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## **Abstract**

Managing work-life balance abroad is considered as one of the key challenges associated with expatriation. That is particularly true when the enactment of the work-life boundaries of expatriates' home and host countries diverge. Drawing from boundary theory, we investigate whether and how expatriates experience cross-cultural challenges in terms of their work-life boundaries abroad. We interviewed 28 German expatriates in South Korea because both cultures differ substantially in terms of their preferred work-life boundaries. Our study shows that perceived work-life boundary pressures in the foreign environment and willingness to adjust to the local work-life boundary culture vary substantially among expatriates. Based on a function of these two forces, we develop a typology of four work-life boundary adjustment styles and relate them to work-life balance satisfaction. Furthermore, we identify individual and organizational factors that influence expatriates' work-life boundary adjustment styles. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

**Keywords:** expatriates, work-life balance, work-life conflict, boundary theory, boundary management styles, South Korea, Germany

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## Clash of cultures?

### German expatriates' work-life boundary adjustment in South Korea

#### Introduction

Global business needs and economic liberalization have led to various job possibilities around the world and have enabled individuals to take jobs in different host countries (Al Ariss, 2014). However, living and working abroad is a challenging experience. On the one hand, expatriates have to adjust to a new working role, often characterized by greater responsibilities and performance expectations (Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer and Luk, 2005; Shaffer and Harrison, 2001). Accordingly, pressure in the work domain is usually high for expatriates. On the other hand, family members are often more dependent on each other and traveling spouses can increase the strain of the expatriate (Haslberger and Brewster, 2008; Takeuchi, Yun, and Tesluk, 2002). Against this backdrop, expatriates face severe conflicts between expectations at work and their private lives and frequently leave their host country before their contract ends (Kraeh, Froese, and Park, 2015). In consequence, managing the boundaries between work and life is acknowledged as one of the key challenges associated with expatriation (Mäkelä and Suutari, 2015).

This challenge is exacerbated when individuals or families expatriate to countries with a different meaning of the relation between work and life. For instance, Germany is, like most other European countries, characterized by a culture of strong segmentation of work and private life. Working hours in Germany are the lowest in the OECD (2015) with 1,371 hours per person per year, a practice that has also shaped and reinforced the importance that is attached to the separation of private life. In stark contrast, the South Korean (henceforth Korean) culture is known for long working hours and integrated work and life spheres (Kraeh et al., 2015). With 2,113 working hours per year, Korea is among the nations with the highest working hours in the OECD (2015). Furthermore, it is very common for employees to socialize with their supervisors, colleagues, and customers late into the night (a practice known as *hoesik*) (Kraeh et al., 2015). Lee, Chang, and Kim (2011) argue that in Korea working long hours is seen as a necessary sacrifice made in order to

support and take care of the family rather than as interference in private life and Koreans do not perceive much work-life conflict when working long hours.

The purpose of our study is to investigate how expatriates manage work and life in such a foreign work-life culture. In particular, using data from 28 interviews with German expatriates in Korea we aim to investigate whether and how expatriates perceive pressure to adjust to the foreign work-life culture and if they are willing to do so. In order to provide a holistic framework, our sample is balanced in terms of organizational expatriates (OEs) who were dispatched to their international position by their employer and self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) who have individually made the decision to work abroad (Inkson, Arthur, Pringle, and Barry, 1997; Peltokorpi and Froese, 2009). Building on their experience, we develop a typology consisting of four adjustment styles in order to cope with the culturally different work-life environment.

This study contributes to the expatriate literature in two major ways. First, we transfer boundary theory (Ashforth, Kreiner, and Fugate, 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996) to the expatriation context. Boundaries are mental fences (Zerubavel, 1997) and lines of demarcation individuals use to differentiate between domains in their everyday social life, in particular the separation between work and private domains. Boundaries are socially and culturally constructed (Nippert-Eng, 1996) and how individuals manage and enact their work-life boundary is different across countries. In consequence, expatriates might experience particular work-life boundary challenges because of cultural differences between the preferences regarding work-life boundaries in the home and host country. To draw a more cohesive picture of these potential challenges, our study investigates, whether and how cultural differences in terms of work-life boundaries affect expatriates. Accordingly, our research extends the current research on work-life balance issues during expatriation by taking account of the cross-cultural dimension.

Second, building on existing theories and our empirical findings we develop a typology of four work-life boundary adjustment styles expatriates employ depending on the specific circumstance of their work and life abroad: ethnocentric, flexible, localized, and disconnected. Those styles are conceptualized as a function of 1) expatriates' perceived pressure to adjust and 2) their willingness to

adjust. Analyzing which adjustment styles expatriates apply is important, as prior research proposed that the fit of one's preferred enactment of boundaries with the enacted boundaries of one's environment is crucial in terms of critical work outcomes such as stress or satisfaction (Kreiner, Hollensbe, and Sheep, 2009). Supporting this, our findings indicate a relationship between the adjustment styles and work-life balance satisfaction.

### **Work-life boundaries and boundary management**

Every day, people decide how much time and effort they devote to their working life vis-à-vis spending time with friends and family in their private life. Domestic work-life boundary research has analyzed this phenomenon from the perspective of work-family or work-life boundary dynamics (e.g. Bulger, Matthews, and Hoffman, 2007; Campos, Graesch, Repetti, Bradbury, and Ochs, 2009; Matthews, Barnes-Farrell, and Bulger, 2010). Within the work-life literature, two main theories have emerged: boundary theory and border theory (for a review see Allen, Euna, and Meier, 2014). Both theories are rooted in role theory, assuming that people play different roles in different domains of their life and that managing these roles can create both order and conflict. Since both theories share conceptual similarities, we will only refer to the term work-life boundaries in the following (Allen et al., 2014).

Boundary theory is based on the initial work of Nippert-Eng (1996) and was further developed by Ashforth et al. (2000). Boundary theory proposes that work-life boundaries can be either thick and inflexible, or thin and permeable in both directions. Integration from work into life refers to activities such as thinking or talking about work at home (Carlson and Frone, 2003) while integration of life into work is demonstrated by talking about private life at work or being open to interruptions by family and private contacts during working hours (Matthews et al., 2010; Olson-Buchanan and Boswell, 2006). Work-life boundary research has examined different ways how individuals manage their work-life boundaries. Boundary management styles are defined as a general approach a person uses to demarcate and regulate boundaries between work and private life (Kossek and Lautsch, 2012). Most frequently, scholars differentiate ways individuals organize and juxtapose

work and life on the segmentation-integration continuum (Bulger et al., 2007; Nippert-Eng, 1996). Segmentation is characterized by impermeable and inflexible boundaries (Kreiner, 2006). Individuals with a strong segmentation tend to mentally, behaviorally, physically, and temporally separate work and life roles (Nippert-Eng, 1996). On the contrary, integration goes along with more permeable and flexible boundaries up to no distinction between domains (Allen, 2013). Similarly to Nippert-Eng's categorization, Kreininger et al. (2009) identified four tactics to manage work-life boundaries: behavioral (e.g. leveraging technology), temporal (e.g. control working time), physical (e.g. creating physical space between work and home), and communicative (e.g. setting expectations). Kossek, Ruderman, Braddy, and Hannum (2012) highlighted different boundary management styles based on the function of three elements: the degree of allowance of cross-role interruption behaviors (high/low), the identity centrality, or salience of work and life roles (dual/mono-centric), and the perceived control of the boundary (high/low). Building on this, they refer to six roles: work warriors, overwhelmed reactors, family guardians, fusion lovers, dividers, and non-work-eclectics. The work warriors, for instance, are characterized by high work-to-non-work interruptions allowance, a work-centric attitude and low boundary control and thus very much integrate work and life, and embrace interference between the two. Conversely, non-work-eclectics' focus is life-centric and they have a high boundary control and show more moderate boundary interruption behaviors. Ammons (2013) differentiated work-family boundary strategies according to the different directions of work-life integration: family to work integration (yes versus no) and work-to family integration (yes versus no). In the no-no condition individuals are trying to "protect their family". This style is similar to the segregation style in prior work. The "above and beyond" style is characterized by an intrusion of work into the family system, however, a strong separation of the family from the work exists. On the contrary, the "enhance family" strategy allows strong integration of family into work, where as there are strong boundaries between work and family. The last strategy entitled "holistic" is in line with the idea of complete integration.

Summarizing these typologies, prior literature characterizes boundary management by the salience of different roles in the work and private life, the degree of permeability of the boundaries

between the domains, the question of direction of interruption – from work to life or from life to work – and different ways how the boundaries are maintained. In terms of the influence of the different types of boundary management on individual outcomes, research found that if individual boundary preferences and external pressures on boundaries diverge, conflict and dissatisfaction are likely to increase (Kreiner, 2006; Kreiner et al., 2009; Chen, Powell, & Greenhaus, 2009). Similarly, if there is a misfit between desired and enacted boundaries (Ashforth et al., 2000; Kossek, Lautsch, and Eaton, 2005; Nippert-Eng, 1996), Ammons (2013) argued that there will be increased work-life conflict and accordingly dissatisfaction.

### **Boundary adjustment when living and working abroad**

Research on the management of work-life boundaries is scarce in the expatriate literature. While prior domestic literature has greatly enhanced our understanding of work-life boundaries, the cross-cultural dimension during assignments has received scant attention. However, potential conflicts between work and life have been indicated already in the early works of Mendenhall and Oddou (1985). These conflicts are particularly highlighted in terms of the relevance of spousal support on expatriate adjustment (Lauring and Selmer, 2010) and the potential stress of international assignments on marriages (Harvey, 1985). Generally, families are more dependent on each other abroad (Caligiuri, Hyland, Joshi and Bross, 1998). Accordingly, similar to findings in the domestic work-life-balance research (Matthews et al., 2010), Grant-Lavvone and Ensher (2001) found that work more often conflicts with private life than vice versa while working abroad. Other research, however, suggests that boundaries are generally more permeable and integrated during expatriation, as work and life activities are often more closely related and intertwined (Caliguri and Lazarova, 2005; Richardson, McKenna, Dickie, and Kelliher, 2015). For instance, in terms of OEs organizations take over some responsibility for the whole expatriate family (Lazarova, McNulty, and Semeniuk, 2015). In cases of SIEs, expatriates might develop friendships with their coworkers, because colleagues are easy to approach and frequent business interactions often turn into private friendship (Pettinger, 2005). However, highly integrated boundaries during expatriation have been considered as a potential threat

to the perceived work-life balance of expatriates (Mäkelä and Suutari, 2015) and prior research has examined coping strategies expatriates employ to cope with work-life conflicts abroad (e.g. Mäkelä and Suutari, 2011). From a cross-cultural perspective, these are interesting observations because they strongly echo a Western understanding of work-life boundaries. Most prior research has not questioned if the Western understanding of rather thick and inflexible work-life boundaries is globally valid. However, the sparse research on work-life balance in Asian countries has shown that the definition of work-life boundaries differs strongly. Lee et al. (2011) argue that in collectivist cultures work is seen as an important means of supporting the family, and boundaries are more permeable. This is because in collectivist societies people see themselves as part of a greater whole and do not practice a separation between the domains (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). Accordingly, even when pressure at work and working hours are high, people in collectivist countries perceive less work-life conflict than in individualist countries (Spector et al. 2004).

Our study aims to investigate whether and how such cultural differences affect expatriates when working abroad. In particular, we are interested whether and how they perceive pressure to change and adjust their personal work-life boundaries to the foreign work-life culture and if they are generally willing to do so (work-life boundary adjustment). Building on this analysis we derive a typology of different strategies of work-life boundary adjustment abroad which we refer to as work-life boundary adjustment styles. Against this backdrop, we aim to answer the following two research questions:

RQ1: Which factors influence expatriates' work-life boundaries when confronted with a new culture of work-life boundaries?

RQ2: Which types of work-life boundary adjustment styles do expatriates apply abroad?



## **Methodology**

### *National contexts of Germany and Korea*

In order to examine how expatriates behave in a country which has a different cultural understanding of work life boundaries, we chose to investigate German expatriates in Korea. Korea has increasingly become an attractive destination for foreign companies and foreign workers (Kraeh et al., 2015). Several, recent studies have investigated the antecedents, e.g. motivation (Froese, 2012), cross-cultural communication (Froese, Peltokorpi and Ko, 2012), cultural intelligence (Froese, Kim and Eng, 2016), of foreign workers' success in Korea, though paid only little attention to work-life balance challenges. Statistics show that the working hours in Korea are among the highest of all OECD countries (OECD, 2015) and working on the weekend and during holidays is often required and supported by the law (Suk, 2013). Korea is a collectivist country (Hofstede, 2001) where work is very important in order to support the family and where boundaries between work and life are more permeable (Lee et al., 2011). Furthermore, Korea can be described as a tight culture in which rules are very strict (Gelfand et al., 2006). Similarly, hierarchy is an important anchor of management (Hong et al., 2016) and the acceptance of the unequal distribution of power is very high (Hofstede, 2001). In consequence, employees take orders from their superiors very seriously and e.g. will not leave the office before the supervisor does (Kraeh et al., 2015). Not complying with these requirements is a strong offence and might be interpreted as disloyalty and a personal insult. However, work-life integration is not seen as something negative, because boundaries between work and life are so permeable, that it is e.g. common that colleagues donate money when an employee suffers from a death in the family. In contrast, Germany is known for clear separation of work and life domains and Germans work the lowest number of hours per year among all OECD countries (OECD, 2015). Furthermore, Germany is characterized by more individualistic values and lower power distance (Hofstede, 2001). Accordingly, acceptance of inequality is rather low and people value self-determination (Hofstede, 20001). In consequence, work is less central to life in Germany. Thus, Germans rather separate work and life and are more likely to develop thick boundaries between the domains.

Beyond the values of power distance and individualism, the value of specificity versus diffusion (Trompenaars, 1994) is also of interest in the context of our study. While Korea is a diffuse culture, in which everybody is connected and the public and private appearance of a person are similar, in Germany the private space is more closely guarded than the public space (Trompenaars, 1994; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1998). This also indicates a more strict approach to work-life separation. Furthermore, taking account of different approaches to time, Hall (1984) differentiated between monochronic and polychronic cultures. Germans are typical examples of the monochronic approach. It is common that people do one thing at a time usually in a predictable and planned order. Accordingly work schedules and working times are of importance. In contrast, Korea culture can be describe as polychromic where work tasks and assignments are dealt with simultaneously and flexibility of time schedules is of high importance in order to respond to ad hoc changes. Accordingly, long working hours and rapidly changing plans and tasks are acceptable in Korea.

#### *Data collection and sample*

Phenomena are context-bound and researchers have accordingly highlighted that theory building needs to take account of the cultural context. In consequence, they have advocated the use of qualitative research (Bamberger, 2008; Doz, 2011; Welch, Piekkari, Plakoyiannaki and Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, 2011). Since qualitative research also fosters the understanding of individuals' coping with specific situations (Doz, 2011), we considered a qualitative approach appropriate to answer our research questions. We used a semi-structured interview guide because semi-structured interviews ensure a certain degree of consistency in questions, while also allowing the exploration of new phenomena (Myers, 2008). The interview guide was developed based on prior theoretical considerations (Witzel, 2000) and consisted of three parts (see Appendix 1). The first part covered general information about the expatriates, including work and family characteristics. The second set of questions dealt with the interaction between different roles in work and private life, stress perceptions, work-life balance, and boundary management. The third part contained questions regarding work-life satisfaction as well as expatriates' satisfaction with the overall situation in Korea.

At the end of the interview, each respondent had the possibility to raise any comments or questions which he or she felt relevant and had not been covered before. Furthermore, additional follow up questions not present in the interview guide were asked in order to deepen and specify our questions or to elaborate on critical incidents (Flanagan, 1951).

We interviewed German expatriates working and living in Seoul, the capital and commercial center of Korea. Since the majority of the foreign population reside in the greater region of Seoul, we focused our data collection on this area. Participants were identified via websites of companies, social media platforms, and networking meetings of local expatriates. Overall, we contacted 71 German expatriates and 28 expatriates agreed to be interviewed (response rate of 39%). We used purposeful sampling in order to balance SIEs and OEs, because both have been shown to differ in terms of their adjustment to the host country (Froese and Peltokorpi, 2013). This procedure resulted in a balanced sample of sixteen SIEs and twelve OEs. Among the 28 expatriates, the majority were male (75%), which is not surprising considering that expatriation is still largely a male activity (Froese, 2012; Suutari and Brewster, 2000). The age of the interviewees ranged from 21 to 55 years, with an average age of 34 years. 54 % of the expatriates were living in a partnership. Out of fifteen expatriates who were in a relationship, eight had a Korean partner and four had a foreign partner. Prior research also showed that a substantial proportion of expatriates are married to local or foreign partners other than their home countries (Davies, Kraeh and Froese, 2015). Three participants did not mention their partner's nationality. The majority of the respondents (93 %) graduated from university. All interviewees were born in Germany. The average time spent in Korea of respondents was 4 years. The interviewees worked in Western political institutions (N=6), Western MNCs (N=6), startups (N=5), academic institutions (N=4), Korean private companies (N=4), Korean political institutions (N=2) and one freelancer (N=1) who mainly worked for foreign companies. Detailed sample information is shown in Table 1.

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The interviews took place either at cafes near respondents' work, their offices, or in their homes at whichever places they felt the most comfortable. According to language preferences we conducted the interviews either in English or German. English was used when expatriates felt more comfortable speaking in English, e.g. because it was their main language of communication in private and business life. Core passages of the interviews conducted in German were translated into English.

In order to receive reliable information from our interviewees, we took account of various potential biases. First, we used semi-structured interview guides in order to ensure some kind of consistency between interviews. As mentioned in the methods section, the interviewers, however, also raised questions which were not explicitly written in the guideline in order to receive additional information. By doing so, we were able to achieve both consistency and individuality among interviews. Second, to prevent further interviewer bias, two independent interviewers conducted the interviews. One male and one female researcher were involved, each interviewing both male and female interviewees. Each interviewer conducted approximately half of the interviews. We did not observe any systematic differences between interviews. Third, in order to prevent interviewee biases, we guaranteed anonymity to all respondents and interviewers paid attention to creating an open atmosphere.

### *Data analysis*

Each interview was tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim (Kvale, 2005). We applied directed content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005) and used the software MAXQDA to facilitate our analysis. Directed content analysis consists of two steps. First, a deductive analysis is conducted in which codes based on prior literature are applied to the data (Potter and Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). Therefore, the researchers scanned the transcripts to code passages that fit the theoretical framework (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). We used an initial coding scheme based on Nippert-Eng's (1996) conceptualization. In order to better understand how the expatriates manage their work-life boundaries, we coded the following four categories: mental, temporal, physical and behavioral influences on work-life boundary management. Since Nippert-Eng's definition of work-life

boundaries takes account of cross-cultural differences and the meaning of social construction in the individual definition and management of boundaries, applying her categories is a promising approach to understand the expatriates' work-life boundary management in Korea. Example quotes are depicted in Table 2.

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In a second step we also conducted inductive analysis (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005) and identified themes (Ritchie and Spencer, 1994). From our data it became obvious that interviewees experienced work-life challenges very differently. While some felt strongly pressured to adjust their work-life boundaries, others did not experience this conflict. Furthermore, some seemed very willing to adjust, while others preferred to stick to their familiar patterns. Therefore, we coded along these two dimensions and created a matrix consisting of two axes: 1) pressure to adjust work-life boundaries to Korean requirements: This code contained information on the pressure expatriates perceived in the external environment to adjust, e.g. the need to take part in *hoesiks* or work on the weekend. 2) willingness to adjust: This code contains information on the willingness or unwillingness of the expatriate to adjust, e.g. the refusal to work on weekends and the wish to separate work and private life. Example quotes are provided in Table 3. This resulted in a categorization of four different work-life boundary adjustment styles.

To validate the grouping of our interviewees in the four styles, data was coded by two researchers independently. Interrater reliability of this categorization was calculated using Cohen's Kappa (Cohen, 1968). Cohen's  $k$  was 0.80, indicating substantial agreement between the coders (Landis and Koch, 1977). Discrepancies in coding were discussed in the team until a consensus was reached.

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While not included in our research questions, we found further patterns in terms of work-life boundary adjustment styles emerging from the data. First, we found that certain demographics and work characteristics seemed to be related to difference in work-life boundary adjustment styles. Second, the four styles also seem to be related to the work-life balance satisfaction of expatriates. To investigate this relationship, we coded each interviewee either as satisfied, somewhat satisfied, or not satisfied. Example quotes are provided in Table 4. This procedure showed that 21% were not satisfied, 43% were somewhat satisfied, and 36% were satisfied. We will report these findings and their relation to the different work-life boundary adjustment styles in more detail after the description of cultural influences on work-life boundary management and the definition of the four work-life boundary adjustment styles.

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## **Findings**

In this section we will first report on the cultural influences on the management of work-life boundaries abroad (related to RQ1). Subsequently, we will present our findings on the different ways of handling work-life boundaries according to four work-life boundary adjustment styles (RQ2). This will be followed by an analysis of differences between the styles based on personal and organizational differences and the relation to the work-life satisfaction of the expatriates.

### *Temporal influences*

The temporal dimension is associated with culturally different conceptualizations of time.

Interviewees frequently report a perceived lack of time for their private life, because work life intrudes into their privacy. For instance, Michael complains that:

*“Korean companies ask for a lot more devotion of time. Especially they require time to socialize after work.”*

Due to the long working hours, expatriates state that they often get home late and are then too tired to enjoy their free-time. Furthermore, they explain that Western work-life boundary conceptualizations are based on the idea of personal control of time and the individual choice of each person of how much time is spent for each domain. On the contrary, Korea is described as a culture of “live to work” with little personal control over the work-life boundary, because the employer dominates employees’ time. In consequence, many respondents miss German organizational workplace arrangements such as flexible working times, fixed vacation entitlements, and various overtime arrangements that protect the boundaries of work and private life. Interviewees also report that the social speed, the pace of daily practices and processes, differs from their home country. The interviewees portray that their boundary management is often challenged by “*bbali bbali*” (hurry, hurry), a typical feature of the Korean culture, meaning that everything has to be done in a very ad hoc manner, in a rush, and often during late hours. Furthermore, the expatriates indicate a strong short-term orientation and spontaneous work task changes, while they would rather prefer accurate and long-term planning in order to protect work-life boundaries. Bastian describes a typical situation when recently a Korean client called him and told him “I am writing a book and need pictures”. Bastian asked the client when they would need the pictures. The answer was that the client needed to hand in the whole book in two hours. These and similar situations often force expatriates to delay their finishing time and actually cut their private life.

### *Behavioral influences*

The behavioral dimension relates to work-life conceptualizations which are represented in a retrenchment of a person's actions. First, expatriates refer to hierarchy and the perception that the Korean culture is strictly hierarchical and that Korean companies reward employees who are willing to obey their superiors. This contrasts, however, with the less hierarchical and more individualistic cultural background of the German expatriates. In particular, expatriates perceive the required long working hours and hierarchical ordering as limiting their individual freedom. The tone and top-down way of communication by superiors leads to further personal conflicts, as performance pressure and ad hoc orders force several expatriates to shift their preferred work-life boundary. In consequence, expatriates often report that the resulting stress does not only decrease the actual time of their private life, but also influences the quality.

*“Sometimes I have a negative influence on my girlfriend. I am very sorry, but everyday it's this negative energy which you carry [back from work] and you cannot get rid of it as you would take off your shoes.” (Thomas)*

Interviewees also highlight the pressure of conformity which determines the extent to which a person can make individual choices. Interviewees describe strong pressures on being homogenous. Besides suppressing individual freedom in their private life, this also strongly impacts the work-life boundaries of the expatriates. While many respondents would like to limit their working hours in order to separate work and life and enjoy some free time, they give in to social pressure and stay in late at work. Furthermore, social obligations affect expatriates. For instance, Regina reports that she sometimes has to attend after-work meetings and drink more alcohol than back home due to mandatory social gatherings. Other expatriates illustrate that one cannot escape these events, because superiors, colleagues, and business partners consider accepting invitations as an act of courtesy.



### *Physical influences*

Physical boundaries are visible in the structure and usage of space. For instance, some German expatriates live in company apartments or compounds close to their colleagues, supervisors, and even their general managers. Accordingly, they feel affected by a low physical separation of work and life. Anke recounts several events, when she met the deputy general manager in the elevator, or the general manager while shopping. Those circumstances are described as very stressful, because of a feeling of observation. This strongly limits the perception of personal freedom and intrudes the private life. Furthermore, expatriates complained about the lack of cultural and entertainment opportunities in Korea. For instance, Tobias mentioned that he misses diversity in cultural entertainment and the German cultural scenes such as theatres or parties with art and music. The limited offer is perceived as a barrier to enjoying private life which leads to a stronger emphasis on work. Continuing the problem of enjoying private life, Korean homes are perceived as a barrier to a pleasant private life.

*“They basically only sleep at home. If you only sleep at home, it doesn't really matter how it looks. I spend a lot of time at home and I need to feel comfortable there. For example, lighting highly affects my mood. In Korea, a lot of places have really bright white light. And that depresses me because I feel like I am in the bus stop all of the time. So in my place, I removed all those lights and it's more similar to what I know from the apartments and houses in Germany.” (Xaver)*

Separation from family and friends is another physical influence. Having left friends and family back home, the value of private life decreases for some expatriates. Not having close people around to talk to and to spend time with in single cases even leads to spending more time at work as it feels better to be at work than spending time alone at home.

### *Mental influences*

The mental dimension is associated with different cognitive representations of how work and life relate to each other. For instance, goals of life differ between Koreans and Germans. One story from

Laura, a teacher at a Korean language school, is about a Korean colleague, who told her that he is willing to work very hard for his children's' education so that they have a better chance in the future. For this purpose, he is willing to accept that he can see them very rarely and must focus on his work. This, however, contravenes the German approach of trying to spend much time with your family and see your children grow up. Thus, Laura mentions that she would decide differently and rather spent more time with her family even if this meant that she had to offer less material wealth to her children. Also, the importance of self-fulfillment of the interviewed Germans is challenged in Korea. Many expatriates refer to a lack of meaning in their working life in Korea. They feel that there is little opportunity for self-development and autonomy, which they, however, strongly value. Further mental behavioral challenges are caused by gender expectations. The expatriates clearly mark cultural differences in the typical role perceptions of women and men in Korea compared to Germany. Because males are mostly considered as the leader of the Korean family, they are pressured to be hard working and successful in the working life. In consequence, the emphasis of males in the Korean culture is on working time, causing a severe loosening of work-life boundaries toward working obligations.

*“On the other hand, acceptance is way higher among Korean women, if you come back home late, or if I am on a business trip. I don't know, what a German woman would say. Of course, my wife does not like it, but it is a part of the culture here and for her it's easier to accept, because she's familiar with that.” (Bastian)*

Taken together, our findings suggest that many expatriates experience differences between the enactment of work-life boundaries at home and during their stay in Korea. However, there is also variation between the interviewees. While some feel heavily affected by external pressures others seem to be less pressured and enjoy the blurred boundaries. For instance, Patrick states:

*“It is hard to achieve work-life balance if your working hours are fixed, because the boundaries are too strong. If you like it or not, you continue thinking even if working hours are over. (...) We live in Korea, therefore, we need to behave like Koreans.”*

Accordingly, some expatriates enjoy and fit in with the Korean way of enacting work-life boundaries, while others feel neither a fit nor willingness to adjust. In the next section, we will analyze these differences more closely and describe four different work-life boundary management styles abroad.

#### *Expatriates' work-life boundary adjustment styles*

On the one hand, we found that expatriates experience the Korean culture differently dependent on the intensity, duration, and frequency of external boundary pressures. Thus, we distinguish between the perception of low to high pressures to adjust boundaries. On the other hand, we analyzed whether and how much an expatriate is willing to adjust their work-life boundaries to local standards. We use this as the second axis of our typology. This leads to a 2x2 matrix incorporating four different adjustment styles which we will describe in more detail below.

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#### *Ethnocentric style*

Expatriates employing an ethnocentric style neither want nor have to adjust their boundaries in Korea. They found a niche, where they can practice their preferred work-life boundary enactments which are similar to their home country. Pressures on adjusting the boundaries are low in intensity and rather infrequent. A typical example for such an ethnocentric profile is Peter. He is working as administrative staff in a German governmental organization in Korea. His boss is German and he also describes the organizational culture as well as the general working style in his organization as

typically German. Work and life are rather segmented and accordingly he tries to ensure that working hours do not intrude his privacy.

*“I refuse to be rushed. I think, I only have two hands and I can only do what I can. Accordingly, what cannot be managed today will not be managed today. I will take a note and will handle it on Monday. It doesn’t change my plans for the weekend.”*

Another expatriate employing this work-life boundary adjustment style is Laura. In contrast to her colleagues she had made arrangements that she can leave her work early. Furthermore, since she is classified as a foreigner, people at work do not expect her to stay longer and *hoesiks* are uncommon. Therefore, she has much free-time. Ethnocentric expatriates do not only perceive little pressure they are also rather unwilling to adjust. For instance, Albert clearly maintains his segmented boundary enactment. He states:

*“For me, work-life balance means that you don’t work too much. You cannot work seven days a week. Even the bible tells you to work six days and rest on the seventh. That is an example of work-life balance. Mainly, it is not thinking about work all of the time. This is why I like spending time to sing. This has nothing to do with my job.”*

#### *Disconnected style*

Expatriates grouped as disconnected often face frequent, intense, and persisting pressure to adjust. However, at the same time they are facing troubles and are unwilling to change and adjust their work-life boundaries. A good example of a disconnected expatriate is Daniel. He mentions several times during the interviews, how much he would like to separate work and life. However, he feels pressure to behave differently.

*“I would be happy, if my employer left my private life alone. (...) I like to separate work and life maybe even stronger than others. However, this is rather unusual here.”*

Generally, individuals in the disconnected group have to enact their work-life boundaries differently than they would prefer. While they would rather maintain thick boundaries, they are forced to integrate work-life as required by the Korean culture. Many of them state that they would like to do more sports as a compensation strategy and complain about the lack of time. Accordingly, they feel that their work obligations overrule their private needs and there is not much they can do about it. As a result, they experience a negative work-life balance which in turn also negatively affects their work.

Interviewees in this group also highlight a strong perception of cultural differences between Germany and Korea. They feel that the two countries differ substantially and that this is not an individual choice, but culture-bound. Even expatriates working for German companies perceive these differences. For instance, Antje states:

*“There is no such thing as work-life balance in Korea. Of course, we are a German firm and this would sometime come up in our meetings. However, the people here wouldn’t understand it. Once, I was heading home with a female colleague. She asked me if it is normal that you don’t get phone calls when you are on vacation. I said no, we don’t get phone calls, this is not normal. This is a strong cultural difference. In Germany work-life balance is important. Here, this is not the case.”*

#### *Localized style*

Expatriates employing a localized style also face frequent boundary pressures. However, compared to disconnected expatriates they are willing to adjust their boundaries to the local context. While some of those applying a localized style already had a good fit with the environment and had been work-life integrators before, some of the expatriates in this cluster switched their boundary style from segmenting to integrating over time.

*“For me work-life balance is no longer temporarily driven.” (Alfred)*

The interviews show that the way they deal with work and life demands almost equals Korean boundaries. Bastian states that he enjoys working long hours and often loses track of time. Due to the internationalization of an integrated work-life culture, he sometimes even takes over Korean attitudes himself. For instance, he forgets to ensure that his employees take regular holidays. Being born and raised in Germany, however, he realizes that one could criticize this behavior.

*“Actually, as a supervisor, I should make sure that my employees take their holidays. However, I sometimes forget this, although I know it should be my responsibility.”*

Generally, localized expatriates see cultural differences between Korea and Germany; however, they do not condemn these differences, but accept and appreciate the cultural requirements. Interestingly, most of the localized expatriates assume positions in the upper management and do not have an immediate supervisor in Korea. Thus, they do not feel pressured by a supervisor. However, they do feel external pressure, because customers expect them to apply an integrated style and behave according to the Korean way.

*„In Korea, it is very different from Germany where you go to work and when you go home it's over. I have a lot of social obligations towards colleagues and business partners. So work goes on.” (Patrick)*

#### *Flexible style*

In general, expatriates applying a flexible style are able to find a mix between German and Korean work-life boundaries. On the one hand, they are willing to adjust to the Korean environment, because they perceive that both the home but also the foreign culture have their advantages.

*“I learn a lot about the Korean culture here; both, at both work and at home. Koreans help each other. And, of course, I do talk about private things with some of my colleagues at work and I talk about work with my girlfriend. I personally like to have a tight connection between the two.”*

(Sebastian)

Another example is Max, who also integrates work and life and does not perceive too much of a conflict:

*“Of course it happens that I have to work on a Saturday or Sunday. Sometimes I get mail orders on the weekend. However, I would not call this work. I just take the order, forward it and that’s it for me.”*

On the other hand, expatriates in this group do not perceive much external pressure in their environment. This is possible, because their work environment is also somehow flexible. For instance, some interviewees reported that *hoesik* is a common practice at work, but it is less formalized. So if someone does not want to drink or leave early, this is accepted. In other cases, expatriates bargained for flexible working hours and were able to achieve this type of arrangement. For instance, Sebastian, who works for a Korean company and with a Korean supervisor states:

*“So we had many discussions and finally our supervisor accepted it. Then we created the innovation team and these days we have flexible work hours. This means we have four core work hours and you can come by ten and depending on when you start you can leave earlier or later.”*

Those expatriates are also willing to extend working hours or to go to social gatherings, however, they also demand that their environment allows them to take time off and time for themselves in exchange for their effort. In consequence, they can and want to enact their work-life boundaries in a flexible way.

Taken together, we identified four distinct types of adjustment strategies that differ along their willingness to adjust and the pressure to adjust to the Korean work-life culture. In particular, we found that some of the expatriates very much fit the Korean environment, whereas others heavily struggle in their daily life. In order to better understand who is particularly affected by work-life conflicts, in the following section, we will analyze if particular groups of expatriates are more likely to apply a certain adjustment style.

#### *Additional analysis of differences*

In order to gain insights in commonalities and differences between expatriates employing the four different styles, we conducted additional analyses. Accordingly, we compared differences according to gender, age, time spent in host country, nationality of partner, type of expatriate, position held abroad, nationality of supervisor, and nationality of company.

Our additional analyses suggest that the organizational environment and in particular the supervisor exert substantial influence on the adjustment style of the expatriates. While expatriates who apply a disconnected style often work with Korean supervisors, those working with foreign supervisors more often apply an ethnocentric or flexible style. These findings seem to indicate that those working with a foreign supervisor are more likely to find a niche where they can practice work-life boundaries as in the home country, or at least have more flexibility, while those with a Korean supervisor often suffer from higher pressure on their work-life boundaries.

The supervisor as well as the position of the expatriates also play a role in the application of a localized style. This is an intriguing finding, because expatriates in managerial positions, in contrast to those in low-level positions, are less likely to be forced by their superiors to adopt local management practices, because they do not have a direct supervisor in Korea. Rather, our findings indicate that people who do not have a direct supervisor and work in managerial positions due to their higher career ambitions have a better fit with a work-life integration culture as enacted in Korea. For instance, Bastian states:



*„I am very satisfied with my job, because the work I do is very interesting. I really like to work, even at night.”*

Furthermore, age and time in host country are influential variables. Four out of five expatriates applying a localized style are older than 40 and all have spent at least four years in Korea, whereas those applying a flexible style tend to be younger. The higher age and tenure of localized expatriates can be explained by the fact that expatriates who are willing to adjust and who show a high fit with the environment are more likely to stay longer in the country. In turn, those who face difficulties to adjust to the local work-life culture are less likely to localize and more likely to leave earlier.

Interestingly, we did not observe any particular differences between males and females. Furthermore, while prior research often highlights the role of family during expatriation, we did not observe any clear patterns in terms of marital/family status either. Also rather unexpectedly, we could not identify any major difference between SIEs and OEs. There is a slightly higher number of flexible and disconnected SIEs than OEs, though we need to take into account the higher number of SIEs in our sample. The number of ethnocentric and localized SIEs and OEs are almost even. Also, expatriates' adjustment styles do not seem to strongly differ according to the origin of their employer. The number of disconnected and localized expatriates working for foreign and local companies are almost even. However, there is a slight tendency for expatriates of foreign companies to employ an ethnocentric style. Peter (working for a German organization and with a German supervisor) mentions:

*“Actually, it feels like working in a German office. “*

This is understandable, because some German companies transfer part of their German work environments, including work-life balance related practices, to Korea. However, we need to acknowledge that country of origin of employer and supervisor are often intertwined. As explained above, supervisor origin seems to have an important influence on adjustment styles.

Additionally, we investigated interrelations between work-life boundary adjustment styles and work-life balance satisfaction. Expatriates who are dissatisfied with work-life balance often complain that their private life is intruded by their working duties. In contrast, expatriates who are satisfied with work-life balance either enjoy the integration of work and life, or feel that they have a good balance between work and life. While six expatriates reported dissatisfaction with work-life balance the majority were either satisfied or at least somewhat satisfied.

Data analysis indicates a relation between the different work-life boundary adjustment styles and work-life balance satisfaction. Not surprisingly the majority of expatriates classified as disconnected (five out of seven) were not satisfied with their work-life balance. Thomas states:

*“Personally, I imagined my life differently. I don’t want to spend all my life working. I’d rather say I work to live and have the money for other parts of my life – to have a compensation. If I only eat, work and sleep, that’s not how I imagined my life to be.”*

Five out of six expatriates who apply an ethnocentric style report that they are somewhat or fully satisfied with work-life balance. Thus, those, who have found a niche and are able to practice a work-life balance similar to that in Germany are more satisfied with their work-life boundaries than those pressured to adjust. Expatriates who pursue a localized adjustment style willingly chose work-life integration and are satisfied with their work-life balance - four out of five are fully satisfied with their work-life balance. On the other hand, the majority of flexible expatriates are somewhat satisfied. Thus it seems that they work in an environment that they feel comfortable with, but they also see room for improvement. In conclusion, it seems that the extremes (ethnocentric and localized) have the highest perception of satisfaction with work-life balance, whereas the disconnected ones suffer the most.

## **Discussion**

Based on interviews with 28 Germans expatriates in Korea this study explored how expatriates experience and manage their work-life boundaries when confronted with a culturally different

meaning of work-life boundaries. First, our research identified a broad array of mental, behavioral, physical, and temporal influences and challenges on expatriates' work-life boundaries abroad. Building on this, we analyzed how expatriates experienced these influences and developed a typology of work-life boundary adjustment styles. We found that expatriates who do not fit well with the work-life boundary enactment in the host country and applied a disconnected style abroad experienced the highest dissatisfaction with their work-life balance.

#### *Theoretical implications*

This study makes several important theoretical contributions. First, we enrich the nascent debate on the work-life balance of expatriates (e.g. Lazarova, Westman and Shaffer, 2010; Mäkelä and Suutari, 2015; Shaffer, Harrison, Gilley and Luk, 2001) by introducing work-life boundary theory (Nippert-Eng, 1996). Our cross-cultural study on German expatriates in Korea empirically showed that while expatriates often perceive high pressure on their work-life balance (Caliguri and Lazarova, 2005; Richardson, McKenna, Dickie and Kelliher, 2015), this is also influenced by the particular cultural situation in the host country. Work-life boundaries are socially and culturally influenced (Nippert-Eng, 1996). Therefore, many expatriates experienced differences between the strong work-life segregation in their home country and the need to loosen their boundaries in order to adjust to the host country. Our interviews showed that the concept of work-life separation does not exist or is very blurred in Korea. Prior cross-cultural research indicates that Korea is characterized by high collectivism, high power distance (Hofstede, 2001) as well as a diffuse and monochronic culture (Hall, 1984; Trompenaars, 1994; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1998). In consequence, Koreans tend to strongly integrate work and life and are less likely to develop thick boundaries between the two domains. Our research highlights that expatriates do not only experience general issues with their work-life balance (Mäkelä and Suutari, 2015), but need to handle particular culture-dependent temporal, behavioral, physical, and mental influences on work-life boundaries (Nippert-Eng, 1996) which can additionally challenge expatriates' work-life balance.

Second, our study complements research on work-life boundary management strategies in the local context (e.g. Ammon, 2013; Kossek and Lautsch, 2012; Kossek et al., 2012) by taking account

of both the individual and the cross-cultural dimension. Building on our data, we developed a new categorization of work-life boundary adjustment styles abroad: ethnocentric, localized, disconnected, and flexible. This matrix provides a framework of how strongly expatriates feel pressure to adjust their work-life boundaries and how willing expatriates are to adjust while living and working in a foreign country. Interestingly, this classification shows that while some expatriates had to apply strong efforts in order to align their work-life boundaries with the Korean environment, others felt a fit with their environment. Furthermore, in line with several work-life researchers (e.g. Allen et al., 2014; Chen et al., 2009; Kreiner, 2006; Kreiner et al. 2009) we found that an individual fit of individually preferred and externally enforced boundaries is important to maintain a satisfying work-life balance also in a cross-cultural context. Accordingly, those expatriates who feel strong pressures to adjust, but are not willing to, are the least satisfied with their work-life balance, whereas those who are willing and able to practice a Korean style are the most satisfied.

Third, to further increase our understanding of work-life balance abroad, we analyzed if particular characteristics such as the type of expatriate, the organizational context, or the private life influence the application of a particular style. While not conclusive, we found interesting patterns. In particular, our data showed that adjustment styles differ depending on the organizational situation, in particular the supervisor. Accordingly, as in the local context, supervisors seem to be boundary keepers (Clark, 2002a, b) and strongly influence the expatriates' enactment of boundaries. On the one hand, our findings indicate that expatriates working with Korean managers more strongly perceive pressures to adjust and suffer strongly if they are personally not willing to adjust. On the other hand, those with a foreign supervisor experience less pressure and accordingly more frequently apply a flexible style. These findings highlight the important role of the nationality of supervisors in predicting expatriate satisfaction (Froese and Peltokorpi, 2011, 2013). Furthermore, our research indicates that those expatriates who have a high fit with the cultural preference of work-life boundaries in the host country also more frequently localize. Accordingly, we found that older expatriates with longer tenure most frequently applied a localized style and were also most satisfied with their work-life balance. This is in line with prior findings in expatriate research showing that

good cross-cultural adjustment results in satisfaction, performance and lower turnover among expatriates (Kraimer, Wayne and Jaworski, 2001; Shaffer and Harrison, 1998).

### *Practical implications*

From our findings we can derive several implications. First, foreign and local organizations might consider taking account of work-life boundary preferences when hiring expatriates abroad. On the one hand, they could try to exclusively hire and dispatch expatriates that share similar work-life boundary preferences with the host country to avoid work-life boundary conflict. On the other hand, expatriates with different preferences might be placed in positions which are characterized by less work-life boundary challenges, e.g. working with a foreign supervisor. Furthermore, before staffing expatriates, particular preparation can be advantageous. Either as a support measure for OEs by a sending employer, or based on the individual decision of SIEs, expatriates might benefit from intercultural trainings and orientation visits which also include awareness of work-life balance issues.

Second, given that some German expatriates face severe work-life boundary challenges in Korea, organizations both local and foreign could slightly modify their concept of working hours and offer more flexible work arrangements in order to increase satisfaction. More flexible workplace arrangements might reduce boundary pressures and enable expatriates to enact their boundaries in a more conducive way. More specifically, respondents suggested that increased vacation, flexi-time, the possibility of home office, and the early announcement of *hoesiks* would help them better deal with the Korean work-life boundaries.

Third, our matrix of work-life boundary adjustment styles could help current and potential expatriates to classify themselves and raise awareness about their current and potential boundary management practices and related boundary pressures in the host country. This would enable them to make more informed choices regarding whether to accept an expatriate assignment and how they can adjust their individual work-life boundaries in the host country. Doing so is particularly important as Kreiner (2006) suggested that the fit of a person's work-life practices with environmental constraints is related to reduced work-life conflicts. In the context of vastly divergent work-life balance cultures,

expatriates may need to adjust to local work-life boundary practices to some extent. Expatriates who are well adapted (localized styles) or the very few that do not need to adjust (ethnocentric) are generally satisfied. However, those who are under external boundary pressures and not able to adapt (disconnected) are least satisfied. Of course, they may adjust over time, since cross-cultural adjustment is a time related process (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. 2005). But, if all else fails they may look for another job, e.g. a job in a more international work environment, or consider leaving the country in order to ensure their wellbeing in the long run. Accordingly, those expatriates might need particular attention by their employer.

#### *Limitations and Avenues for Future Research*

The findings of our study need to be interpreted in the light of its limitations. First, regarding our sampling strategy, people who are highly dissatisfied with their job abroad, or suffer from very severe work-life conflicts might not have responded to our invitation to the study. Thus, our sample might not cover extreme cases in which expatriates for instance suffered from reduced psychological health. Nevertheless, we identified expatriates who were dissatisfied and perceived high pressure who were subsequently categorized as disconnected expatriates. Accordingly, we argue that more extreme cases could provide interesting insights, but would not change the overall classification of our model.

Second, we only interviewed 28 expatriates with a very diverse background in terms of gender, age, origin of company, and so forth. Accordingly, we need to take account of the fact that the number of expatriates grouped into each style was rather low and conclusions in terms of differences between the groups need to be drawn with care. To overcome these limitations and increase the generalizability of our findings, future research could either focus on one particular group of expatriates to conduct an in-depth analysis, or apply a quantitative approach with a larger sample in order to statistically validate and enrich our findings. Furthermore, it would be particularly interesting to further examine if the boundary styles are statistically related to important expatriate performance criteria, e.g. job performance, or turnover. While our study suggests certain relations, e.g. disconnected expatriates are less satisfied, quantitative studies could shed further light on this topic.

Thus, operationalizing the styles and testing it in a large scale survey across different country combinations will greatly enhance our understanding of work-life boundary management during expatriation.

Third, we concentrated on expatriates from Germany, where work-life segmentation prevails, who moved to Korea, where work-life integration dominates. We purposefully selected these two contrasting contexts to be able to identify challenges and adjustment styles to severe work-life balance differences. However, our typology does not refer to particular cultural properties. Thus, we assume that our results are generalizable to other country contexts and that similar dynamics would be at play also in culturally more similar countries, although in this scenario, we would expect work-life boundary challenges and external boundary pressures to be less severe. Also, there might be differences regarding the distribution of work-life boundary adjustment styles across countries. More research in different contexts is needed to validate these conclusions.

Overall, we have shown that integrating the boundary dynamics literature within expatriate research is extremely fruitful as it allows us more context-sensitive analyses of the work-life boundary abroad. Thus, we encourage further international management scholars to investigate work-life boundary dynamics in their work on expatriates. Scholars, for instance could pay attention to situational tactics (Kreiner et al., 2009) or job crafting behaviors (Sturges, 2012), which individuals employ to help create their individual work-life boundary adjustment styles abroad.

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**Table 1:** Characteristics of expatriates

Expatriate's Name	Gender	Age	Length of Stay (years)	Partner	Origin of Employer	Origin of Supervisor	Managerial Position	Type	Boundary Adjustment Style	Work-Life Satisfaction
Albert	Male	52	3.5	Yes	Foreign	None	Yes	OE	Ethnocentric	Satisfied
Alexander	Male	25	1	Yes	Foreign	Foreign	No	OE	Flexible	Satisfied
Alfred	Male	49	4.5	Yes	Foreign	Foreign	Yes	OE	Localized	Satisfied
Anke	Female	26	2.5	No	Korean	Korean	No	SIE	Flexible	Somewhat satisfied
Antje	Female	36	2.5	No	Foreign	Korean	No	OE	Disconnected	Not satisfied
Bastian	Male	44	17	Yes	Foreign	None	Yes	OE	Localized	Satisfied
Daniel	Male	42	2	No	Korean	Korean	No	SIE	Disconnected	Not satisfied
Fabian	Male	33	3.5	No	Korean	Korean	Yes	SIE	Disconnected	Somewhat satisfied
Felix	Male	26	0.5	Yes	Korean	Foreign	No	SIE	Flexible	Somewhat satisfied
Georg	Male	29	1.5	Yes	Foreign	Foreign	No	SIE	Ethnocentric	Somewhat satisfied
Hans	Male	49	7	Yes	Korean	Unknown	No	SIE	Disconnected	Not satisfied
Isidor	Male	55	17	Yes	Foreign	None	Yes	OE	Localized	Satisfied
Laura	Female	29	1.5	Yes	Korean	Unknown	No	SIE	Ethnocentric	Somewhat satisfied
Markus	Male	29	0.5	No	Foreign	Foreign	No	OE	Flexible	Somewhat satisfied
Max	Male	32	7	Yes	Korean	Foreign	No	SIE	Flexible	Somewhat satisfied
Michael	Male	26	4	Yes	Korean	Unknown	No	SIE	Disconnected	Somewhat satisfied
Patrick	Male	40	7.5	No	Korean	None	Yes	SIE	Localized	Satisfied
Paul	Male	34	1.5	Yes	Foreign	Unknown	No	SIE	Disconnected	Not satisfied
Peter	Male	37	4.5	No	Foreign	Foreign	No	OE	Ethnocentric	Satisfied
Regina	Female	32	1	No	Korean	Korean	No	SIE	Flexible	Somewhat satisfied
Richard	Male	30	1.5	No	Korean	Unknown	No	OE	Flexible	Somewhat satisfied
Sabine	Female	37	7	Yes	Korean	None	Yes	SIE	Localized	Somewhat satisfied
Sebastian	Male	30	3	Yes	Korean	Korean	Yes	SIE	Flexible	Satisfied
Stefanie	Female	21	0.5	No	Foreign	Foreign	No	SIE	Flexible	Somewhat satisfied
Theresa	Female	28	4	No	Korean	Foreign	No	OE	Flexible	Satisfied
Thomas	Male	25	2.5	Yes	Foreign	Korean	No	OE	Disconnected	Not satisfied
Tobias	Male	27	1.5	No	Korean	Unknown	No	OE	Ethnocentric	Not satisfied
Xaver	Male	33	5	No	Foreign	Unknown	No	SIE	Ethnocentric	Satisfied



**Table 2:** Example quotes of coding scheme on influences of work-life balance

Code	Subcode	Sample Quotes
Temporal	Lack of time	“Work-life balance ... Yes, that is really a problem in Korea, really. But as I mentioned, there is not enough time ... It would be nice, if one could spend more time with things, you really like.” (Georg)
	Personal control of time	“Naturally, work is stressful and drains your emotions because it is eventually repetitive and there seems to be no end to it. It’s a ‘ <i>muhan dojun</i> ’ [infinite challenge]. The best way is to live from weekend to weekend and enjoy it with your loved ones.” (Michael)
	Social speed	“People call me ten times for the same thing. I think this is also a bit Korean style. It would be nice if I knew why they behave that way. This is somehow the culture. It has to be very fast and done quickly. In Germany, we would say we can do it tomorrow. But here, it has to be done right away.” (Antje)
	Short-term orientation	“Koreans are very spontaneous. You never know what happens tomorrow. Germans like to plan, they like to reserve, they like to book.” (Laura)
Behavioral	Hierarchy	“Because of the hierarchal structure and the Korean society, you have to respect the elder and senior people. Whatever the senior says, you have to follow, whereas in Germany, you don’t do that and you have your own opinion, if something is wrong. It’s also the same in social life. You say ‘yes’ to whatever the senior says whether it’s right or wrong.” (Theresa)
	Pressure of conformity	“In Germany, we do not have this unidimensional thing. There are people, who attain happiness by wearing jute cloths and organizing hippie seminars. Some accept it, some not, and some simply laugh. But, in fact you have a lot of options to attain happiness. It’s generally accepted. However, this does not work here [in Korea]. Here, it’s purely unidimensional. If you decide to act differently, then you stand out. You are somehow eye-catching.”(Daniel)
	Social obligations	“[In Korea] It is more important that you come along well with the person whom you work with. (...) One’s social behavior is almost as important as the work itself.” (Antje)
Physical	Entertainment opportunities	“I think, I would like to have more recreational value in Seoul. But I don’t see that and don’t have that. ... I mean, not only two cinemas, but maybe ten ... so that I can actually get a ticket. That is a big challenge in Seoul, to get tickets.” (Albert)
	Homes	“Where I live here is very quiet and a very strange atmosphere of a dorm. The people here are always closing their doors all the time. I would like to have some living quality what I am used to, which I had at home.” (Tobias)
	Separation of work and life facilities	“I live in an apartment provided by the company. In the morning, everyone who lives here is picked up by a shuttle bus. It’s only five minutes to work”. (Anke)
	Separation from family/ friends	“I’m missing my parents in Germany. The more I see they are getting old, the more it makes me sad.” (Hans)

Mental	Goals of life	“I think it is the goals in life and the rewarding system here, which are making this difference. The more you work, the higher you get. I think time also has another value in different cultural contexts. For example time for yourself and time for your work.” (Richard)
	Self-fulfilment	„It’s not about stress [in Korea]. (...) It’s more about if you don’t see the meaning of your job, then even the smallest task can become really challenging.” (Markus)
	Gender expectations	“The roles in a relationship are more traditional in Korea. The man goes to work and earns the money. Women take care of the home. I was raised in Germany where this is quite different. Women are more independent. They have their own goals.” (Sebastian)

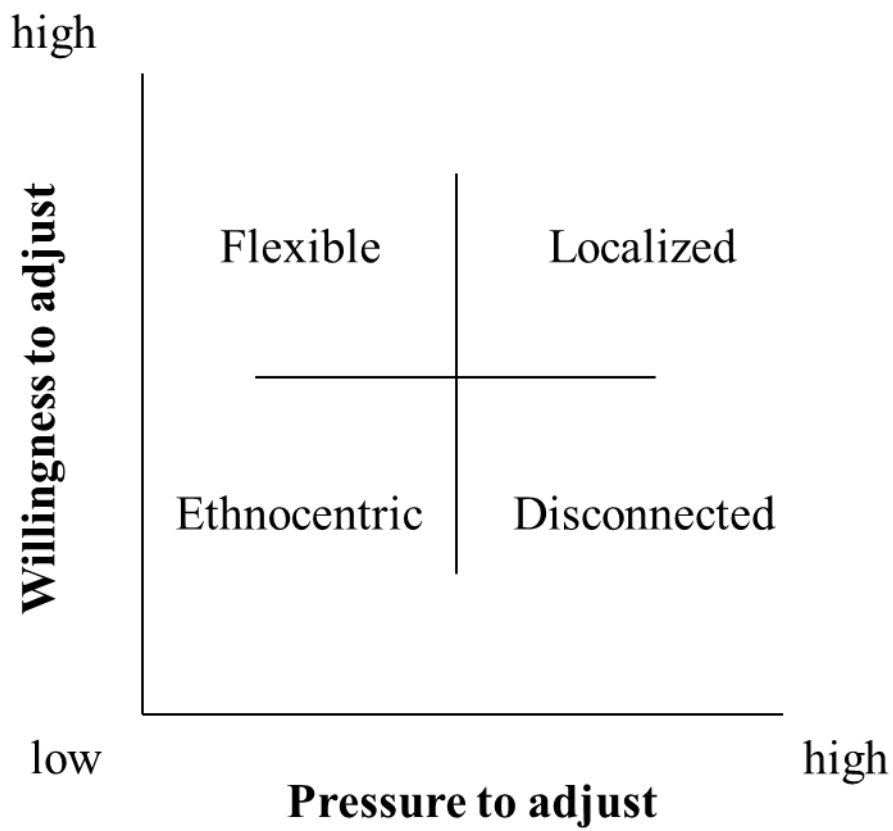
**Table 3:** Example quotes of coding scheme on 2 x 2 matrix

Code	Subcodes	Sample Quotes
Pressure to adjust	High	<p>“I go to work at 08.30 and start at 8.45. I live very close to work. The earliest I ever went home was 6 o’clock. However, that was only once or twice. The latest was 10.30. I do a lot of overtime for different projects which the director wants to finish by the next morning.” (Thomas)</p> <p>“This is fixed in my contract: Overtime is included in my loan and I don’t get extra pay for overtime. So I come home at 8 or 10 pm.” (Antje)</p>
	Low	<p>„My department had a German supervisor. So, we left exactly at 6 pm. But the other department with a Korean supervisor, they never left at 6.” (Theresa)</p> <p>“Usually, I start at 8 and finish around 5 pm. During my first year, I worked a bit longer, if necessary. However, then I came to office a bit later the next day, maybe around 9.” (Peter)</p>
Willingness to adjust	High	<p>“Actually I was fighting with this culture in the beginning, but now I’m satisfied with it.” (Regina)</p> <p>“I’d say, work needs to be done. Holidays are a similar thing. Of course, we can take holidays if we want to but in the end I think business comes first and in the end I often stay longer. (Alexander)</p>
	Low	<p>“It is about “working to live” and not “living to work”. We don’t live to work. This is my slogan. Of course, I have to earn money, but only in order to live well. I don’t want to spend 10 or 12 hours a day working.” (Laura)</p> <p>“In Germany it’s all about having much time for yourself and your family. I feel the same way. And this is also what I am trying to do here as good as I can. In the Korean culture, people have only little time for themselves.” (Michael)</p>

**Table 4:** Example quotes of coding scheme on work-life balance satisfaction

Code	Subcodes	Sample Quotes
Work-life balance satisfaction	Not satisfied	<p>“At the moment, my work life balance is not successful. I don’t know how to relax in my private life. In turn, this also means that I can’t concentrate enough at work.” (Hans)</p> <p>“I’m currently trying to improve my work-life balance. I want to leave the private sector and would like to work in academia.” (Thomas)</p>
	Somewhat satisfied	<p>„My working hours are ok. However, having flexible working time would be nice, then I wouldn’t have to get up at 6.30 each morning. However, it doesn’t bother me much.” (Georg)</p> <p>“Basically, I’m satisfied. However, I’ve been working a lot during the last months. So, I would like to have more time during the week and in the evenings. More time, that would be a good idea.” (Markus)</p>
	Satisfied	<p>“Interviewer: Are you satisfied with your weekdays and weekends? Interviewee: Yes. Very satisfied. If you have fun at work, then you also engage more in work.” (Alexander)</p> <p>“Work-life balance means having a satisfied life with regular income and having only little stress at work. My job is not difficult at all. I go to work and can do whatever I want. So I think that is very balanced. In general, I feel that my work life balance is very successful.” (Theresa)</p>

**Figure 1:** Work-life boundary adjustment styles



## Appendix 1: Interview guideline

### Part 1

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#### Personal background:

- 1) Please indicate your gender.
- 2) What is your age?
- 3) How long have you been in Seoul/Korea?
- 4) What is your nationality?
- 5) What is your highest educational degree?

#### Work characteristics:

- 1) What is your job title?
- 2) How long have you been in that position?
- 3) What are your daily tasks?
- 4) Which skills and what knowledge is required in your current work?
- 5) In your organization, is there any social or organizational support provided?
- 6) How would you describe the organizational climate at work?

#### Characteristics of private life:

- 1) Are you living in a partnership?
- 2) Do the family members live in Seoul?
- 3) Is your spouse employed?
- 4) How would you describe the climate at home?
- 5) How would you describe your (physical health) status?
- 6) Do you smoke, or drink alcohol?
- 7) Please describe your personality.

### Part 2

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#### About living and working in Korea

- 1) Could you please describe what your typical day looks like (working day and weekend)?
- 2) Are you satisfied with your days as just stated and why/ why not?
- 3) If there is anything which you would like to change, what would it be?
- 4) What is the meaning of work-life-balance for you?
- 5) Do you think that cultural differences concerning the perception of work-life balance exist and if so which?
- 6) Is there anything in your social and cultural environment that harms, threatens, or challenges your work or private life? If yes, please elaborate.
- 7) Do you feel successful concerning your balance of work and private life in Korea? Please elaborate on your answer.
- 8) How does your experience at work influence your private life and vice versa?
- 9) How do you think organizations can improve the work life balance of the employees?

#### Your evaluation of living and working in Korea

- 1) Have you ever doubted the significance of your job? When and why?
- 2) Have you ever become cynical about whether your work is contributing anything? When and why?
- 3) Are there any coping strategies to overcome these difficulties?
- 4) Have you ever felt stress and pressure in your job? When and why?
- 5) How do you overcome stress?
- 6) What consequences does this have on your private life?
- 7) Have you ever felt little interest (or little pleasure) in doing things in your private life? Please elaborate.

### Part 3

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- 1) How adjusted to the host country do you feel in with your work and private life?
- 2) Are you satisfied with your current situation and your overall life course? Please elaborate.
- 3) Are you missing something in life? Please elaborate.