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GLOBAL MOBILITY AND DIGITALIZATION

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Guest editor(s): Charlotte Jonasson, Alexei Koveshnikov, Jakob Lauring

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Introduction

Over the last few years, advances in digital technologies have brought about significant changes in the structure and organization of work (Bailey, Faraj, Hinds, Leonardi, & von Krogh, 2022; Raghuram, Hill, Gibbs, & Maruping, 2019; Wang, Liu, Qian, & Parker, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic, in particular, has accelerated the digitization of the workplace, leading to a surge in remote work (Caligiuri, De Cieri, Minbaeva, Verbeke, & Zimmermann, 2020; Koveshnikov, Lehtonen, & Wechtler, 2022; Lazarova, Caligiuri, Collings, & De Cieri, 2023; Sahakiants & Dorner, 2021). This shift has been accompanied by a rapid increase in the use of technology-mediated communication and the development of new technologies (Karl, Peluchette, & Aghakhani, 2022; Mariani, Wamba, Castaldo, & Santoro, Forthcoming; Saura, Ribeiro-Soriano, & Saldaña, 2022).

In the field of global mobility, the digitalization of the workplace has had several important implications. First, it has facilitated the implementation of virtual expatriate assignments within multinational corporations (MNCs). Virtual expatriate assignments refer to situations where employees manage international responsi'

home country without physically relocating to a host destination (Selmer et al., 2022;

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assignments, thus, involve individuals who live and interact in one culture while working predominantly with people from other cultures (Bücker, Poutsma, Schouteten, & Nies, 2020). Virtual assignees use digital communication channels to connect with foreign colleagues, clients, and business partners. Assignments can be long-term, spanning over a year, and encompassing technical and leadership tasks, or short-term, focusing on temporary projects (Holtbrügge & Schillo, 2008; Wicht & Holtbrügge, 2023). It should be noted that while in-person meetings are not completely absent, most work and collaboration in virtual expatriate assignments predominantly occur in the virtual realm. However, unlike virtual teams that involve multiple geographically distant members, virtual expatriate assignments typically entail a single individual working remotely (Selmer et al., 2022; Welch et al., 2003).

Second, digitalization and the development of digital tools also have the potential to radically change traditional physical expatriations and related forms of globally mobile assignments including short-term assignees and international business travelers (cf. Shaffer, Kraimer, Chen, & Bolino, 2012). The utilization of digital and AI technologies in expatriation has emerged as a notable trend, with a particular emphasis on information and communication technology (ICT) (Nardon, Aten, & Gulanowski, 2015; Sahakiants & Dorner, 2021). Digital tools and technologies, such as the use of AI in HRM (Vrontis et al., 2022), are likely to have significant impact on several aspects of expatriation such as expatriate selection, pre-departure training, intercultural competence development, host country adjustment, and intercultural collaboration (Acikgoz, Davison, Compagnone, & Laske, 2020; Kwon & Jang, 2022). However, the actual use and impact of these technologies on global mobility remains relatively limited and little understood.

Recent reviews indicate that there is a need for a more unified understanding of the digital elements of expatriation (cf. Pan & Froese, 2022; Selmer et al., 2022; Vrontis et al., 2022). This might be relevant not only in terms of virtual assignments but also in terms of more traditional assignments. Accordingly, the current special issue aims to improve understanding of the under-investigated theme of expatriates and digitalization in global mobility research.

List of Topic Areas

We welcome submissions that delve into the broader perspective of digitalization and

expatriate management. We invite researchers to explore these areas and beyond, shedding light on the evolving role of digitalization in the context of global mobility.

Concerning virtual expatriate assignments, it is important to recognize that they offer a range of advantages as well as pose certain challenges. Benefits of this type of assignment include improved compatibility for dual-career couples, continuity in children's education, easier repatriation, and significant cost savings (Holtbrügge, Schillo, Rogers, & Friedmann, 2011). Virtual expatriates, however, also face challenges and demands that are unique to their situation. The limited face-to-face contact poses a significant barrier to understanding the culture of local colleagues and can lead to misunderstandings (Holtbrügge & Schillo, 2008). Additionally, virtual assignments offer fewer opportunities for building a common ground for collaboration (Wicht & Holtbrügge, 2023).

Virtual expatriate assignments have emerged as a burgeoning field of research and practice. However, further investigation is necessary to delve into the underlying social and technical mechanisms that enable virtual expatriate assignments to reach their full potential. Additionally, exploring the role of management in the planning and support of virtual collaboration is crucial. Another area deserving attention is the comparison of career paths and repatriation between virtually assigned expatriates and traditionally assigned expatriates. Conducting comprehensive research in these areas will contribute significantly to our understanding of virtual expatriate assignments and inform effective strategies for their implementation (Mello, Suutari, & Dickmann, 2023).

A more underexplored research direction is that of investigating the digital means of global mobility and expatriate management. While digital means, such as ICT and digital project management tools, have been explored regarding virtual work and virtual teams (Lauring, Drogendijk, & Kubovcikova, 2022; Lauring & Jonasson, 2018; Leonardi, 2021; Nordbäck & Espinosa, 2019), more research is needed to understand how this might function in situations of expatriation. For example, connected to the virtual expatriate assignment, it could be relevant to look more into how digital means such as Microsoft Teams, Yammer, or Slack affect collaboration and inclusion when only the expatriate is working remotely (cf. Lauring & Jonasson, 2023). Moreover, even in more traditional assignments, various publicly available means, e.g. translation apps and digital platforms can also fundamentally change the way jobs are performed at the destination (e.g. by decreasing the frequency and duration of travel) and the process of expatriate and

traditional expatriate assignments. Yet research is needed to confirm this as well as also explore the potential challenges of such digitally mediated management (Scholz, 2019).

Another area worth exploring could be emerging new work arrangements such as expatriate telework and digital nomads working from multiple locations. This is a situation where expatriates or their spouses work in a foreign country but rely on communication technology and a home office to perform the larger share of their work (cf. Dickson & Dickson, 2021). This mode of working is becoming popular and recently the concept of digital nomads and remote expatriate jobs has become popular among individual global mobile workers who want to work from a different country than where their employer is situated (cf. Mello et al., 2023; Mello & Tomei, 2021). However, being cut off from a social network expatriates could be more vulnerable than host country nationals (Koveshnikov et al., 2022). Here, Végh, Jenkins, and Claes (2023) see a common theme of falling between two stools where expatriates were ineligible for support in both their home country and their host country. The theme of expatriates using technology to work from home is still in its infancy and needs to be further developed.

We also invite studies that explore new AI technologies such as chatbots, avatars, and generative AI/ChatGPT. These technologies have spurred an interest in the latest HRM research (van den Broek, Sergeeva, & Huysman, 2021; Vrontis et al., 2022) and might also have transformational consequences for expatriates and expatriate management. It has, for example, been suggested that AI can reduce biased decision-making (Kwon & Jang, 2022), which can be relevant for the selection and repatriation of expatriates. Yet, the opposite has also been suggested, where algorithms might favor one type of ethnicity (Scholz, 2019) thereby negatively affecting expatriate career opportunities. New generative AI such as ChatGPT has been found to provide affordances for language teaching (Kohnke, Moorhouse, & Zou, 2023). This might therefore revolutionize expatriate language training programs and the role of shared language for subsequent adjustment (Selmer, Lauring, & Jonasson, 2013). In this vein of research, experiments have also demonstrated that avatar-based games for pre-deployment training improve American soldiers' understanding of Afghan culture (Brown et al., 2019). Such avatar-based cultural training might be included in future pre-expatriation management.

Finally, we also encourage methodological and method development papers that

on the potential development of digital tools that could assist expatriate management and/or expatriate work. In this and other themes we welcome and encourage interdisciplinary research.

Submissions Information

Submissions are made using ScholarOne Manuscripts. Registration and access are available here.

Author guidelines must be strictly followed. Please see here.

Authors should select (from the drop-down menu) the special issue title at the appropriate step in the submission process, i.e. in response to ""Please select the issue you are submitting to".

Submitted articles must not have been previously published, nor should they be under consideration for publication anywhere else, while under review for this journal.

Key Deadlines

Submissions Close: **30th April 2024**

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