscaping, situational awareness training, relocation assistance, lifestyle vulnerability analysis, expat network plan, and crisis management plan are completed. After this, the phase of expatriation and crisis preparation is initiated, in which updates to the crisis management plan, settle-in support, personal protection practice, local socialisation, a 24/7 internal communication platform, and a policy audit among others are introduced. This stage is followed by the expatriation and crisis response procedures including continuous threat level assessment, situation reports from experts, additional resource provision, crisis escalation, internal communication, and insurance of policy compliance. Finally, services are provided for expatriates or repatriates in the last stage of crisis recovery. Here, for example, debriefing and action review, consequence management, evaluation and re-assignment, incident reporting, and the revision of policies take place.

The aim of these actions presented by Gannon and Paraskevas (2019) is the minimisation of risk exposure for both the organisations and the deployed expatriates concerned. Thus, networks used to manage these types of expatriations are also created to avoid reputational and financial losses caused by the accentuated risk levels. This concept of networks is also supported by Fee et al. (2019). Their research suggests that networks can also be utilised for sharing and deepening knowledge that can be exploited in staff protection. Additionally, the role of the earlier introduced brokers is highlighted in this context as they create a sense of a shared risk and thus also minimise the risk exposure.

Likewise, Posthuma et al. (2019) have created a model for managing expatriates in hostile environments. The five variables in their model are expatriate risk management (ERM), the hostile environment, stress, adjustment, and psychological resilience. ERM processes are an organisational level concept put in place to alleviate expatriates' fear and threat perceptions in HEs. In practice these refer to, for example, HRM operations such as developing an international security plan, or supervising kidnap and ransom insurances. The connections between these variables can be seen in Figure 5.

The ERM process incorporates risk evaluation which more particularly consists of risk identification and risk analysis. During risk identification information is collected about the threats and dangers of the environment that could be detrimental to expatriate performance. This is done by a designated risk management team who should consider dangers to both the expatriate's physical as well as psychological safety. Some of these dangers may include theft, assault, carjacking, home invasion, fear, anger, stress, and perceived threat. Additionally, more indirect threats like the potential loss of trust in the organisation must be noted. Without a proper risk identification process, the management of those risks becomes problematic, thus further resulting in poor expatriate adjustment. (Posthuma et al., 2019.)

In the risk analysis phase, the likelihood of an occurring loss and its severity are estimated. This analysis is qualitative but can be complemented by a quantitative

assessment. Furthermore, like the risk identification, the risk analysis should also consider both the direct and indirect effects of the hostile work environment. Once the analysis has been completed, a prioritised list of threats to expatriate adjustment is available. Risk management can then be conducted with the help of this list. (Posthuma et al., 2019.)
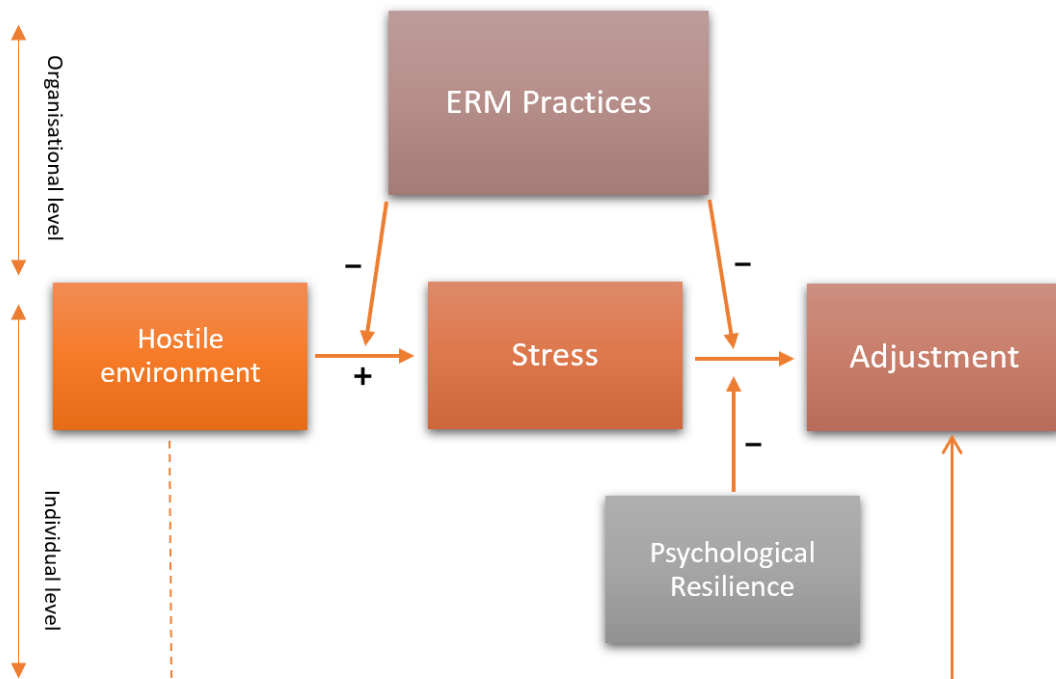
Figure 5 ERM practices in hostile environments (Posthuma et al., 2019).

The practical ways in which ERM can subsequently be pursued include, but are not limited to, registering the expatriate with an international travel hotline, teaching them safer driving practices, educating them on cyber security precautions, as well as providing bodyguards and armoured vehicles. In case these safety precautions correspond with the heightened expectations set by the expatriates, they help create a feeling of trust between them and the company. For that reason they should be taken by all organisations, even ones that do not perceive themselves as being at risk. (Posthuma et al., 2019.)

3.6   Theoretical framework of the study

The theory section of this study is divided into two main chapters; the first addresses expatriate adjustment on a general level, while the second goes deeper into the characteristics of hostile work environments and their widespread effects on expatriation. Here, the previously presented theoretical findings will be summarised as a means of establishing the structure of the methodological part of the study.

The theoretical review in this thesis indicates that the role of IHRM in ensuring expatriation success is essential. This is supported by Wang (2008) as well as Fee and McGrath-Champ (2017). Wang (2008) argues that poor treatment of expatriates results in several negative effects on work performance, while Fee and McGrath-Champ (2017) noted that organisational culture is at the centre of forming expatriate security and safety. These IHRM professionals are also responsible for preventing expatriation failure. As Lee and Kartika (2014) mention, well-adjusted expatriates are less likely to return prematurely. Furthermore, adjustment has an extensive impact on the overall work performance of an expatriate. This elevated performance level causes better organisational performance as well. Therefore, investing in furthering expatriate adjustment by, for example, disclosing to the expatriate how important their role is, offering sufficient support from the home and host organisations, and considering the expatriate's family is highly beneficial for the company (Lee & Kartika, 2014; Malek et al., 2015).

Furthermore, managing expatriates located in hostile environments is complex in many ways due to the ominous nature of these surroundings. Some of the hostile environments faced by expatriates include ones threatened by violent acts, criminal activity, political upheaval, natural disasters, outbreaks, or pandemics (Dew, 2012; European Medicines Agency, 2021; Faeth & Kittler, 2020; Fee et al., 2019). As Beutell et al., (2017) mention, the threat of terrorism especially has intensified in various parts of the world. This has made the topic a valid concern for IHRM professionals (Faeth & Kittler, 2020). The numerous stressors caused by the presence of a violent threat strains the expatriate

and their family noticeably, thereby also negatively affecting the work performance of the expatriate (Bader et al., 2015; Bader & Berg, 2014). This chain of events is explained with the help of the model created by Bader & Berg (2014) where situation- and interaction-related stressors together increase the terrorism related strain and stress experiences by the expatriate. This stress then negatively affects work attitudes thereby also altering expatriate performance. Therefore, it is crucial that the organisation attempts to restrain the stressors that they have control of.

In order to decrease the likelihood of a failed mission, organisations should also particularly focus on reinforcing expatriate coping in the three different stages of the international assignment: the pre-departure training, the in-country stage, and the repatriation phase. These means of assistance include teaching proactive coping skills, increasing the expatriate's emotional and problem-solving levels, and enabling access to psychological assessment. (Beutell et al., 2017.)

Additionally, in relation to expatriates facing health related threats, Suder et al. (2019) identify that the most prominent challenge for expatriates located in hostile environments is the general lack of security. Suder et al. (2019) also mention that the strong level of stress caused by restricted living conditions and the interminable presence of threat then lead to coping mechanisms. This restriction on movement caused by an external threat has been recently present in many countries as the world has struggled to face the most debilitating health threat of our time; the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has majorly shifted the everyday life of expatriates all over the world while also causing managerial issues related to reduced international mobility and the deterioration of the world economy (Aijaz, 2020; Caligiuri et al., 2020). It has also resulted in the deterioration of many expatriates' mental health (Uvais et al., 2021).

The negative effects of health threats on expatriates can however be mitigated. As presented by Ilie et al. (2020) understanding the combined effect of an increased level of work independence and heightened family demands is crucial for ensuring expatriate

well-being and productivity. Therefore, organisations must invest in extended forms of support related to work-family role struggles (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). Additionally, what is equally as important is consistent and coherent communication between the expatriate and the HR department in order to relieve tensions caused by health and safety concerns (Caligiuri et al., 2020). Finally, the role of professional psychological help should not be dismissed as it can have a key role in alleviating the fear experiences by expatriates (Ripamonti et al., 2020).

Furthermore, minimising risks in hostile environments by, for instance, utilising specialist knowledge networks to help protect and prepare expatriates is highly beneficial (Gannon & Paraskevas, 2019). Additionally, the ERM model by Posthuma et al. (2019) is used to identify the five affecting factors on expatriate risk management as well as the correlations between them. Posthuma et al. (2019) also claim that a risk evaluation process consisting of the risk identification and risk analysis phases should be put to place to better manage risks in hostile environments. Finally, to ensure expatriate safety, organisations should always adjust their processes for each specific host country condition. Additionally, collaborating with other firms facing similar circumstances can be extremely useful. (Fee et al., 2019.)

With this summary, the theoretical section of the research is concluded. Next, the methodological choices that guided the research are validated. This includes considerations of research approach and philosophy, research design, population and sampling, as well as research ethics and quality.

4 Methodology

In this chapter, the methodological choices for the study are explained and justified. First, the research approach and philosophy are explained in detail by describing the preferred concepts. Second, the specific research design is presented before moving into the description of the execution of the study. Here the data collection methods are disclosed, and a data analysis is conducted. The purpose of the selected research method is to answer the two research questions presented earlier: "*How do hostile environments carrying risks of health-related threats influence the adjustment and thus work performance of expatriates situated in them?*" and "*What can the home and host organisations do to mitigate the negative effects of these environments and thereby further assignment success?*"

4.1   Research approach and philosophy

As defined by Saunders et al. (2007, pp. 101) research philosophy is a term used to describe the nature of knowledge as well as the development of it. Moreover, research methodology and the actual methods and techniques used to collect data stem from the philosophical concepts of ontology and epistemology. Ontology describes the nature of existence and reality. In turn, epistemology depicts the theory of knowledge and it is used to assist researchers in understanding the most suitable ways to explore the nature of the world. Thereby, ontology is at the core of the research process. Epistemology is then built on the concept of ontology. Moreover, methodology follows next when moving on to more practical concepts and finally, methods and techniques are the most shallow and practical layer of the research process. (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015, pp. 46–47.)

Ontology addresses deep philosophical concepts related to realism, internal realism, relativism, and nominalism. These are ways of describing the nature of the world and are thus only mentioned briefly due to their extensive essence. (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015,

pp. 50.) Epistemology is more connected to the methodological choices concerning research design, and due to its relevance, it is discussed more here. Epistemology entails two conflicting views on how social science research should be operated: social constructionism and positivism (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015, pp. 51). In positivism, the observer is assumed to be independent, the human interests are irrelevant, the research progresses through hypotheses and deductions, generalisations are fulfilled through statistical probability, and sampling requires large numbers of cases that are selected randomly. In turn, social constructionism is characterised by how the observer is a part of the cause being observed, the human interests are the essential drivers of science, the research progresses by collecting rich data from which concepts are bred, generalisations are fulfilled through theoretical abstraction, and lastly sampling requires only a small number of cases that have been selected for particular reasons. (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015, pp. 53.)

In this research, the approach is going to be a mixture of both constructivist and positivist epistemologies, with emphasis on the former. The methodological aims, starting points, designs, data types, and analysis reflect the nature of constructionism, while the outcomes display the characteristics of positivism. (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015, pp. 54.) Furthermore, there are two more dimensions to these research approaches. While a research approach can be either positivist or constructionist, it is simultaneously also either detached or engaged. These contrasting views describe the relationship between the objects of the research and the researcher. Here, the relationship between the two is detached, thereby making the approach of this research closest to detached constructionism (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015, pp. 57–58, 60.) The dimensions of research approaches can be viewed in Figure 6 on page 43.

When moving onwards from the philosophy of research into more practical choices, the three approaches to theory development must be discussed. These approaches are called deduction, induction, and abduction. Deduction involves the evolvement of a theory that is precisely tested through an array of propositions. Thus, the goal of this

approach is to either verify or falsify an existing theory by collecting data that is then used to evaluate hypotheses. Induction is an alternative approach where the order of reasoning is opposite to the one in the deductive approach. In induction, theory is developed based on the findings made from observing empirical data. Thereby, the aim is to generate new theory by exploring a phenomenon and identifying patterns from it. Abduction in turn commences from the discovery of a surprising fact. On the basis of this observation, a probable theory is then established to create an explanation for it. Thus, the purpose of the abductive approach is to involve existing theory to either generate new theory or modify the existing one. (Saunders et al., 2019, pp. 152–153, 155, 805.) The chosen theory development approach in this thesis is the abductive one.
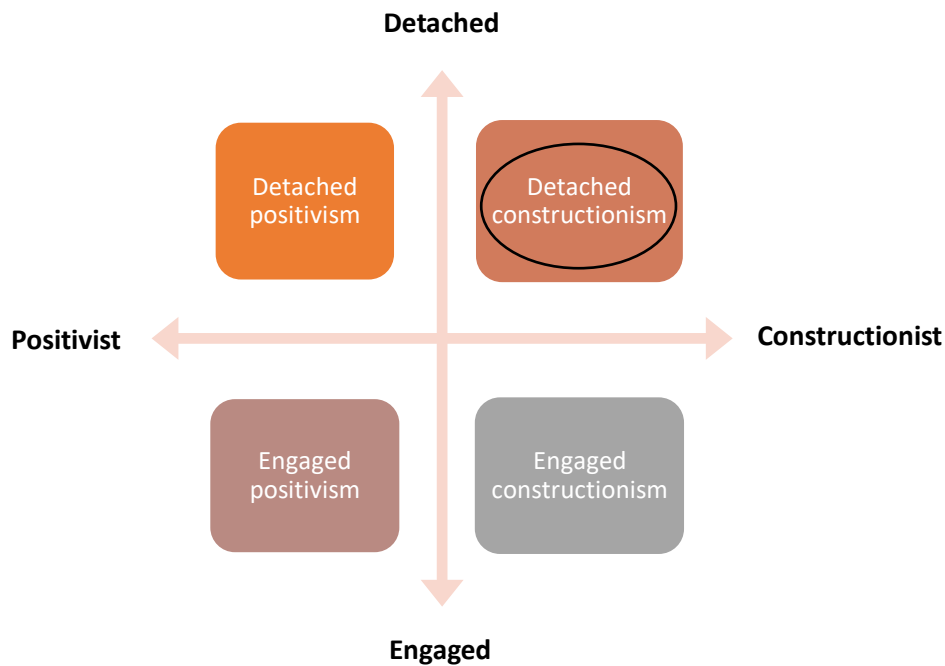

Figure 6 Epistemology and research design choice (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015, pp. 58–62).

4.2 Research design

Once an approach to theory development has been established, the next phase is identifying the methodological choices. There are generally three different types of research

designs: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. Quantitative research uses or generates numerical data. Typical data analysis procedures include statistics and graphs, and data is often collected with questionnaires. Qualitative research in turn uses or generates non-numeric data. Here data is commonly collected through interviews and is analysed for example by categorising data. However, oftentimes the two are combined to create mixed methods research. (Saunders et al., 2019, pp. 175, 181.)

Respectively, this thesis utilises the mono method qualitative study, meaning that qualitative data is collected using a single technique and an equivalent qualitative analytical procedure (Saunders et al., 2019, pp. 179). Easterby-Smith et al. (2015, pp. 129) define the most frequent types of qualitative data to be reports of research participants' statements or actions. These can be among others interview transcripts or recordings, written notes of observations, documents, videos, or images. Qualitative data is not only defined by its non-numeric nature but also by the interpretative and interactive process in which it is generated. Qualitative data must also be developed by the researcher. In addition, qualitative research is explorative by nature and it entails open-ended questions and responses. (Esterby-Smith et al., 2015, pp. 129.)

Moreover, following the selection of a research design, a research strategy must be determined based on the objectives of the study. The seven most common strategies include experiment, survey, case study, action research, grounded theory, ethnography, and archival research. Experiments are commonly conducted as a means of discovering a possible link between two variables. This means establishing an experimental group and a control group whose members are exposed to different kinds of manipulation to find out its effect on the individuals. Surveys are often questionnaires used to collect a large amount of data by asking the target group questions of who, what, how many, and how much. A case study is a research strategy involving an empirical investigation of a present-day phenomenon within its existing context using several sources of evidence (Robson, 2002, pp. 178). It is far different from the previously introduced experiment

and survey as it does not involve neither a controlled environment nor a large number of variables. (Saunders et al., 2007, pp. 135–136, 138–139.)

Action research, per its name suggests, is a strategy of conducting research in the context of the operation by repeatedly diagnosing, planning, acting upon, and evaluating occurrences with the added involvement of the practitioners. Grounded theory strategy includes the initial development of a theoretical framework. This theory is then improved according to data collected from observations. After, this data creates more predictions that are tested as an attempt to find confirmation or further predictions. Ethnography's purpose is to explain and describe the social world of the subjects of research in the exact way these individuals experience it. It is thus by nature time consuming and demanding. Lastly, in archival research the main source of data are administrative documents and data. (Saunders et al., 2007, pp. 141–143.)

As the objective of this study is to study the experiences of a few selected individuals, a variant of a case study was chosen as the research strategy. The "case" in a case study can refer to for example a group, an organisation, an event, or a person. The cases examined in this thesis are the last, people. More specifically this refers to the expatriate individuals whose experiences are appropriately researched in their real-life context. (Saunders et al., 2019, pp. 196–197.) Within case studies there are also multiple different means of collecting data including observation, interviews, documentary, analysis, and questionnaires. (Saunders et al., 2007, pp. 139.) Furthermore, based on two dimensions, six case study strategies can be identified. A case study can be either single or multiple case as well as simultaneously either exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory. (Yin, 2003, pp. 5.)

The research conducted in this thesis is done as multiple case and exploratory. An exploratory study as defined by Saunders et al. (2007, pp. 133) is useful especially when the researcher wishes to clarify an already existing understanding they have of a problem. This exploratory type of research is here completed as a combination of studying the

existing literature and conducting interviews with six individuals who have been or are currently on an international assignment in a hostile environment.

Furthermore, the study will be organised with a cross-sectional time horizon. This means that the phenomenon in question will be studied only at a particular time instead of longitudinally. (Saunders et al., 2019, pp. 212.) Moreover, the particular data collection technique chosen for this research are interviews. To allow room for discussion and interpretation, more specifically non-standardised, semi-structured interviews were selected as the most fitting research technique. In semi-structured interviews a predetermined list of themes is initially created, and key questions associated with these themes are elected to steer the conduct of the interviews. Depending on the philosophical assumption of the researcher, the level of structure varies. As in this case a more positivist and detached research philosophy is applied, thus a more consistent and structured approach to completing the interviews is taken to ensure a certain level of homogeneity between them. Finally, the interviews are conducted as one-to-one, and internet mediated due to government recommendations to avoid human contact as a preventative measure to stop the spread of the COVID-19 virus. (Saunders et al., 2019, pp. 437, 443.)

Even though interviews resemble everyday conversations, the two are set apart by the extent to which interviews are reflected upon, analysed, and prepared in advance. Qualitative interviews are planned, executed, examined, and reported according to a research design. Interviews are most commonly used to gather information about individual lived experiences. Therefore, qualitative interviewing seeks to find answers to questions beginning with "how" instead of "how much", making it a fitting choice for studying the impacts of hostile environments on expatriates' work performance. Another characteristic that typically differentiates quantitative and qualitative studies is the way in which the sample is selected. More commonly in quantitative studies the sample is selected at random to avoid systematic biases. However, what is more conventionally a trait of qualitative studies is the information-oriented selection of the sample. (Brinkmann, 2013, pp. 45, 47, 49, 57.) Flyvbjerg (2006, pp. 230) describes that the aim of

information-oriented selection is to expand the usability of information that is gathered from small samples. He continues by stating that these cases are picked based on the expectations about their content of information. Therefore, on the basis of these definitions and the topic of research, the chosen sample selection method in this study is the information-oriented one.

4.3   Population and sampling

Generalisability is a pivotal aim of quantitative research and can be achieved through statistical sampling procedures (Silverman, 2013, pp. 144). The aim of sampling here is to create an accurate representation of the population and thus it also allows for the creation of broader inferences (Arber, 1993, pp. 38, 70). These procedures are however typically unavailable in qualitative research. In a qualitative study the data are usually collected from one or more cases which have likely been selected simply because they allow access, not on a random basis. This is also referred to as purposive sampling. Purposive sampling authorises the researcher to choose their cases based on the features or processes they illustrate. Thus, cases can be selected critically on the basis of the research interests. (Silverman, 2013, pp. 144, 148.)

The sampling in this research was completed using the above-mentioned purposive sampling method. The target population for this study are expatriates who have been or are currently on international assignments in environments which can be identified as hostile due to a health threat. As the total number of this target population is far too great to be studied in its entirety, a selected six individuals were chosen to represent this group. The number of individuals interviewed was six because of time and access limitations. Additionally, it was visible during the last interviews that the participants were repeating similar points in their answers. Thus, the conclusion was made that likely no critical information would be missed if the number of participants were left at six. Therefore, the saturation point was reached.

The sample consists of only males, which does not thoroughly represent the target population. However, according to Ossorio (2001) as well as Altman and Shortland (2008) around 85 percent of expatriates are men. More recently, Brookfield Global Relocation Services (2016) claim the same portion to be 75. Additionally, this stereotypical profile of an expatriate is completed by their race being primarily white Anglo-Saxon, their employer being an MNC and their occupation being an executive or manager (Berry & Bell, 2012). All six participants fit this description. Thereby, even though the sample is not inclusive or versatile, it may accurately represent the average expatriate.

Furthermore, five out of the six participants were currently abroad. The one individual who had completed their assignment had returned to their home country in December of 2020. Four participants were abroad with their spouse and children. One participant was abroad with their spouse because his children already live separate from him, and one participant was on the assignment alone. The ages of the interviewees' children varied from 3 to 26. Therefore, concerns regarding schooling issues abroad were relevant to most of them. In turn the ages of the participants themselves fluctuated between 34 and 55 with an average of 43.

All of the participants were in managerial positions of varying levels. The job titles of the interviewees included brand and product director, vice president, managing director, manager digital transformation, project manager, and senior vice president. Therefore, these high professional statuses match the expectation set by the Berry & Bell (2012) study. These professionals naturally had varying levels of international experience. Most were on an international assignment for the first time in their careers, but one had even up to twenty years of experience working in various areas abroad. However, all of them had worked even before their assignments in a highly international environment as part of global MNCs where language and culture collisions were typical and part of their everyday working life. Additionally, preceding work trips to the country of assignment seemed to be typical. The duration of the participants' current or most recent

international assignments fluctuated anywhere between one to four years. The detailed background information of the participants' assignments can be viewed in Table 1 below.

Partici-pant code	Age	Gender	Assign-ment desti-nation	Type of HE	Status abroad	Job title	(Expected) Total assignment du-ration	Of which had passed	Duration of inter-view
A	34	Male	France	COVID-19 & Terrorism	With spouse and two chil-dren	Manager dig-ital transfor-mation	2-3 years	1 year 5 months	0:42:02
B	46	Male	Germany	COVID-19	With spouse and two chil-dren	Project man-ager	2 years	1 year 7 months	0:30:44
C	55	Male	Russia	COVID-19	With spouse	Managing di-rector	Indefinite	3 years 7 months	0:31:50
D	43	Male	USA	COVID-19	With spouse and two chil-dren	Vice presi-dent finance	3 years	2 years 9 months	1:02:03
E	35	Male	Germany	COVID-19	Alone	Brand and product di-rector	2 years 8 months	2 years 5 months	0:26:00
F	45	Male	USA	COVID-19	With spouse and two chil-dren	Senior vice president	2 years 7 months	Com-pleted	0:36:25

Table 1 Background information on the participants of the study.

4.3.1 Data collection

Like mentioned in the section on methodological choices and research design, interviews were selected as the most fitting research method for this study. More specifically the type of interviews utilised was semi-structured interviews. According to Brinkmann (2012, pp. 85) semi-structured interviews are planned, though flexible interviews that strive to obtain descriptions of particular experiences of the interviewees. He continues by adding that typically the goal of these type of interviews is to interpret the meaning of the portrayed phenomena to some degree. Brinkmann (2012, pp. 85) also states that the advantage of these type of interviews is that they allow for more knowledge to be produced because there is more leeway for the interviewee to continue on desired an-gles during the conversation. Thus, the role of the interviewer simultaneously evolves from merely a questioner to more of a knowledge-producing participant. Semi-

structured interviews are presumably the most wide-spread approach and were found to be the most suitable option for this study as well (Brinkmann, 2012, pp. 86).

Formulating relevant questions to examine the area in which one is interested is crucial for completing semi-structured interviews successfully. There are mainly three types of questions: open, probing, and closed questions. A combination of all three question types was applied to the interviews of this study to gather an encompassing picture of the individuals' experiences. However, the emphasis was on open questions. Open questions prompt the participant to describe and define a situation or an event. The purpose of an open question is thereby to encourage the interviewee to produce a developmental and extensive answer that either provides facts or reveals attitudes. (Saunders et al., 2019, pp. 458–459.) Naturally, short follow-up statements and questions as well as extension questions were used to support the specific direction of each interview (Saunders et al., 2019, pp. 460).

All six interviews were conducted electronically via the internet using either Microsoft Teams or Google Meetings. These two platforms were chosen specifically due to accessibility and suitableness for both the interviewee and the interviewer. The use of these platforms was favourable also because they allowed for real time video connection. Thereby, the type of interviewing used in this study was synchronous electronic interviews (Saunders et al., 2019, pp. 476). The desired means of conducting the interviews face-to-face was unfortunately inaccessible for two reasons. First, all six participants were located in different countries than the interviewer making gathering impossible. And second, at the time of the interviews the conditions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic suggested social distancing and thus avoiding close contact with people outside one's household. Therefore, web conferencing services were chosen as the second-best option. Furthermore, permission to record the audio of the interviews was requested from and granted by all six interviewees. These audio recordings lasting from 26 to 62 minutes were used as the basis for the analysis.

Moreover, all but one interview was conducted in Finnish, the native language of those five participants to ensure comfort and to avoid linguistic barriers. The sixth interview was conducted in English, also the native language of that particular participant. This means that most quotations and interpretations are translated from their original language into English for the purpose of this thesis. Great precision and care were applied in this process, but nevertheless the risks of misinterpretations are always present in such procedures. More information on the original answers can be attained from the researcher. Additionally, all the interview questions can be found as an appendix.

4.3.2 Data analysis

In order for data to be useful, it must be analysed, and its meanings understood. Qualitative data analysis methods facilitate this as they allow the researcher to develop theory from their data. Data analysis includes processes ranging from plain classification of responses to characterising relationships between categories. Data analysis software can be used to assist in this procedure, but none were applied in this particular research. (Saunders et al., 2007, pp. 470–471.) A critical component of data reporting is the presentation of findings so that they accurately represent what was said (Adams et al., 2013, pp.159).

Typically, in non-standardised interviews, the conversation is audio-recorded and thereafter transcribed. Transcribing is the process of reproducing the recording as a written account word for word. (Saunders et al., 2007, pp. 475.) Therefore, accordingly all interviews conducted and recorded for this study were transcribed. After this, the transcripts were printed for the purpose of coding. Coding is a categorising strategy where sections of data are labelled and arranged, as well as subsequently inspected and grouped (Flick, 2014, pp.24). Hence, all interviews were carefully read, and the content was familiarised. Following this, sixteen areas of reoccurring themes were identified from the interviews, which were then signified from the printed transcripts using coloured markers. Each of

these colours represented one topic. Thus, with this method, the classification of related subject between interviews was organised. Lastly, all discussion under every colour was collected into one file so that the relationships between the experiences could be analysed. The findings are presented proceeding the review of ethics and quality.

4.4   Research ethics and quality

The ethical practice of research that includes human participants is a demanding and intricate responsibility. Regardless of the context, structure, and design of the research one must always be aware of the ethical implications of all individuals concerned with the process. (King & Horrocks, 2010, pp. 103.) Research must be honest, careful, precise, and objective in all phases of the study in order to be ethical. Therefore, honourable research can be completed only through reliable and valid research methods that provide transparent results. (Kananen, 2017, pp. 189–190.) Silverman (2013, pp. 161) defines the main principles of ethical research to be the following: protection of research participants, willing participation and the right to depart, assessment of possible risks and benefits to participants, acquiring informed consent, and not doing harm. These are all guidelines that also steered the research conducted in this thesis.

In addition to research ethics, research quality is something that fundamentally defines the value of the findings. Assessments about the quality of a research are essentially connected to validity and reliability. Validity refers to the suitability of the measures used, precision of the result analysis, and generalisability of the findings. Reliability in turn refers to consistency and replication; if an earlier research is possible to be replicated and the same findings are achieved, the research is reliable. (Saunders et al., 2019, pp. 213–214.)

Validity is divisible into two halves. The term internal validity is used to talk about the extent to which the findings of a research are traceable to the intervention one is

researching rather than to the defects in the research design. External validity consecutively is affected by how well the findings of a research can be generalised to other appropriate contexts. Internal validity is threatened by six factors. First, an occurrence can take place that alters participants' perceptions. Second, being aware of testing and questioning can have an impact on the participant's views or actions. Third, the comparability of results can be influenced by a change in research instruments between the varying stages of a research project. Fourth, as discussed prior, participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any point which naturally has an impact on the study as a whole. Fifth, participants may be affected by external change that further alters their attitudes or behaviours. And last, shortcomings about clarity in relation to cause and effect can manipulate the findings. (Saunders et al., 2019, pp. 215–216.) These pitfalls were acknowledged when crafting the findings of this research.

Reliability has a similar division as it is also sometimes discussed having an external and an internal dimension. External reliability of a research can be tested by investigating whether the analytic procedures and data collection techniques used would generate consistent findings if they were repeated either by another person or in different circumstances. Internal reliability in turn is concerned with the occurring consistency during a research project. Furthermore, both of these aspects of reliability can be threatened by either participant or researcher error and participant or researcher bias. (Saunders et al., 2019, pp. 214.) As the true test for reliability would require external party examination, the highest level of reliability cannot be determined with the results of this study alone. However, avoiding error and bias and thereby ensuring reliability in its full scope was a priority in this research.

5 Findings

In this part the findings of the empirical research are presented. This research examines the experiences of expatriates on assignments in hostile environments. Hostile environment as a term is very inclusive and as defined earlier can refer to anything from political upheaval to natural disasters. The focus of this thesis is on violent acts and health threats. However, due to accessibility issues and the need to limit focus, experiences from violent environments were left out. As the COVID-19 pandemic was at the time a globally prevalent and prominent health threat, the attention was directed towards encounters with that environment. Thus, all findings discuss specifically health threats and their effects on expatriate adjustment and work performance. Additionally, the expatriate organisations' support efforts and their effectiveness were assessed from this point of view as well.

Moreover, the findings are divided into five second level headings. The two first titles discuss dimensions of general and work adjustment. The third delves into the consequences of this adjustment on work performance. The fourth examines the extents of organisational support in hostile environments, while the fifth considers assignment success. These five are further categorised into a total of seven third level headings to provide structure.

As is visible from the theoretical framework, expatriate adjustment is typically considered to be a sum of three dimensions. However, here the dimension of interaction adjustment is imbedded in the two chapters on general and work adjustment. General adjustment thus also includes extra-workplace interaction adjustment for example with HCNs. Work adjustment for one contains work related interaction adjustment because the specific circumstances of the hostile environment caused the matters to be so greatly connected that an integration was made.

5.1 General adjustment

As stated prior, all expatriates had been on their assignments anywhere between one year and five months to a little under four years unless it was already completed. In this case the total length of the assignment also fit in this time frame. This means that all participants had had time to adjust to their country of destination and the new work environment before any hostilities took place. Therefore, the adjustment must be first considered independently before the effects of COVID-19 on adjustment are addressed.

All six interviewees deemed their initial adjustment as more or less successful. The participants mentioned the western nature of their assignment destination and other similarity to their home country as being the most noticeable influencing factors that supported their adjustment. Here comparisons to China, India, and Southern American countries were made as examples of cultures where the respondents thought they might have found adjusting more difficult. However, as the destination countries were the USA, France, Germany and Russia, all interviewees found the living conditions in these destinations quite similar to their European home countries.

Regardless, several hampering cultural and habitual aspects were also mentioned. As background information it should be mentioned that five out of the six expatriates were Finnish (A, B, C, D and E), and one was Irish (F). Therefore, cultural critique and opinions were made by people with such backgrounds. Nevertheless, for participants B and E in Germany the most noticeable hindering differences in terms of the work environment were related to locals' lack of English language skills, longer workdays, and lower use of technology at work. In France, discrepancies in time orientations as well as the interpretation of gestures and non-verbal cues were found to be demanding by participant A:

> *But it took approximately half a year for me to start knowing that if someone says something what is actually means and learn how to… read between the lines…*

For the extra-EU countries, Russia and the USA, the contrasts in cultures affecting adjustment were quite prominent. Participant C who was currently completing his assignment in Saint Petersburg had been working in Russia on and off since the beginning of the millennium. His initial adjustment troubles were therefore connected to the environment of that era. During that time, the lack of infrastructure and challenges in life with small children were mentioned as the most hindering characteristics. Additionally, a feature of the environment that had extended from the year 2000 until the 2020s was the bureaucracy of the country. Adjusting to the speed in which matters progress was still found to be demanding:

> *A lot has changed since the year 2000… back then even the infrastructure left a lot to be desired… [life here back then] was quite challenging… it is bureaucratic and slow to attend to matters here.*

In terms of the USA, differences in political environments were identified the most frequently by participants D and F. The operation of the Donald Trump administration and its effects on the climate were clear. In addition, lack of gun control as well as high levels of religiousness and conservativeness were mentioned as cultural disparities that negatively affected the expatriate's and their family's adjustment to the new environment. Interestingly though, participant D mentioned the culture of the organisation as something meaningful here:

> *I think that in a way as my job title did not change, my employer did not change… When you work in a firm, the culture of the company is so strong that in a way it does not really matter to you whether you sit in which subsidiary of that company because you know the people, you have the same meetings, same colleagues, same colours, culture, and everything.*

Therefore, the role of the company culture in addition to the culture of the country cannot be disregarded. And despite all the above-mentioned differences, it must be highlighted that no interviewee mentioned having had prominent adjustment issues. Additionally, four participants mentioned that them having visited the country of destination multiple times before the beginning of the assignment was an alleviating adjustment

aspect. The general globality of the individuals' roles and of the whole organisation likely affected this as well.

5.1.1 The impact of COVID-19 on expatriate adjustment and comfort

When discussing expatriate adjustment in hostile environments, one cannot ignore the impact of the hostility on the individuals' comfort levels as well as on the adaptation to the new habitat. Specifically, when considering COVID-19 and the far-reaching restrictions on movement and freedom it has brought upon these expatriates, the repercussions are clear.

All three expatriates who were located in European countries mentioned similar factors when being asked about the negative effects of the hostile environment on their adjustment and comfort. Particularly statements such as "one cannot do anything" and "one cannot really go anywhere" seemed to characterise these responses. Participant A said that for five months all restaurants had been closed only permitting take away, which had significantly affected his life making it "not normal". He also added that the curfews set by the government had a noticeable impact on his free time as he did not have time to do anything after work because of them. Cancelled travel plans outside work were also seen as a disappointment for participant A. Furthermore, these impressions were replicated by participant B who also said that everything seemed to be closed which had significantly restricted his freedom to do anything. Participant E confirmed this by stating that "I cannot go to the gym, to matches, not really anywhere". He added that this had caused a seclusion of some degree. Participant B also agreed with this as he said that the entire social part of his life abroad had been cut. Finally, he added that he had plans to travel during his assignment and that they were all naturally cancelled now, resulting in dissatisfaction.

Restrictions on movement seemed to be in general the most prominent negative effect of the hostile environment. The rest of the interviewees who were located in extra-EU countries had all struggled with exiting and entering their country of assignment. Both assignees in the USA faced the same restriction; if they were to leave the country, they could not return again. This was because only US citizens were allowed at the time to enter the country. This caused apparent discomfort as even leaving their state of residence was banned for a period of time. Naturally, these restrictions on even work-related travel were reflected on free time travelling as well. This caused lengthy eras where the participants were unable to see their relatives and loved ones because neither of the parties could travel to see each other. Participant D described this as "in the long run an unpleasant situation". He additionally struggled with great delays in his visa processing:

> *My visa expired… at the end of January… the renewal application was done on time but even that has not been processed yet because there are so many delays in the administration due to the labour deficit… caused by the corona restrictions.*

In terms of participant C in Russia, the restrictions on entering the country were a significant inconvenience. When he visited Finland for what was originally planned to be one month, he was not allowed back to Russia until six months later. This coincidence however did have positive sides to it as well. During these six months the situation in Saint Petersburg worsened while life in Finland was still quite free. Then in turn when it came time for him to return, life seemed to be getting back on track in Russia while restrictions in Finland were only being established. This allowed the participant to continue his hobby, ice hockey, uninterrupted which was naturally defined as positive.

Lastly, a truly unique perspective in the midst of the negativity was participant D's impression on the positive effects of the hostile environment. Because travelling for work and leisure were both banned, this resulted in him finding much more time to exercise when no time was taken up by recovering from jetlag.

> *People are in better physical shape. I… have time to exercise, I do not need to overcome jetlag. This way I am able to work out better than ever before during my career.*

He added that he did not think anyone missed travelling for work and thus this restricting, and in many ways negative, burden had also positive repercussions.

5.1.2 The family of the expatriate as a shaping component

Because of the added demands of distance schooling on the expatriate's children, the focus of the family was kept on them instead of the spouses. Out of the six interviewees, four were abroad with their children. Therefore, these participants were asked about the adjustment of their children and its influence of them. Participant D's children had been studying from home for an entire year between March 2020 and March 2021. Participant D found that they had adapted well to the situation, but that their schooling had had one of the most substantial impacts on their decision to stay abroad or not. In July of 2020 they found out that schools would be continuing from a distance once again.

But we did think in last July for a moment that what the heck. School is proceeding normally back in Finland, what is the point of staying here?

Nevertheless, they did decide to stay abroad. Participant D also continued later:

I think that the biggest strain in this whole thing was not related to my job, but to the fact that the kids have been distance learning for the past 12 months. I feel like that was the most prominent risk factor here… What if they had not adjusted to it? And especially if we had had small children, I do not understand how that could have been managed… I am really amazed and proud of them. They have survived with this distance learning so well. I think that they have had to adapt much more than I have had to.

Depending on the month, both of participant F's children had been studying partially from home and partially at school to various extents. The older more from home than the younger. Moreover, participant F's wife did not work. This allowed for her to take care of the children and help them with their online studies thus decreasing the situation's effect on participant F's adjustment and capability to work. He continued:

And I was very grateful for that, because I know that I had a lot of people in my organisation… where both parents worked online in Zoom meetings and yet had two kids in the room next door that… demanded their attention. So, we afforded our employees as much flexibility as they needed, you know, to work around that.

In turn the children of participant B had been fully distance learning for a couple of months in the spring of 2020 and for the first months of the next year. Other than that, they were able to attend school normally. Participant B was thankful of the house that they had in Germany. There he had his own workspace, and the children had their own rooms as well. This allowed him to draw a line between work time and free time. Additionally, he did not feel as though the children's distance learning had really affected his ability to work. He only mentioned the following aspect:

Probably in that sense sure that of course now that I am here at home, and then they finish school around a quarter to four. Then it is maybe a little bit difficult for me to keep on working because then I would like to go down there to do something with them.

Lastly, participant A with the youngest children explained that their schools were only closed from mid-March 2020 to the beginning of May of that same year. In his own words, "And that was really, it was awful". When the schools were closed, his wife was able to at home more. Therefore, participant A did not think that the children being home impacted his ability to work much. He did state his content though with the decision the French government had made since that closing the schools of small children would be the very last step they take. Finally, he added that no childcare assistance was offered by the firm as far as he was aware.

Furthermore, the expatriates were also asked about their company's efforts in supporting their spouse and children to better adjust under these demanding circumstances. Participant C who was the only one to be abroad with just his spouse said that no support was offered to her in relation to COVID-19 or in general. The only thing he mentioned was her being entitled to the health insurance offered by the firm. Similar treatment was

experienced by participant F who said that no support was given regarding his family situation during the entire assignment. He added:

You know, yeah I think our employees, they got some support in terms of how to manage, but the families no, or my family, no, zero support in that regard.

These experiences were not shared by the three other participants. Participants A and B shared similar lists of means of family support. It must be mentioned here that both individuals were located in EU countries under the same organisation which explains the similarities in their contracts. Nevertheless, participant A stated that his wife was given money for attending language courses as well as for upkeeping her professional skills, which she had used to educate herself for one year. Additionally, the schooling of the children was paid for by the company, and all travelling back to Finland was paid for the entire family unit. However, these were all benefits of the general expatriate contract and no particular support was offered once the environment turned hostile.

Participant B had similar things to say. His wife was given the same money to be used on education which she had spent on job application training that she was pleased with. In addition, a relocation consultant was provided by the organisation who helped them find schools for their children. Other than that, the support provided for the children was merely financial. In general, participant C felt that his family had not been supported by the organisation. Especially regarding the health threat.

Participant D explained that he believed that in general the transition to the US was definitely more noticeable for the rest of the family than to him. This was because his family did not have a similar base to lean on in the new country that he had because of the company. His family had to leave everything behind and in addition they had no clear plans in the country of destination. When asked whether these family's difficulties to adjust affected his own adjustment he answered:

Well yes and no. Let us say that it could not be ignored, but you really could not do anything else but accept the situation as it is and deal with it.

Additionally to this, his wife was given money to be spent on her education, which she did not use. Originally, they had planned that she would start working abroad but the pandemic derailed these plans. Therefore, as at the time of interview she had been out of work for almost three years, she was naturally somewhat diverged from it. The need for her to get back to work was an influencing factor in them deciding to return to Finland when they did. Other than this, the only support given to the family was access to the health insurance covered by the company.

5.1.3 The effects of pandemic-induced stress on adjustment

A great part of the interviews was dedicated to discussing the feelings related to adjustment challenges. This included reviewing the major sources of stress in the hostile environment. Even though reactions to the inception of the pandemic were varied, certain commonalities were apparent in the answers. Most clearly feelings of uncertainty were noticeable. Participants C and E both said that they were not afraid per se, but they both experienced great amounts of uncertainty in the beginning about the symptoms, their seriousness, how to act, how long this might last, and what the pandemic's effects on them will be. Participant E specified that he was in a way more so curious to see what was going to happen next than scared. Participant C found comfort when considering his general history of having been healthy in the past. Participant F in turn mentioned that he was very nervous and unsure though not overly afraid. He added that the worry was greater about the non-health related effects of catching the virus such as having to quarantine than of the actual illness. Participant C also confirmed that his initial reaction was questioning the future developments of the pandemic.

I was not afraid per se. Although, there was that substantial uncertainty in the beginning about what this is.

Participants A and D did not acknowledge any particular negative feelings. Participant D found comfort in the appropriate restrictions set by the government and the capacity of the local health care system. This trust was reinforced because he had access to a proper health insurance. Participant A was equally satisfied with the matter in which the local government had handled the crisis. He found the efficiency of these operations reassuring.

In terms of the biggest sources of stress in the hostile environment, the role of family was most noticeably highlighted. Participant B stated that he felt that he was quite alone in the new country and thus he was worried for himself and his family. Concerns about what were to happen if any of them ended up in a hospital were relevant. Additionally, he was worried about his lack of German language skills and how that might affect his ability to be treated. Thus, even though he had faith in the local health care professionals, he thought that practical matters would be difficult to arrange. Similar feelings were awakened in participant A. His lack of French language skills made him worry about him being able to properly be treated in his new home country. Not knowing what number to call in case his health declined and whether or not he would receive service in English from that number also caused him distress. In addition, he mentioned his biggest stress source with the pandemic to be related to his children.

> *It really has been the [biggest source of stress] whether schools stay open or not … because if schools are not open then it is really quite difficult for me to do my job… When the children come home and then I need to spend time with them.*

> *Because I barely have any [French] language skills, I cannot be absolutely certain that if I became really ill… what would I do then… Where would I call and would they be able to assist me in English there.*

As a side note it should be mentioned here that his children were three and five years old at the time.

Participants C and F mentioned their worry towards their older relatives back home. Participant C said that the most stress was caused in the beginning of the pandemic by the

uncertainty. Doubts about how to act, how long this might last, and what are this crisis' effects on him and his loved ones, were prominent. Participant F specified that he was most concerned about the consequences of the virus on his and his wife's parents and other more vulnerable relatives back home. He also stated:

> *We had our whole lives... in the US... Our second home you might say, all our belongings, everything was there. So, it would have been a really difficult situation if something had happened back in Ireland that we would have had to come home, because we would not have got back to the US to carry on as normal.*

Participant D in turn said that he could not be stressed about the environment everyday anymore. However, he did add that the most stressful matters related to the pandemic were the facts that he could not exit the country and that his relatives were unable to come visit him as well. In addition, he was grateful that all of his subordinates were in different countries than him, so regardless of the situation they would have been working distanced from each other. He compared the circumstance to other foremen who were responsible for employees doing more practical jobs that had to be completed at the actual place of work. Thus, these managers were dealing with much more work stress that he was thankful not to be experiencing.

Lastly, for participant E the most prominent cause for stress and irritation was the lack of activities due to the pandemic when compared to what he could have had in a more desirable circumstance.

> *After all, as a person who has moved abroad... everything changes in a sense anyways. So then if additionally all sort of free time activities are removed and... even the little human contact is taken out, it is kind of a big stressor there.*

However, ultimately he did not feel that he suffered from revolutionary stress because of these. Additionally, modern communication platforms helped him keep contact with people back home which in turn made the demanding situation easier.

5.2   Work adjustment abroad during the pandemic

One can say without a doubt that the health threat brought on by the pandemic caused the need for everyone to adjust to new ways of working. This was clearly visible in the responses of the participating expatriates as well. All six participants had worked at least for a period of time from home. Participant E had worked practically completely from home since the beginning of the pandemic. Similarly, participant C had worked from home for a year with the exception of going to the office once a week mainly to merely sign documents. This experience was replicated by participant B, who also had been working from home for the past year, with the omission of a few days during the summer as well as during September and October.

In turn participant F mentioned that he worked approximately 60 percent of the time from home and the rest 40 percent at the office. He added that he only went to the office for his subordinates. As the most senior person in his area, he wanted to display support to his employees who were unable to complete their jobs from a distance and were nervous because of it.

> *The only reason I went to the office was more an act of solidarity to show the gyus… I am responsible for this business, so I am going to show my face, I am going to be here to answer questions.*

Participant A also visited his office three to four times a week. He said that he could even go to the office every day if he wanted to because he lived so close to the facility. However, he had found this partial arrangement the most fitting for him. Lastly, out of the six people, participant D had been in his place of work the most. He was fully distant for only the first three months of the pandemic and since then he had been working at the office. This was possible because he shared this office with only a few other employees.

In addition to the physical place of work changing for all the participants, other impacts of the health threat were prominent as well. Participant E reported that the hostile

environment had caused almost all face-to-face meetings, customer visits and work trips abroad to be cancelled. The disruption of work-related travel was also mentioned by participants C, D, and F. Particularly for participant C these restrictions on movement had caused great harm. As mentioned prior, he visited Finland for what was supposed to be a month or two in April of 2020. This trip was initiated with the intention of staying in Finland while the worst wave of the pandemic passed in Russia. However, this trip extended to much longer because of the travel restriction between the two countries. Then, because he could not return to Russia in time, his visa and work permit became invalid. This caused even more trouble, and in the end, he had to wait six months until all elements needed for his return were prepared.

Even though his employer was not fussed about this situation, it did have extensive impacts on his work.

> *All signatures had to be written remotely or DHL brought papers for me to sign… Eventually the case was even that our CFO was named the managing director because I lost my work permit and therefore, I could not be the managing director anymore.*

When he finally got the opportunity to return to Russia, he did not have much of a choice in deciding whether he wanted to go there or not even though the situation with the health threat was equally as prominent as in the spring. He said that practically the only other option would have been to resign because one cannot be away for an extended period of time if they intend to be the managing director.

Thereby, it can be argued that the pandemic's impacts on participant C's work were the most significant. Other than this, participant F explained that for him the most noticeable effect of the pandemic was the financial struggle brought on by it. Business in the US had to go on a four-day week to compensate for the lack of orders. This meant that all employees were paid only 80 percent of their original salary. To fill the financial gap caused by this, the organisation applied for designated financial support from the government. This support was given to some extent, but due to the differences between

states in the USA, employees were left in very unequal situations. This responsibility for people's financial sufficiency was reported as the most difficult part of the job for participant F.

Additionally, participant F added that another remarkable impact was the extension of workday durations. Most of the workdays of his subordinates turned into 12-14 hours because the individuals could not do much else than work and the lines between home and work became blurred. Therefore, an important part of his job became reminding people to close their laptops at a certain point and relax. He also mentioned the physical strains of distant working:

> *…It does get to you that you do so many meetings talking at a screen. I even find my own eyesight, I mean I am 45, I am not getting younger. But I find my eyesight has been impacted because it is all in front of the screen now.*

More practical alterations were mentioned by participant D, social distancing, the use of face masks, and changes to work schedules. He stated that in order to decrease the amount of people coming in contact with one another, working in shifts and in same pairings had to be implemented. Additionally, negotiation rooms were not being used and instead all meetings were held online. He also added that he went to the office merely out of habit. He felt that he could just as well work from home but that he was so used to being at the office that he felt more comfortable working there.

Finally, participants A and B reflected on the meaning of distant working. Participant B said that because he had been working from home for the past year, it made him question his need to be in Germany in the first place. Participant A emphasised similar frustrations. He had come to France to build a team. However, this team had not once had the opportunity to gather as a whole. He only met colleagues a few times during the week at the office and even then, they could not engage in extra-workplace interactions because even going for lunch together was impossible as restaurants were only open for takeaway.

5.3   The impact of COVID-19 on perceived level of work performance

The depth of work adjustment inevitably also has a consequence on work performance. Therefore, in order to examine these connections, the interviewees were questioned about the concrete consequences of the hostile environment on their work performance and motivation levels. Participants C, D, and F had the clearest opposing answers to give. Participant D stated that he did not think that his work motivation had decreased. Additionally, he immensely emphasised the importance of Microsoft Teams and other communication platforms in assuring the continuation of work even during these demanding times. Participant C had the same response as he claimed that his work motivation was not impacted either. He in turn highlighted the lack of impact on the results of his work as he referenced that the profits of his area had not suffered. He felt that the entire company had yielded great results despite the pandemic. The financial downturn caused by the virus had affected their orders but no personal impact on performance was mentioned. In general, he felt that he personally, and the whole organisation had managed the distant working well.

As mentioned above, participant F saw no negative influence on his work motivation either. He argued that this lack of significance was explained by the hastiness of his job.

> *No no, I think certainly my job at that stage and now is very busy anyway. So, you know, we had endless meetings, and that is still our single biggest problem that one meeting runs into the next. So, if you look at my calendar, I have maybe 50+ meetings every week. All obviously online. So, it is a busy role, so your motivation is automatically there … your work ethic has to be there.*

Participant B in turn described the impacts of the distant working on his motivation followingly:

> *But what I noticed during the autumn was that it really is important for my own motivation that I am able to go to the actual workplace. That even if I could go only once a week, it really brought… a reason for the job. So, now it is a little bit like oh well, I will just move to my own small hut upstairs and do something here. But when I*

actually go to my place of work it brings a completely different atmosphere to work-
ing… There were not really many people there, a few people were there at the same
time as me… But whenever I saw someone it sorts of gave me a reason for doing that
job.

Conclusively, he thereby had some motivational issues during the autumn. This was caused by the disappointment of having to work distanced once more, when he had thought that it would be possible for him to finally return to work properly after such a demanding beginning of the year. However, when the restrictions caused by the pandemic started once again, he perceived the situations as never-ending, and thereby he struggled with motivating himself. Participant E also stated that the hostile environment had quite a large effect on his work motivation and performance. Working from home he felt that the concept of a workday was lost and therefore his days were often interrupted by jogs et cetera. Additionally, he felt that the financial impacts that the virus had on the company negatively affected his motivation. When no one really knew what to do about the situation he also felt a bit lost. Thereby, he began questioning what is truly important and what not. This pondering influenced his motivation as well.

In conclusion, a very interesting observation could be made when talking with the interviewees about the topic. It seemed that the higher the professional position of the participant, the less they were distressed by the pandemic. As can be seen from the responses above, the vice president, the senior vice president and the managing director felt that they had to do their jobs regardless of the situation of the climate. Therefore, they did not even have the opportunity to feel unmotivated. In turn, the brand and product director and project manager experienced these repercussions much more clearly.

5.4   Organisational support for expatriates in hostile environments

After conversation related to the impacts of the hostile environment on expatriate adjustment, the questioning moved onto the efforts of the organisation. Here the extents of organisational support and the availability of training were reviewed. At first, when

being asked whether or not the expatriate felt that their organisation communicated to them about the value of their role, the responses were versatile. Participant E expressed that communication related to the topic was satisfactory. However, he added that he could not pinpoint whether this appreciation was connected to his role as an expatriate or whether it was generally related to a position like his. Moreover, he did find the appreciation and acceptance particularly from his colleagues and subordinates valuable in his adjustment process. Participants A and B also confirmed that they were encouraged before and subsequently during their assignments about the importance of their role in the country of destination. However, the extent to which this affected their adjustment was left unclear. Based on previous responses, this question was not applicable to the three other cases.

5.4.1 Training and support pre-pandemic

Next, when discussing the training before and during the assignments fascinating discrepancies were brought up. Even though five out of the six interviewees were employed by the same company, the level of training they received was extremely varying. It seemed that participant E was given the most support. His pre-departure training included a two-part interview, a full day where different cultural aspects were reviewed. This entailed making a plan for him on ways to integrate to the new culture as well as educating him on what kind of people he should surround himself with. Participant E felt that his pre-departure training was quite satisfactory and that a sufficient amount of effort was put into it. In addition to these sessions in Finland, he also had a follow-up meeting in Germany a few months after his arrival where the level of his progress was surveyed. Additionally, he was given the opportunity to take language courses in Germany paid by the company, but he never used them.

The four other colleagues from his firm had quite different experiences. Participant A partook in a pre-departure trip to his assignment destination with his family. This was

offered by the company as a means for the family to familiarise themselves with their new home beforehand. In addition, the same opportunity to take language courses was offered to him. Unlike participant E, participant A did utilise this possibility and had been studying French for the entire duration of his assignment. Finally, a tax consultation was given to him before departure and after arrival. Along these briefings, participant A had the chance to contact the consulting firm at any point of this assignment with questions related to the topic. He commented the efforts of the firm followingly:

> *In a way, of course it has pretty much been our own responsibility to search for them [cultural and language courses]. So, no list has been given that "hey here are some things we recommend, choose from these". More so the case has been that I have had to look for them myself and then I have just sent them to the company to be approved. Or actually I have not even done that every time, I have just sent the bill afterwards.*

Participant B had a very similar experience. He was also given the same opportunity to partake in language courses. He had taken German courses for a year before the start of the pandemic. Additionally, he also had the same tax briefing. No other training related to his job or anything else for that matter was offered. Participant B also did not find additional training necessary.

Participant D was also given the same tax consulting pre-departure. In addition to this, he was provided with a check list for practical matters to aid him in his preparations. He also had to do a physical examination that he assumed was only necessary for his health insurance in the US. No cultural training was exploited, but he did mention that he believed there would have been the possibility to partake in an integration training. However, he did not request this as he felt he knew what to expect from his new country of residence.

Lastly from this firm, participant C was not really given any training either. Although, his background argued for the rationality of this decision. He stated:

> *Well, one might say that when I came, I was the most experienced person in the firm regarding Russia. So, there was not really anyone there who could provide me with additional information about the situation in Russia. But of course, there was training from people about the internal conduct of the company.*

Finally, participant F from another organisation described his experiences. The only training he received was the help of a Finnish employee who assisted him and his family with integrating to the US and to a very different culture and environment than what they were used to. This training included mainly general information about the emotional cycle of integrating to a new country.

5.4.2 Training and support due to COVID-19

Subsequently, the expatriates were asked about the extent of their organisations' efforts when the hostility in the environment began. Experiences with organisational support regarding the pandemic seemed to be quite similar across the board. Most participants said that as the situation was very new to everyone, in the beginning the companies were merely following the recommendations and instructions of governmental institutes. These general guidelines were found to be reliable and a sufficient means of support in the beginning as everyone was waiting for further instructions from their companies. Participants D and E stated that an order was given immediately that everyone who could had to move to distance working. Participant E also determined that the situation must have been quite chaotic for the HR which led to the employees not having clear guidance in the beginning on what to do and how to act.

Once the initial chaos had settled, action was taken almost everywhere. Participant C mentioned that a lot of guidelines were given on a concern level and based on them more local instructions were crafted. Additionally, in Russia, where he was, a designated corona team met once a week to discuss the situation. As he was the highest manager of that region, he was thus not given local support. However, he could count on the concern in that regard.

Furthermore, meetings dedicated to discussing coronavirus matters seemed to be a typical means of support. These meetings were mentioned by participants B, C, D, and E. Participant E specified that information has been provided by the HR regarding the next steps and available services, though all of this communication had been general, and no personalised help had been offered. His region had a management meeting once per quartal where the HR was also present to discuss the well-being of the staff as well as the general atmosphere in the company. A more practical abetment had been the given possibility to order discounted workstation equipment home. In general participant E commented:

> *The visibility of HR and this kind of personnel management has increased noticeably in the past year.*

Participant D also said that he felt as though his company had taken the situation very seriously. Similarly, they had also had a global call once or twice a week for the past six months where the global COVID-19 situation was discussed. Additionally, information about means of protection and guidelines on methods of doing business was provided in these calls. Moreover, he found these meetings to be very important for especially business managers who had broader responsibilities. Generally, his consensus was that information and instructions on procedures had been provided well considering the circumstances. Furthermore, this feeling was replicated by participant B who was also content with his company's efforts at the beginning of the situation. His supervisor from Finland held meetings for his entire Finnish team between one to three times a week during the first few months of the pandemic. After this however, not much information had been provided by the organisation.

These feelings of satisfaction were not depicted by participant F who said that not much support was arranged. The experiences of participant A were even worse. He initially said that no information whatsoever was provided. Since he was on an international contract, he was neither part of the French district nor the Finnish one. This meant that the first emails related to the pandemic were only sent to him by the global HR in May,

months after the situation has started. He did mention that local guidelines were provided by the French HR later on but nothing particular for expatriates was ever communicated.

> *Me and one of my friends who is also on an assignment were wondering that why on earth have no instructions been given to us. That what if someone wanted to go back to Finland for example… We have this section in our contracts that if circumstances change then you are allowed to return to Finland and the company will pay for the flight… There has been no info about if someone wanted to use this… So, I feel that the communication was really bad back then.*

This brings us to the topic of early return.

All participants were asked whether their organisations offered them an early return or if they personally wanted to leave early due to the health threat. The clearest denying answers to these questions were given by participants A and D. Both of them mentioned that they were not offered an early return and they did not consider it themselves either. The only time period when participant D thought of the possibility was the previously mentioned July of 2020 when the schools were announced to be closed for the fall semester. However, he did state:

> *Perhaps the best conclusion is that when corona began, it did not even cross my mind that we would return to Finland.*

This was because he had faith in people's abilities to know what they were doing. He also trusted that things would work as they are supposed to, and that if he were to have an issue, help would be available.

A similar response was provided by participant F who said that he was not directly offered an early return and he and his family did not at any point think that they should leave the US particularly because of the pandemic. However, his initial expatriate contract was a three-year one which meant that it was planned to end in April of 2021. Nevertheless, he returned to Ireland in December of 2020 already. This decision was not

made because of the virus but because he was offered a promotion which meant that he would have to leave his current contract. Although it should be reported that participant F did mention that the hostile environment certainly made his decision to return easier.

Participants B and E both considered the possibility of returning. Participant B said that in the end what made him stay in Germany was the inconvenience of moving. Because he was abroad with his entire family, the trouble of rearranging housing and the schooling of the children caused him to make the decision to continue his assignment. Thus, during spring of 2020 when the situation seemed to be calming down, he made an additional contract to remain in Germany for another year. Nevertheless, he mentioned:

> *If I would have known the situation of the autumn and winter at the time, it may be that I would have not made such a decision.*

Participant E similarly considered returning to Finland because the situation with the virus was less hectic there and because the benefits of being an expatriate seemed to fade with the progression of the pandemic. His employer was not actively suggesting that he would interrupt his assignment, but during the fall of 2020 when they were making a continuation to his expatriate contract his foreman did say that if he wanted to go home that was also a possibility. In the end, participant E decided to stay.

Lastly in relation to the topic of organisational support offered due to the pandemic, the expatriates were asked about the offered external help. This referred to mainly psychological assistance, but also other forms of extra-organisation professional aid. Participants A and F directly stated that no such help was offered. Participant F continued by saying that the only comparable assistance offered were mental health articles on how to balance your work and personal life, how to deal with online meetings, as well as taking regular breaks. This material provided by the concern was used a lot as it was also sent onward to his subordinates.

Participants B and E in Germany stated that there the services of psychologists had been offered to anyone who felt that they needed them. Participant B also added that informational calls had been held regarding the topic during the spring and fall of 2020 where a professional had been lecturing about psychological well-being. However, he had not taken part in these. Participant D in the US also mentioned that he knew that the German subsidiary offered these services and possibly that the Finnish one did as well. Despite this, he was not sure about the situation of his own assignment country.

5.4.3 Extent of personal communication with HR

After the commonly offered support in the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic was explored, the levels of personal communication with the HR departments were reviewed. The answers to this question were extremely varying. When being quizzed about the regularity of his contact with HR, participant B stated that the communication was neither regular nor continuous. He added that his contact person in Finland had changed twice during his assignment which undoubtedly affected this experience. Even though the newest addition had introduced themselves upon arrival and expressed their availability, no active contact had been initiated after that. Additionally, participant B did have a designated contact person from the German HR with whom he felt he could be in contact or talk to if necessary. When asked about his content with this level of communication participant B said the following:

> *In a way I have been quite satisfied with the situation… but maybe it would have made me feel more cared about if some contact was taken by them with certain regularity… Afterall one is quite alone here in a way… Especially now in this situation where I have been working from home, maybe it would have been good to contact us more.*

A similar experience was encountered by participant A. He had more so only been in contact with his supervisor. With regard to HR, he stated:

> *Let us say that our HR is helpful every time you contact them… But no one has been proactively asking from us how we were doing or if they could help us in some way.*

However, he did add that he could not determine conclusively if he even wanted more active communication regarding general matters from their part. Instead, he had quite negative experiences to share relating the communication about the health threat. When the worst wave of the coronavirus hit, he was expecting a message from the local HR asking about his circumstance and well-being. This would have made him feel as though they remember he even existed. Additionally, he felt that the French HR did not care about a single expatriate at all and that they did not have time for him.

> *If I give you an example… As far as I remember I sent them 13 emails about my children's schooling sponsorship… I sent 13 emails to the French HR… And they did not react to it at all. So, our global HR had to… take care of it then, because they could not be reached on any occasion.*

Unfortunately, this was not an isolated incident. A similar inefficiency was present when he had trouble with his apartment. At one point during his assignment, the cabinet in his kitchen collapsed completely. His apartment was registered under the name of the company and thus was the home insurance as well. Therefore, the disarray had to be handled with the company. However, despite him having contacted the local organisation multiple times about the situation, no one ever responded to his messages or got back to him about it, which was obviously a disappointment.

Luckily, more positive experiences were shared by the other four participants. Participant D mentioned that his communication regarding personal assignment related matters was sufficient. Particularly, everything related to his future move back to Finland had been handled well. As he was legally part of the US organisation, therefore all his other non-expatriation related communication had been with the US HR. He stated that everything with them had been working as expected. Participants C and F were in peculiar positions because of their statuses. Participant C being the highest-ranking manager of his region was in a lot of contact with the local HR due to his standing. Therefore,

personal contact with HR could not be properly distinguished from position related contact. He was one of the three members that were part of his company's corona meetings that were held every other week. Considering this, his contact with HR was very consistent.

Similarly, participant F was the leader of business where he was located. Thereby, regular HR contact was always established. He also had a meeting with the corona task team on average every other day where the measures regarding the situation were discussed. Both, participant C and F were satisfied with their contact with the HR even if assessing the situation was complicated due to their statuses. Participant F added:

> *I was very fortunate to have a fantastic HR lead on my management team. She was brilliant. Even though she was learning as quick as the rest of us, she devoted so much of her time, you know, after hours as well as work hours to learn and understand about the different challenges that we were facing.… I could not have asked more from the HR.*

Participant D was also quite content with his communication with HR. He mentioned that they were available and contact with them was always straightforward. He added that he believed this success was explained by the fact that the US American HR was used to dealing with Finnish expatriates. In turn, the resources dedicated for expatriates in the Finnish organisation were quite moderate. Therefore, if one wanted to talk to them, one had to be very active themselves.

> *At least my wife was wondering that are they not going to arrange our business more… Let us say that I had to be quite active myself… There was no significant issue, but… it did require initiative.*

Lastly, with regard to the regularity of communication with HR, participant E stated:

> *It has been more so announcements from them to us lately, which is quite good, I think. Like, informative messages have been sent regularly. But have I myself been in contact with HR regarding corona lately, no, not actually at all.*

Conclusively, participant E's communication with his HR could be summarised to have been very general and one sided. He did mention that they had a feedback system administered by HR, where all employees could vent about their feelings. However, it did not appear that participant E had personally utilised this platform. Finally, in terms of desired change, he mentioned that he would have craved clearer instructions from HR at the beginning of the pandemic. In addition, he hoped that HR had examined the employees' well-being more during that time. Therefore, it can be gathered that he was moderately content with his personal communication with HR.

Depending on the interviewees' previous responses, some expatriates were also asked if they discussed their possible worries regarding the pandemic with their HR departments or organisations in general. Participants A, B, C, and E did not talk about their concerns with HR. Participants A and B specified that they tried to cope on their own or look for help in other places. Participant B added that he did not even really have many fears in the first place and that perhaps he merely slept one or two nights poorly in the beginning of the pandemic because of them. Participant E also did not partake in the Teams meetings that the company had organised where staff could discuss their feelings and worries. Despite his lack of participation, he did identify these meetings as useful and informative.

Participant C also said that because of his position in the organisation, he did not review his concerns with HR at all. Instead, he did talk about his safety and possible return to Finland with his superior there. Finally, participant F seemed to be the most involved with HR regarding the subject. He communicated his health and safety concerns during the task force meetings with HR. Moreover, he also found these meetings enormously helpful and added that they could not have functioned without the task force and the HR involvement. Although, it should be mentioned that this perception seemed to be more professional than personal.

5.4.4 Desired extra help and support

Lastly, the participants were asked to reflect on any possible further unmentioned general help and support that they would have hoped for at any point during their assignments. Participants C, D, and E gave clear negative answers to these questions. Participant E proceeded to add that he felt that everything that he could have asked for had been provided. He believed that it was merely up to the individual to what extent they wanted to utilise the offered services. Participant C also complemented his answer by saying that the only dissatisfaction he had was related to his newly changed work contract. At the beginning of 2021, his contract had been switched from an expatriate contract to a local Russian one. This meant that he lost his access to Finnish social welfare and his right to his previous insurance. However, he added that this was purely a contract technical deficiency.

In turn, the three other expatriates had some suggestions to make. Participant F stated that he would have wished for more empathy from the company. He said that if he would have been in place of those people at the time, he would have showed more understanding of the struggles he faced. Being abroad and so far away from one's loved ones in the middle of a pandemic was a difficult situation to be in. Participant F felt that this was a condition most of the people in his company could not relate to.

> *I think all I would do is just… at least just have a conversation, offer some support or some empathy. It may not have any solutions, but I think I would have even liked someone to say, "hey I mean I have never been in your shoes before, and I cannot even imagine what it is like". Even just to have that conversation I never got.*

Participants A and B also had similar comments to make. Participant B stated that regular contact especially from Finland would have been desired. He added that he had not heard from his team in Finland in months and a simple message inquiring about his well-being every now and then would have been sufficient. Moreover, participant A would have hoped for more clarity from his HR. Considering his struggles of not being able to

get in contact with anyone from his company, he would have liked to be told more precisely in the beginning when he should contact local HR, and with which matters the global HR would be the correct department to approach. This would have saved him a lot of wasted energy spent on sending pointless emails that no one would ever respond to.

5.5   Determinants of assignment success during COVID-19

Finally, the interviewees were asked to define the successfulness of their assignments so far and argue why they chose that answer. Five out of the six expatriates characterised their assignments to have been varying levels of successful. Participant E stated that his assignment so far had been mostly successful even though it had included its rough days. Participant A mentioned his assignment to have been successful as well because he had wanted to go on one for a great amount of time and was finally given the opportunity to. Participant C also said that his expatriation had been a success and that if it had not been, he most likely would have not stayed abroad for so long. Lastly, participants D and F gave the most positive assessments as they both said their assignments had been undoubtedly successful.

Participant B defined his assignment followingly:

> *Well, I at least do not feel that it was completely unsuccessful, but I also do not feel that it was a total success.*

He argued this decision by saying that the reason he went on the assignment, to be with his colleagues at the factory and office, had been completely erased. He continued by explaining that he felt that for his job it would have been crucial that he would have been able to be there to talk about matters face-to-face, to have meetings and so forth. Conclusively, the core of his assignment had been completely discontinued because of the pandemic. Additionally, on a personal level a noticeable disappointment was the

cancellation of many of his extra-work plans to travel around and live the local life. A saving feature of his assessment however was the content of finally being able to work in the same time zone and in the same rhythm as the Germans he had been working with already from Finland. Despite this, he could under no circumstance define his assignment a complete success.

Participant C said that he found the assignment to have been successful because his department had yielded such positive financial results every year that he had been there. He added that at least for his employer this was the most valuable indicator of success. He also elaborated that despite the demanding financial year caused by the pandemic, his section had generated the highest profit of all time this year when measured in roubles.

Participant F also highlighted his professional success in his assessment. He said that from a business perspective it had to be considered a triumph because of the situation before his arrival. Two or three of his predecessors had failed their assignments. This naturally made participant F also have doubts about failing before his departure. However, fortunately he did not fail and thus in terms of business the assignment was a success. He also felt that the way he and his team had handled the health threat was as great a job as anybody could have done. One last aspect that portrays his comfort during his assignment is the following:

> *We were often deciding which country would we have been, rather been in during you know nine months of COVID in that case. And I think we would have rather been in the US, apart from if we… had family close to us in the US, we would have rather had stayed there.*

Participant D did not clearly define the arguments for his decision to evaluate his assignment to have been a success. He did however mention two aspects that made his work and life abroad more pleasant. Firstly, he emphasised the importance of all the distance working tools that he had access to. He mentioned that without them his work would

have been very difficult to do. And secondly, as stated prior, he found that the removal of work-related travel had impacted his well-being positively.

Moreover, participant E argued his positive evaluation by listing many positive learnings. His assignment had improved his language skills, he had learned more about German culture, and he could now work better with more diverse people. Additionally, he was pleased that he had been able to go watch football matches and do other enjoyable activities before the pandemic began. His only regret was that he wished he had gotten to know more local people outside of his work.

Finally, participant A explained that his assignment had been successful because he had adapted so well and enjoyed himself greatly. He had a high-quality apartment in France that had for its part improved his quality of life. Additionally, in terms of his professional success, he had learned a great deal about cultures and realised that he had not been as knowledgeable regarding cultural matters as he had thought. Furthermore, after having used English so much, he felt as though the last of his constraints about using the language had vanished. He had also learned new and important information because of his new position. The only negative part he mentioned was that because of the joined effect of the pandemic and his assignment, he could not meet his friends or family at all. However, he did recognise that the circumstances would have been quite similar even if he had been in Finland. Therefore, similarly to participant F, participant A stated:

> *Even though this [the world situation] is not normal, I still think that maybe I would rather spend this time here than in Finland.*

As is detectable from these responses and arguments, it can be said that the hierarchical position of a person undoubtedly affects their perception of their experiences as well. Once again, the two expatriates in the highest positions, participants C and F, highlighted the role of their professional accomplishments in determining the success of the entire assignments. In turn, particularly participants A, B, and E emphasised personal growth and events of their leisure time as important definable factors.

6 Discussion

In this chapter the theoretical framework of the study alongside previous research are assimilated to the findings presented above. The structure of this section is based on the research questions. The first subchapter answers the question "*How do hostile environments carrying risks of health-related threats influence the adjustment and thus work performance of expatriates situated in them?*" and the second subchapter discussed the solution to the question "*What can the home and host organisations do to mitigate the negative effects of these environments and thereby further assignment success?*".

6.1 Expatriate adjustment and work performance in HEs

To preface this section, it must be mentioned that all of the participants interviewed in this research had entered their assignment countries when no hostile environment was yet in place. Therefore, initial adjustment to the host country had occurred in traditional conditions. This signifies that findings regarding initial adjustment do not reflect the struggles of someone arriving to an already hostile environment. Thereby, this section only focuses on the general adjustment of the expatriates as well as their families' impacts on this adjustment process.

All participants characterised their initial adjustment to have been successful. The most prominent argument for this was found to be the similarity between the home country and host country culture. Since all assignments had taken place in western countries by western expatriates, the reasoning was consistent. Additionally, four participants mentioned having had previous experience with the host country as they had either visited the area multiple times before the assignment or had otherwise worked with the locals. This was characterised as an advancing component of adjustment. Therefore, these findings support the theory by Bhatti et al. (2013) where cultural sensitivity, previous

international experience, social network, and self-efficacy are deemed to be the determining factors of cross-cultural adjustment.

In addition, the statement of one expatriate about the ease of adjusting to the workplace endorses the cross-cultural adjustment model by Black et al. (1999). The individual highlighted the strong culture of his company as something that aided his overall adjustment. The comparison made to the lack of this dimension and its complicating effect on the adjustment of his family also supports the theory. Black et al. (1999) in their model present that work adjustment in the easiest of the three dimensions because of the similarities experienced by the expatriate in the procedures of the home and host country organisations.

Moreover, the intricacy of interaction adjustment was also seen in the findings. One expatriate found that he had been able to integrate the HCNs well. A significant influencing factor here was a shared language. Contrastingly, another expatriate found adjusting to the local social environment difficult. Simultaneously, he mentioned his lack of knowledge of the local language as well as initial difficulties of understanding the local non-verbal and verbal communication. Therefore, it can be argued that differences in rules and communication hinder expatriate adjustment, and vice versa, similarities advance it. This again supports the theory by Black et al. (1999). Finally, the success of the overall assignments argues for the validity of Lee and Kartika's (2014) statement that well-adjusted expatriates are less likely to return prematurely.

Furthermore, according to Malek et al. (2015), it is important that the organisation expresses the importance of the expatriate's role to them. Malek et al. (2015) reason this as valuable because when an expatriate perceives that their organisation is appreciative of their efforts, they are likely to adjust to the host-country working and living environments more effortlessly. This dimension of adjustment was also studied in this research, but only partial support for this claim could be found.

6.1.1 The role of expatriate family adjustment

Regarding the family, Lee and Kartika (2014) argue that the sufficient adjustment capabilities of the expatriate's family also positively influence the expatriate's adjusting. Support for this claim was found as a participant stated that the biggest strain on the assignment was not related to his job at all, but to the challenges faced by his children. He continued by stating that the risk of them not adapting to the host country circumstances was a significant uncertainty. In fact, the expatriate's only considerations to interrupt the assignment were related to this issue of the children's maladjustment.

As the role of the expatriate children's adjustment and well-being was repeatedly mentioned by the participants, it can be argued that MNCs should invest more in assuring their welfare. None of the participants of this study mentioned their children or spouses to have been given any support in relation to the health threat. This is concerning in light of the findings of Bader et al. (2015), Bader and Berg (2013), as well as Faeth and Kittler (2020), that all emphasise the importance of family support in hostile environments. Children of expatriates enjoy varying levels of support from their educational establishments. However, as supported by the sample, many expatriate spouses do not work abroad. Therefore, they are highly dependent on their partners. Even though the task is not simple as stated by Ilie et al. (2020) as well as Carnevale and Hatak (2020), this is why expatriate organisations must also take the expatriate family into account when designing support systems for hostile environments.

Lastly, the impacts of the expatriate children's adjustment on the expatriates work performance were also studied. As discussed above, one expatriate mentioned the possibility of his children's maladjustment to be the largest risk factor during the entire assignment. Trompetter et al. (2016) also acknowledge this in their study where it was discovered that an unmistakable correlation could be found between expatriates' work performance and the adjustment of their children. In the study conducted for this thesis, two of the four participants mentioned that their spouse was more available to help with the

children while they were working. Therefore, their work performance was not affected by the added demands of the distance schooling their children had to adapt to. Perhaps the availability of intra-family support in these cases was sufficient enough and that is why they did not request assistance from their organisations. In relation to the families generally, no health threat associated assistance was ever offered to any of the children or spouses of the participants. This contrasts with Lämsä et al. (2017) who state that the entire expatriate family is a strategically meaningful part of the company and should thereby be treated as such.

6.1.2 General assignment support and offered training

Regarding pre-departure training, the levels of support were differing. The extents of training fluctuated between a simple tax consultation and a two-part cultural training that included the creation of an integration plan. During the assignment itself, most participants were only offered financial contributions for their children's schooling as well as for language or culture courses. However, particularly in the latter cases, the efforts of the companies seemed to be passive, and generally the expatriates were themselves responsible for finding programmes to attend. Overall, the most pre- and post-departure training was offered to the one participant who was on his assignment alone. It was left unclear however, whether this was possibly due to his particular status, related to a lower level of experience, or a mere coincidence.

Other than this, the personal levels of communication between the expatriates and their HR departments were quite low. More specifically, the focus in this part is on the non-hostility related contact. The words used to describe this communication included discontinuous, irregular, general, one-sided, insufficient, but also satisfactory, and suitable. Thus, also here a division was apparent. Withal, the more positive appraisals were presented by individuals who were in a lot of contact with HR because of their positions in the subsidiary. Thereby, this communication was not related to their well-being as an

expatriate per se. Additionally, reflecting the nature of these descriptions, the same people who gave negative estimations were also not content with the level of communication, while the individuals with more positive assessments seemed to be satisfied with it.

Even though communication and subsequently support from the HR was often less than expected, there was more than one case where the participant was offered several support mechanisms that they never ended up using. Thus, this would indicate that the offered support was extensive, but not fitting to the individual's needs. Therefore, it would be necessary that in these cases the types of support provided are re-evaluated and altered to match the ones desired by the expatriates.

These findings are interesting when compared to the theories of Bhatti et al. (2013) and De Paul and Bikos (2015), both of which support the idea that the offered levels of direct and indirect organisational support are key definers of expatriate adjustment. Even though all the expatriates described their adjustment as successful, only a part of them enjoyed a satisfactory level of support. The model by Bhatti et al. (2013) particularly suggests that overall adjustment is influenced by both individual and organisational factors. Thus, perhaps the employees who adjusted well despite a certain lack of support were able to do so because their individual factors were so impactful that they compensated for the absence of organisational support.

6.1.3 The impact of the health threat on previously established adjustment

Even though initial adjustment had already been achieved, the outset of the pandemic negatively influenced the residence of all individuals. The most prominent adjective used to describe the feelings provoked by the health threat was uncertainty. The participants felt usure about the future, as well as the impacts of the pandemic on the state of the environment and their health. Feelings of negative curiosity were also discovered. Other

than this, the second most marked unifying stressor amongst the participants was their concern about the well-being of their nuclear family and other relatives back home. In fact, most individuals were not worried about their own health nearly as much as of their loved ones. Despite this, some unease was caused as the result of the expatriates doubting either the quality of the local health care or their ability to access it because of language barriers.

Additionally, restrictions on movement and the cancellation of free time plans seemed to be in general the most prominent stressor of the hostile environment. This was particularly distinguishable amongst the interviewees who were located in extra-EU countries, as they had all struggled with exiting and re-entering their country of assignment. This finding correlates with the theory by Suder et al. (2019) where restricted personal freedom was clearly identified as a stressor of the hostile environment. Furthermore, another inconvenience perceived in the experiences of all expatriates who were abroad with their children, was their distant schooling. This had also caused varying levels of added demands and practical troubles for the family units, thus negatively affecting the comfort of the expatriates involved. This discovery is backed by the findings of Carnevale and Hatak (2020) where in the context of the pandemic, the closure of schools had resulted in an expansion of parental demands causing challenges for the employees.

One aspect that was found to be helpful in releasing the stress caused by the uncertainty was the clarity of direction provided by the government of the country of residence. As ambiguity was high, the individuals naturally sought for clarity from any source. Disappointments about the organisations' crisis communication only worsened this nervousness. Therefore, it can be concluded that it is crucial that HR departments portray certainty and act promptly even if they might be hesitant to do so because of their own confusion. For this to be possible, companies should create crisis plans for unexpected situations like this that would allow for an organised response.

6.1.4 Expatriate work performance under a health threat

The health threat had caused the way of working for all the expatriates to change immensely as every participant had worked from home at least for a period of time. The cancellation of face-to-face meetings, work trips, and customer visits were also relevant ramifications for most. Even extensive impacts such as the necessity to temporarily hand over an individual's job title because of his inability to return to his workplace were discovered. Additionally, some company level financial struggles and the extension of workday durations were present. Despite these, as well as the previously presented extra-workplace concerns, the expatriates' own assessments of their work motivation and performance were surprisingly positive. Half of the participants did not see any impact. One participant found the distance working to be unmotivating, and another saw it having a big effect negative on his work motivation and performance. These findings partially support the models of Bader and Berg (2013, 2014) where the stress caused by the hostile environment negatively affected the expatriates' work attitudes of thus their work performance.

6.2   Organisational support as a mitigator of negative effects

The discussion surrounding organisational support offered specifically because of the health threat included three topics: initial action taken, considerations of early return, and given external psychological help. This chapter is allocated accordingly. As reported by Bader et al. (2015) exposure to environments that cause high general stress lowers the work performance of expatriates. Therefore, as an attempt to reduce its effects, organisational support should be offered. The expatriates interviewed had principally complying experiences. Generally, at the beginning of the pandemic most organisations relied on the guidelines provided by governmental institutes. This supports the statement of Caligiuri et al. (2020) who mention that the pandemic forced HR managers to venture into the unknown. Accordingly, the dubiety resulted in a delayed response. Once more

information about the health threat was gathered, particular company level instructions were provided.

Four out of the six participants mentioned the initiation of meetings devoted particularly for the cause. These meetings were held between every other day and once per quartal. Half of the interviewees stated that their calls were either organised at a concern level or globally. Two individuals partook in meetings with their superior and team in Finland, while one person was given barely any support. Additionally, one of these participants was offered financial support for purchasing distance work equipment. Commonly, given support was very general and attention to the individuals as expatriates was not really provided. One experience in particular was that the individual felt as though he fell in between his local and home organisations and this resulted in him being neglected. He was only provided the first information about the situation months after the initiation of the pandemic. This deficiency is critical because as stated by Caligiuri et al. (2020) the solution to dissolving tensions caused by safety and health concerns is consistent and coherent communication from HR. Ahmed et al. (2020) also acknowledge this as they state that recognising health and safety concerns of employees is critical. Both theories were predominantly supported by the findings.

Moreover, early return was not clearly offered to any of the participants. Three interviewees had not considered returning early themselves either, and contrastingly two participants had. However, none of them ended up interrupting their assignments. Finally, external support from specialists was partially offered. The two participants located in Germany were given the opportunity to speak with psychologists. This support was nonetheless obtruded but merely presented. Mental health articles and related material was presented by the concern to one participant. He had found these helpful and had thus forwarded them to his subordinates as well. The rest of the interviewees were either not offered psychological support or were not aware whether it was extended or not. By utilising the services of psychologists, employees can effectively learn to control their fear and anxiety. Ripamonti et al. (2020) accentuate their meaning by stating that

the establishment of psychological support systems is critical in ensuring expatriate work performance in hostile environments. However, only partial evidence backing this statement was found.

6.2.1 Contentment with the support and desired change

Generally, the consensus of the expatriates was that they were rather satisfied with the actions of their organisations relating to the pandemic. Four participants found their HR departments' efforts to have been satisfactory considering the circumstances. This finding was positive even though two of these individuals were part of their areas' corona task teams. Another participant was partially content with his HR team as the prosperity lasted merely the first few months. And lastly, the sixth expatriate clearly communicated his lack of contentment with his company's efforts. Considering these assessments, desire for change was also presented. These inclinations are discussed next. The proposals are either direct requests or conclusions formed by the researcher.

HR professionals working with expatriates located in hostile environments must pay attention to very particular aspects. Expatriates facing health threats have an increased need for clarity, empathy, and communication regularity. An overlapping finding was made earlier by Caligiuri et al. (2020). Additionally, expatriates who are forced to work from a distance due to the conditions of their environment need to be provided with extra support related to these added demands. For example, individuals who must complete all their work on a computer may suffer from physical troubles related to worsened eyesight. Thus, medical assistance used to ensure appropriate work ergonomics should be provided. In addition to these physical demands, the psychological demands of distant working and isolation can be even more conspicuous. Expatriates working solely from home are likely to suffer from lowered work motivation that can also affect their work performance negatively. The multiplicity of this situation was also noted by Ahmed et al. (2020) as in their research they mention that remote working can lead to the

employee feeling disconnected to the workplace. Similarly, Caligiuri et al. (2020) state that disregarding the challenges of virtual working will result in worsened work performance.

Therefore, organisations must find ways of motivating their expatriate employees. This is not only a means of ensuring well-being but also important considering the success rate of the assignment and thus the financial gain acquired from it. Motivation can be increased for example by emphasising the importance of their role to the expatriate. See Malek et al. (2015). A sense of community should also be sustained by the company when employees are compelled to work segregated from their colleagues. This is especially crucial for expatriates as the only reason for their residency in whichever country is their job. If the individual cannot collaborate with HCNs in person, the sense of purpose for the assignment can be lost. The challenges caused by changes in social environments are also recognised by Caligiuri et al. (2020).

Moreover, outlets that enable socialisation with colleagues outside meetings should be established by the organisation. The social health of expatriates is equally as important as their physical and psychological ones. One participant of the study mentioned that his organisation had encouraged him and his colleagues to spent coffee breaks in Teams. This individual had not found this to be terribly attractive. Thereby, other more creative channels for distant socialisation should be explored. Additionally, as a means of caring for the expatriates' trinity of health, the amount of time they spend in front of a screen should be lessened. This requires among others, the creation of meeting-free times. Furthermore, psychological assistance should be equally available to all expatriates in every location. As stated prior, the importance of external specialist cooperation is supported by Ripamonti et al. (2020). Implementing this might require the interference of global HR because based on the experiences of the interviewees, the discrepancies between subsidiaries of the same organisation can be quite noticeable.

6.2.2 The impact of the pandemic on assignment success

In light of all the experiences described above, the expatriates characterised the successfulness of their assignments. These depictions are from the individuals' perspectives and thereby might differ from the ones given by their employers. Thus, the viewpoint of a self-evaluation should be acknowledged when interpreting the results. Nevertheless, the expatriation success model for hostile environments by Faeth and Kittler (2020) is used as a basis here for the assessment reflection. In this model, the expatriation success quadrat is compiled of the human-influenced environment, the expatriate, the organisation, and the social network. Around eighty percent of the participants described their assignments as successful. Indicated factors that positively influenced this evaluation included sufficient adjustment, improved linguistic, professional, and cultural capabilities, participation in fruitful leisure time activities, financial achievements of branch, and prosperity in new position. In turn, aspects that negatively affected the assignments consisted of cancellation of travel plans, and the issue of face-to-face occupational activities. Generally, the higher the position of the individual, the more they highlighted the role of their professional success versus their personal one.

When compared to the expatriation success model (Faeth & Kittler, 2020), the results are highly comparable. The negative effects of general issues, increased stress, lower well-being, and decreased performance were presented to varying extents by the participant and also mentioned in the model. In turn, the positive components of the corresponding agents were level of personal skills, motivation (for those who it could be applied to), proper adjustment, perceived organisational support, appropriate HR practices, and the acceptance of the expatriate organisation. Therefore, the findings of this study are greatly analogous to the data of Faeth and Kittler (2020). A model that summarises all the above-discussed findings of this research can be viewed on the next page in Figure 7.
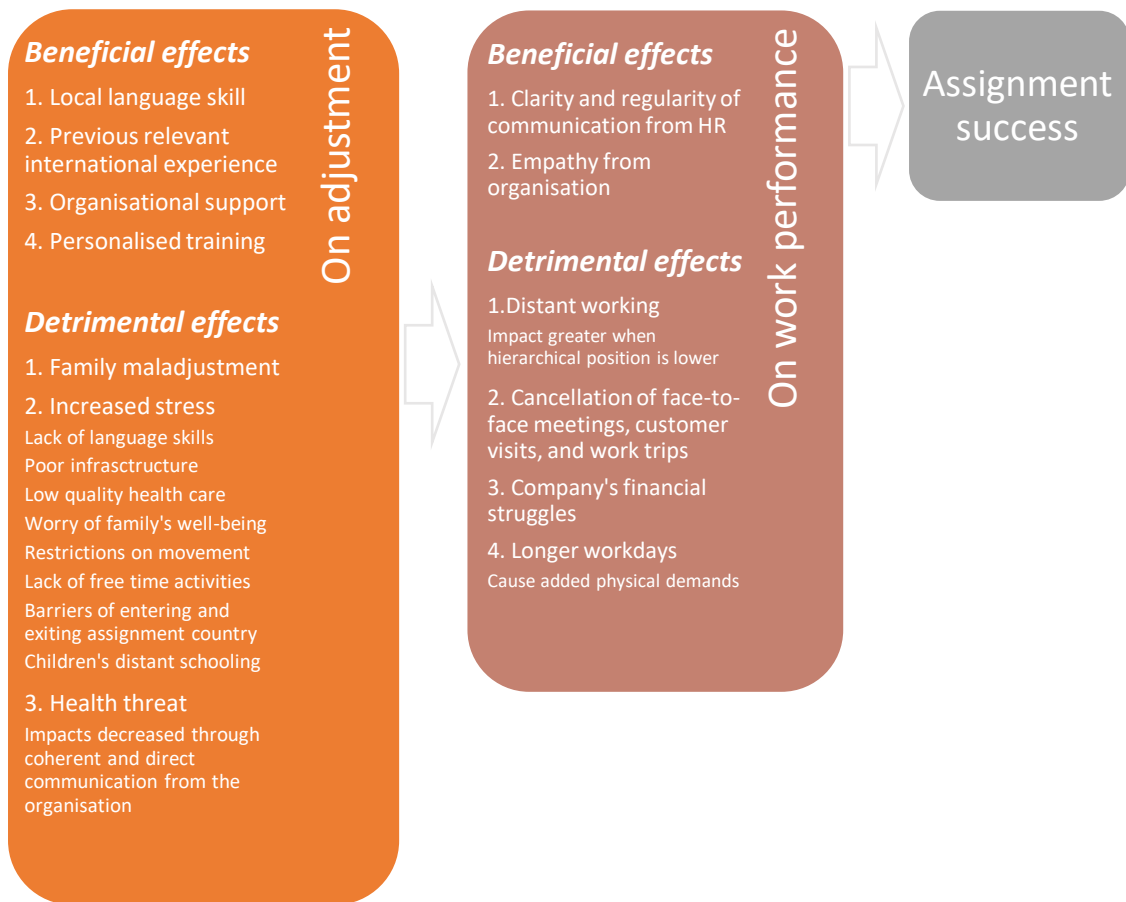
Beneficial effects

1. Local language skill

2. Previous relevant international experience

3. Organisational support

4. Personalised training

Detrimental effects

1. Family maladjustment

2. Increased stress

Lack of language skills
Poor infrastructure
Low quality health care
Worry of family's well-being
Restrictions on movement
Lack of free time activities
Barriers of entering and exiting assignment country
Children's distant schooling

3. Health threat

Impacts decreased through coherent and direct communication from the organisation

On adjustment

Beneficial effects

1. Clarity and regularity of communication from HR

2. Empathy from organisation

Detrimental effects

1. Distant working

Impact greater when hierarchical position is lower

2. Cancellation of face-to-face meetings, customer visits, and work trips

3. Company's financial struggles

4. Longer workdays

Cause added physical demands

On work performance

Assignment success

Figure 7 The constituents of expatriate adjustment and work performance in hostile environments with health-related threats.

6.3   Managerial implications

In this section the managerial implications of the research are summarised. This study focuses on the impacts of hostile environments on expatriate adjustment and work performance. Specifically, the ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic on these individuals are examined. As the termination of the pandemic cannot be delineated, these findings can be directly utilised in the management of expatriates who remain under that specific health threat. In addition to this, the results are adaptable to other environments carrying similar risks. The research was conducted from an IHRM perspective. Thus, its

managerial suggestions are directed particularly for those professionals. Nevertheless, as indicated by the findings, other international managers may also benefit from them. Firstly, the study argues that if the home organisation is aware that the future assignment environment is threatened by a health risk, they should take this into consideration already when selecting the expatriate. Based on the findings, knowledge of the local language of the destination country is remarkably beneficial. Further, if the individual has prior relevant international experience, they are more likely to adapt successfully. Therefore, candidates with these competences should be favoured. Additionally, the family of the candidate should already be regarded during selection. Supporting and acknowledging the spouse and children of the expatriate in all phases of the assignment is critical. Therefore, if the organisation does not have the capabilities or intentions to also invest in the adjustment and well-being of the family, they should not dispatch someone who requires those resources. Lastly, the expatriate's pre- and post-departure training should be highly individualised to avoid wasting resources on unnecessary preparations while simultaneously making the expatriate disappointed.

In addition, the results suggest several proposals for managing expatriates once they are already abroad. The expatriate must be clearly informed of all their contact persons. If the individual has one HR contact from both the home and host countries, the roles and responsibilities of these managers need to be defined. This should be done as an effort to minimise all avoidable uncertainty under the erratic circumstances of the hostile environment. In further relation to the HR managers, the contact between them and the expatriate should also be regular. This will likely enhance adjustment, though it must be noted that the findings propose that successful adjustment can also be completed without sufficient support and constant communication. Nevertheless, the nature of the communication is more essential. Providing the expatriate with appropriate and relevant information will presumably lower their stress and anxiety. Clarity is equally crucial while presenting new data when the objective it to lower expatriate uncertainty.

Moreover, the role of the family was highlighted by the findings. Therefore, particularly the well-being and adjustment of the expatriate's children must be supported to lower the likelihood of assignment failure. Another way in which expatriation success can be encouraged is by recognising the physical, psychological, and social health of the employee. The presence of a health threat is likely to increase strain and concern in expatriates. Therefore, the assistance of external specialist like psychologists needs to be equally offered to every expatriate across all subsidiaries experiencing the hostility. In addition, to advance the physical health of these employees compelled to work solely on a computer, distinct action should be taken. This includes ensuring work ergonomics by providing appropriate equipment, shortening workdays and lowering the number of meetings to reduce screen time, and offering medical assistance for people suffering from worsened eyesight or other defects. Likewise, these employees' social well-being is likely to suffer under these circumstances. Therefore, innovative modes for social interaction to keep physically distant employees socially close should be generated.

The results also illustrate the demand for helping expatriates maintain their work performance. Especially the expatriates in middle level managerial positions portrayed signs of lowered work motivation and performance caused by the health threat. Thereby, their working capacity should be reinforced by emphasising the importance of these employees' role as expatriates. These individuals are likely to feel like their position abroad is not important anymore as they are unable to complete their work like they were presumed to. For that reason, they might require added reinforcement and support from their managers and organisation.

To conclude, even if the organisation is not aware of the future hostile environment they are assigning their employee to, they should attempt to prepare for it. Analysing possible and likely threats to international business is encouraged as well as seemingly worth it. If the organisation has even a general adaptable plan for crisis management, they are more likely to survive the situation with less damage. Naturally going to the extent of predicting a pandemic is extremely ambitious. However, because expatriates are in a

particularly vulnerable position due to their conditions, they require remarkable support and direction from their organisations. Therefore, if the company is at the very least somewhat prepared to assist them is case of emergency, the implications of that crisis are assumably to be more insignificant.

6.4   Limitations of the study

This research was conducted as a part of a master's thesis. Therefore, it has some limitations to it. The most significant limitation is related to the sample of the study. Due to accessibility issues, expatriates from only one type of hostile environment were interviewed. In order to add the generalisability of the findings for all types of hostile environments with health threats, the sample should be more diverse. This would also increase their validity and reliability noticeably. In addition to the characteristics of the environment, also the traits of the individual participants should also be diversified for added accuracy. Even though the gender distribution of the sample relatively accurately represents the entire group, ideally females should have also been included. This would have enhanced the results.

Furthermore, the size of the sample was rather small. Basing generalisations of a hugely diverse group on the experiences of only six individuals naturally provides a limited picture. The nationality distribution of the interviewees can also be seen as a limitation. Five out of the six participants were Finnish and the one remaining Irish. Five of these individuals were also from the same home organisation. This increases the chances of similarities between their experiences. Also, the shortage of prior research on expatriates experiencing health threats confined the theoretical framework of the study. Finally, the researcher is a master's degree student with no prior experience on conducting a study. This combined with the temporal and financial limitations connected to a master's thesis research project narrow the observations of the study.

6.5   Suggestions for future research

Due to the previously mentioned limitations, a more diverse sample with experiences from hostile environments carrying risks of other kinds of health threats should be studied further. This would be particularly interesting since very little research has been conducted on these types on threats before. However, since the comprehending topic of expatriates in hostile environments is in itself quite novel, more research should also be directed towards other forms of hostilities. These environments could be for example ones with elevated natural disasters provoked by global warming or ones with heightened political tension induced by the extreme right. These settings are comparatively effortlessly located, and their prevalence is only increasing. Additionally, studying the experiences of women or gender minorities on assignments in regions that are typically proclaimed uninviting for those individuals would likely contribute incredibly stimulating findings. This research could be further broadened to sexual minorities as well. However, with these hostile environments it would be extremely important to organise the research so that the safety of those participants is secured.

References

Adams, J., Khan, H. T. A., & Raeside, R. (2013). *Research Methods for Business and Social Science Students* (2ⁿᵈ edition). Sage Publications.

Ahmed, T., Khan, M., Thitivesa, D., Siraphatthada, Y., & Phumdara, T. (2020). Impact of employees engagement and knowledge sharing on organizational performance: Study of HR challenges in COVID-19 pandemic. *Human Systems Management*, *39*(4), 589–601. https://doi.org/10.3233/HSM-201052

Aijaz, U. (2020). COVID-19 and the challenges of foreign remittances and expatriates unemployment. *Pakistan & Gulf Economist, 39*(27–29).

Altman, Y. & Shortland, S. (2008). Women and international assignments: taking stock – a 25-year review. *Human Resource Management*, 47(2), 199–216. https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.20208

Andresen, M., Bergdolt, F., Margenfeld, J., & Dickmann, M. (2014). Addressing international mobility confusion - developing definitions and differentiations for self-initiated and assigned expatriates as well as migrants. *International Journal of Human Resource Management, 25*(16), 2295–2318. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2013.877058

Arber, S. (1993). The research process. In N. Gilbert (ed.), *Researching Social life* (pp. 62–80). Sage Publications.

Bader, B., & Berg, N. (2013). An Empirical Investigation of Terrorism-induced Stress on Expatriate Attitudes and Performance. *Journal of International Management*, *19*(2), 163–175. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intman.2013.01.003

Bader, B., & Berg, N. (2014). The influence of terrorism on expatriate performance: a conceptual approach. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management,* 25(4), 539–557. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2013.814702

Bader, B., Berg, N., & Holtbrügge, D. (2015). Expatriate performance in terrorism-endangered countries: The role of family and organizational support. *International Business Review*, *24*(5), 849–860. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2015.03.005

Bader, B., Schuster, T., Bader, A. K., & Shaffer, M. (2019). The dark side of expatriation: dysfunctional relationships, expatriate crises, predjudice and a VUCA world. *Journal of Global Mobility*, *7*(2), 126–136. https://doi.org/10.1108/JGM-06-2019-070

Baruch, Y., Dickmann, M., Altman, Y., & Bournois, F. (2013). Exploring international work: Types and dimensions of global careers. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *24*(12), 2369–2393. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2013.781435

Berry, D. P., & Bell, M. P. (2012). "Expatriates": Gender, race and class distinctions in international management. *Gender, Work and Organization*, *19*(1), 10–28. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0432.2011.00577.x

Beutell, N. J., O'Hare, M. M., Schneer, J. A., & Alstete, J. W. (2017). Coping with fear of and exposure to terrorism among expatriates. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *14*(7). https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph14070808

Bhatti, M. A., Battour, M. M., & Ismail, A. R. (2013). Expatriates adjustment and job performance: An examination of individual and organizational factors. *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management*, *62*(7), 694–717. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJPPM-12-2012-0132

Black, J. S. (1988). Work role transitions: a study of American expatriate managers in Japan. *Journal of International Business Studies, 19*(2), 277–294. https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.jibs.8490383

Black, S. J., Gregersen, H. B., & Mendenhall, M. E. (1992). *Global Assignments: Successfully Expatriating and Repatriating International Managers.* (1st edition). Jossey-Bass Inc.

Black, J. S., Gregersen, H. B., Mendenhall, M. E., & Stroh, L. K. (1999). *Globalizing People Through International Assignment.* Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.

Black, J. S., & Stephens, G. K. (1989). The influence of the spouse on American expatriate adjustment and intent to stay in Pacific Rim overseas assignments. *Journal*

of management, 15(4), 529–544.
https://doi.org/10.1177/014920638901500403

Brinkmann, S. (2012). *Qualitative Inquiry in Everyday Life* (1st edition)*.* Sage Publications.

Brinkmann, S. (2013). *Qualitative Interviewing.* Oxford University Press.

Brookfield Global Relocation Services (2016). *2016 Global Mobility Trends: Insight into how 163 Global Mobility leaders view the future of talent mobility*. Retrieved 21-04-12 from http://globalmobilitytrends.bgrs.com/#/download

Caligiuri, P., De Cieri, H., Minbaeva, D., Verbeke, A., & Zimmermann, A. (2020). International HRM insights for navigating the COVID-19 pandemic: Implications for future research and practice. *Journal of International Business Studies*, *51*(5), 697–713. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41267-020-00335-9

Carnevale, J. B., & Hatak, I. (2020). Employee adjustment and well-being in the era of COVID-19: Implications for human resource management. *Journal of Business Research*, *116*, 183–187. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.05.037

Cole, N., & Nesbeth, K. (2014). Why Do International Assignments Fail? Expatriate Families Speak. *International Studies of Management and Organization*, *44*(3), 66–79. https://doi.org/10.2753/IMO0020-8825440304

De Paul, N. F., & Bikos, L. H. (2015). Perceived organizational support: A meaningful contributor to expatriate development professionals' psychological well-being. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *49*, 25–32. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2015.06.004

Dew, K. (2012). *The Cult and Science of Public Health: A Sociological Investigation.* Berghahn Books, Incorporated.

Dickmann, M., Parry, E., & Keshavjee, N. (2019). Localization of staff in a hostile context: an exploratory investigation in Afghanistan. *International journal of human resource management, 30*(11), 1839–1867. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2017.1291531

Dickmann, M., & Watson, A. H. (2017). "I might be shot at!" exploring the drivers to work in hostile environments using an intelligent careers perspective. *Journal of*

Global Mobility, *5*(4), 348–373. https://doi.org/10.1108/JGM-12-2016-0066

Donà, G. (2021). Race, immigration and health: the Hostile Environment and public health responses to Covid-19. *Ethnic and racial studies, 44*(5), 906–918. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2021.1881578

Dropkin, G. (2020). Covid-19: Contact tracing requires ending the hostile environment. *BMJ*, *368*. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.m1320

Easterby-Smith, M., Thorpe, R., & Jackson, P. R. (2015). *Management & Business Research* (5th edition). Sage Publications.

European Commission (2021). *Migration*. Retrieved 2021-04-14 from https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/glossary_search/migration_en

European Medicines Agency (2021). *Public health threats.* Retrieved 2021-04-14 from https://www.ema.europa.eu/en/human-regulatory/overview/public-health-threats

Europol (2020, June 23). *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend report (TE-SAT) 2020*. Retrieved 2021-04-25 from https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-te-sat-2020

Faeth, P. C., & Kittler, M. G. (2020). Expatriate management in hostile environments from a multi-stakeholder perspective – a systematic review. *Journal of Global Mobility*, *8*(1), 1–24. https://doi.org/10.1108/JGM-07-2019-0035

Fee, A., & McGrath-Champ, S. (2017). The role of human resources in protecting expatriates: insights from the international aid and development sector. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *28*(14), 1960–1985. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2015.1137617

Fee, A., McGrath-Champ, S., & Berti, M. (2019). Protecting expatriates in hostile environments: institutional forces influencing the safety and security practices of internationally active organisations. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *30*(11), 1709–1736. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2017.1322121

Flick, U. (2014). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data analysis*. SAGE Publications.

Flyvbjerg, B. (2006). Five Misunderstandings about case-study research. *Qualitative Inquiry, 12*(2), 219–245. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800405284363

Gannon, J., & Paraskevas, A. (2019). In the line of fire: managing expatriates in hostile environments. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *30*(11), 1737–1768. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2017.1322122

Hall, C. (2007). *International Business* (6th edition). McGraw-Hill.

Harrison, D. A., & Shaffer, M. A. (2005). Mapping the criterion space for expatriate success: task- and relationship-based performance, effort and adaptation. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *16*(8), 1454–1474. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585190500220648

Haslberger, A., & Brewster, C. (2008). The expatriate family: An international perspective. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, *23*(3), 324–346. https://doi.org/10.1108/02683940810861400

Haslberger, A., Brewster, C., & Hippler, T. (2013). The Dimensions of Expatriate Adjustment. *Human Resource Management, 52*(3), 333–351. https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.21531

Huff, K. C., Song, P., & Gresch, E. B. (2014). Cultural intelligence, personality, and cross-cultural adjustment: A study of expatriates in Japan. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *38*(1), 151–157. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2013.08.005

Ilie, M., Ilie, C., & Marin, R. (2020). Human Resources and Communication Management after Changes Due to COVID 19 pandemic. *"Ovidius" University Annals. Economic Sciences Series (Online)*, *XX*(1), 665–669.

Inkson, K., Arthur, M. B., Pringle, J., & Barry, S. (1997). Expatriate Assignment Versus Overseas Experience: Contrasting Models of International Human Resource Development. *Journal of World Business*, *32*(4), 351–368. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1090-9516(97)90017-1

Kananen, J. (2017). *Laadullinen tutkimus pro graduna ja opinnäytetyönä.* Jyväskylän ammattikorkeakoulu.

Kawai, N., & Strange, R. (2014). Perceived organizational support and expatriate performance: Understanding a mediated model. *International Journal of Human Resource Management,* 25(17), 2438–2462. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2014.884615

King, N. & Horrocks, C. (2010). *Interviews in Qualitative Research* (1st edition). Sage Publications.

Kraimer, M. L. & Wayne, S. J. (2004). An Examination of Perceived Organizational Support as a Multidimensional Construct in the Context of an Expatriate Assignment. *Journal of management, 30*(2), 209–237. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jm.2003.01.001

Lazarova, M., Westman, M., & Shaffer, M. A. (2010). Elucidating The Positive Side Of The Work-Family Interface On International Assignments: A Model Of Expatriate Work And Family Performance. *Academy of Management Review*, *35*(1), 93–117. https://doi.org/10.5465/AMR.2010.45577883

Lee, L.-Y., & Kartika, N. (2014). The influence of individual, family, and social capital factors on expatriate adjustment and performance: The moderating effect of psychology contract and organizational support. *Expert Systems with Applications*, *41*(11), 5483–5494. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eswa.2014.02.030

Lee, L.-Y., & Sukoco, B. M. (2008). The Mediating Effects of Expatriate Adjustment and Operational Capability on the Success of Expatriation. *Social Behavior and Personality*, *36*(9), 1191–1204. https://doi.org/10.2224/sbp.2008.36.9.1191

Lämsä, A. M., Heikkinen, S., Smith, M., & Tornikoski, C. (2017). The expatriate's family as a stakeholder of the firm: a responsibility viewpoint. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *28*(20), 2916–2935. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2016.1146785

Malek, M. A., Budhwar, P., & Reiche, B. S. (2015). Sources of support and expatriation: A multiple stakeholder perspective of expatriate adjustment and performance in Malaysia. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *26*(2), 258–276. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2014.937968

Nowak, C., & Linder, C. (2016). Do you know how much your expatriate costs? An

activity-based cost analysis of expatriation. *Journal of Global Mobility*, *4*(1), 88–107. https://doi.org/10.1108/JGM-10-2015-0043

Nowlan, K. (2014). Supporting staff in hostile environments. *Strategic HR Review*, *13*(6), 243–248. https://doi.org/10.1108/shr-08-2014-0047

Ossorio, S. (2001). Misconceptions about women in international arena limit numbers. *Workspan, 44*(1), 13.

Pocztowski, A. (2015). From the Editor. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *26*(15), 1917–1919. https://doi.org/10.1097/HCM.0000000000000075

Posthuma, R. A., Ramsey, J. R., Flores, G. L., Maertz, C., & Ahmed, R. O. (2019). A risk management model for research on expatriates in hostile work environments. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *30*(11), 1822–1838. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2017.1376222

Ripamonti, S. C., Galuppo, L., Provasoli, G., & Benozzo, A. (2020). Unmasking Reflexivity in HR Managers During the COVID-19 Lockdown in Italy. *Forntiers in Psychology*, *11*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.588128

Robson, C. (2002). *Real World Research* (2nd edition). Blackwell.

Russell, R. C., & Aquino-Russell, C. (2010). Expatriate Managers: Powerful Or Powerless? *The International Business & Economics Research Journal*, *9*(2), 101–108. https://doi.org/10.19030/iber.v9i2.526

Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2007). *Research Methods for Business Students* (4th edition). Pearson Education.

Saunders, M. N. K., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2019). *Research Methods for Business Students* (8th edition). Pearson Education.

Shaffer, M. A., Harrison, D. A., Gilley K. M., & Luk, D. M. (2001). Struggling for Balance Amid Turbulence on International Assignments: Work–Family Conflict, Support and Commitment. *Journal of management, 27*(1), 99–121. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0149-2063(00)00088-X

Silverman, D. (2013). *Doing qualitative research* (4th edition). Sage Publications.

Stroh, L. K., & Caligiuri, P. M. (1998). Increasing global competitiveness through

effective people management. *Journal of World Business*, *33*(1), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1090-9516(98)80001-1

Suder, G., Reade, C., Riviere, M., Birnik, A., & Nielsen, N. (2019). Mind the gap: the role of HRM in creating, capturing and leveraging rare knowledge in hostile environments. *International journal of human resource management, 30*(11), 1794–1821. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2017.1351462

Takeuchi, R. (2010). A critical review of expatriate adjustment research through a multiple stakeholder view: Progress, emerging trends, and prospects. *Journal of Management*, *36*(4), 1040–1064. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206309349308

The Economist (2020, March 24). *The coronavirus crisis thrusts corporate HR chiefs into the spotlight*. Retrieved 2020-11-26 from https://www.economist.com/business/2020/03/24/the-coronavirus-crisis-thrusts-corporate-hr-chiefs-into-the-spotlight

Trompetter, D., Bussin, M., & Nienaber, R. (2016). The relationship between family adjustment and expatriate performance. *South African Journal of Business Management*, *47*(2), 13–21. https://doi.org/10.4102/sajbm.v47i2.56

Tsegaye, W. K., & Su, Q. (2017). Expatriates cultural adjustment: Empirical analysis on individual cultural orientation. *The Journal of Applied Business Research*, *33*(5), 963–978. https://doi.org/10.19030/jabr.v33i5.10019

United Nations (1998). *Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration*, Statistical Papers Series M, *58*(1).

Uvais, N. A., Nalakath, M. J., Shihabudheen, P., Hafi, N. A. B., & Salman, C. A. (2021). Depression, Anxiety, and Coping During the COVID-19 Pandemic Among Indian Expats in the Middle East: A Survey Study. *The primary care companion for CNS disorders, 23*(1). https://doi.org/10.4088/PCC.20m02761

Van Der Zee, K. I., Ali, A. J., & Haaksma, I. (2007). Determinants of effective coping with cultural transition among expatriate children and adolescents. *Anxiety, Stress and Coping*, *20*(1), 25–45. https://doi.org/10.1080/10615800601032781

Van Vianen, A. E. M., De Pater, I., Kristof-Brown, A. L., & Johnson, E. C. (2004). Fitting in: Surface- and deep-level cultural differences and expatriates' adjustment.

Academy of Management Journal, 47(5), 697–709.
https://doi.org/10.5465/20159612

Viitala, Riitta (2004). *Henkilöstöjohtaminen.* (4th edition). Edita Prima Oy.

Wang, I.-M. (2008). The Relations Between Expatriate Management And The Mentality And Adjustment Of Expatriates. *Social Behaviour and Personality*, *36*(7), 865–882. https://doi.org/10.2224/sbp.2008.36.7.865

World Health Organization (2020). *Archived: WHO Timeline - COVID-19*. Retreived 2020-12-18 from https://www.who.int/news/item/27-04-2020-who-timeline---covid-19

Yeaton, K., & Hall, N. (2008). Expatriates: Reducing Failure Rates. *The Journal of Corporate Accounting & Finance*, *19*(3), 75–78.
https://doi.org/10.1002/jcaf.20388

Yin, R. K. (2003). *Applications of Case Study Research* (2nd edition). Sage Publications.

Zhu, J., Wanberg, C. R., Harrison, D. A., & Diehn, E. W. (2015). Ups and Downs of the Expatriate Experience? Understanding Work. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *101*(4), 549–568. https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000073

Appendix. Interview guide

Background questions

1. How old are you?

2. What is your gender?

3. What is your job title? (before, during, and after the assignment)

4. How long have you been working for the company?

5. How long was your international assignment? Or how far along are you if you are still abroad?

     a. If you have already repatriated, did you complete the assignment as planned or did you have to leave early/stay longer?

     b. Did you return to the same organisation that you left from?

6. Are you/were you on the assignment alone or with a spouse or family?

7. What country are you/were you located in?

8. What type of hostile environment are you facing/did you face?

Research question 1

9. Did you know the environment was going to be hostile before you left for abroad? Or did it develop into such only during the assignment?

     a. It already was

          I What made you accept the assignment despite knowing this challenge?

     b. It developed into such

          I What kind of support were you offered from your organisation when the hostility began?

          II Were you offered an early return?

          III Did you yourself consider retuning prematurely?

10. How would you describe your overall adjustment to the host country and the new work environment?

     a. Were there any noticeable cultural differences, and if yes, what?

     b. Did your organisation express you the importance of your role as an expatriate?

I How did this affect you or did it at all?

11. Did you find adjusting or finding comfort difficult because of the hostility of the environment? How?

The pandemic

P12. What kind of feelings did the pandemic, and its collateral effects awake in you?

P13. What would you describe as the most prominent stressors of this particular environment?

P14. Did you find the possible restrictions on movement stressful? Tell me how they affected your life and working abroad overall.

P15. How was your everyday life otherwise altered or restricted due to the pandemic?

    a. Did you work purely or partially from home?

    b. If you had children with you, did you also have to find alternative ways for their care?

        I How did this affect your work performance?

        II Did your company provide extra support to help with these added family demands?

Terrorism

T12. What happened? Was there an attack or just the threat of one?

T13. Describe the feelings this provoked in you.

    a. Do you feel like you were given adequate support from the organisation to mitigate any possible negative feelings?

T14. If you are/were abroad with your family, did this affect your family in a particular way (added conflicts etc.)?

T15. Did the terrorism-related feelings affect your work attitude? How?

Research question 2

16. Were you offered a. pre-departure training b. in-country support/training c. repatriation support?

17. If the environment was already known to be hostile, did your predeparture training include specific psychological preparation or was is present in any other way in your preparations?

    a. Were you taught proactive coping skills (e.g. how to prepare for a possible threat and to recognise potential sources of it)? What kind?

    b. Were you taught emotional coping skills or problem-solving skills? What kind?

18. Were you regularly in contact with the HR department of your company?

    a. Were you satisfied with the situation? If not, what kind of change would you have desired?

19. Did you communicate with HR about your health and safety concerns?

    a. If yes, was this helpful?

20. Did your organisation do something to try to alleviate your (potential) negative feelings? What?

    a. Was psychological help offered?

    b. Were other external specialists ulitised to ensure your safety and well-being? If yes, tell me about them.

21. Did you feel like your concerns toward your psychological, physical, and social health were acknowledged? Tell me more about it.

22. If you were with your family/spouse, how were they supported by the organisation?

23. What kind of extra attention or support would you have desired during your assignment?

24. Would you describe the entirety of your international assignment as a success or a failure? Main reasons why?