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Iris Kollinger-Santer, Iris C. Fischlmayr*

Work life balance up in the air – Does gender make a difference between female and male international business travelers?*

Managing work-life balance (WLB) has become an issue for both employees and HR departments since WLB tensions may reduce performance, overall job satisfaction and finally, increase the fluctuation rate. Having a balance between job and non-work is a particular challenge for international business travelers, but research on this topic is still in its very infancy. The aim of this article and its underlying qualitative study was to discover factors that influence WLB of those employees, and to explore potential differences among male and female. The results clearly show a big difference in the perception of factors influencing WLB depending on the family situation. This highlights the need of HR departments to offer individually tailored support for the different groups of international business travelers.

Work Life Balance als Vielflieger – Gibt es Geschlechtsunterschiede zwischen weiblichen und männlichen internationalen Geschäftsreisenden?

Das Managen der Work-Life Balance (WLB) ist für immer mehr Arbeitnehmerinnen und Arbeitnehmer als auch Personalabteilungen ein Thema geworden, da ein Ungleichgewicht zwischen Arbeit und "Nicht-Arbeit" nicht nur Leistung sowie die allgemeine Jobzufriedenheit reduzieren, sondern letztendlich auch zu höheren Fluktuationsraten führen kann. Diese Balance zu halten, ist besonders für internationale Geschäftsreisende eine Herausforderung. Dennoch befindet sich die Forschung zu diesem Thema noch stark in den Kinderschuhen.

Ziel dieses Artikels und der zugrundeliegenden qualitativen Studie ist es, die WLB dieser Gruppe von Arbeitnehmern sowie potenzielle Unterschiede zwischen weiblichen und männlichen Vielfliegern zu erörtern. Die Resultate zeigen, dass die Einflussfaktoren auf die WLB in Abhängigkeit von der Familiensituation unterschiedlich wahrgenommen werden.

Diese Ergebnisse betonen den Bedarf nach Unterstützungsmaßnahmen seitens der Personalabteilungen, welche für die einzelnen Gruppen von internationalen Geschäftsreisenden maßgeschneidert sind.

Key words: international business travelers, gender differences,
grounded theory method, qualitative research, work-life balance
(JEL: M12, M16)

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1. Introduction

Previous research has shown that work-life issues are amongst the most critical stressors for international business travelers regardless of their marital and family status (Kappelhoff, Heidemann, Völker, & Rietz, 2006; Mayerhofer, Müller, & Schmidt, 2010). And this has emphasized the high importance of work-life balance (WLB) for employees who travel regularly in an international environment. Although female and male international business travelers struggle with balancing their work and life domain likewise (Tatmann, 2001; Welch & Worm, 2006), the situation can be even more challenging for female frequent travelers (Gutek, Searle & Klepa, 1991; Frone, Russell & Cooper, 1992). While women generally invest more time in home activities than men (Cinamon, 2006), they are also confronted with specific challenges when traveling, such as dealing with traditional gender roles (Fischlmayr, 2002; Kollinger, 2005) and negative stereotyping towards female managers (Wiegand, 1995; Hadler, 2001). These factors potentially put more stress on female international business travelers than on their male counterparts and are likely to result in a higher work-family conflict.

But although WLB conflicts can lead to serious consequences, such as lower performance and work satisfaction of the traveler, and in the worst case even to higher fluctuation rates, only little attention has been given to role interference and WLB issues among international business travelers (Mayerhofer, Müller, & Schmidt, 2010). There are only few empirical studies in this field which highlight rather selective topics such as positive and negative aspects of travelling, moderating variables and (lack of) organizational support (Welch, Welch, & Worm, 2007; McKenna & Richardson, 2007). The lack of empirical research and scientific attention is more striking when it comes to gender-specific topics in this field: only some few authors like Schneider (2009) and Westman, Etzion & Gattenio (2008) have dealt with gender-specific questions and have examined how female and male frequent travelers experience and perceive WLB conflicts. Also drawing conclusions from the literature on WLB and expatriation (ORC Worldwide, 2007; Fischlmayr & Kollinger 2010) strengthens the assumption that WLB differs among female and male international business travelers.

Due to this smattering knowledge and limited perspectives, this paper aims at exploring the factors that have an impact on the WLB of female and male international business travelers. Based upon the results of a qualitative empirical study, the main differences between male and female international business travelers in the perception of factors influencing and strategies in coping with their WLB will be determined. In this respect, the Grounded Theory Method will be used as an underlying framework and the results will be analyzed against the background of the current state of the art of literature. Given the fact that a comparable study does not yet exist, this paper shall contribute to the limited knowledge in this field and build a starting point for further research.

2. International assignments in change

Over the past decades, the intensive use of globalization strategies, as well as the rapid pace of global competition and economic growth, have resulted in international work

assignments gaining in importance (Kollinger, 2005; Meyskens, Von Glinow, Werther, Clarke, & Clarke, 2009). Thereby global assignments serve different purposes and offer a competitive advantage as they enable organizations to maintain control over their subsidiaries' operations (Harvey, Speier, & Novece, 2001; Rosenzweig & Nohira, 1994), allow the transfer of skills and knowledge through position filling (Schillo, 2009; Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000) and support managerial development by gaining international experience and prepare for future roles within the company (Harvey & Novicevic, 2002; Bonache, Brewster, & Suutari, 2001; Hauser, 2004). Even though the majority of companies plans to increase the number of international assignments (Brookfield Global Relocation Services, 2011, 2012, 2013), changes in the business and expatriation environment have led to an incremental importance of alternative assignment forms which are often used for skill transfer, project-based work, problem solving, control purposes and management development (Hauser, 2004). Alternative forms include short-term assignments, commuter assignments and international business traveling (Collings, Scullion, & Morley, 2007; Collings & Scullion, 2006; Dowling & Welch, 2004).

- *Short-term assignments* last on average between one month and one year (Cartus, 2007; CreME, 2000) and are particularly useful when specific skills need to be transferred like in the scope of a multinational project work, or in case particular problem solving needs arise (Reiche & Harzing, 2011; Tahvanainen, Worm, & Welch, 2005). Since families generally do not move during these assignments they are not perceived as additional stressors on the employees' WLB as long project hours and social-family separation do (Meyskens et al., 2009).
- In the case of *commuter assignments*, employees travel from their home base to another country or vice-versa, generally on a weekly or bi-weekly basis (Cartus, 2007; PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2005), mainly in order to transfer skills and knowledge as well as for control related reasons and projects (CreME 2000). While families generally do not relocate and therefore do not contribute to the overall stress level of the employee, business commuters may suffer from travel fatigue and work-life tensions. Apart from this, commuter assignees may be frequently confronted with serious tax management issues (Meyskens et al., 2009).
- *International business travelers* – a term which is frequently used synonymously by the scientific community with “frequent flyers” or “flexpatriates” (e.g. Reiche & Harzing, 2011, Welch, Welch, & Worm, 2007) – have to travel frequently and communicate with their home office on a regular basis when they are abroad (Mayerhofer, Hartmann, Michelitsch-Riedl, & Kollinger, 2004). International business travelers are “involved in wide range of purposes, including market exploration, trouble shooting, project management, and technology transfer, who cross cultural boundaries, at short notice and over short time spans, and maintain their family and personal lives in their home country location” (ibid. p. 648). The length of their stay abroad is typically strongly determined by the task to be performed and might last from some days to several weeks. Similar to commuter assignments, families typically do not relocate; but given the excessive traveling and frequent last minute travel international business travelers often fight incessant work demand, family issues, a constant backlog of work and various health issues (Welch et al., 2007; Scullion & Collings, 2006; Welch & Worm, 2006; Mayerhofer et al., 2004).

The expansion to new markets – such as the Central and Eastern European countries due to the EU accession or the “BRICS¹” countries – as well as the existence of new market players, clearly increased the demand for international managers apart from the traditional expatriate force (De Almeida, 2009; Collings, Scullion, & Morley, 2007; Süppel, 2003; Morley, Linehan, & Scullion, 2003; Anderson & Boocock, 2002). In addition to this, other forms of cooperation such as sub-contracting, international joint ventures, mergers and acquisitions as well as international projects have also contributed to this development and caused pressure for travelling by requiring an increased number of trips to international locations (Mayerhofer et al., 2004; Schuler, Jackson, & Luo, 2004; DeFrank, Konopaske, & Ivancevich, 2000).

But despite the high strategic importance of long-term assignments and the growing demand for cross-border talent, experienced international candidates are difficult to find in Europe and the US (Teagarden & Von Glinow, 2008). The willingness of employees to move abroad appears to be continuously declining since the beginning of the early 90s (Hutchings, Lirio, & Metcalfe, 2012; Gross, 1994) due to dual career issues, family concerns, decreased financial incentives and perceived negative career implications (Brookfield Global Relocation Services, 2012; Meyskens et al., 2009; Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000).

Given these circumstances as well as the high cost investment for traditional long-term assignments (Schillo, 2009; Tahvanainen, Worm, & Welch, 2005; Peppas, 2004) it becomes apparent that organizations take advantage of alternative forms of international assignments. Brotherton (2012) found that the new forms of working internationally are growing rapidly, as in 2009, 18% of American organizations claimed to apply them. Until 2011 this number has almost doubled, as it was then indicated with 32%. In contrast to this, PricewaterhouseCoopers (2000) could prove an even higher importance of alternative assignment forms, showing that 51% of the organizations² participating in their survey made an increasing use of non-standard instead of traditional assignments.

But despite the high importance of international business travelers for the companies' success, they still do not get the attention they deserve. So far, academic research in international human resource management has dealt very little with international business travelers and has instead focused largely on questions regarding expatriates (Mayerhofer, Müller, & Schmidt, 2010). This applies even more when it comes to gender topics amongst international business travelers since to date only very few scientific papers have focused on issues such as gender-related WLB challenges or differences in the perception and management of WLB tensions (e.g. Schneider, 2009; Westman, Etzion, & Gattenio, 2008; Gustafson, 2006; Hartmann, Mayerhofer, & Herbert, 2004). Apart from this, while increased attention has been given to WLB issues on a domestic level by researchers and also by practitioners in recent years (e.g. Cinamon, 2006; Parasuraman, Purohit, Godshalk, & Beutell, 1996; Greenhaus &

¹ Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

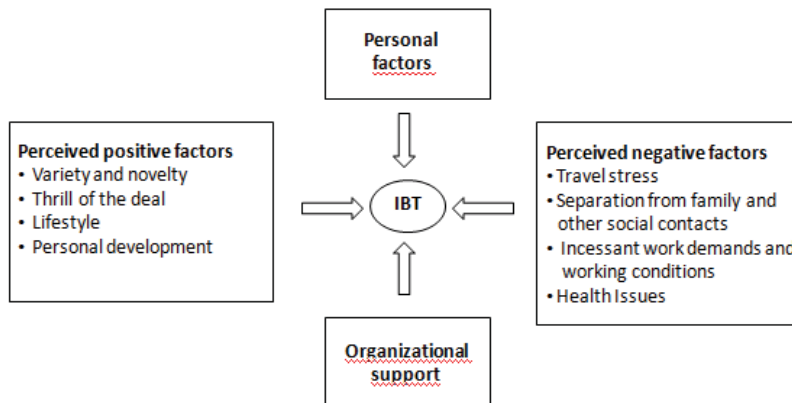
² The sample of PricewaterhouseCoopers survey consisted of 82 international organizations that are leading in their fields (e.g. Caterpillar, L'Oreal, Pfizer, Siemens, The European Bank...). Together they employed 24.500 international assignees in the year 2000.

Beutell, 1985), this does not apply to the international level in the same way (Fischlmayr & Kollinger, 2010). Both, practitioners and researchers consider work-life and work-family balance issues mostly as a domestic matter, which seem to be developed and implemented from a domestic point of view (Harzing & Ruysseveldt, 2004).

3. Work-life balance up in the air – How does it work for international business travelers?

Compared to their local colleagues, international business travelers face additional and different stressors such as health issues, safety concerns or massive time pressure when they are “on the road” or rather “up in the air” (Welch & Worm, 2006). Work-life issues are amongst the most frequently mentioned challenges for this group of employees regardless of their marital status and/or whether they have children (Harzing & Ruysseveldt, 2004; Kappelhoff et al., 2006). This confirms that the balance of private and professional life is of great concern to international business travelers (Mayerhofer, Müller, & Schmidt, 2010). Like most managers that are heavily affected by the contradiction of their professional and private requirements, also business travelers rarely discuss their WLB without discomfort, which suggests massive underlying tensions and conflicts caused by the current situation (Kasper, Meyer, & Schmidt, 2005). But since individuals react differently to stressful situations by showing a diverging perception and evaluation, traveling is on the one hand considered to be exciting, challenging and (career) enhancing. In contrast to this, others perceive business travel as necessary, exhausting and evil (Ivancevich, Konopaske, & DeFrank, 2003). By their explorative study, Welch & Worm (2006) offer a very helpful framework to analyze the different challenges of international travel, which have a significant negative impact on WLB:

Table 1: Aspects of international business travel (adapted from Welch & Worm, 2006)



Although not much attention has been given to the positive aspects of international business travel amongst academics so far, Welch & Worm (2006) found that this special group of employees especially appreciated the *variety and novelty* of their jobs, the *thrill of the deal* undertaken in challenging environments, the *lifestyle* and the *opportunities*

for *personal development* that international travel afforded them. Some of the travelers had even considered themselves to have become addicted to their international business trips, something which those that are now domestically based miss. A finding that was also somehow confirmed by Mayerhofer, Müller, and Schmidt (2010) who reviewed the nature of flexpatriates' lifestyles and found four empirically grounded types – amongst them the *Cosmopolitan*, who is excited to get to know foreign cultures and to gain new cultural experiences.

In contrast to these positive aspects there were also several negative factors mentioned which international business travelers felt as a burden when travelling. These negative influences can be bundled into four main categories – 1) travel stress, 2) incessant work demands and working conditions, 3) separation from family and other social contacts, and 4) health issues which will be explained in more detail due to their high relevance for WLB conflicts:

3.1 Travel stress

Travelling and making necessary travel arrangements can be very intense and put high strain on the affected employees. Amongst the most frequently mentioned potential travel stressors are issues concerning the actual travel itself such as missed or delayed flights, tight airline connections, challenging meeting schedules, as well as health and safety concerns (DeFrank, Konopaske, & Ivancevich, 2000). While health concerns refer to the negative consequences of constant travelling like lack of sleep, missing physical exercise, poor diet and weight gain, safety concerns apply to matters such as physical safety, threat of terrorism, political riots and uprisings (Welch & Worm, 2006). Health fears and concerns regarding personal safety are even more critical when it comes to overseas travel. Crossing multiple time zones, jet-lag symptoms, and the personal interaction with people from different countries and cultures put additional strains on international business travelers (Cassidy, 1992). In contrast to their expatriate colleagues, international business travelers have to adapt quite quickly to a different culture since they may spend only few days or even few hours in a different cultural environment. Adjusting to working with foreign business partners, to other locals and to the cultural specifics of the location may cause stress for the traveler and may have a negative impact on job performance and work satisfaction (Ramsey, Leonel, Gomes, & Monteiro, 2011).

Apart from this, international business travelers do not only feel stressed by the actual travel itself but also experience a high stress potential from planning and making special work arrangements. Since the work at the home office also has to be done while the employee is on a business trip, certain arrangements with peers, team members and managers will be necessary. These arrangements and adjustments will be more comprehensive the longer the business trip lasts. While pre-arrangements would usually be minimal for a day-trip, the picture would look different for a trip of several days or weeks (Ivancevich, Konopaske, & DeFrank, 2003). Summarizing all these factors which make business travelling challenging, and therefore stressful, it becomes clear that they can have a serious impact on the individual's satisfaction and performance.

3.2 Incessant work demands and working conditions

Stress does not only arise because of travelling itself, but also because of the incessant work demands and potentially stressful working conditions of international business travelers which may have a negative impact on the individual's well-being and contribute remarkably to WLB conflict (Wallace, 2005; Hughes & Galinsky, 1994). Since the employees of this target group are often confronted with unplanned and short notice absences, and usually use their offices rather as a home base to which they return to on a regular basis than as fixed facilities, international business travelers have to be extremely flexible and will work at various places and in each and every free minute (Felstead, Jewson, & Walters, 2005).

In addition to this, the longer the business trip lasts, the more likely it is returning to a backlog of work at the home office. Work at the home location usually does not stop while travelling, so travelers usually have to cope with an additional workload during this time. This can cause concern about how to manage these demands and lead to exhaustion, frustration and depression on the side of the international business traveler (Ivancevich, Konopaske, & DeFrank, 2003; Jex, 1998). In order to make the most out of their time and have less work waiting for them upon return, they use the time spent at airports, in flights, trains, taxis, etc. to work. This will allow international business travelers to reduce presence in the home office and to have more time to be with their families or friends (Welch & Worm, 2006; Harris, Brewster, & Erten, 2005). Modern IT technology means might be very beneficial in this respect and help the travelers to be easily in touch with the headquarters or the home office but also get connected with their family and friends whenever they wish to. On the other hand, current *presenteeism* puts stress on the traveler and instant telecommunication may interfere with the mission of the business trip, erode or at least intrude on personal leisure time and therefore increase the workload abroad (Welch & Worm, 2006).

3.3 (Family) relationships and other social contacts

Although some family related problems are not relevant when it comes to international business travelling compared to expatriates – such as career challenges for the spouse and/or a lack of adequate school education which are of high relevance for expatriation – (family) relationships and other social contacts have by far emerged as one of the key stressors for international business travelers (Welch & Worm, 2006). Frequent, irregular and unplanned absences require high flexibility and understanding from the private environment and put high strain on home and family life³. While the business traveler is absent, the spouse has to take over tasks and responsibilities from the travelling partner, especially when children are involved. Since international business travelers may miss children's birthdays, school events, family gatherings, important anniversaries and the like, trivial events can become critical issues over time that have the potential to put strain on and seriously harm the marital and family relationships (Mayerhofer et al. 2004; Espino, Sundstrom, Frick, Jacobs, & Peters, 2002).

³ Interview data of Welch & Worm (2006) showed that adjusting to sudden departures and frequent short absences was found to be more difficult for the family than more infrequent yet longer trips that allowed more continuity and time for planning for the absence.

DeFrank, Konopaske, and Ivancevich (2000) suggest that family stressors are most critical before the trip because there is rarely time for the family due to the intensive trip preparations, and after the trip when there are conflicting needs of the exhausted traveler and the family demands. Liese (2000) has come to similar conclusions explaining that the most challenging part of the business travel is coming home from a trip because the returning traveler is exhausted and cannot meet family expectations and obligations.

But also for international business travelers without children or a permanent relationship, it is hard to meet friends and maintain social contacts due to travel obligations, although frequent flyers also create new relationships abroad which can intensify over time. Apart from this, business travelers can benefit from modern technologies, which allow easy and quick contact with spouse, children and private networks (Welch & Worm, 2006).

3.4 Health issues

Due to their permanent stress, bad nutrition, lack of physical movement and multiple pressures, many international business travelers report physical and psychological consequences such as overweight, sleep disorders, headache, lack of energy, or even burnout (Harris, 2002; Welch & Worm, 2006). Also alcoholism and similar addictions are very common among this target group (DeFrank, Konopaske, & Ivancevich, 2000). Especially the lack of sleep and irregular wake-and-sleep times are a burden for the body as well. Burkholder, Joines, Cunningham-Hill, and Xu (2010) reports about problems in physical coordination and reaction time, physical and mental performance or reduced productivity which might in the long run lead to chronic diseases such as diabetes or depression. Jet-lag, for example, is disturbing the rhythm and might have an impact on cognitive abilities (Burkholder et al., 2010). Recent neuroscience studies conducted with female hamsters (but believed to be applicable to human beings as well) show that regular change of rhythm leads to tiredness and forgetfulness in the short-run and to concentration disturbances in the long-run. Even negative impact on the brain could be observed (Gibson, Wang, Tjho, Khattar, & Kriegsfeld, 2010).

As already mentioned above, what might be stress and risk to one person may be excitement and positive stimulation to another. How individuals perceive and respond to stresses and strains of international travel differs and depends mainly on personal characteristics – such as age, prior travel experience, or the family situation – and the level of support provided by the organization. Thereby the latter may vary regarding the size of the organization, the level of position involved, as well as the job to be delivered abroad (Welch & Worm, 2006). The positive impact of high social support from peers, supervisors and/or subordinates on moderating travel stressors and strains has already been confirmed by several researchers in the 1990s (e.g. Edwards, 1996; Thoits, 1995; Valentine, Holahan, & Moos, 1994; Edwards & Cooper, 1990). However, it could be proved that both personal characteristics and social support have an impact on general performance, WLB, job satisfaction and finally, turnover rates (Aryee, 2005; Welch & Worm, 2006; Ivancevich, Konopaske, & DeFrank, 2003).

4. Does gender have an impact on business travelers' work-life balance?

Tensions due to WLB conflicts can reduce the performance and work satisfaction of the traveler remarkably and can even make the individual leave the organization. But despite the serious consequences of WLB issues, research on international business travelers and their WLB is still in its infancy. Empirical studies focus mainly on rather selective topics such as positive and negative aspects of travelling, moderating variables and (lack of) organizational support (Welch, Welch, & Worm, 2007; Welch & Worm, 2006; McKenna & Richardson, 2007; Westman & Etzion, 2002; DeFrank, Konopaske, & Ivancevich, 2000). This circumstance applies even more when it comes to gender-specific topics in this field. Not much attention has so far been given to potential differences in the perception of work-life balance conflicts between female and male international business travelers, or to the ways in which women and men deal with these potential conflicts. Although a few researchers assume an influence of gender on WLB of international business travelers (e.g. Schneider, 2009; Westman, Etzion, & Gattenio, 2008; Gustafson, 2006), empirical evidence is still scarce. Thus, we can even state that research in this field seems to be almost non-existent and the topic is usually picked up – if at all – in the research on dual career couples or on domestic WLB challenges (Cinamon, 2006; Linehan, Scullion, & Mattl, 2005; Harvey, 1996; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

4.1 Traditional gender roles as a starting point

Although traditional division of labor and gender stereotypes which assign family and household chores to women whereas men are the main breadwinners (Wimbauer, Henninger, Gottwald, & Künzel, 2007; Beck-Gernsheim, 1990) have changed remarkably through the last decades, women are still more likely to experience stress from multiple roles (Higgins & Duxbury, 1992; Bernas & Major, 2000). “Gender role theory argues that societal norm of women’s greater involvement with the family, even within apparently liberalized industrial democracies, mean that women will experience greater conflict in trying to balance work and family responsibilities,” (Harris, 2004, p. 819). Therefore, mothers will experience a significantly higher time pressure than fathers, or men and women without children (Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux, & Brinley, 2005, citing Lewis & Cooper, 1987). Apart from this, women will invest more time on family while men will spend more time on work (Parasuraman et al., 1996). This means that even if women pursue their own demanding career they invest relatively more hours in home activities than their male colleagues (Izraeli, 1994; Cinamon, 2006). In her research across different cultures, Linehan (2006) confirmed these results showing that regardless of a country’s culture – even if it is a country which is characterized by high gender equality – there is still an unequal division of work which makes women responsible for household chores and family. This might make it even tougher for women living in a cultural environment with very traditional gender roles to balance work life and family life (Carikci, 2002).

4.2 Gender and work-life balance

As a consequence, different gender roles lead to differences in how women and men experience work-life conflicts (Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992; Gutek, Searle, & Klepa, 1991).

Early research demonstrated that women undergo significantly higher levels of work-life conflicts than men (Lundberg, 1996). But in his meta-analysis of more than 60 studies Byron (2005) showed a different picture. According to his results, men experience work-family conflict a little more than women, while women, in contrast, experience family-work conflict slightly more than men⁴. Apart from this only few research studies showed no gender specific differences at all regarding the conflict potential and impact on individual WLB (Kinnunen, Geurt, & Mauno, 2004). But some studies also claimed that women experience a higher work-family conflict than men (Cinamon & Rich, 2002). Carlson, Kacmar, and Williams (2000) and Wallace (1999) go even one step further in their studies and analyze time and strain-related forms⁵ of work-family and family-work conflict. They both came to the conclusion that women perceive higher subjective pressure from time and strain-related family-work conflict as well as more strain-related work-family conflict. In contrast to this, there were no gender specific differences regarding time-related work-family conflicts. This corroborates the assumption that women are more sensitive towards family-work conflicts and feel less under pressure because of time but of the experienced strain itself. Although the results of empirical studies are not fully consistent, there are large indications that gender has an impact on individual WLB.

Quite interestingly, while research implies that women and men report work-life conflicts likewise (Tatman, 2001), men report higher levels of satisfaction with their WLB although they have on average longer working hours (Higgins & Duxbury, 1992). This could be explained by Burke (2002) who stated that men typically benefit more from organizational support actions than women. Apart from this, Etzion (1984) showed that while men compensate stress by sources of work support, women

⁴ While in the past researchers focused mainly on the causes and consequences of conflict between work and family by applying an unidirectional perspective, nowadays the scientific community acknowledges that work-family conflict is reciprocal in nature, which means that work can interfere with family (WFC) and family can interfere with work (FWC), (e.g. Harris, 2004). According to this approach, FWC suggests that pressures from the family domain like low spousal support, and the age and number of children spill over into work life. In contrast to this, WFC implies that stressors from the work domain such as the number of weekly hours devoted to work, flexibility of working hours and work-role conflict have a negative impact on the family life area (Bernas & Major, 2000; Cinamon 2006).

⁵ Greenhaus & Beutell (1985) identified three different predictors of conflict between work and family life: time-based predictors indicate that dedicating time to the demands of one domain does not allow enough time to meet the demands of the other domain; in contrast to this strain-based predictors imply that strain generated in one domain makes it difficult to meet demands in the other domain. Finally behavior-based predictors refer to incompatible behavior in one domain with demands in the other domain.

buffer stress with family sources of assistance⁶. Moreover, while spousal back up leads to work stress reduction of men, women experience a higher well-being at home when they feel supported by their spouse (Bures, Henderson, Mayfield, Mayfield & Worley, 1995; Parasuraman, Greenhaus, & Granrose, 1992).

Putting gender specific WLB in context with international business travelling, it must be stated that there is a scarcity of literature. Very few authors refer to the topic: Schneider (2009), for example, found out that women experience travelling a little bit more exhausting and stressful than men. Westman, Etzion, and Gattenio (2008) examined differences in how female and male travelers experience WLB conflict abroad. While work-family conflict and family-work conflict remained relatively constant for men during the different stages of the trip, women experienced less stress during the trip itself and highest upon returning home. Apart from this, returning home was experienced as most stressful by women in contrast to men, who showed the lowest level of WLB conflict after travelling. This can be explained by the fact that business women are not only confronted with incessant work demands at the office when they come back home, but also with significant family and household demands. Even if there are not many findings on gender-specific differences, one might assume that WLB differs among female and male business travelers when drawing conclusions from the literature on expatriation.

4.3 Learnings from expatriation

In the literature on expatriate management, there seem to be no consistent results about gender, expatriation and WLB conflicts. While Mayerhofer et al. (2004) highlighted that WLB issues are more similar for men and women in an international context than in a domestic context, other studies come to the conclusion that female expatriates report higher levels of work-related stress than their male counterparts in the domestic workplace and as expatriates (ORC Worldwide, 2007). This was also supported by Fischlmayr and Kollinger (2010) who found that women struggle more with their WLB due to their higher involvement in family affairs and household demands, as well as due to specific gender roles in business at home and in particular abroad. Apart from this, female expatriates would also be frequently confronted with home or host country prejudices, which might also put strain on women and reduce their personal well-being remarkably.

Given the above stated scarcity of literature and knowledge in the field, the underlying research question of this paper is:

Are there differences between male and female international business travelers in the perception of factors influencing and strategies in coping with their WLB?

5. Research methodology

For studying the phenomenon in question we have decided to use a qualitative approach. In contrast to a quantitative research approach, qualitative studies do not re-

⁶ While supportive actions at work include flexible working hours, home office days, family-friendly benefits etc. (Higgins & Duxbury, 1992), supportive actions at home focus on task sharing between partners, adequate child and elderly care as well as professional house helps (Linehan, 2006).

quire predefined variables, as they do not aim at showing facts and quantifiable evidence (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Since the aim of this research is to find out more about personal experiences of international business travelers, a qualitative method that mainly focuses on verbal data such as personal impressions seems more appropriate than a quantitative method. Furthermore, since there is only little literature in the field of gender differences in WLB of international business travelers this increases the need to explore in a first step relevant factors and influences which play a role for women and men in this context. Based on our findings, a quantitative design for further research might be developed. In particular, we have conducted narrative, problem-centered interviews with 94 women and men being considered as international business travelers. Therefore the interviewees had to fit the following criteria:

- Business-related travel to a foreign location anywhere in the world at least once a month
- Travel to several different and/or changing destinations (in contrast to commuting which refers to bridging the distance between the home and one selected host country)
- Duration of each trip from several days to a number of weeks with a maximum duration of one month per travel (as travelling to one location for more than one month would be classified as short-term assignment (see also Cartus, 2007))
- Industry, position and also country of origin were not considered as selection criteria for the interviewees⁷

The interviewees were confronted with some guiding questions about their individual perception of WLB, positive and negative factors influencing their WLB, individual ways of how to overcome stress factors, perceived support by the company and suggestions for further actions which might be taken up by companies to support their specific situation. The international business travelers were asked to freely and openly answer the questions, to add important information at any place and to give as many examples as possible from their personal experiences (as also suggested by Lamnek, 1995).

After the transcription, elements of the Grounded Theory Method were used to analyze the interviews. As according to its inventors Glaser and Strauss (1967) and later on followed by Strauss and Corbin (1998), Grounded Theory is appropriate to investigate complex social phenomena where little is known about in advance. Rather than focusing on existing theories and testing them with the help of hypotheses, Grounded Theory aims at generating theories itself. Thus, the idea behind it is to search for reasons, explanations, examples and contextual factors directly in the field in order to find out more about the factors being relevant for the topic and to get a better overall picture. As only little is known about our topic, this particular approach is seen as appropriate for the study in question.

⁷ Due to the nationality of the authors, most of the interviewees were Austrians. Cultural differences, if any, will be highlighted in the respective section.

To analyze and interpret the interview data the following steps as suggested by Strauss and Cobrin, (1998) and further elaborated by Goulding (2002) have been followed:

1. Open Coding: by going through the interviews line-by-line key codes are identified
2. Categorization: codes that are related to each other are grouped into single categories. As soon as no new codes are emerging, theoretical saturation is reached.
3. Constant Comparison: every time a new code is put to an existing category, its naming and composition is checked again for its logic and consistency.
4. Axial Coding: categories which are thematically related are grouped into main concepts. The single concepts get their final outline and definition.
5. Theory Generation: the concepts are again streamlined with the contents of the interviews

The results of this analysis will be discussed in the next chapter. Thereby, the topics outlined below have emerged from the interviews during the analysis.

6. Results

6.1 Demographics

Among the 94 international business travelers interviewed, there were 27 women and 67 men.⁸ The sample is not representative as that is not aimed at in qualitative research and furthermore, it is hard or almost impossible to identify the basic population of international business travelers. Nevertheless it might give a realistic picture as women are still under-represented both in general, in managerial positions and among managers on international assignments (Linehan, 2006). This can also be confirmed by the results of a German study among 600 international business travelers which shows a ratio of 36% being female (Schneider, 2009).

The personal, professional and also industry background of the interview partners shows a big heterogeneity without any emphasis on a specific criterion or characteristic. This might be explained by the purpose of striving for maximum differentiation among the interviewees (Agar, 1996) in order to guarantee the validity of the study. In terms of age, for example, interviewees are between 30 and 65 years old. They work for all kind of industries such as construction industry, higher education, chemical industry, banking sector, software development and their companies comprise between 150 to 5500 employees.

Around one fifth of the partners interviewed do not come from an Austrian background but instead are from Germany, Taiwan, US, Canada, Finland or India. All

⁸ Twelve Interviews have been conducted by Valerie Jauker and fourteen more by Katharina Puchmüller in relation to their diploma/master theses on WLB of International Business Travelers written at the Department of International Management, Johannes Kepler University, Linz, under the supervision of Iris Fischlmayr. The same guiding questions have been used and interviews have been checked on their usability for this study beforehand.

of them are well educated, many of them working in managerial or academic positions or as (technical) experts.

Regarding their family situation, the majority (68 interviewees) is either married or lives in a partnership (20 women and 48 men), while 16 international business travelers (7 women, 9 men) are single. Out of all 94 interviewees, 47 have one or more children (amongst them 13 women) whereby 21 have children under the age of 10, and the children of 26 people are older than 10.

Regarding their travel duties, most of the interviewees face regular travelling as inherent necessity of their current position. For some of them, this need emerged over the years with their companies proceeding in the internationalization process or with getting into higher positions within their companies; others have simply changed jobs internally or externally. Just few interviewees mentioned to intentionally have chosen a position with increased travel duties. While the majority of interviewees have limited or no influence on travel times and frequencies, international business travelers coming from the academic field can, to a great extent, decide on their own about the time, frequency and location, sometimes also duration of their travelling. Some have even decided for an academic career because of that flexibility.

The destinations are to any thinkable location worldwide, highly depending on the single companies the interviewees work for. Regarding the majority of Austrians in the sample, certain foci emerge: When it comes to shorter travels on a daily or two-day-basis, Germany and nearby countries (such as Czech Republic, Hungary, France or Poland) are the main destinations (as suggested by Collings, Scullion, & Morley, 2007 for the European area) – besides domestic travelling of course which did not count in that regard. Longer trips lasting a week on average go to China, USA or any region defined as typical “emerging market” (e.g. Indonesia, India, Brazil, ...). Having a look at the other nationalities in the sample, a similar picture reveals: shorter journeys lasting 1-3 days mostly go to neighboring countries, longer ones to the same destinations identified above. It seems that worldwide, certain “hotspots” have been emerging in the past years where the majority of companies is involved in business at the moment, seemingly regardless of the industry.

6.2 Gender differences in the factors influencing work-life balance of international business travelers

Travelling internationally for business is a stressful and tough job, which does have an impact on one's WLB – a fact that is clearly and undoubtedly supported by all interviewees, regardless of their gender. Analyzing the factors influencing WLB we can most certainly support the assumption that these are much more complex than for managers who work mainly on a domestic level, as also suggested in the literature (e.g. Welch & Worm, 2006; Mayerhofer et al., 2004; DeFrank, Konopaske, & Ivancevich, 2000). But when having a closer look at the single factors influencing their WLB and when dealing with coping strategies, a differentiation among men and women, but also according to other characteristics come up. These shall be highlighted in the following paragraphs:

Stressors for male and female international business travelers

As expected, male and female international business travelers face the hardly or almost non-existing separation between job and private life as the main job related stressor (c.f. Welch & Worm, 2006). In contrast to domestic WLB issues, this phenomenon is even more stressful for international business travelers due to a lack of work time regulations, irregular working routines, night or weekend travel or incessant work demands. Furthermore, the knowledge about uncompleted work due to travel absences and the necessity to complete these tasks in time put tremendous stress on the employees (as also reported by Welch & Worm, 2006; Mayerhofer et al., 2004). Together with travel planning and preparation, the organization of meetings, tasks to be completed abroad and follow up on the results of the trip, the work demands seem endless. All these aspects mean additional stressors for the international business travelers when compared to their colleagues who do not have travel obligations. The interviewees stress the inefficiency of this particular work rhythm and suffer from a lack of leisure time. This often causes a feeling of never having time for anything and as a consequence, personal unwell-being.

Traditional role split – has nothing changed so far?

Although both women and men report about those negative effects of intensive labor and high work demands, and although both see the separation between work and non-work as generally challenging, women seem to suffer more from these time constraints and the stress due to the multiple demands and pressures they face. This feeling is mainly caused by tremendous lack of time. Several women report that it is primarily or only up to them to manage their private lives and take care of childcare which includes organizing family life, partnership or the children's activities. Meanwhile men have a more passive role there or just take over specific, limited tasks. Evidently many of these challenges occur in domestic circumstances too, but given the additional stress related to travelling such as travel planning and preparation as well as the absence itself, makes the situation especially tough. Traditionally, female tasks remain the women's responsibility before, during and after travelling and male partners seldom support the international business travelling women. Their male counterparts, in contrast, are freed from this work most of the time as their wives take care of it regardless, especially and above all when travelling. This perception is supported by Schneider (2009) who reports that frequently travelling women are seldom supported by their male spouses when it comes to household and childcare.

“Men can be much more relaxed in terms of travelling, as – and one has to admit that openly – their wives look after the children more than they will. When a woman works part-time, for example, men can do their travelling more easily” (female interviewee, married, no children).

While this statement might also apply to a domestic level, another woman refers clearly to all the stress she faces during her travels:

“Having a fulfilling and demanding job, a family, especially a kid to care for plus all the other obligations is stressful, even if you do not travel. But if you travel, it becomes even tougher. It is really stressful, believe me” (female interviewee, in a partnership, 1 child under 10).

“I made a long list of things that he has to do. [...] And then I usually phone him up, even from abroad. [...] And then I booked out-of-school care for next week from Finland“ (female interviewee, married, 3 children under and over 10).

Apart from this, comparable to Westman, Etzion, and Gattenio (2008), men in our study do not specifically refer to a change in stress level depending on the different travel phases. Some just feel exhausted and tired when returning home and instead of rest and relaxation face demanding partners and/or children, but these additional stressors do not significantly contribute to their overall stress level and WLB perception. Women, in contrast, feel most stressed before and after their travel duties, which again can be explained with the traditional role split.

Interestingly enough, these findings are underlined for all women in the study, regardless of their nationality. They all complain about difficult time constraints as well as limited opportunities for relaxation and leisure time.

Children do make the difference

Given the findings and analyzing them, apart from gender differences another clustering variable emerges: children. It has become clear that the family setting has a tremendous impact on the subjective well-being and therefore on WLB (as also raised by Welch & Worm, 2006; Fischlmayr & Kollinger, 2010). If international business travelers are single or live in a single-career partnership they seem to quite easily keep their WLB since there are not too many additional obligations such as childcare or household duties. This group therefore has more time for their specific coping strategies such as physical activities, caring for themselves or meeting friends. In contrast to this, WLB tensions start to become an issue in dual career partnerships, as both partners are fully committed to their job, suffer from time constraints and possibly both travel.

Given the traditional task split, also in this setting women are much more affected by higher stress levels due to household demands and organizing the private life of the whole family, as already mentioned above. With children, the stress level is clearly much higher – but for women only. While men report a lack of time for their children or their friends, they do not feel an additional burden by childcare or organizing family life in general. The stress and negative impact is highest among women in dual career couple situations⁹ with (young) children, as childcare and organizing the children when abroad takes up a large amount of time.

Regardless of the partnership setting, the situation is toughest with children under 10 and seems to become easier when the children get older. Women whose children are more than about ten years old still report stress due to childcare, but not to the same extent as with smaller ones. For men with older children, this is not even a topic of discussion anymore which might be proof that children and childcare are not perceived as stressors.

“It is a problem of childcare with children younger in age. [...] There seems to be a need to have a little bit more institutional support for that kind of family situation. I mean, for

⁹ There was also one single mum with a child under 10 years old among the interviewees. She was suffering at least equally to women in dual career constellations, if not even more.

raising a family in addition to a career, or managing a dual-career. In the end, somehow people manage” (female interviewee, married, 3 children under and over 10).

One challenge that female international business travelers with children – independent of their age – often report about is lack of societal understanding and support or even pressure from society. This mainly stems from the above-mentioned traditional role models, which are still widespread especially in Austria and Germany, and from missing institutionalized support, both by the state and employers. The women in the sample who come from other cultural contexts (i.e. Finland, Canada, Taiwan) do not report about the same perception. Evidently, men do not face those pressures from society and are often also not aware of what their partners have to encounter with regard to societal expectations and complaints.

Two careers, two travelers, one family

One might assume that WLB tensions are highest in dual career families where both partners are international business travelers. In contrast to dual career couples where just one partner travels a lot, those couples do face two travel schedules, more time constraints due to more absences as well as more exhaustion caused by travelling. Interestingly, role distributions seem to blur in those specific cases as both partners almost equally share household and childcare obligations. Even if their husbands have not shown any efforts in lending a helping hand before the women started to travel or before the children’s birth, they started with that supportive behavior when entering the dual career family–dual business traveler situation. Both partners take advantage of high mutual understanding and consequently, also face less stress in the partnership because discussions about workload and role split distribution are not relevant. The model seems to work as roles are clear, appointments and duties are minutely scheduled and as both partners have explicitly chosen this way of life. A fact that cannot be supported in single career settings where the partner at home often does not appreciate the spouse’s intensive travelling, complains about lack of support at home and even more, ends up with jealousy.

Interviewed women and men in dual family–dual business traveler settings show high enthusiasm and conviction for their situation. They do not get tired of emphasizing that they have explicitly chosen that lifestyle on their own as they do not want to miss any part, neither their job commitment and career, nor their children and most of all their travelling. Therefore, both women and men try to make this model work best, with all its constraints but also opportunities. Furthermore, they are strongly convinced that their children can benefit from their situation as they will not only acquire a global mindset but also certain flexibility when it comes to travelling and having international jobs themselves in their future.

Gender differences in coping strategies

Physical activities, health management including nutrition, personal hobbies as well as social contacts are named as the main strategies for meeting the challenges related to being an international business traveler (Arnold & Adolph, 2005; Kastner, 2004; DeFrank, Konopaske, & Ivancevich, 2000). While findings show only little surprise, they also reveal the crucial role gender plays when it comes to individual coping

mechanisms. Women and men have clear preferences on how to relax in their leisure time and how to cope with the multiple demands they face due to a stressful job, travelling and private obligations. While men rely on physical exercise and “doing nothing” or playing with their children, women try to get their balance via social contacts, thus meeting friends and feeling acceptance, understanding as well as support by their friends. Furthermore, women find energy in mental exercises such as yoga, energy and stress coaching. Men seldom report about similar activities in order to get their WLB again. The statements from the interviews confirm these gender-related preferences:

“I would say that I do a lot of sports activities....I run a lot...I cycle a lot...” (male interviewee, single, no children).

“Besides sports I do different energetic work such as kinesiology or radionics to meet the stressful daily demands. Further, I do meditation and also visit an osteopath because of physical complaints appearing from all the sitting in the car or plane” (female interviewee, single, no children).

Finding time and energy for leisure time activities or oneself turns out to be especially hard for women with children. Thus, again the above-mentioned variable “children” comes into play. Interestingly, men name time with their children as well as spending a day with the family as relaxing and as an energetic source. For women, on the contrary, children are more energy takers and the ones to be taken care of. Therefore, women cannot relax at home or with family anymore. For them, social contacts and time for themselves serve as dominating coping strategies. Also the fact that while abroad it is simply not possible to spontaneously meet in person, makes international business travelers dissatisfied and puts additional stress and pressure on them. At home, they do at least have the potential possibility to see each other face-to-face, even if this is seldom made use of as there is often simply no time for meeting friends, maintaining contact to personal or semi-professional networks or relaxing at home (alone). Attending regular personal appointments is nearly impossible for people who are always on a trip and do have a family. Organizing time with friends often requires more scheduling ahead of time, long-term planning as well as sometimes spontaneity. Instead of serving as an energy source, social contacts might become one more stressor.

“Some of my friends do not understand my situation and complain that I never have time. They take it personal and show little understanding. This is why my friendships have changed in the last years. On top of all the stress, I do not need friends who just blame me because of my work intensity and travelling. They are of the opinion I should rather spend more time with my ‘poor’ child” (female interviewee, single, 1 child under 10).

This statement underlines the above-mentioned societal resentments female international travelers with kids face from society (or even friends). But it seems that some of them have found their own strategies for how to cope with this particular challenge: travelling. The more these women see other cultures, other role models and other ways of how to cope with the challenge of being an internationally travelling mother and wife, the more they get self-confident with their situation also at home and can more easily stand the attacks from society. Meeting women in similar situations gives them a chance to experience understanding, learn about new coping strategies and feel supported.

7. Discussion

The aim of this article was to analyze factors influencing WLB of female and male international business travelers as well as their strategies for coping with stressors that come along in their situation. Given the results, it can be seen as the first study conducted in this area, as most of the already existing studies have only dealt with gender differences as a minor issue or have left it untouched by mentioning that they might have an influence as well (Schneider, 2009; Westman, Etzion, & Gattenio, 2008; Gustafson, 2006). The application of the Grounded Theory Method allowed revealing a holistic picture of the phenomenon of WLB gender differences of international business travelers, as it is especially appropriate for complex social phenomena where not much is known in advance.

Gender differences in WLB of international business travelers are a recent and important topic in globally acting companies. Our study provides insight into several influencing factors of WLB as well as on coping strategies and suggestions for corporate support actions. Combining these recommendations with state of the art scientific literature enables companies to create tailor-made packages in order to meet the needs of the female and male international business travelers individually.

Our results from the qualitative study among 94 international business travelers concerning the factors influencing WLB are supported by other studies, such as from Welch and Worm (2006), Mayerhofer, Müller, and Schmidt (2010) and DeFrank, Konopaske, and Ivancevich (2000). The high stress level related to travelling itself combined with high work intensities due to frequent travelling¹⁰ are referred to as one of the main stressors for all international business travelers, regardless of gender. Time constraints, lack of leisure time as well as health issues are widely reported consequences among international business travelers which, once more confirms existing studies (e.g. Burkholder, 2010; Welch & Worm, 2006; Harris, 2002; DeFrank, Konopaske, & Ivancevich, 2000). But while stressors related to travelling itself are perceived with different intensity by female and male travelers – women report higher stress levels before and after a trip, whereas men show equal ones (see also Westman, Etzion, & Gattenio, 2008) – consequences such as lack of time or missing time for leisure or social contacts are much more stressed by women in our sample. As a reason, traditional role distributions and missing male support in household and childcare (see also Schneider, 2009) can be sorted.

Moreover, one aspect has been referred to as a potential influencing factor on WLB of international business travelers in general, but has not been dealt with specifically so far: children. Our study clearly reveals that having children or not makes a crucial difference in the perception of WLB, mainly for women. It seems that gender does not play a major role in WLB of international business travelers when there are no children involved. With children, however, women and men face different stressors and challenges but also apply different coping strategies. Having a family puts ad-

¹⁰ As also suggested by DeFrank, Konopaske, and Ivancevich, (2000) Cassidy (1992), Ramsey, Leonel, Gomes, & Monteiro (2011), Mayerhofer et al. (2004) or Ivancevich, Konopaske, & Defrank (2003).

ditional burden on the female travelers and does not allow any, or at least not enough, time to deal with stress by applying strategies such as sports, relaxation, time for oneself or meeting friends. But as especially the latter has turned out to be of tremendous support for the women, a kind of vicious circle is started. Apart from the high stress levels due to organizing family life, childcare and household, women are confronted with a lack of understanding from the society which might even end up in accusations.

It can be stated that dual career situations with children, also called dual career families, are particularly tough. At the top of this group, there are dual international business traveler families, i.e. dual career couples with children where both partners are international business travelers. But interestingly enough, many women and men in our study stressed the positive parts of that challenge over the stressful ones. They emphasized the opportunities coming along for their children growing up with globally acting and open-minded parents (also supported by Demel, 2010). Furthermore, it turns out that roles and tasks are much more equally distributed in those couples compared to dual career families where only one partner is travelling. As literature in this does not exist so far, and since the topic is supposed to be of increasing relevance in the future, we highly recommend further research in this field.

When it comes to coping strategies, gender differences again come into play. While men prefer sports and spending time with their children to relax, women rely on mental exercises and social contacts. But since finding time for meeting up with friends is challenging this might quickly turn out to be an additional stressor for the affected women.

Finally, some aspects which are mentioned in the literature on WLB or international business travelers in general, have not been identified as WLB issues for our interview sample. For example age, previous international experience, prior business travels or the culture of the host countries (Welch & Worm, 2006) can be named. The reasons for not being mentioned by the international business travelers in our study might be manifold. Either these factors simply might not be relevant in their specific cases or factors such as age might be strongly linked to the family situation which, though crucial, has not been specifically addressed in our analysis. Others, such as international experience or experience with different cultures might have lost their relevance due to the on-going globalization and the increasing travel demands.

Summarizing these explanations, our results clearly support the high relevance of analyzing gender differences in WLB for international business travelers. Based on what we already know from the scientific community, enriched by findings of our interviews with female and male business travelers, we will formulate recommendations for human resource management on how to best provide support for their international business travelers in the next chapter.

8. Implications for human resource management

As a starting point, it is important to highlight that it is always on the individual to deal with WLB challenges and to take responsibility for his or her actions (Kastner, 2004). In this respect international business travelers might choose and benefit from several potential options. These options may include actions such as consequent time and self-management with a clear priority setting which are tailored to individually

specific needs (Mayerhofer et al., 2004). Moreover all kinds of sport activities or physical exercise, healthy nutrition and stress reducing actions or dedication of time to hobbies (Arnold & Adolph, 2005; DeFrank, Konopaske, & Ivancevich, 2000) can be recommended since coping with stress and travelling are both very demanding and require a certain level of fitness and health condition. Thereby, as mentioned already above, women and men apply different strategies for coping with the challenges travelling brings along.

But given the findings of this study, it has become clear that dealing with WLB tensions should not only be on the individual itself. WLB support for international business travelers by the company, in particular by HR departments, is essential, although practice looks different: companies offering WLB assistance are still very rare, even though many researchers confirmed the high impact of positive individual well-being on overall performance and success of the assignment (e.g. Mayerhofer et al., 2004; Harris, Brewster, & Erten, 2005; Welch & Worm, 2006). Apart from this, Grant-Vallone and Ensher (2001) found that a supportive corporate environment has a positive impact on employees' health, level of anxiety and depression, and finally on WLB tensions. Additionally, also all interviewees, both women and men, have expressed the expectation that companies shall care about their well-being as international business travelers.

Following the high importance of organizational support for the individual well-being of international business travelers, corporate measures could include, but are not limited to, actions such as job flexibility and autonomy – in particular flexible working hours – voluntary fringe benefits like child and elder care, travel management support, (Klimpel & Schütte, 2006; Eby et al., 2005), health care programs (Lümke-mann, 2004), etc.

Research shows that job flexibility and autonomy increase overall job satisfaction, allow spending more time with family and friends and reduce tensions of work and life domains (Shockley & Allen, 2007; Moen, 2003; Thomas & Ganster, 1995). Thereby, job flexibility actions include options such as offering flexi-time¹¹, flexible working hours which permit prolonged weekends or free days after a business trip, autonomous planning of working times, tele-working, home office, etc. (Demel, 2010).¹² While, for instance, prolonged weekends or additional free days would help frequent travelers to balance their WLB and to dedicate (more) time to their families, friends or simply for their hobbies, autonomous work time planning and tele-working options would allow the international business travelers to fight against the backlog of work at the home office and to catch up with the daily business quickly. Apart from this, especially women with children clearly stressed flexible working times after returning from

¹¹ While flexi-time refers to gliding time which gives some autonomy to the employees except of core times where they have to be present at the office, flexible working hours allow autonomous planning of working time regardless of any specific core times or any other limitations.

¹² In addition to these means companies could also consider replacing or reducing business travelling with virtual assignments which avoid main travel stressors such as family separation and social isolation (Holtbrügge & Schillo, 2007).

intensive travelling as well as childcare options while being on a business trip as preferred supportive actions. In order to assist these women with their childcare, companies could offer any form of or support for childcare in times that are not covered by educational institutions, such as evenings, overnight, weekends or holidays. Even in the case of a sick child, emergency support in terms of childcare would be helpful. A pool of babysitters organized and paid for by the company might be an initial idea, apart from company-run crèches, kindergartens or holiday camps. Following these explanations it becomes clear that companies should become much more sensitive for the individual needs of the international business traveler as well as more flexible in terms of support.

“Sometimes just having monetary incentives does not help. Well, you can pay for childcare. But I would prefer organizational support in childcare by, for example, a babysitter pool offered by the company where someone will pick up my child and care for her until I come home from my meeting or trip, or if my plane is late” (female interviewee, in a dual career partnership, one child under 10).

Moreover, Welch, and Worm (2006) found that organizational support was dependent on the size of the organization, the level of the position, as well as on the nature of the job. However, since travel support is said to influence the frequent travelers' overall performance and job satisfaction, assistance should be offered to all travelers where possible and reasonable. Thereby travel management assistance might refer to e.g. provision of transport and pick-up service, taking care of accommodation arrangements, handling local company contacts or securing access to medical care.

Given the study results, it becomes obvious that the need for support varies among the different family settings of an international business traveler. Thus, one overall approach might be less effective than providing options tailored to specific needs and interests. In this respect, travel support actions might be offered in the same way like fringe benefits are offered in a cafeteria system. This would allow the individual to choose from different options which are suitable to meet the personal needs best.

If the focus of the employees' coping strategy lies on health, fitness and social contacts, the company might initiate corporate health programs (BMFSFJ, 2005; Lümke mann, 2004) which offer international business travelers various options to gain and maintain a minimum fitness level. A health-focused mindset throughout the whole company as part of the corporate culture might support this. When applying this mindset to international business travelers, companies could, for example, consequently look for hotels with spa or fitness gym facilities, book flights with trips during the day, keep weekends free from travelling or not necessarily expect the traveler to come to the office after returning from a business trip.

Since the glamour factor of frequent travelling has been slowly but consistently vanishing in the past, companies will have to make some efforts and investments in the future in order to attract and keep their employees to undergo the burden of international business trips. In this respect, a "one-fits-all" approach will obviously not be enough to meet the specific needs and demands of the diverse international business travelers' population. Companies and their HR departments should therefore continue their efforts to develop innovative, target-group tailored concepts, which are

appropriate to reduce WLB tensions and increase the subjective well-being of their international business travelers. This will finally not only be helpful for their travelling employees but also create a competitive advantage for the organization in a world of war for talent.

9. Limitations and future research

Quite obvious, every empirical study has certain limitations. Apart from the main focus on Austrian international business travelers common sources bias limit the generalizability of the results. Besides the suggestions for further research stemming from the limitations, additional recommendations shall be given.

9.1 Limitations of the Study

Austrian sample

Since mainly Austrian international business travelers were subject to this research study, there are specific culture-bound limitations. National culture has an impact on a country's perception of work, leisure time, family and traditional role distribution and defines which importance is given to these aspects. Given Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's (1998) cultural dimensions, Austria still tends to be a masculine culture which values work and materialistic symbols; traditional gender roles are still widespread although this picture is slowly changing. However, in order to limit the influence of a particular country culture, future research should consider also international business travelers from various other countries with different cultural backgrounds in their samples.

Hierarchical levels and industry

Although we have had interviewees from various positions in our sample, attention to have an equal distribution has not been paid, nor has there been any specific analysis according to hierarchical levels or to industries. However, most of our interview partners hold university degrees, are technical specialists and/or work in management positions. This goes along with Collings, Scullion, and Morley (2007) and Mayerhofer, Schmidt, & Bendl (2007) who state in their studies that international business travelers typically have managerial jobs or hold positions as (technical) experts. As Moore (2007) points out that managers and workers suffer from different WLB issues, further studies could analyze potential differences which come up due to the representation in different hierarchical levels (e.g. Fischlmayr, 2004). In order to determine generalizability across industries, future replications would need to compare results across various industries.

Common sources bias

Since interview partners reflect their own personal experiences and their answers might be influenced by social desirability effects or by demands of political correctness, the usage of self-reported data is generally complicated. Applying a more analytical approach, which is proven to be of high scientific value, may support but cannot avoid that results are subjectively interpreted or evaluated.

9.2 Implications for further research

In addition to the already given research recommendations above, the following topics would be worth focusing on: The results of this study strongly indicated that there is an interdependency between the perception of WLB and the respective family status. Some in-depth research on the topic which may also consider different life stages, such as single, partnership/marriage, family/child care, and family/elderly care (Rump, 2010), could bring more insights into the subject.

As the dual career couple challenge steadily gains more importance amongst practitioners as well as in the scientific community, more attention should be given to these special circumstances. Special regard should be paid to dual career – dual international business traveler couples as so far, this particular family setting has not been dealt with in the literature in detail. Since more and more women worldwide have their own careers, hold positions in management and live in dual career partnerships, and since the majority of managerial jobs include travel duties, this topic is believed to be of increasing importance in the future. This is not only true for the women themselves but also for the companies they work for as offering WLB support has already become a decisive factor in the war for talents. Thus, if companies want to attract and keep qualified women, they should think considerably about how to support them with their individual circumstances.

Culture has been mentioned to be influential in two ways with regard to female international business travelers: first of all the cultural background of the respondents strongly determines the position of female travelers in the society and has a tremendous impact on role distribution and relevance of work and leisure. Secondly, in the host countries where they are travelling to, the role of women and as a consequence, the professional acceptance might vary. While these aspects are often considered when it comes to female expatriates (Tzeng, 2006; Harris, 2004) or international business travelers in general (Welch & Worm, 2006), it is rarely considered in studies on gender differences of WLB of international business travelers. Further studies might thus inquire the role and influence of home and host culture on the female traveler.

Finally, a longitudinal design could help us better understand travel stress, WLB tensions and coping strategies (Tennen, Affleck, & Aremeli, 2000) since it may give valuable insights “how travel stress may affect health, job performance, or family relationships over the course of time” (Ivancevich, Konopaske, & Defrank, 2003).

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