

UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA
GRADUATE COLLEGE

INPATRIATION AND POST-SHOCK CAREER ADAPTATION

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By
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Norman, Oklahoma
2024

INPATRIATION AND POST-SHOCK CAREER ADAPTATION

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
MICHAEL F. PRICE COLLEGE OF BUSINESS

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the processes by which inpatriates – a specific type of global employee who has been transferred from a local subsidiary office to the foreign headquarters of their multinational employer – attribute meaning to a substantial disruption of their global work roles. I explore the intersection of inpatriation and adaptation in a volatile work environment, with a vocational interest in how a global crisis functions as meaningful for individuals' careers. This research is based on interviews with 25 inpatriates who were working in a foreign country during the onset, and usually the duration, of the COVID-19 global pandemic. I investigate the extent to which their international assignments, or global work roles, were affected by the global crisis; I explore the contingencies constraining and influencing inpatriates' career decisions during this highly uncertain time; and I elucidate a psychosocial framework of inpatriates' career adaptation under such conditions. By conceptualizing a global pandemic as an exogenous shock to one's globally oriented career, I found that many inpatriates exhibited a counterintuitive response, expressing positive valence toward the career effects of the disruptive event, with salutary consequences including that the shock fostered global identity emergence. The negative case analysis indicated that limited personal agency, or perhaps insufficient adaptive readiness, might explain some of the discrepancy in the global employees' self-reported career consequences. Drawing upon the sensemaking and career construction literatures, I discuss the implications of these research findings for international human resource management and, specifically, inpatriation as an organizational and vocational globalization strategy.

Keywords: inpatriation, career shock, adaptability, international experience, global identity

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

As a prominent cornerstone of the post-World War II global economic order, free movement is an enduring Western societal value. Our organizational and vocational systems have evolved within a geopolitical and commercial environment that emphasizes freedom of movement, freedom of trade, and individualism, among other liberal values. Consequently, *globalization* – the ongoing integrative process among the world’s peoples, organizations, and institutions – has produced novel opportunities for individuals to construct *careers* – their lifelong progress through work experiences – that transcend both organizational and national boundaries. However, the world is increasingly beset by domestic, foreign, and global crises, which make international management more fraught, thus confounding the paradigm of global work that has existed for several decades.

The COVID-19 global pandemic, with over seven million deaths worldwide, is one such exogenous event that has challenged preconceived notions of global mobility (Caligiuri et al., 2020; Mello et al., 2024). The pandemic highlighted many of the inequities and inefficiencies of global work experiences, raising the questions of individual and organizational readiness and resilience for the next global pandemic (Brewster & Haak-Saheem, 2022). Insofar as experience working internationally makes one more competitive for professional employment in the 21st century global economy (Andresen et al., 2022; Biemann & Braakmann, 2013; Ramaswami et al., 2016; Suutari et al., 2018), analyzing this phenomenon in the context of a global crisis may uncover knowledge that assists multinational organizations, and their border-spanning human capital, in preparing and responding to future periods of volatility that are systemically and vocationally disruptive (Bader et al., 2022; Caligiuri et al., 2020; Hite & McDonald, 2020).

At its core, this dissertation is concerned with the experience of an obscure subtype of global employee whose international assignment coincided with the COVID-19 global pandemic. *Inpatriation* is a short-term or long-term configuration of international work by which an individual who works for a multinational's subsidiary operations receives an intraorganizational transfer to the parent-country headquarters (Harvey, 1997; Harvey & Buckley, 1997). While inpatriates might experience status elevation upon returning to subsidiary operations in their home country (Reiche, 2012), stigmatization and even discrimination can be concerns when they are working in the organization's parent country (Harvey et al., 2005; Kim, 2013; Moeller et al., 2016). The disruptive influence of a global pandemic on an already-marginalized international working configuration is an interesting and relatively unfamiliar phenomenon in a global employee literature that is increasingly interested in global crises like military conflicts, terrorism, and viral outbreaks (Bader et al., 2022).

Global employees are individuals who work for multinational organizations and whose roles involve international tasks or relationships, with their professional obligations transcending national boundaries (Shaffer et al., 2012). Despite recent criticisms of globalization, commercial progress will likely continue toward greater world integration (Contractor, 2022). Thus, globally oriented talent will remain in high demand, and the likelihood of future global crises obligates multinational employers to crisis-proof their recruitment and retention efforts (Caligiuri et al., 2020). Indeed, global employees like inpatriates, whose career implications are not well theorized (Collings et al., 2011), might be less prone toward leaving the organization when they perceive stronger career prospects (Reiche et al., 2011; Ren et al., 2013). One might anticipate that career prospects, and potentially employee retention, are bolstered when an organization exhibits credibility through continuous improvement and crisis preparedness.

In the economics literature, a *global shock* is a substantial and unexpected disruption to the forces of supply and demand, originating in one or more countries and having an equal or nearly equal effect on all or most peer countries (Andrade & Zachariadis, 2016; Souki & Enders, 2008). As such, a global pandemic stemming from widespread contagion is like a global famine stemming from synchronous global crop failure or world wars stemming from rampant nationalism and militarism. These are global shocks, and they differ from regional (e.g., Brexit), bilateral (e.g., US-China trade war), and local shocks (e.g., plant closure and unemployment), which are undoubtedly disruptive and thus informative but only insofar as their implications extend to individuals who live or work in the affected countries. A global shock should disproportionately impact global employees, as the work of all such individuals becomes tightly circumscribed by the novel, crisis-induced uncertainty in global markets.

Because international work assignments stimulate career development (Baruch et al., 2016; Shaffer et al., 2012), global employees and their employers may benefit by scrutinizing their vocational and organizational responses to an extreme exogenous shock that was significant in its impact on international work. Given that this unprecedented and abnormal global crisis suddenly disrupted the systems in which they were manifesting their careers (Mello et al., 2024), global employees' responses may have been atypical, marked by higher impulsivity and less rationality. An accounting of how individuals coped with the varying work conditions, and fortified their career prospects, may improve future decision-making about the management of globally mobile professionals during a global crisis (Kraus et al., 2023).

International human resources, global mobility, and multinational talent strategy are all integral to the same organizational function: the productive movement and management of employees in non-domestic environments. Collings et al. (2019, p. 543) described *global talent*

management as the structuring of an organization's architecture such that "pivotal positions that differentially contribute to an organization's sustainable competitive advantage on a global scale" are filled by "high-potential and high-performing individuals who reflect the global scope" and the "necessary commitment to the [multinational organization]". Extant literature acknowledges that individuals frequently embark on international work assignments for the purpose of career advancement (Benson & Pattie, 2008; Bolino, 2007; Mello et al., 2023a; Stahl et al., 2002). Multinational employers that recognize this motivating force, and integrate it into their human resources architecture, might uncover implicit yet valuable mechanisms for leveraging a human capital that subsumes an international orientation.

My dissertation advances knowledge of this organizational function by contextualizing it within a global crisis event that functions as *a career shock*, an extraordinarily disruptive and usually external event that induces career contemplations and subsequent action (Akkermans et al., 2020). Such constraints allow us to understand decision-making in adverse and extremely disruptive conditions. From this, we can identify ways in which inpatriates advance their careers despite shock events, and we can bolster resilience and adaptability in the multinational organization.

Background of the Study

To achieve the objectives of international business, employers often utilize international assignments wherein employees receive new or modified responsibilities in a different country or with some degree of international scope. The literature refers to these individuals as *global employees*. Among the few experiential tools for developing future global leaders, international intracompany transfers (i.e., international work assignments) may be the most effective. For decades, the traditional and default model of such international work, *expatriation*, typically

entailed the foreign assignment of a parent-country national, who would be perceived abroad as an influential representative of the organization's headquarters (Maley et al., 2015). This "control and coordination" function of international assignments via expatriation (Edström & Galbraith, 1977) was dominant in scholarship until researchers began to focus more attention on variety in international assignments, such as by differentiating between corporate-initiated and self-initiated expatriation (Altman & Baruch, 2012).

A promising alternative model of global work is *inpatriation* (Harvey, 1997; Harvey & Buckley, 1997), which differs from traditional expatriation, in part, because the directional movement is reversed, with inpatriates hailing from subsidiary, not central, offices and consequently possessing less power, prestige, and resources than their parent-country national colleagues (Baruch et al., 2013). In the United States, multinational employers can transfer their foreign specialized talent into the United States for temporary work; this is an L-1 nonimmigrant visa classification. An innovative and dynamic work configuration, inpatriation may be instrumental to sustaining the specialized knowledge and diverse culture of a multinational organization.

Unlike expatriates who typically originate in one country, the parent country, inpatriates are more geographically and culturally diverse in their backgrounds. Inpatriates function to transfer arcane knowledge (Reiche 2006, 2011), both implicit and explicit, and to bridge the cultural divide (Harzing et al., 2011) between the organization's headquarters and subsidiary. For such boundary-spanning objectives, inpatriation might be more effective than traditional expatriation (Duvivier et al., 2019; Harzing et al., 2016) when colleagues view inpatriation as encompassing greater organizational knowledge (i.e., both subsidiary and headquarters) than headquarters-anchored expatriation (Mäkelä et al., 2019). When they complete their assignments

in the parent country and return to their subsidiary locations, inpatriates' experiences, knowledge, and especially their social ties, become valuable resources for the organization (Kim et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2024) and for their own careers (Reiche et al., 2011).

Multinational employers may benefit from inpatriation, such as by improving subsidiary performance with stronger advice networks (Kim et al., 2024), but individuals also benefit from their experience working abroad in the company's parent-country offices. For the inpatriates themselves, the value of the assignment is likely its perceived instrumentality in advancing one's career (Dickmann et al., 2008; Moeller et al., 2016). As evidence, many studies report a positive relationship between international experiences and advantageous career outcomes (e.g., Biemann & Braakmann, 2013; Georgakakis et al., 2016; Mello et al., 2023b). Though sparse, the limited research on inpatriates' careers suggest that they tend to experience career progress after the inpatriation assignment – that is, after they return home through repatriation (Portniagin & Froese, 2019). This seems to be especially true when the inpatriates are socially embedded with their parent-country colleagues, having strong perceptions of trust, fit, and firm-specific learning (Reiche, 2012; Reiche et al., 2011). Presumably, social capital built during the inpatriation assignment is instrumental to discovering career opportunities through social networking and leveraging intracompany knowledge links for productive output.

The traditional reliance on corporate expatriates – typically domestic managers (i.e., parent-country nationals) of the parent-country headquarters sent abroad to subsidiary locations – reflects an enduring ethnocentric bureaucratic ideal in many Western multinationals (Edström & Galbraith, 1994) and is beginning to give way to alternative forms of global staffing (Collings & Isichei, 2018). With increasing globalization and migration, as well as difficulties associated with traditional expatriation (e.g., prohibitive cost; McNulty & Brewster, 2019), alternative

models have gained popularity among multinational organizations seeking competitive advantage through international assignments. Furthermore, expatriation is no longer exclusively applied to parent-country nationals sent abroad; a multinational employer might now recruit a manager from one subsidiary location to work in a different country – a staffing model sometimes referred to as third-country national assignments (Tarique et al., 2006). Some expatriates (i.e., self-initiated expatriates) might not even work for a multinational employer and instead choose to venture abroad for personally driven reasons (e.g., exposure to a new culture; Shaffer et al., 2012). Responding to this practical shift away from expatriation and toward alternative models, I seek to uncover a better understanding of inpatriation as an emergent form of global staffing. Moreover, I seek to address the glaring theoretical aperture that concerns the careers of inpatriates and especially the ways by which they navigate a global career shock (Baruch et al., 2016; Moeller & Reiche, 2017).

Purpose & Significance

Multinational organizations are finding value in the assignment of host-country and third-country nationals to the parent-country headquarters (i.e., inpatriation; Harvey et al, 2000; Reiche, 2006; Sekiguchi et al., 2019). That is because inpatriates function as vital “linking pins” between headquarters and global markets (Harvey, 1997; Harvey & Buckley, 1997). Strategically, inpatriation contributes to the realization of multicultural diversity and inclusion as well as the development of long-term human capital. Owing to the inward direction of their international assignment, inpatriates tend to differ from the more prototypical corporate expatriates primarily due to perceived power inequities that stem from disparities inherent to their countries of origin and thus organizational status (Baruch et al., 2013). Expatriates are traditionally well-resourced parent-country nationals who hold a disproportionate amount of

power in exerting social control (Edström & Galbraith, 1977). Conversely, inpatriates typically hail from subsidiary locations, which tend to lack the resources and organizational prestige attributed to parent-country nationals.

In addition to traditional expatriates, it is also important to differentiate inpatriates from immigrant workers. While inpatriates work for a multinational employer and are temporarily transferred from their home country to the organization's parent country for some predefined or open-ended assignment, immigrants are those who voluntarily leave their home countries to establish long-term and permanent residency in another country (Harrison et al., 2019). The United States visa classification for intracompany transfers is specifically a nonimmigrant visa. Nevertheless, inpatriation can be a stressful experience, not just because of the inequities outlined above but also because there is immense pressure on the inpatriate to be a metaphorical and literal bridge, a boundary-spanner, maintaining both a global strategic outlook and a local cultural insight (Maley et al., 2015).

In the context of a global crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic, inpatriates are likely to experience significant challenges that exceed those experienced by prototypical expatriates. For example, consider a multinational with headquarters in the United States and a subsidiary office in India. In this case, a traditional (American) expatriate working in the Indian subsidiary office has organizational prestige and power by virtue of their parent-country national status; they also have enormous resources by virtue of being an American national. When the pandemic began, the United States immediately offered evacuation services to its citizens and expatriates from around the world, with most either continuing their work remotely or receiving extensive unemployment benefits (Lund et al., 2021). Conversely, an inpatriate from the Indian subsidiary working in the American headquarters likely faced more uncertainty and risk due to furloughs,

visa cancellations, and border closures. Indeed, many foreign nationals who were working in the United States but were furloughed due to the pandemic experienced several months of uncertainty regarding whether they would be forced to leave the country. Many developing economies and nations in the “Global South” had fewer resources to evacuate, recover, and subsidize their citizens. It is this preexisting adversity and inequity, coinciding with their highly coveted cultural diversity and boundary-spanning knowledge, that makes inpatriation an interesting case to study in the context of a global crisis.

The focus of this dissertation, while applying broadly to professional global employees and their multinational employers, is the specific model of inpatriation. The purpose of this dissertation is to understand the career implications of a global crisis that interrupts an inpatriation assignment. In doing so, I intend to improve theory regarding the vocational instrumentality of inpatriation for the individual as well as the organizational utility of inpatriation for their employer. My research is significant because it provides unique insight into the emerging inpatriation model while also accounting for the tumultuous chaos that is likely to typify many future international work assignments.

Research Questions

In general, global mobility research continues to reflect the perennial challenge of understanding how individuals experience and potentially benefit from their time abroad in relation to their careers (Caligiuri & Bonache, 2016). *International experience*, which can be work or nonwork activities in foreign countries, generally has a positive impact on one’s career, or their professional trajectory through life (Takeuchi et al., 2005). However, extant data is limited and inconclusive (Hamori & Koyuncu, 2011; Schmid & Altfeld, 2018; Tung, 1988). One might not anticipate positive career consequences for an international work assignment if, for

example, perceived underemployment is a likelihood (Kraimer et al., 2009). Inpatriates seek opportunities to leverage this sought-after international experience and to apply their newly acquired knowledge and social capital. However, a significant aperture in inpatriation scholarship is the lack of theory explaining how inpatriation influences one's career and whether this affects inpatriates' value proposition as a strategic organizational resource (Moeller & Harvey, 2018).

Researchers have not significantly advanced understanding of inpatriates' careers (Moeller & Reiche, 2017), but they have emphasized that inpatriates' circumstances differ from those of expatriates in terms of power inequities (Reiche, 2006) and adjustment needs (Shaffer et al., 1999). With this distinction in mind, it may not be surprising that, in one of the few studies on inpatriates' careers, Reiche et al. (2011) found that inpatriates perceive better career prospects when they trust their colleagues at headquarters, perceive a strong fit with the headquarters, and acquire firm-specific knowledge. An interesting corollary might be whether this is true, and how it is conditioned, by an event that functions as both a global crisis and a career shock. Because of the dearth of research on inpatriates' careers, my research is conceptually broad as I inquire: 1) How do inpatriates make vocational sense of the COVID-19 global pandemic? 2) How does the attributed meaning affect inpatriates' careers? 3) What career strategies do these inpatriates utilize to overcome the challenges of a global crisis?

This line of inquiry is necessary to discover how the inpatriation assignment influences an individual's career and especially how they adapt their careers in a post-shock environment. The primary question is one of sensemaking: How do inpatriates make sense of an extraordinary event that functions as both a global crisis and a career shock? It is unknown what psychosocial dimensions an inpatriate might use to frame this global crisis and to understand its fundamental

nature as a disruptive event. Narrowing my question further, I inquire as to how this attributed meaning informs inpatriates' subsequent strategies to stabilize their careers in the post-shock environment. Insofar as stability is a natural goal to pursue after a disruptive event, inpatriation scholarship lacks theory that explicates the requisite strategizing for such a goal. Moreover, my research questions are ones of process – that is, I investigate not only the meaning that inpatriates attribute to the career shock event but also their subsequent career stabilizing plans and the reasoning that occurs between and that links the two.

To resolve these questions, I pursue applied qualitative methodology that is both exploratory and descriptive, with narratives chronicling inpatriates' career construction in this uniquely complicated context. In doing so, I anticipate theoretical contributions regarding the influence of inpatriation on one's career trajectory, especially the adaptive resources, behaviors, and mechanisms that facilitate realization of career goals in an environment featuring crisis-induced uncertainty and volatility. Practically, this research is valuable in that career adaptation is studied among a diverse array of inpatriates, a subgroup of global employees that receives less attention than more traditional forms. This research is also valuable in that it captures inpatriates' adaptation to a career shock that is historically uncommon but potentially more so in the future. In any given year, there is only about 2% chance that a pandemic of the magnitude of COVID-19 occurs (Marani et al., 2021). Nevertheless, given the increasingly risk-prone nature of international business – from viral or bacterial contagion to military conflict, terrorism, climate emergencies, natural disasters, cyber shocks, and other unforeseen crises and black swan events – researchers and practitioners of international human resource management need an "evidence-base for global mobility policies that will help employees to adjust to new ways of working in teams and the inevitable stress and uncertainty of post-pandemic travel" (Caligiuri et al., 2020, p.

708). My research questions are structured such that I may advance this evidentiary baseline for global mobility.

Summary & Outline

In this first chapter, I provided critical background information for the research. I noted that multinational employers are frequently turning to inpatriation as a strategic mechanism for bolstering knowledge, diversity, and inclusion in the organization. I outlined the ambiguous connection between international experience and career advancement, and I explained how an extraordinarily rare, yet disruptive, event can impede career progress. As it progresses, this dissertation addresses the central research question about how inpatriates' career decisions are influenced by a major exogenous shock like a global pandemic. My goal is to advance knowledge regarding inpatriation, an alternative model to traditional corporate expatriation, which is gaining momentum in practice yet stalling in scholarship. Specifically, I aim to discover how inpatriates cope with the stress of a border-spanning career shock. As such, I contribute to research at the intersection of global mobility and career shocks. This improves theorizing regarding the ostensibly positive impact of international work experience – as well as the ostensibly negative impact of a global crisis – on individuals' careers. Insofar as global crises are expected to become a more common occurrence and concern for global mobility, this inquiry shall provide guidance for optimally organizing structural resilience, agency, and career support for global employees engaging in inpatriation.

In the next chapter, I review germane literature regarding the relationships between global employees and their multinational employers as well as between international experience and career outcomes. Following that, I review extant scholarship on the inpatriation model of international work. That review is organized across three phases of the assignment: predeparture,

in-country assignment, and culmination. I close chapter two by providing an overview of the sensemaking tradition as well as the theory of career construction through adaptation – both of which inform the design and conclusions of my research. Chapter three explains the interpretivist qualitative approach in the methodology as well as specifics for research design, population, sample, and trustworthiness. I present and analyze the data in chapter four, and I discuss the implications of my research in chapter five.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Inpatriation influences one's career by cultivating firm-specific knowledge, as well as political and social capital, which seemingly bolster the inpatriate's perceived internal and external career prospects (Harvey & Novicevic, 2004; Moeller & Harvey, 2018; Reiche et al., 2011). But what does this mean for inpatriates who experience a global crisis as a career shock? And how might their multinational employers respond to a global crisis that threatens the careers of their highly valued global talent? I reviewed over 100 scientific journal articles to frame these questions theoretically and to apply abductive reasoning to the ensuing participant data. Research on international work assignments, and how multinational organizations manage them, spans more than six decades. For nearly half that time, interest in inpatriation as an alternative to expatriation has been fleeting yet reoccurring. I frequently cite the research of Sebastian Reiche, as he is one of the most prolific experts on inpatriation as a model of international work. I also rely on the extensive research of Michael Harvey, who both initiated and shaped our field's knowledge of inpatriation.

Unlike the expatriation literature, there is a dearth of research on inpatriation. Therefore, my review is selective but also relatively comprehensive. I structure this review such that readers understand the field's limited theoretical knowledge of inpatriation spanning across three phases of the work assignment: predeparture, in-country assignment, and culmination. Preceding this is a discerning and critical review of the literature concerning international work assignments and careers. I close this chapter by outlining the sensemaking tradition that guides my research and the theory of career construction that frames it.

Global Employees & Careers

Essentially, global talent management consists of “the systematic identification of key positions” and “the development of a [high-quality] talent pool” in a multinational operating environment (Minbaeva & Collings, 2013, p. 1763). The nature of such a system is both strategic and people focused. Executive leadership is accountable for global talent management, but human resource professionals share the responsibility for its success. Profit-driven multinational enterprises differ in many ways from organizations that are solely focused on domestic markets or even multinational organizations without a profit motive. One is competition, a fundamental driver of globalization, which necessitates a vigilant and adaptive strategic positioning. To that end, and not only because optimizing global talent management is integral to the realization and maintenance of competitive advantage, multinational firms must address the enduring challenge of implementing a “differentiated human resource architecture” that is sufficiently prepared for disruption (Minbaeva & Collings, 2013, p. 1763).

Multinational organizations recruit and develop future leaders who will likely have global responsibilities that precipitate situations in which dexterous and agile adaptation is critical for task and contextual performance. If one considers cross-cultural individual and environmental differences to be the greatest obstacles to effective and efficient global operations, then successful managers are culturally intelligent managers. Caligiuri and Caprar (2023) complemented this view by advocating for *cultural agility*, “a mega-competency that enables professionals to comfortably and effectively work in different cultural contexts.” Cultural agility consists of one’s abilities, motivation, and development toward cross-cultural competence. Cultural agility subsumes cultural intelligence and is related to similar aspirations like a *global mindset* – “a highly complex cognitive structure characterized by an openness to and articulation

of multiple cultural and strategic realities on both global and local levels, and the cognitive ability to mediate and integrate across this multiplicity” (Levy et al., 2007, p. 244). Insofar as career success in a multinational environment is partially driven by constructs like cultural agility and global mindset, multinational organizations are correct to attract and develop employees who possess curiosity, positivity, and flexibility for intercultural dynamics (Caligiuri et al., 2022).

International Experience and Career Outcomes

The extent to which international experience impacts individuals and organizations is debatable. However, few would deny the developmental potential of international experiences. Indeed, this is the fundamental argument among many advocates and scholars of intercultural competency and global mobility. For example, Dragoni et al. (2014) found that leaders exhibited greater strategic thinking when they had experience working in countries with greater cultural distance. Moreover, one may benefit from an accumulation of international experiences because of the variation across cultures. Simple business interactions like meeting clients can manifest in different ways depending on the cultural environment. High cultural novelty can especially facilitate the developmental nature of an international experience (Akkan et al., 2022; Dragoni et al., 2014). Novel interpretations of the same transaction occurring across disparate cultures can contribute to cognitive flexibility, which, along with physical mobility and nonwork routine disruptions, is a primary element of international work. All three elements are developmentally beneficial in that they “involve adjusting one’s thought patterns to interact with people of different cultures and adapt to uncertain situational demands that are complex and challenging” (Shaffer et al., 2012, p. 1300).

While Ng and Feldman (2014) found no significant relationship between international experience and subjective career success, I tend to accept that international experience bolsters one's career by both augmenting organizational human capital and individual career capital (Dickmann & Harris, 2005). A positive relationship between international experience and favorable career consequences has been confirmed relative to higher objective career success (e.g., higher wages; Biemann & Braakmann, 2013; Giraud et al., 2019; Ramaswami et al., 2016) and higher subjective career success (e.g., internal and external marketability; Suutari et al., 2018). Indeed, Capponi et al. (2024) observed a curvilinear relationship, suggesting that those who traverse more countries, accumulating international experience through a higher number of successive international assignments, may realize higher financial compensation.

Scholars have recognized the developmental nature of international experiences for several decades. For example, Miller (1975) found that having had previous international work experience had a significant effect on American expatriates' in-country job satisfaction, and Miller (1977) found that American expatriates perceived colleagues as being more qualified when the colleagues had prior international experience. International experience might therefore function as a signal of credibility and reliability for colleagues (Bolino et al., 2017), and it might also be important for establishing expectations of effective adjustment that can be applied in successive international assignments (Suutari et al., 2018; Zhu et al., 2016). Thus, international work assignments emerged as an important developmental experience in which individuals personally change their mindsets, enhance their work and nonwork intercultural skills, and engage in other learning opportunities that increase the perceived instrumentality of the international assignment for their career prospects (Akkan et al., 2018; Stahl et al., 2002).

Stroh et al. (1994) found that American expatriates reported better in-country adjustment when their multinational employer communicated the value of the international work assignment for the expatriate's career progression. Subsequently, Gregersen and Black (1995) recommended that multinational employers retain and promote high achievers upon repatriation from assignments abroad. Gregersen et al. (1998) then provided developmental strategies for global employees in which they advocated four developmental targets: diverse teamwork, cross-cultural training, transfers abroad, and frequent travel. They summed up the benefits, saying, "Working in a foreign locale every day makes it possible to have mind-altering, head-cracking experiences" (Gregersen et al., 1998, p. 30). A final example from this era, Gregersen (1992) found that American expatriates were more committed to their multinational employers when they perceived that the organization valued their international experience; however, the study also found a negative relationship between total international experience and commitment to the multinational employer. Overall, this research reflected the contemporary notion that international assignees, typically corporate expatriates, worked internationally at the organization's behest and for the organization's interest, despite the boundarylessness of emergent 21st century careers in the global economy.

Over the past twenty-five years, the management literature on international work experiences has overcome the limitations of exclusively American or Western samples of parent-country nationals and the phenomenon of expatriate adjustment for organizational benefit. Today, samples are more diverse and inclusive, and international experience is decidedly individual and constructive in its vocational value. For example, Gupta and Govindarajan (2002) explained how a global mindset enables integrative thinking across national and institutional environments, thereby attuning the individual to be vigilant in the global business environment.

Today, we acknowledge that international experience bolsters an individual's career capital, making the global employee more attractive to potential employers (Suutari et al., 2018). When developing one's career capital in multinational environments, one becomes more marketable and more attractive as a professional global employee (Mello et al., 2023a).

Takeuchi et al. (2005) parsed the theoretical foundation of international experience to delineate current and prior work and nonwork experiences abroad; others have investigated its relationship with a variety of career outcomes (e.g., Benson & Pattie, 2008; Bonache et al., 2010; Dickman & Doherty, 2008; Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007). Spanning all lengths and configurations of educational, professional, and recreational excursions abroad, international experience can be difficult to conceptualize, nevertheless operationalize. Despite the impact of international experience on adjustment processes being poorly understood, researchers do acknowledge the importance of this antecedent for career advancement (Biemann & Braakmann, 2013; Georgakakis et al., 2016). Interest in international experience, global talent management, and global mobility have become more common as emerging market multinational enterprises internationalize (e.g., Luo & Zhang, 2016) and novel models of international work emerge (Shaffer et al., 2012). The trend continues as the human resources function becomes more strategic (e.g., Belderbos et al., 2022), as global populations of people migrate (Harrison et al., 2019), and as the international management discipline becomes more inclusive (Cooke et al., 2021). Interest and accessibility are evident in the establishment of *Journal of Global Mobility* in 2013 as well as in the responsiveness of the human resource management field to both global mobility and global crises (Bader et al., 2022; Baruch et al., 2016; Chen et al., 2024).

Career Shocks in a Global Environment

In the literature on international assignments and global staffing, a focus on career outcomes has become increasingly prominent (Suutari et al., 2018). Arthur et al. (1989) defined *career* as “the unfolding sequence of a person’s work experiences over time” (p. 8). This temporal and dynamic conceptualization of careers captures the changes that occur across the individual, their employers, their geographic locations, their personal responsibilities, their professional interests, and their occupational experiences. Careers evolve according to organizational and individual actions as well as inactions (Verbruggen & De Vos, 2020). In general, there are two perspectives to career development in the global mobility literature (Cappellen & Janssens, 2010). The first is the traditional approach that emphasizes the role of the multinational organization in developing and supporting international assignees’ careers. The second has been referred to as a contemporary conceptualization of careers, and it emphasizes personal agency and personal values in determining one’s own career orientation (McNulty & Vance, 2017). Therefore, the present understanding is that international assignees’ careers are either organizationally or personally directed, but the latter has become more prevalent, with a shift toward agency and the interdependence between role, identity, adaptability, and satisfaction (Tams & Arthur, 2010).

Previous research has identified the international assignment as a key instrument for the development of career capital (Dickmann & Doherty, 2008), which entails knowing-how (e.g., skills and knowledge for a career), knowing-why (e.g., motivation and confidence to pursue a certain career), and knowing-whom (e.g., social capital and networking for a career) competencies (Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007). While multinational organizations tend to benefit from an international assignment due to an injection of intellectual capital, individuals also benefit from the cultivation of career capital (Haslberger & Brewster, 2009).

However, while it may be beneficial for career progression in general (Stahl et al., 2002), an international assignment often does not result in internal promotion (Dickmann & Harris, 2005), thus requiring the individual to venture outside the multinational organization for new employment (Suutari et al., 2018). Indeed, despite perceiving that international experience is favorable for one's career, many do not think the international assignment will benefit them in their current organization (Stahl et al., 2002). Moreover, the extent to which individuals' careers may benefit from the international assignment is often dependent on their adjustment during and after the assignment (Haslberger & Brewster, 2009). This value judgment is also affected by the repatriation phase of the international assignment – global employees tend to mistakenly believe that the organization will proactively and strategically leverage the international experience by providing unsolicited opportunities for career advancement upon one's return home (Akkan et al., 2018). Like predeparture training, repatriation support is often deficient. Due to the volatile ecosystem in which international human resources operate, such as the push and pull forces driving global mobility, the literature suggests a crisis context would substantially disrupt international assignees' adjustment processes as well as the meaning they attribute to the international experience as a dimension of their career (Baruch et al., 2016).

Despite the increasing frequency of inpatriation as an international assignment model among multinational organizations, researchers have barely considered how these individuals make career decisions. Because inpatriates represent a major source of intellectual and human capital for multinational organizations, this theoretical oversight is problematic. Lazarova and Cerdin (2007) argued that both the traditional and contemporary perspectives may affect the career decisions of international assignees, but it is unclear how inpatriates perceive these disparate approaches or even if there are alternatives introduced by a crisis. Hence, international

management researchers are now calling for a more comprehensive understanding of how the inpatriation experience relates to individuals' careers (Moeller & Harvey, 2018; Moeller & Reiche, 2017). Coinciding with this, careers scholars are focusing on how to navigate the vocational implications of a post-COVID-19 world (Hite & McDonald, 2020). In recent years, career success has been the most popular construct of vocational behavior, with career decision-making the second most prevalent (Akkermans & Kubasch, 2017). Similarly, adjustment tends to be one of the primary constructs in the international assignment literature.

A career shock is when one's career is disrupted by a sudden, unexpected event that originates in one's personal or professional life (Akkermans et al., 2018). Chance events like an illness or a termination might be perceived negatively and are likely to happen across the span of one's career. Being promoted or earning a surprise bonus have positive connotations but might be less likely to occur during one's career. These are relatively mundane career shocks, but there has been little research about global employees' responses to them. There has been even less inquiry into extreme shock events, such as a global pandemic. The contemporary approach to career shocks integrates the role of personal agency with the context that defines the circumstances under consideration (Akkermans et al., 2018) For example, Vough and Caza (2017) theorized that career setbacks, or negative career shocks, might in fact relate positively to one's career identity – that is, who they want to become as it relates to their career – by improving resiliency through the sensemaking process. Similarly, Wordsworth and Nilakant (2021) found that an earthquake, as an extra-organizational career shock, led to career transitions, with the relationship moderated by personal motivation and critical reflection. However, their study was limited to the impact of an earthquake on local workers' decisions to leave their jobs. Wordsworth and Nilakant's study did not consider the globalized implications for multinational

organizations' talent strategies nor for international assignees' careers. Furthermore, having only studied leave intentions, their study lacked a more nuanced understanding of the tension between leave and stay.

Pak et al. (2020) argued that, while career shocks could diminish one's perceived person-job fit, organizational resources like human resource management practices and procedures might overcome this issue and bolster perceived fit. For example, a positive assessment of a career shock, which could be due to organizational interventions or personality, may lead to higher engagement and career satisfaction (Kraimer et al., 2019). As such, Akkermans et al. (2020) offered four recommendations for conceptualizing COVID-19 as a career shock: 1) differentiate between short-term and long-term consequences; 2) consider individuals' unique life and career stages; 3) search for unanticipated positive career outcomes; and 4) consider the interrelationship between the individual and contextual facets of career. One can achieve this by capturing emic data that narrates retrospective and prospective understanding of inpatriates' lived experiences with the global pandemic as a career shock.

In a general sense, corresponding with the rise of globalization, individuals' careers are becoming more global (McNulty & Vance, 2017; Suutari et al., 2012). This is especially true for those engaged in jobs located outside their home countries; however, international assignments and global careers are not mutually inclusive (Tharenou, 2005). An international assignment does not always lead to a global career, which is an overall career orientation that typically involves several international assignments across one's life (Mäkelä & Suutari, 2009). As the focus of this study, inpatriates are undoubtedly engaged in global work; however, it is not clear if their career objectives are necessarily global, nor how the inpatriation experience during a global crisis affects their career orientations. People may pursue international job assignments for a

variety of reasons unrelated to professional ambitions, including, among others, family reunification, financial security, political stability, and even personal adventurism (Dickmann et al., 2008; Hippler, 2009).

Human capital – the knowledge, skills, and abilities accrued through experience – is highly valued by multinational organizations and directly benefits both the organization and the individual (Benson & Pattie, 2008). Augmenting human capital is one reason why international assignments tend to benefit individuals' careers (Magnusson & Boggs, 2006). However, international experience can also impede short-term career growth (Bolino, 2007; Suutari et al., 2012) and might even discourage one from pursuing a career with global responsibilities, especially when organizational support structures are absent, or the value of international assignments is unclear. Scholars have argued that individuals who are assigned to their international posting by their multinational employer are likely to receive more institutional support regarding their career ambitions (Tharenou, 2013). However, this does not necessarily mean that they have an interest in pursuing a global career. Employers need to consider whether talent perceives itself as global or has global career aspirations. Indeed, the relationship between international experience and global work aspirations might be explained by the emergence of a global work identity (Akkan et al., 2022) – but it is unknown whether this is true when a global shock interferes with the model.

Global Employees in High-Risk Environments. There has been scant research into how expatriates cope with high-risk international working environments and how such conditions influence their careers. Managing global employees in high-risk international environments received only cursory attention prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (Bader et al., 2020). Such research was not well integrated into the international human resource literature; however,

scholars have begun to remedy this since the global pandemic highlighted the precarious, risk-prone nature of international work assignments. Like the inpatriation model that this dissertation studies, Michael Harvey was also responsible for initiating research at the intersection of international work and crisis management. Surveying the response of multinational organizations to terrorism, Harvey (1993) approximated that only half of such organizations had formal plans to respond to terrorism and that those plans primarily concerned physical infrastructure (e.g., hardware) rather than psychosocial training for global employees.

Contextualizing a high-risk or volatile environment has taken several different routes. In a special issue on the topic, Farndale et al. (2019) limited their notion of a global crisis to one that is either economic, political, or social; the included articles addressing nationalism, recession, institutions, and demographics. Clearly, the likelihood of a global pandemic – a public health crisis – occurring just one year later was not a prevailing consideration for the researchers. Indeed, insofar as scholars previously studied global employee management during times of global crisis, the nature of the crisis was typically anthropogenic rather than organic (Faeth & Kittler, 2020).

Researchers have since investigated the negative implications of international work during crises (e.g., mobility restrictions; Bader et al., 2022) as well as the multinational employer's duty of care to ensure occupational health and safety measures in high-stress environments (De Cieri & Lazarova, 2021). Multinational employers might be concerned with profitability and reducing operating costs during a crisis, but modifications to human resources, such as restructuring global employees' compensation, ought not to sacrifice trust and retainment in the employment relationship (Maley et al., 2020). While global employees are especially vulnerable to the negative implications of a global crisis, no research has yet studied how they

adapt and construct their careers during a global pandemic – notwithstanding prior scholarship finding that such a crisis might attenuate the salience of organizational support while simultaneously accentuating the role of social capital (McNulty et al., 2019).

Inpatriation Assignment

Inpatriation was first mentioned in the management literature by Morgan and Bottrall (1988), who briefly observed the increasing frequency of foreign employees being trained at the multinational organization's headquarters for the purpose of managing subsidiary operations. In the second mention, Adler and Bartholomew (1992) argued that inpatriation functions specifically as a means of maintaining centralized control of the hierarchical relationship between headquarters and subsidiaries. That conceptualization – corresponding to Edström and Galbraith's (1977) argument that international assignments exist to ensure control and coordination – has evolved over time, but inpatriates continue to be perceived as boundary-spanning actors who connect and integrate organizational knowledge and culture. Inpatriation further evolved as a strategy for countering the ethnocentric orientation of a multinational organization, potentially making the firm more inclusive and rational (Brewster et al., 1992).

Today, rather than solely seeking control and coordination, multinational organizations may utilize the inpatriation model to enrich organizational knowledge, social capital, and diversity. Indeed, this was the contention of Michael Harvey, whose research succeeded the three articles mentioned above. Harvey and colleagues' early work (e.g., Harvey, 1997; Harvey & Buckley, 1997) is considered seminal for conceptualizing inpatriation as a tool that cultivates a diverse, multicultural, and global mindset among managers. Harvey and Mejias (2002) also suggested inpatriation as a staffing strategy for filling critical skill gaps in the parent-country headquarters. Building on these early conceptual papers, additional researchers provided

empirical evidence that inpatriation functions as an intraorganizational bridge, such as through intercultural knowledge transfer (Reiche, 2006, 2011) and innovative ideation (Kiessling et al., 2023).

Harvey et al. (2000) argued that inpatriation would be an appropriate international assignment configuration if the multinational organization were concerned with capitalizing on firm relational resources. That is, if the objective of the assignment requires social or tacit knowledge of the subsidiary market, then inpatriation is likely to be a strategic option. They also suggested that inpatriation could be more effective in the bilateral exchanges that tend to hinder expatriation success (e.g., cultural distance; Harvey et al., 2000). Similarly, Harvey et al. (2001) concluded that inpatriation would be most appropriate when there is both high goal congruency and high information asymmetry between headquarters and the subsidiary. In other words, inpatriation shares and fulfills the multinational organizations' strategic goals by bridging the knowledge divide between headquarters and subsidiaries (Harzing et al., 2016).

Inpatriates possess highly valued knowledge of their own native countries and cultures. Their inclusion at headquarters enables the organization to not only address subsidiary stakeholders and markets more efficiently but also to cultivate a stronger multicultural and global mindset among the organization's internal stakeholders (Harvey et al., 1999). As intraorganizational bridges, inpatriates engage in bidirectional knowledge transfer. They not only share their cultural and subsidiary-level knowledge with headquarters, but they also share their newly acquired parent-country knowledge (e.g., culture, procedures, and practices) with their subsidiary colleagues (Lazarova & Tarique, 2005). To achieve the benefits of inpatriation, there are specific considerations at all three phases of the international assignment that require the attention of multinational organizations and their human resource planners.

Preparing for Departure

To realize the advantages of inpatriation for the organization and the individual, it is important to select the right candidate for the posting. Building on his early work, Michael Harvey and colleagues expanded inpatriation research to focus on selecting and training individuals for successful assignments. For example, Harvey et al. (2002) introduced a model of selection that depends on candidates' multiple forms of intelligence and unique knowledge of their local markets, finding that those with unique local market competencies serve as a source of competitive advantage (Harvey et al., 2000). Research has further emphasized the necessity of aligning a selected inpatriate's competencies with the objective of the international assignment as well as with the multinational enterprise's organizational strategy (Moeller & Harvey, 2011a). Moreover, while traditional corporate expatriates and parent-country nationals are less likely to accept a posting to a country with high cultural distance, inpatriates are not so inhibited (Harvey et al., 2001). This suggests that when a multinational organization needs to bridge an intraorganizational culture gap, they may find more success in recruiting an inpatriate from the subsidiary market than an expatriate from the parent country. Again, this highlights the power inequity between inpatriates and parent-country nationals that tends to exist even before the international assignment commences. If high cultural distance is a more complex experience, it is noteworthy that, relative to traditional expatriates, inpatriates may be more inclined toward accepting such assignments.

Inpatriates tend to be effective intraorganizational bridges specifically because of their local market knowledge that provides them with credibility in the organization (Harvey et al., 2003). Therefore, multinational organizations tend to selectively target the countries from which they recruit inpatriates (Harvey et al., 2005). For example, if the multinational organization plans

to expand the scope of a subsidiary unit's responsibilities, the inpatriate is highly likely to be selected from the subsidiary organization. Moreover, because inpatriates' performance is more strongly associated with their motivation than with their abilities, multinational organizations tend to inquire as to the individual's reasons for accepting the international assignment (Schuster et al., 2019). For example, Moeller et al. (2010) suggested that inpatriates from emerging economies are likely to be attracted to the political and financial stability associated with the advanced economies where many multinational enterprises have their headquarters. Conversely, they argued that inpatriates from advanced economies may be more motivated by potential career growth and similarly personal dimensions like achievement (Moeller et al., 2010). Thus, it is important to consider personal motivations, inpatriates' countries of origin, and the environmental conditions of the multinational organization's parent country.

In addition to local market knowledge, professional competencies, and motivation, multinational organizations also assess candidates' capacity to fulfill the inpatriation assignment. Therefore, assignment duration is a key characteristic in qualifying potential inpatriates. In some of the earlier research (e.g., Harvey, 1997), inpatriation was conceptualized as long lasting, with semi-permanent and permanent assignments deemed ideal for cultivating multinational competitive advantage via globally oriented managers. The idea was that having representatives from subsidiary markets working indefinitely at headquarters would help usher in a more responsive and proactive global orientation among decision-makers. If that is the objective for the inpatriation assignment, multinational organizations need to consider whether candidates have the motivation and ability to withstand prolonged adjustment challenges. For example, Harvey and Buckley (1997) suggested that, for multinational organizations based in Western countries, inpatriates from culturally similar countries may fare better in terms of adjustment

than those from more culturally distant countries; however, job-related qualifiers (e.g., education, experience, and skills) were still considered primary criteria.

Knowledge transmission is facilitated by social capital (Reiche et al., 2009); however, long-term inpatriation might hinder the boundary-spanning nature of inpatriates as their ties with the local market may become constrained (Reiche, 2012). Although Moeller and Reiche (2017) noted that long-term inpatriation may still have benefits in terms of building sustainable and consistent relationships with subsidiary markets, most recent research (e.g., Reiche, 2006) describes inpatriation as a short-term assignment that may last up to five years. Accordingly, inpatriation – especially that of shorter duration – may enable inpatriates to maintain strong relationships with their local-market colleagues while also acting as boundary spanners and transferrers of knowledge (Reiche, 2011). Knowledge specialists are likely to be employed for short-term inpatriation because their utility is limited to the transfer of their local-market knowledge; generalists and executives may be more appropriate for long-term assignments as the multinational organization fosters inclusive excellence and pluralism among senior leadership (Moeller & Reiche, 2017). Inpatriation selection, therefore, depends on several criteria and its design is best considered in the context of the objectives surrounding a specific assignment.

Training & Development

Harvey and Miceli (1999) outlined two justifications for effectively preparing a selected inpatriate for their international assignment: to ensure good fit between the inpatriate and the headquarters and to facilitate productive relationships between headquarters staff and the inpatriate. Training should occur prior to departure but also continuously throughout the inpatriation assignment; training should also be offered to any family members who accompany the inpatriate abroad (Moeller & Harvey, 2011b). Because inpatriation requires intercultural

competencies, multinational organizations implement specific training and developmental exercises that consider inpatriates' unique frames of reference (Harvey, 1997). For example, inpatriates from an individualistic culture are likely to respond differently to certain stimuli than inpatriates from collectivistic cultures and thus require a different approach. Harvey and Miceli (1999) concluded that, despite variation at the individual level, country-level cultural influences are significant features of inpatriate training, requiring multinational organizations to consider the contrast with the parent country's culture. In general, they found a stark East-West bifurcation along most training constructs and recommended multinational organizations consider the preferred learning and attributional styles of inpatriates undergoing training (Harvey & Miceli, 1999). By accommodating inpatriates' diverse backgrounds, organizations can more easily facilitate inpatriates' adjustment and socialization at headquarters (Harvey, Kiessling et al., 2011).

Addressing sequential job-related criteria, Harvey and Buckley (1997) argued that multinational organizations must first assess, then remediate, any deficiencies in inpatriates' business education. Next, they argued that multinational organizations should consider culture-related constructs, such as cultural distance and intercultural communication, that might impede a smooth immersion experience. Important to note is their concern regarding assimilation – inpatriates are usually chosen for their unique local-market cultural knowledge, but this could be diminished if the multinational organization compels assimilation rather than acculturation (Harvey & Buckley, 1997). Cultural stigmatization of the inpatriate by parent-country nationals can also be diminished through effective training programs. Moeller and Harvey (2011b) recommended political skill training as a potential tool for facilitating inpatriate acceptance at headquarters; multinational organizations can cultivate political skills, such as social astuteness,

interpersonal influence, networking, and sincerity to diminish the effects of stigmatization. In addition, this intercultural training can be shared among parent-country nationals through diversity and inclusion programming. Nevertheless, multinational organizations will face obstacles to developing political skill among both inpatriates and parent-country nationals (Harvey & Novicevic, 2004); for inpatriates, these might be low self-efficacy or poor communication skills, whereas parent-country nationals' training might be hindered by cultural distance, resentment, and managers' negligence. It is, therefore, necessary for the multinational organization to consider not only the requisite training that ensures success but also the challenges that might restrain success.

Although the international assignment might prove pivotal for one's career development, the predeparture phase often provides insufficient career support and even leaves the inpatriate apprehensive (Pattie et al., 2013). Unlike parent-country nationals, who have power and prestige that may allow them to refuse a foreign posting with impunity, inpatriates are at a disadvantage and tend to disproportionately rely on the international assignment for professional growth. To ensure success in the predeparture phase of the assignment, Moeller et al. (2010) made three recommendations to multinational organizations when they select and train inpatriates: 1) the international assignment should be optional rather than compulsory; 2) the inpatriate should receive realistic job and country previews; and 3) the inpatriate should be promised continued employment with the multinational organization once the assignment ends. Because researchers tend to agree that the inpatriation assignment can be a significant catalyst for career progress (Sarabi et al., 2017), perhaps another recommendation should be for multinational organizations to provide more insight and training into overcoming unexpected obstacles that disrupt the international assignment and potentially impede career progress.

In-Country Assignment

Because inpatriation is often utilized as a means of enhancing organizational capabilities, it is important that organizations and parent-country nationals support inpatriates throughout the entire international assignment. Setting expectations, establishing role clarity, and ensuring coworker support foster more favorable adjustment to the foreign environment (Shaffer et al., 1999). While stereotypes, such as inpatriates' liability of foreignness, can be addressed with organizational interventions at the predeparture stage, it is also important to consider such contingencies throughout the assignment (Moeller & Harvey, 2011b). To combat the stigmatization of inpatriates, Harvey et al. (2005) introduced a step-by-step model that focuses on proactivity and feedback, with the aim of socializing inpatriates throughout their assignment and providing prosocial advice on how to effectively network with their new community. Similarly, Moeller et al. (2010) introduced a model of socialization that depends on the multinational organization providing comprehensive processes that ensure inpatriates can socialize with not just the organization but also the broader culture and institutions of the home country. Inpatriates with higher motivational cultural intelligence – inherent willingness and enthusiasm to engage in cross-cultural socialization – are likely to have stronger social capital following the international assignment (Davies et al., 2023). Consequently, inpatriates may receive prosocial mentoring that facilitates an internalization of corporate values, organizational commitment, and proactive social behavior (Sekiguchi et al., 2019).

Inpatriates have specific and distinct cultural references, which require socialization processes that differ from those aimed at parent-country nationals. Their unique backgrounds affect the ways in which they adjust to headquarters and to the new culture. Therefore, the organization needs to consider the full span of inpatriates' reference points (e.g., internal,

external, and time-based reference points; Williams et al., 2010). In addition to individual and organizational antecedents, it is also important to consider country-level influences in both the parent-country and subsidiary-level environments. For example, Murakami (2017) found that, in Asia, both country (e.g., geographic closeness) and organizational (e.g., large research and development budgets) variables predicted inpatriate success, with the former being more robust.

Beyond socialization, successful management of the inpatriation assignment also obligates the multinational organization to induce productive motivation (Moeller et al., 2010). Harvey and Buckley (1997) emphasized that inpatriates should receive equitable pay and support for themselves and their families, but they also cautioned against assuming that motivation is wholly dependent on compensation. Instead, they argued that compensation and support programs should be individually tailored to account for each inpatriate's specific needs and goals. Similarly, Reiche (2006) contended that motivation should entail informing inpatriates of potential career opportunities that might result from the inpatriation assignment. Determining effective motivational states may help to achieve the strategic goals of inpatriation that are pluralism, global competency, and shared knowledge among parent-country nationals and subsidiary units (Harzing et al., 2016; Tharenou & Harvey, 2006).

As one of the key justifications for inpatriation, knowledge transfer is clearly an important consideration for multinational organizations when managing inpatriation. In part, knowledge transfer can be hindered by issues with acculturation and adjustment (Reiche, 2006). Multinational organizations can potentially remedy this by countering the ethnocentrism that might exist among both parent-country nationals and inpatriates by providing inpatriates with support in understanding the local language and customs (Reiche, 2006). The former might require workshops or seminars in diversity and inclusion, whereas the latter could be resolved by

providing the inpatriate a parent-country national mentor as well as translated corporate communications. In either instance, constructive feedback between the inpatriate, their supervisor, and the global mobility staff is crucial for a successful assignment (Maley, 2009, 2011). In fact, when their international assignments are developmental in nature and include prosocial mentoring, inpatriates' internalization of corporate values is maximized, which has positive consequent effects for the intraorganizational transfer of those values to subsidiary colleagues (Sekiguchi et al., 2019).

In terms of managing inpatriates' performance, multinational organizations might rely on individualized appraisal systems that account for inpatriates' task assignment but also their unique cultural backgrounds. Harvey and Buckley (1997) suggested performance feedback should be more qualitative in nature than quantitative, with a specific focus on behaviors, and they stressed that feedback should be continuous and regular rather than a finite occurrence. They also emphasized the importance of communication and transparency to ensure that performance appraisals motivate effective performance (Harvey & Buckley, 1997). Furthermore, by adapting existing global talent management practices to the inpatriation assignment, rather than the reverse, inpatriates' perceived differences may be diminished and their potential to build social capital increased (Moeller et al., 2016). Inpatriates' social capital is of vital importance in terms of knowledge transfer during the assignment as well as once the inpatriate returns to their subsidiary market. Indeed, support from coworkers, as well as role clarity, are associated with positive adjustment among inpatriates (Shaffer et al., 1999). Inpatriation tends to be more common among multinational organizations that are mature and highly globalized (Moeller & Reiche, 2017), which suggests they may have the organizational resources to customize performance management to individual inpatriates.

Because they often embark on these assignments for career growth, inpatriates may be motivated to perform better when the multinational organization makes potential career or developmental opportunities explicit (Reiche, 2006; Reiche, 2011). However, they would struggle to do so if there is distrust between the inpatriate, or the subsidiary unit, and the multinational organization headquarters (Harvey, Reiche, et al., 2011). Homophily and the liability of foreignness (Harvey et al., 2006) can cause distrust on both sides of the relationship, and it is incumbent on international human resource professionals to cultivate trust between the two parties. Perhaps, in addition to transparency and honesty, this can be achieved by providing career support and guidance to inpatriates working abroad (van der Heijden et al., 2009).

Thus, inpatriates' integration at headquarters is a key concern for global mobility. Kiessling et al. (2023) argued that an inpatriate's embeddedness can influence innovative knowledge transfer – they conceptualized four phases of inpatriate embeddedness: survival, assimilation, acculturation, and pluralism – with increasing embeddedness correlating to the acceptance and integration of the inpatriate's tacit knowledge at headquarters. The more time spent in-country on an inpatriation assignment, the more time available to cultivate strong social network links (Moeller et al., 2016; Reiche, 2012). Supporting this notion, Kim et al. (2024) found that inpatriation is instrumental for knowledge transfer but only when inpatriates have ample opportunity for high-quality networking with well-connected and diverse parent-country nationals.

Culmination of Assignment

In addition to the selection, training, preparation, and in-country management of inpatriates, researchers have also provided analysis regarding the culmination and repatriation phase. However, across the global mobility literature, the culmination and repatriation phase of

international assignments has received significantly less attention than the predeparture or in-country phases. In fact, Moeller and Reiche (2017) found it surprising that, while repatriation analysis is common in traditional expatriation research, it has not been central in inpatriation research. Moreover, because there continues to be a dearth of research on inpatriation, literature regarding the repatriation of inpatriates is also scant.

Nevertheless, research has pointed to the culmination and repatriation phase of the international assignment as one that has significant implications for the international assignee's career (Baruch et al., 2016). Indeed, due to numerous reasons, such as a lack of organizational support and perceived status diminishment, turnover is not uncommon following repatriation (Suutari & Brewster, 2003). International assignments exist to advance the international competencies of the multinational organization, and inadequate repatriation procedures undermine this objective. While organizational actions, such as a predetermined plan for retention or even a premature termination, may indeed play a role in inpatriates' post-assignment career decisions, they are also influenced by personal decisions to pursue opportunities that align with their career objectives (Lazarova & Cerdin, 2007).

Reiche et al. (2011) suggested that, relative to traditional corporate expatriates, inpatriates leave their employers with less frequency following repatriation. Unlike traditional expatriates, inpatriates typically do not relocate with their families, so repatriation may be an easier adjustment since their families will be there to welcome them home (Reiche, 2006). Moeller and Reiche (2017) argued that the implications for the culmination of an inpatriation assignment are likely to stem from the context of the assignment itself, such as atypical circumstances, as well as how well the predeparture and in-country phases were managed, thus linking the three phases of the assignment in importance. Upon inpatriates' return to the subsidiary market, it remains

critical for multinational organizations to continue motivating inpatriates to engage in knowledge transfer (Reiche, 2012), and this might depend on the organization providing strong career and repatriation support (Reiche, 2011). Thus, in addition to career support, an important dimension of successful repatriation may be a continuously engaged social network, with inpatriates and parent-country nationals continuing to share knowledge even after the international assignment ends.

Due to the stress associated with inpatriation (e.g., adjustment and acculturation; Maley et al., 2015), retaining inpatriates in the organization might be a challenge. The argument is that, when compared to expatriates, the retention of inpatriates might be more complex and costlier due to the multinational organizations' reliance upon inpatriates' local-market knowledge (Harvey et al., 1999). In a study of inpatriates working at German multinational organizations, Reiche et al. (2011) found that retention was predicted by perceived career opportunities, which was itself preceded by inpatriates' trust and fit with headquarters. This suggests that career ambitions are of particular concern for inpatriates and the international human resources professionals who manage their assignment. Moreover, Breitenmoser and Bader (2021) found that career derailment upon repatriation can be mitigated when international assignees perceive strong organizational support in the repatriation process as well as when they perceive promotion and compensation advantages relative to their subsidiary colleagues who did not embark on an international assignment.

Although the repatriation phase tends to have considerable effects on individuals' career outcomes, international assignees also report dissatisfaction with career development support in the predeparture and in-country phases (Shaffer et al., 2012). Inpatriates have potential value upon repatriating to their home countries; as subsidiary managers with prior international

experience, former inpatriates leverage their international social capital to lead high-performing subsidiary-level teams (Kim et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2024). Thus, a comprehensive and holistic outlook, extending beyond the culmination and repatriation phase to include both predeparture and in-country aspects, of the inpatriation model may prove insightful for understanding its role in individuals' careers. Indeed, two recent reviews of the inpatriation literature (Moeller & Harvey, 2018; Moeller & Reiche, 2017) recommended future research that provides a more nuanced understanding of inpatriates' career paths, their career-related decisions, and how each phase of the international assignment may affect these choices.

Sensemaking & Adaptation

Inpatriation has been studied through social capital theory (Reiche, 2012), status inconsistency theory (Moeller et al., 2016), and reference point theory (Harvey et al., 2011), among others; no inquiry has yet studied the model through career construction theory (Savickas, 2002). Career adaptability and career construction are built on the notion that meaning can be found through experience and then imposed on future career-related decisions and behaviors (Savickas, 2005, 2013). Indeed, a career shock is itself the result of tension between external disruptions and internal sensemaking (Akkermans et al., 2021). Consequently, responding to a career shock necessarily involves deliberations about career plans and adaptations to guard against perceived liability.

Weick's (1979, 1988) theory of sensemaking refers to how one interprets their environment. Louis (1980) described *sensemaking* as "an essential coping process" for understanding career shocks, which results in "a greater ability to understand, forecast, and interpret subsequent [career] events" (p. 337). Assuming individual construction and interpretation of meaning, sensemaking is derived from myriad ambiguous phenomena including

personal identity, thought processes, and external stimuli (Weick, 1995). Individual identification is a central focus of sensemaking; from their environments, individuals extract and decipher signals that facilitate the emergence of meaning. Due to the ambiguity inherent in today's postmodern and equivocal interpretation of organizations, an individual's explanation of meaning is concerned with plausibility rather than accuracy (Weick, 1995). As such, narrative sensemaking, "which transforms the chaotic events of a crisis into an ordered and official story" (Boudes & Laroche, 2009, p. 377), is a revelatory lens for capturing inpatients' thoughts and behaviors in an uncertain work environment. Narrative sensemaking has been widely applied to organizational phenomena (e.g., Abolafia, 2010; Isabella, 1990; Kelley & Bisel, 2014) and career construction (e.g., Del Corso & Rehfuss, 2011).

Weick (1993, p. 635) summarized the concept, asserting, "The basic idea of sensemaking is that reality is an ongoing accomplishment that emerges from efforts to create order and make retrospective [and prospective] sense of what occurs." Organizational and extra-organizational *crises* – defined as "low-probability, high-impact event[s] . . . characterized by ambiguity of cause, effect, and means of resolution" (Pearson & Clair, 1998, p. 60) – and subsequent change have been frequently used to contextualize sensemaking (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010). Indeed, some of the earliest applications of sensemaking were Weick's (1988) analysis of the 1984 Bhopal industrial disaster in India, Weick's (1993) analysis of the 1949 Mann Gulch fire in Montana, and Gephart's (1984, 1993) analyses of organizationally based environmental disasters. Because today's organizations are fraught with complexity, and multinational organizations are especially embedded in a complex and ambiguous context (Caligiuri et al., 2020), sensemaking is an appropriate perspective to adopt for understanding the meaning inpatients attribute to a global crisis.

Career Construction Theory

A career spans work and nonwork experiences, and yet a career is more a manifestation of meaningful work than of successive work roles. Experiences such as work or nonwork life transitions illicit responses that, when directed at one's work, manifest career decisions. Agency and proactive planning are familiar elements of contemporary, protean, and boundaryless careers (Hall et al., 2018). However, it is career construction theory (Savickas 2002, 2005, 2013), with its foundation in developmental psychology, that I find analytically effective. People experience transitions and traumas in their vocational lives, but the determinative dimensions, relative to careers, are the responses to these stimuli. Career construction theory analyzes individuals' psychosocial responses to crises that disrupt work. As such, this theoretical perspective can emphasize the adaptation processes, coping mechanisms, and career strategies (Hirschi et al., 2015; Rudolph et al., 2017) that inpatients might adopt during a global crisis. Integral to career construction theory is the notion that individuals draw on personal agency to behave proactively in navigating transitions and shaping their careers (Hirschi et al., 2015; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Because global employees tend to exhibit a higher degree of cognitive flexibility (Shaffer et al., 2012), I believe that they are particularly inclined toward the adaptation that undergirds career construction.

Individuals adapt to transitions in their work and nonwork environments; they discern meaning from these transitions and then apply that meaning toward vocational development and career advancement. Drawing on psychological and social resources, both preexisting and emergent, individuals manage work-related tasks, transitions, and traumas by simultaneously adjusting and constructing their careers. Accordingly, career construction theory explains why and how individuals make the vocational decisions that they do, with the central pillar of career

adaptability focusing on one's alignment of personal needs and desires with environmental expectations and opportunities (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Rudolph et al. (2019, p. 3) succinctly conceptualized the model as “a phased sequence of interrelated processes” in which “adaptivity [or adaptive readiness, such as willingness or capacity] influences career adaptability which, in turn, influences adapting responses and, ultimately, adaptation results.”

Savickas and Porfeli (2012, p. 662) described *adaptivity*, or *adaptive readiness*, as a “personality trait of flexibility or willingness to change” that precedes career adaptability and adaptive responses. Adaptivity has been operationalized as flexibility, proactivity, core self-evaluations, future orientation, and dispositional positivity, among others (Rudolph et al., 2017). However, the fundamental understanding remains the same – adaptivity is one’s inclination toward optimal responses to work-related tasks, transitions, and traumas. This state of willing preparedness is an antecedent to the emergence of the self-regulative resources and competencies of *career adaptability* – conceptualized as four dimensions: concern (i.e., a lack of apathy) for one’s future career, control (e.g., decisiveness) over one’s career trajectory, curiosity about career opportunities, and confidence to overcome complacency (Savickas 2005, 2013).

One cannot discern concern, control, curiosity, or confidence in one’s career without first establishing a receptive cognitive state primed toward adaptive action. Optimal *adapting responses* – “adaptive behaviors [e.g., career planning] that address changing conditions” (Hirschi et al., 2015) – are facilitated by career adaptability; and optimal *adaptation results* – “[t]he outcomes of adapting behaviors, often measured in terms of career decidedness, career commitment, job satisfaction, and work success” (Hirschi et al., 2015) – similarly depend on a preexisting state of adaptive readiness as well as the preceding career adaptability and adapting responses (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

Empirically, scholars have confirmed the model such that the theoretical units and their interrelationships exhibit cross-cultural validity. For example, in a sample of Chinese business students, Chen et al. (2023) confirmed that, as an indicator of adaptive readiness, future orientation drives one's independent assessment of various career trajectories (i.e., career adaptability), which subsequently engages critical thinking and problem-based learning (i.e., adapting responses) that improve perceptions of employability (i.e., adaptation results). Additionally, Delle and Searle (2022) confirmed the first half of the model among a sample of Ghanaian business students, finding that both developmental leadership and career optimism functioned as adaptive readiness and predicted career adaptability. Pajic et al. (2018) also confirmed the model in their study of Syrian refugees working in Greece and the Netherlands: functioning as adaptive readiness, positive psychological capital facilitated career-directed concern, control, curiosity, and confidence, which preceded job search self-efficacy. Furthermore, the latter half of the model was validated among a sample of French business professionals, with Kundi et al. (2021) confirming that career adaptability led to an adapting response (i.e., job crafting) and subsequent adaptation results (i.e., career satisfaction and career commitment).

The extent to which a global shock affects an in-patriate's career can be partially explained by this model of career construction. Positive adaptation results, such as stronger organizational commitment or subjective wellbeing, may be explained by effective adapting responses like career planning and exploration (Rudolph et al., 2017). Optimal career adaptability implies a near perfect integration of one's self-concept with work, but this is unlikely as the process is continuous. Nevertheless, achieving optimal adaptation results after a global shock entails positive adapting resources and responses, which one may derive from a

reserve of competencies and resources related to career adaptability. In pursuing an alignment between their personal self-concept and their global work roles, individuals apply these psychological and social resources to direct their careers (Savickas, 2013). However, there is some variation in individuals' willingness (e.g., personality) or ability (e.g., resources) to make vocational adaptations (Rudolph et al., 2019). For example, noting a lack of conceptual clarity in the original model, Hirschi et al. (2015) recommended measures of adaptivity beyond flexibility and proactivity that account for context but still subsume trait-like characteristics (e.g., positive psychological capital; Newman et al., 2014). By unraveling their narratives, one can better understand thematic dimensions of inpatriates' work experiences and career construction.

Black et al. (1991) suggested that international experience, and the formation of intercultural expectations of novelty, should facilitate positive adjustment and superior performance abroad. However, Lee and Sukoco (2010) found that international experience alone does not necessarily indicate better adjustment in the international assignment and that cultural intelligence may be a better predictor. I would assume that international experience fortifies a career, theoretically making one more resilient and poised for constructive coping strategies – international experience augments one's career capital relative to knowing-why, knowing-how, and knowing-whom dimensions (Suutari & Mäkelä, 2007). For example, Felker and Gianecchini (2015) found a positive relationship between students' pre-graduation international experience and the degree of internationalization in their careers, with knowing-why (i.e., discovery of motivation and purpose) mediating the relationship. One might assume that individuals find meaning in their disrupted international assignments such that they are more likely to pursue a globally oriented career when they find global purpose in their work (Akkan et al., 2022).

Theories of sensemaking and career construction overlap in that both perspectives seek meaningfulness as motivation; however, I conceptualize sensemaking as encapsulating the narrower focus of career construction. Inpatriates construct their careers within the broader context of a dynamic, crisis-prone environment that one must continuously interpret. Aligning with the ongoing and iterative nature of both theories, I assume that inpatriates make sense of the global crisis, and overcome its impediments, by enacting vocational responses to the destabilizing stimulus. Meaning emerges throughout career construction but especially as inpatriates adapt to the focal career shock. However, despite adaptivity being an integral aspect of career construction theory (Savickas, 2013, Rudolph et al., 2017), the extant literature overlooks the instrumentality of international experience in preparing individuals to engage in effective adapting responses during their international work assignment. Moreover, for global employees navigating a global crisis, the linkages between adaptivity, adaptability resources, adapting responses, and adapting results are unclear; this theoretical aperture is significant insofar as a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between international experience and career outcomes is a perennial scholarly objective (Mello et al., 2024).

This research study is meant to explore the ways in which inpatriates navigate the career implications of a global crisis. As a global staffing model, inpatriation is notable for inherent structural and relational inequities, intraorganizational fault lines that become more conspicuous in times of crisis (Harvey & Buckley, 1997). By improving the theoretical and practical understanding of how inpatriates make career adaptations during a global crisis, organizations can be better prepared to manage uncertain and volatile conditions in such a way that the retention and success of global employees become more likely. Although I assume a positive influence of international work experiences on individuals' careers, I also suspect that global

employees – and their multinational employers – overlook the importance of optimizing this connection. Moreover, the contingency of a global pandemic introduces unique conditions that further contextualize the tension between agency and structure in global employees' career outcomes (Mello et al., 2024; Suutari et al., 2018).

For inpatriation, interpersonal trust (Reiche et al., 2011) and social capital (Reiche, 2012) – specifically a social network with knowledge spanning parent-country and subsidiary-country colleagues – are among the few constructs that researchers have theorized as drivers of inpatriates' favorable career outcomes. Because much of the inpatriation research is aligned with organizational strategy, there remains an unanswered question regarding inpatriates' perspectives and expectations relative to the career implications of the international assignment (Moeller & Harvey, 2018). As such, Moeller and Reiche (2017) called for scholars to study the processes by which inpatriates make individual career-related decisions and psychologically adjust to a dynamic intercultural environment.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Having positioned this phenomenon within the extant global mobility literature and tradition of sensemaking in organizations, I now explicate my research methodology for deriving insights about inpatriates' career construction during a global crisis. Given that the researcher is the instrument in qualitative inquiries, it is important to recognize bias by identifying one's preconceived notions and assumptions (Maxwell, 2013). It is not possible to omit bias; indeed, credible inquiries of sensemaking incorporate researcher values into the co-construction of knowledge. This reflexive process of deconstructing one's beliefs regarding causation is a cornerstone of quality interpretivist research (Crotty, 1998). This is how I bolster the analytic generalizability of the present research for multinational organizations and global employees (Maxwell, 2021).

With the analysis focusing on inpatriates – individuals experiencing an international intraorganizational transfer from a subsidiary location to the headquarters – who already have lower levels of perceived status, I would expect their crisis narratives to be more sensitive than those of the traditional expatriate. International management theory suggests that the inpatriate role is less privileged and less advantageous than the traditional parent-country national expatriate. One might expect that the crisis response of a multinational employer based in, for example, New York City would be more attuned to the needs of its American expatriates abroad than to its foreign employees working locally in New York. Therefore, I approached this research with the assumption that inpatriates were suffering uniquely, and I aimed to give voice to an overlooked employee demographic that disproportionately contributes to global productivity. Insofar as human capital improvements in rationality and inclusivity remain core objectives of management scholarship, this dissertation has direct theoretical and practical utility.

Research Question

I have one primary research question and two supporting research questions: 1) How do inpatriates make vocational sense of the COVID-19 global pandemic? 2) How does the attributed meaning affect inpatriates' careers? 3) What career strategies do these inpatriates utilize to overcome the challenges of a global crisis? In other words, the primary inquiry is one of sensemaking: How do inpatriates make sense of an extraordinary event functioning as both a global crisis and a career shock? And to narrow the question further: How does this attributed meaning relate to inpatriates' subsequent career strategies?

Research Design

In this exploratory-descriptive dissertation, I utilize Sarah Tracy's (2019) pragmatic iterative approach to qualitative research. Essentially, sensemaking cannot exist without context; one's perception is situated within unique conditions, and knowledge is realized through interaction and iteration. Tracy acknowledges this and advises researchers to pursue socially embedded research by identifying and dispersing "practical wisdom" for societal advancement.

Tracy's (2019) research design for qualitative research is a more practical approach to scholarly knowledge than the grounded theory methodology of Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss – or even the updates offered by Juliet Corbin and Kathy Charmaz. An abductive approach to logic, Tracy's design integrates inductive and deductive reasoning to elaborate, relative to scholarly literature, on an emerging theory. In a true grounded approach, as originally outlined by Glaser and Strauss (Creswell & Poth, 2018), researchers would not conduct a literature review prior to collecting data; they would simultaneously collect and analyze data until an inductive theory emerged; and they would likely apply a positivist epistemology to predict behavior. Acknowledging that humans experience life subjectively, with great diversity

and multiplicity of perspectives, Kathy Charmaz developed a constructivist, interpretive epistemology that deemphasizes the explanatory power of social theories. Instead, Charmaz-oriented researchers pursue abstractions, seeking to understand how abstractions are constructed and how they facilitate intercultural organizing.

Tracy's (2019) pragmatic iterative approach seems more effective for problem solving, in part, because the process is reflexive and focused on incremental refinements. A pragmatic iterative approach combines both emic and etic perspectives; knowledge is not exclusively emergent discoveries but also elaborative insights. Therefore, the pragmatic iterative approach enables the researcher to alternate between novelty in the data and explanations in the literature. Additionally, the iterative nature of this methodology does not indicate rote or mechanical action; iteration refers to the ongoing yet nonlinear process of analyzing empirical data relative to extant theory. It is a recurrent and reflexive process culminating in applicable abstractions.

Population & Sample

For this research, I recruited knowledgeable informants, or those with a deep and personal understanding of the phenomenon of interest (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Depth in this regard refers not to the duration of their international assignment but to their direct, firsthand experience of being an inpatriate at the onset, and perhaps the duration, of the COVID-19 global pandemic. In the context of the sample, consisting of inpatriate employees, the knowledgeable informants are the inpatriates themselves and not, for example, their parent-country colleagues or supervisors. These are employees of multinational organizations who were working abroad, as inpatriates, in March 2020, as the official responses to the pandemic began. My inclusion criteria included that the inpatriates speak English and used English as the dominant language during their international assignment. I did not restrict the inclusion criteria further because I wanted to

maximize sample diversity. For example, it would be an unnecessary hindrance to restrict my sample to inpatriates whose international assignments were specifically for knowledge transfer. This would complicate my recruiting effort, and it would also prevent me from uncovering potential differences between those whose assignments were for knowledge transfer versus other objectives like innovation or expansion.

Inclusion criteria for participant inpatriates, who were, at the time of initial COVID-19 lockdowns:

1. Working abroad as an international, intraorganizational transferee
2. Working at the headquarters or main offices of a multinational organization
3. Working in the multinational's parent country while hailing from a subsidiary country
4. Working with English as the primary workplace language

The online research platform User Interviews, Inc. was my tool for recruiting, screening, and contacting participants. User Interviews, Inc. (<https://www.userinterviews.com>) is an online panel provider that specializes in recruiting individuals for market research. Their services are used by major multinational corporations as well as individual researchers. The User Interviews platform includes several participant demographics, such as age, race, gender, job title, income range, country of origin, and the location of the inpatriation assignment. I include those in Table 1 describing the sample demographics; I omitted participants' job title, employer, and industry for anonymity.

My intention is to produce analytic generalizability, rather than statistical generalizability (Maxwell, 2013, 2021). Therefore, my sample is non-random but purposive and theoretical (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Purposive, or purposeful, sampling is a technique that relies on the researcher's knowledge of the targeted population to obtain a sample that advances the study's purpose. For example, my purpose is to understand how inpatriates experienced a career shock, the COVID-19 global pandemic. Therefore, purposive sampling constrains the sample to

inpatients who attest to their assignment's co-occurrence with the pandemic. A random sample of all inpatient workers would be inappropriate because my present research is concerned with a subgroup of the population. Furthermore, theoretical sampling facilitates the simultaneous acquisition and disposition of data, a process that may reveal theoretical novelty. For example, after I collected and analyzed the first few interviews, I found that social capital was not a salient construct for adaptive readiness but was perhaps more meaningful for adapting responses. I refined my subsequent interviews accordingly.

I did not restrict my sample to specific countries of origin, but the sampling may have been limited by User Interviews recruiting in only certain markets. A common benchmark of sample sizes in qualitative research is theoretical saturation, the point at which additional data points fail to reveal novel insights (Tracy, 2019). I aimed to interview 30 individuals, but I found that theoretical saturation was reached prior to my interview with participant 25. I realized this, in part, due to relatively consistent findings across 21 interviews. Contradicting narratives were observable for four inpatient participants – these negative cases (participants 12, 14, 17, and 19) enrich but also constrain my theoretical conclusions. I also removed one participant from the study because it was clear from the interview that they were not what I could describe as a knowledgeable and informative inpatient – this omission maintained my sample size at 25.

Data Collection & Analysis

The public title of my participant recruitment on the User Interviews platform was “Tell me about your experience working during the COVID-19 pandemic.” The public description for this recruitment read:

“I’m looking to speak with individuals for 60 minutes about their work experience during the COVID-19 pandemic. I’m also interested in how this experience has affected their careers or career goals. The interviews will be conducted, and recorded, on Zoom. I will transcribe the

interviews and delete the recordings. Your participation will be anonymous. This research is for my doctoral dissertation, and I appreciate your participation.”

To incentivize participants, I offered a \$60 digital gift card, facilitated through the User Interviews platform, for a one-hour, Zoom-based interview (<https://zoom.us>) with qualified inpatriates. I built a screener survey within User Interviews. The questions were only available one at a time, and the multiple-choice nature of the first two questions allowed me to automatically disqualify prospects. Those who passed the first two questions answered six more questions in an open-ended format. These responses provided more context to help me determine whether to invite them to participate in the study. The User Interviews platform also links to prospects' LinkedIn profiles, when available; this provided even more insight about whether prospects qualified as inpatriates working internationally during the global pandemic. I specifically sought a diverse sample of inpatriates (see Table 1), so I put no restrictions on any other criterion. Prospective participants were directed to answer the following questions in the screener survey:

1. Were you working for a multinational organization when COVID-19 began?
 - a. Those responding “no” were automatically rejected.
 - b. Those responding “yes” were allowed to continue the screener survey.
2. What type of global offices were you working at when COVID-19 began?
 - a. Those responding with “headquarters (or main offices) located in my home country” or “subsidiary offices located in my home country or in another country” were automatically rejected.
 - b. Those responding with “headquarters (or main offices) in a country that is not my home country were able to continue the screener survey.
3. What was the purpose of this international assignment?
4. In what country were you working when COVID-19 began?
5. What is your country of origin or home country?
6. Did your multinational employer transfer you from a subsidiary office to the main offices in another country? Please clarify.
7. What happened to your international assignment after COVID-19 began?
8. How has your experience working internationally during COVID-19 affected your career?

After three months of active recruiting (October, November, and December 2021), 117 individuals successfully passed the screener survey – that is, 117 provided the desired responses to questions one and two and had sufficient detail in the open-ended questions and digital platforms to satisfy my sampling criteria. As individuals qualified for my study, per my eligibility screener, I invited them each to review the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix A) before scheduling a Zoom-based interview with me in my online calendar. In this invitation email, I wrote:

“Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study. According to your responses to my screen survey questions, you likely meet the criteria of an “in-patriate” working for a multinational organization during the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of my study is to understand how in-patriates made sense of the global pandemic in relation to their international work assignments and their overall careers. This Zoom-based interview will last about 60 minutes. It will be recorded, but I will delete the recording after transcribing it, and your identity will be anonymous. Before our scheduled interview, please review the attached consent form. You do not need to sign this form, but I will ask for your verbal consent at the beginning of our interview.”

Before each interview, I reiterated the purpose of the study as well as potential risks (e.g., anxiety) and benefits (e.g., reflection) of participating. I reiterated that the interviews would be recorded and transcribed but with privacy assured, and I requested verbal consent at the beginning of each interview. I also reminded participants that they could end the interview at any time. During interviews, I kept notes of my observations and thoughts to aid in the subsequent analysis. The interview protocol (see Appendix B) included open-ended, semi-structured questions as well as follow-up inquiries to probe responses. My intention was to make the participant feel welcome and comfortable sharing potentially contentious or emotional information. I also aimed to ensure that my understanding of the information aligned with participants’ intent. I engaged in member checking with participants during interviews – that is, I explicitly communicated my interpretation of the participant’s experience and solicited further

feedback from them. I attempted to recontact participants later (May and June 2022), during the data analysis phase of this dissertation, but I was unable to reestablish contact with participants.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

	Parent (Host) Country	Subsidiary (Home) Country	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Education	Marital Status	Children
1	Denmark	Germany	30	White	Woman	Undergraduate degree	Never Married	No
2	Germany	India	35	Asian	Man	Postgraduate degree	Married	No
3	Germany	Albania	37	White	Man	Postgraduate degree	Married	Yes
4	Italy	Canada	40	Arab	Man	Postgraduate degree	Married	No
5	United Kingdom	Australia	39	White	Man	Postgraduate degree	Married	Yes
6	France	Mexico	33	Hispanic or Latino	Woman	Postgraduate degree	Married	No
7	Germany	India	39	Asian	Woman	Undergraduate degree	Married	No
8	United Kingdom	Israel	34	White	Man	Undergraduate degree	Married	Yes
9	USA	United Kingdom	23	White	Man	Undergraduate degree	Married	Yes
10	Germany	Costa Rica	30	Hispanic or Latino	Woman	Some college	Never Married	No
11	USA	India	30	Asian	Man	Postgraduate degree	Married	Yes
12	USA	Canada	38	Asian	Man	Postgraduate degree	Married	Yes
13	USA	Greece	37	White	Woman	Postgraduate degree	Divorced	No
14	Canada	USA	28	Asian	Man	Undergraduate degree	Married	No
15	United Kingdom	Cyprus	31	White	Man	Postgraduate degree	Never Married	No
16	Australia	India	29	Asian	Woman	Undergraduate degree	Never Married	No
17	USA	Denmark	33	White	Man	Undergraduate degree	Married	Yes
18	Germany	United Kingdom	38	White	Man	Postgraduate degree	Married	Yes
19	Denmark	Romania	36	White	Man	Postgraduate degree	Married	Yes
20	India	Canada	35	Asian	Woman	Postgraduate degree	Married	Yes
21	USA	Singapore	36	Asian	Man	Postgraduate degree	Married	No

22	Switzerland	India	25	Asian	Woman	Undergraduate degree	Never Married	No
23	India	Germany	32	Asian	Woman	Some college	Married	No
24	United Kingdom	India	41	Asian	Man	Postgraduate degree	Married	Yes
25	United Kingdom	Democratic Republic of the Congo	34	Black	Man	Postgraduate degree	Never Married	No

Data Analysis

I used the automatic transcription feature on Zoom to create transcripts for each interview. I listened to each interview recording and edited the transcripts for clarity and consistency. I made minimal edits to aid comprehension and analysis. For example, I changed each mention of the United States of America, such as “the states” or “America,” to “USA”. I removed filler words and tangential comments. Mentions of “endemic” and “epidemic” were all changed to “pandemic.” Next, I uploaded the transcripts to Delve (www.delvetool.com), a software for coding and categorizing qualitative data.

I coded the 25 transcripts using the phronetic iterative approach (Tracy, 2019). As I noted, this approach is a comparative method of finding theoretical insights between the coded data and the extant literature. I also referenced Nowell et al.’s (2017) six phases in thematic analysis: 1) data immersion; 2) initial code generation; 3) thematic discovery; 4) thematic review; 5) thematic definition; and 6) report production. This nonlinear process of developing inferences required me to directly solicit, and engage with, firsthand perspectives of the phenomenon (Daft, 1983). This also required iterative constant comparison, which facilitated my integration of the primary data and emergent themes with extant literature and theory.

As this is a dissertation that represents my own expertise in the domain, I did not have a second person coding my data. Most qualitative methodologists recommend that the doctoral candidate personally and solely code their own data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Utilizing a second

coder, as positivists typically do to demonstrate reliability, could undermine the ontological relativism that drives interpretivist research. However, I engaged in negative case analysis (Tracy, 2019), which is a tool for exploring contradictory or inconsistent data. Such an analysis ensures a plurality of voices in the data, and it bolsters the trustworthiness of conclusions. My aim was not to identify causal, nor predictive, nor even generalizable propositions but rather “to tell a richly detailed story” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 287) that contextualizes this interesting phenomenon.

Saldaña (2009) advocated stratification and pattern recognition in this analytical process. Such was my approach to coding the data. I read through each transcript multiple times, making notes and annotations as I went. However, I soon felt overwhelmed with the volume of qualitative data. I turned to Delve, a qualitative analytical software, which streamlined the process of coding, grouping, sequencing, and searching data points. Abductively, I consulted my review of the scholarly literature as well as interdisciplinary concepts that emerged (e.g., identity). The first step in my analytical procedure was to identify and code every relevant verbal cogitation that my participants provided. I initially did this after each interview, but the second half of the interview transcripts were coded mostly at the same time.

As I began conducting and transcribing the 25 one-hour participant interviews, I followed Tracy’s (2019) guidelines for coding first-level descriptive codes and second-level analytic codes. This initial coding involved reading each interview transcript and marking each statement with a descriptor code. One of these first-level codes was “transitioning to virtual work environment”; I applied this code to many quotes across all transcripts. I focused the coding as I progressed, using commonly occurring codes to sift subsequent transcripts. Another descriptor code was “getting more sleep,” as some participants described changes to their daily routines.

Upon moving to the second-level analytic coding, I joined these two codes together under the primary code “cognitive benefits from crisis.” Here, I was conceptualizing, and referencing the literature, to make analytical connections between descriptor codes.

I engaged in constant comparison throughout the analysis, which ensured the data and abstractions were consistent across the process. The memos that I recorded throughout the research process also helped to ensure this consistency. Moving into second-level analytic coding, I joined “cognitive benefits from crisis” with the parallel notion of “social benefits from crisis,” thereby creating a new first-level code “psychosocial benefits from crisis.” Using the abductive process, I frequently compared emergent theory and extant literature on global mobility and career construction. This led me to associate this “psychosocial benefits from crisis” code with the thematic “adaptability resources,” “adapting responses,” and “adaptation results” of career construction theory.

This analytical step further consolidated the relatively similar initial codes into themes, but this process was iterative rather than systematic. For example, Participant 24 noted, at various times, that his “family is almost entirely in India . . . [with the inpatient being] in the UK seeing them on Skype.” Participant 24 also noted that his family’s shared “resources will be strained” due to the pandemic; they wanted to “invest in the family” but “avoid in-person [hospital] visits.” These four statements from Participant 24 were each initially coded as “family connections.” Another example comes from Participant 21, who described a fearful situation of “people who are in one country [but] can’t travel and go back to their family.” Similar but different than familial bond, this statement has the initial code “family disconnections.” A final example, Participant 2, made the following statements that were coded as “family detachment”: “Honestly [it] doesn’t affect [me] that much . . . my work is entirely different from missing

family” and “[E]ven though we indulge ourselves as we like to travel to good countries, staying away from family has impacted us.” The thematic category spanning these initial codes is clearly related to friends and family. Despite some variance in how they communicated their feelings about being apart (or reunited) with loved ones during the pandemic, the participants were all clearly “missing family and friends” – the name for this emergent theme. However, like many empirical themes I discovered, this one relating to strained social capital had a dual function for career construction theory: adapting responses and adapting results.

I continued this process of initial coding and thematic grouping across all the transcripts. Returning to the theme of “missing family and friends,” I identified two other thematic categories that seemed to play a similar role across participants’ narratives. These themes were “organizational response to crisis” and “governmental response to crisis.” The former subsumes a few initial codes like “reassuring/smooth/supportive work response” (Participant 1 praised their organization’s Human Resources team for transparency and empathy, stating, “she would listen to what you were a little bit afraid of and she made every day at 3PM a [virtual] coffee break for half an hour just to keep some sort of normality and to be able to exchange each other’s fears.”), “equivocating employer response” (Participant 8 described “a mix of good and bad of how [the organization] responded”), and “rough work response” (Participant 23 stated that their multinational employer “could have done better for the people who are international” and Participant 15 was unimpressed with their employer “sending out newsletters from the [government] Health Department” rather than providing information directly). Extant literature guided this process of data analysis. For example, Levy et al. (2007) indicated that I might find one’s global mindset to play a role in adaptive sensemaking processes, and Dragoni et al. (2014) directed me toward cross-cultural relationships as a potential adaptability resource.

This was the process I followed throughout the collection and analysis of the empirical interview data. These flexible but systematic procedures facilitated the analytic generalizability that I aim to deliver in this research (Maxwell, 2013, 2021). For example, contrasting the participant experiences, I sequestered four participant interviews that clearly indicated a more adverse experience than average. These participants – called negative, or deviant, cases – were in the minority, and their experiences differed dramatically from the rest of the participants. See Appendix C and Figure 2 for additional details regarding emergent thematic categories and subordinate codes.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

By design, qualitative research lacks quantifiable values of validity and reliability. However, there are several criteria that indicate whether the research has integrity and rigor. *Trustworthiness* in qualitative research is achieved by addressing four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). *Credibility* relates to how well an audience can recognize and agree with the research and its inferences. It is akin to internal validity in quantitative research. I sought to increase the credibility of my research by consulting external researchers and soliciting their feedback regarding the research design and preliminary findings. I also utilized member checking, or participant verification, by summarizing participants' perspectives and requesting clarification. Corrections on this point required me to revisit some aspects of the interview. I sought to provide enough transparency regarding my methodological decisions, data collection, and data analysis that reasonably informed individuals can perceive integrity in my research.

Transferability is related to generalizability, or external validity, in quantitative research. It is concerned with the extent to which the findings can be applied to similarly situated contexts.

I sought to demonstrate transferability by providing detailed textual narratives that allow readers to determine when and where to transfer and apply my findings. Like credibility, the assessment of transferability is often left open to readers. Indeed, a key marker of quality in many sensemaking studies is the author's willingness to leave such determinations open to the readers (Van Maanen, 1995). Readers are empowered to integrate the qualitative study's findings with their own experiences, perspectives, and value systems. Credible transferences require context and evidence, which I provide throughout this manuscript.

Dependability is related to reliability, both internal and external, in quantitative research. It is concerned with how well readers can follow the reasoning and interpretations of the study. I sought to bolster dependability by clearly documenting the logic behind my exegesis and by providing an audit trail of my decisions. This research is dependable because readers are aware of the facts and procedures that guided my sequential coding and abductive analysis. For example, I document that I gauged participants' career adaptability, in part, by scanning the data to find literal iterations of this construct's four psychological dimensions: concern, control, curiosity, and confidence. An assessment of this that resembles mine would thus be reliable.

Confirmability is akin to objectivity, or external reliability, in quantitative research and is concerned with the accuracy of interpretations – achieved by establishing the prior markers of credibility, transferability, and dependability. I sought confirmability by clearly explaining my assumptions – how and why I made methodological decisions and theoretical interpretations. The goal is to demonstrate that bias minimally affected my decisions and abstractions, thus suggesting that readers could come to similar conclusions by following my logical reasoning.

CHAPTER 4: STUDY FINDINGS

Now that I have explained my quasi-sequential process of building initial codes, grouping initial codes, and categorizing themes, I review my findings. Here, I used the interview data and scholarly literature to resolve my research questions, explicating an iterative process of actions, behaviors, and results that occurred post-shock event. Insofar as inpatriates discerned vocational meaning from the global pandemic, functioning as a career shock, the salience of self-reliance was unmistakable. In a more typical working environment, inpatriates may look to organizational and external signals of career transitions and subsequent adaptive measures. However, in the highly volatile and uncertain conditions associated with the post-shock working environment, inpatriates were isolated and their career prospects were relegated to intrapersonal processes.

Having previously expected organizational structures and social networks with which to engage, corporally rather than virtually, inpatriates made sense of the shock event by reflecting on personal aspirations, ambitions, and acquired capital for achieving favorable post-shock career outcomes. This aligns with recent research showing that global employees with lower status levels, while generally experiencing stressful conditions, responded to the pandemic via internal mechanisms (e.g., coping; Haist & Kurth, 2022) rather than external support structures (Kelly & Conroy, 2024). Pursuing and realizing personal agency, inpatriates enacted career strategies that attenuated external resources and accentuated personal resources. For example, they recalled prior experiences traveling and working abroad as stronger drivers of adaptive readiness than organizational elements like predeparture training; and this notion influenced a concerted strategy to globalize one's career, that is, to further embed oneself in the global orientation of an emergent career. Inpatriates also strategized to transform the crisis into an opportunity for career advancement by, for example, pursuing new skills, knowledge, and

relationships that enhanced their individual human capital, social capital, and career capital. By engaging a newly realized agency in the post-shock environment, inpatients tended to navigate the career implications of the global pandemic by embracing a global work identity and actively manifesting novel opportunities for personal and professional development.

Figure 1. Career Construction via Career Shock

1. Shock	• Adaptive readiness • Exigent conditions
2. Stabilize	• Adaptability resources • (Mal)Adapting responses
3. Search	• Adaptation results • Contingencies, context

Adapting to the Crisis Event

Applying career construction theory to parse the data, thematic concepts emerged. Career construction involves a readiness state of adaptivity that precedes the resources and abilities inherent to career adaptability. Adaptive responses commence to produce adaptive results. These vague sequences were uncovered in participants' narratives; however, temporal progression is obscure, given the unstructured nature of constant comparison and theoretical sampling. Furthermore, I discerned a general pattern in which the onset of the exogenous shock preceded a period of stabilization and subsequent search for new meaning (see Figure 1). The state of adaptivity is active at the onset of the shock event; career adaptability and adapting responses coincide with the period of stabilization; and adaptive results are apparent in the final phase during which inpatients search and discover the distal meaningfulness of the shock event for their careers. Thus, a three-part sequence of career adaptation is presented: shock, stabilization, and search. See Appendix C and Figure 2 for primary codes and emergent themes.

Adaptive readiness was expressed through individual-level characteristics: psychological capital, extraversion, international experience, and international work travel emerged as salient constructs. A clear discrepancy exists between how participants viewed governments versus organizations. Almost to a person, organizational employers were deemed more credible and informative than sovereign governments. Another commonality was the extreme relevance of global institutional responses to the global pandemic for globally mobile professionals. Many participants expressed strong aversion to border lockdowns that threatened their sense of security and freedom to travel internationally and to return home at will. Making autonomous career choices was clearly a favorable contingency. There were also tensions for social capital since inpatriates were usually dislocated from family and colleagues. The extent to which inpatriates could discover and deploy adaptability resources, and engage in constructive adapting responses, was constrained by these conditions.

In other words, stabilizing one's career in the post-shock environment was partly dependent on organizational support and personal agency, but social capital also conditioned the model. Lastly, international experience, and cultivating a global mindset more broadly, were generally seen as strong adaptive characteristics that enabled positive adapting strategies among the inpatriates. Organizational commitment, subjective wellbeing, and personal marketability emerged as salient results of the adaptation process. A negative case analysis uncovered how adverse organizational responses to the global shock event – specifically, forced or involuntary repatriation – had manifestly negative implications for the inpatriate's career adaptation.

Shock Phase

The onset of governmental and organizational responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, such as “lockdowns,” “stay-at-home” mandates, border closures, curfews, and

compulsory remote-work policies, were unprecedented and would thus constitute a veritable shock to any social system. Accompanying these social conditions were extreme levels of intrapersonal uncertainty and fear of a viral contagion and indefinite pandemic. People rightfully feared a global outbreak of disease with once-in-a-century implications. For professionals whose very livelihoods depended on international commerce, whose organizational roles had them working in a foreign country during the onset of such a global crisis, this shock phase became even more pronounced. Inpatriates, and their multinational employers, began making significant decisions in these initial days and weeks of the global shock event.

Many of my study participants cited career advancement as a key reason for undertaking their present international assignment; therefore, it is unsurprising that most participants sought to protect their careers in the post-shock environment. Participant 3 is a prime example of an inpatriate by happenstance instead of by purpose. This individual was working for a financial institution in Albania, which was bought by a larger corporation in Germany, making their location a subsidiary partner in the relationship. Citing both previous work and education outside Albania, and his anticipation of a higher salary and personal promotability that might accompany a Germany-based position, this participant accepted an intracompany transfer to the headquarters office in Germany. His initial posting was a temporary placement to cover a colleague's maternity leave; his work was like what he had been doing in Albania, and he received no formal training. The pandemic began a couple of months after he arrived in Germany, and he described it thusly [*with emphases added*]:

*"We basically went from almost a 100% office-based to a 100% home-based. There wasn't really an issue with doing that because a lot of people in my company **were used to traveling a lot**, so they **were used to being independent** . . . [Now] you had to get used to basically having preset appointments in the first place because you could not call their office directly or walk into somebody else's office and ask a question . . . **The main problem was actually the travel restrictions** . . . We're talking about [international onsite*

events] that would last for a week or two or three weeks or a month. Now moving all of this from face-to-face to screen-based was a bit tedious.” – Participant 3

*“[F]rom one day to the other, we moved from the office to home office basically. And from there people started adapting. So, for the **people who were used to traveling a lot** and had that **time working in different locations around the world**, it wasn't really much of a problem . . . the travel **restrictions were a government decision**.” – Participant 3*

Participant 3, like many other participants, reported a relative ease of transition due to having traveled internationally in the past, which required independent decisions and continuous adjustment. Indeed, it was the restrictions on international travel that Participant 3 found most hindering in the post-shock environment. Facing the shock event, inpatriates naturally looked to their employers and national institutions for guidance. Most experienced this time as a deprivation of freedom and free movement: “[A]dapting to it for the first two months was adapting to coming from complete freedom to fully restricted” (Participant 3). The inability to travel seemed to be a significant issue for many participants. Employers, as the most immediate stakeholder to the inpatriate in this situation, were expected to provide pertinent information for adapting one’s work. For many like Participant 3, organizational support from the multinational employer was mostly nonexistent. He was allowed to make autonomous decisions about how to continue his international assignment in Germany. On the other hand, travel restrictions were regarded negatively, and fault was attributed to national governments. Many found their employers to be effectively responsive to the changing environmental conditions, and they were often assessed as more reliable than national governments. Some, like Participant 25, appreciated their government’s slow action because it delayed imprecise restrictions on business and allowed more time to plan transitions: “In the UK, I think our government probably was too slow in responding. But that was good for my work because it gave us more time to pivot and adapt.”

*“In general, **the organization was very proactive** with keeping us up to date about what's happening. Like COVID started to spread quickly in Italy in January 2020. [Organization D] was very early and very comprehensive. **They gave good support**, and*

*they worked to keep us up to date about the number of cases, whether any data or **information they got from the Italian government** or the local governments or institutions like banks was changing.” – Participant 4*

*“I think how the UK runs and deals with the pandemic is a bit nuts. Yes, there are more vaccines there. But like the way **they drive politics with wishes and opinions**. I don't think it's smart.” – Participant 1*

*“[T]his isn't an attack on the UK, but it's been less reliable and less efficient here than in many countries. Like our government's websites for COVID and travel are less helpful than other countries. Like what are the conditions, how to apply for exemptions, etc. So, **the UK seems poorly managed**, and we have to find information from non-government websites and sources. That's made me **spend even more time on planning** and thinking about [contingencies] than I would if the government was more helpful.” – Participant 5*

After their employers, families and other social relationships were the second stakeholder group to assess. The importance of social relationships in overcoming shock events suggests that inpatients may be even more disadvantaged if their families had not accompanied them on the international assignment. The family of Participant 3 was at home in Albania, and the inpatient reported visiting a couple of times when travel restrictions became less severe. My impression was that he would have returned to Albania indefinitely, for family reunification purposes, continuing his international work assignment remotely, but the logistical and organizational arrangements for doing so were not immediately available. Nevertheless, Participant 3 reported favorably on his children being in a country that allowed them to play outside rather than experience the indoor lockdowns occurring in Germany. This contrasted sharply with individuals like Participant 5 from Australia who found their home countries to be unaccommodating for short return visits.

*“Unlike in Germany, Albania didn't have too many restrictions. So **[my children] were actually much happier to be in Albania**. They could do a lot more things and go out more freely and play . . . In Germany, they would just get stuck with the two of us inside . . . **they [were] happy to get out of here**.” – Participant 3*

*“Well, I was quite cross that my own country **Australia is not more accommodating to Australians who are working [abroad]**. Like if I went home now, it would be hard to get*

*in the country, I'd have to quarantine in a hotel, and **I may not be able to leave** when I need to for my work here in the United Kingdom.” – Participant 5*

An immediate concern for most inpatriates interviewed was the risk of becoming “trapped” in a foreign country. This suggested a future orientation, with the adaptivity indicating a need for a stabilized environment from which to maintain and further advance one’s career. Participants feared being isolated in an unfamiliar country, often with their families in other countries, with all forms of international travel and cross-border movement being suspended. This risk assessment was specific to the host country in which inpatriates were working, but many also feared that they could be isolated in a third-party country while traveling back home. Work authorizations were sometimes a concern, given the disruptions in government agencies as well as in organizational personnel departments. Thus, inpatriates showed strategic awareness for future adaptive measures that would require physical security in one’s work and nonwork environment.

“I was afraid of being trapped in a different country.” – Participant 1

*“And I don’t want to travel somewhere where **I could potentially be at risk or stranded.**” – Participant 5*

*“My manager asked if I want to return home. I said, “Absolutely! You don’t need to ask twice. **Get me the first plane out please.**” You know, I have a husband and children, and they were in Canada. Can you **imagine getting stuck in another country** from your family during a health crisis? I cannot.” – Participant 20*

*“I was quite scared. Because **imagine living abroad** by yourself, being away from family and friends, and then something goes wrong. What do you do? What if something happens to one of your relatives or one of your friends in the other country? **I was quite anxious and worried.** I’m already a stressed person.” – Participant 15*

*“I was nervous about **being stuck in Italy when I’m not Italian**, don’t have a home there, don’t speak the language, no friends or family, etc. It would be very difficult for me to go outside of Italy because **there was no assurance that I would be allowed back . . .** That was **very uncertain** from a job perspective.” – Participant 4*

*“It was unknown if the employment would continue. We didn’t know anything about treatment or vaccinations. The **travel restrictions were scary because we are used to our***

freedom, especially traveling between Canada and the US. I think it was more like if [I] get stuck here how will I get home? Walk across the border?” – Participant 14

Accordingly, uncertainty surrounding the immediate impact of the shock event was a strong driver of inpatriates’ early decision-making about how to protect their career interests. Some, like Participant 3, expressed less fear of the uncertainty surrounding these travel restrictions, ironically invoking their prior international travel experience as enabling a calmer response to the travel uncertainty. In addition, it seemed that prior international experiences and prior international travel were gauged differently, with both fostering a position of adaptive preparedness and willingness to meet the changing environmental conditions.

*“Let's say **my social contact may have dropped by 10 or 20% . . . [but] a lot of my friends have similar traveling lives.** So, we're all expats basically where like 80 or 90% of my friends also travel a lot. So, **we're used to [ambiguous schedules].**”* – Participant 3

*“Another thing that helped me was my [prior job] **working for Global Affairs Canada.** We had **a hybrid [international] working schedule . . .** So, I kind of had the advantage of learning from that experience **how to organize my time** [with] in-person work, in the office, [and] teleworking. [A]djustment was not very hard personally”* – Participant 4

*“**The more you travel, the more you experience international chances to grow, the more you see the world with different eyes.**”* – Participant 6

When discussing international experiences that they had prior to the pandemic, inpatriates often referred to their experiences as fortifying for the current crisis. They described international experience as making them more personally proactive to environmental fluctuations.

International experience informed inpatriates’ planned behaviors and contingency expectations in the present inpatriation assignment. Participant 3 expressed that his prior times traveling abroad made his family, living in Albania, more understanding of his absence while he was isolated in Germany. International experience enabled stronger adaptive responses from inpatriates experiencing the career shock event. Participant 5 made a similar suggestion by stating that their industry experience, event management, enabled a stronger adaptive response to

the shock event: “[B]ecause in our industry with event management, we are always planning for contingencies . . . Of course, no one predicted a pandemic, but we are used to being flexible and responding to things that disrupt our events.” Participant 25 had a similar notion, suggesting that his experience in the technology industry facilitated his adaptative responses:

*“My experience was probably an easier experience than most . . . just in terms of the transition from office working to home, because I already work in the tech space and am familiar with working from home. . . I think **I’m used to adapting to changes**. On the technical side, I think in that sense, for me it was a much easier transition. **People who weren’t used to having that kind of flexibility struggled a bit.**” – Participant 25*

*“I worked for global companies before, so this was not very unusual. That gives me a lot of **experience with processes and people [in] different countries**, [which means that y]ou can **forecast at the beginning how to approach the situation.**” – Participant 19*

*“[W]e’re used to it. I mean, my traveling schedule has been erratic, and the pandemic was erratic, so both **my kids and my wife are used to this from my working schedule**. So, there wasn’t much of a difference in this case.” – Participant 3*

*“I understand the nature of [crisis in] an international company better because my parents were diplomats. It’s about **bridging the cultural gap between people** . . . And I think ever since that experience, I am quite confident in myself, but also confident now I can work in any organization whether they are international or not. It’s just because I’ve had that experience earlier on. **It gave me the confidence and also the experience [to] deal and negotiate with people** in different geographical locations and based on different cultural aspects . . . That helped me a lot throughout my career.” – Participant 25*

Dispositional characteristics also emerged as indicators of adaptivity, or adaptive readiness. Participants who described themselves in terms of calmness, patience, optimism, hope, proactivity, and extraversion when the shock occurred seemed to be in a more favorable position for effective career adaptation. People who were outgoing and sociable found it difficult to adapt to the social distancing conditions, but many also found that this disposition facilitated adaptation when it motivated prosocial behavior. For example, Participant 25 showed optimism and assertiveness when they lobbied their employer for a specific promotion. Extraverted individuals show strong openness to new situations, and they are more adaptable in a crisis.

Because they have a high need for social interaction, they are concerned for dislocated social relationships, but they engage in concerted efforts to adapt their social environments to protect social capital.

*“I think just **being patient helped with coping** in that situation. I think if you are mentally strong, then you can work because you're all **calm and steady**. ” – Participant 22*

*“I would say my **patience and willingness to understand different cultures** [make me a successful international manager]. And being **willing to accommodate** their time zones. ” – Participant 11*

*“My wife and I both worked in [the] Israel office, then she came to USA and me to UK, for different projects. So, **we started the reunion process right before the pandemic started. We saw it was coming** from China and looked to be spreading. **We planned ahead** about what we'll do. ” – Participant 8*

*“Initially the problem was [that **I was**] **used to being very outgoing**. And from one day to the other, basically you have restrictions on meeting your friends . . . **It was a bit tricky basically to adapt your social life** . . . ” – Participant 3*

*“I enjoy being with my clients . . . **I'm an extrovert**. I like talking to people . . . I [won't] hesitate to quit in a heartbeat if there's a better chance [to do] **not zero [international] work trips**. I didn't think about that [before COVID-19]. ” – Participant 12*

*“Virtual is fine, it's easy, but engaging people in those calls are much more challenging. And **I'm good at engaging people in face-to-face, so I had to improvise** a lot and get better at my skills. ” – Participant 7*

*“**I'm a very social person**. I kind of like seek energy [by] going out and meeting people. I don't like my social life to be disrupted. It's more about, you would say, engaging in more online activities, by going out for like small walks and talks. [**Now I'm t]rying new and creative ways to stay in touch with people**. ” – Participant 14*

*“I learned these skills, like **how to confront proactively** and **to speak about problems** and **how to reach out** if you think that there's a misunderstanding. ” – Participant 1*

*“[I]t's very difficult to knock you off track, especially when we've got this technology at our fingertips. I'm confident in the ability for my industry to survive a pandemic, to survive a disaster of any kind, **we're healthcare so it's expected we can manage** [a public health crisis] . . . **I can adapt to the chaos and be proactive**. It doesn't bother me if things are a bit crazy, at least if I can handle it decently. ” – Participant 9*

Reflexively recalling learned flexibility through prior international work experiences and especially through physical international travel; contemplating a future strategic position for

career adaptation; and actively engaging proactive, prosocial, and positive personality traits were all ways in which participants exhibited a strong inclination toward managing the ambiguity and complexity of this career shock.

Stabilize Phase

Having narrated the shock phase of the focal phenomenon, the study participants expressed their efforts to reestablish stability in their work roles. Whereas the pandemic onset shocked the psychosocial system through which inpatriates were manifesting their careers, the subsequent stabilization phase enabled a recalibration of expectations and desires. Adapting responses became more apparent here as inpatriates reconstructed meaning around their disrupted international work. They were responding and adapting to their personal selves but also to their employers, their environments, and their social relationships. Career strategizing was informed by organizationally relevant professional development, preferred locations, strained social capital, and self-reflection. Inpatriates sought ways to make themselves more valuable to their employers, and perhaps more marketable to prospective employers; they also sought a comfortable, secure location to “shelter-in-place” and continue their international work remotely; they leveraged dislocated social capital to support their adapting behaviors; and they found surprising retrospective and prospective benefit in the career-enhancing potential for the shock event.

Adaptability resources are also important features of this stabilization phase. Conceptually, there is much overlap between the adaptability resources and adapting responses of career construction theory. The dimensions of the resource that is career adaptability are concern, control, curiosity, and confidence regarding one’s career. Career adaptability resources are concerned with self-regulation, while career adapting behaviors are concerned with

environmental integration. They merge to produce adaptation results for one's career. However, I found overlapping observable indicators between adaptability resources and adapting behaviors.

Career adaptability resources were observable in, for example, inpatriates' narratives about realizing the future trajectory of immediate decisions. Their careers were abruptly disrupted by the pandemic, and they shifted toward a position from which they could make conscious educational and vocational choices that prepared them for the future. The uncertainty introduced by the pandemic caused some inpatriates to respond by acknowledging their proximal location to organizational leaders in the parent country and then leveraging the atypical proximity for constructive social interactions. Disruptions initiated a consideration of shifting relationships and requirements in work and nonwork lives. In doing so, inpatriates further expressed control over their careers. When the organization failed to provide career support, inpatriates found that the pandemic hastened one's preference for personally driven career control. In the post-shock environment, participants were making more autonomous decisions and had a greater need to take responsibility for their own work and self-promotion. Curiosity was evident where inpatriates expressed desires to grow professionally and personally. They explored their new working environment and found better ways to cope and manage their international work. They found success and became confident when overcoming obstacles associated with their new working arrangements.

"I've spent more time with the company leaders than I expected. Mostly I think it's because they used to travel quite a bit, you know a lot of time in New York or Los Angeles, rarely in London. So, I didn't think I'd see them much, but now they are staying home like everyone, so they engage with us more in the main office. That's part of the reason why I'm still here in London so I can keep building those relationships since they're here. [U]ncertainty after COVID is less of a concern that way." – Participant 5

"Now when the lockdown started, I had concerns about taxes. Especially after I moved to join my wife in America. Where do I pay taxes? The company provided some advice, and I hired professional service." – Participant 8

*“As the pandemic progressed, I started to feel more control over my life. It was almost forced upon me since the company wasn’t really supportive for career changes. And I think **that time allowed me to refine my plans and figure out a strategy**. So, the pandemic had a negative effect at first, but then it actually had a positive effect because **it afforded me the time to really dig deep and self-reflect about what I want to do in this life and where I want to do it.**” – Participant 25*

*“I think there's a lot of parallels [between the pandemic and climate change] because **there's an element of helplessness** when it's happening. And **there's an element of guilt** that we ignore or put off the climate crisis. **It's good that [I am] curious** here because it seems we can do international work and keep building that career. It's interesting my **work is more international now** because it's more nationalities I'm involved with, **but I don't need to travel as before** to do much of the job.” – Participant 8*

*“[I]n the beginning, [the pandemic] had a negative [career] effect. **I felt I was too restricted in my mobility**. How do I show I'm being productive? In my mind, I couldn't execute my plans because of the lockdowns. I think that **I was either too scared or just not confident and didn't want to take risks** during an uncertain time.” – Participant 25*

Overall, it is remarkable that so few criticisms were aimed at participants’ employers; most were much more critical of national governments. Indeed, they seemed to implicitly understand that their multinational employers were being active when national governments were not. Criticism of elected and unelected bureaucrats and public officials was not infrequent. For example, Participant 24 succinctly put it: “I didn’t like the government response at all.” Participant 14, who praised their organization’s response to the pandemic, assailed government officials, stating, “I would say, initially, there was no clear [data] from any credible person. Everyone was speculating. The governments on both sides of the border seemed more confused than I was. I trusted the organization’s information more than what I heard on the news or whatever.” Others acknowledged that their multinational employer acted as a clearing house for relevant regional policies from governments around the world. Participant 19 noted that multinational organizations have global information and “an abundance of government information available” to share with employees. Participant 18 summarized the study

participants' general perspective of governments' responses to the pandemic: "The most striking similarity to me, as a whole, is [that] humankind is not prepared because our governments are not very competent; I don't feel like we're handling the climate crisis appropriately; and I don't think we handled the [COVID-19] crisis appropriately." Unsurprisingly, given the lack of variety in participants' recollections of governmental responses, the "governmental response to crisis" theme emerged from myriad initial codes representing the inadequacy and inefficiency of governmental crisis response.

Fearing that one's employer might fail to provide necessary resources or support, many inpatriates pursued voluntary developmental opportunities. However, few expressed this as a stratagem for seeking new employment with a different employer. On the contrary, the data suggest a more concerted effort at commitment toward one's current employer, at least for the duration of the pandemic. Whether this is a strategy to insulate oneself from a crisis – "any port in a storm," though none of my participants used this specific idiom – or a genuine commitment response is unclear. Participant 3 narrated this logic: "I think it was a normal evolution [of professional development] . . . before the pandemic, I was thinking of changing company, [and] then during the pandemic I said, look, it's probably not a good idea to go to a completely new company, better the evil you know than starting something from scratch at a time like this."

Inpatriates had to establish themselves as knowledge agents, not just for their organization's sake but for their own vocational roles. Work continued in remote conditions, but organizational resources were scattered and unprepared. Being out of sight, and perhaps out of mind, was a concern for many people working remotely during the pandemic. This is especially true for inpatriates, who chiefly benefit by seeing and being seen at corporate headquarters, as

they are now potentially losing one of their main motivators for the assignment. Some compensated for lost developmental opportunities by crafting their own.

*“I was at some point **considering an online training** on a particular software because **I was not receiving the necessary support from the people who in normal days used to give us that support.**” – Participant 3*

*“I am **trying to get more technical certifications.** I'm doing a lot of online classes. I recently got three industry certificates. Those are on my LinkedIn profile. The Lynda learning tool. That's the only way you grow. **The more you know, the more valuable you become** to employers. And that is **the only strategy for my career.**” – Participant 12*

An interesting theme was that of inpatriates seeking a preferred location where they could better insulate themselves from the personal and professional risks of this crisis event. This was among the most evidently active strategic adaptive responses. They did this by lobbying their employers to sanction borderless remote work or to sponsor intraorganizational transfer. Some inpatriates were accelerating already existing plans to relocate or reunify with loved ones. Participant 22 observed that, had the pandemic been present when they were given the inpatriation assignment, their employer would not have initiated an international assignment at all and would have instead assigned international tasks that could be completed from the subsidiary country. Having found themselves in the parent country of Switzerland, working remotely, they did not return home to India but instead sought to continue their work in another subsidiary country that they perceived as more secure, more preferable, and where they had family present: Germany.

*“I wanted to leave because I was all alone, and I was getting depressed because no one was around. This is why I said **I wanted to move to Hamburg because I have family there.** I went to the university there. But still COVID is there, and we had to follow the restrictions, maintaining distance and no friends, nothing.” – Participant 22*

*“**The main [challenge] for me was to decide if I stay in Australia or go to India.** This was immediate, very early in the situation. They begin closing the countries down. That was a personal [decision].” – Participant 16*

*“I was just thinking like this is the end, total apocalypse. I might as well do what I want to do right now. And **I almost immediately emailed my boss and asked if we could get my assignment indefinitely for New York.** They worked it out for me, but the salary was reduced and I’m working less hours . . . [but] it’s not too boring because it’s New York, always something to do here even in quarantine . . . **if I was home in our town in Greece, I would be seriously bored.** I love my country, but there isn’t much excitement there for me.” – Participant 13*

Conversely, inpatriates who had the inverse experience – that is, their employers suddenly ended their inpatriate assignment and forcibly relocated them back to the subsidiary home country – had reduced agency and tended to experience negative career consequences after being involuntarily repatriated. Participant 19 worked for multinational corporations for several years and said that this provided them “a lot of experience with processes and people and budgets [to analyze] the business components in different countries [to] forecast at the beginning how to approach [a mundane intercultural] situation.” However, when the pandemic disrupted this typical system, Participant 19’s employer reacted without much regard to the purpose of the international assignment or to the sentiments of the inpatriate involved:

*“We [were] introducing a new product, and I was in Denmark learning about it. **I was sent home when COVID started, and I felt unprepared** to launch the product. **That’s why I left the company.** A remote launch with more time with training in Denmark would have been better for me.” – Participant 19*

*“[W]hen the pandemic started, **they basically closed all of the offices [and] told us to go back to the home country,** so for me I went back to my home in Canada in March 2020 and continued working from here . . . [now I] make a lower salary.” – Participant 12*

Participants revealed yet another risk of maladaptive response. Fear of being perceived as engaging in remote loafing – that is, concern that colleagues may assume one is doing less work than they are in the virtual environment – is not conducive to effective adaptation. As Participant 1 put it, “I didn’t want to be perceived as being lazy because nobody can see what you’re actually working on.” A minority of participants raised this concern in interviews; however, they typically did so when the organization failed to communicate expectations during the crisis

conditions. Participant 11 engaged in unnecessary work tasks out of concern of this perception: “That was a big personal challenge actually, but I distracted myself with work, just working daily to find new things to do, staying busy.” This appears to hinder the uncovering of meaning for the crisis event. One lacks confidence adapting to new work conditions, and this obfuscates abstractions about meaning found through planned adaptation.

*“[The pandemic] has put a lot of pressure on [my] professional life. **People don't see you working, [and] they don't know you are always available.** [They think that] you're only working for eight hours, which is not the fact. I know I am spending more time at work as compared to how much time I used to put in the office. So that's something [that] has changed . . . **People are not able to evaluate the amount of work needed,** [which] brings an uncertainty [to] the mind of your project lead . . . **The wrong expectations are being set based on the work-from-home culture that came from COVID.**” – Participant 21*

Unsurprisingly, social capital appears to be an important asset to inpatriates – for both their organizational function and their overall careers. Like most people experiencing lockdowns, stay-at-home mandates, and social distancing orders, inpatriates' social relationships were strained during the pandemic. Often already geographically separated from family, friends, and colleagues while working abroad, inpatriates also now experienced the displacement of their parent-country national colleagues. Miscommunication due to remote-based intercultural teamwork sometimes put a strain on intraorganizational relationships. However, many also found that colleagues became more relaxed regarding work in this unusual environment.

*“**Not being able to meet the team [or] have face-to-face interactions, has been hard . . .** Sometimes we have miscommunications because culture or intent doesn't always compute through the software we're using. I had major conflicts with one or two individuals. It was **a simple issue that got blown out of proportion because we were remote and misunderstanding each other.** I think it is the limitation of technology [and not seeing] each other most of the time.” – Participant 12*

*“I think it was **better during COVID,** than pre COVID because I think everybody was **more understanding** and more . . . What's the word? Basically, **more lenient.** Even errors or mistakes or miscommunications were understood or let slide a lot more. I mean, my supervisor did it with me. I did it with the people I was supervising, [and] it may have actually improved, on the other hand, a lot of cases.” – Participant 3*

Inpatriates had to adjust how they maintained and leveraged these work relationships. This did not necessarily involve new actions or technologies, but they did have to make active decisions to incorporate existing or modified processes into their work roles. Participant 18 noted that being less extroverted meant less post-shock adaptation was needed in social interactions: “We work the same together, but it’s less direct of course.” Participant 18 also noted heightened intercultural awareness when communicating internationally over digital media.

*“[T]he main issue for me was basically keeping in touch with my colleagues in the other countries when I needed or when they needed support. And instead of doing this face to face, doing it over a computer screen. I think **it was a normal evolution** and this was something that I was doing also before COVID. I wouldn't travel to X, Y, Z, country for any question that somebody would need support on. I mean, there was teleconferencing before COVID as well.” – Participant 3*

*“One way in which the pandemic was actually good. A perverse way. We could not call each other or ask each other [anything] when we want it all the time. And we got used to it. **We started being more flexible and in a lot of cases, more efficient.** A lot of things that were done with three or ten people in the room. We realized that could be done alone or only with one other person . . . **it basically made us think on how to improve efficiency.**” – Participant 3*

*“We can be more respectful with meetings online, like you’re in Hong Kong and we’re in London. And **everyone is on time because you’re at home** usually. Then **you’re a little [more] careful with how you communicate** in online meetings. Rethink and maybe you realize, okay, this probably is not very good to say to [Hong Kong] colleagues. It’s also **there’s not as much gossip and stuff on a Zoom call.** It’s one thing to sit in the hallway and talk for 50 minutes about nothing, but it feels different on a Zoom call when you’re aware [that] you’re basically wasting time.” – Participant 18*

Some found that the newly dissolved boundaries between work and home needed to be reestablished in absence of organizational structures. This was but one strategy inpatriates used to find advantage from the post-shock conditions. Finding a healthy work and nonwork balance, while continuing international work tasks in a “shelter-in-place” environment at home, proved integral to positive career adaptation. In doing so, participants established a more productive working environment in which they could adeptly pivot toward work or nonwork activities while

also reserving energy for intercultural engagement. Creating these artificial structures ameliorated disengagement and psychosocial resource depletion.

*“You can take it in the beginning. But **then I realized that I don't have any boundary between work life and home life.** So, I had to set up like a specific goal that these are the hours for this project or this country. I need to be flexible. **I had to make some boundaries.**” – Participant 7*

Participants often engaged in self-reflection to assess the relative importance of certain adapting behaviors for their careers. Revealing a feedback loop to the shock onset phase, Participant 3 described their inclination toward reacting optimistically to their disrupted role as having been due to their “busy life” and “usual traveling schedule.” Because their international work had previously kept them occupied with complex intercultural tasks and relationships, Participant 3 found themselves amenable to the familiarly unstructured and uncertain environment. Indeed, Participant 3 was less concerned with international interactions being remote and more concerned with being in the same city as other colleagues and not being able to meet in person. Others expressed similar notions regarding their own reflective assessments of their cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses to the shock event. Some appreciated the novel work configurations, while others did not. These retrospective narratives homed in on the ease with which they transitioned toward working during the global crisis conditions. They found satisfaction in the relatively less stressful, less mobile, and more relaxed lives they were able to craft without neglecting the international work assignment. Many attributed this to their experience working internationally, or for multinational organizations, in the past.

*“I think **the last 18 months have been an experiment in getting to my best life.** The new healthy . . . **adapting to the new way of life.** I'm trying to exercise more outside, [and] **the mental and physical sides of life are more in focus.**” – Participant 8*

*“**Maybe [working internationally] is [a] less stressful situation now.** We can just get on virtual technology, no planes . . . **I started giving more attention to myself,** eating better, doing yoga, meditation, other things. I didn't have too many challenges for my career . . .*

I feel more hope, [and I] learned a lot . . . we can have [an] active role [during a global crisis] . . . [We] know how to handle it because we have been through it. We can adapt. We can still do our work [but] maybe not travel.” – Participant 7

Some inpatriates acknowledged newly discovered time to self-prioritize and realize idiosyncratic methods of sustaining effective international work. Participant 1 found that the crisis event disrupted their international assignment, with the disruption leading to a healthy disconnect and shift toward more self-prioritizing. Participant 1 found that, due to the global pandemic, they realized a healthier work-life balance in the context of their international work assignment. Participant 1 further expressed that the pandemic helped them to realize their career goals, and their regard for international work increased due to the flexibility and autonomy that they realized in adapting to the crisis event.

“My identity is dual Indian and Canadian. I love my work, especially where I get to blend [my] two identities. It’s very fun to interact with colleagues in different countries, and it’s a bit easier since I know India and the customs and the language. It’s interesting this time with COVID, with the extra time to think, I understand this a bit better. I don’t want to work anywhere else, and that’s clear.” – Participant 20

“I’ve been quite relaxed, even excited sometimes because it’s easier. Like this relieved some stress I didn’t even know I had. As the pandemic continued, my anxiety is down for sure, both the anxiety I have about COVID-19 and just regular stress from traveling. I was worried, anxious, a bit confused about what would happen to the world. But now it seems maybe the world will be better off because we learned some lessons in sustainability.” – Participant 25

Search Phase

As inpatriates overcame the novel conditions that had come to typify their disrupted work and nonwork lives, the consummate meaning of the global crisis event, as it relates to their careers, became clearer. The structural boundaries presupposed as inherent to international work assignments were deemed less fundamental to translating that work into a successful career. Novel conditions begot novel strategies for navigating one’s career in post-shock global markets.

Hence, this global shock event enabled unique and idiosyncratic career adaptation strategies that some participant inpatriates deemed motivational for pursuing a globally oriented career.

Recognizing a global nuance to one's career identity, or career calling, is an observable theme in this final phase of the focal phenomenon. Additionally, trust seems to have been easily lost when inpatriates' employers or governments provided low-quality information earlier in the pandemic. Decisions and behaviors related to career adaptation were hindered by inaccurate data, and participants seemed to recall this as relevant when considering future employment abroad. Reestablishing a psychosocial positioning of stability, post-shock and to withstand aftershock risks, incorporated inpatriates' perceptions of trust in their employers. Despite the volatile nature of this global crisis, inpatriates generally found that their post-shock adaptations fostered internal satisfaction primarily and external satisfaction incidentally. Another consequential theme here is continuous learning, with a prospective sensemaking that relies on retroactive meaning and is nontrivial for further career growth. Inpatriates generally found their crisis-bound international work experience advantageous for their individual career prospects. Thus, through post-shock career adaptation, commitment, wellbeing, and marketability became more relevant consequences for inpatriates in this final phase.

Understanding the overall impact of COVID-19 as a global crisis required many participants to differentiate the pandemic as an immediate crisis, with other global crises like climate change being more distant. Interestingly, some found climate change to be an immediate concern for "the Global South" and the pandemic a distant one to those same countries, while they saw the pandemic as an immediate concern and climate change a distant one for "Western" countries. The distinction was in the perceived onset of crisis-related impediments to work and career construction as well as the time available for contingency planning.

“[T]he climate [crisis] could destroy the whole world, [b]ut that’s much slower than the rate COVID took over everything. [O]ur reactions to the pandemic were more decisive because we had less time to react than with the climate [crisis]. A pandemic has us going to our corners, but climate change has us moving north.”— Participant 17

*“Melbourne faced an earthquake recently. I believe that’s a kind of crisis. It affects us all in some way. [Tectonic plates] under the whole earth moving. After the earthquake was like just **clean up and hope no aftershocks come**. But COVID has a lot of these too. We have **the variants and new lockdowns every so often**.” – Participant 16*

*“All these [global crises] have one thing in common: they're devastating on human beings. The only difference is the timescale. **With COVID, we are seeing things in a very short span of time. But if you talk about climate change, it’s over multiple generations.** Two degrees warming over a century, or whatever it is, is not as scary as maybe 100 million deaths in a year . . . We can stop the pandemic with vaccines, but it’s much harder to fix the climate. **And both need preventives, which require planning, not immediate fixes.** We need to get our act together, the sooner the better.” – Participant 24*

Contrasting advanced and developing economies elicited a focus on inequity. Human systems are naturally unequal, and, as outsiders, inpatriates may inherently perceive inequity in their organizational roles at headquarters. However, an interesting sentiment among many was the notion of equalization among organizational actors responding to post-shock conditions. Rather than the many hierarchical status symbols one might typically find in the organization, inpatriates perceived a rather level playing field with their colleagues. This was principally because of technology; all talking heads are equal on a video conferencing call. As Participant 3 stated, “It is good [that] technology makes our differences less important when communicating. We are more even, like avatars.”

Additionally, this contrast exposed an inherent inequity of the global pandemic in that many developing economies did not have the wherewithal to close their markets and lockdown their populations of workers and consumers. This helped to sustain the availability of global commercial activity for many multinationals whose inpatriates working in Western, advanced economies did experience lockdown mandates: “[The] good or bad thing [is that] we're doing business with developing countries, [and] they cannot afford to fully lock down or lockdown for

a long time” (Participant 3). Thus, participants in my study might have reasonably anticipated more job security as well as more general security in Western economies: “[P]eople are dying from tuberculosis or malaria in Africa for decades now and nobody seems to care, but once white people start dying, all of a sudden it's a problem” (Participant 3).

*“Then we got located to Germany right when COVID started. I think **being safe in Germany during the pandemic made us want to stay** here. We started learning German, and now we don't want to go back to India . . . We might live in Germany forever now, it's better than UK. Nice thing is the company, **because they have lots of resources, they let us choose where we [were] going to work**. UK, Germany, India it did not matter from the organization's side.” – Participant 2*

Participants generally expressed an understanding that international work has been permanently changed by the pandemic, insofar as organizationally sponsored assignments are to become more flexible and technologically inclusive. Transitioning international work, from that which once required much physical travel, into a remote experience, with virtual interactions replacing ones that were typically physical, was surprisingly welcome to most participants. Often, they recalled their prior international experiences, whether for work, education, or recreation, as having been fortifying for their present challenge of adapting to novel work conditions. Some lamented having been induced to go abroad, usually for an undetermined amount of time, only to now be doing work the same way they could be doing back home. Work that would otherwise be considered international, a trade association conference, for example, became virtual teleconference events, and the participants were less prepared to describe them as *international* work events. At the same time, however, participants expressed a general increase in their attraction to international work and in their intention to pursue future international work.

*“We know now that **we can do most knowledge-based work without leaving our homes**, certainly without leaving our countries and flying. International roles will still exist, of course, but **they just won't need as much travel** accompanying them. This will be **good for the bottom line and the environment** too. And for people and their families. We will*

need face-to-face meetings, which might require them to travel. But this will be less common than before.” – Participant 17

*“All companies that operate globally are realizing some markets squeeze the talent as much as possible. **Removing the necessary travel part can make this more attractive.** You can recruit with a promise that **international work can be done at home** [because] travel should be an adventure [and not a chore].” – Participant 19*

Indeed, inpatriates seemed to show more organizational commitment when travel flexibility and remote options became more common for their international assignments. They expressed favorability toward this as a new normal of international work, especially because it enabled a healthier balance between their work and nonwork lives. Inpatriates generally found their employers to be the most credible source of pandemic-related information. Certainly, governments were assessed poorly in terms of their ability to provide accurate, timely, and relevant information. As something that has meaning for one’s career, trust being ascribed to one’s employer is noteworthy. Insofar as governmental information was a driver of their adaptive responses to the shock, it was typically received through the organization. Participants tended to believe that their employers would filter inaccurate or irrelevant information from government sources, whose data was necessarily broad and constantly changing. To the extent that participants relied on official information to guide their adaptive responses – such as by returning home or by choosing to remain indefinitely confined in a foreign country – they typically relied on their employers and, specifically, global mobility specialists or human resource managers.

*“One thing that I don't think will go back to normality is the office life. The ones among us that were traveling a lot, even pre-pandemic where we kept saying that we don't need to be in the office to do our job. But the usual answer was this is how it was always done. **Now everybody's starting to understand.** We actually don't need to be spending money on offices . . . **I can basically work from anywhere in the world.**” – Participant 3*

*“Human resources said it was important we feel like we have support and help from the company. But that wasn't the case before COVID. I got a lot of help during COVID, but usually it's more distant . . . **There was a good amount of trust from the company** too. If you have personal appointments, **you're given freedom** to take care of it. The clients are*

very accommodative. It was handled very, very nicely . . . **People are working from different global offices** like Indonesia, Philippines, India. The way they [accommodated] all the employees' work was good. **A lot of flexibility.**" – Participant 16

"I would say, initially, there was no clear [data] from any credible person. Everyone was speculating. The governments on both sides of the border seemed more confused than I was. **I trusted the organization's information more than what I heard on the news or whatever.** The uncertainty was just so thick. Who is the authority?" – Participant 14

"Well, it seems that **my company gave us better instructions than the UK government.** Like we had a generalized system for wearing masks and closing the office even before the government did a lockdown. I'd say **the government was very unprepared and not responsible.** That's probably the biggest surprise." – Participant 5

"I think if it were to happen again, yeah, **companies should help with resources.** Give your employees what they need to cope with the stress. **Empowerment is key.** We can **make good decisions for ourselves when there is information and resources.** I think also they learned what is viable, what works best." – Participant 6

There were several features that seemed to contribute to an overall increase in wellbeing among inpatriates adapting to the shock. Work-life balance became healthier, in part, because inpatriates were largely working from home and were forced to make modifications that better balanced their work and nonwork lives. They were exercising more and spending more time with their families. Working remotely provided a great deal of flexibility that inpatriates leveraged to restructure their work and reduce stress. Having strong organizational support was also important for wellbeing. Feelings of security and stability were bolstered by strong organizational support and regular communication. Inpatriates' flexibility in executing their work roles enabled a focus on personal development, which bolstered achievement and confidence. There were also inpatriates who found that the pandemic allowed them to improve social relationships and emotional support systems. Inpatriates generally felt more resilient, and thus more satisfied, having realized successful adapting measures during and after the shock event.

"Before I came to France, my partner and I were doing a little bit of long distance, [and] **we have used this time to build our relationship.** This will help my career because we support each other's dreams. Now let's make the most of quarantine, even if you're in UK

*and I'm in France, **Let's spend time together, spend quality time together, exercise, you know, online and virtual games.***” – Participant 6

*“Essentially, it is a time for the company to realize **[international] business continuity is possible in virtual environments.** Even when we are working internationally, it is essential to continue information access. I would have 10 flights a year, at least, for work purposes. Now, I have zero in almost two years. **[But international] work has continued with success.** That is the evidence.”* – Participant 19

Learning is a clear implication of any black swan event. An organization will undoubtedly improve their formal and informal structures surrounding crisis management. Inpatriates who experienced the event as a career shock seemed to try safeguarding their careers from further disruption. One way they did this was through continuous learning. Compensating for absent organizational resources, they sought to train themselves in new skills. They pursued certifications or higher education, not necessarily to find new employment but to improve their value to the organization as well as their marketability as a shock contingency. This is intertwined with colleagues' perception of them as credible purveyors of accurate intraorganizational information. To the extent that they had trust in their organizations for high-quality information regarding the pandemic shock event, inpatriates expressed less inclination toward informing their adaptive strategies with external data sources. Aftershocks, in the form of new virus outbreaks or variants stimulating subsequent rounds of lockdowns, are less alarming when inpatriates received the relevant information from their employer organization and not from other, perhaps sensational, media sources. Trust also went in the inverse direction; many inpatriates reported easier adaptation efforts when they felt that their organization trusted them to adapt their work appropriately.

*“I would say I'm very happy in my life. **I feel more secure with my employer, I guess. They didn't fire me, and they helped all their employees adapt** as best they could. I'm more and more thinking how I should be proactive. **I've been doing a lot of learning opportunities,** going to events and meet people. **We built a [career] development plan with leadership.** I am waiting for the project to get restarted.”* – Participant 14

*"Still, it has been good for me that **the global economy was forced to adapt to new technologies** . . . Because of COVID, investments in cloud computing have been expanding significantly, So **I am investing more time and energy into learning these technologies and advancing my knowledge of them.**" – Participant 4*

*"With COVID, it seems like decision-making is important and should be better. So, moving onwards, **I've been doing multiple project management certifications**, and I intend to complete the PMP [project management professional] certification in the next couple of months" – Participant 2*

*"[My] boss started **appreciating my work [and] had a lot of trust in me** because I was the first one to join the team. He respected my technical skills since they recruited me to transfer to New York . . . I knew it was possible I could also end up without work. **I felt better when I had a boss who appreciated my work**, but it was important for me to focus on doing excellent work." – Participant 21*

Continuous learning in the post-shock environment involved making retrospective sense of the crisis event, which often recalled earlier iterations of its meaning. As the shock event unfolded, it became meaningful for inpatriates that their governments and employers may not be as reliable as once expected. Not only that, but they also realized that the typical way of doing international work, which had evolved over several decades, and translating that international work into successful careers, can be upended overnight by unforeseen forces. As they stabilized their positions, finding new vocational equilibrium, the crisis event became even more meaningful for its impact on future expectations. Absent much organizational support, and finding themselves relatively isolated in a foreign country, inpatriates were obligated to discover new ways of doing their international work and sustaining their career advancement despite the crisis conditions.

Although their organizations were, for the most part, deemed credible and trustworthy, inpatriates came to expect improvements to the organizational infrastructure of prospective multinational employers. This is noteworthy given that many participants assessed this global crisis as stimulating a global orientation to their careers. Fault lines underlying the inpatriation

assignment were made starker by the global crisis event, and inpatriates responded by embracing them.

The all-encompassing nature of the global crisis, changing everything overnight, and the competence with which individuals adapted and even expanded the scope of their international work in this context, facilitated realization of a global identity. The shock conditions gave participants more time to reflect on their careers; this pondering coincided with public inquiries into the genesis and global ramifications of the shock event, which further entrenched inpatriates into a global working mindset. Realizing their heightened agency in this moment of change, many acted to transcend organizational and national impediments, such as low-quality information and travel restrictions, and to advocate their global career aspirations.

*“We think things are impossible, then two years later it’s standard. **No one thought [international] remote work would be normal.** COVID made it possible . . . So, I can do this job back in India at my home . . . basically, **COVID said [that with] these small changes you can continue your [global work].**” – Participant 16*

*“[B]eing in Germany allowed me to travel a lot more and even [benefit] career wise . . . that’s a good change because **[I] can basically work from anywhere in the world . . . It’s surprising how easily people adapted, how easy it was for people to adapt to working from home and working internationally without travel.**” – Participant 3*

*“So, both of **our perspectives have become more global** I guess you’d say and less focused on Australia and New Zealand markets.” – Participant 5*

*“My wife and I both worked in Israel office, then she came to USA and me to UK, for different projects . . . we were lucky that **my company allowed me to [relocate to] the USA. It required a bit of persuasion but not much** since my wife works for the company. They initiated a transfer for me to USA.” – Participant 8*

*“I feel the company dropped the ball on career support during the pandemic . . . So now **I try to show more levels of control** over my financial freedom. **I approached them about a promotion for the Africa division.** I basically pitched to them what I could do, and so now I have a new role and better salary. So, when things like this happen unexpectedly, **I’m maybe in a better situation when I take action instead of stressing** about which coping strategy to use..” – Participant 25*

*“I actually benefited from that lonely time . . . **I’m working from home in India, but why not do the same thing in Germany or any [other] country?** The company wants me to*

*return to Germany once everything calms down. I have a stable job, so I'm not going anywhere now. But **this really encouraged me to explore my options.***" – Participant 23

Participants tended to recognize professional benefits when the pandemic functioned as a career shock. Being that inpatriates, as subsidiary-level global employees, are often from developing countries but working at the parent-company corporate offices in a more advanced economy, their contributions to the organization are unique. Inpatriates are already acknowledged as boundary-spanning knowledge actors; however, this crisis event highlights their capacity to advocate for the subsidiary. An inpatriate from India working in the German headquarters of their multinational employer might find great benefit from the intracompany transfer. The international assignment would not only enable their gaining new knowledge and relationships, thus making them more valuable to both parent-company and subsidiary levels, but the international experience would also stimulate career adaptations that incorporate and leverage the international experience for sustaining or advancing career prospects. Making the international experience virtual undoubtedly upsets this model, but by making effective adaptive efforts, inpatriates maintained their role as an intraorganizational, boundary-spanning knowledge actor. They also augmented their career prospects.

*"Especially if I'm continuing the work **in Germany, it's a very central place to be visible and make those connections. I can be a strong strategic voice for India** in my main region as well."* – Participant 7

*"I had a goal to be a leader in the Australia and New Zealand market, but now I think **I'll be a leader in all our international expansion** around the world. And that's because I've been able to spend more time at the head office and interact more with the decision-makers here. I probably would have only been in London 3 or 4 months at the most. Now, I've been here almost 2 years, just **learning more and contributing more and making myself known as a valuable employee.**"* – Participant 5

Increasing individual marketability was not just a function of better career prospects; it was also a result of inpatriates coming to know themselves better such that they could direct their careers more carefully. For example, when inpatriates searched for a secure location to wait out

the pandemic, many directed these thoughts toward future international working locations that could see surprise exogenous shocks. Participants were concerned with protecting their careers from the risk of a global crisis. Several participants mentioned pursuing training and certification programs to increase their value and competitiveness in the market. Moreover, many participants realized a shift in their social interactions such that they were making more concerted efforts to build a career-enhancing social network. The extent to which inpatriates could embrace the changing conditions positively, with future-oriented attentiveness, improved their perceived marketability. Focusing on one's personally unique value proposition was important. Individuals found that their crisis-bound international experience differentiates them in the market as global employees.

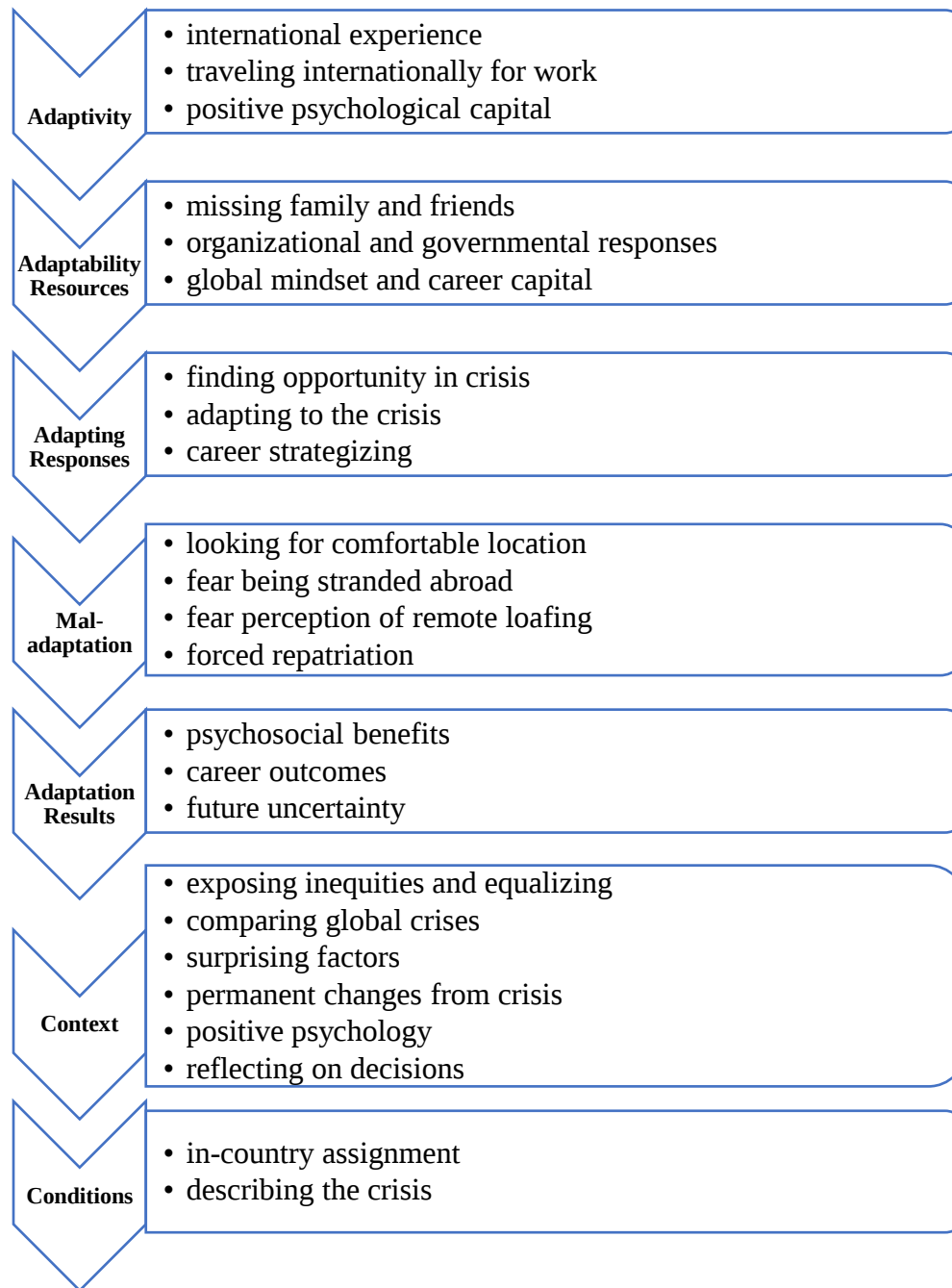
*“This was really my first time traveling to do my job . . . I had a traumatic experience being in Canada when this all went down . . . **Like what if something happens again, right?** What if I'm in a less familiar country than Canada? Can I make that pivot again? I don't know because **the transition was taxing.**” – Participant 14*

*“**[Employers] operate in a global market . . . So that mentality has impacted a lot of things with different employers . . . Employers like [my] international background because [I] have more input for problems at work.**” – Participant 21*

*“**I developed my skills at this time to build up my CV, like some video editing and animation. This is a time to expand my network, meet people who can help my career, and develop skills like the marketing advertisements.**” – Participant 6*

*“**[Adaptation] shows your capability . . . If you can make things happen despite the circumstances, then that's a positive thing. It also made me more upfront. I think that kind of confidence and self-realization has some bearing on your career. Plus, I love the international education part of my work, and I don't see any changes there . . . it's great that you don't absolutely have to travel [anymore]. . . that's the beauty of virtual. I'm optimistic about that. The end goal is to be there for my kids' future. COVID gave us time to find out what do we value together as a family.**” – Participant 24*

Figure 2. Career Construction Themes



Inpatriates continued to find new ways to functionalize the career shock as meaningful for their careers. This global crisis may have stimulated global identity emergence, or at least sped up its formation, among inpatriates, and the exogenous shock created novel conditions in which individuals sought and crafted advantageous vocational opportunities. Other positive but

unexpected externalities that were common included a stronger individual-organizational fit, a healthier work-life balance, and perceived improvements to the degree with which one can self-promote in the professional job market.

Negative Case Analysis

One credible feature of qualitative research is negative case analysis, a strategy for enhancing and validating identifiable patterns (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Tracy, 2019).

Negative, or deviant, cases are data points that are inconsistent with prevalent themes. I previously indicated that the inpatriate participants found positive meaning in their experiences of the global pandemic as a career shock. However, there were four participants who provided a divergent assessment of the experience. Participants 12, 14, 17, and 19 communicated mostly consistent displeasure with the career implications of the shock event. What united these four participants, besides their negative assessment of the focal phenomenon, was the coerced repatriation that each of them experienced. Unlike the 21 participants who reported a mostly positive valence toward the career shock, primarily stemming from increased agency and autonomy toward their career adaptations, these four participants found the sudden end to their assignments detrimental. Their multinational employers terminated their inpatriation assignments and repatriated them without any recourse for sustaining the vocational benefits of the assignment experience.

Inpatriates like Participant 24, who were given the option, and additional organizational support, to voluntarily repatriate deemed it a more favorable experience. Indeed, the autonomy seems to be linked to higher levels of organizational commitment. Participant 21 recalled the “freedom” granted by their employer, who provided employees flexibility in relocating during the pandemic. This is what I would establish as the dominant positive model of inpatriate career

adaptation; the four negative cases contradict the theory. Participant 15, who reported working “for a really big global company” that is “one of the most prestigious companies in the UK,” had a positive career adaptation experience and succinctly set out a normative principle: “Force is never a good tool. You feel safer if you can choose. If you want to come to the office, you can. But if you feel safer at home, just work at home. If you want to be in Cyprus or London, your choice. I'm quite happy with my company's [response to COVID-19].” Most participants experienced this accommodating style of organizational response, and they were generally given the option of where to continue living as they completed their international work remotely. For these inpatriates, negative career implications tended to be more trivial, and participants adapted positively to having agency and autonomy in their decisions. As Participant 3 put it, “[T]here may have been a lag in promotion or in the salary increase because a lot of that was put on hold [during the pandemic] . . . [but] for the time being, I'm good where I am.”

*“[T]hey have been very accommodating. I work for an employer that gives me freedom to work from the office or from home. Actually, one of my project team members left New York and moved to his parent’s home in Texas [to continue work]. I think **I have enough comfort [and] enough reason to continue with this company.**” – Participant 21*

*“I think [the organization] did everything right starting from the beginning. They gave the option to work from home. **They did not ask me to leave or terminate the assignment. We mostly carried on as normal,** but with fewer in-person meetings, so I returned to India before the border closures began . . . [you understand if] you have a family or kids. [My] employer provided funds to purchase home office furniture, and **I felt they tried to support us the most they can.**” – Participant 24*

Like the other participants, the four negative cases each expressed a clear connection between their inpatriation assignment and their career development. However, interrupting and bringing their international assignment to an abrupt halt diminished the inpatriates’ perceived career prospects. The involuntary repatriation of some inpatriates generally seemed to be an irrational and impersonal crisis response from the multinational organizations. The affected inpatriates were not as successful in adapting their careers after the shock event. Career

development and succession plans, especially when dependent on the since-disrupted international assignment, disintegrated. Despite these being large multinational organizations, they adopt a radically reactive position to the crisis that is poorly informed and excessively restrictive.

*“Honestly, I was pretty surprised the way my company responded. **It’s a huge global company in the Fortune 500, yet they seemed scared and unsure** when it came to the pandemic. **When I was told to go back to Denmark, they said it was out of an abundance of caution.** The logic wasn’t there in my opinion.” – Participant 17*

*“So, **it was a real shock for me . . .** I wanted to finish the work because the succession plan for me requires that I successfully complete this project. It’s professional development. But **I really didn’t get to finish it because they paused the project. I went back to California . . . my assignment was cut short. That’s absolutely pausing my career progress.** My career goals are the same. It’s just the basic achievement that has been halted. I’m like begging them almost to restart it or to give me something else to [do]. I’m determined to get back to my development plan . . . [But] the promotion isn’t happening anytime soon. In that sense, **it was a bad [career] effect.**” – Participant 14*

The negative case participants explained diminished career prospects by invoking personal (e.g., social capital) and organizational resources (e.g., training) that were terminated by the involuntary repatriation. Participant 17 missed a promotion that was dependent on the inpatient assignment; they resigned from the organization and saw their income decrease; they lost the international dynamic to their work; and they found their career path had become less clear. At the same time, Participant 17 enthusiastically noted less travel in their schedule and more personal time to enjoy with family. Additionally, Participant 12 mentioned being an extrovert who desires social interaction, but they felt a decline in their social capital after being forcibly repatriated. They did not adapt favorably to the novel environmental conditions in their home country, such as needing to remotely communicate with parent-country clients and colleagues. Participant 12 mentioned feeling that their work relationships had become transactional since returning home, and I wonder if that is a maladaptive response to being forcibly repatriated. Participant 12 was repatriated only from California to Canada, but they still

expressed dismay at their project being suspended. Their compensation was reclassified, and reduced, for Canadian standards, and they reported “a negative effect both financially and intellectually” from the shock event. However, like Participant 17, Participant 12 also expressed an optimistic outlook for the newfound time to enjoy with family.

“My work is not much international anymore . . . Professionally, I hit a roadblock. I was expecting a promotion last year that would come after the [inpatiation assignment]. My higher-ups [forcibly repatriated me] . . . I can be close to my family, [but] I lost some income, and I don’t know where my career will lead on this path.” – Participant 17

“[The pandemic] has meant a loss of my American dream. It does reduce my income. It has reduced my creativity and my ability to network with individuals, with my staff. And it has reduced my ability to travel and work in different countries. On the positive side, I do see that many work-from-home opportunities have opened up, and I am able to spend more time with my family.” – Participant 12

“[T]he mood has changed with some clients. I don’t have the same relationship that I had with them before. The same with my director at work. It’s all transactional. I don’t have the personal contact, and I’m isolated at home in Canada. I’m away from the action . . . I enjoy being with my clients, being with my teams. I’m an extrovert. I like talking to people . . . I will not hesitate to quit in a heartbeat if I think there’s a better [international opportunity].” – Participant 12

Restrained personal agency likely played a role in the maladaptive experience of these participants. Overall, the negative cases adhere to the theme of trusting in the organization’s communication, but they differ in criticizing the reactive position of multinational employers who responded to the pandemic with the extreme measure of terminating inpatiation assignments. The terminating of assignments and the involuntary repatriating of inpatiates was sudden, which hindered adaptive efforts such as transferring tasks and responsibilities to the new working environment. If, like Participant 19, you were relying on the in-person, in-country inpatiation experience to be successful in the post-assignment environment, you were disappointed by a forced repatriation that precluded effective adaptive strategies.

“The communication was good, but I felt the immediate response [involuntary repatriation] was not.” – Participant 17

*“We [were] introducing a new product, and I was in Denmark learning it. **I was sent home when COVID started, and I felt unprepared to launch the product. That’s why I left the company.** A remote launch with more time [for] training in Denmark would have been better for me . . . I want information and choices.” – Participant 19*

Participant 12 was displeased at being repatriated home and suggested that it had introduced distrust into the relationship between employee and organization. Despite this, their predisposition toward a globally oriented career was unchanged. Interestingly, while Participant 12 is a Canadian who was working in the California headquarters of their multinational employer, Participant 14 is a Californian who was working in the Canadian headquarters of their multinational employer. Despite the shock and subsequent involuntary repatriation – which could itself be seen as an aftershock of sorts – Participant 12 seemed to nevertheless aspire toward a global career. Conversely, Participant 14 perceived a decline in their international interests.

*“**I’ve always enjoyed [international work and] being around different people and [a] changing environment.** Prior to the pandemic, the company wanted to get into the Australian public sector. And they were planning to expand in the UK. There were acquisition plans put on hold. I was working on those projects before the pandemic . . . long-term, **I would absolutely love to travel like before.**” – Participant 12*

There were some indications that the negative effect of these involuntary repatriations could be moderated. Participant 19 reacted positively to their organization’s investments in digitalization and employee wellbeing, which seemed to facilitate a healthier adaptive response to the career shock, especially given that their employer coerced a return to Romania from Denmark. Participant 17 suggested that a higher level of perceived organizational support would have facilitated better post-shock and post-repatriation career adaptation. Participant 12 mentioned mentoring and peer support as important organizational resources that should be sustained in a crisis event. Participant 14 did not resign their employment but still reported “a bad effect” of the shock event for their career, principally due to a missed promotion that was dependent on the terminated inpatriation assignment. Participant 14 navigated the shock event,

and protected their career positioning, by cultivating digital social capital and being transparent and trustworthy toward their direct reports and, presumably, other colleagues.

*“We had a brilliant IT team that helped us with the VPN and remote connections. The company shifted to offer **a lot of mental health resources**. That was pretty good. It was super nice to see **different investments in platforms** that offer meditation and wellbeing. That should be there anyways because the pandemic makes it worse.”* – Participant 19

*“And another good thing was the furniture; employees could order, say, an ergonomic chair for home. So that is a lot of people having **equipment facilitated by the company**. [And] we want to build engagement, we start to look for **online tools that will bring the team together**. We **make it vivid in this digital environment**, and communication is starting to increase. There's a human touch, even if it's a virtual one. I would say **[the organization] could have done this faster**.”* – Participant 19

*“COVID ruined the plans I had at [Organization Q]. I became too tired trying to make it work with me [back in my home country of] Denmark but critical resources in the USA . . . Just **the international aspect of it was too hard** in quarantine.”* – Participant 17

*“The one thing for young people is **they won't get the peer support** that they would have received without the pandemic changing everything. They were all in the office together, learning the tricks of the trade. **You learn a lot by observing people** in the group environment. Now kids graduate school and immediately are onboarded to work remotely, [and] **they lack exposure and mentoring** to be successful.”* – Participant 12

*“[P]eople I never spoke to before reached out to **say thank you and to offer resources**. Everyone was like talking to each other more, even just over virtual tools. We are more like a team, online meetings and stuff, is **more intentional than casual teamwork** in the office. Many people know I was being developed for a promotion, so that has been awkward. My direct reports have asked if I'm still going to be their supervisor. I told them as far as I know my job will remain the same. **I didn't get to complete the project that was part of my succession plan**. It ended early with COVID.”* – Participant 14

Overall, it seems that inpatriates do not benefit when their multinational employers terminate their international assignments and repatriate them involuntarily. A more constructive organizational response empowers inpatriates to make their own decisions about where and how to continue their international work when it is disrupted by an exogenous shock. Such a response is more protective of the personal resources (e.g., social capital) and more sensitive to the liabilities (e.g., organizational status) that may inform one's decision about organizational exit.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

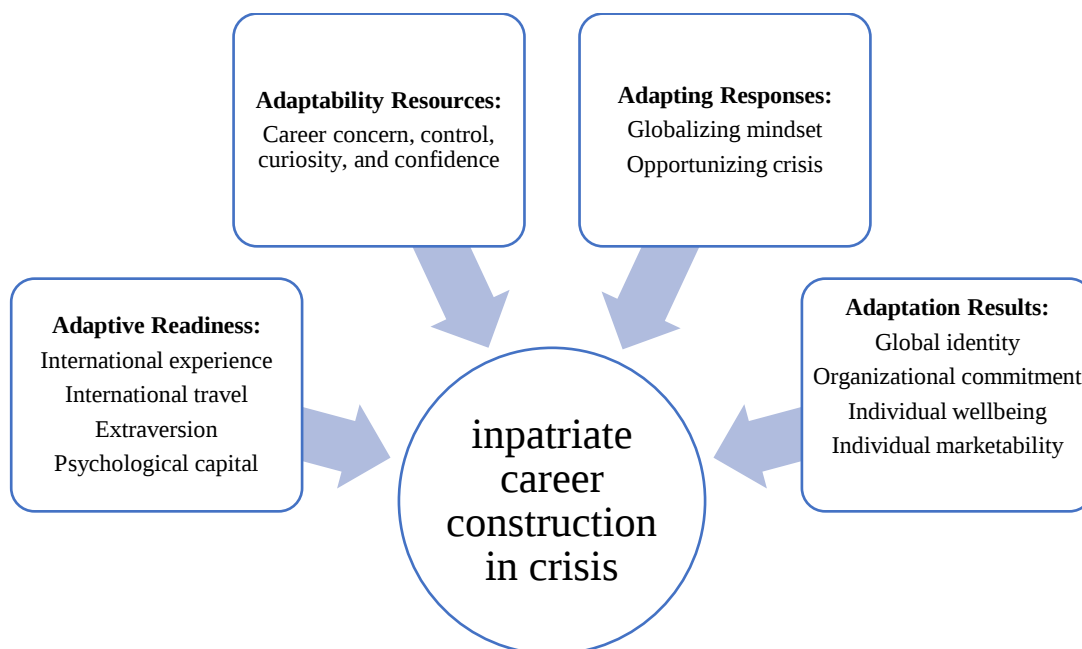
This dissertation research intends to understand the career implications of a global crisis for inpatriate global employees. I pursued a qualitative study with abductive reasoning to investigate how inpatriates adapted to a career shock. The COVID-19 global pandemic induced a realignment in how individuals and organizations work (Bader et al., 2022; Caligiuri et al., 2020; Hite & McDonald, 2020), and this presented a unique context in which to explore this inquiry through participant narratives. For multinational organizations, and the people who populate them, there is a pressing need to understand the consequences of this global crisis for globally mobile employees.

Drawing from the literature on inpatriation and global employees more broadly, as well as that of career construction theory and sensemaking theory, my dissertation advances knowledge on the inpatriate's career. Contradicting the assumption that a global pandemic would be a negative career shock for global employees, I primarily found positive valence toward the post-shock conditions that fostered advantageous career adaptation. For many inpatriates, coping with the shock of the pandemic responses (e.g., lockdowns) was made easier by the experiences they previously had abroad. Many described themselves as more flexible and open to changing conditions, and they attributed this to the obstacles they had to overcome when traveling and working internationally.

Similarly, prior international experiences were often assessed as having inculcated individuals with greater cognitive flexibility, conscientiousness, opportunity recognition, and creative thinking. Inpatriates had stronger adaptivity, or adaptive readiness, when they had prior international experience and especially when that involved international travel. Due in part to the global nature of the focal shock event, inpatriates typically found themselves identifying more

strongly with the concept of global career as they oriented their work trajectories around global disruption. Resulting from effective career adaptation, participants tended to express enhanced levels of organizational commitment, individual wellbeing, and individual marketability (see Figure 3). Accordingly, my conclusions confirm Vough and Caza's (2017) proposition that career setbacks, or negative career shocks, might relate positively to career identity by cultivating resilience.

Figure 3. Conceptual Model of Inpatriate Career Adaptation



Inpatriation is typically perceived as a less prestigious form of international assignment because subsidiary resources and association are generally considered inferior to the parent-country headquarters (Harvey & Buckley, 1997). Being somewhat marginalized and underrepresented in the organization, inpatriation should benefit the inpatriate as much as it does the organization. As a medium for learning and sharing implicit and explicit knowledge, building social networks, and continuously developing, working internationally tends to have positive implications for individuals' careers (Mello et al., 2023a). However, inpatriation has inherent

structural inequities, relative to parent-country national colleagues and traditional corporate expatriates, that complicate this. Therefore, one might expect more scholarly focus on the adjustment of inpatriates, but this is largely absent from the literature (Harvey et al., 2001; Davies et al., 2023). Meanwhile, as a practical configuration of international work, inpatriation is becoming more popular while global crises are becoming more common. Hindering multinational organizations' crisis management has been the lack of understanding about how inpatriates navigate a global crisis that also functions as a career shock.

In line with recent calls to discover *how* inpatriates develop their careers (Moeller & Harvey, 2018; Moeller & Reiche, 2017), and because inpatriation research is still in a nascent stage of development, I designed a qualitative study utilizing semi-structured interviews. This interpretivist design enabled me to derive insights into how inpatriates make sense of their work experience during a global crisis as well as how this meaning relates to their careers. In doing so, I advance theory at the intersection of inpatriation, adaptation, careers, and the implications of global mobility in a global crisis context.

The uncertainty that surrounds global crises like COVID-19 elicits a scholarly focus on the "grand challenges" that impact international human resource management, multinational organizations, and international assignees' decision-making (Buckley et al., 2017; Sanders & De Cieri, 2020). Because the empirical evidence regarding international assignees' career trajectories is inconsistent (Fan et al., 2021) and has barely improved since Stahl et al. (2002, p. 216) observed a dearth of research regarding the "impact of international assignments on managers' careers," an understanding of the individual-level implications for inpatriates' careers augments scholarship in this domain. It is within this crisis context of a global pandemic, and its

impact on multinational organizations and their employees, that I position this study and investigate inpatriates' post-shock career adaptation.

Empirical Contributions

Individuals often accept international assignments because they anticipate career capital growth (Dickmann et al., 2008), and they find success by incorporating personal agency into their career management (Breitenmoser et al., 2018). As a means of contributing value across borders, inpatriation can stimulate progress in one's career (Sarabi et al., 2017) by providing opportunities for learning new skills, meeting new people, and working in novel situations. When a global crisis paralyzes global commerce and disrupts the inpatriation assignment, individuals engage in a process of adaptation during which they realign their personal needs and desires with the new iteration of environmental conditions. Thus, they overcome a shock to their careers by finding purpose in the crisis, attributing it to career exploration and leveraging it for beneficial career consequences.

Readiness for Shock

From an organizational perspective, what is clear from the literature (Collings et al., 2011; Reiche et al., 2019) – and the interview data reviewed for this dissertation – is that predeparture training is woefully inadequate and mostly nonexistent for inpatriates. Most participants in my study described their inpatriation assignments as being roles that were not dissimilar to ones that they previously occupied. I did not find training to be prominent in the relative success of inpatriates adapting to this career shock. Most were like Participant 3, acknowledging “minimal training because they really needed someone in Berlin fast.” While “there wasn't much training beforehand, [t]here was some sort of training in the first few weeks and months when I came to Germany . . . to get an introduction to the accounting system of the

head office . . . [but that] was superficial because other things needed more immediate attention . . . I learned those as I went” (Participant 3). As an inpatriate, Participant 3 was functioning to fill a technical skill gap created by the unexpected departure of a parent-country colleague with specific auditing skills; they reported that “I didn’t even need [training] because I had previous experience” fulfilling this technical role in the Albanian subsidiary office.

Prompting the participant to recall any culture-specific training for their inpatriation assignment, Participant 3 noted, “I guess in one case there was a training for me because people in this specific country needed support on a topic that I didn't have much experience [in] myself. I had to request the training, which was provided within the next couple of weeks.” This was generally how inpatriates reported the training that supported their transition into the international assignment. While it might be true that inpatriates have an easier time adjusting to their parent-country environment when they receive predeparture training (Harvey & Buckley, 1997; Harvey et al., 2011), little evidence to support this has emerged. Post-arrival, rather than predeparture, country-specific intercultural training, might build culture-specific skills and knowledge but not necessarily foster adjustment (Tarique & Caligiuri, 2009). Moreover, the volatile nature of adapting to a global crisis makes predeparture training practically irrelevant unless it is specific to crisis preparedness (Fee et al., 2013).

Expectations could have been better established in the predeparture training stage. For example, while Participant 4’s employer provided “some trainings about living in Italy, how to find a place, how to learn some basic Italian . . . [training] about the culture of Rome and the basic laws . . . some training about safety . . . [and] cybersecurity threats,” the Canadian participant was very “shocked about the lack of English [or French] among the people in Rome.” When assuming inpatriation as a knowledge transfer strategy (Harzing et al., 2016; Reiche,

2011), multinational organizations might be inclined toward targeted training that ensures proficiency in a shared language (Reiche et al., 2015) as well as capabilities like ambiguity tolerance and cultural intelligence (Reiche et al., 2019).

I found explicit support for this but only in one case, Participant 4, whose function was certainly knowledge transfer, as they described it as “focused on [learning] artificial intelligence and geospatial data [from] satellites” before relocating back to their subsidiary location and “other countries where there are regional offices to implement this [technology]”. Participant 4 had a high level of technical knowledge, and the organization’s focus on intercultural training seemed to facilitate knowledge absorption; however, the participant’s adjustment was hindered by the unexpected difficulty they encountered communicating with parent-country nationals. They faced similar unexpected difficulties adapting to a virtual working environment. Despite the advanced technological nature of the project, Participant 4 found it “challenging because our partners, our stakeholders, were not ready from a technological perspective [and] they weren’t prepared to make the change . . . especially [partners] in developing countries . . . [who] don’t have the technical capacity or the know-how [or infrastructure] . . . and may not be able to [access cloud computing services] because of American sanctions.” Participant 4 overcame this challenge, in part, by advocating, “convinc[ing] people, especially senior people and partners to move [to subsidiary locations and] to invest in technology to pay licenses for different software [and] premium services.” Nevertheless, adapting toward a remote international work environment might have been easier had the participant received more training about the locations that their inpatriation assignment was meant to reinforce.

From a career construction perspective (Savickas 2005, 2013), it is reasonable to assume that predeparture training could facilitate a stronger relationship between the inpatriate and their

multinational employer (Harvey et al., 1999; Maley et al., 2015). The goals of training an inpatriate for an international assignment include productive knowledge exchanges between the inpatriate and parent-country colleagues as well as stronger perceptions of fit between the individual and organization (Harvey & Miceli, 1999). However, inpatriates adapt to work disruptions more optimally when they have a preexisting knowledge of the structure and agency inherent to their roles and international tasks. They may evaluate the organization more favorably when they have the resources needed to engage in healthy adapting responses to a shock. Inpatriates, especially when they come from emerging economies, are often inclined toward their international assignment because their multinational organization's headquarters are likely located in advanced economies with relative political and financial stability (Moeller et al., 2010). This institutional strength gives inpatriates the reassurance that their personal and professional lives will improve because they integrate themselves with those markets.

Inpatriates' performance tends to correlate with motivation more so than with abilities (Schuster et al., 2019), and this willingness to adapt is evident in the high cultural distance that many inpatriates tolerate in their assignments (Harvey et al., 2001). As Participant 16 described their successful integration at headquarters, it is "not where you're from [or] what you can do [but rather] how we make decisions, how we take the solutions, how we approach the problems, and how we have that communication and relationship with [international stakeholders]". Although none of the participants in my study reported feeling stigmatized by their parent-country colleagues, this might be because many of them felt that their prior international experiences made them more sincere, credible, and confident in adjusting to the assignment and adapting to the shock event. Political skills like sincerity and sociability are known to facilitate inpatriate acceptance in the headquarters (Harvey & Novicevic, 2004; Moeller & Harvey,

2011b). Participant 6 agreed with this notion, reporting, “My childhood was [cosmopolitan] . . . and I think that helped me a lot, to take life day by day, like just be flexible and have an open mind.”

Zhu et al. (2016) validated "previous culture-specific work experience" as a predeparture resource that impacts work adjustment and career outcomes. Most participants in my study reported that their prior experiences traveling and working internationally prepared them to make favorable decisions when adapting to the shock event. For example, Participant 3 was not distressed by the sudden fluctuations in international work because, as they put it, “I mean, both me and my wife are used to basically getting up on a whim and then getting on a plane.” Traveling internationally meant having to adapt work to constantly changing environments, which made the pandemic shock an easier one to cope with: “[Work] didn't change much because even before COVID, my job needed much travel, [and] we never stayed in the offices, [and we] work either from home or from the client location, [so] we were already prepared” for routine disruption (Participant 7). Inpatriates, who are likely maintaining remote connections to their subsidiary colleagues, adapted constructively when remote work become compulsory: “A lot of the international jobs I've had have been mostly remote working, so I was used to Teams and Skype already” (Participant 8).

Having faced uncertainty in prior experiences abroad, inpatriates found themselves more resilient and proactive (Akkan et al., 2022). Participant 6 expressed this sentiment: “Just this is not my first experience working internationally, and I know what to expect, and even the unpredictable events like a pandemic are anticipated to some extent.” Turning challenges into advantages is a characteristic of one who has learned to operate with flexibility in a dynamic global environment (McKouen et al., 2019). Participant 21 reported that novel cultural

environments gave them the chance to practice communicating their own accomplishments to different audiences: “It really helped me grow to see how things are different in other countries.” Participant 21 also endorsed their international education as having fostered both technical and interpersonal skills that make them attractive to foreign employers: “Internationally, people have very high regards and requirements of my skills and profile, and they expect me to [adapt] easily.” Having experienced life in their home country of Pakistan, Participant 22 noted that they understand what it means to feel insecure, meaning that “[f]or the initial phase [of the international assignment], the one word is vigil[ance]”. Inpatriates, therefore, seem to connect their prior international experiences with favorable mechanisms toward adaptability and adjustment (Takeuchi & Chen, 2013).

International experience can improve cognitive flexibility, enabling one to effectively adapt to novel situations and changing environmental conditions (Harvey et al., 2000; Shaffer et al., 2012). Having experience in foreign countries might also boost one’s self-esteem, openness, and proactivity, thus enhancing the psychological inclination toward favorable adaptation to tasks, transitions, and traumas at work (Rudolph et al., 2017). Psychological capital, and its four lower-order dimensions of self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience, had a positive influence on career adaptability (Safavi & Bouzari, 2019), in part, because the participants’ positive disposition makes them less judgmental and more inquisitive in international work (Vogelgesang et al., 2014). For example, Participant 4 reflected on prior trips to the parent-country offices and reported, “[I] normally have confidence in going to headquarters . . . [and] I managed to quickly adapt to doing my projects online.” Career adaptability is about coping favorably with change, and individuals’ mental capacities partly facilitate this. Having a positive disposition fosters

insight and confidence in a dynamic global working environment, and inpatriates become more proactive and enthusiastic about overcoming disruptions.

Consequences of psychological capital in global work are still being discovered (Newman et al., 2014), but it appears that effective post-shock career adaptability is a significant one (Rudolph et al., 2017). Indeed, prior research has specifically confirmed hope and optimism as predictors of career adaptability (Wilkins et al., 2014). Participant 25 demonstrated the power of psychological capital for navigating a career shock: “I think ever since that [prior international] experience, I am quite confident in myself . . . It gave me the confidence and also the experience to be able to apply the skills that I learn and how to deal and negotiate with people in different geographical locations . . . That helped me a lot throughout my career.”

Extraversion emerged as a prominent indicator of the Big Five personality – in addition to hope and optimism as positive dispositional traits. Notably, all Big Five dimensions have positive relationships with cultural intelligence (Ang et al., 2006) and career adaptability (Rudolph et al., 2017). Participant 23 described their personality as highly social: “Before COVID, I was already kind of a party person. I really want to go out and meet new people . . . Somehow, I adapted. It changed my personality, I think. I was a very socially active person.” Participant 1 described their prior international work roles as having “forced me to train my extroverted side,” and Participant 12 said, “I’m an extrovert, I like talking to people, I’m a people person . . . [and] I like work about relationship building.” Both responded to the shock conditions by improving “international collaboration” and by implementing “fun and play” into remote work so that colleagues could “shar[e] their personalities online” (Participant 1).

Reiche (2006) acknowledged a potential self-selection bias by which individuals with higher levels of emotional stability and extraversion choose to pursue international work. This

may be true, but I also encountered a participant who felt that international work had transformed their introverted personality into a more gregarious one but that this was then reversed with the onset of the global pandemic. Extraversion is less instrumental as adaptive readiness when individuals lack a physiological need for social contact. Since the inpatriation assignment often depends on the inpatriate cultivating social ties, the degree to which inpatriates can effectively adapt to shock conditions, and overcome them to sustain high-quality intercultural interpersonal communication, may affect the success of an inpatriation assignment.

Knowledge transfer and subsidiary performance are driven by inpatriates' social ties with parent-country national colleagues (Kim et al., 2024; Reiche, 2012). I found that relationship was even stronger when inpatriates expressed concerted efforts at intercultural functioning (i.e., motivational cultural intelligence; Davies et al., 2023). Additionally, Kiessling et al. (2023) posed an unanswered question for inpatriation research: whether Big Five personality traits explain professional progress and development. From my research, it seems that extraversion might play a role in overcoming threats to inpatriates' social capital. Indicators of the other four dimensions of openness, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and emotional stability may well be present in the data – Participant 18, for example, implied that their emotional stability supported their successful performance as an inpatriate during a global crisis: “I was a professional poker player for a long time, and I guess that makes me better at dealing with the unknown. I don't mind change or questions as much as other people because I'm very used to it.”

Adapting to Shock

As inpatriates engage in post-shock career adaptation, they seek to stabilize their working environment and to search for purpose that guides constructive career actions (Savickas 2005, 2013). They do this, in part, by engaging adaptability resources such that they demonstrate

concern, control, curiosity, and confidence regarding their careers (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). These psychological resources inform and interact with individuals' adapting responses, such as opportunizing the crisis and globalizing one's mindset, to facilitate advantageous adaptation results. Inpatriates navigate this process while accounting for contingencies like perceived organizational support and personal agency.

Conceptualizing career adaptability with a career adapt-abilities scale consisting of 24 psychometric items, Savickas (2002) outlined career concern (e.g., "preparing for the future"); career control (e.g., "doing what's right for me"); career curiosity (e.g., "probing deeply into questions I have"); and career confidence ("solving problems"). Self-regulation is fostered by these personal resources, which enable employees' adaptation to a changing work environment (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Inpatriates are encouraged to be proactive and to solicit feedback (Harvey et al., 2005), priming them to express career adaptability by showing, for example, concern and curiosity for future career progress. Participant 8 found that the career exploration they engaged in was facilitated by their inherent curiosity, and it was this that helped them realize an alignment between their internal desires and external opportunities: "[I]t's good that I am curious here because it seems we can do international work and keep building that career . . . my work is more international now because it's more nationalities I'm involved with, but I don't need to travel as before."

Similarly, Participant 25 became assertive and "started to feel more control over my life" and "to show more levels of control over my financial freedom" that led them to advocate for their own promotion: "I approached them about a promotion for the Africa division, [and] I basically pitched to them what I could do, and so now I have a new role and a better salary." This self-assurance is indicative of the career adaptability that inpatriates applied to translate their

cognitive flexibility and their proactive, positive, and perhaps extroverted characteristics into constructive adapting responses like career planning (Cappellen & Janssens, 2010; Harvey et al., 2012).

Whereas career adaptability consists of psychosocial resources for coping with a career shock, adapting responses are behaviors specifically targeted at the changing work conditions (Hirschi et al., 2015; Savickas, 2013). Career adaptability is positively associated with constructive adapting responses like career planning and career exploration (Rudolph et al., 2017). In my interview data, I generally found two strategies that inpatriates pursued as they engaged in adapting responses to the career shock. First, participants sought to optimize their situation by finding ways to create opportunities from the crisis. Second, participants problematized the global crisis and refined their work identity to align with global challenges more closely. Both strategies are consistent with the nature of career planning and career exploration, which Rudolph et al. (2017) confirmed as adapting responses that are associated with career adaptability. Inpatriates found opportunities in the crisis by initiating professional development, seeking out preferred geographic locations, leveraging social capital, and reflecting on personal values, desires, and memories to manifest career aspirations.

Participant 4 acknowledged professional development regarding new technologies: “Because of COVID, investments in cloud computing have been expanding significantly, [and] I am investing more time and energy into learning these technologies and advancing my knowledge of them.” When the pandemic responses began, many participants expressed a desire to be in a comfortable, secure location for the time they expected to spend in quarantine conditions. For example, Participant 13 felt that they would be less productive and face disadvantages if they returned home to Greece; the participant reported, “Just thinking this is the

end, total apocalypse, [and] I might as well do what I want to do right now, [so] I almost immediately emailed my boss and asked if we could get my assignment indefinitely for New York.”

Similarly, Participant 8 found an opportunity to speed up the reunion with his wife, who was working for the same company in a different country: “We planned ahead [because] the government wasn't really giving a lot of communication . . . we were lucky that my company allowed me to be in the States . . . since my wife works for the company [there] . . . They initiated a transfer for me to USA . . . We were planning on moving to Colorado in the future, like in the next decade. Now it seemed like the ideal time.” Here, it seemed some inpatriates adapted by changing their international work configuration completely, for example, from inpatriate to globetrotter or virtual global employee (Baruch et al., 2013).

Social capital is certainly an important resource for successful inpatriation (Kim et al., 2022; Moeller et al., 2016; Novicevic & Harvey, 2001; Reiche, 2012). Inpatriates have a network of social relationships in their subsidiary market, and they build a parallel network during their inpatriation assignment. Both networks are important for discovering and dispersing knowledge throughout the multinational organization. Participant 5 was able to leverage the extended time in the parent country, albeit with social distancing mostly in place, to cultivate social capital that bolstered their career: “I think [the shock] boosted my career. I had a goal to be a leader in the Australia and New Zealand market, but now I think I’ll be a leader in all our international expansion around the world. And that’s because I’ve been able to spend more time at the head office and interact more with the decision-makers here . . . I’ve been here almost 2 years [instead of 4 months], just learning more and contributing more and making myself known as a valuable employee.”

As social capital increases, inpatriates are assessed as more legitimate by colleagues (Moeller et al., 2016), and knowledge transfer objectives become more attainable (Reiche, 2012). However, the crisis conditions also prompted some criticism of capitalistic structures around international work, which prompted loosening of intraorganizational social ties and seeking of meaningful work. For example, Participant 1 reflected on their experience adapting to the career shock and reported feeling a new sense of unease with what the participant called “corrupt systems” that they encountered while working “in a big corporation.” Participant 1 was excited by the career prospects that they discovered as they became “more of a community builder” with a goal “[t]o build a better future, not in the big scheme but just find my own sweet spot where I can change things. I might not have the biggest global impact, but I have a local impact where I am.” Adaptive readiness, career adaptability, and adapting responses are associated with myriad consequences for work and nonwork lives (Hirsch et al., 2015). As revealed by Participant 1, these include greater satisfaction and less stress (Rudolph et al., 2017).

Emerging from the adapting response that entailed globalizing one’s mindset, a global career identity seems to be a salient consequential construct for inpatriates. Notably, individuals’ career orientations can change over time. Feldman and Bolino’s (1996) assertion that one can have multiple career anchors – multiple cores to one’s career – that shift in salience suggests that a global career anchor might exist as a dormant or embryonic aspect of one’s career (Cappellen & Janssens, 2010). Indeed, Akkan et al. (2022) found that global identity mediates the relationship between international experience and intentions to pursue global work. As such, I wonder if a global crisis that functions as a general career shock (e.g., a global pandemic; Akkermans et al., 2020) might initiate identity work that reassesses the global crisis as a *global* career shock – that is, the global crisis might *shock* one’s career into becoming more globally

oriented (Presbitero, 2018). Reiche and George (2024) recently theorized that global employees came to associate the COVID-19 pandemic with their work identity in one of three ways: bonding with a global community, contemplating a global identity, and pausing global identity emergence. I found evidence to support all three pathways.

Having a global career identity correlates with extraversion and openness to experience, with cultural intelligence mediating the relationships (Presbitero, 2018). As such, it might be unsurprising that inpatriates' adaptive readiness activated a period of identity work during which inpatriates coped with the global crisis by integrating themselves more fully with the border-spanning nature of the shock. Individuals might have engaged in adapting behaviors that functioned in such a way that the inpatriate developed a sense of belongingness that transcends national boundaries. Inpatriates are predisposed toward developing a global mindset (Harvey et al., 1999), which is useful when they are integrating knowledge and values across borders (Sarabi et al., 2017). However, it also makes it more likely that the inpatriate's identity is affected by complex, uncertain, and rapidly changing global circumstances. Their attention is refined toward informational sources that reflect the global landscape, and their interpretive sensemaking is similarly skewed toward diverse perspectives that reduce prejudice and increase innovation and integration (Levy et al., 2007).

Despite an assumption that social distancing and remote work restricts the intercultural nature of inpatriation, Participant 1 described their work under the pandemic response conditions as having become more international as interactions became virtual and, presumably, more inclusive: "[T]he team became much more international with the pandemic, [and] we were much more collaborating with India now also." The global nature of this crisis and career shock induced a sense of global equalization that made the inherent fault lines of international work

less relevant: “COVID is felt by everyone all over the world about the same.” Participant 9 narrated part of this identity work as they realized international travel would become forever changed: “[The career shock] makes me reassess my ambitions . . . Before, I wanted to be a training manager for the UK, [and] now I'm thinking more on a large scale, perhaps being in a position on the global team . . . my career is more international now than before COVID, [when] there was almost like a novelty about traveling.”

What I found in this dissertation is that inpatriates experiencing the career implications of a global crisis may find unexpected instrumentality in the event. Specifically, the global pandemic had the consequences of closing borders and suspending international travel, but inpatriates ironically found the time valuable as they adapted their work processes and social interactions, coming to identify with global corporate and vocational interests more strongly. Many were also surprised at how quickly and easily their multinational organizations facilitated a shift toward remote international work. This raises the question of whether the newfound identity, or career calling, as a global careerist is more valuable to the inpatriate or to their multinational employer: “It’s surprising how easy it was for people to adapt to working from home and working internationally without travel” (Participant 3). Facing future global crises, multinational employers might have a greater expectation for rapid work adaptations that seek, above all else, to protect the subsidiary-enhancing function of inpatriation (Kim et al., 2022).

Generally, inpatriates expressed greater interest in global work while also expressing less interest in international travel. This may have been one of the cognitive structural adaptations for discovering a career calling, or identity, that is globally oriented. Organizational and national responses to the pandemic created working conditions that obligated inpatriates to adapt their international tasks and intercultural interactions for a remote, digital environment. In doing so,

many found greater significance for their international assignments, seeing them as catalysts for global action and not just as a rung in the career ladder: “So maybe I am less keen to [travel] internationally now. Before, it was pretty easy and fun. You know, nonchalant about risks. Now, it’s hard enough to get into another country so definitely working in other countries becomes more difficult and less fun than before. And we see now we can do a lot internationally but virtually” (Participant 5).

Networking with a geographically diverse arrangement of organizational actors is also integral to successful inpatriation (Kim et al., 2024). In my student, I found that inpatriates further fostered a global career identity by opening themselves to intraorganizational and interorganizational opportunities around the world: “[I] contact[ed] the people I know in the other global offices in case they know of opportunities to promote myself. That could mean relocation, and that's fine if overall travel is less” (Participant 20).

Adaptation Results. Inpatriates centralize a global identity (Akkan et al., 2022) by adapting to the global crisis that disrupts their work. Therefore, the global orientation of their responsibilities and the global integration of their work activities become more salient. A global career shock can function as a motivational challenge and developmental asset. Much like international experience is seen as an asset, overcoming a global, career-disrupting shock event is also seen as fortifying for future stressful situations: “I survived a major global event, and I did it in a foreign country . . . This will really help me in the future because I think differently now, and [I’m] more confident and more aware” (Participant 4). For the duration of the global crisis response, most inpatriates sought to remain in the parent country, or a third-party country that was seen as similarly secure and stable. Such was the case for Participant 22, who chose to work remotely from subsidiary offices in Germany, where they had family present, rather than in the

parent country Switzerland or their home country India. This changed the nature of the inpatriation assignment such that individuals tended to spend more time abroad, sometimes making permanent or indefinite career plans that suggested disinterest in the original goal of the assignment or otherwise grander ambitions.

Researchers have previously found that global employees who are highly embedded in the host country have a stronger global identity for their work and career (Kraimer et al., 2012), and inpatriates tend to respond to embeddedness by dispersing a global mindset and associated innovation throughout the multinational organization (Kiessling et al., 2023). I did not assess embeddedness in this study, but it tends to increase with cultural intelligence (Stoermer et al., 2021), and it is reasonable to assume that organizational embeddedness also increased because the global pandemic responses reduced exit options. Individual and organizational responses to the shock event may have further facilitated other markers of career success: stronger commitment, wellbeing, and marketability (Spurk et al., 2019). Indeed, Participant 5 expressed a sentiment that was broadly shared among inpatriates in the post-shock environment: “[Adapting to the career shock] gives me confidence that I could leave the company if I needed to . . . Not that I want to do that. No, I really like my job and [Organization E], and I’ve gained a lot of abilities here since the pandemic. I feel good about the future.”

Participant 15 had an effective adaptive experience; being extroverted, they regretted no longer having physical meetings with organizational leaders around the world; but, being single with no children, they observed that their adaptation to remote work seemed easier than that of more senior colleagues with busy households and families present in the remote workspace. This observation was bolstered by their assessment of the employer as having given high-quality support and autonomy in the work transitions, which further bolstered commitment to the

organization: “The company wants to make sure people don’t leave for better opportunities . . . I try to avoid that if possible . . . I’m just trying to do the best job I can possibly do and make sure I meet my deadlines, and propose new procedures, and try to improve efficiency . . . I’m quite happy with my company” (Participant 15).

In addition to realizing a global career identity and perhaps stronger organizational commitment, inpatriates found value in their post-shock career adaptation relative to individual wellbeing and individual marketability. Individuals applied psychosocial resources and behavioral responses to overcome the career shock such that they achieved stronger post-shock adjustment and subjective satisfaction (Rudolph et al., 2017; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). While commitment to the parent-company operations is a favorable result of career adaptation, the organization also needs the inpatriate to be committed to subsidiary operations. This can be achieved by enhancing inpatriates' role discretion, socialization with host-country colleagues, and generally supporting healthy adjustment processes to work and nonwork life in the parent-country environment (Gregersen & Black, 1992). My data confirms these points, with particularly persuasive empirical evidence for the first one.

Participant 9 acknowledged these points as well, with their employer providing discretion and resources as the inpatriate took on responsibilities that more senior colleagues rejected, which gave the participant opportunities to network with new colleagues in other countries. Participant 9 became more committed to the organization (“I want to stay with the company because they’ve looked after me so well”), felt pride in their work (“It’s great to be respected in a multinational organization.”), and perceived a stronger sense of internal and external career prospects (“[I] reassess[ed] my ambitions . . . I wanted to be a training manager for the UK, [but now] I’m thinking more on a large scale, perhaps being in a position on the global team . . .

Traveling through the pandemic was good for [my] career development”). This seems to confirm the motivational influence of international experience, especially in crisis situations, to realize career instrumentality (Zhu et al., 2016) and to bolster marketability (Suutari et al., 2018).

Model Contingencies. As I elaborated the model further, I identified two emergent constructs that seemed to impose theoretical regulations. Perceived organizational support and personal agency were salient conditional features of inpatient post-shock career adaptation. Maley and Moeller (2018) suggested that inpatriation assignments could be even more instrumental for career growth if the multinational employer shares clear assignment objectives, provides ongoing mentoring, and regularly communicates assignment and career implications with positivity and transparency. The post-shock organizational environment could be one that fails to sustain meaningful social relationships and work-related resources. This would be deleterious in that the precarious nature of the inpatriation assignment would be more apparent as individuals felt detached from the organization. However, the participants that I interviewed mostly approved of the organizational climate that accompanied the shock event: “Having gone through this experience, I can say it’s important to be in contact with a good manager. I talked with the people who manage global mobility and international transfers. They have been very supportive throughout the whole thing” (Participant 15).

The extent to which inpatriates perceive internal career prospects in the organization – and are therefore likely to engage more deeply in effective career adaptation for the present environment – may be affected by the degree of trust that they have for their parent-country colleagues and multinational employer (Reiche et al., 2011). Indeed, they tend to already trust that the global nature of their organization implies a readiness position for managing crises: “I assumed big international organizations like the one I work for have the ability to adapt quickly”

(Participant 4). Participants showed trust toward their employers when accurate and timely information was made available, especially once national governments and international institutions were assessed as less credible, less rational, and less proximal to the inpatriate's position. When global employees perceive strong levels of organizational support, they reciprocate by, for example, expressing trust and commitment toward the employer (Kawai & Strange, 2014). There is evidence for the inverse as well: "I felt the immediate response was unwise . . . they sent me back to Denmark even though I needed access to resources in the US to have successful product launches . . . In the end, I left the company" (Participant 14).

Despite an early conceptualization of inpatriation as a control mechanism in the headquarters-subsidary relationship (Adler & Bartholomew, 1992), I found that inpatriates acted autonomously when they were allowed to remain in the parent country during the pandemic. The few negative cases that were not given such an option and were instead involuntarily repatriated did not seem to view subsidiary control as their objective. One might imagine a scenario in which the multinational headquarters is forcibly closed by the government, and the organization repatriates the inpatriate to the still-open subsidiary office that needs centralized coordination for some hypothetical global crisis or even quotidian activities. However, in my findings, organizations seemed to forcibly repatriate individuals when the organization lost some operational corporate control, and perhaps canceled specific projects, and not because they sought additional control of the subsidiary.

Personal agency reflects self-efficacy as one regulates their own cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses to a stimulus (Bandura, 2001). I found that it similarly functioned to accentuate inpatriates' positive adaptivity and adaptability: "Force is never a good motivation. I feel safe because I can choose. If you want to come to the office, you can. But if you feel safer at

home, just work at home. If you want to be in Cyprus or London, your choice. I'm quite happy with my company” (Participant 15). Conversely, inpatriates who were deprived of personal agency, by being forcibly repatriated as a response to the pandemic, tended to also feel deprived of career advancement opportunities: “After the pandemic started . . . [m]y employer almost immediately ended the project I was on, and I returned to Denmark . . . Professionally, I’ve hit a roadblock” (Participant 17).

Nevertheless, despite reporting negative consequences of involuntary repatriation (e.g., job insecurity or dissatisfaction), inpatriates were still more likely to continue with their employer when they had technological tools that enabled remote work from their home country. This is consistent with the notion that personalized talent management practices increase the likelihood of inpatriate retention in the organization (Moeller et al., 2016). To optimize the long-term value of inpatriation, and specifically through successive inpatriation assignments (Kim et al., 2022), it seems that perceived organizational support, social capital, and personal agency are key constructs that condition successful adaptation.

Theoretical Contributions

This dissertation makes several contributions to theory. First, because the inpatriation literature has scarcely considered the career implications of a subsidiary-level employee working in the parent-country headquarters, I have sought to improve the theoretical balance of the inpatriation research. Calling for such research, Moeller and Harvey (2018, p. 205) argued, “value is created only when there is a profuse repertoire of knowledge about inpatriates’ experiences and how these underpin firm-level designs for career development and management.” As such, I explicated the individual perspective of inpatriates who, while initially focused on the organizational mission of the inpatriation assignment, responded to the pandemic

by refocusing the international assignment around personal vocational needs and career ambitions. Furthermore, in adapting to post-shock environmental conditions, inpatriates seemed more inclined toward realizing the personal utility, rather than the previously anticipated organizational utility, of their international assignment.

Typically, inpatriation is valuable to the organization for its potential to enrich and transfer intraorganizational and international knowledge (e.g., Kim et al., 2022; Murakami, 2017; Reiche, 2011). In this atypical time of crisis, individuals are distracted from their assignment responsibilities and dislocated from organizational signals. Consequently, and aligning with career construction theory (Savickas, 2013), inpatriates seek to protect their career interests, and foster them further, by engaging personal psychosocial resources that facilitate vocational self-regulation. Thus, inpatriation, contextualized by a global crisis, drives internal and personal processes that seek to align the international assignment with one's self-concept and general career ambitions. This contrasts with prior conceptualizations of inpatriation that typically considered the multinational employer's perspective, with the focal alignment being that between the inpatriation assignment and the organization's strategic goals (e.g., Harvey et al., 2001; Kiessling et al., 2023; Maley & Moeller, 2018).

In extant research, social capital has been shown to partially drive inpatriates' career outcomes. For example, inpatriates may perceive stronger career prospects when they have trusting relationships with parent-country colleagues (Reiche et al., 2011). However, in the post-shock environment, social capital is dislocated, with inpatriates realizing a significant diminution in their interpersonal interactions. Trust was generally maintained when inpatriates received enhanced autonomy and agency in their daily work activities and post-shock adapting measures. Trust was further bolstered when the multinational employer maintained continuous updates of

high-quality information regarding the pandemic conditions. Sustaining a trusting relationship with the organization was important for agentic modifications to intraorganizational social structures.

This contradicts Maley and Moeller's (2014) finding that global employees tend to suffer, and lose trust, because of insufficient face-to-face contact with their supervisors. Indeed, inpatriates may have preferred physical contact with their managers, but they also made proactive attempts to restructure their relationships with parent-country colleagues in the post-shock environment. Previously, executives based in the multinational's headquarters were often traveling and therefore physically unavailable in the headquarters. In the post-shock environment that included travel restrictions and lockdowns, inpatriates were able to leverage executives' newfound availability to restructure their relationships such that mentoring became more accessible. Thus, inpatriates were able to maintain intraorganizational trust, despite lacking face-to-face contact with supervisors, by actively engaging organizational actors with virtual interaction. Actively leveraging these parent-country relationships is one way the inpatriate can continue to support subsidiary-level performance metrics. This finding addresses one of the significant apertures of inpatriation literature: how parent-country social relationships are managed (Kim et al., 2022).

Inpatriates protected social capital, despite the disruptions introduced by the global crisis, with a concerted effort to bolster *bridging* social capital. Rather than *bonding* social capital, by which they might seek to enhance relationships with familiar actors like other inpatriates or subsidiary-level colleagues, they were more inclined toward bridging capital that provided strong linkage to organizational superiors and parent-country colleagues (Mäkelä & Suutari, 2009). Given the discrepancy in status that typically exists between inpatriates and parent-country

colleagues (Moeller et al., 2016), it appears that the post-shock working environment, being mostly remote and virtual, diminished this status inconsistency and made bridging social capital more feasible.

This observation suggests that the crisis-induced disruptions to the inpatriation assignment may have also altered the inpatriate's expectations such that they began to anticipate an indeterminate duration to their time abroad and thus were able to strategize distal career externalities. Accordingly, while inpatriation is often defined in terms of its duration being either short or long term (Reiche, 2006; Reiche, 2012), the nature of post-shock adaptation in this context indicates indifference to the previously established duration for the assignment. While assignment duration is typically determined by the organization's strategic goals, the shock of the global pandemic introduced novel working conditions that made the connection practically irrelevant. This finding supports Reiche's (2011) notion that the distinction between short- and long-term inpatriation is insignificant; the two conceptualizations seem more valid when they are better integrated as one construct with divergent context.

As employee safety and security became a more acute organizational goal during the pandemic, individual autonomy and personal agency effectively superseded prior temporal constraints of the inpatriation. Rather than a short-term assignment for knowledge transfer or a long-term assignment for developing pluralistic senior management, the inpatriation assignment became more undefined and ambiguous. The previously established calendrical endpoint to the assignment did not matter as much once lockdowns and travel restrictions were implemented; instead, inpatriates became more concerned with limitations to freedom of movement. The distinctions between short- and long-term inpatriation became less prominent, which could potentially hinder the border-spanning utility and value of inpatriates as their subsidiary-level

social ties weaken and their intercultural responsibilities become less salient in a remote environment.

Compared to newer arrivals, inpatriates who had been working in the parent country for an extended period prior to the shock onset may have been more embedded and psychosocially adaptive in the intercultural environment. This may have increased the degree of career adaptability among inpatriates, as short-term inpatriates – and especially those arriving just before the global crisis began – may have been better suited to maintaining subsidiary social ties. Conversely, longer-serving inpatriates are more entrenched at headquarters and perhaps less amenable to extraction and knowledge transference. They do, however, tend to have a stronger global anchor to their work and careers (Kraimer et al., 2012), and immersing an innovative global mindset within the headquarters benefits the organization (Kiessling et al., 2023). Newer arrivals, being less integrated at headquarters and in the parent country generally, might have been more successful had they voluntarily returned to the subsidiary location to remotely continue their international intellectual and social capital work (Lazarova & Tarique, 2005; Reiche et al., 2009).

For the most part, it seems that inpatriates sought to extend the value of international experience by maintaining it in the parent country environment – especially when the parent country was deemed more economically and politically stable. This aligns with Rickley's (2019) discovery of a positive correlation between subsidiary executives' international experience and the institutional distance between their subsidiary country and the parent country. As such, one might find that global employees' career construction is driven, in part, by not only the adaptivity of international experience but specifically hegemonic international experience – that which they receive by working in the parent country, which is likely the more economically,

politically, and culturally dominant. On the one hand, this may be concerning to multinational organizations that utilize the inpatriation assignment to achieve specific strategic goals. It raises the question of whether the corporate-sponsored inpatriate may have ambitions to become a permanent colleague in the parent-country headquarters and whether the global crisis presents an opportunity to act on that ambition (Côté, 2022). The inpatriate might decide, given the heightened complexity of crisis response in a less wealthy subsidiary country, to seek a permanent position in the parent country, which contradicts the motivational drivers of inpatriation. Nevertheless, when considering the individual perspective, this might be vocationally beneficial in that, through integration and acculturation, social capital is bolstered (Moeller et al., 2016) and status inconsistency diminished (Maley et al., 2015).

Extant literature regarding career construction theory (Savickas 2002, 2005, 2013) has mostly analyzed mediators and outcomes of the model. Career adaptability, adapting responses, and adaptation results have been elevated at the expense of adaptivity antecedents and markers of adaptive readiness. To remedy this, I framed international experience as a construct that not only influences the realization of global work aspirations, through the emergence of a global work identity (Akkan et al., 2022), but that also empowers global employees with trait-like characteristics that indicate an alacrity to engage in the unfamiliarity, ambiguity, and complexity of international work. Through international work experience, individuals become more comfortable with physical mobility, cognitive flexibility, work and nonwork routine disruptions, task challenges, and autonomy (Shaffer et al., 2012; Mello et al., 2023b). As such, they tend to develop adaptivity in that they become more inclined toward self-regulative behaviors that can effectively respond to a dynamic intercultural environment accented by global crises.

Operationalizing adaptivity has typically included measures of traits that are relatively permanent or inherent to the person, such as self-esteem or future orientation; however, cognitive flexibility has also been confirmed as an indicator of adaptivity (Rudolph et al., 2017). Working internationally heightens the complexity and sensitivity of one's work, not just due to intercultural interpersonal dynamics but also due to the increasing incidence of global crises that have the potential to derail international work assignments and career aspirations. It is my assertion that, while international experience generally fosters favorable career outcomes for global employees (Andresen et al., 2022; Suutari et al., 2018), crisis-bound international experience, such as what was experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, can either accelerate or decelerate the formation of a global work identity as the reality of global instability becomes manifest and suddenly more meaningful for career construction.

Fortunately, one's disposition and relation toward international work are malleable; adaptivity can be learned and not only through international experience. Inpatriate participants in my study analogized their cultivation of a global mindset, which Harvey et al. (1999) described as a predilection of inpatriates, to explain their robust adaptivity and readiness for a global crisis that could disrupt their careers. Story et al. (2014) noted that a global mindset is predicted by psychological capital, international experience, and complexity in one's global work role. This is evident in my data as well. Moreover, because nearly all participants in my study acknowledged insufficiency in predeparture training, one might conclude that adaptivity can be further bolstered by effective preparation that accounts for unforeseen, exogenous global threats.

To optimize inpatriation, and perhaps any other configuration of global work, the individual and their employer could consider the relationship algebraically; where A is inpatriates' adaptivity or adaptive readiness for a global crisis, G is the degree of career shock

sustained by the global crisis (i.e., global career shock), and P is the probability that such a global career shock may occur. With $P \cdot G$ equating to the expected global career shock, one should then consider preparation, that is, adaptivity, or A . If $A < P \cdot G$, then the inpatriate, or other global employee, is likely to experience adverse post-shock career adaptation (e.g., organizational exit). This might be prevented by bolstering A through international experience, dispositional development, expectation-setting procedures, or other predeparture training tools. If $A > P \cdot G$, then the global employee is likely to experience favorable post-shock career adaptation, such that their preparation for volatile global working conditions enables a continuous state of vigilance for the deployment of personal and contextual resources that diminish the impact of shocks.

Practical Implications

The international human resource management literature acknowledges that adaptability is central to global employee performance (Minbaeva & Collings, 2013) and that multinational organizations need to be more proactive in managing global crises (Fee et al., 2013). My findings support both notions, which have practical implications for inpatriates and their multinational employers. I review some of these implications at the three levels of individual, organization, and society. Following that, I acknowledge limitations in this dissertation research, and I outline directions for studying this topic further.

Novel working environments and dynamic social conditions are challenging and unpredictable. For individuals, international experiences tend to precede numerous professional opportunities that might be otherwise unrealized (Shaffer et al., 2012). The developmental potential of international experiences varies, but they tend to be more complex when cultural novelty is higher (Akkan et al., 2022; Dragoni et al., 2014). One might assume that international

experience is also more valuable when it is disrupted by a global crisis that has disproportionate impact on cross-border commerce. This seems illogical, but global employees might well benefit from the memory-enhancing and knowledge-storing nature of novelty. Assuming strong expectations of organizational and governmental resources, global employees, or those who aspire to work internationally, should not avoid such work for fear of global crises.

Being essentially neither positive nor negative, a career shock influences the internal and external conditions that frame the inpatriate experience abroad. As such, inpatriates might realize not only the typical benefits of this model (e.g., knowledge or social capital) but also the atypical benefits (e.g., globalized mindset or cognitive flexibility) of continuous adaptation in a volatile crisis environment. Fear and anxiety hinder critical thinking and rational decision-making. Therefore, applying positive psychology (Newman et al., 2014) to a career shock such as this might be a productive strategy for embracing post-shock career consequences like globalizing one's mindset (Vogelgesang et al., 2014). I would recommend inpatriates frame a global crisis in terms of novelty, with its effect on one's international work assignment being motivational and orienting one toward creativity, learning, and goal setting.

International experience, especially that which is volatile and chaotic, predisposes one toward making favorable vocational adaptations in a dynamic global environment. While inpatriation is an effective globalization strategy for career-seeking actors (Moeller & Harvey, 2018; Portniagin & Froese, 2019), it is also one for their multinational employers (Harvey et al., 1999; Kim et al., 2022). Inpatriation is an expensive endeavor and could be more successful when accompanying organizational structures that signal resilience and support for employees whose international assignments might be threatened by global crises. Indeed, multinational employers have a global duty of care for all employees working internationally or domestically.

How such organizations managed the disruption of this global pandemic is not clear from my study; however, the most empowering organizational response tended to be transparent with expedient communications. Inpatriates benefited from having the organization function as a clearinghouse for any information relevant to their disrupted international work. International human resource professionals can especially support such a mission of collocating, filtering, and transmitting disparate worldwide data.

As novelty can facilitate individual virtues like creativity, it can also foster organizational advantages. Indeed, if properly leveraged, even extreme novelty like that introduced by a global pandemic can position a multinational for competitive advantage. A reactive position may be maladaptive – such as responding to the pandemic by forcibly repatriating individuals back to their home country – and does not conform to a principle of empowerment or the contemporary approach to careers (Akkermans et al., 2018). To benefit from the shock event, the organization must adapt rather than recede. To that end, best practices in global talent management emphasize flexibility and autonomy in aligning individuals' global work roles with their personal needs (Caligiuri et al., 2024).

For the international work assignment to be developmental, inpatriates need to encounter challenges; this is contradicted when the organization responds to a global crisis by forcibly repatriating individuals. Multinationals can embrace the innovative potential of the exogenous shock by maximizing individual agency in adapting behaviors. Mentoring is an effective strategy for optimizing inpatriation (Feldman & Bolino, 1999; Reiche, 2011; Sekiguchi et al., 2019), and mentoring may be an even more valuable resource in times of crisis. Not only would inpatriates benefit practically from career-related mentoring – how to best leverage their inpatriation experience for internal or external career advancement – but they would also experience abstract

benefits as the psychosocial support bolsters their perceived employability, subjective wellbeing, and organizational commitment.

The central issue of global talent management is the alignment of an organization's strategy with the international assignments and strategic skillsets of its global employees (Caligiuri et al., 2024). Rationality and inclusivity are perpetual goals of any dynamic and growth-oriented organization, and inpatriation is an international assignment model that aligns with such a mission. Multinationals are encouraged to pursue innovative ideation and intercultural knowledge transfer as ideal consequences of inpatriation (Kiessling et al., 2023; Reiche, 2006, 2011). Coaching inpatriates to become more global in their mindset and more multicultural in their outlook may facilitate these goals – and it may also support their careers as they adapt to global shocks that may occur while working abroad. Finding commonalities with worldwide others who are similarly experiencing the global crisis may foster mindfulness and tranquility. However, multinational organizations should be cautious of unintentionally devaluing diversity when they sanction technological tools that equalize international work. Considering the diversity value of inpatriation, one might expect that their physical presence in the headquarters, rather than a virtual or remote presence, would be more instrumental for strategic goals.

If organizations benefit from stronger human capital, then societies benefit from stronger organizational capital. Inpatriation can benefit societies, in part, by reducing ethnocentrism and by bolstering trust and intercultural learning (Brewster et al., 1992; Reiche et al., 2011). Stability and flexibility were important for the inpatriates in my study. Constructing their careers in the post-shock pandemic environment was seemingly easier when the parent-country society allowed in-country travel while still maintaining visible signs of responsiveness (e.g.,

notification of novel variant outbreaks). I would be remiss to not acknowledge the negative valence with which in-patriates regarded restrictions to freedom of movement. To the extent that it is possible, societies should refrain from mandating extreme travel restrictions. Responding to a global crisis, such as a viral pandemic, with an early suspension of all international travel might subsequently enable tolerance for moderate levels of domestic travel. Crucially, exceptions might be made for those seeking to exit the country in later phases of the pandemic.

Societies could also be more strategic about pursuing global solidarity, rather than national self-interest, when global crises arise. Perhaps supranational coordination, through the International Labor Organization or some other association of multinational corporate and worker interests, would provide assurance to potential in-patriates, or other global employees, who are concerned with the vocational risks of working abroad in a crisis-prone era. A specialized insurance market for crisis-induced disruptions to in-patriation could provide security to foreign individuals who need leniency in adapting to the post-shock parent-country environment but whom the organization and broader society would prefer to not immediately lose. This reiterates Moeller et al.'s (2010) suggestion that an international assignment's predeparture stage could be optimized by guaranteeing continued employment, and even career advancement, upon completion of the in-patriation assignment. This assurance needs to include extreme contingencies like a global crisis. Moreover, societies worldwide should be pursuing the benefits of intercultural exchange, with dedicated institutional support for ensuring citizens have early and frequent experiences abroad. People with international experience should not be the minority. The world should instead consist of a majority that is predisposed toward optimistic, hopeful, and flexible responses to exogenous global shocks.

Limitations & Future Directions

There are certain weaknesses inherent to this dissertation. First, generalizability is limited to the specific context of the research – inpatriates experiencing a global crisis that disrupts their international work. An important demarcation in this research is the global crisis context. The variety of global crises, or their disparate impact, are not the foci of this research. This dissertation is concerned only with the psychological and social processes by which inpatriates adapted their careers in the face of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Consequently, the research is contextual, but I have attempted to make the conditions surrounding transferability clear. A more robust consideration of various global crises and planetary plights may help clarify inpatriates' career adaptation during volatile and uncertain times.

Moreover, besides a career shock, there are other contextual elements to consider when a pandemic disrupts the international assignment. An inpatriate working at a senior level, versus a junior employee, or an inpatriate working solo versus on a term, could have divergent conclusions. Furthermore, the sample is itself limited to this specific category of global employee. Additional research might investigate differences between inpatriates and other types of global employees as it pertains to career adaptation following shock events. Like with traditional expatriation, there may be group differences between assigned and self-initiated inpatriation or between those from advanced or emerging economies. Such research might also consider individual differences within the population. For example, constructs like gender, tenure, or nationality could all drive divergent patterns of career adaptability and construction. Such a finding might assist researchers' probing of the theoretical linkages between international experience, international work assignments, and a global career identity.

The primary weakness of my research, however, is the nonrandom nature of the sample. Nearly all participants in my research differed in terms of their multinational employer, but studying differential outcomes within the same organization might prove useful in understanding personal actions toward adaptability. The organizational response, and associated adaptive climate, is difficult to parse with this individual-level data. My dissertation further assumes that participants were truthful in the pre-screening questionnaire and in their interviews with me. A similar assumption is that participants' work roles match with the description of an inpatriate. I previously reviewed my protocol for ensuring a credible sample of inpatriates whose narratives were dependable for knowledge dissemination.

My research also assumes participants' veracity in memory recollection. I assume that I collected all relevant information by the time that I reached theoretical saturation and ceased data collection. Additionally, I endeavored to ensure that my procedures for collecting and analyzing data were consistent and transparent. Of course, selection bias could be a risk, and there might be something unique about those participants who sought to join the study. Researchers might benefit from an attempt to categorize inpatriates with more nuance. A typology that considers constructs like motivation or personality could facilitate studies that support the selection, mentoring, and retention of inpatriates.

There is no prior research regarding inpatriates' experiences during a global crisis, and there is limited research regarding inpatriates' careers. Framing the phenomenon through career construction theory enabled discovery of key constructs and relationships, but this also constrained emerging and tangential concepts like temporality. My research was conducted after the initial onset of the global pandemic, with participants providing retrospective interpretations

of their career adaptations. The nature of participant sensemaking and interpretive theorizing, however, is reflexive and iterative; temporality and sequence are thus difficult to capture.

Alternative theoretical frameworks could provide additional insights that capture more temporal nuance. For example, social embeddedness theory could account for individual changes that occur as socialization fluctuates during an exogenous shock. Other theories, like social cognitive career theory or trait and factor theory, could be useful for uncovering a chronological assortment of individual inputs, catalysts, consequences, and other career-related variables. Additionally, modifying the methodology, such as by studying this phenomenon through role theory or institutional theory, for example, would change the interview protocol such that the focus of the inquiry shifts entirely from agentic career adaptation and toward structured behavioral expectations and social conformity. Global employees have a tendency toward loneliness, due to dislocated social connections (Fan et al., 2023); and while most of the participants in my study were not classified as such, applying a theory like conservation of resources could help to isolate, emphasize, and resolve similar instances of adversity.

In addition to criticizing the sample and theoretical background, one can find further issue with the methodology applied in this research. Pragmatic iterative approach (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Tracy, 2019) is all about discovery, identifying and understanding emergent empirical themes while also applying extant theoretical knowledge to categorize and scrutinize the data. The goal is to derive applied knowledge. Recreating this dissertation, even with the same theoretical assumptions, could yield conflicting results. The iteration of sample participants, researcher, and parties' contemporary frames of mind are all likely to influence theorizing. Notably, the specific context of this dissertation – working internationally during a global crisis – makes the study valuable because it is objectively transferable. Trustworthy

research is, in part, research whose transferability is explicit (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This dissertation is bounded by the crisis context and is therefore, perhaps, not well generalized to a broader population of global employees encountering various political, economic, social, and health crises. It is, however, reliable insight into inpatriates experiencing *la force majeure*.

The participant narratives spanned several months of post-shock career stabilizing, but the perspectives are just a brief snapshot of what is likely a multi-year process of adaptation. Member checking was a tool that I used to confirm findings; I consistently asked participants to clarify certain notions and interpretations that I found in their narratives. I also, as a matter of confirming my findings, engaged in peer debriefing, which involved sharing my initial insights with three colleagues and seeking their feedback. In hindsight, I could have improved conceptual clarity for some aspects of the theory. For example, rather than discussing personal agency, perhaps the proper construct is career agency (Tams & Arthur, 2010). For future research, an observational study, with the exogenous shock as the independent variable, or longitudinal primary data could both provide more robust conclusions. However, both might be logistically difficult given the sensitivity of a crisis event. There are additional tools, such as resume audits, observations, and even neuroscience, that could supplement indicators of career adaptability.

Indeed, my findings are limited by how the participants interpreted my questions and how I interpreted their responses. This is appropriate for an interpretivist dissertation (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018), but future research should include additional coders to increase positivist reliability. Future research should also seek to include alternative perspectives, accounting for other analytic levels as well as disparate effects of teammates, supervisors, families, and other stakeholders. Correlational studies, deductive hypothesis testing, and structural equation modeling would provide a positivist analysis of the underlying relations. One

might substantiate, or disprove, my preliminary assumption that inpatriates, relative to expatriates, experience a more precarious international working environment. A competing hypothesis framework might be feasible for this test.

Finally, a quantitative measure for assessing a global career shock could be particularly useful to researchers studying international management and career development. As of August 2024, academic databases reveal only four papers mentioning a “global career shock,” with all four being published since 2021 and only two published in reputable academic journals. All four papers regard a global crisis as a simultaneous shock to typical, or nonglobal, careers; however, none have yet to introduce a psychometric scale for a *global career shock*, nor have any, unlike in this present research, investigated an exogenous shock that disrupts or initiates a global career.

Summary & Conclusion

As a configuration of international work, inpatriation is still in the nascent stage of academic and practical development. This manuscript represents the first study of career adaptability and career construction among inpatriates, and it represents one of the few studies of how global employees managed the disruptive effects of the COVID-19 global pandemic. My research informs a persistent question about how individuals experience and realize vocational benefit from their time abroad (Caligiuri & Bonache, 2016), and my research also advances a narrower question of how inpatriates shape their careers (Moeller & Harvey, 2018; Moeller & Reiche, 2017). Despite the salience of agency and identity for a contemporary, borderless conceptualization of career, this dissertation is the first to analyze their interplay in a post-shock inpatriation environment. Thus, given the lack of theory regarding how inpatriates manage a career shock, I developed the present manuscript to inform international management researchers and global mobility specialists.

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APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Oral Consent Script to Participate in Research

Hello. Would you be interested in participating in a research project I am conducting at the University of Oklahoma? I'd like you to participate because you were working as an inpatient during the onset and/or for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I'm conducting this research project because I am hoping to learn more about the meaning that inpatients attribute to a global crisis as it pertains to their work and overall careers. About 45 people will participate. If you agree to participate, I will be asking you to answer a series of questions about your work and nonwork experiences during the global pandemic via an individual interview conducted virtually over Zoom. This should take about 60 minutes.

Your participation in this research does not involve any direct benefits to you. Although I do not anticipate risks beyond what you might experience in your everyday life, note that some of the questions in the study may make you upset or uncomfortable. Should that happen, you can stop your participation at any time. For emotional support, you can contact U.S.-based services by texting 741741 or calling the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-272- 8255. Outside of the U.S., you can find country-specific support services at Befrienders Worldwide <https://befrienders.org/>.

I will not terminate the interview early, but you may do so at any time. As a token of appreciation for your time, you will receive a \$40 digital gift card via the User Interviews platform. This will be sent to you online after the completion of our 60-minute interview.

All the information I'm collecting will be kept secure and anonymous, and only I, supervisors, or the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board will be able to look at it.

After our interview, I will personally transcribe it. I will de-identify your data by assigning pseudonyms in place of your name and your employer. If any de-identified data is aggregated across participants for analysis or reporting, then I will ensure the group has a minimum of 5 individuals. Any direct quotes will have a pseudonym for both your name and your employer. Your age, gender, and country of origin will not be altered or withheld from the final report. However, when reported, such identifiers will be grouped with at least 4 other individuals. The recording will be deleted, but the de-identified transcript will be kept indefinitely.

After removing all identifiers, I might share your de-identified data with other researchers or use it in future research without obtaining additional consent from you.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant or any concerns or complaints regarding your participation, you can contact me, Benjamin Blake, at benjaminblake@ou.edu. You can also contact my dissertation advisor, Mike Buckley, at mbuckley@ou.edu. You may also contact OU's IRB at 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

In order to preserve your responses, video and audio will be recorded via Zoom.

Do you agree for your interview to be audio recorded? _____ (note response)

Do you agree for your interview to be video recorded? _____ (note response)

Do you agree to being quoted directly but anonymously? _____ (note response)

May I contact you again to gather additional information? _____ (note response)

Data are collected via an online platform (User Interviews), not hosted by OU, which has its own privacy and security policies for keeping your information confidential. Please note no assurance can be made as to their use of the data you provide for purposes other than this research. Before you agree to participate, remember that your participation is completely voluntary, you don't have to answer any question, and you can stop at any time. If you do choose to participate and then change your mind, you won't be penalized in any way.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Please describe your international (in-patriation) assignment.
 - a. What is/was your job? Employer? Industry?
 - b. What was the purpose of the assignment?
 - c. How did you find out about the assignment?
 - d. Why did you accept the assignment?
 - e. When did you start? End?
 - f. Did the assignment end early? Why? What was that experience like?
 - g. What were you doing before the assignment? Where did you live?
 - h. What prior work experience did you have outside your home country?
 - i. What is your educational background? When did you earn your degrees?
 - j. What were your original plans for when you returned home from the assignment?
 - k. What kind of support did you receive before arrival? In-country?
 - l. What kind of training did you receive?
2. How would you describe the COVID-19 pandemic?
 - a. How do you recall feeling when the lockdowns were issued?
 - b. What was surprising? What surprised you the most?
 - i. Explain further (who/what/when/why/where/how).
 - ii. If the surprise was negative, describe a positive surprise (and vice versa).
 - c. How did your feelings change throughout the pandemic?
 - d. Tell me about your family and whether they were affected by the pandemic.
3. Tell me about your (international) work experiences during the pandemic.
 - a. What changed? How? How does that make you feel?
 - b. How did your organization respond to the pandemic?
 - c. How did governmental responses affect you? Home vs. host country responses?
 - d. How might your experience with COVID-19 differ from your colleagues?
 - e. How much time do you spend thinking about the pandemic's effects?
4. How have you adapted to meet the personal challenges of COVID-19?
 - a. What about the professional challenges?
 - b. What has your relationship with your colleagues been like? Your supervisor?
 - c. What challenges have been the most serious? Why?
5. Tell me about how you envision your career now that you've experienced COVID-19.
 - a. What has changed? How does that make you feel?
 - b. What are your career goals?
 - c. How did the pandemic change (or not change) your career plans?
 - d. Has the pandemic changed how you feel about working abroad? How?
 - e. Has the pandemic changed how you feel about working for your employer? How?
6. What strategies have helped you overcome the career challenges of COVID-19?
 - a. What strategies have helped you pursue new career opportunities?
7. How do you compare COVID-19 to other global crises (climate change, poverty, war)?
 - a. We are likely to experience more global crises. How do you feel about that?
8. What else do you want to tell me about the impact of COVID-19 on your work/career?
 - a. Considering COVID-19, what will your career look like in 5 years? 10 years?

APPENDIX C: PRIMARY EXPERIENCE CODES

39 Primary Codes (utterances coded as such; number of interviews containing code).
Italicized codes represent codes that were subsequently omitted or merged with others.

1. Crisis within a crisis (16; 9)

Participant 17: "With my wife and children being in Denmark, it was alarming that I could be cut off from them. I have family still in the US, but I only thought about returning home. I was back in Denmark before the end of March 2020, so it was very soon after the pandemic began. At that point, I was relieved just to be with them."

2. Forced repatriation (26; 6)

Participant 19: "I'm involved with diabetes treatment efforts in Romania. I work for a pharmaceutical company called [Organization S]. We are introducing a new product, and I was in Denmark learning about it. I was sent home when COVID started, and I felt unprepared to launch the product. That's why I left the company. A remote launch with more time with training in Denmark would have been better for me."

3. Novel inpatriation direction (3; 3)

Participant 10: "I'm from Costa Rica, and I did all the compensation for them there. Before COVID, the company announced they would close in Costa Rica, so I applied for a global compensation analyst job. My manager recommended me for relocation. Training for that required me to come to Germany, and that's where I was when COVID started. And now I'm in Florida managing compensation here."

4. Nonglobal motivator (12; 5)

Participant 16: "The cultural area is about professionalism, not just where you're from and what you can do. It's about how we make decisions, and how we take the solutions, and how we approach the problems, and how we have that communication and relationship with the client. That's what matters more than the skill set [or identity]."

5. Cognitive benefits from crisis (23; 13)

Participant 20: "Some of the transitions were challenging. I wasn't used to being around the house most of the day. Working from a single office and not moving around, not going to airports or the security or border control. It was a bit of a hard transition not doing all that every two or three months. I enjoy not doing it now. It's a relief not to leave my family. It's a lot of energy and time I can use for other things. My work has almost 90% that I can do now at home. There is little need to travel overseas for work again. Maybe on occasion. And then 10% I can just come to the local office for meetings."

6. Dual career partner (10; 4)

Participant 6: "Now let's make the most of quarantine, even if you're in UK and I'm in France, Let's spend time together, spend quality time together, exercise, you know, online and virtual games."

7. Career strategizing (116; 22)

Participant 8: "And you know, it's good that you are curious here because it seems we can do international work and keep building that career. It's interesting my work is more international now because it's more nationalities I'm involved with, but I don't need to travel as before to do much of the job."

8. Permanent changes from crisis (51; 18)

Participant 23: "Yes, definitely [I will work internationally in the future], a lot. I feel something has changed because the goal before was to be efficient. When you go to the airport, it takes time. It takes a lot of time to travel. Now you just want to enjoy the time more. And you'll always fear contamination or getting a virus on the plane."

9. Exposing inequities (61; 22)

Participant 22: "Then with artificial intelligence the [international] experience is even at a higher level. So even if I go back to Pakistan, my education and experience itself is more valuable because of technology. And as I told you, there is no work-life balance in Pakistan. But here, even in COVID, before COVID, after COVID, there is work-life balance. In Pakistan they make you work for 10 to 12 hours, but they won't pay you for any overtime."

10. Crisis as equalizer (43; 19)

Participant 3: "It is good technology makes our differences less important when communicating."

11. International experience (63; 21)

Participant 6: "Just this is not my first experience working internationally, and I know what to expect, and even the unpredictable events like a pandemic are anticipated to some extent."

12. Claiming no career transition from shock (16; 11)

Participant 11: "At work, I'm just happy with the fact that everybody has been really hard working and engaged. Because I would say we were lucky that our work was already computer based, and it was an easy transition for us."

13. Social benefits from crisis (41; 17)

Participant 11: "I would say after the pandemic is going to be more local because companies have been so financially strong during this pandemic, and governments will make them spend some profits at home. They're able to afford that. So, I would say they would try to keep work local as much as possible. Then some people will need to travel once in a while. Less pollution will be good for the bottom line."

14. Reflecting on decision (65; 22)

Participant 17: “I don’t know anyone else who left [Organization Q] during the pandemic. Most of us could just do their work from home, but the international responsibilities were extra stress for me. It was a big adjustment to go from freely traveling whenever I needed to doing it all from home. Then I just looked for other opportunities, now I’m doing almost the same thing [without the international responsibilities]. It was important to make sure I made progress toward my career goal, so I made some necessary changes. And I had to find a way to explain to my wife why it was the right thing.”

15. Missing family and friends (64; 24)

Participant 21: “And a major thing was that people who are in one country can’t travel and go back to their family. I couldn’t visit family, and it was becoming very difficult. So [I] could not concentrate on work. Some expatriates permanently shifted back to their own country, resulting in loss of job opportunities, and that affected the budget and the revenue.”

16. Skill building as contingency plan (17; 12)

Participant 4: “Because of COVID, investments in cloud computing have been expanding significantly, So I am investing more time and energy into learning these technologies and advancing my knowledge of them.”

17. Finding opportunity in crisis (43; 17)

Participant 11: “I’m feeling very good about this job in Texas, in San Antonio. It’s the same but more responsibility, more income, more growth. Team leaders like me from different locations will report to me. So in a few years I’ll be settled in Texas with my wife and probably a baby. Thinking about it makes it weird. Weird that it helped me. Having some more time, because we’re not traveling, has definitely given me the opportunity to look into exercising and living a healthy life for my family.”

18. Trailing inpatient spouse (7; 3)

Participant 2: “Well originally, only my wife was requested to go to UK, but I wanted to have the opportunity too, So wife asked the HR if they had a spot for me and they said yes.”

19. Looking for comfortable location for pandemic (31; 18)

Participant 13: “I was just thinking like this is the end, total apocalypse. I might as well do what I want to do right now. And I almost immediately emailed my boss and asked if we could get my assignment indefinitely for New York. They worked it out for me, but the salary was reduced and I’m unofficially working less hours. I like to be productive and do things that give advantage. So, it was definitely a strange situation, but I made it work best I can.”

20. Career outcomes (122; 24)

Participant 20: “I am focusing [my career] a bit more now. That’s the thing with having more family and personal time. I can think about me and what’s the best direction for my career with the family considering. Before, I would see myself

working anywhere that paid enough. Right now, I just really don't see any other organization that is good enough. I want to earn more money, get bigger responsibilities. There is no position open now. I emailed with a person in HR to inquire about planning my future development. That all makes me feel my career will be good if I just stay on track and learn more skills and make an active argument for myself with the new situation."

21. Comparing crises (67; 24)

Participant 18: "Yes, [Brexit affected my international work]. That is why I was in the UK when this whole thing happened. I was officially assigned there for bureaucratic reasons, tax implications and stuff like that. I think it just made everything a little more complicated, traveling back and forth and all that. And [unlike with COVID,] the whole finance sector has definitely been heavily impacted by Brexit."

22. Fear perceptions of remote loafing (11; 9)

Participant 1: "I didn't want to be perceived as being lazy because nobody can see what you're actually working on."

23. Positive psychology (61; 20)

Participant 25: "So, the pandemic had a negative effect at first, but then it actually had a positive effect because it afforded me the time to really dig deep and self-reflect about what I want to do in this life and where I want to do it. It was a blessing in disguise in that regard. A global curse and global blessing too. I didn't see it at first, but over time I started to see the silver lining. I was able to take a difficult situation and turn it into a positive for myself."

24. Government response (55; 24)

Participant 5: "Well, I was quite cross that my own country Australia is not more accommodating to Australians who are working somewhere else."

25. Surprising (38; 23)

Participant 18: "I mean, to be sure, it was somewhat surprising how easy it turned out to be for everybody to work from home. We didn't really, we were not allowed to, work remotely, for the most part before COVID. There were definitely growing pains in the beginning, but after a few weeks everyone was getting used to the new normal. I was actually surprised by how productive everybody was. At work, the family, everything."

26. Social capital (90; 21)

Participant 7: "I'm not 100 percent, maybe 70, 80 percent of my social network remains outside our organization. Networking was lesser. Inside our own organization, the networking was still pretty good. We had a lot of ways to authentically engage each other, but it was harder being isolated. So yes social relationships were hurt, but other things were better. Less stress, for one."

27. Adapting to the crisis (187; 25)

Participant 9: “I think I've had to pay attention to the rules a lot more. Not just in my own country but in other countries. My colleagues mostly stay in their home countries. So I need to be respectful of wherever I'm traveling, especially when you're representing your company, and right now that is heightened as people are alert.”

28. Describing the crisis (102; 25)

Participant 12: “I don't think I was surprised because I lived through the 2008 recession. It felt like *deja vu*. The economy went downhill and everybody was panicking. There was chaos. Of course, it was not an like an economy based recession. It was mostly the pandemic. So that was the only thing that was different, but the consequences were still the same – people losing jobs and everyone's losing income and stuff like that.”

29. Global mindset (117; 24)

Participant 8: “Now, I like the international aspect. I love working with people in different countries and different backgrounds and cultures. I don't think a pandemic is really a fan of international work. There might be a rebound in the sort of digital nomads who do that because they want to. For work, I don't feel international travel will be mandated anymore unless it's really needed or maybe you are a VIP [very important person]. For education, it's still good to get international exposure, learn languages. For fun, yes, let's continue to travel but more smartly. It's all good for you.”

30. Career capital (190; 25)

Participant 24: “A couple of big decisions were important. I decided to prioritize. What's most important to me for my career? The answer is that I work in international education. I think that's why I was so afraid. The pandemic affected all countries, and the borders closing felt like a threat to my work. Also, I'm very clear now what I want. I told my work office the type of path I want and asked if they see a good match. And drink. Life is short. If you want to do something, do it now. Otherwise, you may never know.”

31. Organizational response to crisis (124; 25)

Participant 15: “I was fortunate because I work for a really big global company. It's one of the most prestigious companies in the UK. I think we expected they would consider the safety of their employees earlier than everyone else. They are in so many countries. But they didn't. They were just waiting for the government's measures to be formalized and become effective. I think what they did was not the best. It was not the best procedure. They started sending out newsletters from the Health Department. They started sending newsletters informing us about all the new information and where to find support. I believe they could do more. If you're in almost all countries, you can't ignore a global pandemic.”

32. In-country assignment (64; 25)

Participant 25: “I work in the tech space. I'm a business analyst. I've been in this field for over ten years. The company I work for is [Organization Y]. You know it's auditing and consulting and business services, in almost every country, but they're based in London.”

33. Preparing for international assignment (19; 13)

Participant 4: “And [Organization D] gave training about the culture of Rome and the basic laws that I have to abide by.”

34. Future uncertainty (55; 20)

Participant 13: “Let's hope it doesn't happen again in the future. But we know it happened in 1918, and we've had the Black Death, and the news says we'll see more coronavirus. We better be prepared next time. I just hope we learn because unfortunately people have a short memory. It's a little different than something like climate change that's always happening. I'm hopeful the future will be ready since we just learned how to adjust to a global emergency.”

35. Traveling internationally for work (114; 24)

Participant 14: “To be fully transparent, I have to say no [I don't see myself working in international assignments in the future]. This was really my first time traveling to do my job. I worked in international HR for several years with never going on a plane for work. I had a traumatic experience being in Canada when this all went down. Not because of Canada, like I am a Canadian citizen, but more because my wife was in California, and I didn't have anyone in Montreal to talk to. Like what if something happens again, right? What if I'm in a less familiar country than Canada? Can I make that pivot again? I don't know because the transition was taxing.”

36. Future plans (66; 25)

Participant 18: “Really my career goal has always been to retire early. So that hasn't changed. If anything, this is more clear to me because I don't enjoy working on [another person's] time schedule. I'm not looking to be the CEO, I'm looking to be retired. I thought maybe I retire in 10 years, but [since COVID] I want it now. It might mean I can be [semi-retired] but still working remotely, sort of part-time to supplement my income. The technology makes all this possible.”

37. Expectations before crisis (44; 20)

Participant 11: “There used to be a lot of international travel in my job. Now we don't because of the pandemic. Before we did planning every quarter to say OK I need to travel to these certain offices and client sites in the next 3 months. I was often traveling from Mumbai to Europe and Asia and Australia. It is strange it hasn't affected us too much since the borders closed. We adapted to strictly remote, but I'm glad we can travel now again, which makes it easier.”

38. Benefitting from the crisis (52; 17)

Participant 23: “Surprisingly, I think I got to know myself better. And in this 20 month, I actually closely follow the stock market and government actions, and the

relationship between the two boundaries. As I said, investment banking is a dream for me, and I just started paying more attention to the markets. I started thinking about politics and how things relate. That's being around the house all day.”

39. Fear being stranded abroad (41; 20)

Participant 1: “I was afraid of being trapped in a different country.”