Exploring international work: types and dimensions of global careers

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Contemporary global work comprises a wide and growing array of different modes of international work configurations. In this article, we offer a multidimensional framework for conceptual (theoretical and practical) underpinning of these different modes. Building on the extant literature and the Delphi approach, seven dimensions emerged: (i) time of exposure; (ii) intensity of international contact through work; (iii) breadth of interaction; (iv) legal context; (v) international work instigator; (vi) extent of cultural gap between an individual's country-of-origin and the context in which the international work takes place; and (vii) key cultural-related requirements of one's job/role. To these dimensions, we add individual and organizational contextual variables, e.g. diversity and occupational patterns, as well as career systems with a particular focus on the importance of globally orientated work. Furthermore, we list the major modes of global careers and draw a global career glossary. Both the multidimensional framework and the glossary should facilitate scholars and managers to systematize, analyse, manage and further develop their expatriation and repatriation career strategies, policies and practices.

Keywords: expatriate; global career; international career; international HRM

Introduction

We evidence a growing array of different modes of international work configurations, sometimes with overlapping terms. In the past, the literature has concentrated on 'traditional' long-term expatriation (Brewster, Sparrow and Vernon 2007), but recently alternative forms of international work have attracted more attention. Expressions such as self-initiated work experiences, global management activities, short- and long-term expatriation, international project work or distinction as to the drivers of global work (from self-initiated to organization-sponsored) are used to capture the different phenomena (Bonache, Brewster and Suutari 2001; Inkson and Myers 2003; Mayerhofer, Hartmann and Herbert 2004; Cappellen and Janssens 2005). Diverse forms of international work are being investigated (Dickmann and Baruch 2011), which facilitate the acquisition of diverse human capital (Becker 1964). Moreover, different types of global work – especially given the legality, intensity and duration of assignment – give rise to a diverse set of expectations and different psychological contracts (Guzzo, Nooman and Elron 1994). It is high time to facilitate a classification of global careers and develop a theoretical framework to that end through search for criteria that distinguish the variety of possible modes of global career work patterns that may have a bearing on the work experiences, identity construction and wider life challenges that international careerists face.

Our analysis goes beyond the dominant notion of international work having a few key forms (such as the predominant distinction into long-term and short-term expatriation

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employed by many organizations), thereby being of particular relevance to HRM practice. With 20 different types of international work, the paper explores a much broader array of possible global career variants. Moreover, by identifying seven dimensions in international work that impact on individuals and organizations, we propose a multifaceted picture that allows identification of key personal and HRM challenges. This facilitates the identification of divergent attraction, discourse, career, talent, performance, retention and expectations management for organizations operating internationally.

In addition to its practical relevance, our paper offers a theoretical contribution by exploring how the options and dimensions relate to contemporary career concepts and theories. Cross-cultural and cross-national career moves (or mobility associated with one's career) reflect a world where boundaryless careers (Arthur and Rousseau 1996) are becoming more of the norm rather than the exception. Yet there are clear gaps in the career literature about the generalizability of such theories (Arnold and Cohen 2008; Inkson, Ganesh, Roper and Gunz 2010) and in the global HRM literature the different routes global assignments assume (Baruch, Altman and Adler 2009). The need to integrate the literatures of IHRM and careers was clearly manifested by Cerdin and Le Pargneux (2009).

Our focus in this paper is on the various ways that careers become part of the globalization phenomenon. We seek to reduce the confusion and imprecision that exist in generic contemporary discussions of 'global careers'. At the same time, we acknowledge that while many (career) boundaries are breaking down, the great majority of people are unable and/or unwilling to move geographically (nationally or internationally). In this context, the real meaning of boundarylessness is not the actual extinction of older boundaries, but making these boundaries more permeable (Gunz, Evans and Jalland 2002, p. 62).

To develop our conceptual contribution, we employed a dual method. We have combined a literature review and the Delphi approach to crystallize our dimensions and identify the main types of global work. In the first stage, we conducted an extensive search of the academic and practitioner literature in English from the following databases (in alphabetical order): *Academic Search Premier*, *Business Source Premier*, *Emerald Fulltext*, *IngentaConnect*, *PsyINFO*, *Sage Journals Online*, *Science Direct*. Similar to Point and Dickmann (2012), we employed the following keywords: global/international/transnational careers; international/global/transnational work, expatriation; international delegation, international/global mobility, repatriation; migration; and brain-drain/brain-circulation for this literature search.

This literature review revealed a lack of a comprehensive framework for contextualizing the wider nature of global work and careers. It led to identifying several dimensions we considered relevant to help locate the different nodes of global careers that emerged in recent years.

At the next stage of our investigation, we deployed the Delphi method, with four scholars producing an initial set of dimensions and types of global career configurations. These were circulated to a further six scholars in the area of IHRM, asking for feedback in terms of how comprehensive and inclusive our emergent framework was. That feedback led us to the conceptual framework presented here. It includes (a) seven dimensions of global careers (and two contextual sets of variables – individual and organizational) and (b) a set of 20 types of international work, which allowed us to compile this global career glossary.

Dimensions of global careers

Surveys have shown that international careers are becoming more common and that their patterns are becoming more varied (GMAC Global Relocation Services 2008; ECA 2010).

Given the variation in patterns, what are the variables that could be useful in depicting and making sense of global careers? One such framework is proposed by Peiperl and Jonsen (2007) who posit a four-quadrant matrix with two dimensions to depict types of global people. One dimension is actual time spent away from the home culture or market, and the other one is the amount of interaction across cultures and markets.

However, there are more than two dimensions that can be used to distinguish international work patterns. Peiperl and Jonsen (2007) use a time and content dimension. We argue that a more holistic view is called for to enhance our understanding of the intricacies of global work patterns. Therefore, we propose that context should be added to time and content, forming altogether seven dimensions.

Dickmann and Baruch (2011, p. 120) distinguish a range of individual antecedents and motives as to why persons go abroad. Given that we concentrate not on the drivers of global work but on the phenomenon itself, we do not use a further self-reflexive dimension (individual drivers). Below we explore in brief the significance of the proposed dimensions.

First, the *time spent* in the host country may vary from no time at all (virtual employees) to long-term work (traditional expatriation) and stretch to long-term (temporary migration) and very long-term careers (immigration). There is a large body of adjustment and acculturation literature that studies individual reactions to a host environment and explores intellectual and emotional processes and outcomes, such as culture shock and cultural adaptation (Black, Gregersen and Mendenhall 1992; Haslberger 2008). Increasingly, organizational mechanisms with respect to managing individuals' expectations and coping approaches pre-departure, post-arrival and during a (potential) return process are investigated and recommendations outlined (Dickmann, Brewster and Sparrow 2008).

Second, the *intensity of international contacts* and the necessary ability of global careerists to 'tune into' diverse host cultures and different national business systems are posing stringent demands on individuals. Cappellen and Janssens (2005) outline diverse challenges related to whether individuals are global managers (e.g. flexpatriates) or traditional expatriates. In terms of the boundaryless career literature, this links into the discussion that global managers go beyond physical boundaries and tackle psychological boundaries (Sullivan and Baruch 2009).

Third, the *breadth of interaction* – varying from targeted work exchanges to a more holistic interaction that incorporates a variety of other non-work domains – was identified decades ago as an important dimension in the cultural adaptation of individuals that would lead to appropriate insights and behaviour (Black et al. 1992). It is also the domain of studies that analyse work – life spillover effects. For instance, there has been a long-standing claim that early returnees from international assignments do so because of family reasons (GMAC Global Relocation Services 2008). The individual and managerial implications are by now transparent and discussed in a number of reports (Harzing 1995; Doherty, Brewster, Suutari and Dickmann 2008; Baruch et al. 2009; Bonache, Brewster, Suutari and De Saá 2010).

Fourth, the *legal context* of people having the right to stay in a specific country and, additionally, being allowed to seek work legally can be discussed from a variety of perspectives. Political, economic and ethical approaches are amongst the key voices in this discourse. In terms of societal implications, the 'brain-drain', 'brain gain' or 'brain flow' debates merit attention (Dickmann and Baruch 2011). In terms of societal and business effects and the career patterns of immigrant professionals, there is an emerging literature (Baruch, Budhwar and Khatri 2007). With respect to individual effects, Richardson and

Mallon (2005) have outlined the effects of short-term security and long-term insecurity of residency on individuals. These factors have an impact on personal life and career plans, and thereby influence global careers.

Fifth is the *international work instigator*, namely, whether the persons concerned are supported by their organizations in their international sojourns or whether they themselves initiated these. We argue for three major options here: organization-sponsored, planned, initiated and managed; self-initiated within the corporation, where the impetus came from the individual but the organization is the sponsor, and the future career is anticipated to continue within the corporation (Altman and Baruch 2012); and self-initiated outside the organization, a fully individual enterprise (cf. Jokinen, Brewster and Suutari 2008). Self-initiated, non-organization-supported persons are driven by different influences and goals, bear more financial risks and seem to be more highly integrated into their local environment (Doherty, Dickmann and Mills 2011).

The sixth dimension is the *extent of cultural gap* between an individual's country-of-origin and the context in which the international work takes place. While large cultural gaps are easy to identify, they may be extremely challenging to adjust to. The level of adjustment, however, will have an impact on individual emotions, cognitive confidence and the ability to behave adequately (Haslberger 2008). Higher cultural differences – including the related issue of different languages as a facilitator for understanding – have implications for pre-departure and post-arrival preparations and adjustment (Furnham and Bochner 1986; Rodrigues 2001; Shenkar 2001).

Lastly, the seventh dimension concerns the cultural-related requirements of the *specific position* the job incumbent is expected to fulfil. This suggests a wide variety of options with distinct implications for the nature of expatriation and its salience. For example, technology-related jobs are normally less culture dependent than people-management-related roles. Jobs in strategic roles may serve as a springboard for future executive roles at home. To succeed in marketing or public relations, one needs to delve deeply into the different nuances of communication conventions and normative preferences. A legal role would require extant knowledge of comparative systems (e.g. the USA vs. Germany).

Text Box 1 depicts three different ways of international working. It outlines the cases of Edith, on a self-initiated, open-ended sojourn; Antonio, a flexpatriate; Babatunde, a traditional expatriate on a developmental assignment; and Akram, an impatriate. The four persons' international work patterns serve to illuminate the seven dimensions introduced above.

Apart from these dimensions, we wish to point out the importance of two contextual sets of variables. *Individual variables* include diversity, in particular gender and its implications on the accessibility to a global assignment (Shortland and Altman 2011). Beyond gender, family status, age, race and religion may imply different constraints and enablers for a global career. In addition, occupational patterns such as the differential dynamics of vocational choices dictate a singular logic for the position of an expatriate assignment.

The other set of variables concerns *organizational context* and career system. The issue here is mainly the role of the global assignment in one's career framework, and especially how working internationally could facilitate progress in the executive or professional ranks in a given work/sector.

In summary, we have expanded Peiperl and Jonsen's (2007) framework to include a further five contextual dimensions in addition to time and content of global work. The proposed dimensions matter because they capture key contributions to the areas of international HRM, global careers and expatriation. For instance, dimensions 1 (time), 3 (breadth of interaction) and 6 (cultural gap) relate to the adjustment literature. Thus, individual and organizational outcomes with respect to well-being, cognitive confidence and

Text Box 1. Illustrative examples of global careers.

Edith, a senior HR manager with Volkswagen, has in her early fifties embarked on her own initiative on an open-ended international assignment. Volkswagen is sponsoring her for the first year. Moving from Germany to Brazil, she is on a medium- to long-term assignment (1), has moderately intensive international contact (2), characterized by holistic (3) interactions within her local environment. Her legal status is temporary (4), and as she initiated the assignment (5), it is up to her to find the means to continue it longer term. She experiences challenging cultural gaps socially (6) and at work (7) which she welcomes.

Antonio is a top risk-manager with Global Investment Bank (fictional name) in his late forties. Classified as *globally mobile* (company terms), he is based in London, UK, but spends a fair number of his working weeks at different locations worldwide, providing expert advice and 'trouble-shooting' emerging issues. He is thus on short-term (dimension 1) but intensive (2) and targeted (narrow) interaction with locals (3). Being on short-time visits, it is likely that his work does not pose many legal complexities (4) and that his endeavours are company-initiated (5). Given his focused and brief interventions, the issue of cultural gap does not seem to be major (6); indeed, to some extent, his work can be characterized as a-cultural, and as it is of a technical nature, the cultural needs it presents are minimal (7).

Babatunde, a middle manager in his late twenties with Deloitte-Touche-Tohmats, is in the pool of young high fliers and participates in a *global development programme* (company terms) that takes him for a stint of 24 months from his native Nigeria to China. He is on a long-term assignment (1), has moderately intensive international contact (2) and a holistic interaction in his local context (3). Company-initiated, his legal paperwork has been sorted out in advance (4 and 5). He experiences considerable cultural gaps in his work as well as social and private life (6 and 7).

Akram, an IT worker from Tunisia, has been recruited to work on a project in Paris. He is impatriated for nine months in the first instance (1), has moderate exposure to the French culture (2) but holistic interaction encompassing work and non-work life (3). He works on a legal contract (4) and is organization-supported (5). The cultural gap is moderate (6) and the role requirements are similar to his old job (7).

effectiveness of behaviour are linked. Dimension 2 (number of different cultures) resonates with the boundaryless careers discourse. In turn, dimension 4 (legal) implicates individuals, organizations and society at large in terms of talent (under-)utilization and potential penalties in the case of illegal workers. Dimension 5 (instigator of international work) is related to levels of risk taking, career orientation and the discourse on protean careers. Lastly, dimension 7 (job/role requirements) appears to be hitherto under-researched despite the obvious impact on the incumbent's need for adjustment and level of communication competence. Overall, our model strives to offer a more nuanced, comprehensive and holistic view. Thereby, it presents a rich and varied matrix of global careers providing a map for both academic researchers and global HR practitioners. Our literature search showed that most writers concentrated either on one form of global work or on a few mainstream forms. In addition, research has found that companies have relatively standardized approaches to global careers, which, in turn, oversimplify matters. For instance, Doherty and Dickmann (2012) found that organizations hardly distinguish between the different purposes of international mobility (e.g. Edström and

Galbraith 1977) and their management of global careerists. In a drive to standardize rather than to tailor, decision-makers tend to choose from a small set of options they are acquainted with (Dickmann and Baruch 2011). Bearing in mind the different dimensions as well as the following set of types would open a wide range of alternatives, which HR managers can utilize when considering the issue of people management across borders. We expand this argument as we outline the management implications of each of the types.

Types of international work: drawing up a global career glossary

In this section, we list, define and explicate the different kinds of global expatriation careers we have come across in the extant (academic and practitioner) literature. In so doing, we relate the different types of international assignments to the seven dimensions of global careers. For each type, we list (a) what challenges it poses to IHRM practitioners and (b) pointers to best practice of people management under each category of work.

How many types?

The extant literature is inundated with 2×2 theoretical frameworks, where two-dimensional models offer four-quadrants typologies. However, life is more complicated and complex, and certain phenomena cannot be reduced to 2×2 models. We argue that the seven dimensions we offer cover the major aspects relating to global careers, though we do not claim these to be fully exhaustive. We cannot present a seven-dimensional model on paper, since 2 to the power of 7 is 128. Instead, we focus on 20 types, which represent the majority of global career patterns.[1] These prominent types are outlined below. Table 1 offers a succinct overview.

The table allows an overview of the 20 key types of international work explained below. In so doing, it moves substantially beyond the usual classification of short-/long-term expatriation, frequent flying, international project work, self-initiated foreign sojourns and cross-border commuting (Harris, Brewster and Sparrow 2003; Jokinen et al. 2008). Moreover, this results in manifold managerial implications, which are explicated below.

'Traditional' corporate expatriation

Babatunde is an example of a traditional corporate expatriate (Text Box 1). Expatriation is typically initiated by the employer. It comprises a period of time when an employee of the organization, usually a business firm, is posted to a subsidiary of the firm in a different country for a substantial time period. In the past, a typical expatriation period would last three to five years, but recent surveys (GMAC Global Relocation Services 2008, 2009) point out that the average duration has become shorter. Most of the expatriates are 'home' employees, but some are third-country nationals – originating from a different country to that of the 'home' or 'host'. The expatriation deal accounts for a significant element in the psychological contract between the expatriated person and his or her employer (Yan, Zhu and Hall 2002).

Historically, most cases of organizationally based expatriation were initiated and managed by the organization. The organization chose and approached individuals and offered them an international assignment. International move decisions are subjected to push/pull forces (Baruch 1995). Dickmann, Doherty, Mills and Brewster (2008) have measured a list of 28 key factors that influence the decision of individuals to work abroad and contrasted these with the corporate viewpoint. It emerged that career and development issues were highly relevant to expatriates.

Table 1. Differences in key dimensions of diverse patterns of international work.

International work pattern	Time exposure (short to very long-term foreign work)	Intensity of international contact (one to many cultures)	Breadth of interaction (predominantly work to holistic interaction)	Legal context (rights to stay/work in country)	Predominant instigator (individual or organization-supported)	Cultural gap	Job/role needs
Traditional corporate expatriation	Long term	Moderate (mostly one culture)	Holistic (work and non-work life)	Legal; fairly complex	Organization-supported	Variable	Mostly managerial, executive career move
Self-initiated and non-organization-supported expatriation	Often very long term	Moderate (mostly one culture)	Holistic (work and non-work life)	Mostly legal	Individual-initiated and sustained	Subject to the destination country	Subject to the profession of the initiator
Flexpatriates working in corporations	Short term (often working in home country)	High (many cultures)	Targeted (predominant work interaction)	Legal stay, less complex, legal work (but social security obligations?)	Organization-supported	Less relevant, as deep cultural adaptation is not expected	Can be technical/legal
Expatriation – inpatriates/impatriates	Long-term inpatriation, often shorter term impatriation	Moderate (mostly one culture)	Holistic (work and non-work life)	Legal; more complex than traditional	Organization-supported	Subject to the destination country	As per organizational needs, impatriates often have lower hierarchical roles
Secondments overseas	Short term	Moderate (mostly one culture)	Holistic (work and non-work life)	Legal; less complex	Organization-supported	Typically aimed at low gap	Variable
In-shoring	Mostly long term	Moderate (mostly one culture)	Holistic (work and non-work life)	Legal; might require national level negotiation	Organization-supported	Typically high	Mostly technical
Short-term assignments	Short-term	Moderate (mostly one culture)	Moderately holistic (work and non-work life, but often not with family)	Legal; non-complex	Organization-supported	Less relevant	Mostly technical
Globetrotting	Low to moderate (depending on globetrotting time)	High (many cultures)	Moderate to holistic (while there is work and non-work interaction, globetrotter may not be staying long in country)	Legal; non-complex	Organization-supported	Variable	Mostly professional
Ex-host country nationals	Long term	Moderate (mostly one culture)	Holistic (work and non-work life)	Legal; non-complex	Individual-initiated and sustained	Medium, following initial induction	Typically technical
Virtual global employees	Long term	Moderate to high	Very targeted and restricted to work	Legal; non-complex	No international move	No physical difference, but communication may reflect gap	Typically technical
Cross-border commuting	Long term	Moderate (mostly one culture)	Targeted (predominant work interaction) and people travel home	Legal; complexity depends on the region	Mostly individual-initiated and sustained	Very low, usually to similar culture	Typically similar type of roles
Immigration – legal/illegal/asylum	Very long term	Moderate (mostly one culture)	Holistic (work and non-work life)	Legal or illegal stay and/or work	Individual-initiated and sustained	Typically high, from 'third world' to developed	Sometime need to de-skill temporarily
Temporary immigration	Medium to long term	Moderate (mostly one culture)	Holistic (work and non-work life) if not in camp	Legal or illegal stay and/or work	Individual-initiated and sustained	Typically high, from 'third-world' to developed	Sometime need to de-skill
Government – diplomatic services	Very long term	High (many cultures)	Holistic (work and non-work life)	Legal; with existing tradition	Organization-supported	Vary	Specific, diplomatic roles

(*Continued*)

Table 1 – *continued*

International work pattern	Time exposure (short to very long-term foreign work)	Intensity of international contact (one to many cultures)	Breadth of interaction (predominantly work to holistic interaction)	Legal context (rights to stay/work in country)	Predominant instigator (individual or organization-supported)	Cultural gap	Job/role needs
Government – armed forces	Short to medium term, sometimes long-term	Low (mostly one culture but often using home country working and living patterns)	Low (limited interaction, mostly with people of own cultural background)	Legal from own government's point of view	Organization-supported	Typically high, to 'hard-destination' countries	Specific, military roles
Government – humanitarian and development organizations	Mostly long term, sometimes short to medium-term	Often high	Holistic (work and non-work life)	Legal	Organization-supported	Typically high, to 'hard-destination' countries	People-related, humanitarian
International non-governmental organizations	Long term (sometimes short-term emergency relief activities)	High, potentially very high	Extremely holistic (work and non-work life) due to local interaction mostly being part of the work	Legal	Organization-supported	Typically high, to 'hard-destination' countries	Could be political oriented
International work experiences and voluntary overseas work	Short to medium term	Moderate (mostly one culture)	Holistic (work and non-work life)	Legal or illegal stay and/or work	Individual-initiated and organizationally sustained	Typically high, chosen in purpose	Subject to availability
Students studying abroad	Medium to long term	Moderate (mostly one culture)	Holistic (work and non-work life)	Legal; typically requires visa	Individual-initiated and sustained	Typically high, chosen in purpose	Not relevant
Sabbaticals	Mostly medium term	Moderate (mostly one culture)	Holistic (work and non-work life)	Legal; non-complex	Individual-initiated and organizationally sustained	Typically close but can be specifically chosen as high	Typically similar to that in home

With respect to the criteria presented in Table 1, traditional expatriation can be seen as long term. The intensity of international contact is often centred around one dominant national culture, and the breadth of interaction with locals comprises both work and non-work life. The overwhelming majority of expatriates are likely to be staying legally in their host country. Cultural gaps and job requirements vary.

The major organizational challenges for traditional expatriation management are much discussed in the literature. They consist primarily in finding the right people who will be willing to go (Dickmann, Doherty et al. 2008), enabling them to perform at their best within a short time of acculturation and in managing the repatriation process in a way that motivation, retention and career progression remain positive. HR managers need to employ appropriate practices, depending on their strategic approach to expatriation (Baruch and Altman 2002). Individuals need to be aware of their own drivers and goals that can be realistically achieved in the organizational setting (Dickmann and Doherty 2010), including tackling issues such as dual career challenges, family and other personal commitments, work–life balance issues, career capital impacts and long-term promotion chances (Dickmann and Harris 2005; Jokinen et al. 2008).

Self-initiated foreign work

Alongside corporate expatriation, there were always cases of self-expatriation of people who decided to move and work in another country for a limited time period. Classical examples are medical staff, missionaries, humanitarian agency workers and academics (see Bozionelos 2009 for a case study of nurses; Richardson and Mallon 2005 for academics). In recent years, we evidence more variation in corporate expatriation with individuals self-initiating their own expatriation with organizational support (Altman and Baruch 2012). Individuals who have undertaken non-company-supported moves are more likely to stay longer in their host country and tend to be embedded in their local contexts. However, they are also less likely to reap an objective career benefit in the short to medium term from their move (Doherty et al. 2011). It is, therefore, important to distinguish global career patterns relating to organization-sponsored and non-sponsored careerists.

With reference to the above criteria, self-initiated, non-organization-sponsored expatriation (SIE) is even longer term than traditional expatriation. One study put the average stay as more than six years (Doherty et al. 2011). Individuals tend to be embedded in one dominant national culture, and the breadth of interaction with locals is very wide. In fact, many self-initiated individuals have begun to build their local networks even before moving. While the majority of self-initiated foreign workers are likely to be staying legally in their host country, this might not be as clear-cut as with traditional expatriates. Again, the cultural gap and the job/role requirements vary with the specific context.

The major challenges for SIE management are in understanding the organizational needs and the interests of individuals, as well as developing approaches that are attractive to self-initiated expatriates (Andresen, Ariss, Walther and Wolff 2012). These may include special recruitment activities, a sensitivity to the different drivers of self-initiated expatriates and tailored career options, especially if these individuals can occupy liaison roles with their country-of-origin or are envisaged to go back to their home country to fill an important role. Our dimensions show that international careerists who self-initiated immerse strongly in their local context and gain an in-depth understanding of both the organization and their host country. And yet, they are driven by a different set of motives, with non-career-related issues such as seeking adventure and understanding cultural, environmental and spiritual 'relating' more prominent than with traditional expatriates

(Doherty et al. 2011; Haslberger 2011; Altman and Baruch 2012). HR managers would do well to realize that they risk losing these expatriates if the career opportunities, work–life balance and career breaks offered by the organization do not match the plans of the individual concerned. At the same time, looking out for self-initiated expatriates within particular communities residing overseas could be proven a cost-effective recruitment source for organizations.

Flexpatriates working in corporations

Flexpatriates are sent by their organizations to various parts of the world to perform short-term assignments and return 'home' soon after (Mayerhofer et al. 2004). Antonio is an example of a flexpatriate (Text Box 1). This type of global traveller is typical of executives in multinational corporations (MNCs) (Welch, Welch and Worm 2007). They can be the firm's lawyer, an IT expert, a negotiator, etc. Having the required knowledge and gaining the competence in working across cultures, these 'frequent flyers' (Sparrow, Brewster and Harris 2004) will become a crucial asset for their employers. Yet this mode of work is highly demanding and induces high levels of stress, which for some are energising, but for others might be daunting. Moreover, it has a major impact on the private lives of frequent flyers, making regular sports or social activities, for example, all but impossible (Demel and Mayrhofer 2010).

While the time period during which flexpatriates stay in a given geography may be short, they are likely to work in several cultures in the course of a year. Their breadth of interaction is predominantly confined to the work context and they tend to be working legally. However, many companies may procure business visas for their employees either wilfully or accidentally, disregarding the maximum number of days that professionals can work in a country without having to pay social security or specific taxes (Dickmann and Debner 2011). Table 1 outlines the characteristics of flexpatriates.

The major challenges for flexpatriates include health issues (e.g. burnout, stress), the disruption to their own private lives, work–life balance challenges and perceived isolation (Cappellen and Janssens 2005; Luke-Brome 2011). While many companies do not seem to have instruments developed to manage these challenges, a few seem to experiment with technological support approaches. For instance, one company used a Blackberry function allowing its flexpatriates to know where colleagues were and encouraged them to meet up when abroad (Luke-Brome 2011). Flexpatriation continues to pose many challenges, which are not yet sufficiently understood or addressed.

Expatriation – inpatriates/impatriates

Inpatriation is the practice of developing host country or third-country managers via a transfer to the corporate headquarters (Harvey, Ralston and Napier 2000). Moving to the corporate headquarters has emerged as a response to a practical demand from both head offices and subsidiaries. Increasingly, global firms have realized the need to become more multicultural. One means of accomplishing this strategic diversity is to inpatriate foreign employees into the domestic management team (Harvey and Buckley 1997). This practice is a manifest long-term human capital investment and is instrumental in developing a diverse cadre of future global managers for the firm. In turn, inpatriation is instrumental to avoiding a 'glass ceiling' to local careers.

Al-Rajhi, Altman, Metcalfe and Roussel (2006) differentiate impatriates (foreign nationals hired for a fixed-term temporary employment) from inpatriates. This relates to

the recruitment *en masse* of foreigners by the mother company to work in-house for a limited period of time. An example of impatriation is the case of Saudi companies recruiting foreigners to work for them on special contracts. The work permit is confined to a five-year term by Saudi law and the positions are usually blue collar (low-to-medium skilled). A similar system can be found in Singapore, where employment passes are also restricted to five years, even for highly skilled professionals, managers and executives. The characteristics of inpatriates and impatriates are not dissimilar to those of expatriates, as outlined in Table 1.

HR managers need to compare the financial savings and performance of the inpatriates/impatriates with the opportunity costs of employing locals for such current and envisaged future roles (Dickmann and Baruch 2011). They will also have to handle the legal working visa issues, cultural challenges and other issues explored in the traditional expatriation literature. For some individuals, however, Richardson and Mallon (2005) outline the uncertainties that legal confines induce even for highly skilled academics. Especially impatriation of low-skilled workers in sectors such as construction can entail strong legal and monetary uncertainties for individuals, which calls for HR involvement as a default option (Al-Rajhi et al. 2006).

Secondments overseas

Secondments are a developmental practice, albeit infrequently used (Baruch 1999; Baruch and Peiperl 2000). In this practice, people temporarily vacate their position and move to either another department in their organization or outside of it altogether. One example of a secondment is a new trainee lawyer having several 'chairs' in the induction process, one of which may take place in an overseas location of the firm. Another example is a British civil servant seconded to another government department, or a French *titulaire* moving from one local government to another.

Overseas secondments are usually short in duration and have a moderate amount of interaction as these normally take place in one country. The breadth of interaction with locals comprises both work and non-work environments. The work abroad is usually legally sanctioned and individuals are supported by their organizations (Table 1).

Overseas secondments can be used within the talent management of organizations, and one of the key challenges is related to the capability set of individuals in the new position as well as the reverse transfer of learning and motivation back to the employer (Harris and Dickmann 2005). These secondments are often seen as 'administration heavy' in the identification, liaison and integration into global talent management approaches. Instead, some companies allow their individuals to self-select and initiate such secondment, especially when these support a good cause. Individuals, in turn, have described these as invigorating, yet sometimes dangerous. HR managers need to identify cases where overseas secondments would answer the needs of the organization and would still be attractive to individuals.

In-shoring

Increased globalization, but also crises such as the global credit crunch, forces firms to take drastic cost-cutting steps. Foreign firms who act as subcontractors for local firms may be allowed to bring in employees to carry out work that was formerly conducted by a local workforce.

It is estimated that some 35,000 foreign IT workers are brought into the UK via subcontractors, often replacing British IT employees. One prominent case is that of British

Telecom, which has made employees redundant from a substantial number of their IT-related projects and replaced them with Indian specialists. These were brought to the UK to work for about half the former incumbents' wages (BBC Radio 4 2009). This is essentially the reverse of off-shoring, in which organizations relocate production or service delivery to cheaper locations. Instead, in this 'in-shoring', firms import skilled *and* low-cost personnel to high-wage locations for a limited time period. Distinct from traditional expatriation, in-shoring aims at the replacement of indigenous personnel for predominately labour cost-saving reasons. It is mostly organization-sponsored.

Table 1 shows that the time period of foreign work can be short to long term and that there is moderately intense international contact due to working in one single national culture. The breadth of interaction is wide and in-shoring is mostly legal. However, in the case of the large numbers of farm workers and domestic help in the southern states of the USA, it is common knowledge that in-shoring operates illegally, as would be the case of in-shoring of sex workers (such as from Eastern/Central Europe to Western Europe).

The major challenges for in-shoring are quite similar to those of inpatriates/impatriates, but on a larger, collective scale. Beyond legal issues, organizations need to consider how to manage these individuals and whether or not to integrate the in-shored operation with the local system. HR managers need to engage with national bodies to enable such an option, as well as compare the financial savings and performance of the operation. Individuals, in turn, will have many compatriots working alongside, with substantial implications for their well-being and adjustment to the local context. Depending on the cultural gap and the local environment, the challenges would vary. Sometimes, host locations are seen as especially tolerant and welcoming (Dickmann 2013).

Short-term assignments

While typical long-term expatriation is counted in years, and the duration of flexpatriate missions may last more than a few days, it happens that a firm may require a short stay overseas. Short-term assignments – in contrast to extended business travel – are typically from three months up to a year (Harris et al. 2003). Unlike expatriation, such moves will often not involve a family move. Implications for work–family balance could be severe, in particular if it is not a one-off mission.

Short-term project-based work is especially common in professional service firms that compete through delivering knowledge-intensive services. For example, strategic and technological consulting firms, law and accountancy companies, as well as construction firms, are among those using international short-term assignments extensively. A special case of short-term assignments is overseas internships.

Short-term expatriation is likely to involve a low-to-moderate intensity of international contacts, a substantial breadth of interaction, is probably conducted within a legal context and is mostly company-sponsored (Table 1).

Amongst the major challenges for short-term expatriation are the costs involved. Moreover, HR managers need to identify when short-term assignments to the overseas operation suffice to satisfy both the interests of the organization and those of the individual. One interesting approach by a fast-moving consumer goods organization is to distinguish between short-term assignments aimed at creating cultural sensitivity and long-term assignment aimed at cultural understanding (Dickmann and Baruch 2011). Cultural sensitivity was deemed to be necessary for middle management, while cultural understanding was a prerequisite for more senior positions. The management challenges were in the creation of the talent identification and assessment as well as in the

communication and integration in the overall career system. Challenges for individuals on short-term assignments relate to their disruption of social lives and, often, to the conditions offered that may include being away from their families.

Globetrotting

Being a frequent flyer who runs a variety of missions in different locations does not necessarily entail employment as a firm's flexpatriate. Some such individuals are freelancers, self-appointed, self-employed or delegates of others. The world is their oyster. While we are cognizant of wealthy individuals who travel the globe in pursuit of pleasure, adventure or wisdom, there are many others who do so to make a living, for instance, interim managers content to work across geographies. The time horizon of their work may be short or long, depending on activity and specific context. Overall, the intensity and breadth of international contact is high and the legal context is mostly secure. In essence, globetrotters are self-initiated, although they are likely to be company-supported in their moves (e.g. interim managers).

The major challenges for globetrotting are the costs involved and finding people ready to cope with continuous travelling and still perform well. In fact, onboarding becomes crucial, and given the high cost, organizations often focus on short-term impact of interim managers or specialists. If the globetrotting individual is permanent staff, HR managers should ensure that there is a balance between the time working at the home operation and the length and frequency of the foreign sojourns. For individuals, issues around home making, relationships and sociality can become paramount (Dickmann and Cerdin 2009).

Ex-host country nationals

The term ex-host country nationals (EHCN) was suggested by Tung and Lazarova (2006) and Tung (2008). It depicts a phenomenon where people of non-domestic origin return to their 'homeland' (Tung highlights the case of Chinese and Indian people). Tung distinguishes between three such types: those born and raised overseas; those born in countries such as China, who have lived most of their lives outside that country; and those who spent considerable time outside their homeland and were highly involved with an overseas labour market (the so-called 'sea turtles' (*The Economist* 2011). The common denominator is that they eventually return to their country-of-origin (cf. 'brain circulation': Saxenian 2006; Baruch et al. 2007) and settle down.

This category is an example of a work-oriented as well as a wider migration. In Table 1, it is depicted as a long-term global career with predominantly moderate intensity of international contacts. The breadth of interaction is wide and the individuals live in the host countries legally. Often, the driver to return to one's country-of-origin is intensely personal and self-initiated. Occasionally, the return is company-sponsored as organizations may consider the individual an ideal cultural and business broker.

The major challenges for employing EHCN are how to find them and how to persuade them that it is time to return 'home' (and work for the specific firm). Sometimes, governments engage in this activity, as the example of Singapore's initiative 'careers@home' demonstrates (Dickmann and Cerdin 2011a), or it may be orchestrated by political change, as evidenced in the 'Arab spring'. Especially in countries which perceived an earlier (or current) brain-drain or in organizations which believe that many of their country-of-origin citizens have gained valuable skills and experiences, this can be key to competitive advantage. Apart from attracting these individuals, the key challenge

for HR managers would be recruitment, presumably by enabling an environment that will be conducive to retain them.

Virtual global employees

Unlike all of the above, involving the physical movement of people to and from different geolocations (Harris et al. 2003), a virtual global employee can work from his or her office (or even home, if telecommuting) while being part of a multinational team. Individuals may be engaged in a joint global project or collaborating with contacts overseas. Academics, collaborating from different institutional and geographical bases – not unlike the authors of this paper – have long belonged to this category (Altman and Laguecir 2012).

The time span of a virtual employee's global work ranges from short to long term, and may involve contact with many different cultures. The breadth of interaction is narrow as only the work sphere is normally implicated. The legal context is normally unimportant.

The major challenges for using virtual workers globally are concerned with the need to have face-to-face meetings occasionally (through technology such as Skype webcam telephony that may well have become a lesser issue), how to maintain connectivity with the subsidiary, how to manage time zone differences and how to relate globally when you are locally rooted. Practicalities, such as a good command of language, may well prove the main HR-related challenge, whereby facilitating language acquisition would be of key importance.

Cross-border commuting

In a number of geographical locations, people cross national borders to work in a different country and return on a daily or weekly basis to their home. Examples are Hong Kong managers working in China or Palestinians crossing the border into Israel for employment. Many residents of Tijuana work in San Diego and return to their home in Mexico after work. In the EU, crossing national borders may have social security implications (Dickmann and Debner 2011), but in most cases, EU nationals have a legal right to work freely throughout the region. Citizen of Italy, France, Germany and Austria (not to mention the Benelux countries) often cross the border into adjacent countries for their daily work. Moreover, with the rise of cheaper air travel (e.g. within Europe), some people make lifestyle choices to live in one country and work several hundred or even thousand miles away. While cross-border commuting may be practised for years, the intensity and breadth of interaction is likely to be moderate. The work in the host country is likely to be legal (Table 1).

For individuals, cross-border commuting usually poses similar challenges to in-country (long) commuting. The exceptions are employment permit, social security, taxation and pension arrangements (Dickmann and Debner 2011), which both individuals and HR managers need to be aware of. The above global career patterns take place predominantly in corporations, but there are also international moves which are first and foremost non-corporate in character.

Immigration – legal, illegal and asylum cross-border moves

Immigration is an age-old phenomenon and economic migration is already mentioned in the Bible (Jacob and his family migrate to Egypt). The motivations typically include

push/pull factors (Baruch 1995), often coupled with the belief that immigration would enable one to gain a well-paid job. The procedure to secure an entry to the host country usually starts with a request for a work permit (e.g. visa).

Other key motivations for moving abroad include security and survival. The UN world migration reports have consistently outlined that much migration in Africa happens due to the need to secure food or to leave areas in which one is persecuted. Moreover, some individuals are refugees and/or apply for asylum in their host countries. Some decide to move without entry visa or work permit, aided by illegal trafficking, which exploits the dire needs of desperate persons.

The time horizon for both legal and illegal immigrants is typically long term. In fact, the distinction between permanent immigration and expatriation may be considered legally in terms of the rights to permanent residency. Edith in our vignette is an expatriate who may become an immigrant (Text Box 1). The intensity of international contact may be moderate as it is predominantly confined to two cultures. The breadth of interaction is substantial and immigrants are mostly self-initiated.

The major challenges for employing immigrants are to do with both legal issues, and the need to train the employees and help them adjust to the local culture and rules/regulations. Underemployment and social undermining, even stigmatization, may also pose problems (Min Toh and Gunz 2009). The need for HR managers to develop and implement sophisticated sourcing, onboarding and development policies, as well as establishing flexible and context-sensitive diversity approaches is high.

Temporary immigration

People who emigrate to another country for economic and financial reasons do not necessarily take this step aiming for a permanent change of citizenship. Many emigrate with the initial intention of working for a limited time to save enough money and return to their home country.

This mode of immigration may start as temporary, but can turn into a long-term spell, ending in permanent residency. Apart from the time implications, the classifications in Table 1 are similar to permanent immigration.

The major challenges for employing temporary migrants are similar to those outlined above for permanent immigration. The insecurity regarding a temporary stay in a host country can have negative effects on individuals (Richardson and Mallon 2005). Moreover, HR managers need to be aware of the legal status of their employees.

Below we will outline global careers in not-for-profit organizations. While some of the distinctions here (cases 14–17) may be associated with the type of employer (public sector), the seven dimensions may be applied to them too. We set these apart from international work in corporations since these global experiences take place in government or state organizations and have different local interaction patterns and diverse job pressures. Moreover, sometimes an international career may be the *raison d'être* of the organization and its staff.

Government – foreign sojourns in the diplomatic services

The diplomatic service is probably the archetype of expatriation. For centuries, rulers have sent officials as their representatives to other countries. Typically, diplomats work in a number of different countries as part of a long-term career commitment, which involves staying in a foreign country for a specific term, e.g. three to four years. Their working lives

are likely to comprise a series of such appointments, interspersed with periods spent at the foreign office headquarters in their home country.

In our classification, these global careers can be seen as having extensive contacts, a broad remit of interaction, a long duration, being legal and of course organization-supported.

The major challenges for diplomatic service are the long period of preparation and the need to move diplomats periodically (and their families too). Diplomatic services have long experience of these issues, and HR managers routinely consider spousal issues or education matters for the children. However, the rise of dual career issues may be a substantial challenge.

Government – armed forces' stay at bases abroad

For most countries, the armed services involve serving within the country borders and safeguarding them – the few exceptions include border crossings during wars. Wars (alongside religion-related missions) were historically the main form of global cultural 'exchange' (Appadurai 1990).

While there are also certain missions and duty stations that deal with cross-national liaison activities – e.g. staff at the NATO headquarters in Brussels – we are mostly interested in military bases of armed forces outside their national borders. While the work patterns of army personnel can be rather varied, normally people have a medium- to long-term period of duty in foreign bases. The intensity of international contact (and the wish to culturally adapt) is mostly rather restricted and the breadth of interaction is narrow. Exceptions include the French Foreign Legion or international peacekeeping forces such as the UN (e.g. UNIFIL – the UN Interim Force in Lebanon) and others (e.g. the African Union peacekeeping mission in Darfur and the EU peacekeeping mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina), for which personnel are recruited from many countries (see below on other UN activities). While the legality of activities can be the subject of diverging opinions, armed forces personnel are always organization-sponsored (Table 1).

The major challenges for employing overseas armed forces are concerned with the risks, political issues and sometimes religious issues. Preparation and liaison between different, collaborating armed forces – as seen in Afghanistan, Libya, Iraq – can also be a major challenge, with some efforts directed at understanding each other better (confidential MSc thesis).

Government – humanitarian and developmental organizations abroad

Direct government involvement in supporting economic development and humanitarian welfare in developing geographies is common. All western developed economies provide assistance of that kind, involving the regular dispatch of personnel. Nowadays, China has emerged as a major provider of such overseas aid, with the largest number of expatriate personnel, notably in Africa.

The time span for an individual who goes on various missions is likely to be long. The individual's global career will be characterized by an exposure to many cultures, and often a wide breadth of interaction in a legally defined context, which is sponsored by the country-of-origin government (Table 1).

The major challenges here are similar to those of employing overseas armed forces, though the risks are less apparent in terms of physical safety. HR managers may need to deal with work–life balance and family issues as well as logistics of different kinds: legal,

health and accommodation, to name a few. Moreover, rest and recuperation phases, and psychological debriefings are important, especially when staff return from crisis situations such as in Haiti or the Horn of Africa (Dickmann, Parry, Emmens and Williamson 2010).

International non-governmental organizations

A number of organizations that are not commercial firms or government agencies regularly send people on overseas assignments. Not-for-profit organizations (e.g. Greenpeace, the Peace Corps, Médicins Sans Frontières and the Red Cross) operate globally and send people on many missions, short and long term, to numerous destinations.

The UN is probably the best-known example of an international organization, which enables its professional staff to develop global careers. Its activities encompass a wide remit and include peace-keeping, refugee, emergency and development assistance (e.g. the UNHCR, UNFAO and UNWFP). Staff are generally recruited from a very large base of countries. They are expected to serve in many different 'duty stations' around the world.

Overall, staff experience long-term global careers, which facilitates their contact with several cultures and geographies. The breadth of interaction is wide and the context is legal. While some research has shown that individuals consider their work a calling (Cerdin and Dickmann 2010), their global activities are organization-sponsored rather than self-initiated.

The major challenges here are similar to those of the above last two cases; HR managers need to note the variety of conditions in different countries, which requires different consideration. Many professional staff are permanently mobile in the sense that they have numerous foreign postings and may be dispatched at short notice to crisis areas. Issues of burnout, work–life balance and family connections are especially pressing for HR departments. Moreover, the balance between true hardship locations versus family duty stations is difficult to address as staff who are experienced in difficult environments may have few dependents and are likely to be asked to move into the next hardship station (Dickmann and Cerdin 2011b). Especially when people want to 'settle down' and/or 'start a family', this presents key challenges for IHRM.

International work experiences and voluntary overseas work

A number of organizations offer volunteering work overseas, and some people are willing to pay to gain such experience. This can occur in a gap year, before or after university, but can also take place during a career break or after retirement (though some professions have become used to volunteer their time over their vacation while maintaining regular work commitments, e.g. medical personnel). There is a difference between global work for MNCs and overseas experience for a specific and limited time period (Inkson, Arthur, Pringle and Barry 1997).

These voluntary work experiences are often of the 'win-win' kind. The organization benefits from an internationally aware globalized workforce (even though on temporary basis). For the individuals, it helps them gain an international perspective and a unique experience that would be conducive to their career. The timespan is normally short to medium term and the work experience is characterized by moderate levels of interaction with diverse cultures. The breadth of interaction does include both work and non-work contexts while assignments are mostly self-initiated. A particular case is that of university students, which merits a separate entry.

The major challenges for HR are with recruitment and sourcing: identifying suitable candidates and contracting (meeting expectations); and dealing with health and physical safety issues. At times, HR managers may well need to deal with the family at home to reassure them of the volunteer's safety and well-being. Overall, this is an under-researched area of global careers.

Students studying abroad

Students studying abroad are certainly crossing physical boundaries and are put in a situation that forces them to cross, at least on a short timeframe, cultural boundaries too. The numbers are high and continue to grow, with some 600,000 in the USA alone (McCormack 2007) and substantial numbers elsewhere (Khanna 2007), with a growing mobility of students across the EU following the Bologna agreement (Mechtenberg and Strausz 2008). The consequent potential 'brain-drain' for some countries, or 'brain circulation' is high (Baruch et al. 2007).

The time horizon of international studies – be they just for one term, a year or the duration of a degree – is medium-to-long term. Most students are likely to be legal, though by no means all are. Students mostly study in one other country and the breadth of interaction is likely to be intensive. Often, but not always, these students will be self-initiating their overseas studies (Table 1).

This type of student expatriate shares much in common with the self-initiated corporate expatriate (Altman and Baruch 2012), as she/he aims to expand her/his career/personal development within an educational framework. HR managers and course leaders need to be aware of the motivations of individuals, as well as different normative educational expectations and cultural learning styles. HR involvement is likely to be confined to legal/technical matters, such as visas or minor law infringement (recreational drugs, alcohol), and health issues (from prevention to repatriation).

Sabbaticals

Sabbaticals are mostly confined to the academic profession, but employed also in some firms and organizations. Sabbatical programmes allow participants to learn, develop and grow professionally and personally when they are away from their permanent employment and possibly work in a different country (Baruch and Hall 2004). Thus, once in about seven years, staff that prove worthy of this 'benefit' receive a year off their normal duties, dedicated to their development which typically involves working as visiting scholars in other institutions. Richardson and Mallon (2005) indicate that key motivations for undertaking sabbaticals include career, family considerations and the exploration of new life options.

The time that individuals and their families take for sabbaticals abroad is typically one year or less and is commonly effected in another country. The breadth of interaction will be extensive, legally secure and is most often self-initiated within a formal contractual arrangement.

HR involvement is historically marginal. Typical assistance provided is with work permits, health insurance and sometimes taxation, and possibly housing. Individuals are likely to have a mixture of challenges typical to short-term assignees (regarding cultural adjustment and family issues) and to self-initiated expatriates (housing and schooling).

Expanding the glossary: types and dimensions of global careers

Throughout the second section (Dimensions of global careers), we employed the criteria of the predominant dimensions dealing with a move overseas and working abroad to classify the different patterns of global careers. The emerging glossary is summarized in Table 1 and its individual, organizational, managerial and scholarly implications are outlined below.

Acquiring global experience via international assignments, be they short or long term, work related or otherwise, helps individuals to gain and develop career capital (Dickmann and Harris 2005). Career capital refers to the intelligent career framework (Arthur, Claman and DeFillippi 1995), where global experience helps to reshape the 'knowing-why', improves and enhances the 'knowing-how' and generates a new network of 'knowing-whom' for the person involved. The emerging literature contrasting self-initiated and company-sponsored expatriation (Jokinen et al. 2008) points to individuals gaining different kinds of career capital from their international sojourns. Cappellen and Janssens (2005) argue that their global managers will need different skill sets and will gain diverse insights in comparison to traditional expatriates. Virtual global employees are seen to face different pressures in terms of when they work and how they interact compared to people actually being in the foreign country (Harris et al. 2003). Doherty and Dickmann (2008) outline diverse behaviours and attitudes describing company-sponsored expatriates as active careerists while self-initiated foreign workers were seen as career activists. This indicates that individuals are subjected to a range of different contextual variables and experiences, depending, amongst other influences, on the type of international work pattern. For some of our types, issues including individual identity, motivation, networks, skills, knowledge, wider psychological effects, career progress (Hamori and Koyuncu 2011) and other individual behaviours have been and continue to be explored in research. One of the contributions of this paper is to demonstrate that there are many more different types of international work where these topics may be investigated.

Policy-makers and the seven dimensions

Drawing up the seven dimensions can serve to guide the thinking and decisions of policy-makers both in organizations and in public governance. Most companies have one global mobility policy that often distinguishes long- and short-term assignments, but tends to be highly limited on other forms of international work (Dickmann and Baruch 2011). Using the seven dimensions can serve to increase the sophistication of international mobility with manifold consequences for organizations and individuals.

The first three dimensions, the length of international work, the intensity and breadth, have a well-known effect on the depth of cultural understanding with longer foreign sojourns, high intensity and holistic interactions deepening learning. This consideration may need to be integrated into the design parameters of global leadership development. While 'conventional' expatriation is highly valued in organizations as means to leadership development, we evidence rapid expansion in the number of flexpatriates who gain substantial international exposure to the extent that they are sometimes simply called 'global managers' (Cappellen and Janssens 2005). These may well be among the leaders of the future, but in contrast to their expatriated peers, far less planning and development effort is devoted to them. Table 1 and our discussion serve to remind us of the risks associated with the disruption to their social lives, the potential isolation propensity embedded in their role and the stresses of being perennial 'road warriors'. The risks are not only to the individuals through burnout but also to the organizations through attrition. While reward policies may take care of their special effort and work overload, selection,

performance management, career development and employee well-being policies appear to be insufficiently developed in many organizations (Luke-Brome 2011).

The fourth dimension, the legal context, has many ramifications for individuals, their organizations and policy-makers in government. The legal and regulatory environment influences the ability of low or high skilled workers to enter a country, gain a work permit and be welcomed. The importance of enabling a non-discriminatory environment cannot be over-emphasized, as we are entering a new brave world of economic decline in the West, with xenophobia raising its ugly head (again). This will impact on the well-being and performance of individuals, organizations and states.

The fifth dimension, the predominant instigator of international work, is increasingly discussed in the literature. It is well known that traditional expatriation has a range of disadvantages, including costs (Evans, Pucik and Bjorkman 2010). Given that many organizations fill managerial positions at home with external persons, it should mostly be possible to hire/staff either a local or a self-initiated expatriate – possibly with a view to inpatriate them for a while – to fill a vacancy in a foreign country. Doherty et al. (2011) show that self-initiated foreign workers have different expectations and motives when going abroad, and yet it does not appear that formal company policies take account of these with respect to identifying the drivers or using them for selection, career or performance management. Again, Table 1 could be used to explore diverse international working patterns and include more of these scenarios into the policies and practices of organizations.

The sixth dimension, cultural gap, is important for organizational policy-makers as large cultural differences embody stronger challenges for international workers. Depending on the geographical spread of organizations, their leadership philosophy and perceived needs of future global leaders, a conscious analysis of cultural gaps can serve as input for expatriate selection, support mechanisms and management. The seventh dimension, job/role needs, is related in the sense that where job/role needs are more standardized around the world – e.g. in technical or IT jobs – a large cultural gap is less important for work performance (but not for non-work behaviour and outcomes). The similarity of job/role needs is rarely part of an official international mobility policy in organizations, but would have an impact on the work challenges that individuals face. Overall, policy-makers would do well to develop a more sophisticated approach to international mobility and global careers – the seven dimensions and the 20 types could be a good starting point.

Beyond the seven dimensions used to categorize the different global career patterns, there is a range of variables which can represent different constraints and enablers of global careers. The organizational career 'logic' and its international mobility policies and practices will encourage certain types of global careers. For instance, Dickmann and Doherty (2010) outline the diverse goals, organization–individual interactions and outcomes of global careers in two MNCs. They argue that the 'gestalt' of the corporate global career approach influences an individual's behaviours and attitude, as well as organizational practices.

Moreover, there are individual factors that seem to have an influence on global careers. Age, race, religion, family status or gender are some of these factors. The influence of these individual or other organizational factors on the reality of global careers raises the question whether to include them into the dimensions of Table 1. We have resisted doing so as these factors, undoubtedly important, are not contributing to the definition and identification of international work types which is at the core of this paper.

Table 1 is rich with regards to managerial and scholarly implications. In the first section (Introduction), we have outlined the manifold links of the seven dimensions to the

literature on cross-cultural adjustment, boundaryless careers, societal implications of legal and illegal global work, and organizational policies and practices with respect to the job and role needs of international positions. Academics and consultants need to be careful in prescribing 'one-size-fits-all' solutions. The framework we offer is comprehensive and can help setting the agenda for future research that is more complementary rather than an all-encompassing approach, which we argue is unrealistic.

While this paper did not allow us the space to develop the argument fully, the seven dimensions also indicate that some crucial elements are neglected in research. To take just one dimension, the job or role needs of international workers and the corresponding diverse needs for cultural adaptation are under-researched, especially if one looks at all 20 different types of international work. In addition, we believe that there is still much to be researched regarding the international careers and their work-related challenges of temporary immigrants or humanitarian workers. This list could go on and we would urge researchers to use Table 1 as one of their starting points in designing new research. The conclusions deepen our argument and expand on the academic contribution.

Conclusions

This paper is an initial step to develop a comprehensive framework of global careers in the context of international assignments. We first outlined here seven key dimensions to enact as a platform for classifying all major variants of such assignments. In terms of theoretical contribution, these dimensions offer an expansion of current tools available for scholarly analysis and discourse of global careers. We then depicted the growing array of different international work assignment configurations based on the extant literature and validated by an expert panel. While it may be possible to distinguish even finer aspects of international work, we have concentrated on 20 salient global career patterns. Finally, we categorized the 20 diverse global work patterns in the third section (Types of international work: drawing up a global career glossary) using seven key dimensions. In so doing, we were able to posit a more nuanced picture of global career patterns and outlined the main individual and organizational implications for each of these types.

The paper is built on the ideas of Peiperl and Jonsen (2007) who use the two dimensions of time exposure and amount of interaction. One of our academic contributions is to enrich their basic model and to add five further dimensions. Table 1 develops and systematizes our global career insights and may be used as a starting point to draw up propositions and hypotheses to further the study of global careers. Especially, the dimension of time, intensity and breadth of interaction will have major implications for the competencies and social networks that global careerists acquire through working abroad. The implications for international career capital approaches (Inkson and Arthur 2001) – concentrating on the knowing-how and the knowing-whom – are substantial and would merit a more in-depth exploration than is possible in this paper.

The dimensions of legal context, predominant drivers of international work and the extent of cultural gaps between home and host environments have already been subjected to intensive academic investigations (Baruch et al. 2007; Haslberger 2008; Doherty et al. 2011) with the diverse job and role needs possibly less researched (Cappellen and Janssens 2005). This literature gives valuable academic and professional insights. Our developed typology could be a useful integration mechanism that allows a more nuanced understanding of the large array of global career patterns, which would be valuable for both academics and professionals.

For HR practitioners working on global career and mobility issues, the ideas developed in this paper should facilitate a better understanding of the manifold variants of modern international careers and may support a critical examination of global career strategies, policies and practices. For instance, focusing on the predominant drivers of international careers allows better configuration of the specific circumstances of global careerists and enables mobility experts to develop improved attraction, retention and expatriation packages (Doherty et al. 2011; Altman and Baruch 2012). Moreover, the breadth and intensity of international interaction dimensions enable early planning for the skills, knowledge and capabilities that individual foreign workers are likely to acquire and in what areas they may lack human capital. These insights are a refinement of Cappellen and Janssens' (2005) ideas regarding different types of global workers, who actively look to improve their own human capital. Moreover, they allow development of more tailored international mobility and global career systems (Dickmann and Doherty 2010).

One of the strengths of this paper is that we have outlined the critical organizational facets directed at a selected number of international career types, created a broader overview of these and identified career nodes where less researched evidence is available. Hence, this paper serves as a platform from which both a helicopter view of global careers may be discerned as well as a detailed intervention programme at the operational business unit could be developed.

Dealing with this large variety of global careers has the unavoidable drawback that we had to condense the often-large literature that is available for different subsections of our Table 1. We trust, though, that this paper adds to the development of a more highly integrated picture of international careers at a timely junction in the continuous globalization of our world.

Note

1. Some are unusual though not uncommon, such as a company-sponsored expatriation assignment with a patently obvious illegal element (e.g. knowingly bribing officials is a common practice in numerous geographies (Transparency International 2011) or knowingly implicated in smuggling (e.g. tobacco products)).

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