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## Implications of Flexpatriates' Lifestyles on HRM Practices\*\*

In this paper we argue that flexpatriates' needs and goals are not homogeneous and cannot be met simply by providing standard measures to facilitate working in different cultural locations. We review the nature of flexpatriate lifestyle to examine how employees of multinational enterprises located in Austria face a range of issues in their work, personal and family lives. We present four empirically grounded types, Tough Travelers, Enjoyers, Cosmopolitans and Contactors. The types show various facets of flexpatriates' lifestyles that are essential to understand their significant implications for HR architecture, commitment strategies and HRM practices in order to meet the employees' needs.

Key words: **flexpatriates, HRM practices, lifestyles, qualitative type-construction**

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## 1. Introduction

Even more so in times of economic crises and high unemployment, companies have to compete worldwide and enter new markets. These conditions contribute to staffing challenges like recruiting talent and establishing a “culturally sophisticated workforce and globally savvy business leaders” (Stahl et al. 2009: 90). To solve these staffing challenges a growing number of alternative international assignments are used complementary to the traditional long term expatriation (Collings et al. 2007). In the paper we focus on flexpatriate assignments, short-term, unaccompanied business travel assignments of people who have a job in a home office and carry a workload in other countries (Mayerhofer et al. 2004a,b). Working in cross border projects supports the development of specific competences, which increases the strategic importance of this group of employees (Harvey et al. forthcoming). A flexible and culturally competent workforce is highly valuable to a company due to its unique human capital. Employees with these kinds of characteristics are one of four archetypes Lepak and Snell (1999, 2002) pointed out in their HR architecture concept, where the HR configuration of commitment is especially relevant for flexpatriates and thus strong HR support is especially important for them.

Flexpatriates blur the boundaries between work and non-work domains (Ilies et al. 2009) while they function as key facilitators of cross-unit interaction and exchange. An increased international workload for professionals means opportunities to develop skills and competences in different cultural contexts but also new physical and psychological demands and new types of work-family tensions (Harvey et al. forthcoming; Suutari 2003).

“Increasingly MNEs have to deal with employees who either seek foreign assignments or who are eligible for such postings.” (Briscoe et al. 2009: 186). But only if employees perceive the HR measures as adaptable to their interests, do these measures achieve highly binding effects (Lazarova/Caligiuri 2001). Thus, a commitment based HR configuration presumes that flexpatriates have the possibility to satisfy their needs and goals. We argue that flexpatriates' needs and goals are not homogeneous and cannot be met simply by providing standard measures to facilitate working in different cultural locations but that their needs are diverse and related to different points of reference.

The HR literature has given increasing importance to diversity factors like professional level, gender and age, work life balance and lifestyle (Eikhof/Haunschild 2006; Haunschild/Eikhof 2009). The topic of lifestyle, however, is rarely discussed in the IHRM literature (Mayerhofer et al. 2004a,b; Demel 2010) and even less in the practical development of HRM, although different lifestyles have implications like Briscoe et al. (2009: 186f) show: individuals “who live what might be referred to as ‘alternative’ lifestyles that may not be acceptable in target foreign location. This might involve ‘gay’ or unmarried couples or single parents or employees who live with their parents or who are taking care of elderly parents. Or it just might concern employees who are involved in outside-of-work activities that are very important to the individual and they may not be able to pursue them in the host location. All of these situations create challenges for IHR to overcome.” Briscoe's discussion focuses on the group of expa-

triatees and work-life balance and other issues such as the interdependence between career paths and transitions have been broached (e.g. Mayerhofer et al. 2004), nevertheless a focus on the important issue of binding effects within the strategic valuable group of flexpatriates is missing.

In filling this gap we review the nature of flexpatriate-lifestyle influenced by international work and explore how employees face a range of issues in their work, personal and family lives. We define lifestyle as a set of observable behaviors (based on further developing Richter's model 2006), which reflect the polycontextual working environment and characterize it by drawing upon empirical data from qualitative semi structured interviews with 99 male and female managers working as flexpatriates in multinational enterprises located in Austria. Flexpatriate assignments are employed in various industries and can be found among all hierarchical levels. In exploring the dimensions of lifestyle four empirically grounded types emerged: Tough Travelers, Enjoyers, Cosmopolitans and Contactors. Our analysis of flexpatriates' everyday behavior shows multiple facets of their lifestyles. Finally, we discuss the consequences of these lifestyles for designing a commitment oriented HR configuration (Lepak/Snell 1999, 2002).

## 2. Flexpatriates coping with polycontextual environments

The importance of acquiring and diffusing knowledge across the global organization is recognized as critical to global success. By leveraging, learning and utilizing different global management competencies organizations can gain global competitive advantages (Bartlett/Ghoshal 1989; Prahalad/Hamel 1990). The most common way of filling positions, transferring knowledge and developing cultural competencies among a management cadre is through long term assignments of expatriates (e.g. Edström/Gallbraith 1977; Harvey et al. 1999, Harris et al. 2005; Johnson et al. 2006; Collings et al. 2007). There are, however, emerging problems with expatriation (e.g. high costs, staff shortage, repatriation), and changed circumstances in business and technology (e.g. expansion of the EU, transportation and communication systems, organizational networks and flexible intraorganizational coordination of global units). Also the increased differentiation within assignments and different forms of more flexible kinds of international work such as short term assignments, frequent flyers, commuters and rotational assignments, business travelers, flexpatriate assignments as well as virtual assignments (e.g. Harris et al. 2001; Mayerhofer et al. 2004a,b; Welch/Worm 2006; Demel/Mayerhofer 2008; Dowling et al. 2008; Demel 2010) have not led to a more strategic use of different assignments in organizations (Erten et al. 2006; Collings et al. 2007). In this paper we focus on flexpatriate assignments, a term encompassing short-term, unaccompanied and business travel assignments by people who are still in the job at home office but have a work-load in other countries, while their places of residence do not change. The characteristics of a flexpatriate assignment include:

- Frequent alternation between different location of work including different national and regional cultural contexts.
- A flexible schedule of time and/or time zones and an unclear separation between leisure and work time and few daily routines.

- Changing social relations and contacts with co-workers and connecting and disconnecting relations with family and friends (Dowling et al. 2008; Mayerhofer et al. 2004a, b; Demel 2010).

An international workload for managers and professionals means opportunities to develop skills and competences in different cultural contexts as well as the likelihood of new physical and psychological demands along with new types of work-family tensions (Adler 2002; Harvey et al. forthcoming; Suutari 2003). Work-life issues are amongst the more frequently cited problems associated with international working patterns regardless of whether the employee is single, in a relationship, or whether he or she has children (Harzing/Ruysseveldt 2004; Kappelhoff et al. 2006).

The work-life balance debate in general has failed to capture more diversified employee attitudes towards work and their engagement with work (Eikhof et al. 2007). Moreover, Warhurst et al. (2008) argue that the debate on work-life balance should bring the workplace and work experience back into the frame of analysis and the debate in order to progress to a more holistic understanding of life. Therefore, to assess the work-life balance, it is important to understand the underlying assumptions about the relationship between work and life for employees in general, and flexpatriates, in particular. Also in articulating the relationship between work and life as work-life patterns it is important to consider the characteristics of work practices, structural constraints, lifestyles and logics that shape work-life patterns (Warhurst et al. 2008).

Recognizing these conditions, we aim to offer deeper insights into various lifestyle dimensions and to draw a more differentiated picture of flexpatriates lifestyle. Finally, we identify flexi-lifestyle types in order to better understand special requirements of this group of employees.

### 3. Flexpatriates' lifestyles

The interface between private and professional spheres is a subject of great concern to flexpatriates (Poster 2005). Often flexpatriates are not able to discuss their work-life-balance without discomfort, which can be linked to massive tension and conflict brought about by personal and professional pressure.

In contrast to expatriates, Human Resource Management has so far had little involvement with flexpatriates, leaving them to forge new work patterns and relationships and new lifestyles with peer support and at their own initiative. Thus, academic research in International Human Resource Management has largely focused on questions regarding expatriates. Also, the IHRM literature has yet to address the challenge of balancing work-life. Research and practical management show work-life and family balance issues are mostly considered a domestic-based matter and seem to be developed and implemented from a domestic point of view (Harzing/Ruysseveldt 2004).

International business travelers experience negative effects on work-life balance, especially regarding family separation, travel stress, and health issues (DeFrank et al. 2000; Welch/Worm 2006). Evidently, some job characteristics such as time-pressure, time-flexibility, and job security significantly influence interactions within the family (Hughes/Galinsky 1994). In the research findings about flexpatriates challenges from international work, new circumstances and the lack of "boring" routines are often

mentioned (Mayerhofer et al. 2004a,b). According to Schulze (1992) lifestyle determines what is necessary and what is beautiful. However, there are also negative outcomes associated with lifestyle like health problems and stress, which can be seen as outcomes of flexi-lifestyle. Lifestyle is one of the eight career anchors of Schein's (1996) typology. According to Schein people, who are focused foremost on lifestyle, look at their whole pattern of living, they try to integrate work and life, instead of balancing it, and they may even take off long periods work to indulge in their passions. This anchor has shown the most change since the original research of the 1960s and 1970s (Schein 1996) with autonomy and lifestyle having become more important as anchors. Schein (1996) argued that the occupational structure is moving increasingly toward a different concept of employment contract in which organizations own their career employees less and the definition of work is gradually changing as the boundaries between jobs, between organizations and between work and family become more fluid and ambiguous. These observations seem to be particularly true for flexpatriates (see also Suutari 2003; Demel 2010).

Definitions of lifestyles have been blurred, fuzzy and to some extent contradictory. "Lifestyles are, apart from age (Schulze), determined by the important socio-structural dimensions education (Schulze), and/or economic and cultural resource. (Bourdieu 1982)." (von Normann 2009: 383) In general the focus has been on social characteristics that are associated with behavior patterns. Sociological definitions have their foundation in the work of Max Weber (1972) who distinguished between social class based on economic factors and social status indexed by association and symbols. Lifestyles now are seen as complex and changing despite being embedded in the social and market system (Eikhof/Haunschild 2006; Kelly 2006). "Lifestyles represent collectively shared patterns of perception, taste and behaviour, which are usually seen as rooted in social class and milieu (Bourdieu 1984; Weber 1972)" (Eikhof/Haunschild 2006: 236). People increasingly have to make choices as part of their construction of a "narrative of the self" (Giddens 1991: 76) instead of being able to refer to tradition and custom. Individuals have to produce, stage, and cobble together their own do-it-yourself identities.

The concept of lifestyle is common in sociological analysis (see Bourdieu 1984; Weber 1972). However, HRM studies have rarely considered lifestyle although it has proved to be a powerful concept regarding explanations of employment policies and rules and "the co-evolution of organizational HR practices and workers' preferences and attitudes" (Haunschild/Eikhof 2009: 108).

"Lifestyle represents the aims of social norms relevant for the everyday life activities of human beings" (von Normann 2009: 385). It is derived from socially useful knowledge that is acquired through one's formal education and training as well as experiences, interests and contacts (Bourdieu 1984). This understanding of lifestyle and its influences rests on the widely accepted principle that behavior is a function of the person and the environment and that both variables in this formula are interdependent (Lewin 1948/1997: 188). Therefore, we use the concept of lifestyle as visible and observable contextualized behavior in everyday life to explore how characteristics of flexpatriate-work influence the daily routines of employees. This is consistent with the views of Richter (2006) that behavior and actions molding lifestyles und these actions

can be identified and observed. The dimensions of time and space and cultural-social elements of everyday life are useful to describe international flexible work in more detail, and to portray challenges this group of employees faces in their jobs.

Focusing on lifestyle is an appropriate way to explore the characteristics of flexpatriates' work and the influences on their daily routines. This is consistent with the views of Richter (2006) that behavior and actions, which can be identified and observed, constitute lifestyles. Richter (2006) developed a model of lifestyle consisting of five dimensions:

- *Temporal* dimension refers to working hours in general as well as to the time spent travelling.
- *Spatial* dimension questions the utility and usage of private and public places. Additionally, this dimension encompasses different geographical areas of work.
- *Personal-cultural* dimension refers to differences in an individual's behavior. Work patterns influence the daily patterns of a person from sleeping habits to times for getting out of bed.
- *Factual-cultural* dimension refers to the material aspects of life, like particular items of IT, equipment and gadgets, clothing or luggage to mention a few. These elements greatly influence people's lives and are an important aspect in differentiating lifestyles.
- *Social everyday occurrence* dimension refers to the social interactions from the business side (to colleagues away and at the home base office) to private life (with partner or spouse, family and friends).

According to Richter, these dimensions determine people's lifestyles. We were interested in whether they would differ within a group of people working as flexpatriates. Differences would then become the basis for developing a way to describe the lifestyles of flexpatriates.

#### 4. Method

Our research aimed at gaining deeper insight into the various lifestyle dimensions of flexpatriates and how these dimensions influence different lifestyles. Thus, we applied an exploratory qualitative research approach for exploring and understanding these phenomena and their linkages (Lamnek 2005). Interviewees were chosen through purposive sampling (Flick 2007) according to the following criteria: They are employed in an Austrian multinational enterprise (MNE) or an Austrian subsidiary of a MNE. They have a graduate degree and have had at least three international assignments within a year. The purpose of the study was to gain a broad picture of flexpatriates' lifestyle; therefore, interview-partners working at different hierarchical levels and different branches were chosen. We interviewed men (60) and women (39) whose ages ranged from 23 to 55 with more than half of the group under 35. Most of them were employed in Service businesses such as IT and commerce with some in consulting. Another third was employed in the industrial sector. Their business travels lasted from three to one hundred days a year. Some 20 percent of the interview partners were in top management and 30 percent were at the middle management stage (i.e.

Marketing, Distribution or HR-managers); nearly the half of the interview partners worked on operating level.

In the course of the interviews, we asked semi-structured questions about each of the lifestyle dimensions. Some questions were quantified to get an overview of the entire sample and to be able to identify specific patterns in the sample. Answers to open-ended questions were transcribed and encoded according to the derived categories. We applied a qualitative content analysis (Mayring 2003) to interpret the results and thematically coded the questions concerning the lifestyle dimensions. The aim of our research was to develop types in order to gain deeper and more differentiated insight into lifestyle dimensions and to extend the theoretical discussion (Snow 2004; Weick 1995). Thus, we thematically coded the interview texts according to the lifestyle dimensions. The results were summarized to gain an overall picture of flexpatriate lifestyles and their various characteristics. The team of three researchers met and discussed the data and processes at each of the steps in order to produce a consensual view (Bortz/Döring 2003; Schmidt 2005).

The following steps were taken for an empirically grounded type construction (Kluge 2000). One, the development of relevant analyzing dimensions: A type is defined by a combination of attributes, thus we first needed properties to form the basis for the typology. To gain a more diverse picture of the broad group of flexpatriates, we asked them questions concerning the lifestyle dimensions and the additional question, "If you could wish for anything regarding your international travel assignment, for what would you wish?" This helped us to identify key points of reference (what is most important to them). As in qualitative studies, these properties were elaborated during the process of analysis (Kluge 2000). First, each of the three researchers individually analyzed the interview texts to identify relevant categories. These categories were discussed and reformulated. To generate a common understanding we also drew upon our theoretical knowledge. Then, we again coded the interview texts individually with the derived category-scheme. Two, grouping the cases and analysis of empirical regularities: We grouped the cases by means of the defined properties and analyzed them with regard to empirical regularities. In this step we also integrated our results of the lifestyle-dimensions. These steps were necessary in order to check internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity in the data. Three, analysis of meaningful relationships and type construction: In this step the examined social phenomena not only to describe but also to understand and explain. The aim of this step was to reduce the combinations of attributes to a few types. These analyses led to a reduction of attributes as well as the development of other attributes. Four, characterization of the constructed types: Finally the constructed types had to be described in detail by means of their attributes and meaningful relationships. Table 1 gives an overview of the developed types and a description of the attributes derived from the interview texts.

Tough Travelers' wishes referred to their task and the organization while enjoyers frequently referred to themselves; especially, their health. Cosmopolitans pointed out the travel and the cultural benefits they gained on travelling assignments. Contactors frequently referred to home, their social environment at home and their family and friends. In the following section we will discuss the study results in more detail.

**Table 1: Types of flexi-lifestyles**

	Description	Main topics and themes according to interview quotes
Type I Tough Travelers	Universalism with reference to his/her task and the organization, tough, pragmatic, works everywhere and every time	Desire for organizational support, interviewees would like to have more support for planning and structuring their travels to be able to plan their tasks more effectively
Type II Enjoyers	Individualism and Coe aesthesia, with reference to him/herself and his/her body and health	Desire more comfortable and convenient travels (flying business class, 5-star hotels, good meals, time and opportunities to relax)
Type III Cosmopolitans	Intercultural interests, task are seen and fulfilled within the cultural context s/he works in	Desire time and opportunities to see and get to know the foreign cultures, to gain new cultural experiences; travels for a change
Type IV Contactors	Strong relationship with family and friends, with reference to his/her social environment	Desire to be able to integrate private life with the travels, worry about family, spouse, kids and/or friends while travelling, want to spend time with their social contacts

## 5. Results

A polycontextual environment is the typical world of work for flexpatriates. Although flexpatriates' working circumstances seem to be similar, individual's reactions and the interpretations about important topics and themes are quite different. In the next step we compared the observed behavior in terms of similarities and differences among the flexi-types along the lifestyle dimensions.

A comparison of the flexi-types with the results of the different lifestyle dimensions showed similarities in reactions towards structures of time and places of work. At the same time, we found distinctive patterns especially on the personal-cultural dimension and the social everyday occurrence dimension and to some extent on the factual-cultural dimension. It seems that the organization is the predominant influence on the temporal and spatial dimensions and limits the scope of action for the individuals.

In the following sections we describe the five dimensions (Richter 2006) determining the lifestyles of our sample. The dimensions are organized into two clusters: one, those dimensions dominated by assignments and their arrangements and two, those dimensions shaped by individual preferences and preconditions.

### 5.1 Structural effects of the temporal and spatial dimensions

#### *The temporal dimension*

More than two-thirds of the interviewees had completed six or more international business trips in 2006 and 2007. Some 70 percent of these international trips lasted between one and eight days and most of them were limited to one work-week (five days). Looking at the total amount of workdays abroad during one year, almost one-third of the interviewees were away for one month (20 days) and another third was away up to two working months (40 working days). Moreover, nearly 60 percent of

the interviewees stated that their business travel had been increasing over the last three years.

How do flexpatriates interpret and react to these work-time conditions? The temporal dimension refers to differences in behavior in work and leisure time and to differences in the view of time structure (working time and leisure time every day; daily routines and non routines; weekdays and weekends).

An absence from the company as long as two months is likely to result in an employee facing a heavy workload in the company-home after returning from an international travel assignment. The mixing up of different time structures (private and working time) like finishing work tasks during the free weekend is supported by so called “all-in-wages” and leads to fluid boundaries of work time.

The interviewees see their international activities as a regular or normal part of their work (and working contract). It is, however, less clear if travel-time is work-time. Contrary to an employee’s perception of travelling as an integral part of the job, companies do not regularly compensate travelling hours as working hours:

“I would prefer that time for travelling would be accepted, at least parts of it, as working hours. Since in our company the time for travelling is considered as time for travelling and not as working hours and this time does not flow anywhere. ... and this sometimes is very unfair, since sometimes one spends up to twenty hours a week in transit which is just ignored.” (I 36, 43 year old, male, tough traveler)

In companies using flexi-time arrangements, flexpatriates may be compensated for at least some of their travel time. However, interview-partners did not report any special offers from the corporations for flexpatriates to deal in a more flexible way with working and travelling hours, except in one case. This means that in order to keep up with home office’s working demands flexpatriates must work additional hours. Travel time also increases the number of weekly working hours and further reduces leisure time.

We also asked our interviewees what they did if they had spare time before departure. At the airport before departure they check their E-Mails and use their time for preparation or “*some work, for that usually is not enough time to do*” (I 52, 38 year old, male, tough traveler). So it seems that flexpatriates interpret the timeframe as a given structure and not something to be negotiated with the employer. They just try to keep up with their work and be more effective. This understanding is also reflected in the next dimension.

### *The spatial dimension*

The spatial dimension investigates the utility and usage of both private and public places (e.g. expanding working routines to different places). Additionally, this dimension describes differences among geographical areas. To operationalize this dimension we asked question about where flexpatriates were working and how different geographical locations influenced their lifestyles. Our interviewees stated that they were working almost everywhere. The increasing flexibility of work enabled with communication and transport technology (e-mail, notebook and wireless internet access) has expanded working routines to different places (private, public and geographical) as the following statement points out:

“I often have to work in the evening in the hotel or late at night after I have returned home to get all the administrative stuff done.” (I 29, 37 year old, male, enjoyer) or “It would be good, if you had Internet access and if it would be possible to telephone everywhere. You loose a lot of time, for example, if you are not contactable while sitting in the plane” (I 23, 34 year old, female, tough traveler)

Our findings show that flexpatriates work within polycontextual environments. They work, co-operate and communicate across multiple organizational and national cultures; at times simultaneously. Almost three-quarters of our interviewees work mainly among different regions of Europe (within and outside the European Union), one-quarter worked mainly in Northern America (Canada and US-American cities) and/or in economies such as the United Arab Emirates, Iraq, Egypt, China, and India. An interesting relationship emerged between the work destination and the various flexi-types. Tough travelers worked mainly within Europe, while many cosmopolitans had more distant travel-destinations.

Most of the interviewees reported to work at home if they were not in the office or travelling. Also, travel time is used as working time, so they work during their commute in cars, trains and planes as well as in hotel rooms.

To sum up, all flexpatriates react similarly to structural aspects of time and places of work. The professional work of flexpatriates seems to expand in time as well as in work places. Working time and working places are somewhat fluid. Flexpatriates deliver (and are expected to deliver) results which are not moderated by factors like the number of working hours in the working contract or compensated time for being away from the office. All flexpatriate employees interviewed had to work hard, but there are differences in how, on the individual level, they find positive outcomes from their work. This aspect will be developed further in describing the differences of lifestyle dimensions.

## ***5.2 Flexpatriate-types and distinctive features within lifestyle-dimensions***

### *The personal-cultural dimension*

Daily routines ranging from time to wake up to sleeping habits are directly influenced by working patterns. In our sample we found that patterns of behavior were influenced by travel aspects such as being delegated to foreign destinations at short notice, changes in eating and sleeping-working habits as well as leisure and sport activities. The personal-cultural dimension of lifestyle discusses changes in personal habits. Interviewees were asked about their daily routines look and whether they modified their habits because of international travel. The interview-partners reflected on their experiences of planning and organizing trips but also on the perceived influence of their experiences on their physical well-being.

Enjoyers in particular pointed out that their travel assignments influence their personal feeling and health: “*I have gained weight due to the irregular eating habits*” (I 76, 30 years old, female, enjoyer). They also said that due to their travel assignments they have less time to take care of themselves: “*I have fewer opportunities to do my physical work out*” (I 81, 33 year old, male, enjoyer).

Contactors also perceived travel assignments as having negative consequences on their habits: *“A great disadvantage is that you don’t have regular times and procedures and that impacts on your health”* (I 60, 42 year old, female, contactor).

Interviewees also noted that their travel assignment had positive effects. In particular, Enjoyers and Cosmopolitans stated their intercultural competence had improved; they enjoyed working in and with other cultures and seeing and meeting new people. Enjoyer and cosmopolitan flexpatriates also reported positive changes of gaining new perspectives and staying mentally flexible as a result of cross-cultural experiences. Travelling was seen as enriching and broadening one’s horizon and attitudes towards different cultures. *“Long term assignments abroad have improved my tolerance toward other cultures in all respects. My openness to other styles of clothing and meals for example was improved very much. ...I enjoy it very much to.”* (I 49, 50 year old, female, enjoyer) All in all, new cultural environments provided pay offs to cosmopolitans.

The outlooks of other flexpatriate groups to their temporary travel assignments can be summed up with the statement, if you cannot change it, enjoy it. Some interviewees who felt very strongly about negative aspects of travel assignments had already changed jobs to ones demanding less travel. Others changed their behavior and put their own personal interests first like the Enjoyers. Especially the group of Enjoyers referred to health problems. Sometimes they already have experienced or fear illness due to unhealthy working habits.

At the same time, some of the interviewees didn’t recognize any changed habits caused by their travel assignments. There are two explanations for this. Some employees already have made experiences with changing environments like growing up in different nations and studying in different countries; thus, their job did not differ from their normal lifestyle. On the other hand it could be argued that some employees absorb these requirements into their life and do not even realize a change in their behavior. *“Actually my lifestyle didn’t change. Travelling is simply part of my job.”* (I 51, 49 year old, male, enjoyer)

### *The factual-cultural dimension*

People’s lives are greatly influenced by factual-cultural items. The kinds of elements people use and how they use them is important in differentiating lifestyles. This dimension includes the material items in life, like technical standards and items, clothing and attire and luggage. Companies place these resources at the disposal of their employees so they are accessible nearly anywhere and at any time and can complete their tasks more efficiently. At the same time, these factual resources also facilitate private communication.

Our analysis shows that mobile phones and laptop are standard equipment for all interviewees. *“The most important things are my credit card and the notebook. I also need my mobile. Without these I cannot go on a business trip.”* (I 73, 51 year old, male, tough traveler) Despite these essential material items another important factor is connectivity: *“So I would say connectivity is most important, to be able to be connected to home, and therefore the mobile, blackberry and notebook are essential.”* (I 75, 29 year old, male, tough traveler) Some of the interviewees also mentioned that personal resources like photos of their partner or children, talisman, spa and beauty cases are essential equipment on their journeys; regardless of the

length of the trip. Enjoyers mentioned sportswear, cross-trainers, and MP3 players as the personal equipment most important to them: *“Business wear and casual, music, MP3-player, pictures, sports wear.”* (I 76, 30 year old, female, enjoyer); *“A good fragrance to relax, casual wear, I always try to take a bit of home with me.”* (I 95, 28 year old, female, enjoyer) Cosmopolitans focused more on the special features of the cultural destination including climate as well as socio-economic conditions and how to bring back memories: *“Cash in appropriate currency, a camera and clothes adjusted to the climate.”* (I 77, 44 year old, female, cosmopolitan).

In summary, this dimension relatively clearly differentiates material goods along the different lifestyle types. While all interviewees identified professional-material things (mobile phone and notebook) as the most important equipment for international activity other items interviewees considered important distinguished the various lifestyle types. Contactors saw the connection to home as very important whereas enjoyers preferred individual subjects like sports equipment, jewelry or a good book. Cosmopolitans differed with respect to their orientation towards the respective destination and what it had to offer them from an interest or tourist perspective.

### *Social everyday occurrence*

To explore social everyday occurrence, we analyzed the social interactions of flexpatriates from a business perspective (contact with colleagues and the home base office while away) as well as in terms of private life with partner/spouse/family and friends, both, away and at home. We found that interviewees seldom commented on the everyday dimensions of private life related to family aspects (family status, children and responsibilities for housework) and family-work conflicts. However, our sample characteristics may have influenced this by there being few single breadwinner partnership constellations. Most of the partnerships were dual-earner couples (DEC) or dual-career couples (DCC) and the latter are known to have a high potential to cope with conflict and stress (Sekaran 1986). In terms of care and family conflicts, one interviewee found his own solution and applied for another job with less international travel: *“I have changed to this position in order to be on the road less ... well, this did not work out properly, but I could to some extent reduce travel.”* (I 31, 48 year old, male, enjoyer)

In our sample there are several examples for the interface between private and professional spheres. Thus, an interviewee stated that a consequence of such intensive travel activity is, *“that you cannot maintain private contacts at home if you are travelling a lot. Yes, either you are not here, or you look... primarily after family while being at home or you simply want to rest. This causes you to have fewer social contacts at home.”* (I 54, 32 year old, male, tough traveler)

It appears that only little time and energy remains for social relations. This is illustrated by way of example with the following statement: *“Social contacts change and the only time to you see each other is on the weekend.”* (I 58, 36 year old, male, tough traveler). In some life constellations responsibilities are shifted with the other partner becoming the fulcrum and pivot for the care of social relations: *“On the whole nothing has changed. Friendships have been maintained – thanks to my wife. The only one thing to suffer is the activity in the association, in the case that I am on the way for a long time”* (I 59, 29 year old, male, cosmopolitan).

It can, however, be emphasized that travelling increases new social contacts, “*additional social contacts on site*” (I 62, 38 year old, male, tough traveler) or “*the travel activity has no influence on the contact and family at home. In addition you have social contacts on site*” (I 62, 38 year old, male, tough traveler).

In addition to the challenge of polycontextuality in cross-cultural communication there are positive outcomes like the possibility to become involved in an international network; a point mentioned by more than half of the interviewees. Participants reported few problems regarding interaction with colleagues, especially at the home base office. Some individuals noted that some colleagues at the home office are envious because they do not have the glamour of travel.

### **5.3 Summary of the facets of flexpatriates' lifestyles**

Our findings indicate that international assignments affect flexpatriates' employment and living conditions in both similar and different ways. Fluid boundaries between private and work time as well as public and private places are typical aspects of international assignments in a flexible format. Mobile and virtual work takes place in many more spaces than the traditionally designated workspace. It transforms places; especially public places like cafés or mediums of transportation like taxis into offices (Towers et al. 2006). This third form of rooms or places seems to be another source of evidence of mixing private and work life. These places between home and work offices become legitimized workplaces. Flexpatriates use airplanes, trains and hotel rooms as places of work. In view of time Virilio (1997) declares that these technologies steal “real time” because it shifts “here” and “now” in the background.

Table 2 shows how these arrangements lead to a growing temporal workload and intensifying the blur of work-life balance arrangement of flexpatriates and how it affects the four types differently according to Richter's (2006) lifestyle dimensions.

To sum up the most important type-specific differences, Tough Travelers focus on time, economy of time and efficiently of organized business travels. They rarely make a distinction between places of work. Adopting to different places and cultural backgrounds is not an issue for them – efficiency is most important. This observed phenomenon can also be found in the trend that Ritzer (1998) describes as “McDonaldisation”: Efficiency, control, calculability and predictability are the main criteria of a rather rational approach. The demographic characteristics the tough travelers indicate this is a very heterogeneous group. We found a broad range of ages, hierarchical levels in the organization, and forms of family status (singles as well as partnerships with and without children).

Enjoyers differ concerning the judgment or on the nature of their personal needs. They focus as much as possible on comfortable equipment for their travelling and business stays. One feature of this group is that they have the lowest contingent of persons with care responsibilities among the four types. In contrast, the group of Cosmopolitans emphasizes the importance of the cultural dimension of their international assignments and their multicultural interests. They are seeking cultural differences and inspiration from them. This type differs from the others mainly by the longer duration of their stays of more than a week. Type four, the Contactors, focus

on maintaining their social contacts and relationships. All, except one, of them are living with a partner and in this group has the most families with more than one child.

**Table 2: Overall results according to Richter's lifestyle dimensions (2006)**

Dimension		Main Characteristics	Main Results
Structured by assignments	Temporal	working hours, travelling frequency and duration	Overall Fluid boundaries of work time (irregular schedule) WLB more imbalanced to work (travelling hours add to regular hours, reduced leisure time)
	Spatial	work space and geographical destinations	Overall Changing destinations (different regions e.g. Europe, Asia) Fluid boundaries of work places: working everywhere and expanding working routines to different places
Individuals / type specific impacts	Personal-cultural	habits, change of habits through flexpatriate-job	Overall Changes in habits Individual habits are influenced differently by travel aspects, changes in eating and sleeping habits, trying to find new experiences and wishing to stay in touch with home (office and/or family)  Type-specific Tough Traveler: minor awareness of changes Enjoyer: focuses on individual interests (health and wellbeing) Cosmopolitan: has new experiences and gain intercultural competence Contactor: stresses impacts the wellbeing
	Factual-cultural	resources, support, compensation and symbols	Overall Perceived standard equipment: the notebook and mobile to communicate and to be reachable everywhere No additional financial rewards for travelling  Type-specific Tough Traveler: reasons of practicality and usefulness of resources dominates Enjoyer: sport and personal items Cosmopolitan: cameras, local currency and language guide Contactor: communication instruments to maintain contact with relevant reference groups
	Social everyday occurrence	social life, social contacts and social involvement	Overall Contacts established with different reference groups work-family conflicts and work-private life conflicts  Type-specific Tough Traveler: reduction of social contact with those who are seen as relevant and having high priority Enjoyer: reflects the dark sides of travelling and its consequences to social life. Cosmopolitan: does not seem to be affected Contactor: maintains social contacts with family and the private life sphere

In contrast to Tough Travelers, Enjoyers, Cosmopolitans and Contactors are all confronted with a reduction of clear time markings and an increase in blending between the boundaries of work and time. They, however, focus on other points to manage their working life as flexpatriates.

## 6. Conclusions

The differentiation of lifestyles in this empirical investigation offers a conceptual frame to identify different actions and sensory patterns of flexpatriates. The identification of these diverse patterns provides a starting point for organizations to develop a commitment oriented HRM configuration with lifestyle specific measures to support actual and efficient working activities. If lifestyle is defined as an observable expression of habits that is expressed in an individual's behavior then lifestyle is a rather stable point of reference, which has to be considered for the fit between organizational job requirements and individual attributes. From an organizational perspective it is crucial to develop and implement strategies that fit the needs of this important human capital group in order to enhance their commitment to remain with the company and continue doing their job (Lepak/Snell 1999, 2002). Thus, HR strategies are seen as essential to form an accommodation-model that successfully integrates the different goals and facilitates realizing individual lifestyles (Ridder 2009).

We argue that HRM practices have to take the employees' lifestyles into account in order to meet the employees' needs. Each of the lifestyle types considers certain aspects important. Consequently, these aspects have to be incorporated into organizational incentive and support systems. Tough Travelers might be satisfied if the organization plans their travel and they end up with additional free time or frequent flyer miles, while Enjoyers and Cosmopolitans might consider these incentives far less attractive. Moreover, Cosmopolitans might be interested in challenging destinations because of their individual attraction to cultural experiences and Contactors could be supported with state of the art communication devices.

Our glimpse into the everyday lives of flexpatriates illuminates various facets of their lifestyles. For an increasing number of employees the division between their work and non-work life are no longer bounded by clear time markers. Modern communication serves as a link between time and space (Harvey 1989) and is also a basic precondition for the increase of non standard assignments like flexpatriation, international commuting, and short-term business travels. Our results show that companies are using a mix of frequent international work of somewhat short duration. These kinds of work arrangements contribute to a burden of increasing working hours and workload in the home offices and reinforcing the blurring boundaries between professional and private life.

In a nutshell, interviewees' statements differ along personal dimensions like the personal-cultural and to some extent along the factual-cultural as well as the social everyday occurrence, while they have less individual scope of action concerning temporal and spatial issues. Flexpatriate assignments are no longer optional assignments for employees. For most of our interviewees travelling is simply part of their job. Some of them cope with it very easily but others find flexpatriate assignments adversely affect their lifestyle and consequently their working performance.

Welch/Worm (2006) describe perceived positive and negative factors associated with international assignments. For example, they see the thrill of the deal and personal development as positive factors whereas family separation or health issues are seen as negative ones. The results of our investigation show that, in general, there are no perceived negative or positive aspects applicable to all flexpatriates. Family separation was perceived as a negative factor by the group of contactors but it was not by tough travelers or enjoyers. Thus, indicating that each flexi-type perceives international assignments differently.

Furthermore, our results show that flexpatriate assignments have various affects on lifestyle arrangements. Therefore, adaptations of existing methods and the development of differentiated HR measures are necessary. It is important to incorporate flexpatriate considerations into human resource management planning and arrangement processes for organizations. One possibility is to consider different lifestyle types and their particular characteristics as early as in the staffing process. Very often flexpatriation is handled by operative units without considering formalized HR processes (Mayerhofer et al. 2004a, b). Employees' reference points should be identified and defined in the context of appraisal interviews. Also, empirical results of expatriate-research showed: "the key issue here is that the international assignee's perception about the availability or usefulness of the company's support and career development practices, rather than an objective assessment of whether certain practices are effective, has an influence on whether the international assignee will stay or leave" (Stahl et al. 2009: 95). Depending on the individual manifestation of various lifestyle dimensions, specific aims and focal points are given priority and consequently have to be considered in the design of HR practices.

The findings of our study are not intended to be generalized. The qualitative methods were chosen for their capability to develop an early complex and holistic understanding of a group of international assignees about which we have had limited empirical data. The emergent typology of Tough Travelers, Enjoyers, Cosmopolitans, and Contactors; however, shows that within the group of flexpatriates there are a variety of lifestyles. Therefore, we do need further research about possible changes in the psychological contract and objective and subjective perceived development of flexpatriats' career capital (e.g. aspirations and reality of the career ladder).

From a practical perspective our findings call for the assignment and design of human resource management responses, which we think can be furthered through the use of our lifestyle typology for organizations in order to more effectively understand and work with flexpatriates. To tackle the challenges of recruitment and retention of globally savvy talents, we argue that HR practices have to be revisited in relationship with the background of the diversity of international assignments and individual needs.

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