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# Female Expatriate: The Motivations Behind Expatriate Acceptance, Challenges and Organizational supports

## A Case Study of Finnish-Tech Company

Master's thesis in Master of Science in
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**ABSTRACT :**

This study aims to investigate the factors that influence female employees' expatriation experiences, including motives, barriers, and support systems. As a link between corporate headquarters and international subsidiaries, expatriates are essential to the world-wide operations of multinational corporations (MNCs). Recognizing the motivations for expatriation is essential for both individuals and companies, as it impacts the satisfaction and achievements of the expatriate journey. According to research, expats are frequently driven by a combination of extrinsic and intrinsic motivations. Prospects for career advancement, personal development, and a desire for new experiences are the main reasons people choose to relocate abroad.

Adjustment to a new culture, balancing job and personal obligations, and family responsibilities are the main difficulties faced by female expats. Despite these obstacles, effective organizational and familial support systems are essential for expatriate success and transition. organizational support initiatives were essential in reducing female expatriates' difficulties during their expatriation. Social networks, cultural integration programs, and mentoring programs have all developed as important facilitators, offering useful advice, companionship, and hands-on support to manage the challenges of living abroad.

Six female expatriates with previous work experience were chosen for interviews, and the interviewees were from a Finnish-tech multinational company. Using semi-struc-

tured interviews to explore the experiences of female expatriates, this study's methodology is based on a qualitative research approach. Through interactive dialogues, attendees were prodded to express their reasons for being abroad, as well as the difficulties they faced and the kind of help they needed. This allowed for a deeper understanding of the intricacies involved in living abroad.

Overall, the study's findings provide important insights into the factors that influence women's expatriate experiences, including motivations, obstacles, and support systems. Organizations can better support female expatriates and assist them in understanding their full potential in overseas assignments by adopting adapted approaches.

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# 1 Introduction

In terms of globalization, international assignments are beginning to become usual for numerous companies in the modern marketplace.The deployment of expatriates has become a strategic need for firms seeking to expand their reach and take advantage of international opportunities in the fast-paced world of modern global business. It is estimated that there will be 3.4 billion jobs worldwide in 2023, up from 2.28 billion in 1991—a rise of about 1.1 billion jobs. In 2019 and 2020, there was a notable drop in the global employment rate from 3.3 billion to 3.19 billion, which was likely caused by the sudden economic shock brought on by the coronavirus pandemic (Dyvik & Haraldsen, 2023).

Traditionally, the word "expatriate" brings up the picture of an individual who has been driven into exile from their place of origin, frequently as a result of social or political instability. Nonetheless, it is crucial to understand that the term "expat" refers to more than just one meaning. In a more general sense, an expatriate is a person who lives abroad, regardless of the reasons behind their relocation. This general word refers to a wide range of people who have either made the decision to relocate to a different country than their place of birth or have been forced to do so. A thorough comprehension of expatriation highlights the diverse range of reasons and experiences that contribute to the phenomena of living overseas. According to research by Kagan et al., living abroad can be exciting and present excellent opportunities for professional development and exposure to global business. However, it can also be an emotionally taxing adjustment, requiring one to say goodbye to friends and family and acclimate to a new work environment and culture (Kagan, 2023).

According to data from the 2012 Brookfield Global Relocation Services Survey, which showed that about 60% of executive expats are married, female expatriates frequently face a unique set of difficulties that might affect their experiences and success overseas. In this group, about 81% of individuals go abroad with their spouses or partners. Male

spouses accompanying female expatriates are still not very common, even if the proportion of female expatriates stationed in foreign subsidiaries is gradually increasing (Tahir, 2020).

Research conducted in 2002 by Powell et al. revealed that both men and women viewed a competent manager as masculine (Connerley et al., 2008). Yet, there are still difficulties and barriers that women may run into when pursuing these positions, such as family obligations and cultural prejudices. To achieve greater gender equality and to create a more diverse and dynamic global workforce, it is imperative that efforts be made to support and develop women in leadership roles and overseas assignments. Research concentrating on the experiences of female immigrants has identified specific gender-related outcomes linked to organizational and cultural constraints (Colakoglu et al., 2018).

The situation was different during the chaotic COVID-19 pandemic time; an additional level of crisis developed that profoundly affected a female expat's experience (Mello & Tomei, 2021). A lot of people were working from home. Research on expatriation in high-stress circumstances resulting from unanticipated and ongoing natural disasters is currently lacking (Koveshnikov et al., 2022).

However, To remain competitive, companies have to broaden their talent pools, especially among women. Investigating the reasons behind women's motivation to work overseas, addressing their challenges, and offering assistance throughout the expatriation period plays a key role in encouraging more women to pursue careers overseas.

## 1.1   Existing research study

Previous studies on female expatriates have provided insight into a number of topics, including their experiences, obstacles, goals, and support systems. Throughout history, researchers have examined the distinct circumstances encountered by females undertaking global assignments with the goal of understanding the fundamental elements impacting their choices and the results of their efforts.

The discussion of expatriates—especially the topic of female expatriation—has gained a lot of academic attention recently. The expatriate work plays an essential part in negotiating the complexity of cross-border operations as globalization continues to transform the international corporate scene. The small number of women in expatriate professions, which have traditionally been dominated by male expatriates, has prompted a dedicated investigation into the factors, difficulties, and contributions of female professionals on international assignments (Lassila, 2021). A recent article from Lassila. E, Attributes Influencing The Global Mobility of Self-Initiated Female Expatriates (2022). For female contribution viewpoint, The female and the male professional: gender, career and expatriation interfaces in trajectory for female expatriates (Fraga et al., 2020), Fostering longevity attitudes in women expatriates: the role of general and targeted types of organizational support (E. M. David et al., 2021a), Female Self-Initiated Expatriates, Systematic Reviews on Motivations and Challenges (Osman et al., 2022) and Specific work-life issues of single and childless female expatriates: an exploratory study in the Swiss context (Salamin, 2021).

Many researchers have carried out comprehensive examinations of the factors that encourage female professionals to seek employment overseas, demonstrating a multifaceted interrelationship of career objectives, opportunities for professional development, and the desire for challenging tasks. For example, Motivations and Experiences of Female Expatriate Educators Teaching in Saudi Arabia (Hoke, 2020), Business, pleasure or both?: Motivations and changing motivation of self-initiated expatriates (Despotovic et al., 2022), Push or pull motivation? A study of migrant women entrepreneurs in UAE (Vardhan et al., 2020), and The motivation for the mobility–A comparison of the company assigned and self-initiated expatriates in Saudi Arabia (Alshahrani, 2022). Another existing study regarding female expatriates challenges, for instance; Global Adjustment Challenges Facing Female Business Expatriates (Gerald, 2014).

## 1.2   Purpose of the study and Questions of research

The objective of this research is to conduct a methodical analysis of the facets of female expatriation within the structure of international organizations. The Finnish tech company will be used as an empirical case study in this investigation. The main objectives of this study are to shed light on the variables that encouraged female professionals to accept postings abroad and to examine the difficulties they faced while working as expatriates. This study looks at the factors that encourage female professionals to accept assignments abroad and the particular challenges they face in order to offer insights that might inform organizational policies and practices.

Following the review of the literature, I generated these research questions.

- What are the primary motivations that drive female professionals to accept expatriate assignments in global organizations?
- What are the challenges you faced when you decided to work as an expatriate and what support systems or initiatives would further encourage female expatriates to seek international assignments in the company?

The purpose of these research questions is to investigate the reasons behind female experts' decisions to take on expatriate assignments, as well as their need for assistance. The objectives are to explore the complexities of the existence of female expatriates, understand the factors that affect their decisions, and identify opportunities for better encouraging, challenges during the expatriate time and supporting their participation in overseas assignments.

## 1.3   Structure of the thesis

The focus of the study will be on the experiences of female expatriates, with an emphasis on their motivations, difficulties, and the need for organizational support, as explained in chapter 1. The second chapter examines relevant research and discusses the

reasons behind, advantages of, organizational support for, and difficulties faced by female expatriates. Chapter 3 describes the qualitative approach used to investigate these facets. The findings are presented in Chapter 4, together with information on the obstacles faced and the type of organizational support obtained. In Chapter 5, study limitations are acknowledged and the consequences of the results are discussed.
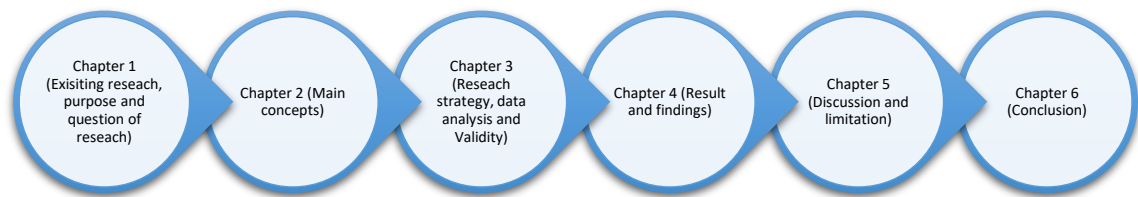


Figure 1: Structure of the thesis.

# 2 Literature review

The literature review on female expatriates in multinational corporations was examined for this study's literature assessment, which focused on the motivation, barriers, and supports. This study will also provide the overview of female expatriate, understanding of challenges faced by women expatriate and how organizational can support female in their expatriation.

## 2.2 Historical Context of Female Expatriates in Global Organizations

The historical trajectory of female participation in expatriate shares has shown some noticeable variances, which can be related to broader economic developments. Gender norms and expectations are reflected in the historical predominance of males on global assignments. Gender disparities in the global workforce persisted because of institutional barriers that stopped women from taking advantage of opportunities overseas. It's well-known that men hold the highest positions in executive leadership positions and intentionally choose people who look similar them to keep a close-knit circle of reliable associates. To emphasize their minority position at these highest tiers, female senior managers are frequently referred to as "tokens (Shortland, 2014).

Gender dynamics and societal expectations gradually changed in the second half of the 20th century. The women's liberation movement and economic shifts both influenced the reassessment of conventional gender norms. Linehan et al. (2000) affirms women's interest in worldwide professions and Stroh, and female expatriates and their supervisors agree about the interest women show in taking on expatriation assignments ((Varma et al., 2001).

As recently as six years ago, female expatriates were a topic that garnered very little attention in global mobility research, despite an increasing interest in comprehending their experiences, as highlighted by McNulty and Hutchings in 2016. This interest was notable enough to warrant a dedicated section within a special issue focusing on nontraditional expatriates (McNulty & Hutchings, 2016; Bader et al., 2023)

## 2.3    Female Expatriates

When considering expatriation, especially for female professionals, motivations and objectives play a valuable role in the decision-making process. The complexity of these motivating factors is emphasized by research in this area, highlighting the need for a comprehensive understanding.

Women who have moved abroad have encountered a variety of challenges, successes, and aspirations that are consistent with the broader discussion about workplace diversity and gender parity. In the twenty-first century, a diverse workforce will require different leadership styles, procedures, and policies. Therefore, it is critical for businesses to understand the complicated experiences of female expatriates as they work to develop inclusive workplaces. Gender biases and uneven treatment are experienced by women (Auster, 1993; Shortland, 2014).

There are more economic benefits to having more women in the workforce than previously assumed (Ostry et al., 2018; Dabla-Norris & Kochhar, 2019). This is explained by the understanding that while men and women have equal potential, they each bring unique talents and perspectives to the table that have substantial economic worth (Ostry et al., 2018; Dabla-Norris & Kochhar, 2019). According to Ostry and others (2018), decision-making, skill, risk-taking, and teamwork are just a few of the numerous ways that men and women are essential in the workplace (Dabla-Norris & Kochhar, 2019).

## 2.4    Motivations to Work Overseas

In the last two decades, research on expatriation—which examines both assigned and self-initiated—has placed a strong focus on the personal motivations behind each person's decision to relocate overseas (Arifa et al., 2021). International employment chances are influenced by a multitude of factors across multiple dimensions. Perfor-

mance and satisfaction are strongly impacted by one's degree of self-determination regarding their actions (Ryan & Deci, 2000). One of the major theories of human motivation that Deci & Ryan, (2000) explain is the Self-Determination Theory, which divides motivation into three categories—intrinsic, or driven by the interest in the activity; extrinsic, or tied to outcomes; and amotivation, or lacking any motivation. According to the theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), intrinsic motivation is preferred because it drives people to participate in activities through internal factors like the fulfillment of learning goals and the sense of accomplishment that comes from personal growth (Ryan & Deci, 2000) On the other hand, extrinsic motivation can be influenced by some outside factors (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Extrinsic motivation is less self-directed than intrinsic motivation since it is impacted by outside variables such as rewards, desired results, or social expectations. It is seen to be less effective than intrinsic motivation since it tends to arouse sentiments of responsibility, such as the need to work in order to maintain financial security, even when it may have personal meaning (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The lack of autonomy—which is similar to controlled motivation—as well as competence and/or connection are the fundamental causes of amotivation and an impersonal causality orientation, which are linked to poor performance and outcomes related to mental wellness (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Carr et al. (2005) identified five main factors that influence relocation: unstable politics, economic factors, cultural influences (such as the desire to relocate to a country with a more beneficial culture), family-related reasons (such as the desire to reconnect with family members), and career aspirations (such as the pursuit of opportunities for professional advancement) (Howe-Walsh & Schyns, 2010). This implies that people might move for a number of reasons, such as better job opportunities, stable political environments, affinities for a certain culture, ties to family, and financial opportunities.

Richardson and McKenna (2002) classified the reasons why self-initiated expatriates decide to go abroad into four metaphorical groups. These four groups are as follows: "The Refugee" refers to expatriates who merely wish to leave their present nation. 'The Mercenary', who is only interested in financial gain, is one type of expatriate who wants to

escape the socio-political or economic condition of their current nation, the weather, or just travel somewhere new. These foreign workers are aware that accepting assignments abroad may result in perceived or real financial benefits. "The Explorer" is comparable to the refugee, but his or her choice is more influenced by culture, adventure, or transition. These foreign workers desire to travel or take advantage of the prestige that comes with working overseas. The "Architect" is the professional developer, the returned foreigner who thrives on career progression. Whether for career, adventure, or personal reasons, moving abroad is a life-changing event. It presents wonderful chances for both professional and personal development, but it also has its share of difficulties (Howe-Walsh & Schyns, 2010).

## 2.5  Women's Motivation to Work Abroad

Janee Hill, a motivational speaker and advocate for women's success in the workplace, explained to Leaders Media in the article Hummel (2023) how important flexibility is to the women she meets and works with. Hill emphasizes the urgent fact that women frequently have to manage tasks equal to two full-time jobs due to the pressures of marriage, parenting, and careers. She presents flexibility as an important requirement for women balancing these many responsibilities, highlighting its essential function in promoting efficiency and balance (Hummel, 2023).

Women's motivation at work is influenced by a number of factors, including cultural, organizational, and individual influences. Personal objectives, values, and aspirations, as well as opinions about one's own competence and self-efficacy, are examples of individual factors (Bandura, 1997). Women's motivation levels are also greatly influenced by organizational characteristics, including job design, leadership style, and corporate culture (Hackman, 1980; Schein, 2010). Furthermore, women's motivation to pursue and succeed in their occupations might be influenced by cultural variables such as gender roles, stereotypes, and expectations (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

For female employees in particular, gender imbalance in overseas employment can be detrimental since it might hamper professional progression and, eventually, diminish opportunities for business success (Bader et al., 2023). Companies could be worried about women's performance in operations overseas (Bader et al., 2023).

The recognition of the different points of view and abilities that female expatriates bring to the global workforce, together with the growing gender equality movement, are reflected in this change. Women's employment participation started to rise in Brazil in the 1970s, according to Fraga, Antunes, and Rocha-de-Oliveira (2020), a country where market closure was the primary economic policy and there was a low foreign return. Due to a wide range of socio-cultural, professional, and personal factors, female employees must make a difficult decision when deciding whether to pursue assignments overseas. Expatriates travel for plenty of reasons, including financial rewards, professional advancement, a need for adventure, and the chance to see other cultures. It is often known that motivation and focus are essential components of success. The importance of staying motivated regardless of unknown rewards was emphasized by Brown and Fenske (2010), who suggested that people with an optimistic mindset can continue to be driven toward their goals even in the lack of certain results (Brown & Neporent, 2010). In the technologically advanced society we live in, everyone deserves equal treatment. A counterbalance to the corporate expatriation-dominated model of international careers is the increasing number of people choosing to work abroad, and international work experience appears to be crucial for acquiring the skills necessary for success in our globalized world (Devine et al., 2004; Conner & Hartl, 2004; (Selmer & Lauring, 2010; (Fitzgerald & Howe-Walsh, 2009).

## 2.6 Organizational support for expatriates

Gender plays a crucial role in the selection process for global assignments. Research suggests that traditional gender stereotypes and biases may influence assignment decisions, with women being less likely to be selected for international assignments

compared to their male counterparts (Suutari et al., 2000). Factors such as family responsibilities, perceived mobility constraints, and cultural norms regarding gender roles contribute to this disparity (Dickmann et al., 2008). Despite the fact that diversity is widely recognized to provide significant commercial benefits (Shortland, 2018), around three-quarters of expatriates chosen for international assignments are men, indicating a gender gap that continues (Hengesteg et al., 2021; Shortland, 2018). This shows that even with diversity's acknowledged benefits, women are still significantly underrepresented in positions that are made possible for them abroad by hiring companies (Shortland, 2018).

Furthermore, organizational policies and support mechanisms can either facilitate or hinder gender diversity in global assignments. Companies that prioritize diversity and inclusion initiatives are more likely to have equitable assignment opportunities for both men and women (Dickmann et al., 2008). However, systemic barriers, such as male-dominated leadership structures and lack of family-friendly policies, may perpetuate gender inequalities in assignment selection (Suutari et al., 2000). Many organizations are striving to promote gender diversity and inclusivity in leadership roles, recognizing the value that women bring to the table. According to a study, female expatriates are equally successful in their jobs as male expats are (Connerley et al., 2008). International assignments, such as expatriate roles, provide women with opportunities to develop their leadership skills, gain global experience, and contribute to a diverse and inclusive corporate culture.

Furthermore, research indicates employees are more willing to accept an overseas assignment if they feel their company to be supportive (Gerdel, 2019; Jawahar & Hemmasi, 2006). According to Varma and Russell (2016), female employees are more likely to express interest in seeking opportunities for working overseas when they feel supported by the company they work for (Varma et al., 2001; Gerdel, 2019). This shows that people's willingness to consider taking on international work assignments is influenced by

the degree of support they perceive from their place of employment. It makes reasonable that expatriate employees could need more organizational assistance while adjusting to work and living conditions that are marked by a high degree of unpredictability and unfamiliarity (Isakovic & Whitman, 2019). This implies that the need for help from their employer increases even more in cases where employees are relocated to foreign nations or cultures, where they may encounter difficulties including language limitations, cultural differences, and new work methods. In essence, organizations need to make sure expatriates have enough support to help them settle in and succeed in their new responsibilities, and the more unpredictable and unfamiliar the new environment is, the more important this assistance becomes.

Committed employees, in turn, demonstrate higher performance levels, reduced absenteeism, and a decreased likelihood of seeking alternative employment opportunities. Some scholars attribute well-being as a consequence of affective organizational commitment (Andrade & Valtcheva, 2009; Bastos et al., 2013; Panaccio & Vandenberghe, 2009; Raina & Sharma, 2013), while others identify well-being as a precursor (Albrecht, 2012; Brunetto et al., 2012; Garg Pooja & Rastogi Renu, 2009; Reuter et al., 2010; Solomon et al., 2020; Yalcin & Bilge, 2021).

It is important to recognize that the connection among perceived organizational support, job involvement, and job insecurity is intricate and diverse, and it could fluctuate based on individual and contextual elements (Hngoi et al., 2024; Vardhan et al., 2020). Nowadays, more women are working, especially in high- and middle-income nations, according to World, Bank Group, and Trade Organization World (Pangestu Mari, 2020)). Between 1991 and 2017, the average global female employment-to-population ratio rose from 45.0 to 47.9 percent Pangestu Mari, 2020). Female expatriates often excel in cross-cultural communication and relationship-building, facilitating stronger connections with stakeholders in diverse global markets. In developing economies, engagement in international trade serves to augment female labor force participation and wage levels, particularly within export-oriented industries. Consequently, this phenomenon contributes to a mitigated gender disparity in employment opportunities

and earnings, aligning with a reduction in the prevailing wage and employment gap between women and men (Pangestu Mari, 2020).

One of the primary benefits attributed to the use of expatriates is the facilitation of knowledge transfer and skill development within multinational corporations. Every country has a different culture and history (Jalloh, 2016), it also mentioned that insufficient cognizance or attunement to cultural distinctions among individuals within international settings can engender inadvertent errors in both professional and personal spheres. Expatriates act as conduits for the transfer of organizational culture, practices, and tacit knowledge across borders, contributing to the enhancement of local workforce capabilities and the overall organizational learning process (Briscoe & Schuler, 2004; Fang, 2008; Harvey et al., 2000).

Expatriates continue to be a crucial component of staffing for international organizations, playing a significant role both operationally and strategically in enhancing global competitiveness (Despotovic et al., 2022; McNulty & Hutchings, 2016). And there has been a notable change in in the twenty-first century, with more and more women opting to pursue jobs abroad and work as expatriates. However, the percentage of female expatriates is notably low, and, male employees have historically and currently handled most international assignments in most industries (Bader et al., 2023; Varma et al., 2001).

In global contexts, effective communication is frequently mentioned as a challenge. Expatriates are essential to the smooth coordination and communication between headquarters and overseas subsidiaries since they are accustomed to the home office's procedures and corporate language (Fang, 2008; Selmer & Lauring, 2010).

## 2.7 Challenges faced by female expatriates

Female expatriates in global organizations face numerous challenges that can impede their success in international assignments. One significant issue is the glass ceiling effect, where women encounter barriers to career progression in overseas locations due to

cultural norms or organizational biases (Al-Tamimi et al., 2023). This can result in limited opportunities for advancement and recognition, leading to a sense of stagnation and frustration. Menzies (2012) study shows that family concerns and gender discrimination are found to be the reason for the slower growth of women expatriates in the global market. It was also found that women expatriates are honored for their performance as compared to male expatriates in North America (Iverach et al., 2014). A study by Linehan and Scullion (2001) on female expatriates in Japan reported that American female expatriates were as effective as their male expatriates and argued that multinational enterprises can reap the benefit of widening the potential expatriate pool by including talented women (Linehan & Scullion, 2004). Similar to this view, Forster (1999) shows that women are inspired and successful in pursuing international careers as their male counterparts (Forster & Shine, 1999).  Despite a slight increase in female employee representation across organizational hierarchies in recent decades, many organizational practices continue to remain gendered in favor of male employees (Acker, 1990; Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000).

Cross-cultural adjustment is not simply important for assignees but for companies too, because; expatriate's level of cross-cultural adjustments during international assignments demonstrates the possibility of international assignment success (Parker & McEvoy, 1993). Cross-cultural adjustment would be defined as the level of a person's emotional relieve with different parts of a host country. Moreover, Cross-cultural adjustment is an inner and mental condition that can simply be evaluated by the person by herself while entering different cultural surroundings (Searle & Ward, 1990). Cross-cultural adjustment is divided into three parts namely general adjustment, interaction adjustment and work adjustment (Searle & Ward, 1990). Overcoming general adjustment in terms of general living conditions, education facilities and health care facilities in the host country, work adjustment and interaction adjustment is a time-consuming process and one may take time to overcome these issues during an international assignment. Previous studies revealed that cross-culture adjustment training has a great impact on expatriate's performance during international assignments (Black & Mendenhall, 1990; Littrell & Salas, 2005; Selmer, 2005).

Studies further discussed that the inability to overcome cross-cultural differences may lead to expatriate's assignment failure (Briscoe & Schuler, 2004; Dowling & Welch, 2004). The more the expatriate knows about the host country's culture the better she can perform during her international assignment. The chance of successful assignment is only higher when the expatriate is well-culturally adjusted. Culturally well-informed expatriates are unbiased and they are open to the host country's culture during the assignment. Culturally learned expatriates are further excellent at integrating new manners, customs, and roles into their own culture (Caligiuri et al., 2001).

Acculturation, or adjusting to a new culture, can occur in four stages, according to Black (1988) the "honeymoon" phase, a dissatisfied phase, adopting some new behaviors, and final complete adjustment. Similar to this, Hofstede (2001) distinguished three results of acculturation: obtaining bicultural adaptation, being excluded and confronted with discrimination, or completely assimilating into the new culture. According to Hofstede,(2001) successful acculturation includes both of these two results: full assimilation and bicultural adaptability. This implies that people might adjust to a new cultural setting at varying degrees; some might fully integrate or adapt, while others might find it difficult to cope with emotions of prejudice or isolation (Howe-Walsh & Schyns, 2010).

Additionally, female expatriates often struggle to balance work and family responsibilities, as moving abroad can disrupt the support systems and networks they rely on. The lack of access to appropriate healthcare services, childcare facilities, or social support can compound these challenges, making it difficult for female expatriates to perform at their best. The challenges encountered by expatriates frequently based on the adjustments required to adapt to new work environments and living conditions. These difficulties may arise due to factors associated with the individual, the organization, or both (Al-Tamimi et al., 2023). Addressing these obstacles is crucial for organizations to retain talented women in leadership positions and create a more inclusive global workforce.

Suutari (2018) mentioned that gender-related considerations influence decisions regarding expatriation as well as the interface between professional endeavors and personal or familial responsibilities (Suutari et al., 2018). Tharenou (2008) suggests that the presence of a family imposes greater constraints on women's capacity to translate their desire for international job opportunities into actual expatriation compared to men (Suutari et al., 2018).

## 2.8  Theoretical framework of the study

An era where multinational corporations (MNCs) depend more and more on expatriates for their organizational growth and allow knowledge transfer across borders has been brought about by the globalization of business. With the growing number of overseas assignments, female expatriates encounter a multitude of obstacles that limit their progress and success in foreign environments. Examining gender differences in expatriation, the glass ceiling effect, cross-cultural adjustment, work-life balance, and organizational practices, this literature review explores the theoretical framework of the difficulties faced by female expatriates.

The experiences of female expatriates are becoming more widely recognized, but obstacles still exist. These include gender discrimination, the glass ceiling effect, and family obligations that impede their ability to advance in their careers and succeed overseas. Studies, however, support the inclusion of outstanding women in expatriate pools, indicating that women may be equally productive as men in foreign employment. Gender differences in foreign assignments are firmly ingrained, as males have traditionally dominated missions abroad in a variety of industries. The gender gap in expatriate representation continues, as evidenced by studies by (Bader et al., 2023) and (Varma et al., 2001). These studies highlight cultural norms and organizational biases that restrict the participation of women in global mobility. Multinational companies view women expatriates as significant assets, which emphasizes the need to understand their job performance

and ability to adjust to foreign cultures (Cole & McNulty, 2011; Yu & Ren, 2021). A woman's identification as an expat is influenced by her employment status as a foreign worker (Yu & Ren, 2021).

A wide range of personal factors, such as job growth, personal development, and cultural enrichment, might affect an individual's decision to pursue overseas assignments. Caligiuri and Cascio (1998) draw attention to the fact that men and women may have different success factors in overseas assignments, indicating that personal reasons are a major factor in determining expatriate experiences (Caligiuri & Cascio, 1998). Women who go abroad frequently do so for a variety of reasons, including the chance to advance their careers and challenge gender stereotypes by taking on leadership responsibilities in multicultural environments. Literature reviews such as Extrinsic and intrinsic motives for working abroad are better understood by applying the self-Determination Theory, and the stages and difficulties of adaptation are clarified by research on this topic.

An essential component of expatriates' success in overseas assignments is cross-cultural adjustment. According to Searle and Ward (1990), cross-cultural adjustment is a complex process with aspects related to work, interactions, and general aspects. During assignments, the performance and well-being of expatriates are greatly impacted by their ability to overcome cultural barriers and adapt to host cultures. While successful global assignments can be advantageous for managers of any gender, there are differences in the elements that lead to success in these roles (P. M. Caligiuri & Tung, 1999; Searle & Ward, 1990). This shows that although the benefits of a successful overseas assignment may be similar for men and women, there may be some differences in the traits and factors associated with success. Put another way, even though the final product might be the same, there may be differences in the routes chosen to succeed in international assignments due to gender-specific aspects and concerns. Female expatriates express serious concerns about work-life balance, especially when it comes to balancing work and family duties. According to Tharenou (2008), family obligations have a disproportionate impact on women's decisions to relocate abroad, which emphasizes

the necessity of organizational support systems to reduce these difficulties (Tharenou, 2008).

Overall, the literature review emphasizes how women are becoming more common abroad, their reasons and obstacles, and how important it is for companies to support gender diversity and inclusivity when sending employees abroad. In order to maximize the contributions of female talent in international environments and promote an inclusive global workforce, these challenges must be addressed.

# 3 Methodology

The purpose of the study is to investigate the motivations, challenges, and support needs of female professionals to expatriate assignments within global organizations. Upon an examination of the literature on the thesis topic, the ensuing chapter will outline the research design and approach employed to effectively address the research questions. The chapter will also justify the selection of research approach and methodology, as well as the methodologies chosen for data collection, sampling, and data analysis. Subsequently, it will provide confirmation of the validity and reliability of the collected data within the scope of this study.

## 3.1 Research strategy and approach

A research strategy is a plan or scheme that is employed to conduct the process of finding and evaluating data for a study project. The process entails multiple stages, such as scrutinizing the principal ideas of the subject, identifying pertinent keywords, exploring suitable sources of information, and evaluating the volume and caliber of the data discovered (Kothari, 2016). For researchers, the strategy acts as a road map, assisting them at each step of the investigation and guaranteeing organized and effective data gathering and analysis. It facilitates work organization, task prioritization, and well-informed choice-making on methodologies and strategies. Furthermore, a strong research plan makes sure that pertinent data is methodically found, assessed, and synthesized, which improves the accuracy and reliability of the research findings.

According to Kothari (2005), there are two primary methods for conducting research: the quantitative approach and qualitative approach (Kothari, 2016). First, quantitative data must be collected so that it may be formally and methodically subjected to quantitative analysis. In contrast, the qualitative research technique is primarily concerned with the subjective evaluation of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. According to Kothari

(2005), the researcher's perceptions and interpretations are crucial in this situation (Ko-thari, 2016). Qualitative interviews were employed in this study  to explore highly sub-jective experiences, attitudes, and perspectives (Yvonna S. et al., 1994).

This strategy makes it easier to investigate complex phenomena in-depth and provides subtle insights that quantitative approaches could miss. Qualitative research is also ex-tremely effective at analyzing social circumstances, cultural influences, and individual perspectives, as S. B. Merriam (2009) points out, which makes it incredibly useful for understanding the intricacies of social phenomena and human behavior. Additionally, the strategy is focused on interviews; it uses projective methodologies and conducts in-depth interviews with members of the organization (Kothari, 2016).

Appropriate methodological strategy selection is required for answering the study ques-tions. In academic inquiry, a research field is developed primarily using two methods: deduction and abduction, both of which are used in this study. Deductive reasoning is formulating concepts based on a careful examination of a corpus of literature in order to setup future empirical research. Preliminary hypothesis or a set of preliminary hy-potheses form the basis of a theory that seeks to offer a potential explanation or solu-tion for a given issue. According to Malhotra (2017), observations are employed for a comprehensive exploration and verification of these hypotheses (Malhotra, 2017).

Abductive inference, additionally referred to as inference to the best explanation, is the process of formulating a hypothesis that best fits the observed facts by making infer-ences from the information at hand (Walton, 2004). Early on in the scientific process, abductive inference is crucial, particularly when proposing and evaluating hypotheses by scientists. It entails weighing several theories to explain observed occurrences and deciding which one, supported by the evidence, is most likely (Walton, 2004). Abductive reasoning is a type of reasoning that allows us to put together different ideas to make sense of the world. It's similar to brainstorming. As a kind of creative inference, abduc-tive reasoning is acknowledged to involve the combination and verification of ideas to produce new understandings (Mirza & Osindero, 2014).  Abduction reasoning was re-

introduced by Peirce, Hartshorne, Weiss, and Burks (1960), and considered a thought process for making sense of complex realities (Karlsen et al., 2021; Mirza & Osindero, 2014).

In this study, the literature review suggests some practices that could be recommended for use in female expatriates, women's motivations to work overseas, and organization support for expatriates. The literature review commenced with a deductive approach, systematically examining existing research to establish theoretical frameworks and hypotheses regarding female professionals' motivations and challenges in expatriate assignments within global organizations. The reality will be investigated through interviews. However, as the study progressed to analyze the research outcomes, it transitioned to an abductive approach. Abductive reasoning involves inferring the most plausible explanations for observed phenomena based on the collected data, even in situations with incomplete information. Through abductive reasoning, researchers identified recurring patterns and emergent themes from the interview data, leading to the formulation of novel theoretical propositions grounded in empirical evidence. Afterward, the conclusion will be drawn, furthermore, the female expatriate's motivation, challenges, and initiatives. By employing both deduction and abduction reasoning, the research encompassed a comprehensive approach that combined existing theoretical frameworks with empirical observations, enhancing the validity and richness of the study's findings.

## 3.2    Data collection

Since data collecting provides the framework for research conclusions, it is an essential step in the research process. More specifically, the main technique for obtaining deep and intricate insights into the drives, difficulties, and efforts of female expatriates will be qualitative interviews. The emphasis on the investigation and comprehension of phenomena and behaviors rather than their quantification is a fundamental feature of qualitative research (Green, 2004). This study only used primary data. The research questions were answered by the primary data, which was only gathered through interviews.

The researcher collects primary data directly, for instance through interviews and surveys, whereas secondary data, readily available, includes sources like websites, journals, and books (Ajayi, 2017). Secondary data is obtained from previously published and collected sources such as articles, books, or journals, providing a convenient means to gather and comprehend information, as well as elucidate the theoretical framework surrounding the research issue (Ghauri et al., 2010).

In the study primary data were collected through interviews, the interviews will be conducted with individuals who have experience working abroad, allowing for an in-depth exploration of their perspectives and experiences. The interview data collection method entails the presentation of oral-verbal prompts and the corresponding oral-verbal responses (Kothari, 2016). The most popular method of gathering data for qualitative research is interviewing. A framework for recording, achieving, challenging, and supporting practices and norms is the qualitative interview (Gill et al., 2008). Three fundamental classifications of research interviews include structured, semi-structured, and unstructured formats (Gill et al., 2008). Structured interviews show similarities to questionnaires that are given verbally, with a planned set of questions asked without much variance and no chance for follow-up questions to dive deeper into answers that need more explanation (Gill et al., 2008). Unstructured interviews lack predetermined theories or concepts and are conducted with minimal organization or structure (Gill et al., 2008). Semi-structured interviews involve in-depth questioning using predetermined open-ended queries, to which respondents provide their answers (Jamshed, S., 2014). Focus groups share numerous similarities with less structured interviews, but they encompass more than simply collecting comparable data from multiple participants simultaneously (Gill et al., 2008). The advantages of semi-structured interviews in terms of flexibility are much greater than the limitations on statistical analysis they may pose. In fact, the flexibility in both designing and refining interview guides, as well as in conducting the interviews, is perhaps the most crucial aspect of success in using this technique. Additionally, this type of interviewing allowed us (Horton and Macve) to

evaluate the credibility of responses ourselves and to explore underlying motives more directly (Horton et al., 2004).

In this study, data was collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with female expatriates who worked in global organizations. Semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility in questioning while ensuring key topics are covered consistently across participants. The interviews conducted for this research were facilitated through online platforms via Microsoft Teams. Microsoft Teams, a widely used communication tool, facilitated the virtual interaction between the researcher and the participants, enabling real-time conversation and data collection despite geographical distances.

The choice of semi-structured interviews via Microsoft Teams was particularly suitable for this research for several reasons. Firstly, the semi-structured format allowed for a balance between flexibility and structure. While the researcher had a predefined set of questions to guide the discussion, there was room for spontaneous exploration of topics that emerged during the conversation. This flexibility was crucial for capturing the nuanced experiences and perspectives of the participants regarding their motivations, challenges, and experiences as female expatriates in global organizations.

Secondly, conducting interviews via Microsoft Teams offered logistical advantages. In today's interconnected world, virtual communication tools have become integral to remote collaboration, making it easier to connect with participants regardless of their location. This enabled the researcher to reach a diverse pool of participants, including those situated in different countries or regions, thereby enhancing the breadth and depth of the data collected.

Moreover, the use of Microsoft Teams for interviews proved to be efficient and convenient for both the researcher and the participants. Scheduling interviews, sharing documents, and recording sessions were streamlined within the platform, reducing administrative burdens and ensuring a smooth research process. Additionally, the virtual nature of the interviews eliminated the need for participants to travel to a physical

location, making it more accessible and accommodating for individuals with busy schedules or those residing in remote areas.

For this study, interviewees were selected based on specific criteria to ensure relevance to the research objectives. Interviewees were specifically chosen to be female expatriates who had worked abroad for a minimum of one year. Before the interviews took place, participants were provided with a semi-structured guide outlining the topics to be discussed. This guide consisted of three main sections:

(a) Clarification of the study's objectives

(b) Questions about the participant's background, motivations for working abroad, concerns, expectations towards international assignments, and their experiences with company support

(c) An opportunity for participants to provide any additional information they deemed relevant

Interviews were conducted in the interviewees' English language to ensure comfort and facilitate effective communication. The interviews conducted for this study had an average duration of approximately 45 minutes, and all sessions were recorded for documentation and analysis purposes. Open-ended questions were used in the interviews to get in-depth answers and insights from the participants about their experiences. To encourage candid and open sharing, the interviews were performed in a non-judgmental and supportive manner (Smith, 2015).

## 3.3   Data Analysis

The data were gathered from semi-structured interview material that was subjected to a thematic analysis. Identifying recurrent patterns or themes within the raw data and classifying them into meaningful categories is the process of thematic analysis, a popular qualitative data analysis technique (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Campbell et al., 2021; Karlsson,

2022). This method allows for flexibility in data exploration and can be used with both deductive and inductive research designs (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Campbell et al., 2021; Karlsson, 2022). Inductive research designs see themes emerge from the data. By finding common threads and grouping them into cohesive themes, thematic analysis enables researchers to methodically assess qualitative data and offer insightful information about the research topic (Karlsson, 2022)). From the participants' answers, themes arose that highlighted shared experiences, struggles, and patterns among the group. The interpretation and discussion of these themes led to a thorough grasp of the reasons behind and difficulties encountered by female expatriates working in international organizations.

The study's interviewees were employees at a multinational corporation based in Finland, and they represented a variety of roles within the organization. These individuals were chosen especially because of their prior expatriate experience, having been sent abroad by their employers to work. Each participant's profile is outlined below:

Table 1: Interview data.

| Number | Gender | Nationality | Host country | Years of working |
|--------|--------|-------------|--------------|------------------|
| 1 | Female | Finnish | USA | Four |
| 2 | Female | Finnish | USA | Two |
| 3 | Female | Finnish | UK | One and half |
| 4 | Female | Pilipino | Poland | One |
| 5 | Female | Indian | Finland | One |
| 6 | Female | Sri Lankan | Finland | One and half |

Six female expatriates, from a variety of nationalities and working in different host nations, contribute to the interview. Participant 1 is a national of Finland who has lived in

the USA for four years. The second participant, who is likewise Finnish, has been employed in the United States for the past two years. Third participant, a Finnish national, has lived in the UK for the past 1.5 years. Participant 4 is a Filipino who has spent a year working in Poland. Indian national participant 5 has worked in Finland for a year. Last but not least, Participant 6, a national of Sri Lanka, has been employed for 1.5 years in Finland. The range of places and nationalities among these individuals offers a thorough understanding of the experiences of female professionals working as expatriates in multinational corporations.

## 3.4   Validity and Reliability:

For research findings to be accurate, consistent, and reliable, validity and reliability are essential components of the method. According to Tatano Beck (2009), the assessment of qualitative studies has historically disregarded validity and reliability, which are typically associated with quantitative research. Despite this, modern research methodologies nowadays also use these concepts when it comes to qualitative investigations ((Balcarová et al., 2024; Beck, 2009; Coleman, 2022)) states that the effectiveness of interview research depends on how well it fits the purpose of investigating the subject matter and how accurately the results are reported (Coleman, 2022).

In qualitative research, validity is crucial to guaranteeing that the results appropriately represent the phenomenon under research. The degree to which the study instrument seems to measure what it is supposed to assess is known as face validity, and it is one component of validity. According to Gray (2018), "member checking," a procedure where researchers casually confirm their understanding with participants during data collection, can also be used to enhance validity (Coleman, 2022).

Face validity in qualitative interviews can be proven by crafting questions that are relevant to the participant's experiences and in alignment with the goals of the study. By carefully developing interview questions that cover a wide range of subjects connected

to the study objectives, validity can be guaranteed. A small sample of participants can be used to pilot test the interview guide in order to find any gaps or potential areas for development in the questions. In order to validate the results of qualitative research, Beuving and de Vries (2015, p. 44) suggest asking participants to evaluate the research report and offer comments (Coleman, 2022). Participants can verify the veracity and accuracy of the findings using this technique, also known as responder validation or member checking, by drawing on their own experiences and viewpoints. The validity and reliability of researchers' qualitative research findings can be improved by including participants in the validation process. To improve the study's internal validity, the interview questions were developed with the help of previous research on the same subject. In order to ensure that participants understood and answered the questions correctly, standardized interview questions in English were used. This helped to maintain consistency and clarity of communication. By reducing the possibility of misunderstandings or misinterpretations of the interview topic, this method enhances the validity of the study.

The consistency and dependability of the research findings—which guarantee that the findings are repeatable and stable throughout time—are referred to as reliability in qualitative research. Dependability is often connected with quantitative research, yet it is also important for qualitative investigations to guarantee the validity and dependability of the study findings. Other terms used to describe reliability in qualitative research include 'dependability' (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013; Rolfe, 2006), 'confirmability' (Jensen & Jensen, 2008) or 'consistency' (Arksey & Knight, 1999) The significance of making sure that research findings remain accurate throughout time and under various circumstances and investigators is emphasized by these terms (Coleman, 2022).

Standardized methods and processes for data collecting are one way to improve the dependability of qualitative research. Researchers can reduce variability in data collection and increase the dependability of the findings by using consistent methodologies, such as semi-structured interviews or observational protocols. Unlike quantitative research, which has access to statistical tests, qualitative research lacks these, making it

challenging to establish reliability (Coleman, 2022). Standardized methods minimize the possibility of bias or inconsistent outcomes by ensuring that data is gathered methodically and consistently from various participants and environments. Giving readers a clear and comprehensive explanation of the research design and how it was carried out allows them to more accurately evaluate a study's trustworthiness (Coleman, 2022; Fitzgerald & Howe-Walsh, 2009a).

Through an exhaustive method of creation and piloting, the interview questions were shown to be reliable. A modest yet important contribution to eliminating persistent misunderstandings about the validity of qualitative research is made by the skillful use of these techniques (Coleman, 2022) . All of the interviews were recorded, which allowed the interviewer to focus entirely on the process, however additional notes were collected just in case. Furthermore, in order to promote participants' freedom of expression, confidentiality was maintained.

Within the qualitative research paradigm, validity and reliability are considered markers of quality, accuracy, and trustworthiness. Using methods like integration (Golafshani, 2003), these ideas impact how qualitative researchers work to reduce bias and increase their credibility when making claims about social phenomena (Jick, 1979). To determine whether the results of qualitative research are credible and reliable, validity and reliability must be guaranteed. Validity is the honesty and accuracy of the research findings, whereas reliability is the consistency and dependability of the research methodology and findings over an extended period of time.

# 4 Findings

The reseach results will be thoroughly examined and analyzed, providing a thorough examination of the obstacles, experiences, and support systems faced by female expatriates in the context of a Finnish multinational corporation.

## 4.1 Motivation to work abroad

The reasons given by the participants differ, yet they generally focus on chances for both professional and personal development, cultural interchange, and the attraction of living abroad. Every participant had a different motivation for taking on an expatriate job, including the desire for adventure and cultural enrichment to financial incentives and career progress.

In order to make sure that their new team used the same working techniques as the software development team in their home country, Participant 1 was motivated to accept an assignment abroad. Expatriates with high intrinsic motivation tend to be highly motivated intellectuals who seek to develop new abilities to overcome outside challenges (Wu et al., 2023). Similar to Participant 1, Participants 2 and 3 also had the same desire to work as an expatriate overseas. She noticed issues with T-Mobile and decided to take action to fix them. She was already working on related subjects and noticed places in need of development. International assignments are frequently taken up by workers who hope to return home and assume management or leadership positions (Konopaske, Robie, & Ivancevich, 2009; Gerdel, 2020). Insch et al. (2008) and Gerdel (2020) note that while this desire for leadership is relevant for people of all genders, it is especially important for women, as they face more barriers to career progression than males do (Insch et al., 2008; (Gerdel, 2019)). One important issue that influences women's decisions about expatriation is their ability to learn new skills (Shortland, 2018). They view living abroad as a way to deepen their understanding of career competencies, such as the "how," "why," and "whom," which will afterward open doors for future career progress (Shortland, 2018)). It appears from this that women see moving abroad as

a means of gaining the necessary information and abilities that will help them advance their careers and enhance their professional development (Shortland, 2018).

*"The team was new and they needed to kind of get to the same way of working as we had in all the software development and that was kind of why I was assigned there as an expatriate". (Participant 1)*

*"So, to take this way of working there and that was my main task and all the time I was getting a lot of support from the software department head." (Participant 1)*

*So, she was all the time asking my guidance when there were some new topics discussed and so on…. so that which direction to call and so on. (Participant 1)*

*"It's rather that you need to be very proactive and active and how this opportunity came to me was that I was already working on similar topics from here, and I knew that there were certain difficulties with T-Mobile. I knew that there were a lot of things we needed to improve and I was proactively presenting to the management that I see that these are the problems we have with this customer." (Participant 2)*

Additionally, interviewees 3 show that their pursuit of work prospects abroad is driven by intrinsic reasons. The prospect of cross-cultural interaction and cooperation between multiple R&D and production facilities was the motivating factor behind Participant 3's decision to accept an overseas assignment. Participant 3 appreciated the opportunity to support cross-cultural cooperation and educate their UK-based colleagues about Finnish work practices as a Finnish expat employed in the United Kingdom. This information and skill sharing improved everyone's professional experience while also facilitating more seamless teamwork. Participant 3 was essential in encouraging efficient communication and teamwork inside the company by overcoming cultural gaps and building under-standing between teams. Their commitment to promoting diversity and cultural sensitivity in an international workplace is evident in their motivation.

When Participant 1, 2 and 3 were assigned to a new team, they realized how important it was to convey their knowledge and experience so that the team's procedures would match their own. They recognized this as a chance to make a big difference in the project's success and to let diverse teams collaborate more easily.

*"First, I was from Finland and to the UK, there was a lot of collaboration between all R&D sites and also the manufacturing of all the factories. So of course,.. I was able to then support my UK-based colleagues in what way? One of the expectations of Finnish engineers or Finnish colleagues and how to deal with them and so on. So could kind of bring that kind of cultural awareness there and vice versa." (Participant 3)*

Interviewee 4 decided to accept an overseas assignment was influenced by a number of factors, including the possibility of earning a better income; extrinsic motivating elements, on the other hand, comprise incentives or rewards that are contingent on results and come from sources outside of the individual. These can be stock options, bonuses, allowances, or chances for advancement; all of these affect a person's propensity to participate in particular activities (Gong et al., 2017; Ryan & Deci, 1985; Wu et al., 2023).

*"Personally, being part of a third-world country, higher pay/salary is one of the main reasons why I chose to accept the offer as an expat." (Participant 4)*

Another reason for interviewee 4 was to desires for personal development, cultural exploration, and the chance to live in a Nordic nation were additional motivators for accepting an expatriate post. Participant 4, a Filipino, saw the assignment as an opportunity to travel and explore new places to enhance their perspective and horizons. The idea of seeing a foreign culture firsthand, picking up insightful life lessons from other viewpoints, and learning from them drew them in. Furthermore, Participant 4 acknowledged the pragmatic advantages of increased income and a more convenient travel schedule, which contributed to the attraction of the expatriate job. In general, their drive was motivated by an urge for adventure and cultural enrichment, as well as a desire for both professional and personal improvement. According to Rosen's 1986 compensating differentials model, financial rewards alone may not be enough to persuade

employees to take on positions that are viewed as less attractive than others (Gerdel, 2019). The possibility of family separation and the difficulties of moving, living, and working overseas make expatriation, despite its possible career benefits, frequently seen negatively (Gerdel, 2019). Consequently, it becomes imperative to provide extra incentives, such as a compensatory differential, in order to lessen these difficulties and encourage people to accept assignments abroad (Gerdel, 2019). This approach suggests that the monetary incentive offered for employment with expatriates makes up for any perceived disadvantages and incentivizes workers to take on these tasks in spite of the difficulties that come with them.

*"It also gave me the opportunity to challenge myself in a lot of aspects - living independently, adapting to new culture, new environment. it's a plus that you will have access to other European countries for leisure and vacation that's not easily and affordably accessible back in the Philippines." (Participant 4)*

The reasons behind Participants 5 and 6 acceptance of an expatriate assignment were personal development, cultural immersion, and the chance to live in a Nordic nation. Those who are assigned abroad naturally experience satisfaction in their work (Wu et al., 2023). Participant 5, who firmly believes in the benefits of travel and discovery, viewed the assignment as a chance to widen their horizons and develop new viewpoints. According to Interviewee 6, the possibility of working abroad offers a special chance for both professional and personal growth. She hoped that by accepting work assignments in a foreign setting, she would acquire many experiences that advance her development on all fronts. It is anticipated that these encounters will offer fresh obstacles in addition to chances to develop her skill set, widen her horizons, and become more adaptive. Moreover, it is believed that working abroad can help improve cross-cultural communication skills, resilience, and problem-solving abilities—all of which are critical for personal growth. Professionally speaking, Interviewee 6 hopes that her overseas job assignments will help her gain specialized knowledge, hone her leadership skills, and build useful networks.

*"Personally, the reason I moved to a new country was to expand my horizons. I am a firm believer that traveling, exploring the world, living in different places, and surrounding yourself with different environments helps develop a broader mindset towards all aspects of my life. I also wanted to experience living in a Nordic country and experience how life is here as compared to the countries near the equator." (Participant 5)*

*"Getting the new experience of working in a different country with work assignments which would contribute to personal and professional growth". (Interviewee 6)*
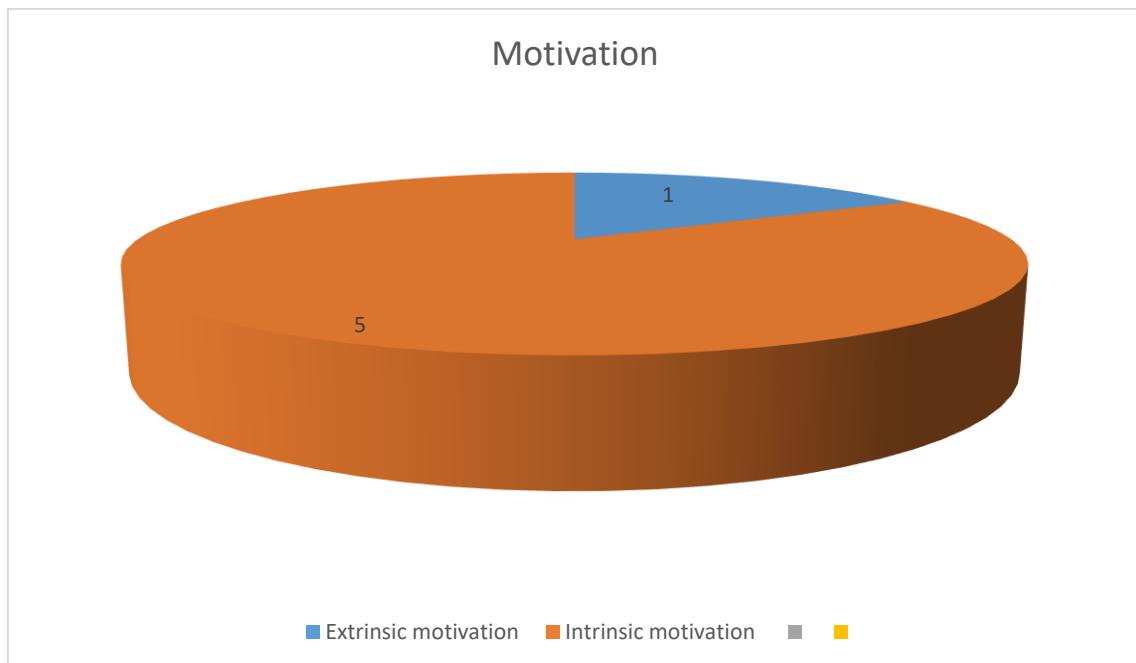


Figure 2: Interviewee's motivation

Out of the respondents, five claimed that job satisfaction was the main reason they accepted assignments overseas. Most of them emphasized that, in comparison to their prior experiences, the projects and activities they completed were more difficult and complex. They mentioned that taking the lead on initiatives enabled them to continuously learn new things. The challenges posed by these assignments and roles were

seen as priceless teaching moments. Furthermore, one respondent stated that receiving a higher wage was a driving force behind taking on overseas jobs.

## 4.2   Challenges faced by female expatriates

When asked about the difficulties they had encountered on their overseas assignments, three of the five participants mentioned particular issues they had, and the other three said they had not encountered any major issues.

In their reflection, Participant 1, 3 and 6 mentioned the general sense of equality and justice in the workplace as an aspect of their experience as an expat in the United States, United Kingdom and Finland. They did, however, admit that their viewpoint might have been different if they had been placed in a nation with a different cultural setting, implying that difficulties could fluctuate greatly depending on one's location. The significance of taking cultural aspects into account while evaluating the difficulties of overseas missions is shown by this insight.

Participant 3 conveyed satisfaction for their expatriate experience's relative smoothness, claiming that they had not had any notable difficulties while overseas. According to this viewpoint, several elements like personal resilience, corporate culture, and adaptation can greatly impact an individual's experience of expatriation. According to Koveshnikov, Wechtler, & Dejoux (2014) and Zakaria & Yusuf (2022), expatriates' ability to function in foreign environments, cooperate with local partners, utilize their knowledge and experience, gain fresh perspectives, and negotiate ambiguous situations makes adaptation essential to the success of a global business (Koveshnikov et al., 2022; Zakaria & Yusuf, 2023). It is important to note that expatriate experiences vary widely since although some may find it easy to complete their responsibilities, others may face more significant challenges.

Also, Respondent six clarifies that it takes skill to get through a wide range of cultural backgrounds, communication styles, and work routines in a large multicultural team. This can be difficult because of the disparities in language, customs, and problem-solving techniques.

*"I was in US where it is tender, and equalities in quite a good level and was already 20 years ago. So if I would have been in some other country, the answer might be different..."* *( Participant 1)*

*"Maybe I'm lucky, but .....I have not experienced that, not even in this expatriate situation." (participant 3)*

*"Main challenge was adapting to work with a large multi cultural global team who does connect with each other virtually. Also settling into work in a new country." (Interviewee 6)*

However, Participant 1 considers the concerns that women frequently have about how being assigned abroad may affect their family, especially their kids. Also, highlighted that women consider more carefully how the relocation may impact their kids' lives, including worries about relationships, language problems, and general environment adjustment. A genenal point of view, she mentioned, men are thought to be more direct in their approach to expatriation, possibly showing a greater inclination to accpet the opportunity with less thought. Research indicated that women are more concerned than males with their spouse's work accommodation (Känsala, Mäkelä, & Suutari, 2015; David et al., 2019). Research additionally showed that women face greater difficulties if their spouses have difficulty adjusting to new locations (Cole et al., 2011; S. David et al., 2019)). According to studies, women also place a high priority on the education and welfare of their kids (E. M. David et al., 2021b; S. David et al., 2019).

*"But, maybe females are thinking a lot about this, that if they have kids at that point that.... how it affects the kids and their life and if I take kids for two years to some other country and they don't know what the language and their friends are kind of living behind and So I have an impression that females are thinking a lot more about that aspect, that*

*somehow.... men are maybe more straightforward in their thinking that they just think that, OK they will accept expatriation somehow... then impacting to females that they are not so active maybe going to this expatriate." (Participant 1)*

During the expatriate experiences, interviewees 2, 4, and 5 faced various difficulties. The personal difficulties of moving their family—especially their two-year-old daughter— were brought up by participant two. She talked about how difficult it may be to navigate foreign childcare systems and how much more work it can be to manage household matters when both partners work. Finding suitable schools for their kids, arranging housing in the new place, and handling the many logistical details of the move—passports, moving companies, bank accounts, and other related issues—all present substantial challenges for women, who frequently face these issues (Tahir, 2020).

The difficulty of adjusting to living alone for the first time was brought up by participant 4. She talked about how difficult it was to find housing and become familiar with local rules and regulations as well as other responsibilities without much help from outside sources. Furthermore, as noted by Tahir (2020), Participant 4 highlighted the importance of cultural novelty in their expatriate experience and the necessity of acclimating to the different cultural environments in the Philippines, their home country, and the nation of their foreign assignment (Tahir, 2020). According to Bartol and Martin's 1998 proposal, cross-cultural management is a process where management recognizes cultural differences and exhibits the ability to adapt to various cultural situations (Hafitah et al., 2007).

Participant 5 also pointed out a particular issue about gender representation at work. One of the most noticeable challenges she faced in their work environment was the lack of female coworkers in their IT company. According to Acker (1990), Meyerson & Fletcher (2000), Bader et al. (2023), and several other authors, there has been a little increase in the percentage of female employees throughout organizational structures in recent years. However, numerous organizational practices still give preference to male employees(Acker, 1990; Bader et al., 2023; Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). The significance

of diversity and inclusion programs in creating an inclusive and encouraging work environment for all staff members is highlighted by this observation.

*"I of course there were a lot of challenges, but they were, at least for me, they have always been related to the work. So the challenge was...it was very challenging task that I took and really like I knew that it's gonna be difficult and I knew that it's not gonna be like, you know, just to walk in the park, but it's gonna require a lot of work and push. And you know, a lot of things to be done in order to be successful, successful with the work that I was sent to do....." (Participant 2)*

*"I think the main reason or main obstacle that I see for many of the female, or if they are, if they would be offered an opportunity to go as an expatriate, is usually the kid. Because like I said, it adds a, not the dimension, especially if your husband is also working or which many time is is the case. Of course, then there's always those kinds of challenges that I was bringing my family there with me, my husband and my daughter. My daughter was two years old at that point, so of course that's always a challenge.... You need to put your small child into daycare with language that she's not speaking at all and you know things like this because my husband was also working....In our case, both were working, so then that print broad kind of an extra, you.... extra stuff to deal with and worry about. And again comparing to if male is the expatriate and the family comes along, then probably the the male can mostly focus on the work stuff, because then there are other people you know your wife and they can be clarifying the things which school or they don't even need a school because they will be staying at home..... When the female is the one who actually needs to is going to the work and do the things, and then it becomes a little bit more difficult unless OK (Participant 2)*

*"Living independently for the first time (i'm living with my parents/siblings before I moved) and sorting things out myself with minimal help from acquaintances - from looking for a new apartment, learning the government rules and law that apply to me." (Participant 4)*

*"The challenge I faced and still face is working in a tech company, there isn't much female companionship." (Participant 5)*

The majority of issues faced by expatriates have to do with adjusting to their new workplace, especially, challenges in interacting with the local people (Al-Tamimi et al., 2023), 2023). As a non-native English speaker working in the United States, Participant 2 reflects on the difficulties caused by language and cultural differences. Despite their fluency in English, she admitted that there was still a small obstacle preventing them from expressing themselves exactly as she wanted to. Effective two-way communication is significantly more challenging when there is a language barrier. Communication involves the interchange of meaning (S. David et al., 2019)). When managing expatriates, language is a crucial factor (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Language also offers a meaningful context for relationships and a frame of reference that might symbolize an individual's identity.

*"I did definitely and especially that I'm not native in English, right? But of course in Finnish, so even I'm I'm able to speak and quite fluent, but still there is always that little bit of a barrier that how you're able to say things in a way how you mean them right and especially in US people are talking a lot and they have very special way of communicating in a way that like small talk and you know all those things that they are able to express themselves with the language maybe even more like much more than some other look some other natives that even still have English as their native language... I think that some people probably thought in the beginning that I might be a little bit rude...."(Participant 2)*

## 4.3 Initiative to overcome the challenges

The first and second interviewees expressed the critical significance of family support systems, especially with regard to childcare and educational opportunities for accompanying dependents. Furthermore, interviewees 5 and 6 had highlighted the importance

of peer support networks in easing the difficulties of adjusting to a new cultural environment by emphasizing the support and companionship that come from having a common cultural background with foreigners. Additionally, Participant 6 discussed the challenges of adapting to a multicultural work environment and the importance of an inclusive workplace culture. She noted that the company's supportive work environment and flexible work arrangements facilitated the transition to working abroad. This highlights the role of organizational culture and policies in supporting expatriates and promoting their success. Academics have studied the critical significance of social connection and support in the context of global tasks, the cumulative research of these individuals highlights the essential role that support and relationships with others play in enabling effective cross-cultural adjustment. To overcome the difficulties of adjusting to different cultural contexts, expatriates frequently rely on strong social networks and support systems. Accordingly, developing social networks and creating all-encompassing support systems become crucial approaches to improving the expat experience and facilitating successful cross-cultural adaptation (Adelman, 1988 ; Aycan, 1997a, 1997b ; Black, 1990 ; Black et al ., 1991 ; Briody and Chrisman, 1991 ; Church, 1982 ; Feldman and Bolino, 1999 ; Fontaine, 1986; Furnham and Bochner, 1986; Rogers and Ward, 1993 ; Searle and Ward, 1993 ; Ward and Chang, 1997 ; Ward and Kennedy, 1992, 1994 ; Weissman and Furnham, 1987; Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2002)

Nevertheless, they also identified areas in which assistance was deficient, notably concerning matters of the family, such as locating appropriate educational institutions for kids. This shows that although businesses might assist in some areas, there is still a need for development in terms of attending to the various needs of female expatriates.

*"I think that it is related to family support so that…. your kind of life situation is supported. So if you are having kids or if you are planning to have kids, so somehow even though you don't have yet kids, then you would have this kind of visibility that if I had kids there, what would happen? What kind of support I would have and then that if you have kids, when you are moving out to some new country there would be some kind of support to help with this issue, that finds the school or kindergarten or there would be some kind of*

*a network helping or even this that for example in Dallas there were really kind of active. Also, some kind of club for females and networking club. " (Participant 1)*

*"It is taking into account that whether you are a spouse or whether you are expatriate both can join somehow those networking clubs. " (Participant 1)*

*"Especially this kind of things that are related to the school and the kind of kids and family life that kind of support system would be helping….. "(Participant 2)*

*"Main challenge was adapting to work with a large multi-cultural global team who does connect with each other virtually. Also settling into work in a new country. But with the supportive and inclusive work environment within the company…. it was not very hard to adapt. With Hybrid work mode and flexible timing, work is made easier. " (Participant 6)*

Wright & McMahan (1992) developed the strategic human resource management (SHRM) theory, which supports the establishment of special support networks for female expatriates in companies. many companies find it difficult to replace expats in a sustainable manner (S. David et al., 2019; Stahl et al., 2009). According to that, addressing two major obstacles that female expatriates face—systemic discrimination that has an impact on women's motivation to achieve maximum achievement in both the home and professional arenas as well as their attraction and retention (S. David et al., 2019; Shortland, 2018).

*"And we do have some support system…So for example, when we moved there, we had a company was assigning some people to support with getting like US Social Security numbers, getting their apartment rented and getting their things like this. But for example, for the schools we didn't get any support." (Participant 2)*

The influence of support on the adjustment of women expatriates refers to how comfortable employees feel with various aspects of their new environment (Black & Gregersen, 1991; S. David et al., 2019). Adjustment is regarded as a crucial aspect among expatriate outcomes, encompassing emotional, behavioral, and cognitive dimensions related to the job, personal life, and the culture (David et al., 2021b). This adjustment

process is multifaceted, involving not only adapting to the job and work-related challenges but also integrating into the new culture and managing non-work aspects of life effectively. While expatriates are adjusting to their new surroundings and starting over, social support can operate as a cushion against stress (Black & Mendenhall, 1990; P. Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2002). This means that expatriates can find it easier to manage the difficulties they encounter when they adjust to the new environment and manage the changes related to their assignments if they have a strong support system of friends, family, or coworkers.

*"I also think it is super important to have a support system of people from the same country. This is helpful as those people come from a similar background, and it gets easier to get through the struggles of life together. It also helps with home sickness. "*
*(Interviewee 5)*

To empower female expatriates, participant 3 has emphasized the value of encouragement and mentoring. She addressed the importance of getting direction and encouragement to get over self-doubt and hesitancy when pursuing overseas assignments. This viewpoint emphasizes how crucial it is to create a welcoming climate in businesses so that female staff members feel empowered to take on demanding jobs. Mentors have a major impact on professional achievement and are essential for job socialization (Allen et al., 1999; Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2002). Feldman and Bolino (1999) studied the several kinds of mentoring that are available, including task assistance, career advising, psychosocial support, and role modeling, and how they affect how quickly expatriates pick up new skills and integrate into their new teams. This shows that the capacity of expatriates to adjust to their new responsibilities and blend in at work can be positively influenced by having mentors (P. Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2002; Mark C. Bolino & Daniel C. Feldman, 2000).

*"I believe that any kind of mentoring is a very good way. I think many times females need some kind of encouragement..... that they feel discouraged....because from my personal opinion, Many times females face critical situations, so they feel that they need to be*

*perfect and know everything before they can apply for a certain job. Offers to apply for*

*international assignments, and I think men are OK." (Participant 3)*

# 5  Discussion

The discussion regarding research focuses on the complicated interactions among motivation, challenges, and supports during the international postings of female workers. According to research, intentions usually possess greater predictive ability for behaviors than other cognitive characteristics including attitudes, norms, self-efficacy, and self-worth (Chiaburu et al., 2011; McEachan et al., 2011; Rossato-Quatrin, 2022). This shows that rather than other personality traits, people's intentions, or their intended course of action, are more closely matched with their actual behaviors. For example, a person's intention to exercise consistently may be a better indicator of their actual exercise habits than their ideas about their own efficacy or attitudes toward exercise. Participants' desires for skill improvement and advancement in their careers emerged as the primary motivator behind their expatriate assignments: motivation. However, in addition to these driving forces, participants faced issues of cultural adjustment and family obligations, highlighting the complex nature of expatriate decision-making. The acceptance of women in the workforce is greatly influenced by social norms within a culture. A country's cultural network is formed by common cultural aspects like history, leadership, religion, literature, and economic systems, which frequently change within national borders  (Hofstede, 1980; Ralston et al., 1992). The term "cultural toughness" (Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985), "culture distance" (Church & Patil, 1982), or "country difficulty" refers to the possibility that the cultural norms of the host country will be different from those of the expatriate's home country (Caligiuri & Tung, 1999).

The difficulties faced by female expatriates included concerns with work-life balance, language barriers, and cultural adjustment. Participants showed adaptation and resilience in negotiating new circumstances in despite these challenges. Notably, successful support networks—both family and organizational—were essential in reducing difficulties and promoting the success of expats. One of the most important factors in facilitating the adjustment and well-being of expatriates is organizational support, which includes cultural awareness initiatives and mentorship programs.

## 5.1 Limitations and Future Research suggestion

The relatively small sample size and the similarity of the participants—all female expatriates from a multinational corporation based in Finland—are two limitations of this study. According to Selmer and Leung (2003), women are increasingly making their way into the field of global management, even though men continue to make up a majority of those assigned to international assignments (Selmer & Leung, 2003).

Although these opinions of the respondents are relevant, it's possible that they fail to accurately represent the variety of experiences among expatriates from different companies or backgrounds. The particular characteristics of the sample may also limit the generalizability of the study's conclusions to other situations or groups. Furthermore, since the interview format might have had an impact on participants' responses, using semi-structured interviews as the only technique of data collection may have limited the breadth and depth of the insights gained.

Additional investigation may be conducted to better understand the particular elements affecting people's motivation and concentration in various situations. For instance, it could be insightful to look into how different levels of internal and extrinsic motivators affect a person's capacity to stay motivated and focused on their objectives. Further research on the efficacy of various methods for improving motivation and focus, like goal-setting approaches or mindfulness exercises, may have applications for people looking to maximize their performance. The contribution of organizational support systems to the success of female expatriates is another topic for future investigation. Organizations seeking to improve their support for female expatriates may find it useful to look into the effects of mentorship programs, professional development opportunities, and support networks on the performance, adjustment, and retention of female expatriates on overseas assignments.

Other possible study topics include how female expatriates adjust to a new culture, how often they hold leadership roles, how successful organizational practices and policies

are in encouraging gender diversity, and what the best practices are for promoting gender diversity within organizations. By focusing on these research topics, researchers can improve our knowledge of the difficulties and problems encountered by female expatriates and provide guidance for the development of procedures, practices, and policies that will help them succeed in their foreign assignments.

# 6 Conclusion

This study emphasized the relationships that occurred between female expatriates' challenges, support systems, and ambitions. Organizations may fully utilize the potential of diversity in the global workforce by empowering and preparing female employees for overseas assignments through an understanding of and attention to these components. Caligiuri (1997) claims that the organizational factors that lead to early returns from overseas assignments typically fall beyond the control of expatriates. A more accurate way to forecast expatriate success is to assess their intent to stay on the assignment willingly. This suggests that evaluating an expatriate's level of personal commitment to the position provides a more accurate measure of their chances of success than focusing only on organizational aspects (Caligiuri & Tarique, 2012).

Overall, the results indicate that before accepting foreign employment, individuals made decisions that led by intrinsic career and development considerations, a thorough assessment of place features, and a consideration of the other criteria listed in Figure 2. On the other hand, The decision of expatriates is also influenced by extrinsic motivation. The success of overseas assignments is usually viewed as a key indicator of the organization's overall performance, making the m essential parts of any company's strategy. International assignments are difficult for both individuals and corporations, emphasizing the importance of ensuring that organizational arrangements and personal expectations are in alignment. The effectiveness of organizational structures and their ability to meet the expectations of the persons engaged are both critical factors in the success of multinational assignments.

The interviewee highlighted the challenges in the result section and mentioned essential component of removing these obstacles is the implementation of customized support programs that are adapted to the specific requirements of female expatriates. However, it is evident that more focused initiatives are needed to bring about meaningful change and create an environment that supports the success of female expatriates in the global

market. Selmer and Lam (2004) highlighted the need for cross-cultural training for expatriate assignees, emphasizing the importance of cultural adaptation as a requirement for success in international assignments (Fitzgerald & Howe-Walsh, 2009b; Selmer & Lam, 2004).

According to Altman and Shortland (2008), particular challenges faced by women are caused and sustained by organizational norms and insufficient assistance networks (David et al., 2021). Therefore, even if progress has been made in identifying and resolving these issues, more research needs to be done in the form of scholarly studies and organizational initiatives in order to create an environment that supports the fair involvement and prosperity of women who are living abroad. The company must keep in mind that women want to work overseas in order to further their careers advancement, and women require additional assistance to achieve their professional goals.

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