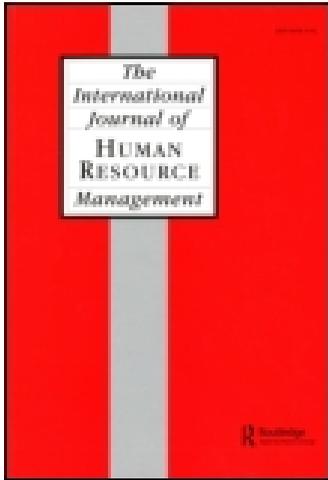


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### Cross-cultural adjustment of skilled migrants in a multicultural and multilingual environment: an explorative study of foreign employees and their spouses in the Swiss context

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## **Cross-cultural adjustment of skilled migrants in a multicultural and multilingual environment: an explorative study of foreign employees and their spouses in the Swiss context**

Claudio Ravasi<sup>a,b,\*</sup>, Xavier Salamin<sup>a</sup> and Eric Davoine<sup>a</sup>

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Skilled migrants are essential to the global economy, and both employers and states depend on them to maintain their competitive advantage. This is particularly true for the Swiss economy, which attracts an impressive number of migrants to counteract the national shortage of skilled workers. The Swiss context is particularly interesting to study because of the strong presence of multinational companies and a situation where the difference between qualified migrants and assigned expatriates is increasingly ethereal. Our study focuses on the adjustment of a population of 152 foreign employees from Swiss-based multinational companies and the adjustment of 126 spouses. We studied different adjustment dimensions focusing on local language proficiency and relocation support practices. Despite the highly multicultural and multilingual Swiss context, our data analysis highlighted relatively low cross-cultural adjustment scores (especially interaction adjustment). We uncovered the degree to which relocation support practices are offered, used and perceived as necessary by foreign employees and showed which support practices could be used to improve the adjustment of migrants.

**Keywords:** cross-cultural adjustment; international mobility; local language proficiency; relocation practices; skilled migrants; Switzerland

### **1. Introduction**

In a context of workforce globalization, multinational companies (MNCs) are faced with the challenge of integrating a more heterogeneous workforce ('traditional' expatriates and settled migrants) as well as their partners and families, into the host country. Skilled migrants have become an important part of the workforce (Peiperl & Jonsen, 2007) upon which both employers and states depend to maintain a competitive advantage (Helbling, 2011). This is particularly true for the Swiss economy, which is highly specialized in value-added activities but faces a national shortage of highly skilled employees (Département fédéral de l'économie, 2011). A large number of MNCs are located in Switzerland, especially in the French-speaking Lemanic region, where there is a mixed population of assigned expatriates and highly skilled migrants (Steiner & Wanner, 2011). Most MNCs in the Lemanic region use the notion 'foreign employees' to include both groups for human resource management purposes, namely integration and support practices that welcome new employees and their spouses. The Lemanic region is therefore a relevant location to investigate the adjustment of foreign workers and their families. Our

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study aims to comprehensively examine the practices used by MNCs to support foreign employees' and their families' cross-cultural adjustment.

Expatriation literature has traditionally focused on adjustment issues faced by foreign workers in a host country and the support practices offered by MNCs (Dabic, González-Loureiro, & Harvey, 2013; Takeuchi, 2010). This literature offers useful conceptual tools to address the above-mentioned research questions. Our study relies therefore on several concepts and instruments originating from traditional expatriate research studying cross-cultural adjustment (Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991) and specific support practices offered to foreign employees (e.g. Cerdin, 1999; Suutari & Brewster, 2001). To date, very few studies have focused on support practices offered to foreign employees' partners and families, especially when they are settling into the host country and pursuing their own careers. Our study aims to deepen our knowledge of these issues by empirically examining the relationship between the use of particular practices and the adjustment of employees and their partners.

In Section 2, we describe the Swiss immigration context. Hypotheses related to adjustment and support practices are then developed in Section 3, before explaining our method in Section 4. Results are then presented and discussed in Sections 5 and 6.

## 2. The Swiss immigration context

### 2.1. *Highly skilled migration in Switzerland*

Since the 1990s, immigration flow into Switzerland has been strongly characterized by a rising number of highly skilled standards and the strong geographical and cultural proximity of a migrant workforce (Haug, 2005; Steiner & Wanner, 2011). Highly qualified immigration has always existed in Switzerland and it has considerably increased along with its strengthening economic globalization (Reiser-Bello Zago, 2013). In 2010, of the 139,000 foreign nationals entering as permanent residents, the majority were from neighboring European countries including 30,700 Germans, 11,700 French and 10,200 Italians. It is worth noting that there was also a significant number of entries from Anglophone countries (UK, 5,700; North America, 5,700) as well as people from Asia (13,500) (OFS, 2013a). Pecoraro (2005) showed that these nationalities represent the majority of highly skilled migrants working in Switzerland.

The Swiss economy specializes in the production of value-added goods and services, pharmaceuticals, financial services and machinery (Département fédéral de l'économie, 2011; Junod & Neff, 2010). The economic growth of the country is strongly reliant on an accumulation of knowledge and human capital that stimulates a strong demand for highly qualified personnel (Pecoraro, 2007). However, as the country faces a national workforce shortage, having access to highly qualified foreign workers is essential to the Swiss economy (Naville, Walti, & Tischhauser, 2007). In 2000, the ratio of highly skilled migrants among the total population of recent migrants to Switzerland reached 61.80%, some 38.7 points above the 1990 rate (Pecoraro, 2005). A recent study showed that the majority of top managers in the largest Swiss companies are foreign nationals (64%), a rate that appears to be much higher than other countries such as France (22%) and Germany (27%) (Davoine & Ravasi, 2013). Switzerland appears to be particularly attractive to highly skilled migrants – even from developed and neighboring countries – due to a conjunction of various economic, sociocultural and political factors (DeWaard, Kim, & Raymer, 2012).

Highly skilled individuals may be initially attracted to the country for income- and employment-related reasons, as these aspects of Switzerland are favorable compared to elsewhere. Switzerland has one of the highest wage levels internationally (International

Labour Organisation, 2013), and has the third highest GDP per capita in Europe after Luxemburg and Norway (Eurostat, 2013). Individual income taxes are also particularly favorable in Switzerland (KPMG International, 2012). Zurich and Geneva have the highest salary levels worldwide and rank in the top four for highest purchasing power (Höfert & Kalt, 2012). These cities also offer many job opportunities, as they are the site of several headquarters and subsidiaries for numerous multinational, international and financial organizations (Naville et al., 2007; Steiner & Wanner, 2011). Switzerland is a major host country for foreign direct investments (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2011). Other factors also strongly contribute to stimulating highly skilled migration in Switzerland: quality of life, stable political environment and infrastructure (Naville & Walti, 2006; Schweizer, 2010; World Economic Forum, 2012). A strong specificity of the country is its stable political system of direct democracy, where civic and voting rights are key aspects of citizenship and national identity (Chevrier, 2009; Wanner & Fibbi, 2002).

Switzerland has a long tradition of welcoming foreign populations and this is an essential element of the country's social fabric (Fibbi, 2013), where multiculturalism and diversity are founding principles of the culture (Froidevaux, 1997; Lhabitant, 2003). Switzerland is a highly multilingual country, with four national languages (German, French, Italian and Romansch). Moreover, the use of English has become particularly important, in the work and nonwork contexts (OFS, 2014; Stotz, 2006). Grin and Schwob (2002, p. 411) observed that the linguistic repertoires of a strong proportion of people are varied throughout the country. In line with this element, Grin, Sfredo, and Vaillancourt (2009) estimated that the multilingual skills of workers in Switzerland constitutes a value that represents about 10% of the Swiss GDP (about 50 billion Swiss francs), and is therefore a clear asset for companies in the country.

As in many other countries (Keeley, 2009), the issues surrounding immigration policy have always been hotly debated in Switzerland (Le Temps, 2013; Rausa & Reist, 2008). Swiss firms and organizations also acknowledge the increasing cultural diversity of their workforce. The Swiss Post, for example, employed over 140 nationalities in 2013 and designed internal programs and platforms to help their local employees develop intercultural competencies (Hubacher, 2013). Cultural diversity may be especially active within MNCs, which have developed considerable support opportunities for their foreign workers – who are to a very large extent immigrants – and traditional expatriates working in Switzerland on a temporary basis (accompanied by their spouses). Many MNCs in the French-speaking part of Switzerland are even pooling their efforts to facilitate the integration of foreign workers' partners and have launched an 'International Dual Career Network' led by major players such as Nestlé, Philipp Morris and Medtronic (see International Dual Career Network, 2013).

## 2.2. Clarifying concepts: foreign employees, migrants or expatriates?

'Managing internationally mobile employees' is often a synonym used for expatriate management in companies and research (Harvey & Moeller, 2009). In the expatriate research field, expatriates traditionally refer to employees sent by an international company from their headquarters to foreign subsidiaries for a limited duration (Vance, 2005). More recently, however, expatriate research has increasingly emphasized alternative forms of international mobility (Bonache, Brewster, Suutari, & De Saá, 2010) and until now, this has mainly been self-initiated expatriates (Doherty, 2013). This term commonly refers to individuals who initiated their international assignment themselves, without (or with very

little) corporate support (Andresen, Al Ariss, & Walther, 2012; Inkson & Myers, 2003). Self-initiated expatriates and organizational expatriates have been found to be different in adjustment, local language proficiency, job satisfaction (Froese & Peltokorpi, 2013), motives for an international move (Doherty, Dickmann, & Mills, 2011), career anchors (Cerdin & Le Pargneux, 2010) and other variables such as age and gender (Suutari & Brewster, 2000). However, the increasing localization of contracts for expatriates to reduce costs blurs the boundaries between traditional organization-assigned and self-initiated expatriates (Manpower, 2008; Salamin, 2012). Criteria for the differentiation between migrants and self-initiated expatriates are not very clear in management literature (Al Ariss, Koall, Özbilgin, & Suutari, 2012) despite recent efforts by several researchers (Al Ariss, 2010; Andresen, Bergdolt, Margenfeld, & Dickmann, 2014; Cerdin & Selmer, 2014) to clarify the terminology of various types of internationally mobile people. Al Ariss (2010) observed that literature on international careers tends to distinguish between migrants and self-initiated expatriates along four major dimensions: geographical origin and destination of international mobility; the forced/chosen nature of the movement; period of the stay abroad and the symbolic status of a 'migrant' compared to the self-initiated expatriate. In a similar vein, Cerdin and Selmer (2014) proposed a definition of self-initiated expatriates based on four conceptual criteria that distinguishes them from other types of international movers. According to these authors, self-initiated expatriates (1) freely choose to relocate, (2) have a regular job in the host country or are searching for such a job, (3) plan to return to their home country and (4) have skilled or professional qualifications. Keeping these dimensions in mind, it is worth emphasizing the ambivalence of the Swiss immigration characteristics and context. The foreign population of highly skilled individuals comes mainly from developed neighboring countries, although a significant number also come from Asia. While many individuals might be attracted by the advantages that Switzerland offers and choose their destination freely, recent economic crises, as well as the increasing specialization of local markets (Steiner & Wanner, 2011), pressure many people with specific skills to move across borders to find more suitable employment. Regarding the period of stay abroad, most foreign nationals in Switzerland are settled nationals (established in the country on a long-term basis) (Office Fédéral des Migrations, 2013; OFS, 2013b). Most of them therefore do not correspond to the typical highly skilled mobile population relocating for a few years and then leaving for a third country or moving back home. Even organization-assigned expatriates often try to relocate on a long-term basis in Switzerland, even if they have to leave their initial employer (Salamin, 2012).

For the purposes of this paper and the Swiss context of our study, we used the MNC term 'foreign employees' as 'internationally mobile individuals who moved from a foreign country to Switzerland for work/career-related reasons'. We tried also to answer to the call of Berry and Bell (2012) to overcome the boundary between these two types of internationally mobile individuals by merging individuals considered 'migrants' and those considered 'expatriates' into a single category. Merging these two categories also fits with the study of Andresen et al. (2014, p. 2304) who consider self-initiated expatriates and organization-assigned expatriates as subgroups of migrants, since their definition stipulates that all expatriates are migrants.

### **3. Supporting the adjustment of foreign employees and their partners: hypotheses of our study**

In the expatriation field, the concept of cross-cultural adjustment is generally used to study problems and difficulties experienced by expatriates in their work and nonwork

environments (Takeuchi, 2010). Cross-cultural adjustment refers to a person's psychological comfort and familiarity with various aspects of the foreign environment (Black & Mendenhall, 1990). In our study, we wanted to focus on the main areas of adjustment difficulties for foreign employees and their spouses as well as on the relocation practices that may facilitate adjustment. Most of the studies investigating expatriate adjustment are based on samples of individuals who share the same nationality, such as groups of Japanese expatriates (Takeuchi, Yun, & Russell, 2002). Other studies used samples of expatriates based on a single country (such as American expatriate spouses in Germany in Mohr & Klein, 2004) or in multiple locations (Cole, 2011). For our study, we used a sample of foreign employees and partners of different nationalities from multiple locations around the world and studied their adjustment to a single host country. Using a single host location allowed us to better control for the cultural and institutional influences specific to Switzerland.

### 3.1. Dimensions of adjustment

Adjustment involves reducing the uncertainty associated with evolving in a new environment (Black, 1988), and the ability to 'fit-in' or to negotiate interactive aspects of host culture (Ward, Okura, Kennedy, & Kojima, 1998). In the expatriation field, the most influential theoretical model of expatriate cross-cultural adjustment is the one proposed by Black et al. (1991). While earlier contributions examined expatriate adjustment as a unitary construct (e.g. Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963), Black et al. (1991) proposed a multidimensional concept including general, work and interaction adjustment, which was clearly operationalized, widely used and appropriately validated (Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Luk, & Shaffer, 2005; Hechanova, Beehr, & Christiansen, 2003). *General adjustment* refers to the comfort associated with various aspects of the host-cultural environments such as living conditions, food or health care; *interaction adjustment* refers to the comfort associated with socializing with host-country nationals, both inside and outside of work; and *work adjustment* refers to the comfort associated with the work requirements and tasks on assignment. It is a powerful tool for studying the problems and difficulties commonly encountered by foreign employees in their efforts to adapt to new life conditions, interacting with locals and adapting to different work environments and organizational practices. Black et al. (1991) remains the most widespread operationalized model for examining and comparing expatriate cross-cultural adjustment, though their conceptualization has been criticized from a theoretical point of view (Haslberger, Brewster, & Hippler, 2013) as well as for methodological reasons (Hippler, 2006). Although a new and relevant adjustment scale was recently developed and validated (Hippler, Caligiuri, Johnson, & Baytalskaya, 2014), and recent studies focus more on the integration process of qualified migrants (Cerdin, Abdeljalil Dine, & Brewster, 2014), in our study we used the Black et al. (1991) model because one of our objectives is to highlight the specifics of Switzerland as host country and observe differences (and similarities) in adjustment levels with other host countries. This widely used conceptualization of expatriate adjustment developed by Black et al. (1991) is therefore the most suitable instrument for this purpose even if it may have limited our findings; as discussed in greater detail in the final section of the article.

The Swiss context may present some institutional and cultural particularities that positively influence the process of interaction adjustment. Black, Gregersen, and Mendenhall (1990) state that of the three adjustment dimensions (general, work and interaction), interaction is the most challenging: mental maps and rules are always

involved in social interaction and the latter can be problematic due to different social manners or negative attitudes toward foreigners as discussed by Peltokorpi and Froese (2009) regarding Japan. Most empirical studies support this assertion with only a few exceptions – where general adjustment received higher scores than interaction adjustment (Gabel, Dolan, & Cerdin, 2005; Selmer, 2001; Shay & Baack, 2006; Templer, Tay, & Chandrasekar, 2006). In Switzerland, we expected a higher interaction adjustment because of its tradition of welcoming foreign populations (Fibbi, 2013), and because multiculturalism, diversity and multilingualism are seen to be the cornerstones of the nation (Froidevaux, 1997; Lhabitant, 2003). We therefore formulated the following hypotheses:

- Hypothesis 1a:* For foreign employees in Switzerland, interaction adjustment will not differ significantly from the other adjustment dimensions.
- Hypothesis 1b:* For partners of foreign employees in Switzerland, interaction adjustment will not differ significantly from the other adjustment dimensions.

### 3.2. Importance of local language proficiency

Despite the fact that English is commonly spoken in various work and nonwork contexts in Switzerland (Stalder, 2010; Stotz, 2006), past research has found that adopting English as a common language does not ensure efficient communication (Björkmann, Tienari, & Vaara, 2005; Peltokorpi, 2007). Even when they are relatively fluent, non-native English speakers from different cultural origins might interpret the underlying meaning according to their own cultural norms, which leads to misunderstandings (Henderson, 2005; Selmer, 2006). Additionally, people often have a natural tendency to interact in their native language (Peltokorpi, 2008). Individuals with poor host-country language skills may be intentionally or unintentionally excluded from daily interaction with locals and be categorized as out-group members (Piekkari, Vaara, Tienari, & Säntti, 2005; Selmer & Luring, 2011).

Expatriate fluency in the host-country language may facilitate cross-cultural adjustment due to more effective communication and perceptual skills (Andreason, 2003). This language proficiency might encourage communication exchanges with host-country nationals, who appear to be a great source of information and support for expatriates, and enable them to develop a better understanding of local culture (Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2002; Froese, Peltokorpi, & Ko, 2012). In a work context, local language proficiency may also help expatriates to better understand work values and behave appropriately in a professional environment (Takeuchi et al., 2002; Wang & Tran, 2012). Additionally, speaking the host-country language with local colleagues better enables them to build trust and relations (Luring & Selmer, 2012). We therefore formulated the following hypotheses concerning the impact of language proficiency with regard to foreign employees (information on the language proficiency of partners was not at our disposal).

- Hypothesis 2a:* Local language proficiency will be positively related to general adjustment of foreign employees.
- Hypothesis 2b:* Local language proficiency will be positively related to interaction adjustment of foreign employees.
- Hypothesis 2c:* Local language proficiency will be positively related to work adjustment of foreign employees.

### 3.3. Partner/family

Family migration has been extensively studied since the 1970s by researchers in different disciplines including economics, sociology and psychology. The earliest studies were mainly conducted by economists and sociologists and aimed to study the decision-making of migrant families, the impact of migration on employment status and the earnings of 'trailing spouses' or 'tied migrants' (Cooke, 2008). The family migration field has also expanded to include the particularities of the social, economic and geographical context in which migration takes place, family migration behavior and their psychological and sociological consequences (Cooke, 2008). In the expatriation field, the seminal contributions of Tung (1981), Harvey (1985) and Adler (1986) shed light on the difficulties of expatriate partners: disruption/interruption of social ties and routines, loneliness, isolation, social roles modification, loss of identity and self-esteem. For expatriate partners, the adjustment to the host country's culture can be longer and harder compared to the expatriate employee (Suutari & Brewster, 1998) as during the assignment, expatriate employees are less exposed to the culture of the host country and they generally continue to work in a relatively familiar context. Expatriate partners are usually in charge of dealing with several practical/administrative issues tied to the relocation process and the settling of the family in an unknown environment while the partner works long hours (Davoine, Ravasi, Salamin, & Cudré-Mauroux, 2013; McNulty, 2012).

Furthermore, dual career couple expatriate partners are faced with the additional challenge of finding a job and ultimately abandoning and sacrificing their own careers (McNulty, 2012). Adjustment can be more difficult for dual career couples who need to develop strategies to coordinate both careers (Mäkelä, Käsälä, & Suutari, 2011). Spouses are often forced to resign from their jobs and abandon potential careers to follow their partner (Kupka & Cathro, 2007). Expatriate spouses may not be allowed to work because of permit and visa limitations, or face serious job-finding obstacles including cultural and language barriers, unrecognized foreign educational or professional qualifications, lack of available and suitable jobs and general preference for local workers (Pellico & Stroh, 1997). Partners forced to abandon their career are in a more fragile psychological state due to their career interruption and the exclusive focus on their partner's career. Furthermore, when the expatriate spouse is able to secure a new job in the host location, it may be at a lower level than before and include a loss of status, power, self-worth and identity (Eby, 2001). Spousal adjustment is a major issue in most studies because of increased adjustment difficulty. We formulated the following hypotheses accordingly:

*Hypothesis 3a:* General adjustment will be lower for foreign employees' partners than for foreign employees.

*Hypothesis 3b:* Interaction adjustment will be lower for foreign employees' partners than for foreign employees.

*Hypothesis 3c:* Work adjustment will be lower for foreign employees' partners than for foreign employees.

### 3.4. Relocation practices

Companies have several practices at their disposal that they can offer foreign employees to facilitate their relocation and integration into the host country. These practices can also affect the degree of adjustment to several aspects of life in the new country (Guzzo,

Noonan, & Elron, 1994; Takeuchi, 2010). MNCs have long developed relevant experience and specific knowledge in the development of relocation and career-related measures to ensure the efficient transfer of international skilled employees between geographically dispersed organizational units (Peiperl & Jonsen, 2007). Given the increasing use of self-initiated expatriates, who are generally excluded from career-related practices (Suutari & Brewster, 2000), we chose to focus only on relocation practices. Only relocation practices that can be offered to all types of foreign employees were taken into account.

In this category of organizational support, some practices are intended to prepare foreign employees for their new environment. Companies can provide cross-cultural training (Forster, 2000) and communicate information about important practical issues before the foreign employee arrives in an unfamiliar, often unknown, environment (Haile, Jones, & Emmanuel, 2007). In a similar vein, companies can even organize or fund a trip to the host country that can help the foreign employee to formulate realistic expectations about the destination country (Macdonald & Arthur, 2005). Having recognized the importance of the role played by the partner/family and the magnitude of the potential negative consequences associated with the move, the employing organization can also decide to include the partner and other family members in the training program (Haile et al., 2007; McNulty, 2012). In most cases, foreign employees and their partners are faced with language barriers – total or partial funding of language courses are therefore useful to help them interact with host nationals (Puck, Kittler, & Wright, 2008).

Companies can also offer spouses career counseling and other career-related support (help with work permits and other practical work-related issues, e.g. covering job search-related costs) (Harvey, 1995; McNulty, 2012). Organizational help in finding accommodations in the host country can be also taken into account as well as offering an allowance or payment for moving the belongings of foreign employees and their families (Forster & Johnsen, 1996). As economic conditions and cost of living can differ greatly from one country to another, companies can also provide different forms of financial compensation. Some companies offer mobility and relocation allowances as well as allowances for school fees (Klaus, 1995). Tax or insurance support (insuring household goods, pension plan and health insurance) are also part of the relocation practices offered by some companies (Suutari & Tornikoski, 2001). To ease the introduction of foreign employees, the employing organizations can also assist them in dealing with administrative processes in the host country such as obtaining visas or work permits and managing the administrative paperwork required by immigration services (Aycan, 1997).

Black et al. (1991) showed that organizational support as a whole is significantly related to the cross-cultural adjustment of expatriates and their partners (Black & Gregersen, 1991). For partners of foreign employees, pre-move visits and training (Black & Gregersen, 1991) and employer spousal support (Kraimer, Wayne, & Jaworski, 2001) have a positive impact on adjustment. Organizational support in the form of logistical assistance or help with administrative paperwork (Shaffer, Harrison, & Gilley, 1999; Takeuchi, Wang, Marinova, & Yao, 2009) also has a positive impact on partner adjustment. The impact of cross-cultural training on adjustment was confirmed by the meta-analysis of Morris and Robie (2001). We therefore hypothesized a positive correlation between use of relocation practices and the adjustment of foreign employees and partners. On the basis of the expatriate corporate support literature (Klaus, 1995; Suutari & Brewster, 2001), we distinguished two categories of support practices: the first category includes country information and training support practices, the other includes administrative, logistical and financial support practices.

*Hypothesis 4a:* Use of information and training support will be positively related to the adjustment of foreign employees and partners.

*Hypothesis 4b:* Use of administrative and financial support will be positively related to the adjustment of foreign employees and partners.

## **4. Method**

### **4.1. Participants and context of the study**

The empirical data came from a survey of foreign employees living in French-speaking Switzerland and working for MNCs. Twelve MNCs, representing a relatively large number of industries including food, pharmaceuticals, tobacco, technological and scientific services, agreed to participate in the study. They either forwarded the link to the online English version of the survey or they sent the paper version to foreign employees. We received 152 completed and usable questionnaires (126 of them included information on partner adjustment). In our survey, we asked respondents to query their partners about their levels of adjustment. In 38 cases, the partners answered themselves and in 88 cases, the foreign employees gave their perception of their partner's adjustment. An ANCOVA test was then performed to investigate methodological biases, i.e. differences between the two ways of evaluating partner adjustment. Our analysis revealed no significant differences between the two methods: expatriates' perception of the adjustment of their spouses was therefore used as a measure of spousal adjustment.

Preliminary results were then presented and discussed with a sample of HR representatives (HR business partners, HR managers and global mobility managers) from six MNCs who took part in our study. Two other global mobility experts from the International Link network took part at the discussion. Results were then presented and discussed individually with other HR managers from six other MNCs in charge of international mobility. Discussions with these key informants allowed us to test the validity and reliability of our data (Kumar, Stem, & Anderson, 1993): results on levels of adjustment, perceived necessity and current offers of certain relocation practices were confirmed, providing us with a more comprehensive understanding of the context of our research.

The average age of participants in our study was 38.38 years ( $SD = 8.11$ ), they had spent 2.01 years in Switzerland ( $SD = 2.07$ ) and had international experience (measured by number of years spent in a foreign country, including Switzerland) of 6.67 years ( $SD = 6.19$ ). For those with a fixed-term contract, the planned duration of their current assignment was 3.55 years ( $SD = 1.49$ ). Of the 152 participants, two thirds ( $n = 101$ ) were male. The vast majority of participants were married or living with a partner and half of them had no children. The foreign employees in our study came from more than 30 countries including the following nationalities: French (20.3%), German (13.8%), Italian (11.1%), British (6.5%), US (5.2%), Japanese (5.2%) and other nationalities (37.9%). Characteristics of foreign employees that participated to our study are given in [Table 1](#).

### **4.2. Instruments**

We used the 14-item scale developed by Black (1988) and Black and Stephens (1989) to measure the three dimensions of expatriate cross-cultural adjustment. Respondents were asked to answer a seven-point Likert scale (from 1, 'not at all adjusted', to 7, 'completely adjusted') on how well-adjusted they were to several aspects of their lives in Switzerland.

Table 1. Characteristics of participants.

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Gender			Marital status		
Male	101	66.4	Married	126	82.9
Female	51	33.6	Single	26	17.1
Age (years)			Level of education		
< 30	22	14.4	Less than bachelor	10	6.6
31–40	69	45.1	Bachelor	33	21.7
41–50	48	31.4	Master/graduate	84	55.3
> 50	14	9.1	Post-graduate	25	16.4
Nationality			Type of expatriation		
French	31	20.3	Self-initiated	82	53.9
German	21	13.8	Organizational	70	46.1
Italian	17	11.1			
British	10	6.5	Partner working status		
US	8	5.2	Working partner (before)	84	68.3
Japanese	8	5.2	Working partner (during)	49	40.8
Other	58	37.9			
Children			First international		
Yes	77	50.7	Yes	83	54.6
No	75	49.3	No	69	45.4

The reliability of each dimension was acceptable (Nunnally, 1978): general adjustment ( $\alpha = 0.84$ ), interaction adjustment ( $\alpha = 0.95$ ) and work adjustment ( $\alpha = 0.80$ ). We measured the adjustment of foreign employees' partners with the nine items developed by Black and Stephens (1989) on general and interaction adjustment, and we measured their adjustment to work/career with a self-developed three-item scale (*Work, Personal income level* and *Career development*). The reliability of each dimension was also acceptable for each aspect of partner adjustment: general adjustment ( $\alpha = 0.85$ ), interaction adjustment ( $\alpha = 0.90$ ) and work adjustment ( $\alpha = 0.90$ ). We measured the level of host-country language proficiency by asking respondents to answer a single-item scale (from 1, 'not at all', to 5, 'completely') on their ability to speak/converse in the local language. Concerning relocation practices, we used items developed by Cerdin (1999) and Suutari and Brewster (2001) that we slightly modified to integrate suggestions made by corporate representatives. Availability, use and the perceived necessity of relocation practices were measured. We measured the relocation support by asking expatriates which practices were offered by their employers (Yes/No/Don't know) and by asking them to evaluate the perceived necessity of these practices and their effective use on a five-point Likert scale (from 'small extent' to 'large extent'). The 16 items were later classified in two broad categories: *information and training support* and *administrative and financial support* (see Table 5). These categories were identified by the three authors on the basis of relevant literature on expatriate relocation support practices (Klaus, 1995; Suutari & Brewster, 2001). Each of the authors then independently classified the 16 items in one of the two categories and agreement was reached for all of them.

Consistent with theoretical assumptions and previous research, the following other variables were measured and their impacts were controlled: gender, age, previous international experience (measured in years), time spent in Switzerland since arrival (measured in years), type of expatriation (self-initiated expatriates vs. assigned expatriates) and host language proficiency (self-evaluation of the ability to converse in French on a scale from 1 to 5).

## 5. Results

The correlation matrix for the adjustment dimensions of foreign employees and their partners as well as descriptive statistics of other variables of our study are given in [Table 2](#).

The type of expatriation does not correlate significantly with any dimensions of foreign employee adjustment. Gender had a significant positive correlation with foreign employee interaction adjustment ( $r = 0.196, p < 0.05$ ) and partner interaction adjustment ( $r = 0.186, p < 0.05$ ). Partner general adjustment was significantly and negatively correlated with time spent in Switzerland since arrival ( $r = -0.253, p < 0.01$ ) and with previous international experience ( $r = -0.228, p < 0.05$ ). The age of the foreign employee had a significant and negative correlation with partner work adjustment ( $r = -0.323, p < 0.05$ ). The language proficiency of foreign employees was significantly and positively correlated with foreign employee interaction adjustment ( $r = 0.341, p < 0.01$ ), with partner interaction adjustment ( $r = 0.267, p < 0.01$ ) and with partner work adjustment ( $r = 0.447, p < 0.01$ ).

The six adjustment variables were all strongly inter-correlated with the exception of partner work adjustment. The latter had significant and positive relationships with the other two dimensions of partner adjustment but with none of the foreign employee adjustment variables.

Foreign employee adjustment scores were relatively low (mostly less than 5.0) and are similar to other studies conducted in other locations (see, for example, Black, 1990; Black & Stephens, 1989; Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009; Van Vianen, De Pater, Kristof-Brown, & Johnson, 2004; Waxin & Panaccio, 2005). Partner adjustment scores were also similar (slightly lower) to most studies on expatriate spousal adjustment (see Black & Gregersen, 1991; Black & Stephens, 1989; Herleman, Britt, & Hashima, 2008; Mohr & Klein, 2004; Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). We expected that cross-cultural adjustment in a developed, multicultural and highly esteemed country like Switzerland would have been easier, but our results show that adjustment in Switzerland is as difficult as it is in other locations.

For foreign employees, we found lower levels of interaction adjustment ( $M = 4.13, SD = 1.67$ ) than general adjustment ( $M = 5.01, SD = 1.10$ ) ( $t = 6.846, df = 151, p < 0.00$ ) and work adjustment ( $M = 5.48, SD = 1.23$ ) ( $t = 10.271, df = 151, p < 0.00$ ). For partners, the levels of interaction adjustment ( $M = 3.79, SD = 1.67$ ) were significantly lower than those of general adjustment ( $M = 4.64, SD = 1.22$ ) ( $t = 6.223, df = 122, p < 0.00$ ) but not work adjustment ( $M = 4.32, SD = 1.84$ ) ( $t = 0.882, df = 57, p < 0.381$ ). Hypotheses 1a and 1b are therefore not supported. Among the three dimensions of adjustment, our data clearly show that the most challenging dimension for foreign employees and their partners is the interaction adjustment. Interaction with locals represents the most significant challenge for foreigners in Switzerland and is more difficult to master than challenges related to work and general life environments.

We performed a hierarchical regression analysis to test Hypotheses 2a, 2b and 2c, in keeping with Selmer's (2006) study focusing on the impact of language on adjustment. Following the same approach as Selmer, we entered the 'time spent on the current assignment' variable in the first step and the 'host language proficiency' variable in the second step. In addition, we entered the variable 'type of expatriation' in the first step. This process allowed us to measure the impact of language ability on interaction adjustment while controlling for time spent in Switzerland and for type of expatriation (self-initiated vs. assigned expatriates). As illustrated in [Table 3](#), neither the 'time spent in Switzerland' control variable nor the 'type of expatriation' control variable had any significant impact on the three adjustment dimensions. Language proficiency showed significant positive

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and correlations with adjustment levels.

	M	SD	Employee adjustment			Partner adjustment		
			General	Interaction	Work	General	Interaction	Work
Employee adjustment								
General	5.01	1.10	–					
Interaction	4.13	1.67	0.410**	–				
Work	5.48	1.23	0.415**	0.416**	–			
Partner adjustment								
General	4.64	1.22	0.721**	0.247**	0.219**	–		
Interaction	3.79	1.67	0.319**	0.626**	0.204**	0.488**	–	
Work	4.32	1.84	0.106	0.165	0.045	0.350**	0.300*	–
Other variables								
Gender	–	–	0.082	0.196*	0.129	0.145	0.186*	0.083
Age (years)	38.4	8.11	0.034	–0.044	0.088	0.030	–0.002	–0.323*
International experience (years)	6.67	6.19	–0.141	–0.072	0.010	–0.228*	–0.100	–0.050
Time in Switzerland (years)	2.01	2.07	–0.136	–0.011	–0.038	–0.253**	–0.070	–0.102
Type of expatriation	–	–	–0.034	–0.004	–0.062	0.044	0.020	0.057
Language proficiency (1–5)	3.35	1.43	–0.026	0.341**	0.096	–0.091	0.267**	0.447**

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

Table 3. Results of hierarchical regression for effects of language proficiency on adjustment.

	General adjustment	Interaction adjustment	Work adjustment
Step 1			
Time in Switzerland (control)	-0.136	-0.011	-0.039
Type of expatriation (control)	-0.035	-0.004	-0.062
<i>R</i>	0.141	0.012	0.073
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> (adjusted)	0.020	-0.013	-0.008
<i>F</i>	1.502	0.010	0.397
Step 2			
Language proficiency	-0.013	0.348*	0.106
<i>R</i>	0.141	0.345	0.128
Change in <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.000	0.119	0.009
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> (adjusted)	0.000	0.101	-0.004
<i>F</i>	1.003	6.667*	0.824

\* $p < 0.001$ .

impact on interaction adjustment ( $\beta = 0.348$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) but not general adjustment or work adjustment. We also found a statistically significant *F*-value for interaction adjustment only ( $F = 6.667$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating a good fit between our data and the regression model tested for this dimension of adjustment only. Therefore, only Hypothesis 2b is supported.

To test Hypotheses 3a, 3b and 3c, a series of independent sample *t*-tests was performed. We found higher scores of cross-cultural adjustment for foreign employees compared to those of their partners, suggesting that the adaptation process was more challenging for them. Significant differences were found for general adjustment ( $t = 4.684$ ,  $df = 122$ ,  $p < 0.00$ ) and work adjustment ( $t = 3.687$ ,  $df = 57$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) but not for interaction adjustment ( $t = 1.740$ ,  $df = 122$ ,  $p < 0.08$ ). Hypotheses 3a and 3c were supported and Hypothesis 3b was not supported. The correlation matrix for the adjustment dimensions of foreign employees and partners and the use of relocation practices is given in Table 4.

Five practices out of seven of those we coded as 'information and training support' are positively correlated with the general adjustment of the foreign employee's partner: *Allowance for or payment of language courses for the expatriate* ( $r = 0.331$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), *Allowance for or payment of language courses for the partner/spouse* ( $r = 0.193$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), *Cross-cultural training in the host country* ( $r = 0.235$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), *Cross-cultural training in the host country for the spouse/partner* ( $r = 0.215$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and *Spouse employment support* ( $r = 0.186$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). None of them were correlated with the adjustment of foreign employees.

We did not observe a radically stronger correlation between 'administrative and financial practices' and adjustment. Three of them (*Housing*, *Dealing with administrative paperwork* and *Tax support*) were not correlated with any dimensions of adjustment. Four were correlated with foreign employee adjustment: *allowance for or payment of moving costs* with general adjustment ( $r = 0.212$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and work adjustment ( $r = 0.209$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), *insurance support* with work adjustment ( $r = 0.166$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), *allowance for or payment of housing costs* ( $r = 0.211$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and *allowances for other benefits* ( $r = 0.190$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) with interaction adjustment. Only two of them were correlated with partner adjustment: *schools for children* with general adjustment ( $r = 0.299$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and interaction adjustment ( $r = 0.192$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and *allowance for or payment of schooling costs* with general adjustment ( $r = 0.235$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). In our study, corporate relocation practices (either administrative and financial support or information and

Table 4. Correlations among use of relocation practices and dimensions of adjustment.

	GA1	IA1	WAI	GA2	IA2	WA2	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13	P14	P15	P16	
GA1	-																						
IA1	0.410**	-																					
WAI	0.415**	0.247***	-																				
GA2	0.721***	0.626***	0.204*	-																			
IA2	0.319***			0.488**	-																		
WA2	0.106	0.165	0.045	0.350**	0.300*	-																	
P1	0.094	0.055	-0.035	0.003	0.010	-0.234	-																
P2	0.060	-0.034	0.059	0.132	-0.034	-0.030	0.325**	-															
P3	-0.059	0.010	0.023	-0.063	-0.008	-0.271*	0.274**	0.110	-														
P4	0.010	-0.017	0.016	0.063	-0.042	-0.171	0.260**	0.191*	0.461**	-													
P5	0.154	0.096	0.121	0.299**	0.192*	0.085	0.254**	0.121	0.324**	0.109	-												
P6	0.212**	0.032	0.209**	0.072	0.135	-0.048	0.397**	0.109	0.155	0.126	0.266**	-											
P7	0.144	0.079	0.045	0.235**	0.167	0.004	0.223**	0.083	0.284**	0.116	0.691**	0.301**	-										
P8	0.141	0.211**	0.111	0.106	0.177	0.075	0.377**	0.251**	0.134	0.213**	0.311**	0.331**	0.415**	-									
P9	0.085	0.012	-0.007	0.331**	0.091	-0.061	0.187*	0.199*	0.135	0.145	0.202*	0.162*	0.300**	0.151	-								
P10	0.094	-0.048	-0.117	0.193*	0.052	-0.308**	0.302**	0.186*	0.309**	0.220**	0.279**	0.144	0.418**	0.176*	0.631**	-							
P11	0.101	0.190*	0.037	0.059	0.054	-0.169	0.243**	0.184*	0.106	0.366**	0.220**	0.212**	0.346**	0.434**	0.222**	0.400**	-						
P12	0.112	-0.015	0.035	0.146	0.009	-0.059	0.286**	0.417**	0.293**	0.179*	0.235**	0.234**	0.340**	0.371**	0.493**	0.535**	0.327**	-					
P13	0.061	0.095	0.166*	0.039	0.057	0.073	0.088	0.234**	0.029	0.165*	0.067	0.165*	0.210**	0.180*	0.144	0.164*	0.329**	0.204*	-				
P14	0.127	0.043	0.053	0.235**	0.131	0.018	0.186*	0.175*	0.295**	0.466**	0.349**	0.073	0.325**	0.243**	0.349**	0.431**	0.315**	0.314**	0.315**	-			
P15	0.121	0.056	0.072	0.215*	0.142	0.086	0.195*	0.135	0.259**	0.457**	0.356**	0.085	0.345**	0.269**	0.345**	0.462**	0.338**	0.276**	0.296**	0.931**	-		
P16	0.076	-0.051	-0.056	0.186*	0.115	-0.032	0.097	-0.047	0.091	0.209**	0.199*	0.122	0.214**	-0.41	0.162*	0.278**	0.148	0.096	0.119	0.568**	0.592**	-	

Note: GA1, IA1, WAI: general, interaction and work adjustment of foreign employee; GA2, IA2, WA2: general, interaction and work adjustment of foreign employee's partner; P1: housing (search, availability); P2: dealing with administrative paperwork in the host country (e.g. immigration services); P3: trips to discover Switzerland before the assignment; P4: training and information before departure; P5: schools for children (search); P6: allowance for or payment of moving costs; P7: allowance for or payment of schooling costs; P8: allowance for or payment of housing costs; P9: allowance for or payment of language courses for the expatriate; P10: allowance for or payment of language courses for the partner/spouse; P11: allowances for other benefits; P12: tax support; P13: insurance support (household goods insurance, pension plan, health insurance); P14: cross-cultural training in the host country; P15: cross-cultural training in the host country for the spouse/partner; P16: spouse employment support.

\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

training support) have little positive correlation with general, interaction or work adjustment for foreign employees and partners. Hypotheses 4a and 4b can only be partially supported.

Results on the availability, use, correlations and perceived necessity of relocation practices are given in Table 5. Concerning the availability of relocation support, we observed that administrative and financial practices (ranging from 57.2% of *allowances for other benefits* to 94.1% of *allowance for or payment of moving costs*) are offered more frequently than information and training practices (ranging from 27% of *cross-cultural training in the host country* to 73.7% of *allowance for or payment of language courses for the expatriate*).

For scores on the perceived necessity of these practices, we did not observe any inconsistency between perceived necessity and current availability: administrative and financial practices (ranging from 3.63 of *schools for children* to 4.66 of *allowance for or payment of moving costs*) are perceived as more important than information and training practices (ranging from 2.89 of *cross-cultural training in the host country for the spouse/partner* to 3.83 of *allowance for or payment of language courses for the expatriate*). When these results were presented to the HR representatives from MNCs who took part to our study, they confirmed and validated the scores on the perceived necessity of these practices. However, despite administrative and financial support practices being more frequently offered by organizations and their perception as being necessary by foreign employees, they seem to be less strongly correlated with the adjustment of foreign employees and their partners than information and training practices.

Table 5. Availability, use, correlations and perceived necessity of relocation practices.

<i>Practices</i>	<i>Availability (%)</i>	<i>Utilization (1–5)</i>	<i>Positive correlation</i>	<i>Necessity (1–5)</i>
Allowance for or payment of moving costs	94.1	4.44	GA1; WA1	4.66
Housing (search, availability)	90.8	4.16	–	4.53
Dealing with administrative paperwork in the host country (e.g. immigration services)	85.0	4.10	–	4.42
Tax support	75	3.62	–	4.30
Allowance for or payment of schooling costs	59.4	3.45	GA2	4.25
Insurance support (household goods insurance, pension plan, health insurance)	71.1	3.32	WA1	4.15
Allowance for or payment of housing costs	63.8	3.62	IA1	4.09
Allowance for or payment of language courses for the expatriate <sup>a</sup>	73.7	3.04	GA2	3.83
Allowance for or payment of language courses for the partner/spouse <sup>a</sup>	68.3	3.06	GA2	3.81
Spouse employment support <sup>a</sup>	47.9	2.06	GA2	3.70
Schools for children (search)	68.1	2.10	GA2; IA2	3.63
Allowances for other benefits	57.2	2.82	IA1	3.50
Trips to discover Switzerland before the assignment <sup>a</sup>	56.6	2.63	–	3.16
Training and information before departure <sup>a</sup>	48.7	2.39	–	3.14
Cross-cultural training in the host country <sup>a</sup>	27	1.74	GA2	2.86
Cross-cultural training in the host country for the spouse/partner <sup>a</sup>	27.6	1.79	GA2	2.89

Note: GA1, IA1, WA1: general, interaction and work adjustment of foreign employee; GA2, IA2, WA2: general, interaction and work adjustment of foreign employee's partner.

<sup>a</sup>Information and training practices.

## 6. Discussion

Contrary to our expectations, cross-cultural adjustment scores for our population of foreign employees and spouses were relatively low. For spouses, adjustment scores were less than 5.0. The interaction adjustment score was especially low for employees and spouses (4.13 and 3.79 on a scale of 7) and were significantly lower for the employees than the other adjustment dimensions. A primary result of our study is that interaction with locals remains an issue for foreign employees and their spouses, despite Switzerland being a rich country with a skilled local, multicultural workforce and low unemployment rates.

In general, a low interaction adjustment might be explained by inadequate language skills and inability to speak the local language (Suutari, 1998) in addition to the cultural distance (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005), which leads to difficulty establishing contacts with locals. Since nearly half of our sample came from neighboring countries and Switzerland is characterized by multilingualism, we expected that interaction adjustment would not be a problematic issue. An early explanation could be the particularities of the local understanding of 'citizenship' and 'national identity' (Chevrier, 2009; Wanner & Fibbi, 2002) that are closely tied to civic and voting rights and obligations in the Swiss political system of direct democracy. This could create a greater distance between local citizens and foreigners and hinder their social interaction. Another explanation could be linked to a so-called 'expat community' in the Lemman Lake region (a closed social bubble of expats and foreign employees of MNCs) using English as a common language in the middle of a French-speaking region. An interesting and new phenomenon in Switzerland is the structural change within the population of foreign employees, moving progressively from an 'expat community' to a 'highly skilled migrant community'. This seems especially true in the Geneva Lake Region, characterized by a preponderance of highly skilled immigrants from neighboring and developed economies and where most of the foreign population has settled on a long-term basis (Office Fédéral des Migrations, 2013; OFS, 2013b). The progressive change of status of foreign employees in Switzerland over the last 20 years from assigned expatriates to self-initiated expatriates with local contracts or skilled migrants increases pressure on the local employment market, and this could lead to a newly increased negative attitude toward foreigners, even from the local highly skilled population who now feel they are in competition with an abstract, globally skilled workforce (Flückiger, 2013; Ruedin & Pecoraro, 2013). This phenomenon might explain why interaction between foreigners and locals remain weak or have decreased.

In line with past empirical evidence, our results show that host-country language fluency facilitates interaction adjustment, (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Froese et al., 2012; Peltokorpi, 2008; Selmer, 2006; Selmer & Luring, 2011; Shaffer et al., 1999). This finding illustrates that although Switzerland is highly multilingual, language diversity is clearly compartmentalized into mostly monolingual linguistic regions (Grin & Schwob, 2002) with which locals strongly identify (Chevrier, 2009). In the Geneva Lake Region, the ability to speak French significantly and positively influences the ability of foreign employees to interact with local nationals. On the other hand, contrary to our hypotheses, no relationships were found between language proficiency and general and work adjustment. This might be explained by the fact that Switzerland is strongly internationalized in many aspects (see Section 2) and that more information may also be available in English, particularly in larger cities (Demont-Heinrich, 2005). Lüdi and Werlen (2005) showed that the use of English at work has significantly increased in Switzerland over the past few decades – especially for highly skilled workers. Moreover, expatriates in our sample were all working in MNCs, most of which adopted English as a

corporate language and designed processes and procedures in English. In this context, it could be argued that French proficiency might be less crucial when adapting to the professional environment.

Much has been done in Switzerland recently to integrate migrants and their families into several levels and different spheres of life (Wichmann, 2013) by the government as well as local companies facing the need to integrate a large number of foreign workers (over 140 nationalities are employed by Swiss Post; 146 by Swiss retailer Migros on the national market). They have developed practices and tools to facilitate integration and support cultural diversity. Aratnam (2012) emphasizes that considerable effort has been made to integrate highly skilled foreigners into Switzerland directly within companies. This may be particularly true in MNCs that employ an increasingly diverse population of foreign workers (Zimmermann & Sparrow, 2007). While services provided by relocation agencies used to be offered by MNCs to traditional expatriates, these services are increasingly offered to self-initiated expatriates and foreign employees with local contracts. In addition to logistical and administrative support, these services typically include general information about Switzerland as well as language and cross-cultural training. Within the Geneva Lake 'International Link' and 'International Dual Career Network', collective spousal employment support measures are provided to foreign employees of network members (International Dual Career Network, 2013; International Link, 2013). Our study showed that some of these support practices are correlated with the adjustment of foreign employees and their spouses. Administrative and financial support practices are the most frequently offered measures by organizations. Financial support practices can have an impact on adjustment dimensions because they may facilitate the daily lives of foreign employees and offer them more cognitive availability to deal with their new social and work environments (Aycan, 1997). They are mostly perceived as more necessary by foreign employees, except for specific measures like private school support, a measure that makes more sense for foreign employees in Switzerland as assigned expatriates with a limited-term assignment frame.

In the category of information and training practices, cross-cultural training is the most rarely offered measure for foreign employees and is rated as the least necessary measure by the employees themselves though it is positively correlated with adjustment, especially on spousal adjustment. This is consistent with the literature defending the impact of cross-cultural training for employees and spouses to improve adjustment and performance (Morris & Robie, 2001). Language training is a traditional support measure for expatriates and their partners (Puck et al., 2008) and it has a significant impact on spousal adjustment. Our study highlights that both cross-cultural and language training given to the employee seem to be more strongly correlated with the adjustment of the employee's spouse than with the adjustment of the employee themselves. The results of our study show that even though all these measures, including spousal employment support, are positively correlated with the general spousal adjustment, they are perceived as less necessary by most foreign employees.

## **7. Conclusion: implications and limitations**

Some limitations of this study should be acknowledged. Self-reporting was used to collect the data, since it appeared to be the most relevant method for measuring cross-cultural adjustment. Since this data collection method may potentially lead to common method bias, including inflation of relationships between variables, we proactively followed steps aimed to reduce these biases (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). For

example, we clearly emphasized that respondent anonymity was guaranteed and that items were assigned in random order. We also stressed that there were no 'right' or 'wrong' answers. While cross-cultural adjustment is a process that occurs over time (Black & Mendenhall, 1990), our study only dealt with participant adjustment levels at a single point in time. Further studies could consider adopting a longitudinal approach to address this weakness. Another potential limitation involves the language used in our survey (English). The large number of different nationalities of our respondents made it impossible to translate the questionnaire into all the languages necessary and since the language version of a survey can impact answers due to ethnic affirmation or cultural accommodation effects (Harzing & Maznevski, 2002; Ralston, Cunniff, & Gustafson, 1995) this could have affected our findings. Another limitation relates to the exploratory nature of this study – especially regarding the spousal adjustment data collection method, the testing of our hypotheses and the relatively small sample size. Regarding the indirect measurement of spousal adjustment, asking foreign employees to evaluate the adjustment of their partners implies the possibility for underestimation or overestimation of adjustment levels. Future studies should send separate questionnaires to foreign employees' partners with instructions specifying that the survey must be completed without consulting each other in order to increase accuracy. Future studies should also take into account the language proficiency of partners and use a more sophisticated scale to measure this aspect. Merging different categories of internationally mobile individuals in our sample, even though reasonable and justified by the particular context of our study, could also limit our findings. Future research should continue to investigate differences between different types of internationally mobile individuals and take into account their specifics during observation such as differences in adaptation and integration (Cerdin et al., 2014; Cerdin & Selmer, 2014).

The last important limitation is the operationalization of cross-cultural adjustment used in this study (Black et al., 1991). The validity of this approach is increasingly being criticized for methodological reasons (lack of inductive-exploratory approach, concerns about arbitrariness and the validity of some items, see Hippler [2006] for a review). It may be possible that in our study, and in our particular context, we were not able to capture the whole picture of cross-cultural adjustment since environmental features that require adjustment could be more numerous and more complex than the 14-item scales proposed by the Black et al. (1991) model and their three domains of adjustment. Moreover, we were unable to differentiate between the facets of adjustment considered important by our respondents and those that were not. Future studies should use a more comprehensive and refined adjustment scale such as those of Hippler et al. (2014), which include a more exhaustive range of adjustment domains and take into account their saliency as well as the direction (positive or negative) of change to obtain more accurate and relevant findings.

Our study has several implications. It stresses the importance of national particularities when studying the cross-cultural adjustment of foreign employees. The effort made to contextualize our study and its findings highlights the need to address the issue of different national contexts to generalize findings about foreign employee adjustment (Suutari & Brewster, 1998). Cross-cultural adjustment literature may certainly benefit if more macro-level elements of host countries would be taken into account when measuring expatriate adjustment. Attractive countries for highly skilled migrants like Switzerland could be considered laboratories for the study of immigration management (Al Ariss & Özbilgin, 2010). The population of foreign employees in Switzerland's settled MNCs is an excellent example of a progressive change from mobile expatriates with short fixed-term

assignments and expatriate packages to a new population of skilled migrants with local contracts and longer-term career plans in the host country. The consequence of this is a progressive move from an 'expat community' to a 'highly skilled migrant community'. Despite longer-term settlement intentions and a multilingual, skilled host-country population, our study showed that skilled migrants do not seem to interact more with locals than the traditional population of assigned expatriates. This finding might reflect what Yanaprasart (2006, p. 53) terms the 'ambiguity of Swiss hospitality', between the tradition of being a country of immigration and the rigidity of its social structures toward foreigners, leading to potential challenges in daily interactions between foreign workers and the Swiss. On the other hand, a further clear finding of our study is the importance of host-country language fluency when interacting with local nationals, despite the highly multicultural Swiss context and the increasing use of English. This finding suggests that local language fluency is essential for the 'highly skilled migrant community', who aims to settle in Switzerland on a long-term basis, to develop ties with local nationals. Further research should qualitatively investigate the relationship between locals and migrants and the 'highly skilled migrant communities' phenomenon.

Regarding the practical implications, our findings show that some relocation practices are positively correlated with the adjustment of foreign employees and their spouses (though the correlations are often quite weak). Our results show that spouses experience stronger cross-cultural adjustment difficulties and that the influence of relocation practices on their adjustment levels seems to be stronger compared to foreign employees. Given the importance of spousal adjustment issues, our study clearly highlights the need for MNCs to provide organizational support to facilitate the experience of foreign employees' spouses. Our study may help MNCs to adequately support foreign employees, since our results provide important information for international organizations on how to efficiently support their foreign employees in their adjustment to a new host country. This is particularly helpful because some of the relocation practices (e.g. cross-cultural training) that are strongly correlated with adjustment are not perceived as necessary by foreign employees. In light of our findings, foreign employees, in particular, should not underestimate the importance of language proficiency and thus of language courses as well as intercultural training for their adjustment and integration. With regard to the low levels of interaction adjustment found, our study draws attention to this particular aspect and shows the necessity for Swiss-based MNCs as well as MNCs elsewhere to work harder to better integrate foreign employees and their families into the local community. Corporate sponsored initiatives and activities can be implemented to promote favorable relationships between the local and foreign workforce with consequential advantages in terms of work environment as well as for the image of (Swiss and foreign) MNCs' subsidiaries and headquarters. Our results, embedded in the Swiss context, highlights how international organizations can calibrate and adapt their mobility programs and provide support that is tailored to different countries, as adjustment problems and difficulties are highly embedded in national contexts.

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