

Expatriate support and success

A systematic review of organization-based sources of social support

Paul van der Laken, Marloes van Engen and Marc van Veldhoven

*Department of Human Resource Studies,
Tilburg University, Tilburg, The Netherlands, and*

Jaap Paauwe

*Department of Human Resource Studies,
Tilburg University, Tilburg, The Netherlands and*

*Department of Applied Economics,
Erasmus University Rotterdam, Rotterdam, The Netherlands*

Received 29 November 2015
Revised 5 February 2016
16 April 2016
24 May 2016
Accepted 25 May 2016

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to review empirical research on the relationship between organization-based social support and the success of international assignments (IAs).

Design/methodology/approach – Four search engines were used to obtain empirical studies relating organization-based social support to success criteria. Studies were compared based on type of theoretical foundation, criteria of success, source of social support and study design.

Findings – The reviewed studies draw on three theoretical paradigms – based on stress, social capital and relational exchange. The results demonstrate that expatriates receive social support from multiple organization-based sources and that these sources' proximity to the expatriate influences the relationship between social support and success. Regarding geographical proximity, sources in the home and host countries fulfil different supportive functions and therefore stimulate different success criteria. Additionally, the success criteria stimulated by organizational support depend on the type of supportive practices offered. The impact of support from organizational members is further influenced by their hierarchical proximity to the expatriate, with supervisory support relating most strongly to success. In addition to proximity, characteristics of the expatriating employee and the assignment (e.g. expatriate motivation and assignment hardship) influence the value of social support. Finally, social support relates most strongly to expatriates' satisfaction, commitment, and adjustment and these frequently mediate its effect on expatriates' retention and performance.

Research limitations/implications – Although only organization-based sources were considered, this review demonstrates that a multidimensional perspective is warranted when examining the effects of social support during IAs.

Practical implications – This review provides insights into the ways organizations could and should assist (self-initiated) expatriates when aiming for specific outcomes.

Originality/value – This in-depth examination of social support in the work environment of expatriates combines several theoretical paradigms and investigates multiple criteria of success.

Keywords International assignment, Expatriate, Social support, Systematic review, Success

Paper type Literature review

Introduction

The transition implied by an international assignment (IA) often brings about situational uncertainty and elevated job demands for the expatriate, who simultaneously needs to leave behind most of his/her professional and personal social networks. Overseas transfers may therefore have serious consequences for expatriates' well-being, adjustment and performance in their new roles (Baruch *et al.*, 2016; Black *et al.*, 1991). An expatriate's social environment can, however, provide the



necessary resources that allow him/her to address this transition (Adelman, 1988; Caligiuri and Lazarova, 2002; House, 1981; Lin, 1999).

Social support from within organizations is widely acknowledged as crucial to the success of IAs (see Bhaskar-Shrinivas *et al.*, 2005), but several factors seem to moderate its impact. First, expatriates distinguish among different sources of organization-based social support and these vary in terms of their impact on IA success (Kraimer and Wayne, 2004; Kraimer *et al.*, 2001). In part, this may be due to the (perceived) proximity between the source of support and the expatriate (Altman and Taylor, 1973; Byrne, 1971; Ibarra, 1992). This proximity can be hierarchical, geographical, situational and/or cultural, and determines, among other things, the frequency and formality of contact, the content and mode of interaction, the shared (overseas work) experiences and the (perceived) cultural gap (Claus *et al.*, 2015; Gudykunst and Nishida, 2001; Johnson *et al.*, 2003; Ng and Sorensen, 2008). Second, the context in which the social support is provided can affect its value. On the one hand, the value of social support may increase with the demands of the IA (Bakker *et al.*, 2007). On the other hand, social support can be less valuable when substitutes are available, such as assistance from other sources (see Podsakoff *et al.*, 1996).

Additionally, multiple criteria have been used to measure the success of IAs. In general, the effect of social support seems stronger when evaluated using more "proximal" criteria (Harrison and Shaffer, 2005), but studies show that the moderating factors described above introduce exceptions. For example, social support by supervisors directly stimulates distal criteria such as expatriate performance and retention, whereas organizational support has its effect through processes of adjustment and commitment (e.g. Kraimer and Wayne, 2004; Kraimer *et al.*, 2001).

This paper examines how these moderating factors have influenced the relationship between organization-based social support and the success of IAs. This may provide clarity regarding which criterion of international success is affected by which type of assistance, by whom, and under which conditions. Such clarity holds value for both academia and practice. Future expatriate management research may be aided by understanding the factors that need to be taken into account when investigating social support. Moreover, this review may provide insights into the (causal) relationships between social support and proximal and distal success criteria. In terms of practical value, this review provides a basis of evidence for the decisions human resource and global mobility professionals need to make regarding the implementation of practices and policies. In particular, the insights of this study may shed light on the optimal design of the overseas transfer and socialization process. Based on the results, organizations may wish to tailor their supportive practices to expatriates as well as assignments in order to increase the effectiveness and the return on investment of the provided support.

Search methodology

In September 2015, the libraries Web of Science (Core Collection); EBSCOhost (Business Source Elite, PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, Psychological and Behavioral Sciences Collection); ProQuest and ScienceDirect were systematically searched for relevant documents. In total, 21 keywords had been derived from literature and through discussion with international human resources and expatriate management scholars in the authors' networks. Clustered into three subgroups, these keywords resulted in 100 possible keyword combinations for which titles, abstracts and subject terms of

documents were searched (Table I). In addition to the automated search, all issues of the *Journal of Global Mobility* published prior to September 2015 were manually inspected for additional relevant studies by examining their abstracts and full texts.

Inclusion criteria

The automated search resulted in 854 references of which 572 were unique. Of these, 78 references were excluded because they were not written in English (2), did not refer to an academic study (22) or no full text was available (54). Next, studies had to examine expatriates in a professional environment. This led to the exclusion of 225 documents that studied regular employees, missionaries, soldiers, partners, students or repatriates, or that did not study a work context whatsoever. Another 171 documents were excluded because they did not examine success criteria. Following Caligiuri (1997) and Harrison and Shaffer (2005), expatriates' adjustment, commitment, performance and retention (including return intentions) were considered relevant criteria of IA success for this literature review. Expatriates' satisfaction was added as a fifth success criterion because scholars regard it as a proxy for the mediational process between social support and success (e.g. Cao *et al.*, 2014). Finally, 36 documents were excluded because they did not examine social support. Of the remaining 64 documents, 37 were empirical studies that statistically examined how social support in expatriates' work environments influences at least one of the criteria named above. A manual search of the *Journal of Global Mobility* resulted in the identification of two additional studies that met the inclusion criteria. The final selection therefore yielded 39 articles, including three doctoral dissertations (De Paul Chism, 2014; Littrell, 2007; Pattie, 2007). Please refer to Table II for an overview of the selection process.

Coding

The 39 studies were then coded by the first author on four dimensions. First, it was determined which theories the articles had used to explain how social support may relate to the success of IAs. The mentioned theories clustered in three paradigms and articles were coded according to which of these they had used. Second, the success criteria examined by the articles were coded. Third, social support was coded according to the characteristics of its source. A basic distinction was made between organizations and their members. These members were furthermore coded for their proximity to the

Social support	Expatriate success	Specificity of sample
support	performance effectiveness success failure attrition retention intent ^a cognition ^a withdraw ^a commitment	expat ^a sojourn ^a inpat ^a transpat ^a country national ^a global professional ^a global worker ^a overseas assign ^a international assign ^a global assign ^a

Table I.

Keywords by their respective cluster

Notes: ^aKeyword was truncated and thus extended versions of that keyword were also included; 100 (1 × 10 × 10) keyword combinations were used

Table II.
The seven steps
in the selection
procedure

Specification	Remaining studies	Excluded studies
<i>Search results</i>		
Web of Science	854	289
EBSCO		368
ProQuest		139
ScienceDirect		58
<i>1st step</i>		
Unique studies (automatic)	764	-90
Unique studies (manual)	572	-192
<i>2nd step</i>		
Full text English articles	496	-76
<i>3rd step</i>		
Expatriate sample	271	-225
<i>4th step</i>		
Success criteria	100	-171
<i>5th step</i>		
Social support	64	-36
<i>6th step</i>		
Empirical papers	37	-27
<i>7th step</i>		
Manual search of JGM	39	2

expatriate in terms of organizational hierarchy (i.e. supervisor, mentor, peer or subordinate), their geographical location (i.e. located in the home or host country), their employment status (i.e. host country national (HCN), inpatriate or expatriate) and their cultural background (same or different from expatriate). Finally, study design elements were examined, such as sample characteristics, the measures used and their raters.

Theoretical paradigms

In the broadest sense, social support can be defined as the assistance and protection that one party provides to another (Shumaker and Brownell, 1984). More specifically, scholars have proposed that social support manifests itself in four types or forms. Emotional support is the affective component and involves the provision of care, empathy, love and trust. Instrumental support consists of more concrete assistance, in the form of tangible resources, services or aid. Informational support relates to the provision of information to assist with general problem-solving. Finally, appraisal support involves the provision of information for self-evaluation (House, 1981). Multiple theories link social support to the success of IAs and the theories used by the 39 articles in this review can be clustered into three theoretical paradigms: a stress, a social capital and a relational paradigm.

First, ten articles (26 per cent; Table III) refer to theories on stress management. IAs imply major transitions in terms of work and living environment, job content, work roles and/or employment status. Such changes can be stressful and threatening as they introduce considerable uncertainty (Ashford and Taylor, 1990). For example, the behavioural patterns associated with the new culture in general and the new work role

Table III.
Included articles,
their theoretical
frameworks and the
examined variables

Authors (year)	Theoretical paradigms			Support constructs	Success constructs				
	Stress	SC	RE			S	C	R	A
Bader and Berg (2013)				HCN disaffection					1
Bader <i>et al.</i> (2015)	X			POS					1
Pattie <i>et al.</i> (2009)		X		Host supervisor LMX; home supervisor LMX					1
Bhatti <i>et al.</i> (2013)		X		Direct and indirect support					2
Bozionelos (2009)				Protégé experience; peer support					3
Bruning <i>et al.</i> (2012)		X		HCN colleague; HCN network size; HCN network frequency; HCN network density; HCN network closeness				1	1
Cao <i>et al.</i> (2014)		X		POS; career network size with HCNs; career network size with home country nationals				1	1
Chen <i>et al.</i> (2010)				Subsidiary support					1
Chen (2010)		X		Perceived organizational supports; LMX					1
Chen <i>et al.</i> (2011)				Group support; workmate support; support from motherland					1
Claus <i>et al.</i> (2015)		X		Support network size; virtual contact; frequency of contact					4
De Paul Chism (2014) ^a		X		Host POS; home POS					2
Florkowski and Fogel (1999)		X		Realistic assignment preview; relative standard of living; home country mentor; repatriation policy					1
Guzzo <i>et al.</i> (1994)		X		Financial inducements; general support; family-oriented support; financial sufficiency; general support sufficiency; family sufficiency; POS work; POS off-the-job; POS repatriation					2
Harrison and Shaffer (2005)				Leader-team exchange					1
Jayasekara and Takahashi (2014)	X			HRMPs (preparation; recruitment; selection; training; performance evaluation; compensation)					2
Johnson <i>et al.</i> (2003)		X		Number of expatriate contacts; number of HCN contacts; breadth expatriates (×3); depth expatriates (×3); breadth HCN (×3)					2
Kawai and Mohr (2015)		X		POS; PSS					3
Kawai and Strange (2014)		X		Career POS; finance POS; adjustment POS				1	1
Kraimer and Wayne (2004)		X		LMX; adjustment POS; career POS; financial POS; global POS					1
Kraimer <i>et al.</i> (2001)		X		Parent company POS; foreign facility POS; LMX					2
Lee and Kartika (2014)		X		Organizational support					3
									2
									1

(continued)

Authors (year)	Theoretical paradigms			Support constructs	Success constructs	Success constructs							
	Stress	SC	RE			S	C	R	A	P			
Littrell (2007) ^a	X			Psychosocial peer support (home/host); career peer support (home/host); mentoring peer support (home/host); number of home country mentors (x2); number of HC mentors (x2); total number of mentors					5	2	1		
Liu and Ipe (2010)			X	Parent company POS; local subsidiary POS; LMX									
Malek <i>et al.</i> (2015)		X		POS								1	
Pattie (2007) ^a				PSS; LMX								1	
Pattie <i>et al.</i> (2013)			X	LMX								1	
Puck <i>et al.</i> (2008)		X		Support; rewards					1	1	1		
Shaffer <i>et al.</i> (2001)			X	POS								1	
Shen and Jiang (2015)				POS									1
Shih <i>et al.</i> (2010)				HIWS (HR flow; work structuring; reward systems; employee influence)					1				1
Showail <i>et al.</i> (2013)				POS									1
Stroppa and Spieß (2011)				Co-worker social support; supervisor social support					1				1
Supangco and Mayrhofer (2014)	X	X		POS; supervisory support					1				1
Takeuchi <i>et al.</i> (2009)		X		Current assignment POS; off-the-job life POS						1		2	1
van der Heijden <i>et al.</i> (2009)			X	Career POS (parent)							1		2
Wang and Takeuchi (2007)		X		POS							1	3	1
Wu and Ang (2011)			X	Company support								1	3
Yahya <i>et al.</i> (2012)			X	POS									2
Count (39)	10	10	17							3			
%	26	26	44							8	9	16	22
										21	23	41	56
												59	

Notes: SC, social capital; RE, relational exchange; S, satisfaction; C, commitment; R, retention; A, adjustment; P, performance; X, applicable; blank, not applicable; number, number of dependent variables. ^aDoctoral dissertation

in particular may not be clear and may thus cause stress (Kahn *et al.*, 1964; Katz and Kahn, 1978). Additional uncertainty may arise because of changes in non-work roles due to the overseas transition (Minuchin, 1974), and the resulting strain may have implications for an expatriate's work environment as well (Lazarova *et al.*, 2010). In summary, the general notion of theories in the stress paradigm is that an IA causes stress and adjustment issues due to uncertainty, which can be minimized by providing expatriates with resources through social support (Ashford and Taylor, 1990; Gudykunst and Nishida, 2001).

Second, ten articles (26 per cent; Table III) use social capital, social networks and social learning theories to demonstrate how an expatriate's professional network can stimulate IA success. According to social capital theory, an expatriate's social network holds certain resources that can be accessed by the expatriate (Lin, 1999). This means that expatriates can call on their social ties for assistance, including financial or material benefits, emotional support, task assistance, information, visibility, legitimacy and/or sponsorship in a social system (Seibert *et al.*, 2001). By mobilizing this social capital, expatriates make sense of, behave appropriately and perform effectively in their work environment. This relates to social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), which posits that expatriates learn how to behave in their new cultural and work environment by observing and interacting with their social ties. In this sense, expatriates gain information about their expected role and work behaviours and about the cultural norms and social conventions of the host country through interactions with their colleagues (Aycan, 1997; Black *et al.*, 1991; Caligiuri, 2000). Altogether, this "social capital" paradigm proposes that expatriates draw resources from their professional social networks, which allows them to behave effectively in their overseas environment.

Third, 17 studies (44 per cent; Table III) refer to theories based on relational exchange and psychological contracting. In general, social support can be viewed as a resource that is shared with the expectation of reciprocity (Cohen and Syme, 1985) and, therefore, exchange theories argue that interactions between two parties create a pattern of mutual obligation (Blau, 1964; Gouldner, 1960). For example, expatriates form an exchange relationship with their employing organization(s). Organizational support theory therefore posits that, based on the policies and practices in place in an organization, an expatriate may infer to what extent the organization(s) support(s) his/her well-being. The more supported the expatriate perceives him-/herself to be, the more s/he will reciprocate that support regarding the good of the organization and its members (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). This process closely links to theory on psychological contracts, which involves the expectations of employees and organizations regarding their mutual obligations to each other (Rousseau, 1995). However, expatriates also perceive such an exchange relationship with their leaders (i.e. their supervisors). An expatriate with a high-quality leader-member exchange relationship will build mutual respect and loyalty over time through the reciprocal exchange of supportive resources with his/her supervisor(s) (Liden and Maslyn, 1998). The care and assistance these expatriates perceive themselves as receiving from their supervisors may, by itself, increase their ability to be successful. However, expatriates may return the favour to their supervisors by showing higher levels of affection and effort. In conclusion, this "relational" paradigm proposes that expatriates receive support from their work environment and feel obliged to reciprocate with effort and psychological bonding.

In sum, the 39 studies in this review have used stress, social capital and relational paradigms to explain how social support may relate to IA success. The remainder of

this review first examines the support expatriates perceive themselves to receive from their organization(s), before turning to the assistance expatriates receive from three hierarchical groups of organizational members (i.e. supervisors, mentors and co-workers). Each separate section elaborates on the relationship between social support from one source and the five success criteria. Moreover, each section presents source-specific moderating factors and an intermediate conclusion. The overall conclusions and implications for future research and practice are presented in the final discussion section.

Organizational support

Following the domestic literature (e.g. Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002), organizational support encompasses all those practices and policies that are perceived by expatriates as conveying that the organization(s) values their contributions, cares about their well-being, considers their goals and values, treats them fairly, listens to their problems and helps to solve them. Prior studies have identified up to 43 such practices that organizations can implement to facilitate IAs and to stimulate the social support expatriates perceive to be coming from the organization (Guzzo *et al.*, 1994).

In all, 26 studies in the current review have investigated perceived organizational support (POS) using different measures. In total, 17 studies examined expatriates' perceptions regarding the general supportiveness of organizations (e.g. Shaffer *et al.*, 2001). Alternatively, four studies examined POS in terms of the specific practices implemented by organizations (Florkowski and Fogel, 1999; Jayasekara and Takahashi, 2014; Shih *et al.*, 2010; Wu and Ang, 2011), whereas another four examined specific types or bundles of practices (Kawai and Strange, 2014; Kraimer and Wayne, 2004; Puck *et al.*, 2008; van der Heijden *et al.*, 2009). Guzzo *et al.* (1994) investigated both general POS as well as specific practices and found that the effect of practices on IA success is indirect through expatriates' general POS.

Organizational support and success

The 26 studies demonstrated that POS is highly important for the success of IAs. In particular, the positive effect of POS on the more proximal success criteria is apparent. POS consistently has a positive effect on the job satisfaction and organizational commitment of expatriates (Cao *et al.*, 2014; Guzzo *et al.*, 1994; Jayasekara and Takahashi, 2014; Kawai and Strange, 2014; Kraimer and Wayne, 2004; Liu and Ipe, 2010; Puck *et al.*, 2008; Shaffer *et al.*, 2001; Takeuchi *et al.*, 2009; Shih *et al.*, 2010; Supangco and Mayrhofer, 2014; Yahya *et al.*, 2012). Similarly, positive effects on expatriates' adjustment were found in the majority of studies (Bhatti *et al.*, 2013; Kawai and Mohr, 2015; Kawai and Strange, 2014; Kraimer and Wayne, 2004; Kraimer *et al.*, 2001; Malek *et al.*, 2015; Takeuchi *et al.*, 2009; Wu and Ang, 2011; Wang and Takeuchi, 2007). Only three studies found insignificant effects of POS on adjustment. While Chen *et al.* (2010) likely found no effect due to their aggregated measure with low power, an effect of POS in Chen (2010) and Supangco and Mayrhofer (2014) may have been absent due to the support from alternative sources that was included in their models.

POS consistently has a positive effect on the more distal success criteria, but the observed relationships are frequently indirect. Regarding the completion of assignments and the retention of expatriates, 11 studies demonstrated a positive effect of POS. However, combined, their results suggest that this effect is not only direct but also partially indirect through the adjustment, satisfaction and commitment of the

expatriate (Cao *et al.*, 2014; De Paul Chism, 2014; Florkowski and Fogel, 1999; Guzzo *et al.*, 1994; Jayasekara and Takahashi, 2014; Kraimer and Wayne, 2004; Puck *et al.*, 2008; Shaffer *et al.*, 2001; van der Heijden *et al.*, 2009; Wang and Takeuchi, 2007; Wu and Ang, 2011). The results of the 15 studies that investigated POS in relation to expatriates' performance are less straightforward. Four suggest a direct positive link (Malek *et al.*, 2015; Shen and Jiang, 2015; Shih *et al.*, 2010; Wu and Ang, 2011), five found no effect of POS at all (Bader *et al.*, 2015; Chen *et al.*, 2010; Kawai and Mohr, 2015; Showail *et al.*, 2013; Wang and Takeuchi, 2007) and, finally, five studies found that the effect of POS on expatriate performance is mediated by expatriates' satisfaction, commitment and adjustment (Bhatti *et al.*, 2013; Bader and Berg, 2013; Kawai and Strange, 2014; Kraimer *et al.*, 2001; Kraimer and Wayne, 2004). Only one of the studies that investigated the direct effect also tested for indirect effects and found partial mediation (Malek *et al.*, 2015). It is likely that the larger part of the effect of POS on expatriate performance occurs indirectly through the more proximal success criteria.

Moderating factors

This review found three main factors that can moderate the impact of organizational support on the various criteria of IA success. The first relates to the type or content of the support provided, the second to the geographical proximity of the organizational entity providing the support, and the third to the context in which the support is provided.

First, there are many practices that organizations can implement to assist their expatriates (see Guzzo *et al.*, 1994), and expatriates may therefore feel more or less supported in different aspects of the expatriation process. While earlier scholars investigated the effects of individual practices, contemporary research more frequently examines how expatriates' feel supported in these different aspects, including their career, their adjustment and their finances. Career POS is defined as "the extent to which the organization cares about the employee's career needs" (Kraimer and Wayne, 2004, p. 218) and has been shown to relate directly to expatriates' commitment, their adjustment and their intentions to complete the assignment (Kawai and Strange, 2014; Kraimer and Wayne, 2004; van der Heijden *et al.*, 2009). However, the positive effect of career POS on performance seems to be indirect (Kawai and Strange, 2014; van der Heijden *et al.*, 2009). Adjustment POS refers to the extent to which the organization cares about the adjustment of the expatriate (and his/her family) following the overseas transfer (Kraimer and Wayne, 2004). Adjustment POS relates positively to expatriate adjustment, but may actually have a negative effect on the performance of expatriates (Kraimer and Wayne, 2004). Finally, financial POS is defined as "the extent to which the organization cares about the employee's financial needs and rewards the employee's contributions in terms of compensation and employment benefits" (Kraimer and Wayne, 2004, p. 218). Apart from enhancing expatriates' satisfaction and commitment, financial POS has a direct positive effect on expatriates' retention and performance (Jayasekara and Takahashi, 2014; Kraimer and Wayne, 2004; Puck *et al.*, 2008). In sum, the type of support provided to expatriates may influence whether or not certain success criteria are influenced (directly). Most strikingly, financial support stimulates expatriates' performance directly whereas career assistance may only have an indirect effect, and adjustment POS may even have negative consequences for expatriates' performance.

Similar conclusions may be drawn based on an early study that examines the effects of a realistic assignment preview, financial support, home country mentoring and a

clear repatriation policy. Florkowski and Fogel (1999) found that financial support particularly stimulated commitment and expatriates' intentions to remain on the assignment. Furthermore, a clear repatriation policy was beneficial for expatriates' commitment to the parent organization but decreased their commitment to the subsidiary. Home country mentoring and realistic previews had no effects on expatriates' adjustment, commitment or leave intentions. Again, these findings highlight that the impact of organizational support depends on the type or content of the support and the criteria of IA success under investigation.

As a second moderating factor, multiple organizational units share the responsibility to provide support during IAs. At least two organizational units are involved in the expatriation process: a sending parent organization and a receiving host subsidiary organization. While scholars acknowledge that expatriates are in a dual employment relationship, involving psychological contracts with both the parent and the subsidiary organization, this has not frequently been accounted for in empirical investigations of organizational support. Only three out of 26 studies in this review have examined whether it matters which of the organizational units is considered the provider of support. These studies demonstrate that support by each unit has distinct value for the commitment (Liu and Ipe, 2010) and adjustment of expatriates (Kraimer *et al.*, 2001) but that expatriate retention is only stimulated by support from the parent organization (De Paul Chism, 2014). This raises questions regarding the referent organization(s) in the other 23 studies as well as regarding the relationship between parent and subsidiary POS and the other success criteria.

The third moderating factor involves the context in which the support is provided. Organizational support may be more or less valuable depending on the assignment context and the expatriate him-/herself. Regarding assignment contexts, on the one hand, the value of social support seems to increase with the level of hardship. For example, the effect of POS on expatriate performance was stronger under conditions of high stress (Bader *et al.*, 2015), high demands (Kawai and Mohr, 2015) and local prejudice (Shen and Jiang, 2015). On the other hand, the value of social support may be affected by the availability of supportive resources in general. For example, synergetic (Liu and Ipe, 2010; Takeuchi *et al.*, 2009), complementary (Kraimer and Wayne, 2004; Kraimer *et al.*, 2001; Supangco and Mayrhofer, 2014) and substitution (Chen, 2010; Shen and Jiang, 2015; Supangco and Mayrhofer, 2014) effects have been found between different forms of social support from different sources. Regarding individual differences, the value of support may vary from one expatriate to the other. For instance, POS only stimulated performance among expatriates who identified with their organization (Showail *et al.*, 2013).

Conclusion

In conclusion, POS typically has a positive impact on the success of IAs. It has a direct positive influence on more proximate success criteria, such as expatriate satisfaction, commitment and adjustment. The effect of POS on the retention of expatriates and the completion of assignments is also positive, but may be partially indirect. Regarding the performance of expatriates, the impact of POS is typically indirect, although direct effects were found if the assistance involved financial support or was provided under certain circumstances. Finally, the assistance provided by parent and subsidiary organizations can have unique, differential and/or synergetic effects. Further implications for POS in research and practice are presented in the discussion section.

Support by organizational members

Separately from the organization, organizational members can function as a source of social support for expatriates. These organizational members may differ in terms of their proximity to the expatriate with regard to organizational hierarchy, geographical proximity, situational context and cultural similarity. Following theories on social penetration and social attraction (Altman and Taylor, 1973; Byrne, 1971; Gudykunst and Nishida, 2001; Ibarra, 1992), this (perceived) proximity can influence the social support these organizational members are willing and able to provide to expatriates.

First, the hierarchical distance of the source may influence the value of its social support due to perceived discretion and the content of the support. On the one hand, the extent to which social support is perceived as voluntary or discretionary has been shown to increase its value (Eisenberger *et al.*, 2001). While supervisors provide assistance on a daily basis, this can be viewed as part of their job. Expatriates may experience support from their peers less frequently but on a more voluntary basis (Ng and Sorensen, 2008). Although social support from subordinates can be as voluntary as that of peers, it may be harder to accept or may even be perceived as brown-nosing. Social support by mentors seems to be more of a hybrid, as it can be more or less formally arranged and hierarchical (e.g. from seniors, supervisors or peers). On the other hand, the type of social support provided may be influenced by the hierarchical level of the source. For instance, while each individual can provide all types of social support, some hierarchical roles (e.g. supervisor) provide better opportunities to offer certain types of support (e.g. appraisal). In sum, the hierarchical proximity of the source may thus influence the type of support provided as well as its formality.

Furthermore, organizational members in multinational organizations can differ in terms of their geographical locations, employment status and/or cultural backgrounds. The geographical distance between two organizational members influences how frequently they interact or whether contact is face-to-face or virtual (Altman and Taylor, 1973; Claus *et al.*, 2015). Moreover, an IA is quite an experience and organizational members who have not had such experiences or are currently not on an assignment themselves may struggle to provide suitable assistance to expatriates (Johnson *et al.*, 2003). Finally, differences in cultural norms and values may cause a (perceived) distance between individuals. A vast amount of research demonstrates that cultural factors can lead to ambiguity in communication, can inhibit relational bonding and can have implications for the provision of social support (Aycan *et al.*, 2000; Feldman and Bolino, 1999; Gudykunst and Nishida, 2001; House *et al.*, 2004; Peltokorpi, 2007; Sias *et al.*, 2008).

The following sections discuss how social support by specific organizational members has been found to affect the success of IAs. As the majority of reviewed studies investigate the support provided by a specific hierarchical group of organizational members, this section discusses the results according to the same division of members. For three groups – supervisors, mentors and co-workers – the influence of their support on the success criteria is discussed. Moreover, each section includes an overview of the moderating factors, such as the other proximity dimensions, that may have influenced the results. While each section concludes with a brief summary, the overall implications are presented in the general discussion.

Supervisor support

Social support by supervisors and its impact on the success of IAs is examined by nine studies in the current review. The majority of these studies used the construct of leader-

member exchange to measure the perceived supervisor support (PSS) by the expatriate (alternatives in Kawai and Mohr, 2015; Pattie, 2007; Stroppa and Spieß, 2011; Supangco and Mayrhofer, 2014).

Supervisor support and success

Support from supervisors consistently has positive effects on the satisfaction, commitment and retention of expatriates. Four studies demonstrate how PSS contributes to the job satisfaction of expatriates (Benson and Pattie, 2009; Kawai and Mohr, 2015; Stroppa and Spieß, 2011; Supangco and Mayrhofer, 2014), whereas one study demonstrates how PSS fosters expatriates' commitment (Liu and Ipe, 2010). Furthermore, because a positive impact of PSS on expatriate retention was found in two large studies (Pattie, 2007; Benson and Pattie, 2009), a smaller study attributes its insignificant effect to study artefacts (Pattie *et al.*, 2013).

Results are more ambiguous regarding the criteria of adjustment and performance. While two studies demonstrate how supervisors may assist expatriates in their adjustment process (Chen, 2010; Kawai and Mohr, 2015), no such adjustment effects were found in two other samples (Kraimer and Wayne, 2004; Kraimer *et al.*, 2001; Supangco and Mayrhofer, 2014). Similarly, supervisor support has been found to improve expatriates' performance in four studies (Kraimer and Wayne, 2004; Kraimer *et al.*, 2001; Pattie, 2007; Benson and Pattie, 2009), whereas three other studies found insignificant effects (Kawai and Mohr, 2015; Pattie *et al.*, 2013; Stroppa and Spieß, 2011).

Moderating factors

A review of studies suggests that their mixed findings may have been caused by at least three moderating factors. The first factor relates to the possibility that expatriates have multiple supervisors/managers. Second, the context in which the support is provided may be influential. Finally, results suggest interpersonal affectivity may play a role.

As a first moderating factor, expatriates may have multiple supervisors at different geographical locations, and these have been shown to play different supportive roles. Benson and Pattie (2009) demonstrate how assistance by local, subsidiary supervisors was essential for the adjustment and retention of expatriates. In contrast, support from supervisors in the home country primarily influenced expatriates' performance and career success. Despite these findings, limited academic attention has been paid to these differing supportive roles that supervisors fulfil. This is highlighted by two studies in the current review that leave the location of the supervisor in question completely unmentioned (Chen, 2010; Stroppa and Spieß, 2011). On a related note, no study in the current review examined whether supporting supervisors were themselves expatriates or HCNs or whether cultural differences played a role.

The context in which supervisory support is provided forms a second factor, as it seems to influence the value of this support. Studies demonstrate that PSS becomes more important when the overseas role is novel or ambiguous (Kawai and Mohr, 2015). Furthermore, the effect of PSS is stronger when it is combined with support from the (parent) organization (Liu and Ipe, 2010). Additionally, five studies demonstrate that supervisors may provide unique or substitutable resources compared to other sources of social support (Pattie *et al.*, 2013; Kraimer and Wayne, 2004; Kraimer *et al.*, 2001; Stroppa and Spieß, 2011; Supangco and Mayrhofer, 2014). Although it is difficult to draw a simple conclusion, these findings suggest that the effect of PSS on IA success relies, at least partly, on the context in terms of the overseas role and the other available resources.

The final, third moderating factor involves the measurement of constructs. Although scholars typically expect common method variance to inflate effect sizes (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003), the opposite occurred in the current review of PSS and expatriate performance. All studies that examined expatriates' self-rated performance found insignificant effects of PSS (Kawai and Mohr, 2015; Stroppa and Spieß, 2011), whereas those that used supervisor evaluations of performance found mostly positive effects (Benson and Pattie, 2013; Kraimer and Wayne, 2004; Kraimer *et al.*, 2001; Pattie, 2007; Pattie *et al.*, 2013). One explanation for this phenomenon is that expatriates might not be able to assess their own performance very well. However, this seems questionable, as the issue did not arise when examining the impact of POS on expatriate performance. Hence, the concept of interpersonal affectivity may offer a more likely explanation (see Lefkowitz, 2000). It suggests that expatriates who have a high-quality relationship with their supervisor will generally be more positively evaluated by that supervisor without actually performing well. This would imply that the relationship identified between supervisor support and expatriate performance may have been a design artefact.

Conclusion

In summary, PSS is typically associated with the success of IAs. Studies consistently demonstrate that supervisor support improves the satisfaction of expatriates, whereas they suggest a small positive influence on expatriate commitment and retention. Regarding expatriates' adjustment, studies demonstrate either positive or non-existent effects of PSS. The evidence of an effect of PSS on expatriates' performance is meagre. As our review shows, the supervisor support-success relationship is contingent on moderating factors such as the proximity of the supervisor, design artefacts related to the measurement of constructs, and the available or needed resources in the IA context.

Mentoring support

Four studies in the current review examine the influence of social support by mentors on the success of IAs. Each of these studies measured mentoring support in a different way. Bozionelos (2009) asks expatriates for the number of mentors they have had, Florkowski and Fogel (1999) survey whether expatriates have a mentor looking out for their interests, Littrell (2007) examines both the number of mentors and the support they provide and Lee and Kartika (2014) specifically investigate expatriates' own mentoring behaviours.

Mentoring support and success

The few studies in the current review that investigated mentoring support show mixed results. For example, while Bozionelos (2009) shows that mentoring improved the satisfaction and retention of expatriate hospital personnel, such effects were not found in a different sample (Florkowski and Fogel, 1999). Furthermore, mentoring did not influence expatriates' commitment or their adjustment (Florkowski and Fogel, 1999). In contrast, Littrell (2007) found that mentorship could improve the satisfaction, commitment, adjustment and retention of expatriates, but this only applied to minor aspects of the mentoring process, whereas the overall relationship was weak at best. Finally, Lee and Kartika's (2014) results suggest that expatriates who take on mentoring roles themselves adjust better to their host environment and may therefore perform better.

Moderating factors

The reviewed studies put forward one factor that may have affected the results, namely, the geographical proximity of the mentor and the consequences this holds for the support provided. Following Littrell (2007), it is likely that the formal assignment of a mentor does not aid expatriates, but rather the expatriate is aided by the (perceived) mentoring activities and the enhanced organizational visibility. These latter two are affected by the geographical proximity of the mentor. Littrell (2007) compared mentors in the home and host countries and found that they fulfil similar as well as different supportive roles. They provide their expatriate protégés with equal amounts of career and psychosocial assistance, whereas mentors in the host country were especially capable of providing emotional support. Due to these different roles, home and host country mentorship had distinct effects on the examined success criteria. Most strikingly, both home and host mentoring could improve the satisfaction and retention of expatriates, whereas only a host mentor stimulated expatriates' adjustment and IA completion rates (Littrell, 2007). Unfortunately, Littrell did not extend her studies to proximity in terms of employment status or cultural background, but her results do provide early evidence for the influence of geographic proximity on mentor programmes.

Conclusion

Limited conclusions can be drawn regarding the impact of mentorship on the success of IAs, mostly due to the mixed effects and the limited number of studies in this review. Nevertheless, no strong impact of mentoring support on the success of IAs was found in any of these studies. Early work further suggests that the impact of mentoring support relies on the types of support offered and that this is influenced by the geographical location of the mentor.

Co-worker support

Nine studies in the current review have examined the effect of perceived co-worker support on the success of IAs. However, studies often do not explicitly define the hierarchical proximity between the supporting co-worker(s) and the expatriate. While some studies investigate the support by co-workers regardless of hierarchy (e.g. Malek *et al.*, 2015), others specifically examine support by peers (e.g. Stroppa and Spieß, 2011) or by subordinates (Harrison and Shaffer, 2005). Moreover, only two included studies define how similar the co-workers were to the expatriate in terms of their geographic location, their employment situation and/or their cultural background (Claus *et al.*, 2015; Johnson *et al.*, 2003).

Co-worker support and success

The studies demonstrate mixed effects of co-worker support on IA success. Regarding expatriates' job satisfaction, one study found a positive effect of co-worker support in general (Bozionelos, 2009), whereas another study investigating peer support found no effect (Stroppa and Spieß, 2011). While no study examined co-worker support in relation to the commitment of expatriates, Bozionelos (2009) found that the retention of expatriates did not improve as a consequence of co-worker support. Additionally, several studies demonstrate how support from co-workers stimulates the adjustment of expatriates (Chen *et al.*, 2011; Harrison and Shaffer, 2005; Johnson *et al.*, 2003; Lee and Kartika, 2014), whereas other studies found no effect (Malek *et al.*, 2015) or even negative effects (Bruning *et al.*, 2012; Claus *et al.*, 2015; Johnson *et al.*, 2003).

An effect of co-worker support on expatriate performance seems absent (Stroppa and Spieß, 2011), except in studies examining specifically the assistance HCN co-workers provide to expatriates. In these latter studies, the support HCNs provide consistently stimulated expatriate performance (Bader and Berg, 2013; Bruning *et al.*, 2012; Chen *et al.*, 2011; Harrison and Shaffer, 2005).

Moderating factors

One main factor seems to consistently influence the results of the reviewed studies, namely, the proximity between the supporting co-worker and the expatriate. Additionally, one study found that the personal characteristics of expatriates may influence the value of co-worker support.

Two studies of co-worker support demonstrate that geographical proximity may influence the extent to which support by co-workers is beneficial to IA success. Claus *et al.* (2015) found that expatriates who more frequently experience virtual rather than face-to-face co-worker support report lower levels of adjustment. Although not the focus of their research, this suggests that face-to-face interactions between colleagues at the same geographical location are more valuable for adjustment purposes than virtual interactions between globally dispersed colleagues. Cao *et al.* (2014) demonstrate how expatriates' professional networks in the home and host country fulfil different supportive functions and therefore differentially affect expatriate satisfaction and retention.

These conclusions align with those of Johnson *et al.* (2003), who compared the support expatriates receive from other expatriates and from HCN colleagues. The expatriate colleagues are clearly situationally (and potentially culturally) similar to the expatriate, whereas HCN colleagues are both situationally and culturally different compared to the expatriate. Johnson *et al.* (2003) found that, although providing similar levels of social support, assistance from expatriate co-workers and from HCN co-workers differs in terms of content. Therefore, support from each group has a distinct impact on the adjustment process.

Finally, results by Stroppa and Spieß (2011) suggest that co-worker support may be more valuable to certain expatriates. They found that co-worker support only improved performance among expatriates who demonstrated high levels of personal initiative. They suggest that such expatriates accept adjustment challenges, recognize their personal mistakes and actively seek out feedback in their social interactions. This allows expatriates with high levels of personal initiative to gain more from the social support they receive.

Conclusion

The impact of co-worker support in general seems rather mixed, potentially due to the wide variety of co-workers one may have in a multinational organization. It seems that more focussed research attention is needed: scholars should differentiate between support from co-worker groups that are similar in terms of their position in the hierarchy, their geographical location, their employment circumstances and/or their cultural background. Subsequently, the relationship between co-worker support and IA success may become more apparent. This is illustrated by the consistent results regarding the positive effect of HCN support on expatriate performance (e.g. Bader and Berg, 2013) or by the unique contributions of support from HCNs and from expatriates to the adjustment process (Johnson *et al.*, 2003).

Discussion

This paper systematically reviewed literature concerning the factors that moderate the relationship between organization-based social support and the success of IAs. Three theoretical paradigms – based on stress, social capital and relational exchange – were employed by the 39 included articles. Moreover, three main moderating factors were found. First, the articles demonstrate that social support is a highly complex construct in the expatriate management literature, as its source can differ in terms of its hierarchical, geographical, situational and/or cultural proximity to the expatriate. The proximity of the source may affect the value of its support. Hierarchical proximity is most frequently specified, and studies demonstrate that organizational support is most essential, closely followed by supervisor support, which stimulates success in most cases. No clear effects were found regarding mentoring, and co-workers seem too broad a category in which to find consistent effects. Studies furthermore show that, based on the geographical proximity of the source, social support may stimulate different processes. Social support sources in the home country were consistently found to fulfil different supportive functions than their counterparts in the host country. Regarding situational and cultural proximity, future research needs to examine how they influence the value of support. This may be especially helpful in untangling the mixed results regarding co-worker support. Second, in line with common belief, the impact of social support was more consistently positive for proximal success criteria such as satisfaction, commitment and adjustment, which were shown to frequently mediate the effects on the more distal criteria of retention and performance. However, certain configurations of support, such as that of HCN co-workers, contradict this general assumption, underlining the need for future research to specify the proximity dimensions. Third, this review suggests that support is more effective depending on the characteristics of the expatriate and the assignment, examples being the expatriate's cross-cultural motivation or the level of hardship.

From a theoretical perspective, this review identified three main paradigms that complement each other, especially in light of House's (1981) taxonomy of support. First, stress management theories posit that social support is necessary to facilitate international transitions by reducing the uncertainty expatriates experience. Therefore, the stress paradigm applies especially to the informational and appraisal support expatriates receive, as both reduce uncertainty by clarifying what is (to be) expected. Second, theories in the social capital paradigm view resources as means by which expatriates may achieve their goals in the new cultural and work environment. Although various types of resources may fit this perspective, the general notion of the social capital paradigm is that resources are instrumental. Finally, social exchange theories argue that only social interactions that are considered fair and discretionary would make expatriates feel a psychological obligation to reciprocate. In this sense, support needs to include emotional elements in order to fit the reciprocal process of this relational paradigm. In sum, the theoretical paradigms seem complementary, as they refer to different types of support and different processes. Future research could test to what extent sources provide specific types of support and how these stimulate the processes leading to IA success.

From a more operational perspective, the large variety of social support sources in the 39 studies shows that the construct is highly multidimensional during the process of expatriation. Assistance in the work context can be provided by multiple organizational units (i.e. headquarters, subsidiary or sending organization) as well as by their members, who may be more or less proximal to the expatriate on multiple dimensions. This review

demonstrates that, at least, the hierarchical and geographical proximity of a support source influence the relationship between its support and the success of IAs. However, too many studies ignore this influence and do not specify the relevant information. Regarding situational and cultural proximity, workplace interactions between individuals with different cultural backgrounds, with different past experiences and on different employment terms occur on a daily basis as expatriation, in all its variants, steadily increases (Baruch *et al.*, 2016). Although literature suggests that such differences influence the value of social interactions (e.g. Peltokorpi, 2007; Sias *et al.*, 2008) and early studies demonstrate some effects (e.g. Johnson *et al.*, 2003), the expatriate management literature has not sufficiently investigated the implications yet. Scholars should more consistently report how proximal the social support source under investigation is to the expatriate.

This review suggests that the organization is the most crucial source of support in expatriates' work environments. Due to the breadth of supportive practices (see Guzzo *et al.*, 1994), POS was found to consistently stimulate all success criteria. Moreover, results suggest that organizational support yields unique resources for expatriates, as it accounted for significant variance in success after controlling for support from other sources (e.g. Malek *et al.*, 2015; Cao *et al.*, 2014; Liu and Ipe, 2010; Kraimer and Wayne, 2004; Kraimer *et al.*, 2001). This may not come as a surprise, as POS entails unique financial resources, such as tax equalization and allowances, or instrumental and informational support, such as pre-departure preparation. Future studies can investigate to what extent these practices, or POS and its dimensions (financial, adjustment and career POS), fulfil expatriates' needs in terms of House's (1981) support types. Moreover, future studies could examine what elements of organizational support can be substituted with support from other sources.

As a second point regarding POS, this review demonstrates that scholars should take into account that multiple organizational entities are perceived to share responsibility for certain types of support (cf. Aycan, 1997). Expatriates form distinct perceptions regarding the supportiveness of, at least, the parent organization and the subsidiary, and these separate perceptions account for unique variance in IA success (Kraimer and Wayne, 2004; Kraimer *et al.*, 2001; Liu and Ipe, 2010). HRM system theory (Bowen and Ostroff, 2004) could be used to argue that the impact of POS will be larger if expatriates feel supported by both organizations. If both organizations send a consistently supportive message, the strength of this message will be enhanced, causing expatriates to reciprocate with increased affection and effort. Future research could examine to what extent parent and subsidiary organizations can create a strong supportive climate in order to synergistically enhance success rates. Similar moderation effects have been demonstrated between work and non-work domains (Takeuchi *et al.*, 2009) and could also be examined for the various practices, the dimensions of POS or the types of support they influence (House, 1981).

Turning to supervisor support, this review demonstrates that PSS stimulates success as well. Particularly, the extent to which high-quality relationships with supervisors are formed has been demonstrated to enhance expatriates' performance and attachment (e.g. Kawai and Mohr, 2015; Kraimer and Wayne, 2004). Here too, results suggest supervisors in the home and host country fulfil different and potentially complementary supportive functions (e.g. Benson and Pattie, 2009). Nevertheless, additional research is needed to investigate how these two supervisors provide different resources and whether dual-supervision entails synergetic effects that provide a return on investment or whether it merely causes role ambiguity.

Relatedly, results suggest that supervisory support can work in synergy with POS as well. Liu and Ipe (2010) found that expatriate commitment was at its peak when expatriates perceived support from their supervisor as well as from their parent organization. HRM system strength theory (Bowen and Ostroff, 2004) may again explain these findings, as supervisors are often seen as agents of the organization who are responsible for the direct implementation of supportive practices (Ng and Sorensen, 2008; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). If the supportive signals of supervisors and organizations are congruent, this may enhance the supportive climate that expatriates perceive. However, a synergetic effect between only PSS and parent POS existed in Liu and Ipe's (2010) study, and not with subsidiary POS. This is peculiar, as the three support sources may be expected to contribute to the same supportive climate. Unfortunately, Liu and Ipe (2010) did not report the location of the supporting supervisor or whether it concerned expatriates' perceptions of home supervisor support in particular, which would have explained why only interactions with parent POS were found. Future studies might examine to what extent supervisors and organizations in the home and host countries contribute to the same supportive climate(s). Furthermore, as PSS and POS have unique as well as similar effects on success (see Kraimer and Wayne, 2004; Kraimer *et al.*, 2001; Liu and Ipe, 2010), future research could examine to what extent these sources provide different and similar resources.

This review did not find conclusive results regarding the support of co-workers and mentors, but this may be attributed to the situational and cultural proximity of these sources. For example, it has been argued that HCN co-workers provide unique informational resources that stimulate the adjustment process, whereas expatriates' relationships with comparable others, meaning expatriate co-workers, may, in particular, offer emotional resources due to their similar situational context and/or similar cultural background (Adelman, 1988; van Bakel *et al.*, 2015; Caligiuri and Lazarova, 2002). It has already been demonstrated that support from these specific co-worker groups has differential effects on the success of IAs (e.g. Johnson *et al.*, 2003). Similarly, it has been suggested that the cultural proximity of mentors and their protégés influences the content and value of their interactions (Feldman and Bolino, 1999). Future studies should examine to what extent (previous) employment status and cultural proximity affect the value of supportive interactions.

Finally, this review suggests that factors other than proximity influence the effectiveness of social support in general. First, social support was found to contribute more to IA success criteria under conditions of enhanced hardship. This includes conditions characterized by local resistance (Shen and Jiang, 2015), role ambiguity (Kawai and Mohr, 2015) or political and social instability (Bader *et al.*, 2015). Second, it seems that the effectiveness of social support may depend on the personal characteristics of expatriates, such as their cross-cultural motivation (Chen *et al.*, 2010), the extent to which they identify with the organization (Showail *et al.*, 2013) or their personal initiative (Stroppa and Spieß, 2011). Third, as stated above, some sources of social support have synergetic effects (Takeuchi *et al.*, 2009; Liu and Ipe, 2010) whereas others seem to complement or even substitute for each other (Cao *et al.*, 2014; De Paul Chism, 2014; Kraimer and Wayne, 2004; Shen and Jiang, 2015; Stroppa and Spieß, 2011). Future research should examine more broadly which factors moderate the effectiveness of social support and how they do so. Best practices might exist in terms of types and forms of support that always produce effects and that should consequently be provided on each assignment. Other supportive interventions might only provide a return on investment under certain circumstances or may require a certain mindset of the expatriate.

Such moderating factors may be especially relevant because there is no longer only one type of expatriation, given the rise of non-traditional assignments and the changing profile of expatriate managers (Baruch *et al.*, 2016; Brookfield, 2015).

This review is subject to three main limitations. First, in its search for relevant documents this review focussed on success criteria related to expatriates' effort and attachment (see Table I), which means that important studies examining expatriates' job satisfaction and adjustment may have been overlooked. However, the purpose of this review was to illustrate what moderating factors influence the effectiveness of social support, not to provide a comprehensive overview of all processes at play. We urge scholars to consider reviewing the moderating factors affecting the relationships between social support and each success criterion separately and in more detail. Moreover, future studies could include other important outcomes of IAs such as knowledge transfer, personal development, career success and well-being.

Second, in focussing on organization-based social support, this review did not consider the assistance expatriates receive from social ties outside of the workplace. Valuable social resources that members of the local community may provide to expatriates (van Bakel *et al.*, 2015) were thus overlooked, and future studies should investigate to what extent expatriates' interactions with non-work local ties stimulate success. More important, this review excluded the support expatriates receive from their families, which has been shown to have a major influence on IA success (e.g. Lazarova *et al.*, 2010). Taking into account insights from the current review, future studies could examine how geographical proximity (i.e. trailing vs non-trailing) affects the supportive resources that family members provide. Subsequently, their relative impact on IA success could be evaluated. Furthermore, scholars could extend the current framework to include success criteria from the family domain, such as spousal adjustment, work-family conflict, family well-being or even family performance.

Third, a meta-analytical approach might provide more insights regarding the influence of the moderating factors. It could demonstrate whether hierarchical, geographical, situational and cultural proximity actually introduce discriminant validity between support sources. Moreover, it could statistically test whether social support actually has a stronger impact on the more proximal criteria of IA success. Furthermore, in light of the changes in the expatriate population and the rise of new forms of assignments since the last review (see Bhaskar-Shrinivas *et al.*, 2005), a new meta-analysis could compare the effects of social support for traditional and non-traditional expatriate profiles and for different forms of assignment.

In conclusion, social support is highly multidimensional in the context of IAs and while it has positive connotations in general, its effect on the various criteria of success may not be as straightforward. The rise of the term "expatriate return on investment" indicates the necessity of a more detailed investigation. Scholars should therefore team up with multinational organizations to examine what manifestations and configurations of social support reap the most benefits. This review shows that, in order to answer this question, researchers should consider at least two dimensions of proximity of the support source: its geographical location as well as its hierarchical relation to the expatriate. Moreover, the input and interests of multiple stakeholders involved in IAs should be considered. These stakeholders include not only the organization and the expatriate but also the expatriate's family, other organizational members and members of the local community. Only by employing such a multidimensional and multistakeholder perspective can social support be truly instrumental for all involved.

References

Note: References with an asterisk (*) were included in the review.

- Adelman, M.B. (1988), "Cross-cultural adjustment: a theoretical perspective on social support", *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, Vol. 12 No. 3, pp. 183-204.
- Altman, I. and Taylor, D.A. (1973), *Social Penetration: The Development of Interpersonal Relationships*, Rinehart and Winston, New York, NY.
- Ashford, S.J. and Taylor, M.S. (1990), "Adaptation to work transitions: an integrative approach", in Ferris, G.R. and Rowland, K.M. (Eds), *Research in Personnel and Human Resource Management*, Vol. 8, JAI Press, Greenwich, pp. 1-41.
- Aycan, Z. (1997), "Expatriate adjustment as a multifaceted phenomenon: individual and organizational level predictors", *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 8 No. 4, pp. 434-456.
- Aycan, Z., Kanungo, R., Mendonca, M., Yu, K., Deller, J., Stahl, G. and Kurshid, A. (2000), "Impact of culture on human resource management practices: a 10-country comparison", *Applied Psychology*, Vol. 49 No. 1, pp. 192-221.
- *Bader, B. and Berg, N. (2013), "An empirical investigation of terrorism-induced stress on expatriate attitudes and performance", *Journal of International Management*, Vol. 19 No. 2, pp. 163-175.
- *Bader, B., Berg, N. and Holtbrügge, D. (2015), "Expatriate performance in terrorism-endangered countries: the role of family and organizational support", *International Business Review*, Vol. 24 No. 5, pp. 849-860.
- Bakker, A.B., Hakanen, J.J., Demerouti, E. and Xanthopoulou, D. (2007), "Job resources boost work engagement, particularly when job demands are high", *Journal of Educational Psychology*, Vol. 99 No. 2, pp. 274-284.
- Bandura, A. (1977), "Self-efficacy: toward a unifying theory of behavioral change", *Psychological Review*, Vol. 84 No. 2, pp. 191-215.
- Baruch, Y., Altman, Y. and Tung, R.L. (2016), "Career mobility in a global era: advances in managing expatriation and repatriation", *Academy of Management Annals*, Vol. 10 No. 1, pp. 1-49.
- *Benson, G.S. and Pattie, M. (2009), "The comparative roles of home and host supervisors in the expatriate experience", *Human Resource Management*, Vol. 48 No. 1, pp. 49-68.
- Bhaskar-Shrinivas, P., Harrison, D.A., Shaffer, M.A. and Luk, D.M. (2005), "Input-based and time-based models of international adjustment: meta-analytic evidence and theoretical extensions", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 48 No. 2, pp. 257-281.
- *Bhatti, M.A., Battour, M.M. and Ismail, A.R. (2013), "Expatriates adjustment and job performance: an examination of individual and organizational factors", *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management*, Vol. 62 No. 7, pp. 694-717.
- Black, J.S., Mendenhall, M. and Oddou, G. (1991), "Toward a comprehensive model of international adjustment: an integration of multiple theoretical perspectives", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 16 No. 2, pp. 291-317.
- Blau, P.M. (1964), *Exchange and Power in Social Life*, Transaction Publishers, London.
- Bowen, D.E. and Ostroff, C. (2004), "Understanding HRM-firm performance linkages: the role of the 'strength' of the HRM system", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 29 No. 2, pp. 203-221.
- *Bozionelos, N. (2009), "Expatriation outside the boundaries of the multinational corporation: a study with expatriate nurses in Saudi Arabia", *Human Resource Management*, Vol. 48 No. 1, pp. 111-134.

- Brookfield (2015), "Brookfield Global Relocation Services: 2015 global mobility trends survey report", available at: <http://globalmobilitytrends.brookfieldgrs.com/#?q=5> (accessed 26 November 2015).
- *Bruning, N.S., Sonpar, K. and Wang, X. (2012), "Host-country national networks and expatriate effectiveness: a mixed-methods study", *Journal of International Business Studies*, Vol. 43 No. 4, pp. 444-450.
- Byrne, D. (1971), *The Attraction Paradigm*, Academic Press, New York, NY.
- Caligiuri, P.M. (1997), "Assessing expatriate success: beyond just being there", in Saunders, P. and Aycan, Z. (Eds), *New Approaches to Employee Management*, Vol. 4, JAI Press, Greenwich, pp. 117-140.
- Caligiuri, P.M. (2000), "Selecting expatriates for personality characteristics: a moderating effect of personality on the relationship between host national contact and cross-cultural adjustment", *Management International Review*, Vol. 40 No. 1, pp. 61-80.
- Caligiuri, P. and Lazarova, M. (2002), "A model for the influence of social interaction and social support on female expatriates' cross-cultural adjustment", *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 13 No. 5, pp. 761-772.
- *Cao, L., Hirschi, A. and Deller, J. (2014), "Perceived organizational support and intention to stay in host countries among self-initiated expatriates: the role of career satisfaction and networks", *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 25 No. 14, pp. 2013-2032.
- *Chen, G., Kirkman, B.L., Kim, K., Farh, C.I. and Tangirala, S. (2010), "When does cross-cultural motivation enhance expatriate effectiveness? A multilevel investigation of the moderating roles of subsidiary support and cultural distance", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 53 No. 5, pp. 1110-1130.
- *Chen, H.F. (2010), "The relationships of organizational justice, social exchange, psychological contract, and expatriate adjustment: an example of Taiwanese business expatriates", *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 21 No. 7, pp. 1090-1107.
- *Chen, K.H., Yien, J.M., Huang, C.J. and Huang, K.P. (2011), "Social support, overseas adjustment and work performance of foreign labors in Taiwan", *African Journal of Business Management*, Vol. 5 No. 22, pp. 9231-9239.
- *Claus, L., Maletz, S., Casoinic, D. and Pierson, K. (2015), "Social capital and cultural adjustment of international assignees in NGOs: do support networks really matter?", *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 26 No. 20, pp. 2523-2542.
- Cohen, S. and Syme, S.L. (1985), *Social Support and Health*, Academic Press, New York, NY.
- *De Paul Chism, N. (2014), "Modeling effectiveness outcomes among expatriate professionals working for non-governmental organizations", doctoral dissertation, Seattle Pacific University, Seattle, WA.
- Eisenberger, R., Armeli, S., Rexwinkel, B., Lynch, P.D. and Rhoades, L. (2001), "Reciprocation of perceived organizational support", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 86 No. 1, pp. 42-51.
- Feldman, D.C. and Bolino, M.C. (1999), "The impact of on-site mentoring on expatriate socialization: a structural equation modelling approach", *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 10 No. 1, pp. 54-71.
- *Florkowski, G.W. and Fogel, D.S. (1999), "Expatriate adjustment and commitment: the role of host-unit treatment", *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 10 No. 5, pp. 783-807.
- Gouldner, A.W. (1960), "The norm of reciprocity: a preliminary statement", *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 25 No. 2, pp. 161-178.

- Gudykunst, W.B. and Nishida, T. (2001), "Anxiety, uncertainty, and perceived effectiveness of communication across relationships and cultures", *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, Vol. 25 No. 1, pp. 55-71.
- *Guzzo, R.A., Noonan, K.A. and Elron, E. (1994), "Expatriate managers and the psychological contract", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 79 No. 4, pp. 617-626.
- *Harrison, D.A. and Shaffer, M.A. (2005), "Mapping the criterion space for expatriate success: task-and relationship-based performance, effort and adaptation", *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 16 No. 8, pp. 1454-1474.
- House, J.S. (1981), *Work Stress and Social Support*, Addison-Wesley, Reading, MA.
- House, R.J., Hanges, P.J., Javidan, M., Dorfman, P.W. and Gupta, V. (2004), *Culture, Leadership, and Organizations: The GLOBE Study of 62 Societies*, Sage, London.
- Ibarra, H. (1992), "Homophily and differential returns: sex differences in network structure and access in an advertising firm", *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 37 No. 3, pp. 422-447.
- *Jayasekara, P. and Takahashi, Y. (2014), "Improving post-assignment behavioral outcomes of expatriates: a Sri Lankan perspective", *Journal of Global Mobility*, Vol. 2 No. 3, pp. 298-316.
- *Johnson, E.C., Kristof-Brown, A.L. and Klein, M.R. (2003), "Expatriate social ties: personality antecedents and consequences for adjustment", *International Journal of Selection and Assessment*, Vol. 11 No. 4, pp. 277-288.
- Kahn, R.L., Wolfe, D.M., Quinn, R.P., Snoek, J.D. and Rosenthal, R.A. (1964), *Organizational Stress: Studies in Role Conflict and Ambiguity*, Wiley, Oxford.
- Katz, D. and Kahn, R.L. (1978), *The Social Psychology of Organizations*, Wiley, New York, NY.
- *Kawai, N. and Mohr, A. (2015), "The contingent effects of role ambiguity and role novelty on expatriates' work-related outcomes", *British Journal of Management*, Vol. 26 No. 2, pp. 163-181.
- *Kawai, N. and Strange, R. (2014), "Subsidiary autonomy and performance in Japanese multinationals in Europe", *International Business Review*, Vol. 23 No. 3, pp. 504-515.
- *Kraimer, M.L. and Wayne, S.J. (2004), "An examination of perceived organizational support as a multidimensional construct in the context of an expatriate assignment", *Journal of Management*, Vol. 30 No. 2, pp. 209-237.
- *Kraimer, M.L., Wayne, S.J. and Jaworski, R.A. (2001), "Sources of support and expatriate performance: the mediating role of expatriate adjustment", *Personnel Psychology*, Vol. 54 No. 1, pp. 71-100.
- Lazarova, M., Westman, M. and Shaffer, M.A. (2010), "Elucidating the positive side of the work-family interface on international assignments: a model of expatriate work and family performance", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 35 No. 1, pp. 93-117.
- *Lee, L.Y. and Kartika, N. (2014), "The influence of individual, family, and social capital factors on expatriate adjustment and performance: the moderating effect of psychology contract and organizational support", *Expert Systems with Applications*, Vol. 41 No. 11, pp. 5483-5494.
- Lefkowitz, J. (2000), "The role of interpersonal affective regard in supervisory performance ratings: a literature review and proposed causal model", *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, Vol. 73 No. 1, pp. 67-85.
- Liden, R.C. and Maslyn, J.M. (1998), "Multidimensionality of leader-member exchange: an empirical assessment through scale development", *Journal of Management*, Vol. 24 No. 1, pp. 43-72.
- Lin, N. (1999), "Building a network theory of social capital", *Connections*, Vol. 22 No. 1, pp. 28-51.
- *Littrell, L.N. (2007), "Mentoring expatriate employees: the influence of multiple mentors on overseas experiences", doctoral dissertation, University of Central Florida, Orlando, FL, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/jspwovm> (accessed 2 November 2015).

- *Liu, Y. and Ipe, M. (2010), "The impact of organizational and leader-member support on expatriate commitment", *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 21 No. 7, pp. 1035-1048.
- *Malek, M., Budhwar, P. and Reiche, B.S. (2015), "Sources of support and expatriation: a multiple stakeholder perspective of expatriate adjustment and performance in Malaysia", *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 26 No. 2, pp. 258-276.
- Minuchin, S. (1974), *Families and Family Therapy*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Ng, T.W. and Sorensen, K.L. (2008), "Toward a further understanding of the relationships between perceptions of support and work attitudes: a meta-analysis", *Group and Organization Management*, Vol. 33 No. 3, pp. 243-269.
- *Pattie, M.W. (2007), "The effects of supervisor-subordinate goal congruence on performance and turnover intentions during expatriation", doctoral dissertation, University of Texas, Arlington, TX, available at: <http://tinyurl.com/jgkzszu> (accessed 29 October 2015).
- *Pattie, M.W., Benson, G., Casper, W. and McMahan, G.C. (2013), "Goal congruence: fitting international assignment into employee careers", *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 24 No. 13, pp. 2554-2570.
- Peltokorpi, V. (2007), "Intercultural communication patterns and tactics: nordic expatriates in Japan", *International Business Review*, Vol. 16 No. 1, pp. 68-82.
- Podsakoff, P.M., MacKenzie, S.B. and Bommer, W.H. (1996), "Meta-analysis of the relationships between Kerr and Jermier's substitutes for leadership and employee job attitudes, role perceptions, and performance", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 81 No. 4, pp. 380-399.
- Podsakoff, P.M., MacKenzie, S.B., Lee, J.Y. and Podsakoff, N.P. (2003), "Common method biases in behavioral research: a critical review of the literature and recommended remedies", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 88 No. 5, pp. 879-903.
- *Puck, J.F., Mohr, A.T. and Rygl, D. (2008), "An empirical analysis of managers' adjustment to working in multi-national project teams in the pipeline and plant construction sector", *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 19 No. 12, pp. 2252-2267.
- Rhoades, L. and Eisenberger, R. (2002), "Perceived organizational support: a review of the literature", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 87 No. 4, pp. 698-714.
- Rousseau, D. (1995), *Psychological Contracts in Organizations: Understanding Written and Unwritten Agreements*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Seibert, S.E., Kraimer, M.L. and Liden, R.C. (2001), "A social capital theory of career success", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 44 No. 2, pp. 219-237.
- *Shaffer, M.A., Harrison, D.A., Gilley, K.M. and Luk, D.M. (2001), "Struggling for balance amid turbulence on international assignments: work-family conflict, support and commitment", *Journal of Management*, Vol. 27 No. 1, pp. 99-121.
- *Shen, J. and Jiang, F. (2015), "Factors influencing Chinese female expatriates' performance in international assignments", *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 26 No. 3, pp. 299-315.
- *Shih, H.A., Chiang, Y.H. and Hsu, C.C. (2010), "High involvement work system, work-family conflict, and expatriate performance – examining Taiwanese expatriates in China", *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 21 No. 11, pp. 2013-2030.
- *Showail, S.J., McLean Parks, J. and Smith, F.L. (2013), "Foreign workers in Saudi Arabia: a field study of role ambiguity, identification, information-seeking, organizational support and performance", *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 24 No. 21, pp. 3957-3979.
- Shumaker, S.A. and Brownell, A. (1984), "Toward a theory of social support: closing conceptual gaps", *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 40 No. 1, pp. 11-36.

-
- Sias, P.M., Drzewiecka, J.A., Meares, M., Bent, R., Konomi, Y., Ortega, M. and White, C. (2008), "Intercultural friendship development", *Communication Reports*, Vol. 21 No. 1, pp. 1-13.
- *Stroppa, C. and Spieß, E. (2011), "International assignments: the role of social support and personal initiative", *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, Vol. 35 No. 2, pp. 234-245.
- *Supangco, V. and Mayrhofer, W. (2014), "Determinants of work role transition outcomes of Filipinos in Singapore", *Journal of Global Mobility*, Vol. 2 No. 3, pp. 317-342.
- *Takeuchi, R., Wang, M., Marinova, S.V. and Yao, X. (2009), "Role of domain-specific facets of perceived organizational support during expatriation and implications for performance", *Organization Science*, Vol. 20 No. 3, pp. 621-634.
- van Bakel, M., van Oudenhoven, J.P. and Gerritsen, M. (2015), "Developing a high quality intercultural relationship: expatriates and their local host", *Journal of Global Mobility*, Vol. 3 No. 1, pp. 25-45.
- *van der Heijden, J.A., van Engen, M.L. and Paauwe, J. (2009), "Expatriate career support: predicting expatriate turnover and performance", *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 20 No. 4, pp. 831-845.
- *Wang, M. and Takeuchi, R. (2007), "The role of goal orientation during expatriation: a cross-sectional and longitudinal investigation", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 92 No. 5, pp. 1437-1445.
- *Wu, P.C. and Ang, S.H. (2011), "The impact of expatriate supporting practices and cultural intelligence on cross-cultural adjustment and performance of expatriates in Singapore", *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 22 No. 13, pp. 2683-2702.
- *Yahya, K.K., Mansor, F.Z. and Warokka, A. (2012), "An empirical study on the influence of perceived organizational support on academic expatriates' organizational commitment", *Journal of Organizational Management Studies*, Vol. 2 No. 11, pp. 1-14.

Corresponding author

Paul van der Laken can be contacted at: p.a.vdrlaken@tilburguniversity.edu

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:

www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm

Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com